

*I would love to live  
Like a river flows,  
Carried by the surprise  
Of its own unfolding.*  
—John O'Donohue

# English Department Capstone Conference



# ENG 495 *Capstone Conference*

**10 December 2021**

**Virtual Conference—Zoom Sessions**

**Grand Valley State University**

**Allendale, Michigan**

Fall Semester 2021

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## Why a Capstone Conference?

The English Capstone provides several important opportunities for English majors not offered elsewhere in the curriculum: the opportunity to reflect individually on the intellectual impact of majoring in English (intellectual autobiography); the opportunity to engage in the development and writing of an extended paper (senior thesis); and the opportunity to participate in the public presentation of the thesis work (departmental student conference).

Our Capstone course underscores the department's principles and values: to cultivate critical reading and reflection; to produce excellent writing in a variety of forms; to speak, read, and write effectively; and to achieve literary, analytical, pedagogical, and theoretical skills.

This conference is the culminating event for the English Capstone course. It requires that students publicly present a project for which they have been responsible from its inception to its final form. The presentation makes concrete the expertise that students have accrued in the research process and allows them to speak as authorities on their topic. No matter what career our students enter, public speaking is an essential skill, as is the act of distilling complex knowledge into a compact yet comprehensible package. Thus, this final assignment for the Capstone course is the one that perhaps most clearly transitions students out of the major and into the next phase of their lives. We see this element of the course as a way to help students recognize each others' accomplishments—and to help them be proud of their own as they move forward into their various futures.

## Schedule

Session One: 9-9:50 a.m.

*Panels A & B*

Session Two: 10-10:50 a.m.

*Panels C, D & E*

Session Three: 11-11:50 a.m.

*Panels F, G & H*

Session Four: 12-12:50 p.m.

*Panels I, J & K*

Session Five: 1-1:50 p.m.

*Panels L & M*

Session Six: 2-2:50 p.m.

*Panels N & O*

## Notes

Congratulations to all Capstone students for the extensive planning, researching, developing, organizing, writing and revising that has brought you to this semester's ultimate event, the English Capstone Conference. Your effort undoubtedly will be noted by the English department faculty facilitating your presentation. And to those faculty, my colleagues, I wish to say 'thank you' for your support of our majors during my years of coordinating the Capstone program. Your dedication has been greatly appreciated and admired.

Professor Kurt Bullock, coordinator  
English Capstone Program

**Panel A****Reading Communities**

Facilitators: Dr. Amy Masko &  
Dr. Janet Navarro

**Elise Cooper**  
**‘The Community That**  
**Books Built:**  
**Constructing an**  
**Effective Classroom**  
**Community with**  
**Literature’**

In this thesis, I will define community and literacy as they relate to the general education classroom. I will argue that these two areas are intrinsically related to one another. It is clear from research done that community and literacy are related in ways that make them necessary to critically think about as a classroom teacher, which is why the literature in general education classrooms should be reflective of the classroom community the teacher of that classroom is trying to emulate. The community members in the classroom are the students, so the literature in the classroom should be reflective of them. The benefits of this practice create not only a strong sense of belonging in students but also more academically inclined students.

**Kaitlin Rozenboom**  
**‘Reading into Literacy’**

Reading literacy is steadily becoming a growing problem in the United States. According to recent scores listed by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), reading literacy scores are stagnant. Educators must find new ways to aid students in developing their reading literacy. Many different factors play into a child's ability to develop reading literacy, such as socioeconomic status, genetics, and adequately educated teachers. The educator's job is to level the playing field and provide each student a chance to become a life-long reader. Teachers can implement various tactics such as choosing books that resonate with the reader, creating text-sets that garner interest, and offering more read-aloud time in the classroom. Once a student begins to read, they are able to reap the many benefits of increased reading literacy including emotional and social development that helps them structure their thoughts and feelings.

**Sara Navia**  
**‘The Science of  
Reading: Success in  
Elementary Teaching’**

Teaching reading in an elementary classroom can be difficult for many educators. Every educator has an idea on how to teach their students to read; however, many do not know the research that supports the practice. Research shows that the science of reading is what is helping most students learn to read in the early years of literacy instruction. The science of reading is looking at how the brain learns language from a cognitive standpoint. It can be considered a simple view of reading that states that a student learns by decoding a text and language comprehension. Putting these two elements together make a great reader and give students the foundational skills they need to be successful. Teachers should be using the science of reading to drive instruction in the classroom.

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**Panel B**      **Race, Language & Teaching**  
Facilitators: Dr. Brian White &  
Dr. Shinian Wu

**Olivia Bambacht**  
**‘Linguistic Racism  
as a Product of  
Stimulation and  
Exposure’**

Black American dialect offers up challenges for some students. They may not understand why they are being told they speak incorrectly when they have spoken the same way for their whole lives. The language they use at home is considered “ghetto” or “street-talk” which gives it a negative connotation. It is impossible to think that a student’s extracurricular activities do not have an impact on how they speak. Once they leave the classroom, they do not stop learning. They are influenced by each individual they interact with. Statistically, black families are likely to live and work in communities full of uneducated or mistreated individuals. Their opportunity of education is compromised because they are not supplied with resources necessary to become successful. These factors all contribute to the problem of linguistic racism in the classroom.

**Kyndal Gordon**  
**‘Legitimizing Black  
English: One Teacher  
at a Time’**

Suppressing Black English as a legitimate means to express oneself is causing Black English speaking students to be disengaged when reading, experience anxiety with public speaking, and develop an unwillingness to participate in writing activities. Acknowledging that Black students are performing below the standard in ELA classrooms is common



knowledge. Educators are now including diverse literature into their libraries, and most school districts have begun mandating diversity and inclusion personal development for staff. However, 92% of teachers in Michigan are white. Subsequently, there is a language barrier present in any classroom that is predominantly black and brown. Former Black students are not becoming Black English teachers because they have never believed themselves to be legitimate English speakers. I will illuminate the path to becoming an English teacher and how it lacks to the resources to legitimize Black English in schools and produce Black English speakers as English teachers.

**10 a.m.**

## **SESSION TWO**

### **Panel C**

#### **Neutralizing Trauma**

Facilitators: Dr. David Alvarez &  
Dr. Patricia Bloem

**Brynn Strickland**  
**‘Are Teachers**  
**Prepared: The**  
**Effectiveness and**  
**Preparedness of**  
**Educators in the Face**  
**of Student Trauma’**

Trauma is an issue that many children face, and its effects can be seen in all aspects of life, especially within the classroom. A child's behaviors can be unpredictable, and sometimes, uncontrollable. When children bring these traumatic backgrounds to the classroom, not only does it make it challenging for them to learn, but it creates additional stress and trauma for the teachers. Through the scholarly writings of many authors including Barbara Dane, James Caringi, and Eric Tribunella, I explore the use of trauma literacy in schools, its effectiveness, and secondary trauma to which teachers become susceptible. I will analyze the use of trauma literature and why teachers are not prepared to handle the effects of children's trauma.

**Emily McKee**  
**‘The Importance of**  
**Death and Dying within**  
**Children’s Literature’**

In this thesis I will argue the importance of including themes of death and dying within children's literature and how the positive exposure to these themes can be beneficial in a child's processing and acceptance of death. Oftentimes, parents have a desire to “let kids be kids” and will actively refrain from allowing children to read about difficult and real topics pertaining to life. My research will argue the importance of using the themes of death and dying within children's literature

to help children reflect on the omnipresence of morality. A children's book can be an excellent form of communication regarding death, if embraced by parents and educators. This thesis will analyze *Invisible String* by Patrice Karst and *I Miss You* by Pat Thomas to provide examples of the importance of death and dying as it is portrayed to children within English Literature.

**Grace Young**  
**'Trigger Warning:  
A Trauma-Informed  
Teaching of Young  
Adult Literature'**

Within the first 28 days of its release, the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*, based on a young adult (YA) novel by Jay Asher, garnered 476 million viewed hours. Teens watched as the show explicitly depicted a suicide so graphically that the scene later would be altered and accompanied by a permanent trigger warning. Depictions of trauma are not unique in YA novels. Stories of sexual assault, abuse, bullying, and violence are not only becoming best sellers, but are being integrated into curriculum nationwide. While YA literature can provide a complex understanding of trauma, developing a deeper sense of empathy and allowing discussion of societal issues, it is imperative to implement these novels with sensitivity to avoid the re-traumatization of students. It is necessary for YA novels depicting trauma to offer supportive resources and for trauma-informed teaching techniques to be utilized when these novels are present in classrooms and curriculum.

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**Panel D**

**Race, Perspective & Teaching**

Facilitators: Dr. Fred Antczak &  
Dr. Brian White

**Lillian Winnie**  
**'Eliminating Racism:  
Zero-Tolerance  
Policies in the  
Education System'**

Systemic racism is racism interwoven throughout all aspects of society. In schools, there are rules and guidelines in place to eliminate the possibility of racist acts happening within school walls. There is a narrative that with all of these rules and guidelines in place, there should be no room for racism to take place, yet despite all this effort, there are reports that contradict this anti-racism narrative. This study examines a collection of current events involving students experiencing racism within the confines of schools. Then, using the circumstances of the events, there is an inventory of resources and books discussed in order to create a bridge for educators to have conversations



with their students and their colleagues about how to be anti-racist and create equity and equality for all people.

**Tyana Reynolds**  
**‘Teaching Critical  
Race Theory to  
Elementary Students’**

To continue in America’s educational pursuit, it is imperative that we address and combat the key problems that face our youth and our nation’s population in modern day, as well as in distant and recent history. A topic growing in popularity is the term “Critical Race Theory,” a movement that encourages racial justice and understanding in the educational system and advocates for equity in legal policy. In this presentation, I will be discussing the overarching themes that Critical Race Theory addresses, and the misconceptions that many people believe. With the many layers that C.R.T. possesses, I will be revealing the ways that it can be successfully and carefully incorporated into the elementary educator’s curriculum and outlook on teaching. In order to prevent inequality and mistreatment and instead encourage freedom and equity of African Americans and minorities tomorrow, we need to educate the students who will make up our future today.

**Leya Shekanena**  
**‘Intent Means Nothing,  
Perception is Key:  
The Adventures of  
Huckleberry Finn  
Controversy’**

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a novel riddled with controversy and contradiction. In fact, over the course of its existence, Huckleberry Finn’s adventure has been banned, censored, and ridiculed as much as it has been sanctioned, permitted, and praised. In my presentation, I will explain the convoluted nature of this phenomenon by exploring it through the lenses of perceived authorial intent, linguistic validity, and context. After this exploration, I will reveal the reasons behind this dissonance’s existence as well as argue that, as the book’s problematic traits consistently outweigh its favorable ones, this polarizing novel should not be included in current English curriculum.

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**Panel E      The Nature of Things**

Facilitators: Dr. Brian Deyo &  
Dr. Corinna McLeod

**Alisa Twomey**  
**‘Ecofeminist Adult**  
**Fiction: The Call for**  
**New Perspectives**  
**and Breaking the**  
**Foundation of**  
**Domination’**

Over the years, it has become more evident that anthropocentrism and patriarchy have been central to the dominant ideology in our culture. In fact, humanity has created dualisms for people and nature: These dualisms have caused some people to be labeled as “others” in society. Often, this continued “othering” of women, nature, and queers has created a foundation for domination that men continue to hold over these oppressed groups. Ecofeminism is a movement that has stemmed from these issues of discrimination and injustice. Individuals must be educated on the ecofeminist view so that they can gain a newfound perspective on how the world is currently operating. Adult realistic fiction literature can help portray and conceal these ecofeminist perspectives. After recognizing the domination for power that is occurring through the depiction of these stories, people can combat the hegemony and move towards more equal treatment of nature, queers, and women.

**Holly Bihlman**  
**‘Narrating Doomsday:**  
**Jeff VanderMeer’s**  
***Annihilation* and**  
**Cli-fi’s Impact on**  
**Climate Action’**

The development of climate change literature, coined as “cli-fi” in 2011 by Dan Bloom, has shaped a new conversation around how climate change can be addressed and acknowledged through literature. An encouraging number of literary scholars have argued that cli-fi can be used as an emotional incentive to kickstart a dramatic change in the way we coexist with Earth, while scientific scholars have stuck to their guns in defense of factual data and research. Through the analysis of Jeff VanderMeer’s *Annihilation* and arguments from other scholars and authors in the conversation, this presentation will evaluate how *Annihilation* can be used to initiate a more accessible discourse surrounding climate change. These arguments are meant to help facilitate the growth of cli-fi as a more widely accepted mechanism for climate action and an effective narrative on the end of the world.

**Panel F****Approaches to Language**

Facilitators: Dr. Dan Brown &  
Dr. Corinna McLeod

**Kaitlin Newton**  
**‘A New World through  
Virtual Reality’**

Language classes today do not provide students with the same level of excitement, determination, or experience unless they are immersed in the fascinating realm of virtual reality (VR). VR has been discovered to provide English language learners with a novel learning experience and environment. But can virtual reality be a tool to promote language learning growth? VR can aid in more hands-on learning and experience for persons learning the English language or learning English as a second language, allowing them to interact with people from across the world who speak English. VR improves certain aspects of English as a foreign language in various situations and when considering the development of communicative skills and interactions. Not only does virtual reality assist with communication skills, but it also aids in the broadening of English-speaking abilities. This will aid students in learning English more quickly and efficiently.

**Maddie Olsen**  
**‘The Power of Poetry’**

Poetry is a form of literature that tells a story, produces rhythm, and presents cultivating language. Writing and the reading poetry are essential skills for children to learn as early as three years old. This presentation will explain the benefits of giving students early exposure to this beautiful form of literature. Poetry can teach lessons about a topic, oneself, and be a persuasive technique. This subject matter should be presented starting in preschool to build on their language learning, vocabulary, poetic devices, and imagination. Creativity is a huge aspect of poetry that can be developed through the illustrations of poetry young students may read. This skill can be added on to ultimately create wonderful student poets.

## **Panel G**

## **Fearful & Fantastical**

Facilitators: Dr. Rachel Anderson &  
Dr. Kurt Bullock

**Megan Delgado**  
**‘Creating a Monster:  
How Author Stephen  
King Keeps Fear Alive  
within the 21st-  
Century Society’**

Author Stephen King has created an empire upon his ability to create such terrifying monsters. Understanding the neurological response of fear to particular stimuli creates a bridge towards the likeness of art-horror. King’s capabilities to recreate old fears using new monstrous forms speaks to the creative strength that he possesses—but if humanity acknowledges the root of fear, then what is left to say about the popularity of novels within the horror genre? The readaptation of existing fears creates a uniform reaction out of a wide audience; the knowledge of human nature and the reaction held towards a horror stimulus allows for creative authors to adapt their monsters into modern versions of ancestral fears. Researching the neurological conditioning of fear within humanity, I will form an understanding upon the connection between the fear response and the stimulus of a King horror monster.

**Madelyn Gleason**  
**‘Determined to  
Prove a Villain’**

In pop culture, movies featuring villain origin stories have become a popular cinematic trope. These movies have proven that audiences are fascinated by villain characters having their perspectives being told. Audiences recognize the evil but have mixed feelings after seeing the perspective of the character. While these cinematic stories may appear as a recent phenomenon, William Shakespeare can be credited for showing off villain characters’ perspectives and stories centuries ago. He allowed his villain characters to be in the spotlight and appeal to this same ambiguous nature. I will show how Shakespeare used various methods to make his villain characters ambiguous to the audience by analyzing one of the most notorious villains, Richard III. After analyzing this famous villain, I will relate these techniques to a cinematic villain, The Joker, to show how Shakespeare’s work set the precedence and is parallel to the recent phenomenon in cinema today.

**Mads Terpstra**  
**‘Werewolf Sensibilities:  
Exploring Synesthesia  
in *Green Creek*’**

T. J. Klune has spent the past decade writing queer fantastical fiction with a focus on magic-oriented neurological phenomena. Klune’s contemporary fantasy series, *Green Creek*, features an emphasis on sensory language as a side effect of lycanthropy. This series’ portrayal of synesthesia, a neurological curiosity which intermixes the five senses, allows the reader a deeper understanding of both main characters’ mental states, as well as their interpersonal relationships. This presentation examines the key aspects of *Green Creek*’s depiction of the mental phenomenon—specifically its relationship to smell, sight, and empathic connections—and will finish by speculating as to why werewolf fiction in particular is a suitable medium for incorporating literary synesthesia.

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**Panel H**      **Pathways to Inclusion**

Facilitators: Dr. Sherry Johnson &  
Dr. Christy Pearson

**Rebekah Truax**  
**‘The Education System:  
Improving the  
Diagnosis of  
Reading Disorders’**

Throughout my presentation, I will outline the current dyslexia laws for uncovering and identifying student reading disorders within the education system. These laws are relatively new, still developing, and present in 46 states to varying degrees. However, their implications and procedures are insufficient and inconsistent, doing more harm than good. Although these laws are a step in the right direction, I will explain how the education system can do more and do better. Through my research, I have developed a universal method that all schools across the country should implement to make sure every disorder under the umbrella of reading disorders, not just dyslexia, may be caught early and identified. Literacy expectations are higher than ever before when children enter kindergarten, meaning identifying reading disorders early is more important than ever. This well-researched method will help teachers provide interventions to students sooner rather than relying on the wait and fail method.

**Rachel Velderman**  
**‘Learning English with**  
**Autism: The Issue of**  
**Special Education**  
**Inclusion in Public**  
**Education’**

Learning the English language can be difficult. The subtle nuances of the language make it challenging for neurotypical individuals to navigate and master. Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), a neurological disorder that impacts cognitive function, behavior, and social interactions, are presented with even more obstacles. Due to the range in severity of symptoms on the spectrum, children with ASD have to overcome varying degrees of language acquisition difficulties. Educators and the federal government have toiled with the debate of how to best teach children with ASD the English language. Most advocate for the best possible educational experience for individuals with disabilities, but the issue of inclusion in the general education classroom remains controversial. Laws, educational frameworks, and teaching designs have been developed to include individuals with ASD in the general classroom, weighing the positive and negative aspects of inclusion to work towards the best interest of everyone involved.

**Becca DeFay**  
**‘Ableism in the**  
**Classroom: Children’s**  
**Literature, Policy,**  
**and Teacher Talk’**

Over the years, the education system has greatly evolved, making efforts toward being more inclusive for all students regardless of their race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Though these efforts have proven to be effective on many fronts, studies suggest that inclusive education practices are still not fully representative of all students, specifically in regards to students with varying abilities and disabilities. To create a more inclusive environment for all students, it is imperative that all students are being represented in educational settings through the literature presented, educational policy at work, and teacher talk present both inside and outside of the classroom setting. In this presentation, I will discuss the ableism present within the educational setting, and how and why dismantling this discourse is necessary to make the educational experience of all students more equitable.



**Panel I****Societal Classroom Issues**

Facilitators: Dr. Lindsay Ellis &  
Dr. Rob Rozema

**Miller Johnson**  
**‘Toxicity in the**  
**Classroom: Boys**  
**Averting from**  
**English’**

This presentation will demonstrate how boys’ experiences in the English classroom result in an environment of toxic masculinity both in the classroom and their outside world. By expanding upon common classroom practices, including approaches to reading and writing, teacher expectations, and motivation factors in male students, I will show how boys are deterred from becoming fully immersed in the English subject. Those ideas can illustrate why there is a lack of male interest in the English subject and profession as well as how there are engagement gaps between boys and girls in English and school overall. Looking closer at these current practices and beliefs will allow me to display how they individually reinforce traditional or toxic masculinity, which relates to the assumption that the English topic is inherently non-masculine.

**Allison Hoffman**  
**‘Women’s**  
**Advancement in**  
**Literature:**  
**How Newbery Award**  
**Winners Reflect Social**  
**Ideologies’**

One way that we use English to help convey our social ideologies is through literature. My paper focuses on how children’s literature influences the social perception of women. Centering on five Newbery Award winning books, this paper analyzes the portrayal of the main female character from each author’s book. Each of these award-winning books was taken from the start of a new decade, beginning in 1980 and ending in 2020. The reason I chose Newbery Award winning books was because each book was once considered the most distinguished children’s book published that year. I believe that while these books cannot capture the gender roles portrayed in all children’s literature published that year, they can provide a good example of common gender roles for that decade. This study aims to examine the ways women are portrayed in literature, and how their depiction, through the roles they perform, influences young readers today.

**Macy McDonald**  
**‘Getting Comfortable  
with the  
Uncomfortable:  
Teaching Social  
Justice’**

This presentation analyzes the body of research which revolves around social justice and the implications and methods of teaching it to students at the elementary level. With today’s current social climate and the prominence of social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and the fight for income inequality, it is necessary that students are exposed to these topics at a young age to avoid misconceptions and biases. Findings suggest children begin to form biases as early as three years old. This thesis aims to examine ways to counteract these biases and negative stereotypes through literacy by using picture books and critical literacy teaching methods.

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**Panel J**

**How We Communicate**

Facilitators: Dr. Dan Brown &  
Dr. Shinian Wu

**Margaret O’Leary**  
**‘Standard English:  
The Dominant  
Approach to English  
Usage amongst  
Countless Varieties’**

This presentation will focus on the predominance of standard English usage in professional and academic English-speaking environments. Standard English is one dialect in the English language amongst countless others. Still, standard English is primarily regarded as the most correct form of English. Through a focused comparison of what is standard English use to what is seen as divergent or ‘improper’ English use, this presentation aims to understand the broad context of the English language. Through researching the topic with a heavy focus on social and institutional influences, the research presented will center on understanding the origins and implications of standard English’s broad reach. After compiling and analyzing sources, there are conclusions on the development and dominance of Standard English as it is today. The presentation will focus on attempting to prove that standard English is a dialect of the English language, not the most proper usage of English.

**Julianna Morris**  
**‘Bilingualism on  
the Rise:  
What Can Language  
Immersion Do?’**

While the number of bilingual speakers is increasing, there is still a lack of support for bilingualism in the United States. Myths about multilingualism continue to be obstacles for avid support. As evidenced by a lack of education programs and a shortage of teachers, bilingual speakers are at a disadvantage in comparison to monolingual counterparts. Programs like language immersion can increase academic achievement and

interpersonal skills among bilingual learners. Students can develop life skills beyond just language learning. Centered on language immersion education, this presentation will explore the successes and challenges of bilingual education programs thus far. I argue for the importance and necessity of bilingual education.

**Meghan Szilagyi**  
**‘The Power of  
Language Training in  
the Work Force’**

This presentation explores the benefits of having language training in the workplace for immigrants. Due to the increasing number of immigrants working in the workforce, it is crucial for the employees to know the host’s language. Many of these immigrants have little to no comprehension of the English language, which can create a barrier between the worker and other employees, as well as the employer. These employees need the necessary skills and training to be able to properly communicate and perform in their place of employment. Language learning should be imperative in the workforce for immigrant workers because it will improve the workers’ basic and academic language skills, the relationship between workers and administrators, and the quality of production.

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**Panel K**

**Validating Cultural Identity**

Facilitators: Dr. Colleen Brice &  
Dr. Ashley Shannon

**Kendra Lippincott**  
**‘Rebuilding Today’s  
Educational  
Institutions Using  
Validation Theory and  
Culturally-Responsive  
Teaching’**

The global pandemic has forced the United States to reevaluate its education system—one that has evaded any form of serious reconstruction for decades. Laura Rendón’s 1994 publication “Validating Culturally Diverse Students” addresses the lack of modern reform made to the education system to support increasingly diverse student populations. To support today’s richly diverse schools, educators must implement culturally-responsive pedagogies that validate students’ identities. Rendón defines validation as the intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents that seeks to validate students as creators of knowledge and foster personal development rather than cultural assimilation. Given the current cultural climate within the United States, many educational scholars are revisiting Rendón’s Validation Theory, insisting educational institutions begin taking an active role in

the validation of culturally-diverse students. This research explores the applicability of Rendón's theory in K-12 schools, and how to create culturally-sustainable English language arts classrooms.

**Kylie DeFries**  
**'Representation of the  
LGBTQ+ Community in  
Young Adult Literature'**

When it comes to representation of kids and young adults in literature, figuring out elements and characteristics is one of the most important requirements for understanding. In order to see what our future holds, we must start prioritizing what the young people today are surrounding themselves with. The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer and plus community (LGBTQ+) is one of the minorities that is rarely represented in an accurate and diffident way, especially for those who are still trying to found out what life means to them and what they make of themselves. In order to have an accurate presentation, we must visualize what we want in our future as a society, yet make sure we have the books and resources that are easily available for our children today.

**Lexa Benn**  
**'Providing Classroom  
Equality for the  
LGBTQIA+ Students  
through Diverse  
Literature'**

The literature provided and taught in classrooms is crucial to the mental health and well-being of students. Currently, the literature taught in most classrooms in the United States does not represent the LGBTQIA+ community. A lot of the literature around this topic is not even allowed in many schools. For students that identify as LGBTQIA+, self-harm and suicide rates are significantly higher than that of straight students, and using literature to create classroom discussions for these students has the potential to significantly improve their mental health. If more literature that had LGBTQIA+ themes and characters was brought into classrooms and discussed, it would create a welcoming environment for students who are part of this community and foster empathy in those who are not. Representation also helps LGBTQIA+ students to know that they are not alone. These aspects all prove to help mental health in youth.

**Panel L****Playful Possibilities**

Facilitators: Dr. Fred Antczak &  
Dr. Brian Deyo

**Auburn Kilian**  
**‘Helping Students**  
**Dance Their**  
**Way to Literacy’**

The arts are frequently misunderstood and underrepresented by society. Dance in particular has had a disappointing history within the education system. Sadly, this disregards the research that points towards the benefits of kinesthetic learning within the classroom. When schools decide to separate learning and physical activity, they are neglecting the connections that are found between the brain’s development and movement of the body. Dance allows children to enhance their sensory awareness, consciousness, and cognition. In order to aid in students’ literacy learning and their creativity, dance can be used to help fuel the English curriculum. In this presentation, I argue that dance and kinesthetic learning should be incorporated within literacy education as a tool for English development in students.

**Alyssa Lake**  
**‘Playing Through**  
**Development’**

Play-based learning was first introduced by Friedrich Fröbel, a German educator who invented kindergarten. Fröbel believed that “play is the highest expression of human development because it expresses what is in a child’s soul.” Children use play to construct their understanding of the world around them and develop core skills as they grow. Studies have found that the use of play-based learning has a positive impact on the growth and development in children. When combined with literacy, the process of learning is inviting and fun. Learning literacy through play enables children to explore the importance of the words around them and enhances their learning experience. This presentation illustrates the importance of play-based learning using studies and other evidence to support the idea that play-based learning is developmentally and academically beneficial to children.

**Shelby Ann Minnema**  
**‘Shōnen and Shoujo**  
**Academia:**  
**Placing Manga and**  
**Anime in English**  
**Literature Studies’**

The Japanese style of comics, Manga and Anime, have increased in popularity in the United States over the past three decades. Manga’s wide variety of genres, styles, and themes for all ages shows how it has become trendy today. Despite its mainstream effect on today’s popular culture, Manga is an area of literature that has yet to become commonly used in language arts and English classes at any level of instruction. There are numerous studies of why Manga in literature classes can be valuable for many analysis areas and how it is beneficial for English students. Some critics can argue that Manga is not necessary in the academic literature world, yet Manga and Anime have a place in the literary world and can be advantageous in literature classes at any level of education.

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**Panel M**

**Who We Are & Become**

Facilitators: Dr. Sherry Johnson &  
Dr. Jo Miller

**Madelyn Spaniola**  
**‘Crafting a Persona**  
**through English**  
**Properties’**

Without realization, people use English properties to craft their own personal persona. We create a “character” for ourselves through these properties and present ourselves to others based on how we would like to be perceived by them, creating a “persona.” Properties we use to craft ourselves include word choice, intonation, dialect, accents, and slang. It is found that some people change their characteristics in order to appear desirable to specific people or groups of people. While this happens in real life, this presentation will be homing in specifically on Moira Rose from the television show *Schitt’s Creek*, as she is unique in how she creates her unparalleled persona, especially through her crafted accent and distinctive diction. This practice happens every day by many people in real-world scenarios, yet her character is an exaggerated version of a crafted persona.

**Kara Heugel**  
**‘When the Lights of**  
**Health Go Down’**

The conversation regarding mental health over the last few decades has changed greatly, as we all have come to the realization that everyone has gone through, or is going through, unseen battles in their lives. There are many lenses through which we can look at mental health, how it affects us, and how it connects us; literature is one that can continue to change the way



that we discuss mental health. Virginia Woolf was a leading authority when it came to writing about mental illness, as she herself presumably suffered from bipolar disorder, complex post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression, before succumbing to her illness by means of suicide. Many of Virginia Woolf's writings reflect her own experiences of mental illness, and these can be used to help readers interact with what it means to be mentally ill, and how to possibly deal with their own mental health.

**Stacey Melville**  
**'A Reader's Impact on**  
**Death: Where Critical**  
**Literature Theory**  
**Meets Emotion'**

The reader-response critical theory of literature contains the belief that the reader is not a passive member of the literary world, but rather that the reader is an active participant in finding the meaning within a text. The reader finds such meaning based on their life experiences and how they view the world. Death and dying literature can foster especially strong meaning for the reader because the subject is particularly evocative. In this way, death and dying literature will affect every reader differently depending on what their life experiences have been. Therefore, if our life experiences affect the meaning we find within text, then reading literature also can affect our life experiences. Because death and dying are such intricate parts of the lived human experience, it would follow that the impact of death and dying literature will weigh upon the reader's feelings towards mortality and our eventual death.

**2 p.m.**

**SESSION SIX**

**Panel N**

**Contemporary Literary Readings**

Facilitators: Dr. Rachel Anderson &  
 Dr. Rob Rozema

**Shaina Benedict**  
**'The Empowerment**  
**of Heroines:**  
**A Feminist Analysis of**  
**21st-Century Romance**  
**Literature'**

Scholars have dismissed the romance genre as inferior literature, stating that romance literature contains formulaic plots, patriarchal themes, eroticism, and too much importance upon love and marriage. Although the genre has these characteristics, 21st-century romances promote empowerment among women. They should not be discounted because they follow along with the cultural norms of our present-day society, which has

begun to value an empowered woman. In this presentation, I use both adult and young adult 21st-century romance books to show a wider representation of the genre. My thesis focuses on a feminist literary analysis of the heroines in the adult novels *Night Shadow* by Nora Roberts, *Redeeming Love* by Francine Rivers, and in the young adult series, *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer, and *Hush, Hush* by Becca Fitzpatrick. These texts exemplify the feminist postmodern theory as they attempt to destabilize patriarchy and gender stereotypes.

**Jillian Ferry**  
**‘The Hunger Games &  
Today: Examining  
Similar Societal  
Trends’**

*The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins is one of the most widely read books amongst young adults, but it was not just luck that made it so popular. The trilogy highlights key societal trends in the fictional world of Panem, many of which can be seen in United States society. Collins’s exaggerations of these trends that society has hegemonically agreed to not only led to the trilogy’s popularity, but also caused a change in its readers. In seeing many of the problems in their own society, readers such as those a part of Generation Z may have become more motivated to make changes in society so they do not experience a similar future to Panem. This essay explains the parallels between the two seemingly different worlds, and what caused the change in young readers. We must see these parallels in order to understand our own world and its future better.

**Jessica Miner**  
**‘Truth in Fiction:  
Harry Potter and  
Differences in Society  
through Gender and  
Racial Studies’**

This presentation will explore the overall arching theme of acceptance presented throughout the *Harry Potter* series. To depict such a theme, this presentation will utilize gender and racial literary fields of study to perform an in-depth character analysis of Hermione Granger. This examination will consist especially of societal perspectives regarding and ideologies surrounding witches, especially the house in which that witch is sorted into, muggle-borns, and house elves. By examining these specific societal structures, this presentation will highlight the sentiment that differences should not merely be tolerated or equated with determining a person’s worth. Instead, differences should be regarded as essential assets. This article will also explore the way in which literature assists in teaching applicable life lessons, specifically in regards to the *Harry Potter* series. The theme of acceptance illustrates the significance of this series and its general application to society, not merely academia.

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## **Panel O**

## **The Critical Fantastical**

Facilitators: Dr. Jo Miller &  
Dr. Christy Pearson

**Mary T. Ludwig**  
**‘Impossible Realities:  
Educational,  
Psychological, and  
Philosophical  
Contributions of  
Children’s Fantasy  
Literature’**

Fire-breathing dragons, unicorns with long flowing manes, animals talking and feeling human emotions: Children’s fantasy literature is riddled with examples of impossible realities. Children’s fantasy literature is a popular genre among children and even adults. Are books containing such unrealistic ideas beneficial to children’s learning and development? This thesis explores the relationships between children (specifically upper elementary age) and children’s fantasy literature. Children’s fantasy literature offers value to children’s learning beyond entertainment. This thesis focuses on the educational, psychological, and philosophical aspects of children’s fantasy literature and how these aspects impact children today.

**Kathryn Fulton**  
**‘Creating Critical  
Thinkers: Philosophy  
and Religion as  
Essential Elements  
of Classroom  
Literary Analysis’**

The political climate in America today creates greater challenges for discussing polarizing topics in public school systems. The Language Arts: Reading Literature Common Core Standards certainly provide room for debate, but ultimately, it is clear that students are required to engage with literary texts in ways that address more than surface-level plots. I argue that the purpose of the education system is to develop individual, critical thinkers, and that the English classroom creates space to use English literature as a medium to discuss topics as complex and nuanced as moral dilemmas and the existence of a higher power. In this presentation, I use the postmodern dystopian novel *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy to demonstrate the entirely new level of literary analysis that becomes possible when philosophy and religion are responsibly discussed in the classroom.



**Honoring Student  
Writing in the  
Persuasive and  
Personal Essay,  
Poetry, Fiction,  
& Drama  
Held in Conjunction  
with the Departments  
of Classics &  
Writing**

Named in honor of former department member E. William Oldenburg, this annual contest offers GVSU students first-place prizes of \$50 and second- and third-place prizes of \$25 in each of the following categories:

- Personal, analytical, or persuasive essay written by a freshman;
- Personal essay written by a sophomore, junior, or senior;
- Analytical or persuasive essay written by a sophomore, junior, or senior;
- Poetry written by any GVSU undergraduate student (a portfolio of three to five poems would be an appropriate entry, and a single poem would not be considered);
- Fiction written by any GVSU undergraduate student (one short story per entrant);
- Drama written by any GVSU undergraduate student (one short play per entrant);
- Essay, poetry, fiction, or drama written by a GVSU graduate student.

**Entry Requirements:**

- Entries must have been written while enrolled at GVSU;
- Entries should be typed, double-spaced (photocopies are acceptable), and submitted with a detachable cover sheet indicating:
  - title of work;
  - category entered (please specify graduate or undergraduate);
  - contestant's name and student ID;
  - address, phone number, and e-mail for March and April of the academic year;
- Place contestant's name on the cover sheet only, not on the manuscript.

All winners who have not been or currently are a student employee at GVSU must complete an I-9 Form, which may be obtained and turned in to Student Employment (105 STU). Entries are accepted online through the English department website. Manuscripts will not be returned.

**The Robert C.  
Chamberlain  
Scholarship**  
**A Tuition Scholarship  
for Junior English  
Majors  
Demonstrating  
Excellence in Writing**

The Chamberlain Scholarship will be awarded at the English Department's Awards Ceremony held in April.

**Eligibility Requirements**

- Students must be English majors;
- Students must have Junior status;
- Students must have at least a 3.0 GPA;
- Students must be full time;
- Students must demonstrate financial need by filing the FAFSA.

**Application Requirements**

Each student must submit:

- A short letter explaining why the student qualifies for this scholarship;
- Two pieces of writing, at least one from a class at Grand Valley State University.

Applications must be submitted online at:

[www.gvsu.edu/scholarships](http://www.gvsu.edu/scholarships)

Application deadline is TBA, Winter 2022.

**The Gilbert R. and  
Patricia K. Davis  
Endowed Merit  
Scholarship**  
**A Merit Scholarship  
for Full- or Part-Time  
Junior and Senior  
English Majors**

The Davis Scholarship will be awarded at the the English Department Awards Ceremony held in April.

**Eligibility Requirements**

- Students must be a Junior or Senior declared English major;
- Students must have completed 30 credit hours at GVSU;
- Students must have at least a 3.0 GPA;
- Students may be full or part time (part-time students are especially encouraged to apply);
- Financial need is not a criterion;
- Students who receive the award as Juniors are eligible to receive the award as Seniors if they maintain their eligibility.

**Applications Requirements**

Applications must be submitted online at:

[www.gvsu.edu/scholarships](http://www.gvsu.edu/scholarships)

Applications deadline is TBA, Winter 2022.



**The English Faculty  
Scholarship for  
New Majors**  
**A Scholarship Made  
Possible through the  
Generosity of GVSU  
English Department  
Faculty Members**

The English Faculty Scholarship for New Majors is awarded to two English majors annually at the English Department Awards Ceremony held in April.

**Eligibility**

- Applicants must be a declared English major at the time of application
- Applicants must be a currently-enrolled student with fewer than 60 credit hours completed (1st or 2nd year student) during the semester of application
- Cumulative 2.5 grade point average or better
- First-generation college student

**Supplemental Questions**

1. Are you the first person in your immediate family to pursue a college degree (neither parent/guardian(s) has a four-year degree)?
2. In 100-200 words (1-2 paragraphs), explain why you are applying for this scholarship, why you should receive the award, and how it will assist you in achieving your academic goals.
3. Why are you interested in this scholarship?

Please include an academic writing sample, minimum three full pages in length, submitted for a class during your freshman or sophomore year.

**Applications Requirements:**

Applications must be submitted online at:

[www.gvsu.edu/scholarships](http://www.gvsu.edu/scholarships)

Application deadline is TBA, Winter 2022.

**Dr. Andrew M.C.  
Brown Memorial  
English Scholarship**  
**A Scholarship  
Created to Assist  
Language &  
Literature Emphasis  
English Majors**

The Brown Scholarship will be awarded at the the English Department Awards Ceremony held in April.

**Eligibility Requirements**

- Candidates should be accepted or currently enrolled at GVSU;
- Must be a senior with a declared major in English with Language & Literature emphasis;
- Must be enrolled for at least 12 credit hours with a cumulative GPA of 3.3 or higher;
- Preference will be given to students intending to pursue an advanced English degree.

Financial need may be considered, as evidenced by

filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

### **Application Requirements**

Each student must:

- Provide a short statement of why you qualify for this scholarship;
- Submit two pieces of writing, at least one from a GVSU English class.

Renewal Criteria: This scholarship is non-renewable. Award sum varies.

Application deadline is TBA, Winter 2022.

**Robert Franciosi  
American Literature  
Scholarship  
A Scholarship  
Created to Assist  
English Majors who  
Express Interest in  
American Literature**

The Robert Franciosi American Literature Scholarship is awarded annually at the English Department Awards Ceremony held in April.

### **Eligibility**

- Applicants must be accepted for or currently enrolled at Grand Valley State University
- Applicants must be an undergraduate junior or senior enrolled full-time or part-time with a major in English with Language & Literature or Secondary Education emphasis
- Applicants must be a resident of Michigan
- Applicants must have completed 30 credit hours at GVSU with a 3.0 or higher cumulative GPA
- Applicants must be meeting satisfactory academic progress (<https://www.gvsu.edu/financialaid/satisfactory-academic-progress-sap-17.htm>)

### **Supplemental Questions**

1. Please describe in 1,000 words or less your experience studying American Literature and why you feel it has been valuable.

Preference will be given to students who demonstrate an interest in American Literature.

Financial need may be considered and will be demonstrated by the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

### **Applications Requirements:**

Applications must be submitted online at:

[www.gvsu.edu/scholarships](http://www.gvsu.edu/scholarships)

Application deadline is March 3, 2022.

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