ABSTRACT

GRAHAM, ABBEY CHRISTINE KRALL. Tensions of Multimodality: A Case of Teaching and Learning in One Secondary English Classroom. (Under the direction of Dr. Angela M. Wiseman).

English language arts in schools is positioned in a context where the meaning produced in the English classroom is caused and instantiated through a combination of contextual factors from both the national (i.e., government policy), and from the local level (i.e., district, school, and departmental ethos; as well as a teacher’s and students’ backgrounds). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teaching and learning surrounding a multimodal curriculum through the framework of multimodal social semiotics.

This research is situated in a 12th grade English classroom, located in a large district in a relatively homogenous mid-sized suburban city in the western United States. Participants included one teacher, Mr. Z, who was purposefully selected due to his position of revamping the senior curriculum which had been in flux for the past several years, and six students who volunteered to participate in the study. All data were collected over a three-month period and included classroom observations and field notes, teacher and student interviews, and classroom artifacts. Data were analyzed through open and holistic coding methods, and then collapsed into five larger themes (Saldaña, 2014). The first theme focuses on the teacher’s belief that a multimodal curriculum is one way to provide students with life lessons. The second and third themes focus on how students responded to a multimodal curriculum through their design decisions which focus on audience and harnessing multiple modes due to their familiarity with certain modes. The remaining two themes focus on the tensions that surfaced between teacher’s pedagogy and students’ engagement are based on perceptions of
assignments and choices offered in the classroom. The findings from this study align with existing research on multimodal social semiotics in the English language arts classroom, and highlight the importance of teachers’ beliefs on the classroom content, and utilizing a multimodal curriculum to provide students’ choice and authentic literacy assignments. The findings from this study have implications for policymakers, practitioners, and future researchers.
Tensions of Multimodality: A Case of Teaching and Learning in One Secondary English Classroom

by
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“Experience is that thing you get, right after you needed it.”
- My Mom

To my parents—Dave and Christy Krall—who provided for me in every way possible, but also who continually put up with my shenanigans as the youngest child. Thank you for never letting me give up in my athletic and academic pursuits. You both truly taught me the definition of hard work and perseverance.
BIOGRAPHY

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”
(Matthew 7:7)

Abbey was born and raised in Colorado Springs, Colorado. She earned her bachelor’s degree in English from Southern Methodist University. She then went on to receive her master’s degree from the University of Denver. After teaching for a few years in the high school English classroom, she was intrigued by struggling readers and wanted to explore the underlying issues that afflict students’ literacy during adolescence. Her research interests include adolescent literacy, struggling readers, disciplinary literacy, teachers’ beliefs, and multimodal literacy.
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“And will you succeed? Yes! you will, indeed! (98 and ¾ percent guaranteed.)
KID, YOU’LL MOVE MOUNTAINS!” (Dr. Seuss, 1990)

If there is a saying that “It takes a village to raise a doctoral student,” it is not a lie.
This journey has been one of the most trying experiences, and there is no way that I could
have accomplished it alone. Even though my office became known as “my dungeon” and I
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

We need to confront how to envision the relationship between literature in the multimodal age and the ‘deep purposes’ of English as “the subject that provides means for understanding the relation of an inner world of imagination and desire with the outer world of culture and of social demands.” (Kress, 2002, p. 17)

Introduction

In an increasingly global world, it is important to understand how individuals make meaning and communicate with those around them. This increase in globalization and technology necessitates how literacy and communication are re-envisioned due to the different ways information flows among people, space, and time (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Jewitt, 2009; Jewitt, Bezemer, & Kress, 2010; Rowsell, Kress, Pahl, & Street, 2013; Siegel, 2006). With this in mind, it is necessary that educators do not succumb to the idea that communication, and the state of the world, is changing at such a quick pace that is out of our control, and that we are unable to keep up (Kress, 2006). But rather, educators use this pace of change as leverage in the classroom to engage students in authentic literacy tasks that bridge their out-of-school and in-school lives.

Multimodality is deeply ingrained in communication. Multimodality refers to the different forms of representation that communication can take, which includes language, images, gestures, posture, and tone (Jewitt, 2009; Kalantzis, Cope, & Cloonan, 2010; Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005). From a global perspective, students need to be proficient in the different forms of multimodality (Bull & Dupuis, 2014) to become competitive in the workforce after high school, which necessitates their training and access to technology during school hours (Sewell & Denton, 2011), and their ability to read multiple modes
critically (Beach, 2012; Beavis, 2013; Towndrow, Nelson, & Yusuf, 2013). Cope and Kalantzis (2009) assert the “new economy” requires citizens to be competent in literacy past basic skills such as reading and writing; rather what is demanded by this “new” global economy are citizens and workers who are able to communicate effectively, are able to work in collaboration with others, are multi-skilled, and are agents of their own learning. According to Kress (2006), “theories of how we make meaning underpin all aspects of the English curriculum and of English pedagogies” (p. 37). Therefore, it becomes the “duty” (Kress, 2006) of the teacher to take action, ensuring learners are involved in consuming and producing texts that harness multiple modes and lead them to a more critical understanding of how we communicate through multiple modes simultaneously.

The English classroom is a complex mix of signs that looks distinct in different classrooms. All teachers and students bring their individual backgrounds and interests into the classroom which create different signs that both parties must interpret and navigate. Kress et al., (2005) formulate that signs in the English classroom are produced through both outward production (i.e., classroom layout) and inward production (i.e., reading activities). These signs all come together to produce a multimodal orchestration of English (Jewitt & Kress, 2010). Ultimately, how English is produced and how it is experienced in classrooms is an amalgamation of government policy, schools’ responses to said policy, departmental decisions, and teachers’ and students’ backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs.

Problematically, schools, and particularly English classrooms, are the place where texts have undergone little change in how they are used and conceptualized (Applebee, 1992;
Siegel & Rowe, 2011; Stotsky, Traffas, & Woodworth, 2010). Consequently, school is constructed as a “contradictory symbolic space” (Wissman, Costello, & Hamilton, 2012) situated between traditional, print literacies and newer, multimodal literacies. Therefore, this research addresses calls from the research field to explore how multimodality in the English classroom can encompass changing literacy practices of adolescents (Beavis, 2013), as well as expand what is considered a meaning-making resource, to encompass non-print, pictures, and audio in the English language arts (ELA) classroom (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; O’Brien, Stewart, & Beach, 2008; Schwartz & Rubinstein-Avila, 2006, Wade & Moje, 2000). A broadened view of curriculum and semiotic resources in ELA captures the multidimensionality and possibilities afforded through various objects which students can appropriate for communication (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Draper & Siebert, 2010).

It is important to understand that even though I use the term “text,” I am not implying the connotation of text as solely a print based object. In the field of multimodal social semiotics, a text can be defined as any combination of modes or occurrence of communication (Siegel & Rowe, 2011). Modes can be written, spoken, visual, auditory, and gestural. The completeness of a text as a multimodal semiotic entity “derives from a (shared) understanding of the social occasions in which it was produced, in which it functions or to which it alludes” (Kress, 2010, p. 148). Since, the meaning of the text is inherently shaped by the context and individual, how a text and learning are defined may have “ideological and material consequences for students, teachers, and society” (Wade & Moje, 2000, p. 611). Additionally, texts can be used as tools to “examine assumptions about the world” (Moje,
Dillion, & O’Brien, 2000, p. 177), and how individuals are positioned. Viewed as different modes of communication, texts are more than linguistic artifacts or discursive tools, rather they shape the social organization of the classroom, and they fulfill social purposes that can neither be separated from the context nor the learner (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Draper & Siebert, 2010; Moje et al., 2000; Wade & Moje, 2000; RAND, 2002). Drawing from Cope and Kalantzis (2000), a “text is any representation resource or object that people intentionally imbue with meaning, in the way they either create or attend to the object, to achieve a particular purpose” (p. 28). This view of a text highlights its meaning-making potential.

Various disciplines define texts and literacy in unique ways, and use traditional and nontraditional texts—or multimodal texts—to different degrees (Draper & Siebert, 2010; Moje, Stockdill, Kim, & Kim, 2011). For example, a text in social studies may be characterized as a photograph, political cartoon, memoir or letter (Wineburg, 1991), on the other hand a text in mathematics may be considered graphs and numeric symbols (Hillman, 2013), while a text in science may be a field guide or a lab report (Cervetti & Pearson, 2012). These examples display how multimodal signs (e.g., graphs, pictures, symbols) are integral to communicating in different disciplines. Despite these differences across disciplines, texts remain “the source of and inspiration for much of the learning that takes place” (Wade & Moje, 2000, p. 274) in the classroom.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this embedded single-case study design (Yin, 2014) is to describe how one teacher's beliefs about a multimodal curriculum translate into classroom practices, as
well as how a sampling of focal students respond to this multimodal curriculum. The study
took place in a senior English classroom which was free from the restraints of standardized
testing and a “strict” curriculum imposed upon the teacher by district or school mandates.
This four-month qualitative case study was situated around a 12th grade classroom where an
English teacher decided to implement a multimodal curriculum. Specifically, my research
questions are:

1. How does one teacher’s beliefs about teaching multimodal curriculum translate to
   both pedagogy and classroom practices?
2. How do students respond to this multimodal curriculum?

**Rationale for the Study**

There are various factors that impact the ELA classroom and pedagogy, with one of
the most important being policy. Because a larger focus of this study is to examine how a
multimodal curriculum is utilized and perceived in a secondary English classroom, it is
necessary to situate the current state of education and adolescent literacy within larger
policies that affect classroom teachers. Policy enables and constrains schools and teachers’
abilities to provide their students with equitable literacy instruction, exerting top-down
control on schools. These policies overwhelmingly influence the ELA context, whether
teachers are aware of their presence or not (Bean & Harper, 2011; Luke & Woods, 2008). In
schools where accountability, standardization, and high stakes tests remain dominant, the use
of multimodal texts may be less common (Consalvo & David, 2016).
The rise in national testing has spurred a discourse that education and adolescent literacy are in a state of crisis (Wendt, 2013). Current policies, such as the Common Core State Standards (hereby referred to as CCSS; National Governors Association for Best Practices [NGABP] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010), employ language to present adolescent underachievement in reading as “stagnant,” which ultimately is a danger to society and global success since “we have lost ground to our international peers” (About the Standards, 2015, para. 2). This stagnation—or failure—to equally prepare all students to be college and career ready has also become associated with globalization; however, reading and the ELA curriculum has not necessarily followed the changing needs required for learners in the 21st century (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009). Teaching and curriculum in ELA has tried to keep “one foot rooted in the past with enduring canonical literature while expanding into global literature and digital spaces” (Bean & Harper, 2011, p. 66). Moreover, semiotic resources (or texts) and out-of-school literacies that are valued in various communities may not align with the texts and literacy practices that are valued in schools (Heath, 1983).

Even though—at surface level—current educational policies presume an increased academic rigor for all students, they still perpetuate a narrowed agenda of traditional literacy that leans toward written learning, representation, and expression (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Due to high stakes assessments, the “ELA classroom must naturally accommodate federal mandates by narrowly defining what counts as literacy” (Bean & Harper, 2011, p. 65), which means creative thinking, analysis, and reflection are pushed aside, even though all of them
are necessary if we want our students to be global citizens. Despite the fact that the CCSS makes a case for students to produce and publish their writing with digital tools (Mills & Exley, 2014), this production is situated in the absence of students’ understanding how their semiotic choices—sounds, images, gestures, space—can modify or complement their message in a digital space (Chan & Unsworth, 2011). This is problematic if we want students to be critically aware of how individuals represent meaning across space and time. In this age of policy and high stakes assessments, what counts as a resource for meaning-making in ELA still needs to be made more explicit in order to make decisive pedagogical recommendations (Wade & Moje, 2000). Consequently, when teachers are challenged with policy and curricular changes, they have to confront their beliefs about their content area, pedagogy, and students.

Given that the CCSS have placed an emphasis on integrating media and technology into the classroom through the production of digital texts (NGABP & CCSSO, 2010), it is even more imperative to understand how teachers address this curriculum and how students learning processes are affected by a multimodal curriculum. Quantitative surveys have shed a limited amount of understanding about text selection as whole (Applebee, 1992; Stotsky et al., 2010; Rush, Ash, Saunders, Holschuh, & Ford, 2011; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015); however, they have ignored multimodal texts as part of this selection. Researchers have also explored how small groups of students make meaning through discussion with their peers while producing multimodal texts (Chisholm, 2010; Miller, 2011; Ranker, 2008), yet few studies have addressed how a teacher incorporates a multimodal curriculum into the
classroom (Siegel, 2012; Yandell, 2007), and how a multimodal curriculum affects the learning processes of students (Smith, 2016). Consequently, more research is needed on how teachers define texts and integrate technology to construct a multimodal curriculum in their disciplinary teaching—in this case ELA—as well as how out-of-school literacy and multimodal texts provide options for how student communicate (Pyo, 2016; Vasudevan & Wissman, 2011), are linked to school domains (Moje et al., 2011), and support students’ disciplinary learning (Bull & Dupuis, 2014; Goss, Castek, & Manderino, 2016).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it investigates what happens when an English teacher—not restricted by curriculum or standardized tests—draws upon multiple modes outside of traditional print literature to provide students with meaningful experiences in ELA that connect with their background and prepare them for global participation in the 21st century and communication in their final semester of high school English. Through the lens of multimodal social semiotics, this case study explains the friction created between how an English teacher approached a multimodal curriculum to engage students in diverse perspectives and essential understandings surrounding the human experience, and students’ complex response to that curriculum.

Organization of Dissertation

In the next chapter, I present an overview of the theoretical framework multimodal social semiotics and relevant literature that guided this study. In chapter three, I detail the research methodology of this embedded single-case study. I also discuss details about the
research site, participants, data collection methods, data analysis, my positionality as a researcher, issues of validity and reliability, and limitations of the study. In chapter four, I present the findings from this case study in five themes which answer my two research questions. In chapter five, I discuss the findings from the study, make connections to previous research presented in chapter two, and conclude with implications for practice, policy, and future research.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“Common sense assumes that English is about language and texts—written or spoken, literary or everyday. Yet the making of English happens in the orchestration of many modes, shaped by the social, cultural and historical context of classrooms and schools.”

(Jewitt & Kress, 2010, p. 349)

In this chapter, I present the primary framework for this study: multimodal social semiotics to situate the current research. First, I present a view of literacy as multimodal to situate the changing nature of literacy in a global context. Second, I discuss the framework of multimodal social semiotics, tracking its underpinnings from semiotics and social semiotics. Third, I establish the secondary English classroom within the world of multimodality, and how the curriculum, a teacher’s pedagogy, and students’ responses and learning are uniquely situated in this discipline. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research that has been conducted within multimodal social semiotics and how it provided a basis for my study.

Theoretical Framework

Twenty years ago, the New London Group (1996) called for an understanding of texts, pedagogy, and knowledge to be viewed as integrated and multimodal—rather than purely linguistic or monomodal—which was a radical concept that spurred a whole strand of educational research and pedagogical models centered around the idea of multimodality (Jewitt, 2009). Literacy, described as “a rapid and continuous process of change in the ways in which we read, view, listen, compose, and communicate information” (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008, p. 23), acknowledges the pace of change, as well as how literacy must reflect its dynamic, interrelated and constructivist nature. This conception of literacy
contrasts with the notion of “mere literacy” (New London Group, 1996, p. 64)—or traditional literacy—a singular, canonical English the New London Group asserted needed to be changed, especially if the overall goal of school is to prepare students for diversity and global communities.

Serafini (2015) defined multimodal literacy as a process of “generating meanings in transaction with multimodal texts, including written language, visual images, and design features from a variety of perspectives to meet the requirements of particular social contexts” (p. 413). No longer can literacy be thought of as a solely linguistic accomplishment because “the time for habitual conjunction of language, print literacy, and learning is over” (Jewitt, 2009, p. 241). Rather, literacy processes associated with reading and writing must be viewed within different mediums, an approach which combines traditional literacy with different semiotic systems and modalities (Walsh, 2008).

Learning and meaning is multimodal and constructed through visual, audio, spatial, and gestural meanings. Instead of viewing literacy as “formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed” (p. 61), The New London Group (1996) called for literacy in schools to encompass diversity and a variety of texts to prepare students for full social participation in a global economy and life after school. The type of literacy pedagogy that the New London Group called for—multiliteracies—is interested in not only how communication occurs through multiple modes simultaneously, but also the inclusion of students’ cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom. Despite the focus of this study on multimodalities, it is necessary to acknowledge that a pedagogy of multiliteracies hinges on
navigating multiple modes in and out of school contexts. In the following section, I provide a brief overview of the history of multimodal social semiotics, to frame the present study.

![Pedagogy of Multiliteracies](image)

**Figure 2.1** Theoretical framework meshing 4 assumptions of multimodality, students’ response, and pedagogy of multiliteracies.

**Multimodal Social Semiotics**

Multimodal social semiotics is a theoretical approach that explores how meaning is made in a culture through various modes (Kress et al., 2005). Through the lens of this theory, communication is about more than just language, but is an approach to understanding the multiple forms of representation, which includes language, images, gestures, posture, and tone (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005). To further explore the nature of multimodal social semiotics, I present an overview of the theory and its underpinnings in
semiotics and social semiotics in the next section before explaining the four primary tenets of multimodality according to Jewitt (2009).

**Overview and History of Semiotics**

Semiotics has a long history dating back to John Locke (Iser, 2006); it stems from linguistics and is the study of how people communicate meaning through the production, use, and reception of signs and sign systems (Kress, 2010; Jewitt, 2009; van Leeuwen, 2005). The main theorists of semiotics and social semiotics are Ferdinand de Saussure, C. S. Peirce, and M. A. K. Halliday; their contributions are described more in depth in the following sections.

**Semiotics.** Semiotics is the study of how people communicate meaning through the production, use, and receptions of signs and sign systems (Kress, 2010; Jewitt, 2009; van Leeuwen, 2005). Siegel (2006) defined semiotics as “an interdisciplinary field of studies that examines how meaning is made through signs of all kinds—pictures, gestures, music—not just words” (p. 65). Semiotics stemmed from linguistics and centered around the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure and C. S. Peirce (Siegel, 2006). In semiotics, the *sign* is the basic unit of meaning. For Saussure, a sign derived meaning by fusing an arbitrary link between a signifier with a signified (Siegel, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2005). In other words, no similitude existed between the form/word (signifier) and concept (signified), as in the word “dog” and the concept of dog. Based upon these ideas, the signifier and signified remained discretionary terms.

**Social semiotics.** Moving away from Saussure’s understanding of language as a self-contained system, Peirce was interested “in language as a system (langue)” (Siegel, 2006, p.
68). He developed semiotics to consider how the meaning of signs are constructed in relation to other signs. Further diverging from Saussure, Peirce focused less on the formal and arbitrary properties of sign systems, and more on the process of meaning-making (Siegel, 2006). He argued that signs were relatable and had connections to one another; meaning associations were not derived arbitrarily through a simple substitution of words. His triadic model (see Figure 2.2) connected sign, object, and interpretant, emphasizing other participants interacting with the speaker and the object, which laid the foundation of modern semiotics (Iser, 2006).

![Figure 2.2](image)

**Figure 2.2** Pierce’s semiotic triadic relationship.

The difference between semiotics and social semiotics is in how meaning-making is fundamentally driven by the context in which signs are produced and received. Semiotics views the sign as isolated, whereas social semiotics sees the sign as socially situated (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Contrary to the semiotic view of the sign as arbitrary, social semiotics sees the sign as a meaning-making resource, where the sign is always motivated by
the sign maker (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Kress, 2010; Siegel & Rowe, 2011; van Leeuwen, 2005).

Halliday’s (1978) social semiotic theory of communication further demarcated from Saussure's arbitrary linkage between signifier and signified. This emphasized how a sign could not be removed from its context due to the social foundation of semiotics. Halliday (1978) also rejected Saussure's model because it failed to recognize reflection and action inherently situated in the socio-cultural context. In this manner, social semiotics moved toward “generativity...at the core of meaning-making” (Siegel, 2006, p. 69), focusing on sign-making and semiotic production, rather than mere sign-use (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). In social semiotics resource is preferred to sign “because it avoids the impression that ‘what a sign stands for’ is somehow pre-given, and not affected by its use” (van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 3). Semiotic resources are socially made, observable actions and objects used to make meaning and communicate, rather than an established set of rules (Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005). Therefore, there is no set of laws governing the intrinsic characteristics of semiotic resources, which is important to consider in the classroom when investigating how students generate meaning through remixing modes.

Current conceptions of multimodal social semiotics are related most closely to Halliday’s notion of social semiotics and how people use semiotic resources in their everyday meaning-making practices (Barton & Unsworth, 2014; Kress, 2010). Accordingly, this theory emphasizes literacy as a multimodal social practice with specific affordances created in different contexts, thus highlighting the nuances and social aspects available to
individuals during communication. Furthermore, the multimodal dimension of the theory is interested in the sign-producer’s and sign-user’s agency in various social environments (Kress, 2010).

My research takes the view that teachers and students use semiotic resources in the English classroom differently based upon their individual perceptions and motivations. Consequently, semiotic resources are inextricably linked to the context in which they are produced and received by individuals, in this case a 12th grade English classroom. In this research study, some of the different signs that were interpreted by students included the incorporation of various videos, as well as how the teacher communicated his version of ELA through his classroom rules and expectations, which will be discussed at length in chapter 4. In the next section, I explore the four assumptions of multimodal social semiotics established by Jewitt (2009) to frame my understanding for why multimodality is important to consider.

**Four Assumptions of Multimodal Social Semiotics (Jewitt, 2009)**

These four assumptions encompass how knowledge and content are represented and communicated by both teachers and students in the classroom. First, meaning is produced and received using multiple modes, rather than just through language; second, meaning is contextually driven and shaped through cultural, historical, and social means; third, people create meaning through selecting and combining various modes; and fourth, modes are social in nature, where meanings are shaped by previously established norms and rules in various
social contexts. These four assumptions will be discussed more in depth in the following sections.

**Language is just one part of the multimodal ensemble.** The first assumption about multimodality is that communication occurs through multiple modes simultaneously. Multimodal communication is about more than just language, but is an approach to understanding the multiple forms of representation, which includes language, images, gestures, posture, and tone (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005). Chiefly, communication occurs through all modes separately and simultaneously, and has the ability to reshape resources and make new meanings. Modes contribute to various layers of meaning and connotation (van Leeuwen, 2005), and become particularly important in literacy research for understanding the construction of knowledge in schools in general (Mills, 2015), and more specifically in English classrooms (Battacharly et al., 2007; Kress et al., 2005).

**Each mode has different meaning potentials.** The second assumption of multimodality is that individuals choose signs due to their semiotic potential, or the semiotic resources that are available to them at various points in time during communication. According to Kalantzis et al., (2010), there are five different modes that create meaning in multimodal texts: musical/audio, linguistic, visual, spatial, and gestural (see Table 2.1). Because meanings and intentions are fixed to particular modes and representations, rhetors choose the “most apt forms and materials from which to fix the intended meaning potentials” (Serafini, 2014, p. 50) depending on the specific cultural and social contexts. For example, the choice of gestural modes may be more appropriate for students to covertly communicate
with one another in situations where access to verbal/linguistic modes is limited between students (e.g., during a lecture). Therefore, what is most appropriate at one point in time might be less apropos in a different context and/or point in time.

Table 2.1

Various Modes and Their Meaning Potentials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Semiotic Meaning Potentials (van Leeuwen, 2005)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>Structure and syntax (e.g., grammatical rules); diction or lexis including connotation and denotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Framing (e.g., What is included? What is excluded?); can be material entities (e.g., photographs, films, monuments); typography (e.g., shape, color, size, texture, perspective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial</td>
<td>Physical: two-dimensional (e.g., how things are organized on a page), and three-dimensional (e.g., organization/layout of room); virtual (e.g., online)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestural</td>
<td>Nonverbal communication through movement, posture, gaze, facial expressions; symbolic gestures universally recognized (e.g., thumbs up for good job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical / Auditory / Verbal</td>
<td>Musical accompaniments to aid in tone and perspective; volume, pitch, tone (e.g., phonological)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because all modes are contextually based (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005), different communities and cultures decide what counts as a mode based on “their social-representational needs” (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p. 172). Therefore, what is considered a mode is inextricably shaped by social, cultural, and historical factors, which influence how multimodal resources are selected (Jocius, 2013) alongside a mode’s availability and its meaning-making potential (Beach, Thien, & Webb, 2012).
People orchestrate meaning through interactions of different modes. The third assumption of multimodality is that a multiplicity of modes—or ways that meaning is communicated—contribute equally to meaning in representation and communication (Jewitt, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Because “no single mode provides an exact fit, readily able to represent all the meaning potentials a person intends” (Serafini, 2014, p. 51), people convey meaning through combining modes. No purely monomodal texts or discourses exist, but rather all texts and discourses exist on a continuum where some modes are more present than other modes at different times (Walsh, 2008); this means that written language, visual images, and design elements are not mutually exclusive (Serafini, 2014). Moreover, one mode is not inherently better than the other, but rather different modes convey different meaning potentials individually, as well as in combination with one another (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Kress, 2010; Serafini, 2014). Additionally, materiality—or the physical substance—is central to the assumption that meaning is produced through interactions between multiple modes (Hepple, Sockhill, Tan, & Alford 2014; Jocius, 2013).

The materials are those “in and through which meaning is realized and through which meaning becomes available to others,” (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p. 172). For example, the materiality of a PowerPoint versus a digital movie communicate meaning differently due to how the former relies more on verbal modes and the later relies more on sound, image, and movement (Jocius, 2013). Accordingly, one must consider the affordances and limitations when selecting and combining modes, which can involve physical constraints, social practices, and material aspects associated with various modes (Serafini, 2014). This process
of remixing (Alvermann & Moore, 2011), or combining and repurposing modes—images, videos, music, and print—leads to practices of transmediation (Chisholm, 2011; Kress, 2003; Suhor, 1984).

**Meaning of signs are shaped in a social world.** The fourth assumption of multimodality is that meaning of signs are produced and shaped in social contexts. Individuals are social agents who choose signs or forms of expression they think are the most appropriate and apt for specific contexts during communication (Jewitt, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Kress et al., 2005) to achieve “maximum effect and benefit” (Kress, 2010, p. 1). The “rhetor is an improviser [without] an absolute freedom of choice,” (Kress et al., 2005, p. 20). Their choice of mode is constrained by audience as well as situation. Thus, individuals try to express themselves in ways that they believe are “maximally transparent” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 11) for others around them. Social semiotics “suggests that rules, whether written or unwritten, are made by people, and can therefore be changed by people” (Jewitt, 2005, p. 47). However, these rules cannot be changed by just anyone; therefore, the importance of power and social agency come into consideration.

All four of these assumptions are important when considering how communication occurs through multiple modes simultaneously, where language is only one part of the multimodal ensemble. Additionally, rhetors produce meaning through combining multiple modes, which have different meaning potentials, ultimately reinforcing how multimodality is contextually and socially situated. These four assumptions of multimodality present a view of literacy which emphasizes the individual contexts where learning takes place in schools, as
well as in different localities (i.e., content area classrooms) throughout schools. These assumptions framed my understanding for the present study and how the secondary English classroom is deeply situated within multimodality, which is explored more in depth in the following section.

**Secondary ELA Situated Within a World of Multimodality**

Researchers have proposed the ELA classroom as the perfect site for the nexus for change (Au & Gourd, 2013). Kress et al., (2005) positioned ELA as separate from other disciplinary subjects due to how social participants construct “entities in the English classroom [that] have an effect on the shape of the entity; a situation that cannot readily be imagined in subjects such as mathematics, science, geography, and others” (p. 4). Specifically, other disciplines are more concerned with content knowledge, whereas English is concerned with “explor[ing] enduring themes relevant to individuals and mankind” (Au & Gourd, 2013, p. 19). In addition to “the aesthetic (or implicit moral or ethical) sensibility, [English is a] subject oriented to the practicalities of effective communication” (Jewitt, 2010, p. 149). Consequently, ELA is a site constructed around students’ different ways of knowing and communicating through multimodal signs (Kress et al., 2005). Not only does the context of the classroom vary between different disciplines, but also between teachers and students; ergo, meaning in ELA is produced through the curriculum, the teacher’s praxis, and students’ responses to both (Kress et al., 2005).
**English Curriculum**

Due to the complex interactions between signs, participants, and contexts that merge in the English classroom, the resulting curriculum has been referred to as a *constructed text* (Yandell, 2007). This view acknowledges the amalgamation of signs that enter the English classroom through participants’ daily lives and interactions. Viewed in this way, the English curriculum reflects the social landscape and practices of the classroom. Kress and colleagues (2005) research on how English is constructed in inner city classrooms throughout London demonstrated that “English teachers actively construct their subject day by day, *differently* in the settings of the different classrooms” (p. 117), emphasizing how classrooms are contextually bound by school site, teachers’ classroom, time of day, and even day-to-day operations. This study is particularly relevant to my research because it emphasizes the importance of the students and the communities various social-representational needs and positions them as driving forces of change within the individual English classroom.

In addition to the needs of the student population, English is currently situated in an era framed by public criticism of education, accompanied by calls to address students’ lack of college and career readiness (ACT, 2005; NGABP & CCSSO, 2010). In multiple countries (i.e., Australia, UK, and US) national standards have been refined to incorporate changing literacy practices including the use of technology and multimodal texts which are necessary for global citizens (Jewitt, 2013). Despite increased attention to newer literacies, technologies, and multimodal texts reflected in standards, high stakes tests may be slower to adopt questions that reflect students’ comprehension and competency navigating multiple
modes such as image and text interactions (Unsworth & Chan, 2009). A driving factor for how English is produced and how it is experienced in classrooms is an amalgamation of government policy, schools’ responses to said policy, departmental decisions, social and geographic environment in which the school is located, teacher's background and experiences, as well as the demographics and dispositions of students in the classroom.

**Standardized assessments.** Driven by the desire to demonstrate equality in education across the country and world, standardized assessment and multimodal literacy are at a crossroads. Au and Gourd (2013) argued that despite being cloaked in a language of equity and closing the achievement gap, high stakes testing proves problematic for students and education in general. A primary point they offer is that “the statistical logic of standardized tests require that some students fail” (p. 16), which runs counter to the narrative painted by policy makers that all students should reach proficiency. If all students were to achieve “proficiency” on standardized assessments, then the validity of tests would be questioned immediately. Au and Gourd (2013) equate high stakes testing to economics, in that not everyone can be a “winner,” and that naturally there are some losers.

Close analysis of standardized tests in Australia demonstrate the lack of questions dealing with visual images, but more troubling is how poorly students performed on questions which did involve images. Unsworth and Chan (2009) posit how national assessments need to recognize both digital and print texts and reflect the multimodal nature of texts more broadly to include images. They found that less than 4% of the questions on the 2008 grade 9 National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) included
This limited set of questions also failed to address how the images contributed to meaning of the texts in either a direct or a supplementary manner.

On a separate assessment, the 2005 and 2007 Basic Skills Test (BST) in Australia for grade 5, Unsworth and Chan (2009) found a more promising percentage of test questions (33\%) involved images. They grouped these questions surrounding image-language interaction into two categories: *elaboration* and *extension*. Items classified as *elaboration* used either text or image to further elaborate—describe or specify—the meaning of the other mode. Items categorized under *extension* involved images or texts that added new meanings to the other mode. Despite the greater number of text-image questions on this assessment, students performed poorly on these types of questions, answering less than 50\% of such questions correctly. Unsworth and Chan’s findings reiterate the importance of integrating information simultaneously from multiple texts and multiple modes for comprehending, drawing inferences, and harnessing critical reading practices necessitated in today’s society.

**National standards.** The English classroom is affected by policies that enable or constrain teachers’ abilities to provide their students with equitable literacy instruction (Au & Gourd, 2013; Bean & Harper, 2011; Luke & Woods, 2008). Situated within the context of standardization, the speaking and listening strand of the Common Core State Standards (NGABP & CCSSO, 2010) predicates that students’ communication should “make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence to add interest” (SL.11-12.5) by the time they are in the 11th and 12th grade. Additionally, students should
be critical consumers of information which requires them to “integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) to make informed decisions and solve problems” (SL.11-12.2). Consequently, students should be able to make semiotic choices that demonstrate a clear understanding of how individuals make meaning and communicate through multiple modes.

With a growing attention to the presence of multimodal texts in schools, various studies have analyzed how national standards position such texts (Beavis, 2013; Mills & Exley, 2014). Mills and Exley (2014) compare how the standards in the United States (CCSS) and in Australia (ACARA) incorporate multimodality from grades K-10. According to their review of the CCSS, “narrative” appears 26 times throughout the reading and writing standards, displaying the high value that is placed on narrative texts in ELA. For grade 6-12, the CCSS reading standards are divided into reading informational texts and reading literature. Whereas the informational standards declare students should be able to interpret information presented visually, the literature standards do not attend to visual elements of design in narrative texts (Mills & Exley, 2014). This stands in contrast to the Australian curriculum.

In terms of multimodal texts and literature, Beavis (2013) described the national curriculum in Australia as more progressive than the US; it has become increasingly more progressive through its emphasis on the aesthetic value and experience of literature. Whereas the CCSS are divided into reading, writing, language, and speaking and listening, the Australian standards situate literature as one of three core strands alongside language and
literacy. Consequently, this positioning has further established the authority of literature in English classrooms throughout Australia. Additionally, the Australian standards ascribe tasks having students read or write in such a way that demonstrates their “appreciation” and “aesthetic” experience with literature. These standards herald a literary literacy through the use of “nomenclature [which] asserts the value of a particular type of experience and perspective as central to English curriculum” (Beavis, 2013, p. 243). This emphasis on a literary literacy values knowledge and texts in ELA classrooms differently than knowledge and texts in the other disciplines. Furthermore, the national standards in Australia have broadened the scope of texts and modes that warrant ‘literary’ attention. This recognition of a wider variety of multimodal texts reiterates the necessity for students who are “critical, capable and creative users of digital and multimedia forms of literacy” (Beavis, 2013, p. 244) in a world that is becoming more global and diverse.

While the Australian curriculum may highlight the aesthetic value and merit in literary texts, Mills and Exley (2014) contend that both the CCSS and the Australian curriculum value narrative texts with a varying emphasis on multimodality. Both multimodalities and metalanguage, the specific vocabulary for thinking about multimodal texts, which are necessary to support different sign systems are glaringly absent from the CCSS. As Mills and Exley (2014) argue “There is no recognition that visual, audio, spatial, and gestural meanings are used to support, juxtapose, and/or sometimes even deliberately contradict the linguistic meanings in the production and interpretation” of different texts (p. 138). However, an awareness of these complexities is important for understanding how
multiple modes work in conjunction with one another to create layered meanings in a text (Mills, 2005). Approaching literacy and texts from this perspective not only recognizes, but necessitates, students become critical users and producers of multimodal texts (Beavis, 2013; Towndrow et al., 2013). This means teachers must intentionally provide students with access to multimodal texts, as well as espouse a pedagogical stance that embraces a multimodal curriculum.

**Construction of English through Praxis**

Outside of the curriculum, high stakes testing, and national standards, teachers and students are fundamental for shaping the learning environments in English, creating what Jewitt and Kress (2010) refer to as a *multimodal orchestration* of English. This multimodal orchestration is concerned with how knowledge is created and received in the English classroom through teaching and learning materials, as well as the actions of sign-makers (i.e., teachers and students) in the classroom. What results through this multimodal orchestration is “the making of complex semiotic entities, *texts*” (Jewitt & Kress, 2010, p. 344). Their study takes the view that texts are multimodal ensembles of interactions between individuals, the spatial layout of the classroom, and pedagogical materials. In line with this notion that ELA is a constructed entity, this section explores research concerning multimodal social semiotics in the English classroom centered around how teachers make use of various texts and communicate classroom expectations through multiple modes (Ajayi, 2015; Kress et al., 2005; Sewell & Denton, 2011; Wilson, Smith, & Householder, 2014). The idea that students should be critical users and producers of multimodal texts for global participation
necessitates that teachers espouse a pedagogical stance that embraces a multimodal curriculum with intentionality. Thus, multimodality is fundamental for realizing the complex nature of communication (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005), the potentials of teachers’ pedagogical decisions (Hutchison, Cloonan, & Paatsch, 2014; Walsh, 2009; Wiseman, Kupiainen, & Mäkinen, 2015), how teachers’ beliefs are interwoven in the English classroom (Kress et al., 2005; Sturtevant & Linek, 2003), and how students layered responses to multimodal texts (Smith, 2016) all intersect in the English classroom as a complex mix of signs (Kress et al., 2005). Research concerning multimodal pedagogy is presented in the next section.

Kress and colleagues (2005) examined the conditions in which ELA was produced and actualized in various English classrooms and settings where the National Curriculum was being enacted in England. Using the lens of multimodal social semiotics, all aspects of the lesson and the classroom were considered meaningful contributions to English. This included the room layout, visuals displayed on the walls (i.e., students’ work, posters), student-grouping based on ability, and inclusion or exclusion of certain literary texts. The authors declared that “the meaning of any event or of any structures does not lie in the meaning of one sign, but has to be seen in the complex meanings of a set of signs all read together” (Kress et al., 2005, p. 25). Therefore, the appearance and interpretation of a single sign fails to tell the whole story about how English is produced and experienced in the classroom, thus promoting an expansive notion of ELA. The multiple meanings created in English classrooms are based upon contextual factors. For example, how a teacher organizes his/her
classroom—the spatial and physical layout—is a sign expressing his/her expectations about the social nature of the classroom; however, in a few cases the degree to which the layout encouraged or discouraged classroom discourse was different from the pedagogy observed and enacted. Consequently, this project highlighted how teachers and students portray and co-produce their ideologies of ability, identity, and resistance through nonverbal means such as grouping, their interactions with one another, and their gestures (Jewitt & Kress, 2010).

For my research study, multimodal social semiotics framed my understanding of how English is created contextually and socially through multiple modes wherein teachers’ and students’ ideologies and expectations surrounding the purpose of ELA created tensions in how a multimodal curriculum was actualized.

**Teachers guided by their beliefs.** A teacher’s beliefs are central to his or her multimodal pedagogy. The changing landscape of modern communication necessitates that individuals acknowledge and explore new ways of doing things, ultimately changing their mindsets or dispositions to accommodate new literacies and digital resources. Lankshear and Knobel (2007) referred to these altered dispositions as *Mindset 2*, because they recognize how an increase in technologies is fundamentally changing the way people communicate, as opposed to people with *Mindset 1* who believe communication is the same as always, just with technology incorporated. *Mindset 2* describes how people approach the contemporary world, recognizes how texts serve as a changing place for expertise and authority, and acknowledges how sites of production are no longer hierarchical, but constructed spaces of authorship and knowledge (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).
Not only are teachers’ beliefs (or Mindsets) important because of changing technologies, but their beliefs about literacy instruction may also present a barrier for implementation in the classroom. Whereas teachers’ content-oriented beliefs influence what is taught in the classroom, teachers’ pedagogical-oriented beliefs influence how teachers instruct students in their classroom. Teachers’ self–efficacy in their proficiency, or lack thereof, with certain strategies and texts is one of the main reasons cited for choosing to implement or disregard certain pedagogical practices (Donahue, 2000; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Theriot & Tice, 2008). What is unique about the teaching profession is that many teachers believe the way they were taught will also be effective for their students. This may prove problematic if many teachers were taught from direct instruction, rather than participatory methods, which are necessary in today’s classrooms to prepare critical thinkers and future citizens who are communicating and constructing knowledge multimodally.

Alongside entering the profession with preconceived notions about teaching and students, teachers also report their perceptions about teaching are influenced by contextual conditions that include high-stakes testing (Au & Gourd, 2013), time constraints (Siegel, 2012), and availability of materials (Sturtevant & Linek, 2003). Furthermore, teachers’ beliefs about their students, teaching practices, and content are directly related to how challenging teachers make their classroom activities and content for their students (Schunk, 1991), which are reflected in their pedagogical design. In conjunction with beliefs about their students, when teachers perceive contextual conditions as barriers to instruction in the ELA
classroom, they may be even less inclined to design their classroom in a way that promotes multimodal instruction.

**Pedagogical Design of The Classroom**

Teachers’ beliefs about knowledge and resulting pedagogy are shaped further by the school structure and foci. Specifically, students are taught to think, write, and respond in formulaic ways, especially in schools where emphasis is placed on standardized testing (Au & Gourd, 2013; Dooley & Assaf, 2009). When the emphasis of school is on test scores, teachers shy away from creative assignments and multimodality (Siegel, 2012) and lean more toward direct instruction. One of the main problems resulting from high stakes testing is subject matter contraction (Hallman, 2015), or narrowing of the curriculum, in which schools attempt to align their curriculum with the tests (Anagnostopoulos, 2003), and teach students to write in formulaic ways (Applebee & Langer, 2011). The focus of the classroom shifts from content and process to form and product (Au & Gourd, 2013). Sleeter and Stillman (2005) refer to Bernstein’s (1975) “frame” of curriculum, which is the amount of control teachers have over the contents of the curriculum. In schools where the frame is weak, teachers have more control over the selection, organization, pacing, and timing of their curriculum, as opposed to a strong curriculum frame, which is characterized by strong control outside the school. Problematically, multimodality does not fit into the classroom when instruction is geared toward formulaic ways of knowing and creating.

If teachers view knowledge as something to be transmitted hierarchically versus constructed cooperatively it will have a large influence on their instruction. Those who
endorse hierarchical, teacher-directed learning tend to focus more on covering the curriculum. In contrast, those who endorse constructivist methods resist “static, reproductive notions of teaching” (Gritter, 2010, p. 164), infuse technology in the classroom (Pope & Golub, 2000), strive to transition from familiar literacy tasks to multiple modes (Mills, 2010; Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010), to combine students’ prior knowledge, cross-disciplinary texts (Bull & Dupuis, 2014; Hill, 2014) and personal interpretations (Del Nero, 2017) to motivate and engage students (Parsons, Malloy, Parsons & Burrowbridge, 2015; Spires, Hervey, Morris, & Stelpflug, 2012) in content area reading and knowledge-building.

Even though ELA teachers may hold similar beliefs about the overall goals of English, their practices can be quite different due to contextual factors, and pressure placed upon them and their school from high stakes testing.

In “Pedagogy of New Literacies,” The New London Group (1996) proposed four components of multiliteracies pedagogy: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice (see Table 2.2). This multiliteracies pedagogy fits with the current research because multimodality informs meaning-making, but it is facilitated by multiliteracies--the pedagogical tool (Rowsell & Walsh, 2011).
### Table 2.2

*Overview of Four Components of a Multiliteracies Pedagogy (New London Group, 1996)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component of Pedagogy of Multiliteracies</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situated Practice</td>
<td>Students situate meaning-making in real world contexts; students learn when they are motivated and see relevance in activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overt Instruction</td>
<td>Students are explicitly taught metalanguage of design; students’ learning scaffolded to guide conscious awareness and control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Framing</td>
<td>Students interpret social context and purpose of design’s meaning; students constructively critique and creatively extend what they have learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformed Practice</td>
<td>Students transform existing meanings to design new meanings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The current research study draws attention to how a teacher’s pedagogical beliefs and decisions surrounding a multimodal curriculum shape the learning environment in one 12th grade English classroom through overt instruction and situated practice, which the following sections explain in more detail. Overt instruction can be thought of as the more direct approach to multimodality through metalanguage and scaffolding, whereas practice is more student directed. The key is one emphasizes the instruction of the teacher, while the other, the practice of the student.

**Overt instruction.** Rather than implying rote memorization and drill-and-kill exercises in ELA, *overt instruction* is concerned with making students consciously aware of their learning. Mills (2006) defines *overt instruction* as “the collaborative interactions
between expert and novice that enable learners to transcend what they can achieve independently” (p. 29). As such, teachers’ overt instruction should include explicitly teaching students the metalanguage associated with multimodal design (Bailey, 2009; Dalton, 2012) and scaffolding students’ use of digital and multimodal tools (Bailey & Carroll, 2010; Curwood & Cowell, 2011; Mills, 2010; Ranker, 2008).

**Metalanguage of Multimodality.** Similar to nuanced academic vocabulary needed to fully participate in various disciplines, students need this metalanguage to fully engage with multimodal texts and composing, which provides them with a refined and specific way of talking and thinking about multimodal texts (Serafini, 2015). Drawing on systemic functional linguistics, or Hallidayan linguistics, Unsworth (2006) calls for a metalanguage that encompasses the characteristics of participatory semiotic modes. Such a metalanguage more effectively captures the meaning-making potential of multimodal resources and “function[s] as a tool to enhance the development of critical social literacies” (p. 71). The New London Group (1996) asserted the importance of metalanguage in schools to empower students, rather than impose rules about standardization. Through this view, a metalanguage for multimodalities would honor variations and uniformity which are valued in ELA, and would replace the hegemony of a singular and standardized English (Kress, 2006).

Furthermore, metalanguage is one way to bring forth such affordances offered through multimodal resources into students’ immediate awareness. This can be accomplished through practicing analyzing others’ products before producing their own (Jocius, 2013; Turner, 2011), and discussing affordances of multiple modes in classroom practice (Bailey,
In Wiseman et al. (2015) study of photography in the third grade classroom, the teacher was observed integrating important terms specific to photography such as framing, symbol, time, and point of view. To further develop students’ use and knowledge of this metalanguage, Dalton (2012) suggested mini lessons for students that address features such as composing, production, and distribution of work. Additionally, when students reflect upon their multimodal composing process, they develop a metalanguage for design (Smith & Dalton, 2016). In many ways, teaching metalanguage in English is parallel to teaching grammar, both of which provide students effective tools for reading and writing analytically (Burn, 2010). In addition to metalanguage, scaffolding learning activities is a necessary part of overt instruction and guiding students toward a conscious awareness of their learning.

**Scaffolding.** Even though millennials have grown up immersed in technology, there is still a time and place for ensuring competency for digital tools through scaffolding (Yandell, 2007). Mills (2010) contended that teachers have the responsibility to model and scaffold multimodal literacies in the classroom to engage students in “mature forms of communication that are unattainable for many students without intervention and expert guidance” (p. 41). Teachers can scaffold students’ literacy practices by connecting school and home literacy practices (Vasudevan & Rodriguez Kerr, 2016), by brainstorming through written modes first (Bailey & Carroll, 2010; Curwood & Cowell, 2011; Ranker, 2008), and gradually incorporating multimodality through purposefully sequencing the curriculum (Mills 2010; Vasudevan et al., 2010). When there is a lack of guidance or scaffolding for students, they may be unable to “access new spatial and visual designs of meaning” (Mills,
2006, p. 26), as demonstrated in her ethnography of 6th graders designing Claymation movies. Scaffolding also allows the teacher to focus students’ attention on specific elements of multimodality. Mills (2006) argued that without appropriate scaffolding from the teacher, the students could not move beyond their known experiences to new experiences. However, Dalton (2012) offers a cautionary remark surrounding how too much scaffolding may limit students’ creative processes. There is a fine line between allowing too much freedom, or on the flip side, too many constraints when incorporating digital literacies and multimodal composition in the classroom. However, specific instruction from the teacher through metalanguage and scaffolding is necessary for practice to ensue.

**Situated practice.** According to the New London Group (1996), pedagogy that is characterized as a situated practice asks students to situate their meaning-making in real world contexts. This allows students to see the relevance of such tasks in their lives, and in turn affects their motivation. Human knowledge is constructed socially and is a “situated practice” (The New London Group, 1996, p. 84) that exists in a community of learners (Jacobs, 2012). The social construction of meaning is very reminiscent of sociocultural theories of learning and reading (Vygotsky, 1978). This view approaches students and learning from the perspective that students are not passive receptacles to be filled with information; rather they should be guided through activities where they are actively constructing meaning. This emphasizes learning as an active process that occurs when learners are motivated and see the relevance of a subject in their lives.
Motivated to see the relevance. Integral to situated practice is the notion of meaning making in real world contexts, which motivates students to see relevance in school subjects and activities. Bridging students’ out-of-school literacies with school is one way to promote engagement and make school more relevant for students (Dowdall, Vasudevan, & Mackey, 2014; Walsh, 2010). Teachers in Quirk et al., (2010) believed students experienced higher literacy growth when they were more internally invested, motivated, and naturally curious; in other words, “agents of their own literacy development” (p. 112). Teachers can use digital technologies (Mills, 2010) such as Wikis, blogs, mobile devices, music video, Facebook, and Twitter (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Pennington, 2014) and out-of-school literacy practices (Smith, 2014) to align and contextualize classroom activities more closely with students’ background and interests (Miranda, 2010), and use interdisciplinary projects to bridge the bifurcated content many students experience in high school between different subject areas (Bull & Dupuis, 2014; Hill, 2014)

One such interdisciplinary assignment was Hill’s (2014) Tour Across America. Students in this 8th grade language arts class created a multimedia project that created interdisciplinary connections between mathematics and writing. Students were hypothetically assigned the role of a tour manager of a fictional band preparing for a yearlong US tour. As such, this role required students to work in collaborative groups and plan the logistics of performing in all 50 states, considering revenue and expenditures, as well as create press releases and advertisements. Through this project, students exhibited a natural excitement for learning and reading. Whereas Hill (2014) was focused on the ELA classroom, Bull and
Dupuis (2014) explored using multimodal texts with high school students during an interdisciplinary unit on genetics between Biology and English classes. During the unit, students discussed nonfiction texts on environmentalism using literature circles in English, and created a digital media research project that spanned across both classes. Another way to span disciplines is through Hybrid texts—texts that integrate narrative and informational texts—which pose as an engaging genre to teach content area material across the curriculum (Bintz & Ciecierski, 2017). Similar to using multimodal projects to bridge the divide between different content areas, hybrid texts position literary and informational texts as symbiotic modes, as opposed to discrete texts relegated to different content areas (Bintz & Ciecierski, 2017). Pedagogy positioned as situated practice creates opportunities for relevant and engaging literacy practices from their out-of-school lives (Bowmer & Curwood, 2016) and connects ideas between disciplines within the school contexts.

**Classroom layout.** Serafini (2015) explained how pedagogy surrounding multimodal literacy should not focus solely on “an individual's perceptual and cognitive abilities, [it] should also address how visual images and multimodal texts function in broader sociocultural context” (p. 413). This necessitates pedagogy that addresses how information is presented and functions in society in order for students to be more critical in their everyday literacy practices. A teacher’s multimodal pedagogy can affect the spatial configuration of the classroom (Jewitt, Moss, & Cardini, 2007). Additionally, multimodal pedagogy hinges on preparing students for social and civic participation (Mills, 2010) and critically examining
social concerns (Jocius, 2016). This view of multimodal pedagogy reiterates the importance of English as situated in global communities.

**Physical space constructed in the classroom.** One way teachers construct their own versions of literacy and the English curriculum is through the spatial design of their classroom. They make conscious decisions about various modes to include through their text selection, the layout of the room, the decoration on the walls (Consalvo & David, 2016), and their gestures and praxis (Kress et al., 2005; Wilson et al., 2014). Jewitt and Kress (2010) asserted that “how phenomena or concepts are represented shapes both what is to be learnt (e.g., the curriculum) as well as how it is to be learnt (the pedagogic practices involved)” (p. 349). Researchers have explored multimodal pedagogy as one way to understand how disciplinary specific gestures contribute to meaning-making in the content areas (Wilson et al., 2014), how to engage students by bridging traditional literacy in the classroom with newer technologies (Alvermann & Moore, 2011), and how newer technologies incorporated into the classroom change the pedagogical space (Jewitt et al., 2007).

Jewitt et al., (2007) found that interactive whiteboards (IWB) altered English through the spatial configuration of the classroom by shifting the emphasis of the classroom towards the front of the room towards a central focus on a visual display. It was observed in this study that interactive whiteboards changed how English teachers positioned themselves in the classroom to create spaces for more interaction between the teacher and the individual students and more interaction between peers. Changing the mode of how certain information
was presented to students (i.e., through an interactive whiteboard) physically altered the teacher’s instruction in addition to students’ responses to the multimodal curriculum.

**Teacher as the gatekeeper to access materials and texts.** Social semiotics “suggests that rules, whether written or unwritten, are made by people, and can therefore be changed by people” (Jewitt, 2005, p. 47). However, these rules cannot be changed by just anyone; therefore, the importance of power and social agency come into consideration especially in the classroom where the teacher is positioned as the authority of the subject area. For classrooms and curriculums that are focused on students reading and writing in standard English, it becomes a critical issue about power; it “entails a version of human social subjects as bound by convention” (Kress, 2006, p. 38). Perpetuating the expectation for students to abide by the established conventions of language and conform to standard English is an issue established and maintained by those in power, which is, in most cases, the teacher. Kress (2006) insisted that allowing students opportunities to connect diverse resources for meaning-making in innovative ways is ultimately an “economic resource” of tremendous value “in the market of social interaction” (Kress, 2006, p. 39). From this point of view, literacy becomes a market based principle that students need for life in a global context. This view shifts the power from the teacher as distributor or knowledge, to student as the producer of knowledge and meaning. Questioning the standard forms of English and acknowledging how meaning is produced and received through multiple modes in English changes the relationship between consumption and production of texts, which has implications for both teaching and learning.
Multimodal texts. One way teachers enact their agency on the curriculum is through the texts they choose. However, research from teacher surveys on text selection and use in the English classroom show that texts have remained primarily unchanged in the last 50 years (Applebee, 1992; Stotsky et al., 2010, Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Teachers’ selection of texts are closely intertwined with their knowledge and beliefs of texts, including their unfamiliarity with newer Young Adult (YA) titles (Applebee, 1992; Friese, Alvermann, Parkes, & Rezak, 2008), fears about how some books may be received negatively by local communities, as well as feelings of unrest about their literary merit (Applebee, 1992). Aside from their unfamiliarity with various texts, teachers’ choice of texts may be constrained by access to texts, institutional pressure where schools dictate exact texts for teachers to use, and high-stakes assessments (Friese et al., 2008). Teachers may select texts due to their underlying concerns about readability or for content knowledge; however, many times texts selected and used in the classroom come from textbooks or anthologies (Stotsky et al., 2010; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015), and do not reflect students’ interests. Ultimately, a teacher’s choice regarding one resource over another in the ELA classroom can restrict students’ learning and access to multiple modes in the school setting.

Several researchers have investigated the changing literacy practices within schools and increasingly noted how a variety of texts have become recognized as legitimate pieces of literature (Bowmer & Curwood, 2016; Cook, 2017; Vasudevan & Rodriguez Kerr, 2016). This research reflects the merging of traditional and contemporary modes of communication (Beavis, 2013; Jocius, 2013), the different demands placed upon readers (Jewitt, 2009;
 Rowsell et al., 2013; Walsh, 2006; Zhang & Duke, 2008), graphic novels (Jimenez & Meyer, 2016), and students’ creation of digital movies (Mills, 2007; Smith, 2014).

**Reading multimodal texts.** Due to the changing nature of communication in the information age and literacy practices requisite to accommodate these changes, the skills needed to access and comprehend multiple types of texts is continuously evolving. Unsworth (2001) endorsed the “textual habitat” (p. 7) that both affects individuals and is affected by individuals through the interrelationship between readers, environments, and texts. Different types of multimodal texts (i.e., digital texts, graphic novels, picturebooks) necessitate different ways of approaching reading (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000; O’Brien et al., 2008; Park, 2012; Zhang & Duke, 2008). Allowing students opportunities to learn and communicate using multiple modes creates more potentials for how students read and access texts, including where they start reading, as well as what parts of the text they read (Jewitt, 2009).

Previous research concerning students’ consumption of multimodal texts in secondary ELA classrooms demonstrates how meaning is produced through individuals’ navigation between the layout of images, words, and colors (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Walsh, 2006). To explore similarities and differences between how meaning is produced and received through multiple modes, Walsh (2006) examined the various reading demands required between three different texts—a novel, a picture book, and an informational website—all on the same topic. All three modes required readers to interpret the purpose and context of the modes as primarily textual, visual, or digital, while at the same time making connections to their
background knowledge, and filling in any gaps in their understanding. While meaning-making occurred in similar ways through all three texts, the processing of modes was different due to their varying affordances. The modal affordances, or meaning-making possibilities, are derived from the cultural, social, and historical uses of modes. In other words, this study showed that linguistic modes dominated print-based texts and created a mostly linear and sequential reading path, whereas visual images dominated multimodal texts (picturebooks and websites) and included readers’ visual, tactile, and kinesthetic senses to navigate reading pathways in a nonlinear manner. Consequently, various modal affordances associated with predominantly linguistic, pictorial, and digital texts changed the way a reader approached reading.

The way a reader approaches reading is also influenced by his/her assumptions about texts. A reader's presuppositions directly affect his/her dispositions and actions during reading, where one enters a text, and if he/she reads a text in a linear manner or not (Rowsell et al., 2013). This stance or expectation of reading changes how one approaches and subsequently reads a text. Rowsell et al. (2013) posit that people under the age of thirty have a different stance towards texts due to their “distinctly different position in social organization and arrangements” (p. 1188) than older individuals. This is important since students in the millennial generation have grown up surrounded by a changing landscape of communication caused by digital texts and technology, which alters how they approach multimodal texts. Consequently, multimodality creates multiple potentials and ways for students to access texts (Cook, 2017), and consumption of different texts leads to more active
and nuanced reading practices (Cho, 2013; Rowsell et al., 2013). Considine et al., (2009) posit that a primary goal of teachers today should be helping students in the millennial generation analyze, evaluate, and construct meaning from print and nonprint texts. Therefore, the instructional focus around multimodal texts should be around what said texts *do* and should mentor students to be more critical consumers of texts in an era of globalization.

In public domains and communication, language has become decentralized, replaced by visuals as the main medium of communication. This change is not only apparent in society as a whole, but in school settings through textbooks (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). In their sample of English textbooks, Bezemer and Kress (2008) found an increased number of images incorporated in texts written between 1930 to 2005. Textbooks from 1930 contained 1-2 images per every 100 pages, whereas texts from 2005 contained 3 images per every 10 pages. Their study highlighted that images were not used to illustrate or duplicate written portions, but both words and images attended to discrete aspects of meaning. This finding is important because it highlights how meaning is produced and received through multiple modes simultaneously. This increased reliance on visual modes seen in textbooks and other areas of communication breaks down the hierarchy of modes to accommodate contemporary reading and writing practices in classrooms in which linguistic modes have historically been the most predominant mode utilized in English classrooms and schools.

**Out-of-school literacies.** In general, students are caught between the different ways that in-school literacy practices and out-of-school literacy practices manifest themselves. “Boring,” in-school writing (Witte, 2007) requires students to respond to certain prompts;
compose research papers; analyze characters, setting, and plot; and create persuasive and argumentative analyses of literature and ideas. These practices are traditionally relegated to the world of school literacies. In contrast, literacies of everyday life (Grainger, Goouch, & Lambirth, 2005) or out-of-school writing, involve more choice, are more informal and conversational in nature, promote student interaction and collaboration, and use multiple modes to accurately convey an individual’s message (Mills, 2010). Out-of-school literacies involve writing for various purposes and over various platforms such as text messages, social media, blogs, wikis, and instant messaging (Pennington, 2014). When incorporated into the classroom, such literacies seem more like extracurricular writing (NCTE, 2009), and they display a systematic shift in the purpose and audience of students’ writing (Gomez, Schieble, Curwood, & Hassett, 2010; Grainger et al., 2005; Walsh, 2010). Furthermore, digital tools can serve as a conduit for authenticity (Bailey, 2009), and collaboration (Mills, 2010), exploring one's identity (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Ito et al., 2010; Vasudevan, 2006), and discovery (Goss et al., 2016). This increased interaction between individuals, technology tools, and online spaces is characteristic of new literacy practices (Gomez et al., 2010), and characterized as multimodal by how individuals communicate through a variety of modes online.

Creating multimodal texts in the classroom not only capitalizes on students’ competence with digital skills developed outside of school, these texts also allow students to represent their knowledge in alternative modes of representation (Jocius, 2016). Writing that is characteristic of out-of-school composing removes the teacher as the sole consumer of
student writing and opens the door for the amount of influence and inspiration students can have on one another’s ideas. Online journals are one way to facilitate student-to-student conversations and collaboration, rather than the assign, grade, and return model that is traditionally implemented in classrooms (Read & Landon-Hays, 2013). Multimodal composition is one way to bridge students’ out-of-school literacies to the classroom, as well as require students to think deeply about how meaning is “constructed, conveyed, and eventually interpreted by an audience” (Jocius, 2016, p. 16). Refocusing students on the text, purpose, and audience while reading and writing asks them to critically analyze texts through a lens that is necessary to be a critical and global citizen. (Considine et al., 2009; see Figure 2.3).

![T.A.P Media Triangle](image)

*Figure 2.3* T.A.P Media Triangle Adapted from Considine et al., (2009).

Students who are critical consumers of information must be able to make sense of information from a variety of sources and perspectives. This requires them be “adept and flexible in working across different modalities” (Goss et al., 2016, p. 338). Therefore, it is
necessary for students to be critical and adopt an evaluative stance that examines and questions the author and source of a text (Goss et al., 2016). One way to address this is through the T.A.P. Media Literacy Model (Considine et al., 2009), which focuses on Text (e.g., medium, genre), Audience (e.g., interests, lifestyles), and Production (e.g., context in how a text is created, distributed, and consumed). This model is one way to help students who are constantly inundated by information construct meaning from various texts and become more critical consumers and producers of texts, which is a skill necessitated in an increasingly global world (Considine et al., 2009; Grainger et al., 2005).

Students’ Response and Learning to Multimodality

Sites of multimodal production, such as English classrooms, become particularly important in literacy research for understanding how students construct meaning in schools. Multimodality incorporated into the English classroom engages students in a “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2012), positioning them as active producers and consumers of texts. Studies have focused on English students’ engagement with literature through aesthetic responses to literature (Del Nero, 2017; Wissman & Costello, 2014), creating multimodal representations about literature (Chisholm, 2011; Miller, 2011; Smith, 2014), and construction of identity through classroom interaction and artifacts (Leander, 2002; Consalvo & David, 2016). Previous studies on students’ engagement surrounding multimodal texts have shown the most engaging literacy tasks were the ones that students found authentic (Bailey, 2009), included time for collaboration with peers (Smith, 2014), allowed for choice (Vasudevan, 2006), and provided an appropriate amount of support from the teacher (Parsons
et al., 2015). Furthermore, studies on multimodal products have also explored students’ nuanced awareness of audience and purpose.

**Multiple Modes Used to Construct Meaning**

Research presents individuals as social agents who choose signs or forms of expression they think are the most appropriate and apt for specific contexts during communication (Jewitt, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Kress et al., 2005) to achieve “maximum effect and benefit” (Kress, 2010, p. 1). As previously discussed, choice of mode is contextually bound and constrained by audience as well as situation. Therefore, individuals try to express themselves in ways that they believe are “maximally transparent” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 11) for others around them. Thus, clarity in communication highlights the importance of audience in students’ design decisions.

In one particular study, Jocius (2013) explored how adolescents used digital media for academic purposes in response to reading *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2003). The predominant mode of communication was dependent upon students’ choice of composition/presentation tool (PowerPoint or digital video software). PowerPoint presentations lent themselves to static images and explicit explanation in the form of written or oral explanations; whereas digital videos incorporated more auditory modes through moving images, and voiceovers. As students become more competent and familiar with multimodal composing, they “need the chance to translate, transform, and transduce modes” (Jocius, 2016, p. 20).
Design of Multiple Modes

Design opportunities supported through multimodal composition are one way students and teachers can rethink textual authorship and authority in the English classroom. Situated in multimodality, freedom and design choices allow students’ products to communicate to a larger audience and contribute to their agency and engagement in the English classroom. Students can exercise choice through their selection of topic (Bailey, 2009; Vasudevan, 2006), their selection of mode (Jocius, 2013; Vasudevan et al., 2010), how they synthesize information (Hutchison et al., 2014), and organize information for an audience (Walsh, 2007). Essential to design is the concept of (re)design or (re)mixing (Alvermann & Moore, 2011) modes to create new texts that communicate their message and understanding to an audience in a nuanced manner.

(Re)design / (Re)mixing modes. (Re)designing and (re)mixing modes affords individuals with innovative ways to communicate. The New London Group (1996) used hybridity to refer to how individuals restructure modes through processes of (re)designing. Through hybridity, people are constantly creating and innovating with different modes that are available to them in various contexts and cultures to make meaning. This process of combining modes and transferring meaning across modes leads to practices of transmediation.

Transmediation. Suhor (1984) first introduced transmediation, which he defined as “translation of content from one sign system into another” (p. 250). This reconfiguration or reshaping of modes can result in loss/gain of specificity, generality, and ordering of
message/ideas (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Chisholm, 2011; Walsh, 2009). Co-constructing multimodal representations can facilitate students’ talk about literature and support their literary interpretations (Chisholm, 2011). Chisholm’s (2011) study of 12th graders discovered rich talk occurred during multimodal composing. Students in this study co-constructed meaning and pushed each other’s reasoning focused around their study of Macbeth.

Other studies have demonstrated that using digital videos for reflection (Bruce, 2009; Smith & Dalton, 2016) enabled students to move beyond the literal meaning of a text and towards a deeper understanding of these themes which were presented in new ways (Miller, 2011; Ranker, 2008). Through the process of transmediation, generative thinking results when no clear link exists between the content and expression of sign systems (Siegel, 2006; Siegel & Rowe, 2011). Thus, it is through this struggle for comprehension and understanding where students engage in literacy by integrating their background knowledge, prior experiences, and in-school and out-of-school literacies.

**Recursive nature of composing.** In the classroom, digital tools enable students to engage in the recursive process of writing that happened between modes (Dalton & Smith, 2012) and at various stages (e.g., planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) in the writing process (Bruce, 2009; Jewitt, 2005; Jocius, 2016). Fifth graders in Jocius’ (2016) Neighborhood Stories Program approached multimodal composition through various paths throughout the study as they became more comfortable working across modalities. Some students determined music choices first, while others started the design process with visual elements and pictures; these entry points in design were dependent upon students’
perceptions of the affordances offered through the different modal resources. Similarly, Jewitt (2005) focused on students in the 7th grade as they explored various ways to combine design elements such as borders, images, fonts, and pictures when constructing brochures using Word documents. The reiterative nature of Word afforded students the ability to design and redesign their brochure multiple times in order to achieve their desired effect for their intended audience.

**Identity Explored Through Multimodal Composition**

The variability of design choices is another way for students to represent their identities in the classroom through layering different modes (Rowsell & Pahl, 2007) and assuming authorial stances (Vasudevan et al., 2010). Composers may represent their personal goals and interests through laying different modes (Rowsell & Pahl, 2007). Vasudevan et al., (2010) used the term *authorial stances* to describe how students took “on literate identities and claim[ed] a presence as an author and narrator of one’s own experiences” (p. 461). Students involved in this study engaged in multimodal storytelling by drawing on their prior knowledge, experiences, and interests from outside of school to engage in the academic content of school, and repositioning themselves as “successful” students. Nagle and Stooke (2016) assert that an *identity text* (New London Group, 1996) is “created when students are encouraged to use the full repertoire of their talents, to choose their own topics and decide how they will carry out their projects” (p. 3). Such activities engage students in designing identity texts that authenticate their out-of-school experiences inside the walls of the school.
Engagement and Resistance

Drawing from Rosenblatt’s (1988) Transactional Reader Response theory, the meanings that students make while reading and writing are shaped by the purpose and stance individuals bring to the text/event. Not only does the reader's background influence the meaning of the text, but the medium of relevant literature allows readers to “explore [them]selves and the world around [them]” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 37). Even though Rosenblatt was not describing work with multimodal texts directly, her theory is significant because it emphasizes how meaning is constructed at different places in time and between different people, which highlights the contextual and individual piece associated with reading and writing. Furthermore, various researchers studying multimodality in ELA used Rosenblatt’s Transactional Reader Response to frame their study (e.g., Del Nero, 2017; Wissman & Costello, 2014). For Del Nero (2017), “aesthetic transactions with texts must be prioritized for academic reading to be a meaningful experience for all students” (p. 9). In this study of 7th grade ELA students, aesthetic transactions with texts acted as a catalyst for discussion in the classroom, where students drew personal connections and parallels between different Gothic texts in meaningful ways that reflected their real lives (Del Nero, 2017).

Wissman and Costello (2014) noted in their study of 8th grade students in a reading support class that students’ aesthetic transactions with texts enhanced their overall thinking and responses to The Outsiders (Hinton, 1967). In this study, students created comics drawn from their sensory, creative, and experiential aspects of reading and writing. Students who completed assignments geared toward efferent goals proposed utilitarian ends of “just get it
done.” Products that represented an efferent reading showed a lack of engagement with the novel and were more concerned with providing an accurate representation of the novel, rather than exploring the semiotic resources afforded through the digital composing tool, whereas students who engaged in aesthetic digital composing found images that contributed to their transactions in unexpected and dynamic ways. Students closer to the aesthetic end of the efferent-aesthetic curriculum utilized social agency to interact with literature in creative and nuanced ways (Del Nero, 2017; Wissman & Costello, 2014).

**Summary**

Multimodal social semiotics informs this study and addresses the complex nature and context surrounding the English language arts classroom. Currently English classrooms are situated in an era of high stakes testing and national standards which do not embrace multimodality in a way that the changing nature of communication necessitates. Overall, researchers agree that students communicate through multiple modes, in which language is only one part, that different modes have different meaning potentials, and the meaning of signs is shaped in a social world. More research is needed on how multiple modes of communication can be used in the English classroom and accepted as legitimate pieces of literature and texts by students.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

“Much of what English is and does is precisely about forms of social interaction and ‘social being’; it is and remains still the domain of subjectivity and of [an] identity of a certain kind.” (Kress et al., 2005, p. 30)

This qualitative case study investigated the teaching and learning surrounding a multimodal curriculum of one teacher and six students in a 12th grade English classroom. Qualitative data collection methods were used for this study based upon the philosophical assumption that reality is contextually constructed and seeks to understand and describe human behavior from a much smaller sample (Merriam, 1998). Over a three-month period, I examined a multimodal curriculum within one suburban ELA classroom. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does one teacher’s beliefs about teaching multimodal curriculum translate to both pedagogy and classroom practices?
2. How do students respond to his multimodal curriculum?

Chapter 3 details the methods utilized in my study to investigate a contemporary situation (a multimodal curriculum) positioned within its real-world context (a 12th grade ELA classroom). First, I outline the research design and methodology, followed by an overview of the research site and participants. Next, I describe steps in data collection and data analysis, and address issues of validity and reliability, as well as acknowledge limitations of the study in the final section.
Research Design and Method

Given that the focus of this qualitative case study was on the multimodal curriculum and students’ responses in one 12th grade ELA classroom, case study methodology was chosen for the intent of exploring and describing the uniqueness and situationality of this particular case (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Additionally, the descriptive nature of case study lends itself to rich, thick description (Geertz, 1973). In the following sections, I discuss case study methodology and the design for this study.

Case Studies

In general, case studies are not used to establish or modify generalizations, but rather to focus on particularization (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Adhering to the notion that knowledge is constructed, case study was an appropriate methodology to understand how individuals in this 12th grade ELA classroom make sense of their experiences and construct knowledge surrounding a multimodal curriculum in a single ELA classroom. The case for the study at hand was limited to a single 12th grade English classroom. Due to the multiple participants involved in the study, Yin’s (2014) single-case embedded design was the most appropriate choice for this study (see Figure 3.1).
Utilizing case study methodology positioned me as an “interpreter and gatherer of interpretations” in which I reported my “renditions or construction of the constructed reality or knowledge” gathered throughout this investigation (Yazan, 2015, p. 137). The goal in this case study was discovery and insight driven from my desire to explore “how” and “why” questions (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Through qualitative data collection methods, including interviews and “discrete observations” (Stake, 1995, p. 12), this single-case embedded case study examined how individuals’ beliefs, practices, and responses are linked to a multimodal curriculum.

**Description of the Research Site**

The context of this study was a 12th grade English classroom at Mountain Pines High School (all names and places are pseudonyms), which is located in a large district in a mid-
sized suburban city in the western United States. The study focused on one teacher, Mr. Z (participants self-selected pseudonyms), and a focus group of six students during his first hour class period. In the next section, I will describe the participant selection process and provide a brief snapshot for each of the seven participants.

Site Selection and Access

As a current teacher at Mountain Pines High School, I selected Mr. Z’s classroom as the primary site for this study for several reasons. First, Mr. Z was the only teacher in the English department involved in the school’s Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiative. Second, during senior English meetings, which took place over the course of the first semester of the 2015-2016 academic school year, I was continually intrigued by the ways Mr. Z spoke of incorporating multimodality into his daily lessons to engage students in his classroom. Lastly, as the lead teacher for the senior English team, Mr. Z was in charge of revamping the senior curriculum which had been in flux for the past ten years.

Previously, educators of this particular course had not taught the class for more than one year consecutively. Since senior English is a requirement imposed upon all students in order to graduate, Mr. Z approached planning the curriculum with students in mind. He realized that many—if not most—students in Senior Composition and Literature [SCL] would not pursue English at the college level, or even a post-secondary education. Additionally, 12th grade is a class where students are free from the restraints of standardized testing, in which Mr. Z felt as though senior English could become a place where both
teachers and students could engage in more creative outlets through a subject that is notoriously traditional in both texts and assignments.

Prior to collecting data in the spring semester of 2016, I met with Mr. Z to express my interest and to describe my research in detail, as well as conduct informal observations to narrow my focus within his classroom. After I received approval from the Institutional Review Board at North Carolina State University, I sent the approved protocol to the school district’s central office for their authorization. After I received approval, I met with Mr. Z to get his formal consent, and received consent from students who volunteered from this class before collecting data.

Since I was interested in investigating the teaching and learning surrounding a multimodal curriculum, purposeful sampling was used to select a case that was most likely to lead to deeper understandings, to develop assertions, and possibly modify pre-existing generalizations (Stake, 1995). Therefore, a single classroom teacher was purposefully selected to enable a deeper understanding of how a multiplicity of factors intersect in this teacher’s views about a multimodal curriculum, and how these beliefs are related to his pedagogical decisions. A focal group of students who volunteered to participate—representative of the whole class—were identified as embedded units of analysis within the case to show how this multimodal curriculum is experienced by students during their final semester of high school.
The School

The site for my dissertation study was a public high school located in a suburban area of the Western United States. Mountain Pines High School is situated in one of the two large school districts that were awarded “Accredited with Distinction” by the state’s Department of Education. Equally important, it is one of only three high schools in the entire city that offers an International Baccalaureate (IB) program, and of these three, it is the only school that requires every freshmen and sophomore to take untracked English classes in the Middle Years Programme (MYP), which is the precursor to the Diploma Programme for juniors and seniors. In 2010, freshmen and sophomore English curriculums became completely integrated by eliminating tracked classes and adopting the MYP model. In an effort to increase inquiry and provide all students with a high-quality education, this shift toward MYP is echoed in the school’s mission statement, which reiterates the desire to provide all students with an “inclusive learning community [which is] dedicated to excellence and growth, prepares and empowers students to be leaders through the exploration and engagement in rigorous and innovative educational…experiences that cultivate character in a respectful and safe environment” (Mountain Pines website). Ideally through the MYP program, all students have experienced the same rigorous academic curriculum in their freshmen and sophomore English courses, through which a consistent groundwork and set of common expectations has been established for all students at the high school.

The school offers both Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, in addition to remedial, traditional, and honors classes for junior and senior
students. By the time students reach their senior year they have three choices which would fulfill their final English Requirement: IB Language and Literature HL II, AP Literature and Composition, or Senior Composition and Literature (SCL). Consequently, senior English is comprised of students who have either opted out of the IB and AP programs their junior or senior years for the traditional English track, or students who may just be looking for an “easy” English credit their senior year.

During the 2015-2016 school year, Mountain Pines High School enrolled approximately 1650 students, with student demographics comprised of 68% White, 15% Hispanic, 7% Asian, 4% African American, and 6% other; only 13% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. In this relatively homogenous community, the school operates on a 90-minute block which rotates every two-days. Students enroll in eight courses each semester, meaning four of their classes meet every other day. Due to the rotating block schedule, some weeks SCL met three times a week, other weeks the class only met two times a week.

**The Classroom**

Mr. Z’s classroom was outfitted with his school assigned laptop, a document camera, a whiteboard, a video projector, and a projection screen located at the front of the room. Mr. Z’s desk was situated in the rear of the room at the right-hand corner. When he was not sitting at his desk, he was frequently moving around the room to touch base with students, or sitting at the front of the room facing students perched on a stool or an empty student desk. Students’ desks were arranged into a horseshoe formation comprised of desks two to three rows deep. This panoptic arrangement of student desks suggested a layout to facilitate
discussion and group work amongst students. During one observation, Mr. Z commented to his students about the class layout, noting “If it were up to me—by the way—we wouldn’t have desks. I would just have chairs in here. Folding chairs. Couches and stuff. But anyways, it would be more like a rotating office” (transcription, March 11, 2016). This brief comment from Mr. Z highlights his ideal classroom layout that runs counter to normative classroom arrangements (see Figure 3.2; Note: Mr. Z did not intentionally group focal students in proximity to one another).

![Figure 3.2](image)

*Figure 3.2* Mr. Z’s classroom layout with focal participants’ placement.
Instruction. A typical day in Mr. Z’s classroom was structured into three discrete sections. After greeting students, Mr. Z usually gave students a verbal overview of the class period, in addition to upcoming senior events. These announcements—intended specifically for seniors—increased in frequency as the year neared an end. His verbal overview of class was accompanied by a visual component, where a PowerPoint slide projected a thought provoking quote, the daily agenda, and that night’s homework. After briefly checking in with students, the first portion of class was devoted to guiding students to think about relevant themes and concepts that would present themselves in the reading for that class period. During this time, students were asked to respond to a prompt in their journal or hold a brief discussion after viewing a short online video. The second portion of class was devoted to reading the text, either as a class or individually. Since “text” in this class took the form of both written and visual texts, “reading” involved viewing movies as well as reading print texts. The third part of class was devoted to a wrap up activity of either questions, response journals, or a discussion.

On February 22nd, 2016, the start of the school day shifted for all students from 7:45am to 7:35am. The impetus for this extension in the school day was caused by a recent string of snow days, and was instituted district wide to ensure students had enough contact classroom time in order to graduate. Prior to this change, most students were present when the bell rang at 7:45am. However, once this shift was in place—on more occasions than not—there were ten or fewer students present in the classroom when the first period bell rang. Mr. Z would acknowledge students present in the classroom with a brief “good
morning,” and then class would officially commence anywhere from five to fifteen minutes after the 7:35am bell when a majority of students had straggled into the classroom. This change in the school hours also lead to Mr. Z reiterating his announcements from the beginning of class which pertained to the senior schedule to ensure students who walked in late were privy to this information as well.

The Teacher

During his first interview, Mr. Z mentioned that his general teaching philosophy was “to try to do as much student-led, centered discussion teaching as possible” (interview, March 4, 2016). Currently in his thirteenth year of teaching—a majority of which were spent at the postsecondary level during and after completing his doctorate in Philosophy—the move from a college professor to a high school teacher “opened [him] up to much more creation, creativity, product—creativity-based, product-based forms of learning” (interview, March 4, 2016). Especially important to these student-led projects were the affordances associated with digital tools because “for the students today—it’s more native to them in a sense. It’s more part of their everyday life” thus transforming student centered learning in his classroom beyond traditional pen and paper and essay forms (interview, March 4, 2016).

One of the primary goals Mr. Z had for his students was for them to “leave the English class with a better understanding of how complicated our inter- and intra- personal lives are” (interview, March 4, 2016). Mr. Z tackled the idea of “how complicated it is to be human being and deal with yourself, and how complicated it is to be a human being and deal with other people around you” by trying to model for students this complication, but also by
incorporating various texts into his classroom to make students more reflective of why people are treated differently (interview, March 4, 2016). When describing his overall goals for his students he emphasized “get[ting] students to the essence—the core, or the substance—of what we're trying to teach, not just the form” (interview, March 4, 2016).

The Students

Due to the nature of SCL being one of the three required English courses offered for students during their senior year at Mountain Pines High School, “you really have a mixed bag in the classroom...the classroom is very complicated” with a varying degree of students interested in the curriculum at hand (interview, April 28, 2016). As mentioned before, the student population in SCL was composed of both ex-IB students, ex-AP students, and general education students who each have their own rationale behind taking SCL. This variability among students in the classroom was one of the driving forces behind Mr. Z’s predilection toward a multimodal curriculum.

Snapshot of the student participants. Twenty-five students (17 males and 8 females) were enrolled in Mr. Z’s senior English class. All students were invited to participate in the study at the beginning of the semester. Of the twenty-five students, seven students (4 males and 3 females) expressed interest and returned their signed consent form for the study. One student dropped out of the study before Spring Break because she was too busy to find time for the three interviews outside of the class period. The remaining six focal students were representative of the whole class, including low, middle, and high achieving students and were balanced in terms of race (two self-identified as Asian and four as White)
and gender (two self-identified as females and four males; see Table 3.1 for a summary of student participants).

Table 3.1

*Description of Focal Students’ Attributes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focal Student</th>
<th>Race*</th>
<th>Gender*</th>
<th>Student Self-Reported Perceptions About English and Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Furgy</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Read books outside of school from fantasy genre and financial books to learn investment tips; Likes how English allows individual interpretations, and there is not one right answer; Texts in ELA are good for teaching interpretation and comprehension; Considers sound as a mode due to feeling the emotion behind it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrett</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Identifies as “not a huge reader”; cites only reading text messages outside of school; feels unsuccessful when given too many options to choose from in assignments; likes graphic design; uses color and pictures to evaluate it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Identified as a “very argumentative kid” who doesn’t like to read; takes a blatant disregard for rubrics; considers texts important if they make one think and allow for debate; mainly reads children’s books to his son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Does not like reading or writing because she “is a bad reader”; likes to visualize while she reads; admits to reading constantly: phone, posters, magazines, at work; but doesn’t sit down and read a novel on her own time; feels creativity is relegated to art class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Smith</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Does not like to read, but likes short chunks of information usually found on websites such as reddit.com; feels more engaged when allowed the freedom to choose topics in writing in ELA; disregards MLA when writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.1 (Continued)

| Rose       | White | Female | Likes how ELA allows for different viewpoints and creativity which you can “make it your own without sounds unintelligent” (interview, February 18, 2016); values the diversity in texts read in school due to different individuals’ interests; for her a text was something with “writing and words and stuff” whereas a picture would be considered a source that can be used |

*Both race and gender were how participants self-identified.

**Furgy.** Furgy, a self-identified Asian male student, described himself as a busy individual who frequently “put school on the back burner” his senior year due to too many extracurricular activities, such as playing the cello and working 30 hours a week after school (interview, March 3, 2016). One of the more active participants in the classroom, Furgy sat in the front row and was frequently observed searching Amazon on his phone looking at computer parts to purchase with John Smith.

**Garrett.** Garrett, a self-identified white male, sat in the back of the classroom, and rarely voiced his opinion during whole class discussions. In our first interview, he described “school as not really being [his] thing” (February 17, 2016). He labeled himself a creative person in certain aspects, and cited his interest and knowledge in graphic design to be related to his background in stock car racing. During class, Garrett frequently shared work with Ginger or Rose.

**Ginger.** Ginger, a self-identified white male, was frequently late or absent to class, and on several occasions had his head on his desk during class. During class, he frequently discussed with Garrett the challenges he faced with being a new father to his 7-month-old son. Despite walking in late, Mr. Z never had to direct Garrett toward the current classroom
activity; rather through observation of his peers, and an occasional inquiry directed at Garrett, Ginger would quickly pick up on what his peers were working on and follow suit. Albeit most of his work was completed independently, Ginger was observed sharing his work and answers with Garrett after Garrett asked to copy.

**Jennifer.** Jennifer, a self-identified Asian female, was raised in a bilingual household, where she spoke “English to [her] dad, but mainly Korean to [her] mom, and I talk to her more” (interview, February 16, 2016). Despite being fluent in Korean, she could not read or write in Korean. Mr. Z’s class was one where Jennifer had a hard time staying awake, and was observed on several occasions asleep on her desk. Even when she was awake, Jennifer never contributed to class discussion. She sat apart from the majority of the other students in the study, and utilized peers around her for support when required to complete independent work.

**John Smith.** John Smith, a self-identified white male, took his seat in Mr. Z’s class everyday approximately 15 minutes before the warning bell signaled students to head toward their first hour classes, despite the 7:35am start time. Throughout the entire semester, John Smith was positioned in the first row, where he sat next to, and worked alongside, Furgy, whom he reported as one of his best friends. John Smith actively participated in all classroom discussions—usually being the first one to respond to a question posed by Mr. Z—as well as interjected side comments throughout each lesson which were directed toward Furgy.

**Rose.** Rose described herself as a dyslexic student who hated poetry and “old-timey language” because it further inhibited her comprehension (interview, February 18, 2016).
Despite her dyslexia, Rose considered herself a reader outside of school for leisure and pleasure, although, she was rarely observed reading in class. Most of the time during class, Rose was on her phone playing games or texting others regardless if the class was reading as a group or individually.

**Data Collection**

Guided by my research questions, data sources included (a) participant observations with audio-taped transcriptions (b) field notes taken during class observations, (c) three semi-structured interviews with the teacher and focal students, (d) classroom and school artifacts, and (e) participant reflections (see Table 3.2 for summary of data sources collected). The purpose in collecting multiple sources of evidence is to converge all evidence into separate and unique findings about each individual case (Yin, 2014).

Table 3.2

*Summary of Data Sources Collected During the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Observations</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Audio Recordings (Recorders Located Near Participants)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Recordings of Classroom Observations</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Field Notes</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Interviews with Participants</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Reflections</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Observations

Because classroom observations are helpful in collecting data of people during their everyday situations (Yin, 2014), I attended Mr. Z’s class regularly starting with the first class of the second semester, observing a total of 40 out of 45 class sessions over the course of the semester. During the first unit of the semester (an independent research paper), I did not take any notes or video/audio record classroom interactions as I was awaiting IRB approval. Formal observations started mid-February at the onset of the Macbeth unit and lasted through students’ last day of the semester, May 13th. Observations occurred two to three times per week—depending on how many days this class met each week on the school’s rotating block schedule—each observation lasting the entire 90-minute class period. Altogether, there were 26 formal observations over my 17 weeks of contact with the participants between January 6, 2016 and May 13, 2016.

Initially, my assumed stance as a researcher was of a non-participant observer in which I sat in the back of the room beside Mr. Z’s desk, and observed the teacher and students. Throughout the semester my role gradually shifted toward one of “moderate participation” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 1998); I was a constant presence in the classroom and rarely, if ever, actively participated in the action of the classroom unless Mr. Z or the students initiated interaction. My continued presence bred familiarity, causing increased participation. Not only was my presence in the classroom frequently noted by students, but they would talk directly into the audio recorders on their desk with one particular group
speaking amusingly to the recorder as if “the CIA was listening” (transcription, March 3, 2016).

The goal of the classroom observations was to illuminate the teacher’s and students’ consumption and production of multimodal texts. Additionally, the observations were used to triangulate data between what participants reported in their interviews and what was observed in action. To record data, I used a video recorder, three digital audio recorders, and my personal laptop. A video recorder was set up in the back of the room to capture the teacher’s comments to students, gestures and movements during instruction, and use of texts projected for students at the front of the room. Since the six students sat in different areas of the room, three separate audio recorders were positioned near groups of participants to accurately capture their utterances. Prior to each observation, I asked students for their permission to record them, and reminded them they could turn off the audio recorder at any point. Many the observations were transcribed at the conclusion of the study. These notes and transcriptions allowed me to revisit them multiple times during data analysis, which took place after all was collected.

**Researcher Field Notes**

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) assert that “it is critical to document closely these subtle processes of learning...as they occur” (p. 13) since extended periods of time in a research setting “tends to dilute the insights generated by initial contact” (p. 13). To avoid this *dilution of insight* that might result from being in a single research setting for an extended period of time, I collected field notes as a way to preserve classroom experiences as
close to the moment of occurrence as possible, with the intention of being able to revisit these notes later (Emerson et al., 2011).

During observations, I typed field notes in a Google Document on my personal, password-protected computer. These field notes were arranged into two columns: one for observations and one for researcher reflections. Under the “Observation” column I captured classroom activities, and students and teacher behaviors, participation, and interactions that transpired. I focused less on capturing participants’ exact utterances since I was using video and audio recorders for this purpose. Under the “Reflection” column I recorded my reaction and thoughts to such observations. At the beginning of each class, I noted which students in my study were present/absent/tardy. At the end of each class period, I took an overall inventory of the major class activities that transpired, as well as the overall environment and atmosphere of the class on that particular day. I also included any lingering thoughts or reflections about the class period in general, which became foundational to constructing a rich, thick description of the research site and participants.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

I interviewed all participants at three different time points throughout the study: one at the beginning of the study, one half way through the study, and one at the end of the study (see Table 3.3). The interview protocol followed Seidman’s (2013, p. 20) “Three-Interview Series” which explored the participants’ literacy history, the details of certain multimodal experiences in class, and a final reflection. The purpose of these interviews was to gather
more information, clarify and validate observed behaviors, as well as delve deeper into the teacher’s and students’ perspectives about multimodal texts in the ELA classroom.

The interviews with focus students lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. The same interview protocol (see Appendix C) was used with each student participant. These interviews took place in my classroom or the English office before/after school or during students’ study hall period to avoid removing them from any academic class time. In a similar fashion, Mr. Z was interviewed at three separate time points. His interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour, and took place during his planning period in the English office. Following Seidman’s (2013) three-interview series, the first interview “Focused [on] Life History,” the second interview on “The Details of Experience,” and the third interview on “Reflection on the Meaning” (p. 21-22; see Appendix B for teacher interview protocol).

The first round of interviews took place between February 16, 2016 and March 3, 2016, and served to highlight individuals’ histories with literacy. The overall aim of this interview was to situate “the participant’s experience in context by asking him or her to tell me as much as possible about himself or herself in light of the topic up to the present time” (Seidman, 2013, p. 21). Thus, students were asked to describe how they viewed themselves as students, as well as reconstruct moments where they deemed themselves successful, and not successful in previous English classes.

The second round of interviews occurred with each participant individually after Spring Break between March 30, 2016 and April 12, 2016. The purpose of this interview was “to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experiences in the
topic area of the study” (Seidman, 2013, p. 21). During these interviews, I asked students questions directed around three multimodal products they created prior to Spring Break. Students were asked to describe the processes they went through for each of the three assignments, as well as what overall goals they hoped to achieve through their final products.

The third and final round of interviews took place during the student’s last week of school between May 9, 2016 and May 13, 2016. The goal of the final interview was to “address the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life” (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). Thus, students were asked to explore their understanding of in-class activities as well as describe their level of participation throughout the semester to help them reflect upon their overall experiences surrounding multimodal texts in the English classroom.

All interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder and transcribed verbatim prior to conducting subsequent interviews with each participant. During each interview, I refrained from taking notes, in order to give each participant my full attention. After the completion of the interview, I recorded a memo of my reactions and initial thoughts, which included documenting student behaviors during the interview, which would not have been captured through the audio recording.

Table 3.3
Participant Interview Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Interview #1</th>
<th>Interview #2</th>
<th>Interview #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Table 3.3 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date Collected</th>
<th>Date Returned</th>
<th>Date Evaluated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>2/18/2016</td>
<td>4/1/2016</td>
<td>5/13/2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Collection of Classroom Artifacts**

Artifacts collected included classroom handouts, as well as students’ multimodal productions. These were collected to add data to the overall context of the classroom, verify information collected during interviews and observations, and serve as topics of discussion for interviews. Written artifacts created by students (see Table 3.4) consisted of a robot story created on Google Slides in small groups, individual students coloring of *Macbeth* graphic novel, final projects for *Macbeth* in the choice of a visual or verbal representation, cut and keep decisions created during the short story to film unit, the final exam for the semester, and students’ response journals.

Table 3.4

*Overview of Artifacts Collected from Student Participants Throughout the Semester*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robot Story</td>
<td>After watching a short, silent, informational film about a robot, students worked in groups to create a story out of the film using 10 or less slides using Google Slides [see Appendices F and G].</td>
<td>March 1, 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Data Analysis

This study was a qualitative case study. Making sense of the data “involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what participants have said, [taken] together with current research” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). In general, qualitative research is characterized by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.4 (Continued)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coloring of <em>Macbeth</em> Graphic Novel</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students were given specific (and crucial) scenes drawn from a black and white graphic novel version of <em>Macbeth</em>, and asked to intentionally color it in either a realistic or ironic manner, as well as identify the characters, scene, and surrounding action in the text [see Appendix E].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Project: Visualization or Speech</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students were given the choice to 1) visualize two central scenes in <em>Macbeth</em>, which included drawing a picture about each scene, as well as written text to accompany each picture; or 2) write a page long campaign speech as if they were running against Macbeth [see Appendix H].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cut/Keep Decisions for Short Stories and Movie Worksheets</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worksheets where students fill out three things they would include/leave out if the text was turned into a movie, along with justification for those design choices. Additionally, a post movie reflection on what features the movie did keep and did cut, and for what reasons the directors made those design decisions [see Appendix D].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Exam</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three short written responses. Part 1: Justification for which picture best represents the witches from <em>Macbeth</em> with textual evidence drawn from both a passage and a picture. Part 2: After reading a flash fiction story, choose three features that must be kept in order to create a movie based on this text. Part 3: A final reflection on a life lesson learned in high school/English. [see Appendix I].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Journals</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiral journals where students wrote answers to questions in the textbook, as well as personal responses to open ended questions posed throughout <em>Macbeth</em> as pre-reading or post-reading for each act [see Appendix J].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the goal of eliciting understanding drawn from participants’ perspectives; in this case, how multimodal texts are produced and consumed in one secondary ELA classroom. In order to develop a holistic description and explanation of the case, data analysis of qualitative case studies is primarily inductive and builds abstractions by analyzing emerging and meaningful patterns (Merriam, 1998). (See Figure 3.3 for description of data analysis procedures.)

### Figure 3.3
Explanation of steps in primary data analysis.
Coding

I took the time to personally transcribe all interviews and observations in order to ensure that I could garner a more in-depth understanding of the multiple facets of data collected and the participants involved in this qualitative case study. Throughout the data collection and analysis, I concurrently memoed about emerging themes and patterns, recorded musings in the forms of questions to pursue, and created connections to my research questions (Merriam, 2009). From these analytic memos I generated general “assertions” (Erickson, 1986), or interpretations and conclusions, drawn primarily from my ongoing observations.

First Cycle Coding Methods

During the course of the study, participant interviews were immediately transcribed and open coded prior to subsequent interviews. This inductive approach toward analyzing the data through open coding allowed me to approach each interview with an open mind, and see what information emerged from the data as interesting and important (Seidman, 2013). For my first pass through each interview, I utilized initial coding (Saldaña, 2014), also known as open coding. The purpose of initial coding was to explore emerging ideas and capture the essence of larger portions of the interview transcripts. These initial codes were a combination of in vivo codes, which used participants’ actual words to formulate codes and remain rooted in the participant’s voice and culture of the classroom, as well as process codes and gerunds to capture the student’s actions and responses to a multimodal curriculum.

The interview excerpt below shows how initial coding (Saldaña, 2014) applied to Ginger’s second interview (see Table 3.5). The underlined portions represent what portions
of the text I physically annotated during my first pass through data because they stood out to me. The italics on the side represent my handwritten codes which were recorded along the margins of the interview. During this interview Ginger discussed his final project for the *Macbeth* unit.

Table 3.5

*Example of “Initial Coding” (Saldaña, 2014) Applied to a Student Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABBEY: So then, why did you choose to make the design choices that you made? As far as color, etcetera?</th>
<th>“random” choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GINGER: Honestly, the colors were just kind of random. I mean, I colored—I usually like to keep to stuff. Since I colored Macbeth’s crown orange, I kept it throughout as much as I could. And I made people red haired, because I’m red haired, and I feel that was necessary. And the rest of it was just kind of random coloring. I mean there is no really red for royalty, or any of that stuff. It was just kind of “oh this color looks cool to put on it” so I just kind of colored it.</td>
<td>consistency reflects himself “random” choices no archetypal significance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the interest of reducing and reshaping material gathered primarily from the first and second interviews with participants—in combination with observations and field notes—I developed participant profiles (Seidman, 2013). These narratives were intended to capture the essential characteristics unique to each case, thus they were crafted from a combination
of the participants’ words and actions, and shared with participants for feedback prior to the conclusion of the study.

During the summer following all data collection, I imported all data into NVivo and holistically coded (Saldaña, 2014) all interviews, observations, and field notes. According to Saldaña (2014), holistic coding is appropriate as a preparatory approach enabling the researcher to grasp the picture of data as a whole, rather than coding data immediately following data collection and transcription. During this process, I created “nodes” within the NVivo software, to break the data into discrete parts and examine it for emerging patterns (Stake, 1995). After I completed a first round of coding on all data collected, I collapsed the 146 initial codes into 58 codes, merging similar codes. I printed off the names of all 146 nodes, and cut each one into a strip of paper. These strips of paper were then spread out on my countertop where similar nodes could easily be arranged into similar groups. Newly emerging piles were grouped together and labeled with sticky notes with new names to capture the essence of these new nodes. After I regrouped and relabeled the 146 strips of paper, or nodes, into 58 codes, I returned to the NVivo software and collapsed nodes in these new groupings. (See Table 3.6 for an example of initial nodes which were regrouped into larger holistic codes and renamed.)

For these resulting 58 codes, I created a code book in Google Sheets linking each code with a statement defining each unit of data, as well as provided an example for each code. While creating the code book, I condensed codes from 58 to 45 upon encountering notable similarity between codes. To further collapse initial codes from open coding and
transition to second cycle coding methods, I created a conceptual map of my codes based on my two research questions, 1) How does one teacher’s beliefs about teaching multimodal curriculum translate to both pedagogy and classroom practices? 2) How do students respond to his multimodal curriculum? And further reduced these codes into 8 categories. For each category, I created longer thematic phrases to narrow in on the essence and deeper significance of each category, which were then followed by my reflections and examples from the data. After peer debriefing and member checking I arrived at five themes, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Table 3.6

*Sample Drawn from Codebook of Holistic Codes which were Collapsed into Similar Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collapsed Code Name</th>
<th>Holistic Code Name</th>
<th>Code Definition</th>
<th>Example from Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RANDOM DESIGN CHOICES</td>
<td>A lack of reasoning behind why specific design choices were made for certain selections</td>
<td>GARRETT: The witches are going to have triangle bodies. Because that’s cool. ROSE: Same.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disregard for Assignment Requirements</td>
<td>Briefly looking at what the requirements are, and then doing their own thing, in spite of those requirements</td>
<td>JOHN SMITH: Furgy and I. We just try making—“lets see how bizarre we can make this.” And we go in and are given specific instructions, and it’s like “how much can we bend these?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of a Process</td>
<td>Design decisions made spur of the moment with no other discussion behind them</td>
<td>ABBEY: So as far as the placement on the page, how did you decide where you were going to put things? FURGY: I winged it. I guess that’s the easiest way to say it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3.6 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of Time</th>
<th>ROSE: So like since [Mr. Z] said we pretty much had the class period. I was like “yeah, I can’t try and do anything crazy because it’s going to be like $\frac{1}{2}$ done,” so something finished that’s not as good is better than something that is half done but good quality, I’ve found from my school career.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design decisions made for the purpose of getting something done—without color or without a lot of effort—due to the lack of class time to work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Issues of Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009) are concerns in any kind of research, qualitative or quantitative of great importance because the researcher is the instrument both collecting and analyzing data. Therefore, the credibility of qualitative research hinges on the person doing the research (Patton, 2002). Specifically, an overall strength of qualitative research is that it does not try to eliminate the humanness associated with research to include ideological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs (Merriam, 2009). To this end, the qualitative researcher must prove his/her trustworthiness through internal validity, external validity, and reliability, which I addressed in my study (see Table 3.7).
Table 3.7

*Strategies Used to Establish Validity and Reliability (Merriam, 2009)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures to Establish Quality in Case Study Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Validity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation of multiple sources of data during data collection and analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member reflections of draft during write up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term observation in research site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Validity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich, thick description of data during analysis and write up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing a “how” or “why” question during the research design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission of researcher bias and subjectivity statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit trail maintained data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVivo for a case study database during data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher positionality statement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Internal Validity**

To ensure *internal validity*, data analysis requires the researcher to thoroughly understand his/her data, triangulating findings between multiple sources of data. Analysis of case study data is an intuitive process, during which the researcher searches for patterns and consistency (Stake, 1995). My “assertions” (Erickson, 1986), or interpretations and conclusions about the data are linked to observations, but they are also intrinsically linked to the personal experiences, beliefs, and knowledge (Stake, 1995). Because assertions are unintentionally linked to one’s subjectivities and epistemology, they need to be triangulated with other sources of data to strengthen the internal validity of the study (Stake, 2006).

Qualitative case studies provide both the etic perspective—the outsider’s viewpoint—which in this instance are the interpretations of the researcher, as well as the emic
perspectives—the insider’s perspective—from the individuals that are part of the case. Therefore, written drafts of participant profiles were shared with focal students for additional input. Member reflections (Tracy, 2010) allowed each participant to review the accuracy of my observations and interpretations and offer feedback if he/she had any questions or concerns, which helped keep potential researcher bias and subjectivity in check. Only one student—John Smith—wrote four comments of feedback after reading his narrative profile: 1) in two places he wrote “This feels odd to me” where I had integrated quotes drawn from his interviews, 2) he crossed out a statement and added the comment “not really that true anymore,” and 3) he commented “Good” beside a paragraph.

**External Validity**

In general, characteristics of qualitative inquiry include the concern for context and meaning, which is why the case study methodology was apropos for my research endeavors seeking to understand and describe human behavior. I believed that people are social beings whose reality is socially constructed, and I adhered to the philosophical assumption associated with qualitative research in that reality is contextually constructed (Merriam, 1998). By assuming that human behavior is contextually bound, the boundaries between the social phenomenon and context may not be ostensible, but are inseparable from social, cultural, political, and historical influences (Yin, 2014). To establish external validity, my research questions were concerned with first identifying both a teacher’s and focal students’ perceptions about a multimodal curriculum and texts, and observing how these perceptions are reflected in this particular classroom context.
Generally speaking, case study research is not touted for its generalizability; however, it is a useful methodology because it provides a rich, detailed description of the context of a specific situation (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Aligned with constructivist research traditions in which there are multiple versions of knowledge, rich thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) developed from the study enable readers to arrive at “naturalistic generalizations” (Stake, 1995). From these descriptions, readers may derive connections to the present study through vicarious experiences or personal engagement. In this manner, generalizations enable readers to understand the case study by adding their own parts to the story.

**Reliability**

Data was collected, stored, and transcribed in a similar manner for all participants. All observations and interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for coding. After transcribing observations and interviews, I uploaded all transcripts into NVivo, a qualitative software program, to create a case study database (Yin, 2014) to help manage, store, and organize my data throughout the research process.

From the outset of the study, I collected and organized all data electronically on my password-protected laptop. Data collected that was not in digital form (i.e., the coloring of *Macbeth* graphic novel, the *Macbeth* final project, the cut/keep decisions for short stories and movies, the final exam, and student journals) were scanned to my computer and identified by the participants’ pseudonyms. Data was organized according to type: artifacts, interview audio, observation audio, observation field notes, observation video, and transcriptions. Subfolders were created within these folders based around units of study and participants. In
order to easily identify files, each one was named in a similar manner with number, category, and date.

Over the duration of the study, I created an audit trail (Yin, 2014) to keep track of interviews, activities that occurred during classroom observations, participant attendance, and location and names for data files and artifacts. For reliability measures, this audit trail served as a chain of evidence providing a detailed account of the relationship between the questions, evidence, database, and report in each case (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, this collection of data from interviews, observations, and artifacts allowed for corroboration between multiple sources.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study investigated the situated literacy practices of various agents and actors in one 12th grade ELA classroom. One of the main limitations of this case study research is that I was an outside observer intruding on classroom interactions. Whether I was cognizant of it or not, teacher and student behaviors may change as they perceive themselves being watched. Also, due to the small sample size of the study, this study is not meant to create grand generalizations about how teachers and students make sense of a multimodal curriculum in the ELA classroom.

**Subjectivity Statement**

Educational researchers are positioned as “insiders” in many school settings because their past experiences as teachers can heavily influence their perceptions. Before my first year of teaching, I was convinced I was going to immediately change the world. Then the
realities of the classroom set it, and no longer was life all rainbows and sunshine where teaching students occurred in a vacuum. I bring my own biases to this research in many areas. As another teacher of SCL at Mountain Pines High School I know how I structured my class and what activities I used to involve my students. At the same time, I completely understand the “senioritis” that seniors were experiencing at this high school during their last semester of school. I think all teachers are very easy to judge and criticize other teachers; at the same time, I think we are a group of people who very readily want to praise the teacher for doing the best they can, especially when we reflect on how challenging the classroom experience can be day-in and day-out.

As a White woman in my early-thirties enrolled as a doctoral program in curriculum and instruction and literacy, my own biases and beliefs hold that the definition of literacy is constantly changing and evolving to fit the needs of a diverse society and the different skills each student brings to the classroom (Albers & Harste, 2007; Beach, Thein, & Webb, 2012). I believe that if we truly want our students to be literate in the 21st century and successful members of society, then we, as teachers, need to involve them and engage them in the curriculum. Also, students need to feel like what they are learning is relevant to their lives because students that passively acquiesce, like I did in high school, are definitely few and far between. Additionally, I believe the greatest form of knowledge comes in students’ ability to communicate with the world around them. Therefore, all students need to be armed with the abilities of reading, writing, and speaking when they leave high school, and the teacher is the ultimate provider of the experiences that develop these skills (Johannessen & McCann,
2008). Drawing from my own experiences, I learned the most about English when I had to teach my students. Thus, I believe that giving the power to the students and creating authentic tasks is the most beneficial way to develop prepared citizens. My own teaching style was rooted most firmly in constructivism and social learning perspectives that acknowledge the variety of skills, attitudes, and beliefs each student brings to the classroom.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have explained the qualitative methodology for my case study which was designed to investigate the teaching and learning surrounding a multimodal curriculum in one 12th grade English classroom. This study utilized purposeful selection of an ELA teacher and a focal group of six students in his classroom. The data collection for this study included: participant observations, field notes, audio recordings, semi-structured interviews, and artifacts. To determine relevant data, I applied open and holistic coding methods, and then collapsed data into larger themes (Saldaña, 2014). This chapter explained how internal validity, external validity, and reliability were maintained throughout the study.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

“English is a number of curricula, around which the English teacher has to construct some plausible principles of coherence. It is first, a curriculum of communication...It is, second, a curriculum of notions of sociality and of culture...what texts appear and how they are dealt with; what theories of text and language underlie pedagogies, and so on. English is also a curriculum of values, of taste and of aesthetics...and English is the subject in which ethics, questions of social, public morality are constantly an issue.” (Kress et al., 1995, p. 5-6)

In this chapter, I present the findings from a qualitative case study that investigated the teaching and learning surrounding a multimodal curriculum in a 12th grade English classroom in a large district in a mid-sized suburban city in the western United States. Specifically, this chapter presents findings from the case (one English teacher) and the embedded units of analysis (the six student-participants) in this single-case embedded design (Yin, 2014). This chapter includes the five themes which resulted from initial and holistic coding (Saldaña, 2014) of qualitative data (i.e., field notes, transcriptions of classroom observations and participant interviews, students’ multimodal artifacts) collected over a three-month period in Mr. Z’s classroom. My understanding of multimodal social semiotics framed this study and informed my data collection and analysis. All data were collapsed into five themes which answer the following two research questions:

1. How does one teacher’s beliefs about teaching multimodal curriculum translate to both pedagogy and classroom practices?
2. How do students respond to his multimodal curriculum?

The first theme focuses on the teacher’s praxis driven by his belief that students can be taught valuable life lessons through exposure to multimodal curriculum. The second two themes focus on the students’ responses to a multimodal curriculum. Students harness design
decisions to elicit a response from their audience, as well as position themselves as social agents to communicate meaning through multimodal modes. The final two themes address tensions that surfaced between both teachers and students. Theme four explores the tension regarding the pedagogy enacted by the teacher which was driven from his beliefs about knowledge in ELA, and students’ perception of this curriculum as “easy” and “busywork.” Theme five addresses the complexity of choice afforded through multimodality for both students and teachers (see Figure 4.1 for an overview of themes).
Figure 4.1 Outline of five themes and subthemes in findings.
Theme 1: Pedagogy and Curriculum Explore Complexity of Being Human

Apparent in Mr. Z’s classroom praxis was his desire to teach students life lessons through the various texts they read throughout the semester. These life lessons surfaced throughout classroom instruction as tidbits of information about life in general—rather than information specific to the English classroom—through the incorporation of videos from YouTube, NPR, and Ted Talks, in addition to short stories, audio books, and news articles. For Mr. Z, the importance of English lay in how individuals have to negotiate the multifaceted ideals presented by the human condition in their daily lives, not merely the regurgitation of factual knowledge.

Mr. Z described himself as a “formalist,” and thought it was “really important for [students] to know things like meter, stanza, form, the different forms and all that”; however, this goal stood behind his belief of getting students to the “essence or the core or the substance of what we’re trying to teach” (interview, March 4, 2016). He believed that if all students know is the form of poetry,

Then we might as well not [teach them] poetry because [they’ve] lost everything that's important about poetry. The most important part of poetry is that kind of core thing that transforms you with the problem or the kind of thing that can’t really be described.... And they get that they don't get the form…they’ll learn the form eventually, or even if they don’t, that other stuff will transform them, not the formal stuff. (interview, March 4, 2016)

When describing his approach to teaching Macbeth he did acknowledge the importance of teaching students that it was a tragedy and the art and language of Shakespeare in addition to the substance of Macbeth which he described through the play’s main character:

I think of Macbeth is somebody who is gripped by ambition, who’s driven to extremes and then the consequences for that. And that kind of substance-truth that
Mr. Z described his pedagogical approach to guide students to these core truths of the text through

The questions that we ask them [and] those questions are asking them to think more broadly, outside the text. Like what would happen to you if someone took your position? Or something like that. So hopefully students are identifying with the core truths and not just the form of it. (interview, March 4, 2016)

Drawing from his background in teaching philosophy, Mr. Z described his ideal pedagogy as

To try to do as much student-led, centered discussion teaching as possible, where in college what that looked more like, was just discussion. It was a lot of discussion, like formal discussion, and in philosophy it was always about debates and arguments. So having students give arguments, and then other students critiquing arguments. So it was very—kind of—analytical based, logical based, kind of argumentative discussion around ideas, and then building knowledge in that way. (interview, March 4, 2016)

As far as his belief surrounding assessments was concerned, he was interested in sticking with student-centered tutorials, so “I don’t give them a pre-formatted quiz that every student has to take, no matter where they are…I start off with the tutorial, get to know where they are at right away and then keep pushing them from there” (interview, March 4, 2016). Since moving to high school teaching he described his teaching as being

Opened up to much more creation, creativity, product—creativity-based, product-based forms of learning where it’s have the students produced projects, have them be more creative than that. And I really like that form, especially combined with digital tools, because I think it just makes the creative process—at least for me, but I think for the students today—it’s more native to them in a sense. It’s more part of their everyday life. (interview, March 4, 2016)

When describing how his pedagogical beliefs manifested themselves in the classroom, Mr. Z described “pushing in the direction of blending technologies in the classroom, so that there's
more opportunities for students create, share, co-create, co-share, co-produce work and
develop group based understandings. Um, group-based products around works” (interview,
March 4, 2016).

He considered himself “very much aligned with the IB world, but I think the IB world
is about literature…and central to IB is global citizenship, it's the person, it's risk-taking, it's
thinking, it's being a compassionate listener, it's everything. So I’m fully onboard with IB”
(interview, March 4, 2016). In order to steer students towards these life lessons developed
from texts and the English curriculum, he used students’ individual experiences and personal
lives as a starting point for literary analysis. These experiences were one way to ignite
students’ multimodal aesthetic responses to literature (Wissman & Costello, 2014), as well as
a way for Mr. Z to demonstrate for students how communication is inherently multimodal, or
presented and received through various modes simultaneously. In the following sections I
describe the four subthemes which elucidate Mr. Z’s multimodal curriculum as an
exploration of self and others. Mr. Z’s use of multiple modes in ELA were used to prepare
students to navigate between diverse worlds, individuals, and perspectives; to read the
complex and convoluted signs that others exude; to guide students to the essential core or
“substance truth” (i.e., the theme) of the text, and to teach students various lessons relevant
for life after high school.

Preparing Students to Navigate Between Diverse Worlds, Individuals, and Perspectives

One of Mr. Z’s primary goals was for his students to leave the English classroom—
and ultimately high school—with a better understanding of how complicated humans inter-
and intra-personal lives were (interview, March 4, 2016). He tackled the intricacies of “how complicated it is to be a human being and deal with yourself, and how complicated it is to be a human being and deal with other people around you” (interview, March 4, 2016) through various texts in the English classroom.

Central to multimodal communication is the ability to understand multiple forms of representation which include images, gestures, posture, tone, and language through which meaning is produced and received by individuals simultaneously. To provide students with exposure to multimodal communication for the sake of diversity and global participation, texts in Mr. Z’s classroom took the form of videos from YouTube, NPR, and Ted Talks, as well as short stories, personal vignettes, audio books, and news articles. Since traditional print texts may currently be the more familiar and recognized resources in the English classroom, these served as the jumping off points for students to talk about issues that surrounded modern society and their lives on multiple occasions, as well as explore and question individuals’ morals and values.

A digital window into a world of diversity. One of Mr. Z’s key beliefs for using multimodal videos (i.e., TED Talks and YouTube videos) was to provide an entry point for diversity. Not only was literature valued as a “window” (Bishop, 1990) into various life experiences, but videos featuring diverse perspectives were another way to expose students to different viewpoints situated outside the immediacy of their own social worlds.

Especially at our high school, which is predominantly white, affluent, upper class, I try to pick—like if we are showing TED Talks, I almost always pick TED talks with a person of color or a minority. I very rarely—and hate—to show TED talks with a white male standing up there because they’ve seen a lot of that. They need to see
other voices because they are not exposed to it—or if they are—I am not sure how they are being exposed to it. And I want them to see that kind of diversity. (interview, March 4, 2016)

This exposure to diversity represented an intentional decision on behalf of Mr. Z through which students could encounter diverse perspectives and cultures throughout their day, especially in a homogenous community such as Mountain Pines High School. Additionally, he used these and various resources as a starting point for students to question the kinds of stories they told about themselves and each other, as well as the kind of stories that were being told about them.

Going into the short story unit, he showed them a TED talk from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This video, “The Danger of a Single Story” (Adichie, 2009) emphasized how certain stories and stereotypes prove problematic for individuals. Mr. Z encouraged students to start paying attention to those words like ‘just’; like “I’m just going to do this, or I’m just going to do that.” Because essentially what you’re telling yourself is that there are no other stories that are open to you or available to you, and that’s never true—that’s never true for anybody. (transcription, March 29, 2016)

He asked students to critically attend to the “just” that they inserted in their speech about their future plans. Not only was he raising students’ critical awareness surrounding the power of words and language, but he worried they were starting to internalize stories told about themselves, and missing out on the other stories that could be told about their lives (transcription, March 29, 2016). In this particular talk with students, Mr. Z reminded them “you’re kind of in charge of your own story and there are multiple stories you can tell” (transcription, March 29, 2016). This encouragement—reminding students they were in
control of their own lives—was one way to address any negative stereotypes or inner beliefs students in Senior Composition and Literature [SCL] may have held about themselves, their abilities, and their futures. Not only did he advocate for students to be more critical of the stories that they told and accepted about themselves, but he also encouraged them to question certain beliefs and stereotypes surrounding individual identities like “what does it mean to be a Muslim?...an Arab?...a Mexican?...from the Middle East?...an immigrant?...an Asian?” (transcription, March 29, 2016). Adichie’s video signaled the segue from Macbeth to the final unit in SCL. During this storytelling unit, students had to critically decide on what to cut or keep from various short stories and movies. These design decisions ultimately depended upon the type of story students were trying to portray to their audience. Even though students did not specifically address racial stereotypes in any of the short stories in the final unit, this conversation created a potential space in the classroom to immerse students into thinking critically about what is included and excluded from various texts and how that influences what message is communicated.

**Exposure to empathy for others.** The concept of empathy was closely connected with developing an understanding of the human condition, as well as our inter- and intra-personal lives. An underlying purpose driving reading in Mr. Z’s class was to develop empathy in ourselves and empathy for others around us. Before starting Macbeth, Mr. Z showed students a video produced by John Green (2012) about “How and Why We Read: Crash Course English Literature #1.” The purpose of this short five minute video from YouTube was to emphasize students’ attention on how reading literature is a way to explore
and develop empathy. John Green attested that “stories are about communication”; therefore, readers need the skills and awareness to read empathetically, critically, and attentively, through which they will develop “a fuller understanding of lives other than [their] own, which will help [them] to be more empathetic...and [acquire] the linguistic tools to share [their] own story with more precision.” This video reiterated earlier points made by Adichie highlighting how precise language is necessary for clearly presenting our stories to others, Some of whom may live very far away and in fact live centuries after your death. Not only that, but instead of this happening during a pleasant conversation, they are reading your dry dead text on a page. So they can’t hear your intonation or see the tears dripping from your cheeks. (Green, 2012)

Not only is this a challenge of Shakespeare, but one Green (2012) asserts we face every time we write for an audience. In conjunction with Adichie (2009), Mr. Z used this video to initiate the storytelling unit and emphasize the importance of communication with those around us, highlighting the importance of modes individuals use to construct communication through gestures and tone. Similarly, Mr. Z reiterated his belief in the importance of walking empathetically in somebody’s else’s shoes, which we get through interaction with others, but

Usually it comes from reading, and the stories that we tell each other...but all of that—is learning to communicate how you are feeling to one another. And when you learn that, you see more deeply into that other person. Ideally you can empathize with them. (transcription, February 16, 2016)

At the heart of empathizing with one another was the power of storytelling. This was then a segue into what could possibly be relatable for students in today’s generation who are reading texts from Shakespeare:

Macbeth is like—you know, this is a story from a long time ago and it probably has nothing to do with you, but there’s actually quite a bit. Macbeth...has a lot to do with what is going on in our lives right now. So it would be important that we would keep
in mind what would be an empathetic understanding we could get out of it. (transcription, February 16, 2016)

Not only did Mr. Z establish how an individual’s story is a type of text to be explored, interpreted, and responded to in our daily lives, but he interwove how these experiences can be a resource established and used to understand Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. By first establishing a common ground surrounding *Macbeth*, Mr. Z authorized students’ experiences as a resource to negotiate the text and the text as a resource to negotiate the social lives of students (Kress et al., 2005). This highlights the key resource we all hold inside ourselves as meaning-makers, as well as the transactional nature of reading implied here.

In these two examples, the fluidity that Mr. Z and John Green (2012) encouraged between social spaces reflected multimodality in the sense that individuals can move easily between different contexts and social activities while easily interacting with various social agents (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). In this case, *Macbeth* presented another mode for students to explore and to gain a better understanding for how individuals inhabit and navigate diverse worlds more astutely.

**Reading the Complex and Convoluted Signs that Others Exude**

Mr. Z approached the complicated nature of being human and dealing with others by drawing students attention to the complicated nature of signs that others exhibit in social interactions. The ability to critically perceive and understand the different semiotic meaning potentials rhetors draw upon during communication is central to understanding the complexity of being human and interacting socially within diverse spaces.
One of the ways students can productively develop their interactions with others is through interpreting signs around them and the signs that others exude, such as gestural signs (i.e., nonverbal expression communicated through facial expressions, posture, and gaze) and verbal signs (i.e., volume, tone, and pitch; van Leeuwen, 2005). For Mr. Z, learning to interpret signs in the English classroom was intrinsically linked to interpreting signs of other human beings on a daily basis.

Like these skills we learn in English in terms of interpreting signs, isn’t any different than what happens when they step out the door and their friend confronts them and they look at their face and instantly say “Why are you sad today?” They’ve been given a sign, or an image, and they have somehow decoded it, deconstructed it, and interpreted it, and form an interpretation that that person is that today. And sometimes they get it wrong; that person was hungry, or something like that. (interview, March 4, 2016)

Using skills developed from analyzing symbols and signs in literature, Mr. Z hoped students would become more aware of the signs that others exhibit on a daily basis, as well as how different cultures appropriate signs to make meaning. This also meant students need the tools to critically address cultural signs with which they may be unfamiliar, in order to successfully navigate the world around themselves and the multiplicity of meanings that are communicated through commonly recognized signs and symbols. Not only are skills of close reading and “deconstructing” and “interpreting” useful for literature in ELA, but also broadly applied to students’ lives and their interaction with others.

Critically addressing cultural signs. Mr. Z took advantage of in-the-moment learning opportunities to address students’ interpretations and misconceptions surrounding signs. On one particular occasion, prior to departing the classroom for their Google
Cardboard Expedition in the library, Furgy blurted out “There’s a swastika on my desk!” (transcription, March 11, 2016). Despite being on a tight schedule in order to arrive on time for their scheduled field trip, Mr. Z did not ignore Furgy’s comment and shuffle students out the door. Rather, he turned on the projector and displayed a picture of the German and Buddhist symbols side by side to show how the swastika reversed is a peace sign in east Asia, and was the “original symbol of the peace sign” (transcription, March 11, 2016).

Mr. Z: ...but if you’re curious, this is your brief moment in history, and also a lot of what English Literature is about is learning to read symbols, and you think symbols like [inaudible] but symbology is really important in terms of conveying issues. And as I was pointing out, maybe this is known or unknown to you, unfortunately a student drew something that’s not very pleasant and I’ll have to deal with it. They will probably destroy the desk over the summer.

John Smith: Use a sander.

Mr. Z: ...Anyways, this is what is called the Buddhist Swastika. Swastika is a Sanskrit term...But basically this is the original symbology which is a peace symbol by the way. This has been used as a peace symbol in various [inaudible] cultures for a very very long time. This is the Nazi Hakenkreuz otherwise known as the swastika. Which is reversed and tilted. They are actually very different symbols. In a sense, but there is a reason why they used it, you know because the Nazi’s were—

Furgy: Yep, this is a swastika.

John Smith: Oh, it is one. It’s not tilted.

Mr. Z: But it’s the reversed part because tilting it is based on how you look at it anyway. It’s really the direction. It’s the same symbol and there are reasons why they took that same symbol. It’s not like they just accidentally happened upon a symbol that’s peaceful—

Furgy: Ohh! I like this!

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1 Google Cardboard Expeditions is a virtual reality experience that turns an Android Phone into an immersive experience, providing students with virtual field trips to places all over the world (i.e., Mount Everest, outer space, coral reefs, London).
Mr. Z: It’s kind of like when people take a cross turned upside down, or turn the American flag upside down or something like that. (transcription, March 11, 2016)

This interaction highlights how Mr. Z took the time to harness Furgy’s observation and redirect it for greater student learning and understanding. He not only used Furgy’s observation of the swastika to emphasize the importance of symbols not only in English language arts, but also in cultural and historical terms. He emphasized how different cultures harness the power of symbols to leverage their agenda and how taking something that was previously recognized as a peaceful sign and perverting it like the Nazis did is important to understand as humans who need to approach the world with a critical eye.

This is one of several moments where Mr. Z had the opportunity to capitalize on a student’s line of inquiry or dismiss the comment completely. Furgy was not ignored; conversely, his inquiry about the symbol on his desk was pursued. Mr. Z took this comment as a starting point to explore a real-life example of how different cultures decide what counts as a semiotic resource based on their “social-representational needs” (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p.172). Both the example about reading someone’s gestures and the signs they exude in action, as well as the example about reading a static symbol emphasize the importance of being able to critically “read” and address signs. In today’s global society it is obligatory for students to be critical viewers and readers of not only books, movies, and texts, but also critical viewers and readers of individuals and the signs they give off during communication.

**Using “The Substance-Truth” to Move Beyond the Text**

One way Mr. Z approached making the ELA curriculum more relatable for students was through making the texts and examples discussed in class relevant for students and their
daily lives. Mr. Z used multimodal and popular culture texts (e.g., films, websites, comics, and memes) and examples to make topics relevant for students. One of his goals was to guide students to the “substance-truth that goes beyond [the text] itself, but is why we read [different texts], because [they] might inform our daily lives.” (interview, March 4, 2016). This was approached through more overt methods of “basically telling [students] that this is relevant to their lives, and hopefully getting them to be on board with it” (interview, April 28, 2016). While reading Macbeth Mr. Z explicitly discussed reasons students in the 21st century are still reading works of Shakespeare, why cultural knowledge associated with Shakespeare still circulates through modern society, and why movie adaptations are still being created from stories written 600 years ago.

You’ll be in relationships where you’ll say one thing to the person in front of you and think you can trust how they feel about you, and inside their hearts will be very different. And that might be very painful for you because that happens. People say they appear one way, and on the inside are very different and you have to navigate a world in which you are not—you are never fully sure that the other person in front of you is entirely genuine. (transcription, February 24, 2016)

In this example, Mr. Z linked how the theme of deception from Macbeth may be applicable to students’ current and future lives. Without specifically pointing out the larger themes as they pertain to individuals, many students may get caught up in the literal story of Macbeth, and question how a story from 500 years ago could maintain its relevance. Thus, it is necessary to have conversations pertaining to why an antiquated text may still be relevant to their lives. Additionally, Shakespearean drama is meant to be experienced as a performance, which means producing and reading signs is central to how communication is formed and communicated while reading Shakespeare (Ajayi, 2015).
Disciplinary difference created by a “literary literacy.” Part of Mr. Z’s excitement for literature was articulating to his students how literature in English—and in turn literacy—is uniquely positioned through its differences from texts in other subject areas. During the third classroom observation Mr. Z used *Macbeth* to exemplify how literature delves into the intricacies of how human emotions play out,

[which is] one of the awesome things that happens in literature that doesn’t happen in other classes so much. In physics, you study the nature of the world; what stuff is made up of. In chemistry, you understand chemical reactions. In psychology, you understand a little bit about human desire and how people act. But literature is much more about the kind of human side of feelings that you don’t always get in psychology. So how does jealousy work? How does desire work? And how does guilt work? And how does it rack our brains and keep us awake at night? (transcription, February 24, 2016)

He reiterated to students that the purpose of literature is to scrutinize and communicate the essence of the human condition rather than disseminate factual, content specific, information needed to regurgitate on tests. Consequently, the *literary literacy* (Beavis, 2013), which is created in English draws in students’ attention and exploration of human experiences and emotions. This type of literacy created in English becomes an analysis of characters as abstract entities or literary phenomena through which students explore larger thematic and metaphoric meanings presented in different pieces of literature (Kress et al., 2005). In Mr. Z’s class, students explored questions that delved into characterization and larger thematic ideas with every text, both print and visual. Mr. Z also attempted to connect these larger thematic and metaphoric meanings to students’ lives through journal prompts, discussion questions posed to students while watching movies, and specifically how he paraphrased *Macbeth* into modern and “hip” language as he read the play aloud.
Through popular cultural texts and examples. Mr. Z incorporated texts from popular culture as one way to link students’ 21st century knowledge to the enduring themes which emerged during their reading. Popular culture texts included modern movies, memes, video clips, and graphic novels. These texts were used to guide students toward the “substance-truth” of a text, or what John Green (2012) described as “the message that transcended ages.”

During one pre-reading journal activity for Macbeth, students were asked to brainstorm the meaning behind blind ambition and provide examples of individuals gripped by such ambition. During class, students made connections to sports stars like Kobe Bryant and Michael Jordan, the tech mogul Steve Jobs, infamous people like Martin Shkreli and Jordan Belfort from the film The Wolf of Wall Street (Scorsese, 2013), as well as the literary character Jay Gatsby from The Great Gatsby (Fitzgerald, 1925). Through this journal prompt, students engaged in a discussion surrounding a key theme in Macbeth—blind ambition—through examples they produced from relevant knowledge of their 21st century worlds and modern culture and society. In this scenario, the theme of ambition served as a broad jumping off point for students to access central ideas from the text.

Tidbits About Life

Mr. Z frequently used print texts students were reading or movies students were watching to give the class tidbits of information and reminders about life. During one such case, Mr. Z paused The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (Stiller, 2013) to look at the structure of
an email. He used his laser point to focus in and draw students’ attention to the different structural elements of the email.

In my final senior moments with you guys…let’s pause here. Let’s look at the structure of this email. [Students laugh] It has more details than I have gotten from some of you and various classes that avoid this part. This is the intro to the email, the heading. And look at these complete sentences; sometimes that is avoided. “Yo. Mom gave me email address. Check out this clip of me thanks.” And this again is a paragraph. One sentence. “Thank you.” Very nice. Complementary sign off at the end with his name. (transcription, April 8, 2016)

By using a still frame in a movie video, Mr. Z drew on visual modes of communication; the use of his laser point was to focus students’ attention on certain parts of the screen, and act as an extension of him gesturally from behind his desk. By also looking at the structure of the email, he focused on the linguistic modes that maintain cultural capital in how one communicates through written language through things such as emails.

So I am just telling this all to you now because you are going out into the real world sometime soon—this is not the real world, this is school world, but um, look at this email. It’s so nice, and this kid is like nine years old or something like that. So when you send emails to employers and to people that you want to request things from, really take note. There is the header, the paragraph, sentences, thank you very much, signing your name, stapling a dollar to it...Maybe just a picture of a dollar. Throw in some bitcoins. (transcription, April 8, 2016)

Even though this interaction with the students presented itself in a lighthearted and sarcastic manner when describing the proper way to construct emails, Mr. Z used the movie at hand to provide students with a visual model demonstrating how to properly write an email.

Additionally, he forged connections to a previous satiric text in class shown during the research paper unit. Mr. Z playfully reminded students to “staple a dollar” to their email, like the Strong Bad Email #64: English Paper (see Figure 4.2).
Mr. Z used a multimodal curriculum to engage students in conversations concerning how complicated it is to be a human being and deal with yourself and others. Integral to this practice is how multimodal resources in the ELA classroom can serve as “windows” (Bishop, 1990) into worlds outside of students relatively homogenous world. Videos and symbols can be used to navigate diversity and empathy, and explore how complicated communication is between other people. While Mr. Z used a multimodal curriculum to approach teaching students life lessons before they leave high school, students responded to multimodal resources in the classroom through their design decisions which highlighted the importance of audience, as well as utilizing multiple modes to communicate.
Theme 2: Students Appropriate Design to Communicate Meaning Potentials

Students created multimodal texts with the intentions of communicating a specific message to their audience. Multimodal communication provides modes through which students can explore multiple perspectives, as well as communicate their individual perspectives through intentional design decisions. Students’ design decisions highlighted the importance of perspective and audience which was achieved through transmediation (Chisholm, 2011; Suhor, 1984). Students also appropriated creativity and agency in the classroom by merging in-school and out-of-school topics to elicit a response from their audience. Other design choices used by students explored their self-identity and race, exemplifying how multimodal texts can provide a place for students’ social narratives to play out (Nagle & Stooke, 2016). Students’ design choices highlight how multimodal texts are received and produced based on the producer’s or viewer’s intentions. In the following section, I describe how students appropriated multimodal design to achieve specific goals geared toward an intended audience.

Emphasizing the Importance of Perspective

When composing multimodal texts, students’ awareness of audience influenced what they incorporated or excluded from their design. During our second interview, students described their processes as well as intentions for their Macbeth final visualizations. These visualizations of specific scenes from Macbeth imitated the movie’s portrayal of the characters, as well as the point of view captured in certain shots. Students referred to their point of view, or perspective, captured through their drawings as a lens or canvas, denoting the physical space and frame used to capture still frames from a moving picture.
Rose, a student who self-identified as dyslexic during our first interview, continually reiterated her affinity for visual modes. She used her identification as a visual learner to justify the scenes she drew, claiming she could not construct visual images from the book after she saw the movie, “like the book images are totally lost after I see the movie” (interview, April 1, 2016). She described her paper as a “canvas” that she divided equally between the two drawings; “I split it in and half in my brain and I was like this is the canvas for this one, this is the canvas for this one [sectioning off the paper with her hands like a lens while talking]” (interview, April 1, 2016).

Similarly, Garrett explained how one of his pictures was drawn from the movie, and the other displayed what stereotypical witches look like in his mind’s eye (see Figure 4.3). Just as Rose described the different “canvases” for her drawings, Garrett described his pictures with keen attention to the location of a camera and what was in focus for the audience through the viewing lens.

The camera was back here looking down [reaching his hands over his head and motioning to a camera above his head and angled down] and there was a sink, so obviously there wasn’t a wall there or anything, it was just like a sink in the middle of the room. (interview, March 30, 2016)

This placement of Macbeth in the center of the page next to a sink depicts how Macbeth is literally and symbolically trying to wash away his guilt. Garrett is able to capture the suspenseful mood created through this scene by removing the audience and other characters or objects from the set to show the isolation of Macbeth in a moment of extreme guilt immediately following the murder of Duncan. This observation also highlights how Garrett
considered who was behind the camera dictating what viewers are able to see or not see in a still frame.

*Figure 4.3* Garrett’s visualization for his *Macbeth* final project displaying Macbeth and the witches.

The semiotic meaning potential provided through students’ use of visual modes engaged them to consider what was included or excluded from the audience’s perspective, as well as how these decisions are drawn directly from the individual behind the camera lens or art canvas. Acknowledging how the text, audience, and production are interrelated is one way students in Mr. Z’s classroom critically analyzed how a text is constructed, conveyed, and interpreted.
When asked why he chose to do one scene from the movie and one from the play, Garrett explained:

Because—they are similar but also different because in the movie—in the book you read it and you visualize it for yourself and how you think it would be. But in the movie, it shows how they thought of it, and how, ah, I guess what they think was happening—or obviously what they decided to do. So it’s just kind of two different viewpoints of it. (interview, March 30, 2016)

The “they” he refers to represents some anonymous power that makes all the decisions in taking the original print texts and turning them into movies. “They” hold all the power in the production of this text, which Garrett pointed out was different from how he initially envisioned the scene while reading it himself.

This assignment allowed Garrett and Rose to recreate visual representations from *Macbeth* that displayed how they visualized the scene, as well as how scenes from the movies displayed filmmakers’ artistic designs. Whether scenes were constructed from their own imaginations or from the movie, students acknowledged the importance of audience, camera angle, and viewing area when placing their drawings on the page.

Abbey: Tell me about the scenes that you decided to draw.

Rose: The first scene I did was the scene where the witches are in the morgue with a few different dead peoples—I don’t know who they are. Um, but they are spouting off ‘double bubble toil and trouble’ and weird little rhymes or whatever. So that was one, and then the other one was the scene where Macbeth kept seeing Banquo standing on the dinner table and stuff, at his fancy dinner, because he had killed Banquo and he was feeling really guilty about it.

Abbey: So were these based off of the movie or the book?

Rose: Mine were more based off the movie because I’m like a really visual learner, and so if—like if I only have a book to base knowledge off of, I can make visual images in my head. But after I see a movie I don’t make visual images from the book anymore. It’s only the movie images. (interview, April 1, 2016)
Hollywood’s appeal to the audience. After the short story unit where students had to decide what they would cut and keep from the short story to the movie version, many students voiced how important the audience was in making these decisions as a director, especially when trying to evaluate how “Hollywood obviously had their touch, but at the same time they still tried to pull in what the book was kind of saying” (Ginger interview, May 9, 2016). Analyzing the two versions of the same text across two separate mediums (i.e., drama and film) allowed students to see how Hollywood attempted to maintain and portray the essence of the story. John Smith agreed that “Usually endings change because of how Hollywood wants [a story] to be wrapped up, or even like with The Secret Life of Walter Mitty, how the entire story went...There was very little to even recognize the story other than that he daydreamed. That was it.” (interview, May 9, 2016). For students, the producer of films, whom they interpreted to be Hollywood, was ultimately responsible for the changes made to texts, further demonstrating the interaction between production, text, and audience. Similarly, Rose cited Hollywood as the primary reason for design changes in movies due to what people would want to see in a movie. Because I think there’s kind of a certain number of demands that people have when they decide they want to go spend money to go see a movie. So I think that in order to change it from a story into a movie you have to make it interesting so people want to go see it. (interview, May 13, 2016) For Rose, entertainment had a monetary value, which had to be worth the audience’s time. Through analyzing the design choices that Hollywood inflicted upon certain short stories, students gained valuable insight into the importance of the audience for shaping design decisions in movies.
Through this process of transmediation, defined by Suhor (1984) as “translating content from one sign system into another” (p. 250), students analyzed how reconfiguring and reshaping modes can result in loss/gain of specificity, generality, and ordering of message/ideas. Mr. Z’s multimodal curriculum presented students with how the same story can be reinterpreted and re-communicated through different modes based on a designer’s choices. Through his investigation of multimodal texts, Ginger explained how authors harnessed agency through their design decisions, which influenced the overall message and theme they intended to communicate:

Hollywood just appeals to the audience. While—I mean books do that too obviously, but they do it in a way that they want to just be focused on the main points...In Bicentennial Man, like how in the movie they added the love aspect for the bicentennial man, but in the book, they didn’t state the love aspect, they just added in more focus on him trying to gain his freedom and stuff. (interview, May 9, 2016)

Ginger’s reflection shows how transmediation between a print mode to a visual mode changes a fundamental aspect of the text—a major plot point—which in turn changes how the viewers interpret and engage with one mode opposed to other modes. Changes in modes for The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (Stiller, 2013) alter the thematic focus from freedom in the short story to romance in the film version. Similarly, Jennifer reiterated the change of meaning which is accompanied by changing mode. She recounted the importance of

Actually read[ing] the book and not just watch[ing] the movie because I’ve done that before and I’ve written about wrong things, because um, they are different. And I have definitely done this more than once. (interview, May 11, 2016)

In essence, Jennifer noted how the change in mode changes the message of the text, but also how some meaning may be lost or gained from one medium to another (Bezemer & Kress, 2008), as well as fundamental aspects of the text changed to fit an author’s intended purpose.
Through this close comparison of short stories and movies in Mr. Z’s class, Jennifer became more aware of her previous folly of blindly substituting one text for another in her attempt to avoid reading.

**Composing to Elicit a Response from the Audience**

Students voiced that a primary goal during composing multimodal texts was their desire to elicit an emotional response from their audience. However, it is important to understand how the classroom context and conversations between the teacher and peers played into their design decisions. For the *Macbeth* final, both Furgy and John Smith provided the other with the idea for their final exam.

John Smith: What should I do for mine?

Furgy: Futuristic Macbeth. It has Google Glasses.

John Smith: Neon [inaudible] because its future.

Furgy: It has Google Glasses, and it gets a virus, and then it goes evil! [*laughing*]

John Smith: Everything is in chrome. [*laughing*] [says something inaudible about a box.]

Furgy: Hmm?

John Smith: Everybody’s going to be in a box for this scene. (transcription, March 17, 2016)

However, this conversation occurred immediately after a 10-minute conversation at the beginning of class where Mr. Z spoke to students about Oculus Rift and Google Glass. This discussion was linked to students’ experience with Google Cardboard and robot videos from previous class periods.
During our second interview, John Smith elucidated his design decisions to draw all his figures for his Macbeth final as robots (see Figure 4.4). He explained that “this was like before spring break! [and] I just wanted something really stupid...not a whole lot of engaging thought was put into this” (interview, March 31, 2016).

![Figure 4.4](image)

Figure 4.4  John Smith’s Macbeth final project portrays Duncan’s death through “unplugging” rather than stabbing.

Furthermore, during our interview John Smith explained it was

More fun to see people be like “What?” instead of like “That’s okay.” Most people look at it and have no reaction, and you look at this and you’re like “What?!” At least there is a reaction. Because I’m not good enough to be like, “Wow, that’s great John Smith!” But I can make it weird enough for people to be like, “Yeah, that’s weird John Smith.” (interview, March 31, 2016)
His stated goal for Mr. Z’s class was to “try thinking outside the box; [and] try doing weird things” (interview, February 25, 2016). One way to achieve “weird things” was through purposefully designing his project to grab the audience’s attention in a creative manner. For the Macbeth final project, John Smith combined themes from Macbeth with various videos Mr. Z had shown students about robots to portray Macbeth through a futuristic lens.

Even though the assignment called for the use of dialogue to fit students’ graphics, John Smith used binary as the robot’s language:

John Smith: Should I put the dialogue in binary?

Furgy: Oh God no!

John Smith: One zero zero zero zero.

Furgy: You look it up and see your entire dialogue in binary.

John Smith: Oh it would be super long. Like insanely long text message.

Furgy: Just have that for the entire page.

John Smith: one one one one one, one one one one one, one one, zero one one one one one one. That is weird. Scary system. (transcription, March 17, 2016)

The students had to supplement their pictures with a paragraph of explanation which allowed John Smith to stick with his futuristic choices on the visuals and use linguistic modes to accompany them and clarify his design choices for the audience.

Not only did John Smith collaborate with Furgy regarding ideas they drew, even Mr. Z gave John Smith his input after John Smith proudly showed Mr. Z how Dave—his character from the robot video—made an appearance into his drawings as well (see Figure 4.5).
John Smith: There’s Dave.

Mr. Z: Dave is now in *Macbeth*?

John Smith: Yeah, he’s in *Macbeth* now.

Mr. Z: Oh Dave is [inaudible]

John Smith: Yeah.

Mr. Z: This is not actually from *Macbeth*.

John Smith: Well, maybe it was in the background.

Mr. Z: Maybe you should call him Dave-kin.

Furgy: Dave-kin. [laughing]. Like Duncan. (transcription, March 17, 2016)
Not only did John Smith run with the futuristic idea of robots fused with *Macbeth* to show larger themes, he also incorporated the robot video. Mr. Z’s suggestion of calling him “Dave-kin” was also incorporated into John Smith’s drawing as a humorous way to forge connections between multiple texts.

**Composition pushed boundaries of school audience.** Students’ multimodal compositions incorporated topics that may not be considered school appropriate to many teachers. Such topics included Seppuku, one night stands, drinking, and use of inappropriate
language. These design decisions did not add to the overall message of the text but were intended to cause the audience to pause due to their initial response of shock and awe.

For multiple assignments, John Smith and Furgy tried to “see how bizarre we can make this [and] how much can we bend these [instructions]” (interview, March 31, 2016). To achieve this shock and awe factor from their audience, John Smith and Furgy incorporated foul language and content inappropriate for school into their robot video. Rose wasn’t particularly pleased about her peers’ choice of foul language in the text of their story, but she also did not question their inappropriate choices in an overt way that required her partners to make any revisions. During her interview, Rose confided “I wouldn’t say it made me uncomfortable. I was kind of just like ‘you’re going to do that? That’s—you’re not going to get in trouble? Like okay.’ You know?” (interview, April 1, 2016). This group did not use an inappropriate story line like Garrett and Ginger’s group, however, they employed foul language on (on 3 out of their 8 slides), substituting letters with symbols. (See Appendix G for this group’s Robot Story.)

While presenting the robot videos to the class, Mr. Z merely dismissed their use of foul language by breezing quickly through slides and then questioning how this work was representative of their knowledge from four years of high school.

Mr. Z: [reading from slides] “Get away from me—” Words I shouldn’t say [talking about a bad word in the previous frame]. “I’m off to go knock up the toaster.” And that’s the end of this one. So we have, in your—four years of high school [pause] and this is what we get. So with that said. [laughing]. We have Robot Story, we have inner thoughts of the objects around the robot, and then we have knock up the toaster. So who votes for this one? [Pause] Nobody? (transcription, March 1, 2016)
The use of foul language in this story is merely glossed over and Mr. Z quickly moved on to the next group. Rather than addressing the use of foul language directly, Mr. Z commented in an interview how students tried to make the robot story as relevant to themselves as possible, and for many of them that was a story where the “robot leaves home, goes to work, you know, is abused by one of the employees, and then leaves for the end of the day” (interview, April 28, 2016). In contrast, other groups

Created very intense like, it was almost like—it was weird—it was work, but then they flavored it with some kind of drug addiction, and like ‘I’m going to kill the world.’ Like this is how the robot got abused and started to kill everybody. And I don’t think that that’s part of their worlds….They probably just went to instantly thinking about robots, and then connected with other stories of robots that they have in their head. (interview, April 28, 2016)

Because this was a “fun” activity and more of a time filler so this group did not get ahead on their *Macbeth* reading schedule, Mr. Z approached the content of the videos in the same manner and chose not to address this use of foul language and content.

Ginger and Garrett similarly chose content inappropriate for school as the main topic for their robot video. During his interview, Ginger explained

I hoped—just kind of a humor thing. Watching the video—eventually in the video this guy literally pokes the robot with a stick and it falls over and it’s like—it looks like a dead fish out of water. So we were all laughing pretty hard and stuff. So we were just kind of like, it will look drunk. Aka the title “Drunken Robot.” [Laughing]. (interview, March 31, 2016)

Despite the fact that a drunken robot in their story had nothing to do with the video, nor was it school appropriate in topic, this group of students did not let this deter them from composing a story in which their robot also has a one night stand. When I questioned group members about their decisions, Garrett maintained that there was a moral to their story.
Yeah! He vomited, and then it was just—I think it was kind of like it went back and ah, it was like a “don’t drink”—because at the end of it, we were like “oh that’s kind of like a don’t drink, or don’t get drunk and go out with friends.” And stuff like that viewpoint of it. (interview, March 30, 2016)

This incorporation of a “moral” to not drink was how this group rationalized why it was appropriate for them to incorporate content that may otherwise be considered taboo for the classroom. Similar to a moral at the ending Ginger recounted “We were just kind of like, ‘let’s think of an appropriate high school ending’” (interview, March 31, 2016). Even though the majority of this group’s story was inappropriate for school, Ginger highlighted the importance of the audience being high school students and therefore their story had a “moral” at the end as a way of rationalizing what they were doing was okay for school, even though they knew it was pushing the boundaries.

**Exploring Stereotypes Through Composition**

Another way that students appropriated design in their compositions was to address stereotypes in overt and subvert ways. Students’ compositions often contained design choices that reflected stereotypes of gendered or racial identities. For the *Macbeth* coloring assignment, Rose chose colors driven from “gender roles in that I picked purple for her dress and green for his robes” (interview, April 1, 2016). Ginger chose colors to represent himself and “made people red haired because I am red haired and I feel that was necessary” (interview, March 31, 2016).

The class coloring of *Macbeth* led itself to an in-depth conversation about stereotypes because of how students were choosing to represent individuals, and unearthed unexpected classroom micro-aggressions between students. The conversation started with Mr. Z
addressing Furgy’s choice to color all his characters yellow, through which Mr. Z tried to make based on color archetypes instead of race at first.

Mr. Z: Yellow is good because yellow has symbolic connotations right? For yellow being like cowardice. Yellow sometimes represents a cowardly person.

John Smith: It does?

Mr. Z: Although they are bold in their act, the yellow represents their cowardice, although you could play the race card too—

Furgy: With his face!

John Smith: Yeah, they’re Asian.

Mr. Z: But I don’t think that’s the type of color—

Furgy: That’s racist. That’s all there is to it.

John Smith: Furgy is horribly offended.

Mr. Z: So what is this?

Furgy: Red Hair?

John Smith: All Gingers—

Furgy: They are all from Scotland, yeah.

Mr. Z: Don’t you think that’s stereotypical?

John Smith: [laughing]

Mr. Z: Everyone from Scotland has red hair?

Furgy: You just said, that’s racist to have yellow hands! Yes! I am being stereotypical. (transcription, March 7, 2016)
This transaction lead into a conversation between Furgy and Mr. Z about Furgy’s nationality, which is a mix of Korean and Scottish. From here, the conversation in the class turned to John Smith and Furgy mocking Furgy’s mother using Asian accents.

John Smith: Because he is himself [stereotypical and racist].

Furgy: Yeah, that’s because I am myself. Super stereotypical and racist.

Rose: I think it’s interesting also because he’s racist toward his own race.

Mr. Z: Against what?

John Smith: We hope on Skype and are like “Herrow Andrew” [in an Asian accent]

Furgy: “Oh herrow, how are you?” [in an Asian accent]

John Smith: And then your mom actually is that.

Furgy: Yeah, and then my mom will be yelling at me. I’ll just hear over Skype “Furgy, Furgy.” [in an Asian accent]

John Smith: “Go play cello!” [in an Asian accent]

Furgy: “Complete your homework. Go study more.” [in an Asian accent]

John Smith: [laughing]. It’s like...you think of the stereotypical Asian mother, and that’s Furgy’s mother, exactly. There’s no stereotype. It’s true. (transcription, March 7, 2016)

At this point Mr. Z tried to redirect the exchange between the two students and change the conversation into a life lesson surrounding stereotypes and race.

Mr. Z: But the hard part is—what you want to think about stereotypes is there are certain ways, like cultural ways of being so people act differently because of the culture they are in are stronger, the more closely knit those cultural beliefs are with your everyday actions, other than the way people dress, or different parts of the country….Those kinds of actions may become stereotypical, but then when we border
on the dangerous is when we start judging people for not acting in ways that they stereotypically should. Or when we highlight—like negative traits for a culture and we contribute those for being stereotypical traits for that culture where they have nothing to do with their culture at all.

John Smith: Stop being such a stereotype Furgy.

Furgy: I’m sorry [in a mocking tone]

Mr. Z: Be careful Furgy. It’s all fun and games now, but how do you know your mom is not hurting on the inside from you making these comments?

Furgy: Because—

John Smith: I don’t think she is.

Mr. Z: Have you ever asked her?

Furgy: I don’t go “Hey mom! You’re such a stereotypical Asian woman!”

John Smith: We also don’t go up to her and go “oh Herrow” [in Asian accent].

(transcription, March 7, 2016)

The activity surround Macbeth was just one way that opened the conversation in the classroom up to stereotypes. In this case, Mr. Z used colors and archetypes to try and point students toward a different meaning and direction with their color decisions, however, this just led to a tirade between John Smith and Furgy about Asian stereotypes. By carrying on the conversation after the teacher walked away, these students resisted Mr. Z’s guidance in being culturally sensitive. The teacher had the goal of being open and accepting, whereas the students took this conversation to a whole new level about stereotypes and race that the teacher was unable to control and turn into a positive life lesson. Even a teacher’s best efforts are often inadequate because of students’ choice in the classroom. Ultimately, teachers can only be as effective as their students allow them to be.
In other projects, students’ design decisions utilized more than just color to represent identity, but chose to explore racial stereotypes. These design decisions were considered either to be covert or overt. Covert design decisions were hidden ways of displaying racial stereotypes, whereas overt design decisions were apparent.

**Covert racial stereotypes.** Covert ways of exploring race were displayed in Furgy’s design decisions. At surface-level, his design choices seem to represent his interest in Japanese culture. A common symbol incorporated across Furgy’s compositions was seppuku. (See *Figure 4.6.*) The robot video is the first assignment in which I observed Furgy portraying Seppuku through manipulation of the original text; however, the symbol becomes increasingly apparent in his subsequent assignments. During our second interview, I inquired further into Furgy’s knowledge of Japanese culture since it showed up in two of the three assignments we discussed that day. Furgy explained he knew “A surprising amount [about Japanese culture] because [he] actually went and visited Japan last summer...with [the] orchestra” (interview, March 31, 2016).
For their robot assignment, Furgy manipulated the still frame captured from the video by overlaying his own drawing of a sword in the robot’s hands. After reading this slide aloud to the class, Mr. Z complemented this group on their design choices, “I just love the engagement with cultural ideas outside our culture here and giving the robot a sword” (transcription, March 1, 2016). Mr. Z chose to focus his feedback to this group on their nuanced use of multiple modes, rather than the inappropriate topics of the slides. Mr. Z also missed Furgy’s self-disclosed goals of being “racist” that drove his design choices of using seppuku since they were disguised in his interest in the Japanese culture.

Multimodal texts were one way for Furgy to incorporate his knowledge from outside of school into the classroom. Such background knowledge about the Japanese culture provided Furgy a jumping off point for how to engage his interests into the classroom.
However, there were also underlying reasons for Furgy’s use of seppuku. For the *Macbeth* final project, Furgy chose to display scenes from *Macbeth* through a lens which reflected the Japanese culture through every frame, rather than the singular frame used in the robot video. Similar to how he gave John Smith the futuristic idea for his *Macbeth* final, John Smith suggested that Furgy “‘make everything in the Japanese sense’ [Laughing]. So I did!”

Abbey: Okay, why did he suggest that?

Furgy: Because I’m Asian I guess.

Abbey: But are you Japanese?

Furgy: No, I’m Korean! [Laughing]

Abbey: So why did he suggest Japanese?

Furgy: Because it’s just something we have in our group of friends. Just be as racist towards Furgy as possible [laughing] which I join in on. I pretty much went with whatever scenes I could make the most racist. [Laughing]. To be honest. (interview, March 31, 2016)

During this interview, Furgy explained assembling signs which best portrayed the Thane of Cawdor committing seppuku to

Regain his lost honor. So that’s the second scene with the old Thane of Cawdor. And the third one is the three witches, which I portrayed as monks this time [laughing] and then Macbeth [asking] “how do I gain more honor?” (interview, March 31, 2016)

Furgy’s explanation and portrayal of the story is nuanced in that he understands the implicit themes present in *Macbeth*, and he desired to emphasize how a tragic hero, Macbeth, essentially lost his honor through his blind ambition and greed for more power. His written explanations, which supplement his visuals, only mention seppuku and avoid any other acknowledgement of design decisions or cultural attributes. The significance of culture is
only explored during this interview where he acknowledged his covert intentions at exploiting *Macbeth* in a racist way. (See Figure 4.7.)

*Figure 4.7*  
Furgy’s *Macbeth* final displaying Macbeth as a Japanese warrior.

When questioned further about what he hoped to achieve through these design decisions, he uncomfortably admitted to “making as many stereotypes in this as possible. [laughing]” (interview, March 31, 2016). Rather than delving deeper into a conversation about race and stereotypes, Furgy quickly insisted “It was just—a lot of the stuff I do in this
class is just for fun. So. It’s a really easy class” (interview, March 31, 2016). He attributed his design decisions to the “easy” nature of the class.

The *Macbeth* final project was one way for Furgy to incorporate an inside “joke” in the classroom, in such a way that concealed his true intentions of using racial stereotypes. His drawings show a nuanced understanding of the text as do his written responses. Therefore, from the teacher’s perspective this may have looked like deeper engagement with the text, wherein it concealed Furgy’s true intentions, which were not made explicit until his second interview with me when he was specifically questioned about his design choices. You might put one more sentence here that gives an overview of his design choices.

**Overt racial stereotypes.** Whereas Furgy’s drawings hid his racist intentions through incorporating seppuku in a way that aligns with the theme of dishonor in *Macbeth*, Garrett and Ginger’s robot video stands in stark contrast. Their design choices very clearly highlight a diverse culture that they are outsiders to, a culture that is represented by a minority of the student population at Mountain Pines High School. When Ginger described their choices, he became extremely hesitant and nervous. He claimed

> Honestly, we were just making fun of things, I guess you could say. I don’t know how we got Dequan high school—we were just kind of thinking of the most outrageous name we could think of and for some reason Dequan was the name that came to our brain. And then Jaquinta. We were trying to think of a female name that sounded kind of interesting, *[laughing]*, in certain terms, so we were like “huh, what is an interesting female name, that is not commonly used?” ...The names were supposed to be kinda funny and random. Really no *pause* yeah, really no significance about them, just fun silly name that we’ve come up with. (interview, March 31, 2016)

During this interview, Ginger becomes very nervous and uncomfortable talking about his specific choices surrounding Dequan and Jaquinta. He attempted to dismiss them as “making
fun of things” but how that comment was followed up with “I guess you could say” implies a much deeper decision than just making fun of things. He continues to note how Dequan is an “outrageous” name for a high school, further distancing it from their world. The name Jaquinta was used because “it is interesting” but again, Ginger’s following statement of “in certain terms” demonstrated how there was more to their choices than being interesting and outrageous. Unlike Furgy’s outright admission of being “racist as possible” Ginger tried to conceal their decisions as “funny” and “random” with “no significance about them.” You need one more sentence here that is direct, explicit. Not only did Ginger become extremely uncomfortable when I ask him about the decisions, Garrett also displayed a level of discomfort and passed the blame back to his other group members for these “random names.”

Garrett: We just kind of picked random names for the robot and everybody in the story.

Abbey: How did you come up with these random names?

Garrett: Ah, it was just—I asked Jake and Ginger which ones to do and they told me. And I was like “Okay! I’m going to put it in!” [Laughing]. So we did that, and he was going to a party and [pause] ah— (interview, March 30, 2016)

He avoided talking about specific choices made around names such as “Dequan” and “Jaquinta,” and placed the onus on others outside of himself.

This group’s design decisions were classified as overt racial stereotypes because they reflected a culture dissimilar to their own Caucasian world with which they both self-identify, as well as the relative homogeneity of the school’s population. From the interviewer’s perspective, these students were well aware of their design choices and what they hoped to imply through the “random” use of names. Utilizing an unstructured inquiry
model in the classroom unearthed unexpected classroom micro-aggressions where students unleashed inappropriate ideas and beliefs about stereotypes about different groups of people in an inappropriate and non-productive manner, which is another example that runs counter to Mr. Z’s goal of being open and accepting in the classroom. In this case, the racial design choices by these students went unexplored and were unaddressed by the teacher, which runs counter to what his articulated beliefs were about cultivating diversity. Rather than addressing the issue, teachers may often ignore such misbehavior or inappropriate comments because they do not want to further perpetuate the students’ comments.

Theme two highlights how students appropriated design decisions to communicate various meaning potentials to their audience. They recognized how the author of a text is given full reign of what they allow their audience to see through the frame or canvas of their work. This was reflected in their own compositions as well as their reflections upon how Hollywood makes changes from certain short stories to appeal to an audience. Through unstructured inquiry projects, students also appropriated design decisions that would elicit a response from their audience. Many of these decisions included inappropriate material that pushed the boundaries of what is acceptable in school in terms of language and content. Lastly, students appropriated design decisions that explored racial stereotypes in overt and covert ways. This theme highlights the agency the author has in what they communicate to a larger audience, even if those choices are appropriate or not, and is related to the third theme that communication happens through multiple modes.
Theme 3: Communication Occurs Through Multiple Modes

Students’ individual backgrounds and their self-perceived learning preferences influenced the modes they perceived carried the most meaning. Different students aligned more closely with different semiotic modes based upon their out-of-school experiences. Students also highlighted how different modes carried different potentials for communication. According to Kalantzis, Cope, and Cloonan (2010), there are five different modes that create meaning in multimodal texts: musical/audio, linguistic, visual, spatial, and gestural. In this study, students aligned with four of these modes and revealed how music and auditory modes are associated with evoking emotion from the audience, linguistic modes can serve as a basis for argumentation, visual modes can clarify one’s comprehension, and gestural modes can express meaning to an audience.

Musical and Auditory Modes Evoke Emotion

Music and audio accompaniments can aid in establishing tone and perspective when communicating through multiple modes. Closely related to musical and auditory modes are verbal modes, which I have grouped with musical and auditory modes due to their semiotic potentials of volume, pitch, tone (e.g., phonological), which are all directly related to sound. Furgy, Ginger, and John Smith discussed the importance of music and auditory modes in terms of a composer’s intentions, evoking an emotional response in one’s audience, and establishing the tone of one’s composition.

Due to Furgy’s background in music, he enthusiastically supported that “music has so much more to it than just sound,” just like “art is [more] than colors on a canvas.” He described his creativity in terms of his music in which he “created [his] own interpretation of
the music” (interview, March 3, 2016). Music can portray the composer’s emotions as well as provoke an emotional response from the audience. He explained when he played Shostakovich’s “Symphony Number 4” it really illustrate[d] what Shostakovich was going through. If you listen to the music and look at the text, you can really just hear what—where he’s coming from. There’s emotion behind it. It’s not just notes thrown on a page. It’s someone’s feelings in the sound. (interview, March 3, 2016)

Furgy’s example explored how a composer must be intentional in his or her design decisions regarding musical modes. In order to fully communicate their intended meaning to an audience and not rely on written words to explain themselves, the composers must have an awareness of how sounds are structured together to create a meaningful piece and not just notes haphazardly “thrown on the page.”

During the first interviews, Ginger and Rose both noted their affiliation with choices. Whereas Rose identified as “kinda creative,” unsure if her participation in choir “counted as creative” (interview, February 18, 2016), Ginger enthusiastically described himself as a “choir kid” and observed that deciphering the deeper message of a song was “probably one of [his] favorite things to do” (interview, February 19, 2016). For Ginger, music was a source of emotional relatability, where musicians

Write it out where it seems like they are writing it for you, but obviously they weren’t because—you know—you’re not that special. Let’s be honest here. But it just seems like that sometimes. It’s really cool because you can listen to it and totally relate your life to it, and it’s fun. The song kind of attaches to you. (interview, February 19, 2016)

He describes how this emotional response evoked through a combination of musical and linguistic modes makes songs more relatable on a universal level. In addition to song lyrics being important for Ginger, he was the only student in the study who even mentioned
listening to the audio version of *Macbeth*, let alone enjoying how the mode allowed him to follow along and reduced his public fear of reading aloud.

Reading the short story in class was really nice with the automated thing because I hate to read out loud; it’s just a fear of mine. I just don’t like it because if I get stuck on a word or something, like 8 people correct me, and I’m like “oh, that’s awkward.” [Laughing] So having [Mr. Z] pull it up on the computer and having him go along, that was nice. (interview, May 9, 2016)

The audio version of the text served as a mode of access into the reading of *Macbeth*, but it allowed Ginger to avoid fear of public embarrassment through reading, and freed up his attention to focus on the story, and meaning of the text.

Whereas Furgy and Ginger focused on the emotional response that is evoked through music, John Smith emphasized the role of music in composing videos for his YouTube channel. During our second interview, John Smith wanted to show me one of the videos he had created for his YouTube channel as the starting off point for our conversation. He was never asked to bring in this video, however, I gladly accepted the opportunity for a student to show me his multimodal creations from out-of-school, especially since John Smith’s YouTube channel and the number of followers for his channel were sources of pride for him.

The video, which was a satire on first person shooter games, did not even get five words in before John Smith criticized his music choices. John Smith reflected upon the important realization that “I need to base my videos around music, not around the videos themselves. So I need to pick a song, and then make it match” (interview, March 31, 2016), thus making music and images “sync up” with one another. For him, the music created the backdrop to drive the rest of his multimodal design choices for visual and linguistic modes.
Whether students discussed the role of music in their multimodal compositions, or the importance of music in forming an emotional response, they all highlighted how music and sounds establish the tone of the piece that can then be used in conjunction with other modes.

**Linguistic Modes for Argument and Humor**

Ginger was the only individual who reported a preference towards linguistic modes of communication. He believed that the most important texts were the ones that make you think; they do not have a clear answer and therefore tend to spur a debate. The idea that texts spur one’s thinking is consistent with his self-reported enjoyment of “old texts” written by Shakespeare due to their complex structure, which requires active engagement with the structure and language of the text. Linguistic modes also aligned with his self-identification as a “Very argumentative kid, so like you know—if I have a point, I’ll stick behind that point and it takes a lot of reason and facts to kind of push me the other way” (interview, February 19, 2016).

He described the flow of his writing for two separate assignments: the robot story and the *Macbeth final project*. For Ginger, his writing “flowed” when he could express how he was feeling. For his Macbeth final project, he chose to write a persuasive speech, and explained:

> When I was writing this, stuff was just flowing and I was putting it on the paper. And I reread it and thought “this is actually pretty funny and stuff.” But I would definitely choose writing over drawing. (interview, March 31, 2016).

His writing also flowed during the robot video and his group was “just kind of going with the flow again of a humor kind of ordeal, just kind of, you know. Kind of thinking of random things that work out funny” (interview, March 31, 2016). During both assignments, writing
flowed allowing him to achieve entertainment and humor through his written communication. This flow of writing and ideas was also linked to how he described himself as a creative individual: “I would say I’m a very creative kid. A lot of things just kind of pop up in my head and I just run with it and go with the flow” (interview February 19, 2016).

He did not perceive that his written communication skills or his argument skills were impeded by his belief that he was “probably the worst speller you will ever meet [and] worst grammatical person you will ever meet. So when I’m typing up a paper, like commas, they don’t exist to me” (interview, February 19, 2016). Even though Ginger labeled himself as bad at grammar and spelling, he was one of only two focal students to write a persuasive campaign speech for his *Macbeth* final project instead of creating a visualization of two different scenes. He explained

> I hate drawing. I am a really bad drawer. I can’t even draw a stick figure correctly, so it gets very entertaining. So I mean, yeah, usually the drawings are easier, but I do like writing because I do like expressing how I feel and stuff. (interview, March 31, 2016)

The creative choice afforded through written modes were one way he could express his feelings more freely. This assignment was also in alignment with his affinity toward argument, and provided him with the most potential to take a stance on an issue. Therefore, it did not matter if he was bad at spelling and grammar for this assignment since the goal was persuasion and argument, which he was able to construct using capital letters for emphasis, emojis, rhetorical questions, and specific plot points derived from *Macbeth*, which he organized throughout his speech to effectively construct his claims pointing out Macbeth’s flaws and his issues in a persuasive manner (artifact, March 17, 2016). Through his writing,
he hoped to achieve the overall effect of portraying Macbeth in a humorous light and “just point out his flaws and his issues” (interview, March 31, 2016). This assignment also provided him with

A nice way to reflect on Macbeth. You remember, you go through the story and you go through the movie and stuff and just how it is different and everything. So it was nice to reflect back and see what he’s done in this little cycle he’s had of whatever it was. So, yeah. I was just going for an overall humor, humor point of view and put out my opinion on why I believe I should be the new king of Scotland. (interview, March 31, 2016)

The speech was a way for him to incorporate his own point of view, and view Macbeth from a more humorous tone and point of view.

**Visual Modes Clarify Comprehension**

Multiple students privileged visual modes over the other four modes. Jennifer, a student who described herself as “more artsy” (interview, February 16, 2016), appreciated Mr. Z’s class because it allowed her to be artistic and did not dictate one way in which she had to present her learning. Whereas for Rose and Garrett identified as “visual learners” and once they had a visual in their head about the story, it replaced the picture created by the novel. These students’ self-identification as being visual learners “show how students sometimes privilege or foreground some modes as being more ‘reliable’ modes in their reading” (Jewitt, 2005, p. 328).

Garrett labeled himself a creative person in certain aspects, predominantly due to his background in graphic design which he linked to stock car racing. He reported being

A very artistic guy, just because that is the way that I am, and I like to see things that look good, and colors that go together and stuff like that. Not so much about art itself, like the drawing or whatever, because I am no good at that, [laughing] but like the colors. I am into the graphic design and stuff like that, with cars, because we race and...
we do paint jobs... I like that. So everything I do, I like to match, or make it look
good. (interview, May 9, 2016)

Garrett used color intentionally to represent the mood of the text, and for character
identification. He colored each character differently, so he could “point them out more and I
could easily tell who’s who by just looking at them” (interview, March 30, 2016). Garrett
used color to differentiate the characters, making them match throughout, resembling how he
would differentiate cars on a race track.

Similarly, visuals were extremely important for Rose and her comprehension. Even
though the Macbeth unit was her least favorite unit this semester because

I don’t like poetry and old English types of language because it’s hard for me to read.
And I don’t really understand until I—I didn’t understand Macbeth at all until I saw
the movie. (interview, May 13, 2016).

After watching the movie for Macbeth in class, Rose told Garrett how she needed the visuals
to understand this play. She noted that “It’s just easier to understand when I have an actual
picture…. I am super visual. The words when we are reading it mean nothing to me. I need to
actually see what is going on to understand.” (transcription, March 11, 2016). In this way, the
visual of the movie was used to support her comprehension of the text.

Despite being a visual learner she struggled to understand how to create her own
visuals of the play for the Macbeth final project. Forty-three minutes into class she asked
Furgy what scene should she draw. Sixty-five minutes into the 90-minute period while Mr. Z
is checking in on all the students he noticed Rose’s lack of work.

Mr. Z: You haven’t even started the drawing yet.

Rose: That’s because I can’t even draw.

Mr. Z: There are a lot of people in here like that.
Garrett: Wait! What are you trying to say? [laughing]

Rose: Are you doing both assignments? What are you writing?

Male: You have to write for the graphic novel one too.

Rose: Right. (transcription, March 17, 2016)

Consistent with her self-report during our first interview as “not really [being creative]. I can kinda draw” (interview, February 18, 2016), this notion is reiterated in her reasoning for why she had wasted a majority of the class on her phone.

Not only did Rose waste her time during this class period, she turned in work that reflected zero effort. For Rose, visuals were helpful when she was trying to understand something, like Macbeth, but when it came to producing visuals to supplement or demonstrate her understanding they were not helpful, nor did she spend any time even trying to create visuals.

For students in this class visual modes allowed them to be creative, present their ideas with a coherent design to them, and supplemented their comprehension. According to Jewitt (2005), “computer literate readers, privilege image and colour over writing when reading a multimodal text” (p. 328). Due to the emphasis and value the students placed on being visual learners and their affinity toward “reading” visually, Mr. Z served an important role as mediator between the multimodal texts and students by providing them with an alternative viewpoint on how high school English served as an “alternative way of viewing and thinking about the world” (Jewitt, 2005, p. 329).
Gestural Modes Signify an Audience

Another important mode of communication in the classroom was gestures. Garrett, John Smith, and Rose discussed the importance of gestures as a mode to communicate meaning. They highlighted how gestures carry specific meaning potentials, are used to engage one’s audience during communication, and can also be interpreted in different ways depending upon one’s audience.

Gestures can be used both to accompany linguistics modes, as well as replace linguistic modes as the primary mode of communication when linguistic modes are restricted and unavailable for use. Garrett explained that gestures “show something, [they] have meaning towards them. So if someone is deaf they use hand gestures, and each of those hand gestures means something” (interview, February 17, 2016). Drawing on gestures as being important for the deaf community, he indicated how gestures are the language of people who do not have access to linguistic modes of communication.

John Smith discussed the importance of gestures as a supplement to other modes. Specifically, he drew upon his previous experience in a speech class which emphasized how to be more purposeful with gestures during communication. In this class, he learned how to communicate to a group of people at once, which made him more aware of how he “would actually move while I was talking” (interview, February 25, 2016). He indicated

Moving your body while you are talking is extremely important to convey your message. It’s just how speech class made me start doing this [circling his hands around in an exaggerated motion], and it’s how you should talk. Talking like this is kind of boring [sitting with his hands down]. It’s fun to move things. Right? [laughing]. (interview, February 25, 2016)
He highlights the importance of gestures to engage an audience during communication and how gestures and movement should occur simultaneous to verb modes.

Rose referred to gestures in the form of actions to help her understand the text better. The gestures in *Macbeth* supplemented her understanding “because [the actors] made it almost normal language, like at least because their interactions on the screen. But it was like watching a movie in Spanish, essentially for me [Laughing] (interview, May 13, 2016). She also referred to how gestures can be captured and interpreted through a still frame like photography, which capture a certain moment in time. For example,

> If you have a picture of someone talking to someone else, a bunch of people would interpret that differently. Like someone would say she looks really mad while talking to him, where someone else would say ‘oh, they’re probably having a great conversation about whatever.’ (interview, February 18, 2016)

These gestures—which are converted to static visuals in her example—are then interpreted by an audience, which “depend on the viewpoint of the person looking at it” (interview, February 18, 2016). Rose pointed out the complexity of gestures and how sometimes the same gesture or facial expression is not universally recognized by different audiences.

All three of these individuals explain how the semiotic meaning potential for gestures exists in nonverbal communication through movement, posture, gaze, and facial expressions, and rely on an audience’s interpretation of such signs, which are shaped and interpreted in a social world.

Students demonstrated how multiple modes are the cornerstone for communication. The use of gestural, visual, and musical modes highlight how language is just one part of the multimodal ensemble. Each mode has its own unique meaning potential which people can
orchestrate through combination with other modes. In this study, students’ choice of modes for communication was based on what modes they were most familiar and comfortable with due to their experiences outside of school and how they viewed themselves in terms of their strengths as learners, rhetors, and makers of meaning.

**Theme 4: Tension Surfaced Between Engagement and Value of ELA**

From the students in this study it was clear that they valued Mr. Z as a teacher and at times the creativity it afforded them. However, there was a disconnect between Mr. Z’s goals for engagement and the students’ goals for engagement. Mr. Z wanted students to be interested in ideas and activities they may have never encountered before and create products, and students wanted to be engaged by doing “fun” things that were relevant to their future lives. Students talked about their engagement or interest with Mr. Z’s class in his ability to get them to come to class, as well as how relevant they found different pieces of literature due to the personal connections they forced during reading.

Mr. Z’s beliefs and implementation surrounding the multimodal curriculum were partially based on his perceptions that students were not engaged in school due to their lack of motivation and lack of exposure to a course like this in their previous years of high school. As noted by Schunk (1991), a teacher’s beliefs about his/her students, pedagogy, and content are directly related to how challenging they make their classroom activities. This is important because based on Mr. Z’s experiences with students throughout the year, by March, he perceived that getting students to produce things was Not always successfully in senior comp and lit class where discussions and creative productions are definitely not on the forefront of seniors’ minds, especially if they
haven’t been pushed like that every year and that context is clearly not set up from the beginning. (interview, March 4, 2016)

For Mr. Z, the students’ lack of previous exposure to as course such as his, was cited as a factor limiting students’ engagement with multimodal production in ELA. However, what really could have been at play were students’ beliefs about the subject of English as a whole, rather than laziness and lack of motivation driven from “senioritis.”

**Student Engagement Equivalent to Wondering**

A stated goal for Mr. Z was to incorporate activities to engage his students. He reported that “In the ideal sense, what I want them to do is read and be engaged, and start to wonder maybe about things they haven’t thought about before. Or seen things in ways they haven’t seen them before” (interview, April 28, 2016). Described in this way, engagement meant igniting students’ natural curiosity, causing them to question the world around them; accordingly, engaged students would begin to see the world through a different worldview than previously experienced. However, Mr. Z noted that in order for students to be engaged, they would have to put forth the effort; “What I would like to see is, much more engagement with the students, which will require them to be engaged. So that’s a problem” (interview, March 4, 2016). This desire for students to become more engaged in the English classroom puts the onus back on the students.

Additionally, a juxtaposition existed between being engaged—or reacting to texts—and being bored. When reflecting upon the memes about *Macbeth* Mr. Z had shown to them, he noted the students
Were engaged in the sense that they were like “That’s boring, that sucks, or this or that.” But they were reacting to it, so like, one of the things I would like to do more of is create things and reuse it in the class to evaluate. (interview, April 28, 2016)

In this instance, any kind of student reaction to a text was considered a type of engagement. Even if a student’s reaction was negative, that reaction at least showed some kind of awareness with the text at hand, which meant students were not completely disengaged. Mr. Z also pointed out the importance of creating things to be used later for student reflection and evaluation to get students more engaged and critically aware.

Another instance where Mr. Z noted the disconnection between student engagement and reaction was when reading “Bicentennial Man” and discussing questions. Even though students may initially say “This is the most boring story ever” or “I hate this story,” it was Mr. Z’s goal to raise some questions and get them thinking about deeper conflicts, such as “Is that robot really human?” One point which lead students to a conversation about death and mortality came from Mr. Z’s self-reported line at the end of “Bicentennial Man” about how “mortality is only endurable as long as everyone else’s mortal. We are all going to die” (interview, May 27, 2016). Students responded to the work in ways that considered how this scenario would never happen

but if they left the classroom and you asked them do you like that story, or do you find it interesting, or would you read it again? They would be like “No, I hate that story. It was so boring” or something like that. (interview, April 28, 2016)

According to the teacher, engagement did not necessarily have to present itself in a positive manner, as far as students’ falling in love with texts or ideas, but at least in a manner where they demonstrated an awareness of the text through some form of reaction, even if that reaction meant they were upset or baffled by the concepts drawn from the various texts. In a
sense, multimodal resources were used to pose questions for things for students to think critically about and relate to a real-world situation.

**Intentionality driving design decisions.** For multiple assignments, Mr. Z reminded students to be intentional in their design decisions to demonstrate their critical thinking and engagement with various modes to make meaning. Intentionality was highlighted in coloring the *Macbeth* graphic novel as well as the *Macbeth* final.

For the *Macbeth* graphic novel he wanted students to “be very intentional in the colors [they] attribute[d] to the characters and into the backgrounds” (interview, April 28, 2016). The goal of the assignment was to give students a black and white version of *Macbeth*, in which they could imbue meaning into the pictures through colors purposefully chosen to communicate their interpretation of the scene. He instructed students that their color choices did not have to be realistic, but they did have to be purposeful. During his second interview he reflected how

Some students did some really cool things where they made this character green, and I think they made Macbeth one color at the beginning of the scene and a different color at the end to transform differences. Not everyone did that, but some of them did. So again, this idea of same images, different colors, different interpretations, so you see that kind of variability. (interview, April 28, 2016)

The choice and variability demonstrated students’ different responses to their sections of the text.

Upon later reflection, he evaluated that this assignment as unsuccessful for many students because they did not engage in the broader idea of how color, text, and image can vary and change how a reader interprets the scene. As noted in the previous example, some students were immediately clued into highlighting the interplay between color, text, and
image to communicate their complex understanding of *Macbeth*. Reminding students to be intentional in their design choices acknowledged the different meaning potentials implicit between modes, and written language and visual images do not communicate meaning in a mutually exclusive manner (Serafini, 2014).

When describing the *Macbeth* final to the class, Mr. Z encouraged students to be intentional no matter which option they chose (i.e., visual or linguistic depiction). If students chose the graphic novel option, they were directed to

Pick scenes that are important to the play and highlight the larger ideas that go into making the world of *Macbeth*...Make sure you include quotes in your drawings to identify the scene you are depicting and help illuminate the scenes...[and] write a brief paragraph explaining your choices and the ideas expressed in your scene on the back of each drawing. (transcription, March 17, 2016)

Students who chose to compose a political speech campaigning against Macbeth were encouraged to consider how “There is something he has done that has crossed into the line of ‘You don’t do this.’” (transcription, March 17, 2016). Students who chose a speech really had to “think about what has Macbeth done that doesn’t make him fit to govern in a sense? And what are the qualities?” (transcription, March 17, 2016). To achieve these goals, students had to decide how they were going to highlight Macbeth’s qualities through linguistic resources that developed a compelling voice and provided examples that emphasized his lack of morality. For both of these assignments, students were instructed to be intentional and choose the most apt form to convey their intended meaning (Serafini, 2014).
Student Engagement Prevented by “Senioritis”

“UGH, I’m a senior, I want to—I don’t want to be here,” (interview, May 9, 2016) is how John Smith described the attitudes of his classmate. During this semester, many students became disengaged and completed assignments for the sheer goal of graduating.

When asked what advice he might give Mr. Z, Furgy did not put the onus back on the teacher, but rather on the other students in the classroom.

It’s not his own fault, it’s the students. A lot of the students that are in senior comp and lit don’t care. They just don’t care, and he can’t really do much with those kids. He can try and motivate them, but in the end, if they don’t want to learn, they are not going to learn. So like Mr. Z tries to motivate them. It shows. He does know what he’s talking about, he tries to have fun with his job as well. But when the student doesn’t want to learn, they aren’t going to learn. It’s not his fault. (May 11, 2016)

Furgy’s statement aligns with Mr. Z’s comment that students must “be engaged” themselves, which meant they actually had to put forth effort to response and reaction to discussion questions in class.

Just showing up. For other students, being engaged meant showing up for class and actually reading the stories. During his first interview, Garrett described “school as not really being [his] thing” (interview, February 17, 2016). However, Mr. Z was

Really one of the few teachers that I enjoy[ed] because I said I’m not a school person, and some of the teachers just kind of strike me in a bad way, but Mr. Z is really cool. He’s laid back...nice...and just a happy guy. He ma[de] [ELA]—not fun—but he ma[de] it easy to come to school. (interview, February 17, 2016)

Garrett was consistently an individual on time for his first period class with Mr. Z, and only absent three days over the entire semester of English. His comment highlights the important role relationships between teachers and students play when influencing levels of students’ engagement and buy-in, especially for students like Garrett who really didn’t identify with
school. Similarly, Rose’s evaluation of Mr. Z’s class as “engaging” was a direct reflection of her attendance to first period class, rather than her deep engagement with content and activities in the classroom:

Mr. Z does a good job at keeping us engaged especially because it’s like the last day and I’ve still felt like showing up. So he’s done a good job at keeping us engaged through the entire semester which is like a miracle in my opinion. (interview, May 13, 2016)

For both Garrett and Rose, just showing up to Mr. Z’s class was considered “engagement” which was in conflict with Mr. Z’s goals for the students of creating new meaning and wondering about new things.

**Engagement through “actually reading.”** Each of the students entered Mr. Z’s classroom with different reading habits. Ginger approached reading with the preconceived notion that he “did not like reading long books—but I mean, if the book grabs my attention and stuff, like I’m totally down to read it” (interview, May 9, 2016). John Smith preferred to read online forums like reddit.com, which is composed of people’s opinions and questions arranged into short snippets and headlines. He liked reading “short chunks of information which are usually how websites are structured” (interview, February 25, 2016). However, Garrett and Jennifer referred to themselves as “not much of a reader.”

Due to students’ variable willingness to engage in reading, many students talked about their engagement or interest in the short stories in terms of the length of the text they were required to read, as well as the personal connections they forged during reading.

**Length of Text.** John Smith reflected upon the short story/movie unit as “an interesting experiment” with one of the keys being the length of the story at hand.
I feel like pairing a short story will keep the attention spans of the students there long enough for them to not just be bored out of their minds. They can read a quick short story in a class period, or two if it’s really that long, and then they just move on to the movie...so it’s very “bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam” instead of like dragging on Macbeth for five class periods because kids get really really bored. If you can keep the momentum going really really well, you keep engagement up high. (interview, May 9, 2016)

He explained how attention spans and length of a text held students’ interest rather than probing deep questions like Mr. Z wanted.

**Different Perceptions Surrounding the Value and Purpose of English**

One of the clear differences and tensions that existed between Mr. Z and his students was their different perceptions in the overall value of English as a school subject in preparing them for their future lives. Whereas Mr. Z approached teaching from the perspective that ELA was developing the whole student, students were more interested in the cold hard facts of the other disciplines.

**Mr. Z’s perception of ELA.** One of the reasons a 12th grade English classroom was selected for this study was due to the lack of standardized testing for this grade level. Additionally, no *strict* curriculum was being enforced by the school or department on what could or should be used in Mr. Z’s classroom to spur students’ learning. According to Mr. Z, SCL was an ideal case to teach because it was only “constrained by district and state mandated things like the Common Core, but those are so general you can put anything you want in there. So we are really free to do whatever we want in a sense” (interview, March 4, 2016). This “freedom” removed any Pressure that [students] have to learn this, and this, and this by the end of the year...I don’t think it’s—nothing for them to learn, but my view of English is you’re learning...
the same damn thing every year from the first year you start an ELA class in kindergarten. So it’s not like there’s some surprise concept that you get Senior Comp and Lit. (interview, March 4, 2016)

The only constraints Mr. Z described were created by “some students [who were] going on to college. So we should prepare them a little bit about thinking ahead and their futures, most specifically with personal statements” (interview, March 4, 2016). Similar to beliefs previously voiced by Mr. Z a key value for ELA was in preparing students for their lives after school by thinking about the core and essential values they personally held in relationship to various texts and resources used in the class. Besides going to college or taking an AP test, which would require students to learn a specific concept or theory surrounding literature, Mr. Z expressed how “there’s really nothing [new] that they need to learn” in SCL.

One thing that specifically separates English from the other core academic disciplines is the acceptance of multiple interpretations of a text in ELA, which also permits individuals’ response as valid interpretations of literature. As opposed to other disciplines where individual perspectives don’t hold the same value as scientific, historical, or mathematical facts. This different perspective between the subject areas was noted by students who struggled with seeing the utility in English as a subject area.

**Students perceptions of ELA.** Despite the freedom many students claimed to enjoy in ELA, a tension existed surrounding how this freedom separated English from the other academic disciplines. During the first round of interviews, students relegated English to its own special realm than the other subject areas by placing a higher value on nonfiction texts and facts.
Garrett contended “it’s two different things from English to actual school” (interview, February 17, 2016). He further explained this difference between his perception that “nonfiction should be more of a thing in school because it talks about what really happened as opposed to fiction, or you know, what ifs.” (interview, February 17, 2016). The emphasis on “actual” positions the English class at the bottom rungs of the school structure, containing one of the lowest economic potentials when it comes to school subjects if students do not view it as a realistic subject or skill necessary for their futures. His perceptions of English not only highlight the difference between fact and fiction, but also illuminate how tasks in Mr. Z’s classroom that deal with fictional texts and composing multimodal texts were not seen to be of an authentic nature, nor did they hold a value in preparing him for experiences outside of school.

Rose is the only student who acknowledged that it is important for students to read a variety of texts

I think it’s really important that everyone...read different types of texts, even including poetry, because even though I may hate it, someone else may really like it. Someone else might learn a lot from each different type of text, so I think it’s important that they do have diversity in what we read. (interview, February 18, 2016)

Both Garrett and Rose point out the main distinction between English and the other academic disciplines is created through the difference between aesthetic and efferent transactions with a text. For Garrett, the aesthetic transactions with the text—or the author’s diction and stylistic choices—were valuable for enjoyment purposes in ELA but were not legitimate things to learn. Whereas for Rose, she could understand how such an aesthetic response to things like poetry may be beneficial for some students.
The belief from Mr. Z that there might not really be anything new to learn in ELA was echoed by students who talked about how the most legitimate part of school are the facts that come from textbooks. Students’ perceptions of English not only highlight the difference between fact and fiction, but also illuminate how tasks in Mr. Z’s classroom that deal with fictional texts and composing multimodal texts were not seen to be of an authentic nature, nor did they hold a value in preparing them for experiences outside of school. Which in turn was noted as a tension that surfaced in ELA between the students and the teacher in terms of engagement and value of ELA.

**Theme 5: Tensions Surfaced Behind the “Right” Amount of Choice**

From the outset of the study, students reported how their favorite part about ELA was the open-ended nature of the subject area, but this was also their least favorite area because too many choices left them feeling disabled and unsure of how and where to begin an assignment. Especially when it came to multimodal projects, students were left with many questions regarding what they should communicate to their audience and how.

Mr. Z’s pedagogical oriented beliefs influenced how he approached teaching in his classroom. Due to his work with IB and college level courses in the past, he gave students freedom to converse and make meaning in English through informal discussions and classroom interactions. However, at the end of the year, he reflected on what he perceived as “[his] failing this year” (interview, March 4, 2016), which was providing students little to no guidelines on how to approach a creative project. He approached instruction and projects in SCL by not giving many rigid guidelines for how to do an assignment outside of the larger,
more formal concepts that he wanted them to touch upon. For example, in the Macbeth final project the formal requirements were two pictures that included dialogue and a paragraph explaining their design choices on the back. Otherwise, how students approached the assignment was up to them. This lack of directions is further complicated by how

...in senior comp and lit we have so many different kinds of students. A lot of them have grown up in a culture of classrooms that have basically have said “here is exactly how to do this, and do it.” One of my most poignant experiences this year was when one student [was] literally like yelling at me, “I have no idea how to do this!” And every time I would say, “well you just figure it out, and do this,” she got even more angry at me that I would not just give her a concrete set of steps on how to finish. There was really nothing I could say; it was really a creation—creative type of project, but she just couldn’t handle it. (interview, March 4, 2016)

Despite the fact that Mr. Z would remind students to be intentional with their decisions, he offered them few guidelines in hopes that they would interpret scenes in ways that would give them agency and choice, rather than restrictions, which were manifest through rigid rules and guidelines. However, this lack of guidelines proved problematic for students if they could not cope with the open-ended nature of such assignments. Students may not have been provided enough instruction or scaffolded on how to harness multiple modes in a creative way, especially if this is not something they were used to doing from their previous English classes. Additionally, students who struggled with assignments such as these may not have self-identified as a creative people and found the open-ended nature of these assignment too daunting. Therefore, instead of truly engaging in the work, they turned in products that reflected little to no effort.
Providing Students Choices

In pursuit of increasing students’ engagement with English, Mr. Z wanted to keep students at the center of their learning by “trying to get them to create things and go beyond the simple pen and paper or the essay form” (interview, March 4, 2016). One way Mr. Z put students at the center of their learning was providing them with options in how they presented their learning.

During the *Macbeth* final project, students were given the choice of presenting their learning either 1) visually through drawing two panels resembling a graphic novel, or 2) verbally through writing a persuasive speech. Both assignments maintained a creative and less formal focus for how students were required to demonstrate their understanding of *Macbeth*. For Mr. Z, this choice was one way of “letting the student interest guide what they produced as a product” (interview, April 28, 2016). He explained that the *Macbeth* final was student centered due to the affordances and freedom through which they could chose to show their understanding but choice was also another way of making ELA relevant to students; “So giving them some choice so at least it’s relevant to them, as far as they have had some agency in picking it” (interview, April 28, 2016). This idea of relevance incorporates the notion that students should be able to present their understanding through multiple modes, rather than a traditional pen and pencil assessment. Yet full choice remained out of students’ control since the options were predetermined by Mr. Z.

Mr. Z noted the campaign speech may have held relevance for students because this unit took place during the election season and during a time where “unfortunately, people are
saying things that *Macbeth* might say. So maybe [the students] might be engaged with contemporary politics” (interview, April 28, 2016). Providing students choice in compositional modes (i.e., visual or verbal) was one way to give students ownership of their work (Jocius, 2013). Not only were the students granted with a choice in modes to fit their self-perceived strengths as a writer or as an artist, but they were able to pick the mode which they felt carried the most meaning potential for communicating their point about *Macbeth* and the enduring understandings gleaned from the unit (Bezemer & Kress, 2008).

**Students Navigate the “Double Edged Sword” of Choices**

English is a discipline that embraces multiple interpretations, rather than a singular way of thinking. From their first interview, students repeatedly voiced their enjoyment of unrestricted learning opportunities, which were presented primarily through writing and composition activities in English.

Ginger liked the choice and control they were afforded through writing in Mr. Z’s classroom “because we can kind of put our own twist on it” (Ginger, interview, March 31, 2016). Furgy categorized writing in English as more of a creative type of writing; “like you are the one that comes up with the idea, and really elaborates on it” (interview, March 3, 2016). Garrett appreciated times when they were allowed to write because “we get to give our opinion, and then it’s kind of what we choose and how we feel about something, as opposed to be[ing] forced to write about something” (interview, February 17, 2016). These comments from students highlight how English stands out from other disciplines through freedom and creativity in writing. Outside of providing students with “the backbone of
[assignments and] guidelines to follow,” students felt empowered to “mess with the
guidelines [themselves] and change the input and stuff” (Ginger, interview, March 31, 2016).

For Jennifer, the best part of Mr. Z’s English class was the freedom to make her own design choices when it came to classroom assignments. This unrestricted nature of English made her feel more at ease with the subject as a whole.

[Mr. Z] just lets you do it your way. You know? Like with the assignments, you don’t—you have limits, but not like too many. You can do whatever you want with it, um, it’s really up to you, and you can be creative. But if it was another class, I would just feel like I wouldn’t be as engaged or interested just because I just don’t really like English class overall. (interview, May 11, 2016)

For Jennifer, creativity and choice were directly linked to her engagement and enjoyment of the class which were specific to Mr. Z’s classroom and not just English overall. Jennifer’s evaluation of English also emphasizes the “art” in the discipline that Mr. Z did not forego.

Many students enjoyed the freedom associated with the lack of guidelines, but they also communicated feeling “stuck” without sufficient directions. Furgy described English as a “double edged sword” because “sometimes it [was too] hard to come up with your own interpretation” (interview, March 3, 2016). This lack of direction left Furgy feeling uncertain where to start in a project. During the Macbeth final, Furgy complained to John Smith that “I don’t even know how to start this man” (transcription, March 17, 2016). Similarly, this concern was echoed by Garrett who perceived too much freedom or too many options became crippling for his progress and project completion, leaving him feeling overwhelmed and not knowing where to start his project. During the Macbeth final project, it took Garrett 45 minutes into the class period until he even asked peers around him for suggestions on “a good scene to draw” (transcription, March 17, 2016). Additionally, both Furgy and Garrett
recounted unrestricted projects as some of their least successful moments in previous years of ELA.

Both the teacher and the students became aware of the tension that formed around too many choices in the English classroom. Much like the story of Goldilocks, students either found projects in English too limiting, or too unstructured, highlighting the need for an appropriate balance that is “just right.” Consequently, a fine line existed between providing students with sufficient guidelines and choices to empower them, or providing students with too few guidelines which cripple them, leaving them unsure of where to even begin a project.

**Students’ views of rigor.** Closely associated with choice in the classroom was the level of rigor students equated with the different activities and class as a whole. Most referred to Mr. Z’s class as “easy” and “fun,” and some students it to be a valuable learning experience, while others completely dismissed it as busywork and irrelevant.

**Positive view of rigor.** Ginger was one of the focal students who responded positively to the graphic novel activity both in class and during his second interview. He pointed out how even though the students were coloring, they were “still reading the words and everything. So you are still understanding the material he is trying to get to you.” (interview, March 31, 2016). In this way, they were “still getting material, it’s just—he does it in a fun way, which is awesome to us because, you know it’s relaxed for us and this is like—its easy, but at the same time it’s still work” (interview, March 31, 2016).

Ginger perceived how learning through interacting with multiple modes of color, language, and visuals may be easy and fun, it was still learning. Similarly, Rose noted the
conceptual work, or the thinking that was required during the short story and movie unit even if they

Weren’t doing as much like hands on, writing with it, [but] conceptually we did about as much. It was similar to other units in that Mr. Z was always trying to get us to think about something deeper than just the paper we were holding. (interview, May 13, 2016)

For Ginger, SCL was one way for teachers to “take the load off of us” and remove unnecessary stress from his senior year (interview, May 9, 2016). He acknowledged that he only had to write one essay, which was drastically different when compared with his peers enrolled in AP Language or AP Literature courses. Yet, Ginger expressed if he would have written one more essay during the second semester of his senior year beyond the single research essay seniors were required to complete for graduation, “I would’ve straight died. Honestly, with everything I have on my plate, I would just be done!” (interview, May 9, 2016). As Ginger’s comment highlights, students who enrolled in SCL over AP or IB courses had various reasons for doing so.

Negative view of rigor. Many students appreciated how understanding Mr. Z was of their senioritis and their lack of motivation to complete work. However, a common theme that surfaced when talking to students was their negative perception regarding the rigor of SCL, which was also associated with the lack of strict guidelines and rules in his classroom. Furgy and John Smith curbed their appreciation for Mr. Z through their outright vocal dissent for some activities being “too easy” and mere “busywork.”

Furgy’s response to Mr. Z’s multimodal curriculum was complex. During his first interview, he directly compared the lack of rigor in Mr. Z’s class to the workload in his other
classes. Yet his perception about the relaxed workload in SCL was juxtaposed with his personal enjoyment of the class overall. He described the class as

Really easy. [Laughing]. Like, coming from someone who has been in several AP classes over the past two years, it’s just going to Comp and Lit 4...it’s like, is this really all that’s required to graduate? [Laughing]. And it seems—it almost seems like a joke. Like I love the class. I don’t have to try that hard. It’s enjoyable. (interview, March 3, 2016).

John Smith categorized the work in Mr. Z’s classroom

As—what is it—busywork! Because a lot of the work that we did just seemed like it had no true purpose. It was just there to keep up there, and to keep a grade in the gradebook because a lot of what we’ve done this entire year has a) either been like we wrote an essay, or we’ve been watching movies. A lot of the in between stuff, just seems like we had to do it...and everyone just...mindlessly going “Ehhhh.” (interview, May 9, 2016).

Based on comments from this interview, having students write out their design decisions using traditional pencil and paper modes of communication removed social collaboration from the classroom where students’ thoughts only existed in a vacuum for the sake of work to be entered into the gradebook. Assignments that existed for the sake of grades alone were not valuable or engaging in the eyes of the students. For John Smith, the process of writing out their design decisions and using linguistic modes of communication that flowed in one direction from student to teacher, was deemed less meaningful than a discussion about the same choices. He even suggested that Mr. Z offer more opportunities for discussion. Based on this evaluation, John Smith considered communication with peers as a more valuable mode for understanding and central to creating a common and collective understanding of English in the classroom.
Students’ view of rules and discipline. One of the signs that students interpreted in ELA was the relaxed classroom structure. Even though Ginger reported loving Mr. Z’s class, he expressed how there needed to be more strict rules (e.g., cell phones away, attendance, etc.). Rose voiced a similar concern regarding ELA and Mr. Z in that “I think he does a really good job at teaching the class. But I think sometimes kids kind of stepped all over him when it came to showing up late, and like, talking during his lessons and stuff like that.” (interview, May 13, 2016). In order to change this, she thought he should

Probably just demand a little bit more of them as far as rules goes. I think as far as assignments go, it was good. But I think the teachers who demand that the seniors show up on time do because they have to, and because they want to graduate. (interview, May 13, 2016).

For Rose, Mr. Z’s lax expectations about students’ tardiness and absences was the reason why so many students “took advantage” of him. Students were concerned with the loose flow of the classroom that did not resemble rigid rules they experienced in other content area classrooms, as well as previous English classrooms.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the findings for this qualitative case study and answered the research questions about how a teacher’s beliefs about multimodal curriculum translate to both pedagogy and classroom practice, and how students responded to this curriculum in one 12th grade English classroom. I concluded that a multimodal curriculum was used to teach students life lessons. However, tensions surfaced between using a multimodal curriculum to encourage student centered learning and the teacher’s and students’ resistance to this curriculum which resulted in pedagogy that minimized the prevalence of a multimodal
curriculum to certain days in the semester. Additionally, students responded to the multimodal curriculum by appropriating multimodal modes that emphasized the importance of audience and perspective. Students also responded to this multimodal curriculum based on their personal perceptions of the rigor of the classroom demands and interest in the different texts. In Chapter 5, I discuss these findings in relation to existing research and implications for practice and future research.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

We cannot continue to think of [English] as a subject founded on language, whether its focus is literary or linguistic, or whether it attempts to encompass both. ‘English’ will need to become the subject which takes responsibility for all modes of public communication: verbal, visual, and others, if and where they become significant.” (Kress, 2006, p. 36-37).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the teaching and learning surrounding a multimodal curriculum of one teacher and six students in a 12th grade English classroom. My initial interest in a multimodal curriculum situated in English Language Arts [ELA] was driven from the notion that texts in English have remained primarily unchanged in the classroom in the last 50 years (Applebee, 1992; Stotsky et al., 2010; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Also, ELA is a unique context where the meaning of English is produced and instantiated in classrooms as a combination of contextual factors at both the national (i.e., government policy) and local level (i.e., district, school, and departmental ethos; teachers’ and students’ backgrounds). I was particularly interested in investigating how a teacher in a high performing school used a multimodal curriculum to stimulate students’ understanding within the English classroom free the restraints of a “strict” curriculum and standardized testing, as well as how students responded to this curriculum during their final semester of high school.

This study is composed of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the problem and significance of the study. Chapter 2 presented multimodal social semiotics as the primary frameworks for this study. Chapter 3 outlined the qualitative research methodology utilized in this single-case embedded design. Chapter 4 described the five themes which resulted from data analysis. In this chapter, I summarize the present research study and position the
findings within previous research on multimodality in the ELA classroom. I also discuss the implications of the findings for policy, practice, and research before concluding with my final thoughts about the study.

**Summary of Methodology**

This single-case embedded design (Yin, 2014) investigated a contemporary situation (a multimodal curriculum) positioned within its real-world context (a 12th grade ELA classroom). For my research, I purposefully selected an English teacher, Mr. Z, and a focal group of six students who volunteered to participate. This study was situated in a large district in a relatively homogenous mid-sized suburban city in the western United States. Qualitative data collection methods were used based upon the philosophical assumption that reality is contextually constructed and sought to understand and describe human behavior from a much smaller sample (Merriam, 1998). The data collection included: participant observations, field notes, audio and video recordings, semi-structured interviews, and multimodal artifacts. I applied open and holistic coding methods (Saldaña, 2014), and then collapsed data into five larger themes to address the two research questions that guided this study:

1. How does one teacher’s beliefs about teaching a multimodal curriculum translate to both pedagogy and classroom practices?
2. How do students respond to his multimodal curriculum?
Discussion of Findings

All data were collapsed into five themes, which are summarized and organized by research questions below. The first theme focuses on the teacher’s guiding beliefs and pedagogy behind a multimodal curriculum. The second and third themes focus on how students responded to a multimodal curriculum through their design decisions. The remaining two themes focus on the tensions that surfaced between the teacher’s pedagogy and students’ response surrounding perceptions of assignments and choices offered in the classroom.

Research Question 1: In a 12th grade ELA classroom, how does one teacher’s beliefs about teaching a multimodal curriculum translate to both pedagogy and classroom practices?

Researchers agree that ELA classroom is uniquely positioned within schools as the site to prepare students for their futures (Au & Gourd, 2013; Kress et al., 2005; Kress, 2006). However, a tension exists in English between teaching students the standard forms of language and other innovative forms of communication necessary for global participation. Even more broadly, English is situated in a larger cultural context, which is framed by public criticism of education (ACT, 2005; NGABP & CSSO, 2010), pressures created by high stakes testing (Au & Gourd, 2013; Siegel, 2012), national standards (Beavis, 2013; Mills & Exley, 2014), and changing literacy practices necessitated for global citizens (Considine et al., 2009). Jewitt and Kress (2010) refer to the classroom context as a multimodal orchestration of English. This multimodal orchestration is concerned with how knowledge is created and received in the English classroom through teaching and learning materials, as well as the actions of sign-makers (e.g., teachers and students) in the classroom. My findings
demonstrate that the multimodal orchestration of Mr. Z’s classroom was less centered around having students utilize technology to create multimodal products, which was one of the main reasons he was purposefully selected for the study. Students were observed creating multimodal products with technology during one observation of the 26. Rather ELA was orchestrated through Mr. Z’s use of digital videos to engage students, activities in the classroom, and his classroom management.

For this study, one theme addressed the first research question. For Mr. Z, freedom in the senior curriculum afforded him a space to create a multimodal curriculum where students could explore what it meant to be human. Many times, the focus of discussions were centered around lessons and advice about life, which extended far beyond the English classroom. Mr. Z’s approach to a multimodal curriculum in the English classroom created opportunities for students to explore the complex and emotional side of human existence. Digital resources (in the form of videos) created a space where students were exposed to diverse worlds and perspectives of various individuals. Not only were multimodal resources and popular culture texts used as a springboard for students to explore an empathetic understanding of others, they were also used to draw a direct connection to students’ lives outside of the classroom. A focus of Mr. Z’s curriculum was to expose students to the unique way in which literary texts in ELA address issues regarding humanity, like what it means to be a human in a diverse and global society. However, what one teacher espouses, does not necessarily translate to practice.
Pedagogy. Multimodality, the pedagogical tool of multiliteracies, is facilitated through four different components of pedagogy: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice (The New London Group, 1996). Teaching students the metalanguage of design is one way to raise students’ contentiousness in their own design decisions, but ultimately makes them more critical consumers and producers of multiple modes of communication (Serafini, 2015; Unsworth, 2006). Mr. Z’s pedagogical beliefs about discussion and creation to guide multimodal classroom activities, did not always translate into classroom practice. The open-ended nature of the assignments alongside the lack of direct instruction, scaffolding, or metalanguage incorporated into the classroom may have been perceived by students as a lack of teaching on Mr. Z’s part. During his interviews, Mr. Z frequently compared SCL to his IB classes or his college philosophy students who would “run” with open ended discussions and guidelines, however, findings from this study showed otherwise. In this particular class of students, Mr. Z would pose questions that both him and the students reported as “falling flat.” Besides discussion not being as productive as Mr. Z desired, students in the class struggled with the lack of guidelines and guidance provided on creative assignments. He seemed open to student ideas, but lacked the understanding of how to incorporate a student-centered curriculum designed to engage students with choice in their discussion and assignments.

One form of pedagogy frequently seen in classrooms is what Cope and Kalantzis (2009) refer to “back to the basics” instruction, which is a “didactic, skill and drill curriculum which jams content knowledge to fit the tests” (p. 16). However, this type of pedagogy is the
opposite of what Mr. Z does in his classroom. He did not use didactic methods, or a transmission style of curriculum or teaching, nor was he confined by high stakes test; however, the students were unable to pick up if his teaching methods are trying to achieve something more meaningful than purely busywork. Whereas Mr. Z intended assignments to be engaging and spaces for students to learn life lessons within the safe confines of the classroom, students frequently missed this goal and reported their perception of assignments as busywork, futile for preparing them for their futures. Through his easy-going approach to SCL, Mr. Z gave students an opportunity to engage in literacy tasks for the real world. However, students did not view the tasks in Mr. Z’s class as authentic and misappropriated their time and the importance of such activities to which Mr. Z was not always aware because he believed his assignments were authentic and engaging. Take for example the Macbeth coloring activity. Students were genuinely excited to color; however, it was not because it lead to deep understanding and comprehension of the play. Many students refused to go back into the text to find their scene in the play if they were unsure about what was taking place in their graphic novel. This is one example where the teacher could have explored the importance of framing and how it functions in graphic novels, which would have provided students with an added layer of complexity and engagement by exploring the interplay of various modes in this particular type of text.

Alongside instruction, teachers have multiple opportunities throughout their day to capitalize on students’ inquiry and interests or dismiss these moments either purposefully or not. Unlike the observation by Vaughn (2014) where the teacher redirects students to refocus
on worksheets and tasks at hand rather than pursuing students line of inquiry by deeming them off-topic, Mr. Z attempted to capitalize on these potentially rich learning opportunities that value and promote student agency. In this study, Mr. Z invited students to have critical conversations about stereotypes and diverse perspectives through the Aibos dog video, the Adichie’s Ted Talk about the problem with a single story, as well as places where he intervened between Furgy and John Smith’s conversations of them stereotypically mocking Furgy’s mom through Asian accents. On a separate occasion, he even used Furgy’s comment about swastikas as an *agentic opening* (Vaughn, 2014) into the importance of symbology. Students voiced how there was a lack deep and meaningful conversations in the classroom; however, Mr. Z tried to open the door for these conversations to have a place in his classroom through the short videos he showed, the questions he asked regarding thematic points in the literature and the life advice offered to students. What occurred was students continued micro-aggressions and perpetuated stereotypical comments, which from my data were micro-aggressions primarily geared toward Asians between Furgy and John Smith. Due to the narrow scope of this study, there may have been other micro-aggressions in the classroom that were not captured because they fell outside my data collection. This demonstrates how despite his best efforts, a teacher’s goals and intentions can be altered in the classroom by students. While a driving force behind his student-centered multimodal curriculum was to keep students engaged and cultivate diversity, this did not prevent behavioral issues. A choice he made to ignore students’ inappropriate racial comments, whether directly or indirectly, caused Mr. Z to miss opportunities to address race because he
may not have grasped the extent of the comments or he did not have the tools and knowledge to address such comments directly.

**Research Question 2: How do students respond to this teacher’s multimodal curriculum?**

The results of this study support existing research on how students draw upon multiple modes to construct meaning (Beavis, 2013; Towndrow, et al., 2013; Serafini, 2015). Individuals assemble modes to represent their personal goals and interest (Rowsell & Pahl, 2007), demonstrate creative connections between texts (Grainger et al., 2005), and create original texts through remixing and restructuring different modes to convey meaning (Alvermann & Moore, 2011). The results from the current study also emphasizes the importance of choice in the classroom. Products like John Smith’s which remixed various texts into one understanding of *Macbeth* showed a creative and nuanced response to the multiple texts constructed in class. However, on the whole, students’ assignments flowed in one direction: from student to teacher, which shifted the focus of the assignment from how students represented meaning-making through various signs to completing assignments to ensure they passed senior English for graduation. Students’ multimodal compositions demonstrated creative approaches toward communication through multiple modes. The desire to clearly communicate their intended message to their audience required their consideration to perspective or point of view. However, students’ frequently incorporated inappropriate or controversial material to elicit a response from their audience. Students also incorporated signs into their multimodal compositions that ran counter to their racial
identities, demonstrating how students would appropriately, or inappropriately, harness agency in the classroom when consuming and creating multimodal texts.

**Multiple modes.** Out of the five modes that can be used to create meaning in multimodal texts (Kalantzis, Cope & Cloonan, 2010), students identified with four of these modes: musical/audio, linguistic, visual, and gestural. Even though communication occurs through multiple modes simultaneously, students composed through modes that they identified with and were most comfortable using because of their experiences and familiarity with these modes outside of school. In this way, a multimodal curriculum encouraged students to appropriate different modes of communication based on what worked best for them as individuals.

Students’ backgrounds and interests leveraged what they felt was important to pay attention to in a text and in their design choices. For example, Garrett’s design choices were focused on color and based around his interest in graphic design and car racing. Much like color would be used to identify different cars on a race track, Garrett used color as the primary marker for identifying characters in the *Macbeth* graphic novel. Ginger harnessed linguistic modes and print based signs (like capital letters and emoji’s) to create a speech for Macbeth. My findings demonstrate that students chose modes based upon their self-identified modal preferences, rather than the modes which created the easiest path to completing an assignment. The design choices to elicit shock value present in many students’ work can also be seen as a precursor to innovation. Take for example John Smith who created an original text through his design decisions to transform all the characters into robots in his *Macbeth*
final project. Through this original text, John Smith demonstrated the connections he forged between *Macbeth* and various robot videos shown to students, which were unrelated to *Macbeth*. John Smith even incorporated “Dave” — a character from his robot story — into his *Macbeth* final project. Creative liberties such as these create moments, which if harnessed, could be important and nuanced contributions in various contexts.

Alongside combining multiple modes to achieve personal goals and interests, previous research shows how unrestrained choice in multimodal tools, topics, and products (Hutchison et al., 2014), can increase students’ engagement in designing texts (Parsons et al., 2015; Ranker, 2008; Wiseman et al., 2015), and expressing one’s identity (Nagle & Stooke, 2013). Additionally, students can draw upon on their prior knowledge, experiences, and interests from outside of school to engage in the academic content of school (Chisholm, 2011; Spires et al., 2012, Vasudevan et al., 2010). Findings from my study demonstrate that students exhibited engagement or “buy in” for assignments when they were permitted to present their learning in their own creative ways. For example, unrestrained choice is reflected in Furgy’s multimodal projects, which all contain references to Seppuku.

Problematically, utilizing an unstructured inquiry model unearthed unexpected classroom micro-aggressions about stereotypes and race. Despite the teacher’s goal of being open and accepting and even trying to confront moments of stereotypes, race, and diversity, these moments went undetected by students.

Researchers suggest that reading multimodal texts necessitates different reading skills. Different types of multimodal texts (i.e., digital texts, graphic novels, picturebooks)
necessitate different ways of approaching and reading (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000; O’Brien et al., 2008; Zhang & Duke, 2008). Walsh (2006) explained that linguistic modes dominate print-based texts and create a linear and sequential reading path, whereas visual images predominate multimodal texts and construct reading pathways in a nonlinear manner. In my study, when the students created graphic novels for Macbeth they commandeered the power of multimodal texts by offering readers multiple entry points into the reading. Unlike traditional reading practices, that allow readers one linear path throughout the story, like Shakespeare’s drama, students’ design of the Macbeth final enabled them to create a text which allowed for multiple entry points through visual modes. Many of these scenes were not in chronological order, but rather highlight two separate snapshots of the text that resonated with students. The frame in Furgy’s graphic novel was even constructed with the frames reversed, so if analyzed from the lens of how one would approach reading anime, then they were in the proper chronological order. In order to construct their visualizations of scenes students had to decipher their interpretation of Macbeth by navigating various layers of meaning which were constructed through print, audio, and visual texts throughout the unit.

**Findings Across Research Questions**

Structured around various pieces of literature, ELA lends itself to the study of enduring themes relevant to humanity and society (Au & Gourd, 2013). As a whole, ELA is interested in how individuals effectively communicate to various audiences (Jewitt, 2010). The current findings support Kress and his colleagues (2005) who suggested the social
participants in ELA shape the quintessence of the English classroom. Thus, the resulting curriculum in English remains a constructed text (Yandell, 2007) which is assembled in unique ways based upon participants’ daily lives and interactions. My findings demonstrate that this particular context of students constructed a text of apathy and disengagement which hinged upon their “senioritis.” The students approached school with attitudes exemplifying “who cares” and “let’s just get it done” rather than an authentic engagement. Despite their stated desires for an easy semester of ELA, when they were presented with activities that lacked the traditional form of reading and writing they were used to in the classroom, they were unsure of how to feel or respond. Mr. Z was filled with ideas of how to work with students and what engagement should look like in the ELA classroom; however, when students’ engagement ran out during their last semester of high school, there was an inconsistent energy production between what beliefs the teacher espoused and what pedagogically transpired in the classroom. This suggests a relationship between what the students and teacher sense from one another about the value and importance of ELA, and it affected the amount of energy different practices contributed to the classroom from planning lesson to classroom productivity as the semester transpired. This case of Mr. Z demonstrates how it is difficult to incorporate multimodality and inquiry into the classroom (Spires et al., 2012).

Two themes emerged across the two research questions and explored the tensions that surfaced between teachers and students. One tension was created through the teacher’s intentions and goals for his multimodal curriculum, and how students perceived those
intentions. A second tension was created through the freedom of choices offered by the teacher, and the students’ navigation of those choices. The tensions that emerged between the teacher and students involved a disconnect between the teacher’s intentions and the students’ perceptions. Mr. Z’s belief that SCL was a place for building upon previously encountered concepts in ELA, rather than a place to learn any concepts distinctly “new” to ELA proved problematic for several students. Additionally, Mr. Z approached SCL with a lenient style of classroom management, which many students perceived as unsettling. Lastly, both the teacher and students noted the tricky nature of engagement. Whereas Mr. Z desired students to react to themes in literature, many students refused to engage with literature at all due to their self-diagnosed “senioritis” and self-identified lack of motivation towards anything related to school.

Another layer of student response observed in this study was students’ perceptions of the assignments as important to their learning. These individual judgements about the topic as interesting or boring, or even too long to read (Wissman & Costello, 2014), influenced students’ aesthetic and efferent goals for reading (Rosenblatt, 1988). My findings demonstrate that students who viewed assignments as unimportant to their learning approached reading from more of an efferent stance—reading for information for a purpose rather than to experience reading through exploring the work and oneself—students approached assignments with utilitarian goals of “just get it done” (Wissman & Costello, 2014). In this study, Furgy perceived Mr. Z’s classroom to be full of busywork. He described the work in Mr. Z’s class like a chore, one in which he took no pleasure in, but just had to
complete. Furgy’s personal value judgement was based off of his onerous experience the previous year in AP Language and Composition. Whereas students who approached reading from more of an aesthetic stance, completed assignments that showed personal engagement and interest. Students who were interested and engaged in “fun activities” reported a much more positive response to classroom activities, and were able to see the value in the activities despite their relatively facile nature.

A core belief of Mr. Z was to provide students with various choices in the ELA classroom concerning multiple modes of texts, open-ended design decisions, and products to present their understanding. Even though students voiced an appreciation for the open-ended nature of ELA which allowed for creativity, a tension surfaced for students in finding the perfect balance between too many choices and not enough choices, as well as a tension between how much direct instruction Mr. Z provided students and how much freedom he gave students in the classroom.

**Implications for Practice**

This research has implications for how multimodal composition is integrated into the secondary English classroom. As the findings demonstrate, a teacher’s beliefs had a direct impact on how English was constructed in the classroom and communicated to students. A multimodal curriculum can incorporate diverse perspectives and provide students with counter narratives (Nagle & Stooke, 2016). A pedagogy focused solely on print texts and linguistic resources in the classroom is a disservice to students in the 21st century and ignores how communication is rooted in multimodality. Due to the increased access to information
through cell phones and technology, students are inundated daily by information that flies at them through pictures, sound bites, and video clips, some of which may be trying to manipulate them to believe certain things or do certain things. Therefore, it is important students are able read the texts they encounter daily in a critical manner to see what the goal of certain texts are and make well-informed decisions. This also requires students to read across multiple modes to construct their understandings. Additionally, it is important for students to understand how their choice in modes affects how they communicate their point to their audience.

This research raises important issues concerning students’ attitudes surrounding a multimodal curriculum in the English classroom. It is important to consider how students perceive different semiotic resources since it may influence their dispositions and how active or laid back they are when approaching reading and analyzing. Students not used to doing creative projects in the classroom may interpret such activities as “busywork.” Additionally, students unfamiliar with using multimodal texts in school may be more resistant to such texts, viewing them as inferior due to their lack of previous exposure to such texts in the school setting. This lack of exposure highlights the instruction that needs to surround transmediation and multimodal composition through intentionally incorporating a metalanguage for multimodality, as well as scaffolding how modes are incorporated into multimodal projects. Another piece of multimodality is the cognitive piece of learning associated with over instruction. Students need to reflect upon their multimodal compositions (Smith & Dalton, 2016) to gain a deeper understanding and perspective about if and how
their design choices are communicating their intended message to their audience. This cognitive and reflective piece may also engage students to consider what they gained from different projects and the different modes they rely upon to communicate.

The findings from this research implicate teacher training, professional development, and the necessity of time for reflection for teachers who are asked to shift their teaching to meet the needs of multimodality. Teacher training and ongoing professional development should address incorporation of technology, in-school and out-of-school literacies to engage students in authentic ways in different content areas. Additionally, topics for teacher training and professional development should cover how to appropriately handle students’ incorporation of content inappropriate for school and the classroom. Continued training for how to address students’ racial micro-aggressions through diverse literature should also be considered. Ultimately more supports are needed for teachers to properly and appropriately incorporate multimodality into the English classroom.

**Implications for Policy**

This research has implications for how multimodal composition is integrated into the secondary English classroom. Problematically, standardized assessments promote a narrow frame for what student learning should look like the classroom, and may be in direct contradiction to calls for students to be literate in the 21st century literate.

Not only do teachers need to be more cognizant of how they approach teaching metalanguage—the language of design choices—to students, but documents like the CCSS also need to include a metalanguage surrounding multimodality, since this vocabulary which
supports different sign systems is glaringly absent from the CCSS (Mills & Exley, 2014). Additionally, policy needs to consider the incorporation of “multimodality” into its language. The more global and digital the world becomes, the more important it is for students to have access to technology and different modes through which to demonstrate their understanding. The shift of assessments like PARCC to online platforms are still missing the mark in integrating multiple ways adolescent learners access a text and produce meaning. Thus, assessments should consider incorporating different modes for students to formulate meaning across videos and images, and critically evaluate the messages being communicated through digital modes. Current research coming out of Stanford University (Donald, 2016) highlights students’ inability to judge credible information, and this is case and point why students need to be able to read critically to be more informed citizens.

**Implications for Research**

This study has implications for future research regarding multimodality in secondary English classroom. The present study answered two questions: 1) How does one teacher’s beliefs about teaching multimodal curriculum translate to both pedagogy and classroom practices? 2) How do students respond to his multimodal curriculum? The findings raised questions concerning students’ perceptions of multimodality in the English classroom, as well as teacher’s pedagogy of a multimodal curriculum.

More needs to be understood about students multimodal composing processes, as well as students’ perceptions about multimodality in the classroom to address how integrating out-of-school literacies practices and technology into the classroom can further content area
learning. Equally important to studying students’ perceptions of multimodal composing processes, is research on students’ modal preferences and their design decisions utilized to communicate their intended message to their audience in the most apt way possible. Considering metacognitive practices or critical reflection of classroom practices, future research could potentially explore how metacognition affects students’ use and proficiency with multiple modes of communication?

More research is needed that focuses on effective instruction of a multimodal curriculum and assessment of students’ multimodal products. This includes teachers’ use of metalanguage and scaffolding in the classroom to engage students in multimodal composition. Additionally, further research is needed on how to incorporate choice into the ELA classroom where students can see themselves in the curriculum, the projects, and the assignments, and still be afforded choice without feelings disabled by given too much choice.

**Concluding Thoughts**

In the present study, Mr. Z tried to incorporate more diverse and multimodal texts to engage students’ traditionally seen as looking for an “easy” English credit during their senior year of high school. However, he was confined by the traditional ethos of the English department and the school, which denied Mr. Z’s request to teach a graphic novel during this semester due to a single inappropriate frame displaying female nudity. This view that students are unprepared to deal with visual images, or that images are somehow damaging and scarring to students is an example of restricting literacy practices necessary for global participation. The rejection of the graphic novel also highlights opposition and fear that exists
around abandoning traditional texts for more multimodal texts, while at the same time maintaining the school as the gatekeeper to restrict or allow students’ access and exposure to different forms of knowledge.

The mix of texts utilized in Mr. Z’s multimodal curriculum created a space that did not resemble what students expected nor were accustomed to from experiences in previous English classes. In this classroom, the literature valued for close analysis (pictures, audio, and films) stood in conflict to what students perceived to be literature traditionally valued in English classes. Instead, texts used in SCL represented texts valued in electives, such as Film as Literature. Additionally, the environment of Mr. Z’s classroom created a space which challenged preconceived notions of “tradition” and “authority” in the English classroom (Kress et al., 2005). My study highlights students’ institutionalized beliefs about texts deemed appropriate for school, as well as their lack of experiences creating meaning through multiple modes for academic purposes. Many students may not have previously engaged in creative projects in ELA and thus believe that doing fun and creative projects was a form of busy work. In my study, Garrett’s comment regarding how “it’s two different things from English to actual school” (interview, February 17, 2016), highlights a perception that others in my study shared about texts and projects in ELA as inferior to other subject areas. This view demotes ELA and fictional texts to a lower status in the academic realm of school and nonfiction texts (i.e., textbooks) used in other disciplines to be the ones that hold the most clout.
The context of Mr. Z’s classroom, constructed and communicated ELA through an aura of casualness, informality, and relaxation. This nonchalance associated with the discipline and subject matter was created through Mr. Z’s classroom management and consequences, or lack thereof, and through the resources he used during in class activities. The casual and laid back atmosphere of the class was reiterated to students when Mr. Z presents them with his idea for the short story unit a “slow canoe ride into your graduation. (transcription, March 11, 2016). The demeanor of the students changed from when they were reading the text to watching the film. While watching the film they became more comfortable and relaxed, as well as engaged and interested. Instead of using film as a literary study in and of itself, it was used to supplement linguistic modes of reading the short story. Even though Mr. Z attempted to create an atmosphere rich and ready for a multimodal curriculum, the way in which it was used remained haphazard. Even though Mr. Z was true to his beliefs that he wanted students to question their stories, identities, and values and in this way his multimodal curriculum, short videos, and questions posed to the class were in alignment, the fact remains that teaching hard. Ultimately this case study demonstrates the it is hard to match your beliefs with your actions, especially when it comes to the ELA classroom.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A: IRB Approval Extension

From: IRB Administrative Office pins_notifications@ncsu.edu
Subject: Wiseman - 6598 - IRB Protocol renewal/amendment approved
Date: February 17, 2017 at 12:18 PM
To: acgraha2@ncsu.edu

Dear Abbey Graham:

Date: 02/17/2017

Project Title: Teaching and Learning from Multimodal Texts in a Secondary English Classroom

IRB#: 6598

PI: Wiseman, Angela Michelle

Approval period ends: 02/17/2017

The renewal/amendment request for the project listed above has been approved in accordance with policy under 45 CFR 46. If your application was to amend your study protocol, and your study received expedited or full board review, this letter does NOT change the expiration date for your study. If you applied to renew your expedited or full board protocol, your new expiration date is shown above.

1. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
2. You must use the approved documents which have the status "approved" in the document viewer in the eIRB for your study.
3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation via amendment request.
4. If any unanticipated problems or adverse events occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website: http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs-docs/irb/unanticipated-problem-form/
5. Any unapproved departure from your approved IRB protocol results in non-compliance. Please find information regarding how to avoid non-compliance here: http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs-docs/irb/non-compliance_faq_sheet.pdf

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Deb Paxton
919.515.4514
IRB Administrator
depaxton@ncsu.edu
NC State IRB Office

Jennie Ofstein
919.515.8754
IRB Coordinator
irb-notification@ncsu.edu
NC State IRB Office
Appendix B: Teacher Interview Protocol

Script:
Thank you so much again for welcoming me into your classroom and allowing me to observe Senior Comp & Lit 4. The observations and these interviews help me learn about the different types of texts you use in the English classroom, and how you support the students in your classroom. If you want to refer to your written lesson plan or any other helpful documents during this interview, please feel free to do so. Your responses will not be discussed with anyone else. Please be completely honest during the interview.

Would you mind if I recorded the interview? It will help me to stay focused on our conversation, and it will ensure that I have an accurate record of what we discussed. At any point, if you would like me to turn off the audio recorder, just let me know.

Interview #1:
Personal Background:
• How long have you been teaching?
• Why did you become a high school teacher?
• Tell me about your own literacy experiences. Who are you as a reader and writer?

Teaching Philosophy:
• What are your overarching goals as a teacher?
• How would you describe your teaching philosophy?
• How is your philosophy manifest itself in your curriculum and teaching in Senior Comp & Lit?
• When students graduate high school, what do you most hope they have learned from your class?
• In what ways does high school English align with your views of literacy?
• What literacy skills do students most need outside of ELA?
• What are some ways you prepare students to read, write, think, and speak for life after high school?

Senior Comp & Lit:
• How would you describe the Senior Comp and Lit curriculum?
• Describe a typical lesson in your English classroom.
  o How do you structure your daily lessons?
• Tell me about the assignments you typically give in your class.
• How do you determine the main objectives for you lesson?
• What kinds of materials do you use most often in your classroom?
• Describe any students in your classroom you think I should know about.
• Is there anything else you would like to tell me that I didn’t already ask you?
Thank you for your time today.

**Interview #2:**

**Pedagogy Reading**
- What is the main goal of reading in your curriculum?
- How do you choose the texts that your students read in your classroom? Exclude?
- Think of a time when students interpreted a text in a way that surprised you. Describe this event. Why did it surprise you?
- Do you think students in senior comp and lit find the text interesting? Engaging? Relevant?
- Are the kinds of reading they do in this class similar to the kinds of reading they would do outside school? Why?
- How have you tried to make the reading relevant?
  - Can you tell me about one or two times when this has been successful?
  - Can you tell me about one or two times when this has been challenging?

**Writing**
- What is the main goal of writing in your curriculum?
- How do you choose the texts that students create in your classroom?
- Think of a time when students created a text in a way that surprised you. Describe this event. Why did it surprise you?
- Do you think students in senior comp and lit find the writing they do in class interesting? Engaging? Relevant?
- Are the kinds of writing they do in this class similar to the kinds of writing they would do outside school? Why?
- How have you tried to make the writing relevant?
  - Can you tell me about one or two times when this has been successful?
  - Can you tell me about one or two times when this has been challenging?

**Multimedia Texts.**
- How do you use technology in your classroom on a day to day basis?
- How do students use technology?
- I'm interested in your use of multimedia texts. Could you share some of your thinking there? Why have you included a range of media?

**General Interview Questions about Multimodal Artifacts:**
- Tell me about this assignment.
- What guidelines did you give students?
- What did you hope for them achieve?
• Describe the process you think they went through when reading/creating this assignment?

• Is there anything else you would like to tell me that I didn’t already ask you?

Thank you for your time today.

Interview #3:

General Interview Questions about Multimodal Artifacts:
• Tell me about this assignment.
• What guidelines did you give students?
• What did you hope for them achieve?
• Describe the process you think they went through when reading/creating this assignment?

General Reflection:
• When reflecting on your year of teaching senior comp and lit, what do you think went the best? The worst?
• In your first interview, you said you hoped students left your class with _____ skill, do you think they achieved this? Why or why not?
• What changes would you make to the Senior Comp and Lit 4 curriculum next time around if you had to teach this again?
• What assignments do you think went the best? Why?
• What assignments were the most meaningful for students? How do you know?
• Since this was your first year of using BYOD, how do you foresee yourself using technology in the classroom next year?
• What is the largest benefit to using multimodal texts? Explain.
• What is the largest drawback to using multimodal texts? Explain.

• Is there anything else you would like to tell me that I didn’t already ask you?

Thank you for your time today.
Appendix C: Student Interview Protocol

Script:
Thank you so much again for meeting with me to discuss the types of texts you use in the English classroom. Your responses will not be discussed with anyone else. Please be completely honest during the interview.

Would you mind if I recorded the interview? It will help me to stay focused on our conversation, and it will ensure that I have an accurate record of what we discussed. At any point, if you would like me to turn off the audio recorder, just let me know.

Interview #1:

Introduction:
- How would you describe yourself as a student?
- Do you consider yourself a creative person?

English Language Arts:
- What do you like most about ELA?
- What do you like least about ELA?
- Tell me about a time when you were successful in English?
- Tell me about a time when you were unsuccessful in English?

Reading & Texts:
- What kinds of things do you read in school? What types of texts do you read?
- What types of texts are important in school?
- What types of texts are important in English? Senior Lit and Comp?
- Do you read different types of texts when you leave school? What are they?

Writing & Texts:
- What types of writing do you complete in school?
- What kind of writing do you do when you leave school?
- Do you consider an image/gesture/sound a text?

Senior Comp & Lit:
- How would you describe Mr. Z class? What is it like?
- How much control do you feel like you have over what you read? What you write?

Conclusion:
- Is there anything else you would like me to know that I did not ask you about today?
Interview #2 & #3:

**General Interview Questions about Multimodal Artifacts:**

- Tell me about this assignment.
- What guidelines were you given?
- Why did you choose to make the design choices that you made? (color, placement, size, font, etc.)
  - What did you hope to achieve?
- Describe the process you went through when reading/creating this text?
- Is there anything else you would like me to know that I did not ask you about today?
Appendix D: Cut/Keep Features

Short Story and Movie Unit

Name: ___________________________ Blue / Gold: ___________________________

From Texts to Movies: What do you keep? What do you cut?

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Appendix E: Graphic Novel Coloring Directions

Coloring Fun Time with *Macbeth*
EQ: Can we understand a text better through Coloring Fun Time?

Coloring Time:
1. Color the frames as you wish. Consider coloring them according to the mood - dark, scary colors - or coloring them ironically - bright and cheery colors!

Understanding Time:
1. Somewhere in your packet, you need to identify the following:
   a. (i) Which characters are in your scene, (ii) what act your scene comes from, (iii) what is happening, and (iv) why this is important for the larger ideas and themes in the play.
Appendix F: Garrett and Ginger’s Robot Story

Drunken Robot

The robot, whose name is Sebastian is a senior in High School at Daquan High. It was a Friday night on a brisk cool night and the party was about to start. Everybody was starting to show up rollin in their stangs on 20" wheels with an 8" lift. As the alcohol was being dispersed, Sebastian shows up an hour later because he can only walk. Sebastian had a handful of oil and was ready to party like a robot.
After Sebastian got completely wasted he was ready to go home to his female companion. When he gets home after walking through the wintry forest he and his “friend” Jacinta the Honda robot.

When Sebastian and Jacinta got home Jacinta wanted a full stomach before anything happened. At that point Jacinta was ready to party as well and went to the garage and got some high quality oil of 96% concentrated. She downed 6 quarts in 30 minutes and was heavily drunk and ready for what’s gonna happen next.
As Jacinta sneaks up behind Sebastian she puts her hands around Sebastian's neck and then tackles him to the ground she whispers in his ear “don’t worry be happy.” With Drinkin Bone by Tracy Byrd in the background the slowly stumble to the bedroom as she stops him and get’s on the bed and says “draw me like one of your french girls.”

Sebastian begins to draw Jacinta on a very nice canvas. All of the sudden Sebastian gets a weird feeling in his tummy wummy and projectile vomits on Jacinta and the horribly drawn picture. After this event he crawls in a different bed alone trying to fall asleep and finally succeeds when he grabs the sheets and the room stops spinning.
When Sebastian wakes up the next morning he slowly walks out of the room to see Jacinta making breakfast for them. He looks up at her and realizes Jacinta is a lot less attractive than she was the night before because he had too much oil.

As Sebastian starts to feel funny he falls to the ground and passes out. He wakes up a little later in the middle of the forest with his 96% concentrate oil in his hands before the events ever happened.
Appendix G: John Smith, Furgy, and Rose’s Robot Story

Inner thoughts of a robot

By

I’m smarter than these meatbags. I should be in charge.
D*ck move, Dave.

This isn't Canada, Dave.

This is where I commit seppuku Dave.
I'm off to kill Dave's family. Don't pull that Canada s#!t on me Dave. I hope your family has cookies in the pantry.

Get away from me you fat f@%k.
I’m off to go knock-up the toaster.
Appendix H: *Macbeth* Final Project Directions

Final *Macbeth* Activity  
Senior Comp & Lit, AY15

Now that we have finished *Macbeth* and fully absorbed its meanings and implications, let’s explore *Macbeth* in one final activity. Pick from one of the following activities:

1. Campaign Speech:
   a. Imagine you are running against Macbeth for President of Scotland (I know this is totally not historically accurate, but just play along). Write a campaign speech that outlines why Macbeth is wrong for the country and why you are the best choice. What has Macbeth done or what values does he embody that disqualify him for the presidency? What have you done and what values do you embody that make you the best choice? 1 - 2 pages, with paragraphs, and make your speech relevant to the world of *Macbeth*.

2. Graphic Novel:
   a. Pick 2 scenes from *Macbeth* and depict them visually. Make sure you include quotes in your drawing to identify the scene you are depicting and that help illuminate the scene’s importance. Your drawings need not be professional (remember, I can only do stick figures), but you must pick scenes that are important to the play and that highlight the larger ideas that go into making the world of *Macbeth*. Lastly, write a brief paragraph explaining your choices and the ideas expressed in your scene on the back of each drawing. 2 drawings, with 2 paragraphs of explanation, and quotes from the play in each drawing.

**Due Date:** This is an in-class activity. If you miss class, then this is do as soon as possible after Spring Break.
Appendix I: Final Exam

Final Exam Senior Comp & Lit Spring AY15

Part 1: Macbeth and the Witches

Directions:
1. Read the passage below.
2. Then compare the two pictures.
3. Answer the following question using complete sentences and detailed thoughts:
   a. Which of the two pictures best represents the witches from Macbeth? Make sure to use details from the passage in supporting your response.

1. Passage:

   WITCHES
   The weird sisters, hand in hand,
   Posters of the sea and land,
   Thus do go about, about:
   Thrice to thine and thrice to mine
   And thrice again, to make up nine.
   Peace! the charm's wound up.

   Enter MACBETH and BANQUO

   MACBETH
   So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

   BANQUO
   How far is't call'd to Forres? What are these
   So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
   That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
   And yet are on't? Live you? or are you aught
   That man may question? You seem to understand me,
   By each at once her chappy finger laying
   Upon her skinny lips: you should be women,
   And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
   That you are so.

   MACBETH
   Speak, if you can: what are you?

   First Witch
   All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!

   Second Witch
   All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!

   Third Witch
   All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!
2. Pictures:

A

B
Prompt: Which of the two pictures best represents the witches from *Macbeth*? Make sure to use details from both the passage and the pictures in supporting your response.

Part 2: Flash Fiction and Movies

Directions:
1. Read the flash fiction story below - “War of the Clowns” by Mia Couto.
2. Respond to the questions that follow using complete sentences and detailed thoughts.

1. “War of the Clowns” by Mia Couto
   
   One time two clowns set themselves to arguing. The people would stop, amused, to watch them.
   
   —What’s that? they asked.
   
   —Why, it’s only two clowns arguing.
   
   Who could take them seriously? Ridiculous, the two comedians reparteed. The arguments were common nonsense, the theme was a ninnery. And an entire day passed.
   
   The following morning, the two remained, obnoxious and outdoing each other. It seemed as though, between them, even yucca soured. In the street, meanwhile, those present were exhilarated with the masquerade. The buffoons began worsening their insults with fine-edged and finetuned barbs. Believing it to be a show, the passersby left coins along the roadside.
   
   On the third day, however, the clowns arrived at acts of force. Their blows became a disarray, their counterkicks zinged more across air than across bodies. The children rollicked, imitating each jester’s blows. And they laughed at the two fools, their bodies tripping upon their own selves. And the boys wanted to repay the delightful goodness of the clowns.
   
   —Dad, give me some coins to leave on the sidewalk.
   
   On the fourth day, the jabs and blows grew worse. Beneath their makeup, the faces of the clowns began to bleed. Some kids became scared. Was that true blood?
   
   —It’s not serious, don’t fret, their parents soothed them.
   
   In failures of trajectory, some were struck by directionless wallops. But it was light fare, only serving to add to the laughs. More and more people joined the gallery.
   
   —What’s going on?
   
   Nothing. A friendly unsettling of accounts. It’s not worth separating them. They’ll tire out, it’s nothing more than a bit of clowning around.
   
   On the fifth day, however, one of the clowns armed himself with a stick. Advancing on his adversary, he discharged a blow that tore off his wig. The other, furious, equipped himself with a symmetrical beating bat and responded with the same dismeasure. The wooden rods whistled through the air in somersaults and deliriums. One of the spectators, unexpectedly, was struck. The man fell, deadspread.
   
   A certain confusion arose, the souls divided. Little by little, two battlefields began to form. Various groups traded drubbings. Still more were felled.
It entered a second week and the surrounding neighborhoods heard it said that a
dizzied pandemonium had set in around the two clowns. And the thing embroiled the entire
plaza. And the neighbors found it funny. Some went to the plaza to verify the reports. They
returned with contradicting and inflamed versions of their own. The neighborhood continued
to divide itself, in opposing opinions. Conflicts began in some neighborhoods.

On the twentieth day, shots began to be heard. No one knew exactly where they came
from. Could have been from any point in the city. Full of terror, the inhabitants armed
themselves. The tiniest movement seemed suspect. The shots spread. Dead bodies began to
accumulate in the streets. Terror reigned over the whole city. Soon, massacres began.

At the beginning of the month, all the city’s inhabitants had died. All except the two
clowns. That morning, the comics sat, each one in his corner, and ridded themselves of their
ridiculous dress. They looked at each other, worn out. Later, they rose to their feet and
embraced, laughing at the flags dispersed. Arm in arm, they gathered the coins from the
roadsides. Together they crossed the city destroyed, careful not to tread on the cadavers. And
they went in search of another city.

2. Prompts - Respond to both I and II!

I. Pick three features (events, characters, dialogue, etc.) that you think need to be
in any movie based off of this story. What are they? And why are they
necessary?

II. Whom would you cast to play the clowns? (If you can’t think names, think types
of actors, such as comedians, serious actors, young, or old.) Justify your
response.

Part 3: Reflecting on English, High School, and the Future
What's one life lesson you learned during your four years of English classes and how do
you think it will help you as you move forward from high school? Please provide a
thorough, careful, and well thought out response.
Appendix J: *Macbeth* Student Journal Prompts

Macbeth Journal – Prereading Act 1

- Do you believe that people change as they become more greedy? Why or why not?
- How would you define “blind ambition” and how could it be applied to your answer on greediness?

Macbeth Journal – Prereading Act 2

- The Witches have been referred to by critics as the “weird sisters.” (Weird coming from the Anglo-Saxon word “wyrd” meaning “Fate.” This can be further expanded to mean the “goddesses of destiny.”)

Write ½ page – 1 page journal on the following:

- Do you think the “weird sisters” know the future?
- Do you think they cause it?
- Do you think it would be possible for Macbeth to become king without murdering Duncan? (He did become Thane of Glamis and Cawdor without any effort...).
Journal Pre Reading Act 3

Journal: Write ½ page to 1 Page:
How you would feel and what you would do if someone took your position somewhere, (ie. such as losing your starting position on the basketball team or being demoted at work.)

Macbeth
Post Act 3, Scene 3 Journal

• In a ½ page to 1 page Journal respond to the following quote in relationship to Macbeth:
  “What goes up, must come down”
Journal – Prereading Act 4

• Write ½ page to 1 page:
Write about an incident when you have felt guilty and/or paranoid about doing something.

Prereading Act 5 Journal

• Most critics agree that Lady Macbeth deserves a substantial amount of blame for what happens in *Macbeth*. She has even been cited by some as “the real cause and agent of the tragedy.”
Journal – Write ½ Page to 1 Page

• Think about the meaning of this and consider her role in Acts I and II, as opposed to her role in Acts III and IV.
  — How does her role as a motivating force in Macbeth life change?
  — Can she be said to be the “real cause and agent” based on her influence in the first two acts?
  — If not, who or what is responsible for the tragedy?

Post Reading Act 5

Critic Frank W. Wadsworth has commented,

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare wrote a tragedy of a man’s conscience. During the course of the play, Macbeth changes from a person of strong but imperfect moral sense to a man who will stop at nothing to get and keep what he wants. By the play’s end, Macbeth has lost all emotion.

Think about the meaning of the this quotation and then write ½ page to 1 page in which you agree or disagree with the comment. Make sure you provide reasons why that support your opinion.