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Centering Students as Designers: Engaging with *Lowriders to the Center of the Earth*

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“¡Vámonos! We Have to Follow Those Footprints”¹

While reading *Lowriders to the Center of the Earth*, one student explains a visual reference to “El Chavo,”² while another group shares la llorona stories from their childhood. Students speak Spanish, English, and, like the characters in *Lowriders*, a beautiful mix of both. Non-Spanish-speaking students ask questions about pronunciation. Students laugh, take pictures of pages to send to friends, and admire the ballpoint pen artwork. There is genuine interest and enthusiasm as students read, connect, share, and think.

Authentic literacy practices like the one described above cannot be captured through a single lens and demand high quality, dynamic literature. As co-teacher researchers, we are interested in authentically and dynamically engaging with literacy. Our work considers the ways multiple texts and media, used as equal and valued texts, support and do not support students in high school English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms. Thus, we concern ourselves with “the increasing influence of visual culture and continuing concerns about cultural diversity,” especially as these are represented in literature for young people (Short 287).

In this article, we focus on a tenth-grade ELA class and a single curriculum unit on morality and the afterlife that utilized a range of texts. Students engaged with the text *Inferno* (Dante Alighieri 1996), the film *What Dreams May Come* (Vincent Ward 1998), and the graphic novel *Lowriders to the Center of the Earth* (Cathy Camper and Raúl the Third 2016), and also created their own texts. In attempting to frame these three works as equitable and in constant dialogue with one another and with students, we argue that “texts not conventionally considered academic (such as comics) and texts often read in schools (such as works of the canon) have porous boundaries and often share similar literary roots” (Low and Campano 26). In particular,

¹ Camper and Raúl the Third 14.
² *El Chavo del Ocho* is a Mexican sitcom.
we highlight our use of *Lowriders* and the ways students connected to it, as well as our successes and missteps in positioning *Lowriders* as a complex text valued in an academic setting.

As the teacher and community insider, Annmarie has many social and cultural ties to the school community our work centers, whereas Ashley is an outsider, a white woman, who acts as an invited guest in this school community. We both understand our positionality and try to recognize and disrupt the power dynamics constantly at work within our system of education.

**Literature Review**

As co-teacher researchers, we approach all elements of our work together from a critical literacy framework that promotes a diverse array of texts, authors, and forms. Such a framework informs pedagogical practice by making power relations visible in order to reflect on, name, and change individual and social experiences of inequity (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell). Because students often enter classrooms without a knowledge of how systems of power operate (Dyches 76), teaching within a critical literacy framework provides adolescents with opportunities to be active participants in examining and speaking back to inequitable power dynamics. Critical reading and reflection on a variety of nontraditional and traditional texts promotes the deconstruction and repurposing of language for social transformation, helping students to envision a more hopeful future (Janks).

In our work together, we prioritize multimodal texts as a way to engage students and center their voices as expert readers, consumers, and critics. A multimodal text intentionally takes up multiple modes, including color, sound, image, alphanumeric text, and spatial arrangement (Jewitt and Kress). Each mode offers opportunities for meaning making. The use of multimodal texts that feature diverse adolescent experiences aligns closely with the goal of critical literacy: development of a growing social and political awareness in young readers.
Critical Literacy, the Canon, and the Comics Medium

Despite the multitude of nontraditional, multimodal, and diverse material that exists for a young adult audience, the majority of secondary language arts teachers continue to teach the Western canon as the staple of their curriculum (Applebee; Sheahan 60). Working within the tradition of critical literacy practices, we problematize overemphasis on works of the dominant narrative while simultaneously acknowledging that practicing teachers are often required to teach these texts or choose to do so of their own accord. We are cognizant of the variety of reasons the canon continues to be such an entrenched part of language arts classrooms, some of which include teacher familiarity and comfort with these texts (Allen 1; hooks 37), the ease of accessibility to canonical works in school book rooms and classroom anthologies, and concerns regarding the “rigor” of texts in a climate of standardization and high-stakes testing (Anagnostopoulos 177).

Though we understand the canon is often taught with the best intentions in mind, we choose to teach within a framework of critical perspectives that demand teachers challenge, against all odds, the singular tradition of canonical texts within their curriculum. Our work— influenced by critical scholars who argue for the concurrent teaching of nontraditional texts and dominant narratives (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 51)—seeks to provide students with an understanding of dominant perspectives while simultaneously giving them the tools necessary to reinvent and reimagine these perspectives for their own purposes as readers, authors, and artists (Dyches and Sams 380; Low and Campano 28). We work to decenter canonical works as the central curricular focus, destabilize dominant perspectives, and ultimately displace the primary use of traditional texts in the ELA classroom. By privileging diverse multimodal and nontraditional texts in the classroom, we hope to center the varied cultural backgrounds of our
students through disrupting print-centric practices that primarily uphold the perspectives of dominant groups (Dallacqua and Sheahan).

In particular, we believe that using the comics medium (which includes graphic novels), particularly ones with diverse authors, characters, and representations, can support problematization of the dominant narratives of whiteness and prejudice that exist in classroom spaces (Dallacqua and Sheahan; Low; Torres and Tayne). Along with meeting curricular needs and requirements (Brugar et al.; Cook), the comics medium challenges the ways schools work and addresses the ways they do not work for students, especially students of color. Christian Hines argues that examining marginalized characters in comics positions comics as a “tool to interrogate school structures” (17). In this research, our intention was to highlight diverse characters and stories with students as a way of challenging dominant and canonical structures of the school.

**Multiliteracies in the Classroom**

We come to our teaching and research with an understanding of literacy as a social practice (Street) that is multiple and global (New London Group 4). A multiliteracies pedagogy and perspective promotes multiple modes of communication and design and cultivates equitable spaces for learners to engage with and design texts (New London Group 15). This act of designing as defined by the New London Group involves “work performed on/with Available Designs in the semiotic process” (77). We purposely positioned focus texts, or “resources for meaning,” such as *Lowriders*, as Available Designs for students to work with and on (New London Group 77). This practice supports the use of many complex and multimodal texts, including graphic novels and film, and “provides students with preparation and practice to consume, comprehend, respond to, and produce communications in our contemporary culture”
In particular, when considering the act of designing, or “making new use of old materials” (New London Group 76), we consider how students draw on familiar conventions that are part of their communities and apply them to their meaning-making with classroom texts. “The unique knowledge, experiences, and intentions that individual readers bring to a communicative situation results in their designing new meanings” (Connors 10). We are interested in this design process and the multimodal resources students draw on to make (new) meaning.

In the twenty-plus years since the New London Group shaped a multiliteracies pedagogy, it has been taken up, reconsidered, and challenged (see Jacobs; Leander and Boldt). Current and ever-changing literacy practices make change in schools necessary, especially considering the ongoing primacy of traditional printed texts in curricular units of study (Cope et al. 6). Reexamining multiliteracies for current educational settings, Robyn Seglem and Antero Garcia argue for the need of student access to a range of texts as well as opportunities to manipulate them in critical and transformative ways (61).

Along with challenging print-only texts as primary resources, multiliteracies take up critical literacy practices (Collier and Rowsell 15). We agree that “the critical orientation of multiliteracies is one of the most vital aspects of classroom pedagogies” (Garcia et al. 3). Multiliteracies pedagogies should center around young peoples’ “everyday language and literacy practices such that they are brought into relation with dominant texts and discourses” (Lizárraga and Gutiérrez 39). This intermingling of dominant discourses and diverse minority discourses is especially important to this research; we intentionally selected texts for classroom work that spoke from dominant and minority spaces in the hopes of exposing power dynamics and inequities (Collier and Rowsell 15). Through placing these works in dialogue with one another,
we aimed to decenter canonical texts historically viewed as the crux of the language arts curriculum.

Within the linguistically, culturally, and racially varied context of this study, we understand the need for multiliteracies (Seglem and Garcia 58) and approach our work, then, within a critical literacy framework that centers the deconstruction of dominant narratives through the merging of new literacies and canonical texts. Encouraging multimodal composition rooted in the social and lived experiences of diverse students (Vasudevan and Campano 319), we seek to provide “educational spaces where students understand themselves as both inheritors and creators” (Low and Campano 30). In doing so, we hope students are empowered to draw on their own knowledge and valued resources to redesign their texts and worlds.

Methodology

This research was framed by critically conscious language and literacy methods (Kress; Willis et al.) that encourage ongoing self-reflexivity in teacher researchers and commit to legitimizing the experiences of marginalized student populations, and our methods were grounded in teacher action research\(^3\) (Anderson et al.; Hubbard and Power; Shagoury and Power). As teacher action researchers, we wanted to “enact change” within the classroom environment, especially in regard to available text selections (Pine 235). Annmarie was invested in diversifying her classroom text after acknowledging her canon-heavy curriculum. These texts, which center white, male, monolingual voices, did not mirror her students’ identities. As co-teacher researchers and critical friends, we began posing more questions, choosing new texts, and making changes to Annmarie’s entire curriculum. This particular unit illustrated our work to

\(^3\) Teacher action research is a process of questioning, planning, observing, and reflecting about occurrences in one’s own site (often a classroom) in order to learn and create positive change. This process is deliberate, systematic, and often occurs in collaboration with others.
invite texts that would complicate and decenter canonical texts already imbedded in Annmarie’s curriculum while still taking up similar themes. *Inferno* was already part of the given curriculum, so Ashley recommended *Lowriders* to Annmarie as another text that takes up a journey into the afterlife, but highlights a very different perspective that aligned more closely with the students’ identities and upbringing. We wondered about how the variety of media could engage students. We asked ourselves how we might structure a unit to highlight themes and diverse narratives without privileging a single text or idea. Oscillating between engagement with theory, critical literacy scholarship, and Annmarie’s classroom, we read, observed, taught, discussed, and questioned throughout the focal unit.

The data presented here comes from a single unit that was part of a larger two-year action research study. Through a seven-week unit that explored various interpretations of the afterlife, we investigated the question, What happens when nontraditional texts are integrated into a tenth grade ELA curriculum that also includes canonical texts? By providing multiple interpretations of the afterlife and morality in a range of narrative forms, we hoped to encourage students to value and share their own complex epistemologies as they related to and diverged from the unit texts.

*Our Context*

Our work is situated in a diverse, urban public school in the Southwest where one-hundred percent of the student body qualifies for free or reduced lunch. The school is home to a large population of refugee students and students of color, with twenty-eight different languages spoken in the school’s community. Our study took place in a tenth-grade ELA classroom made up of nineteen students, fourteen of whom were female. Eleven students identified as Latino/a,
three as African American, two as Asian American, two as Native American, and one as Anglo-American.

We came to this work as collaborators. Both of us identify as teachers and scholars committed to innovative, critical acts of literacy with students. Annmarie self-identifies as a native New Mexican and a Hispana/Chicana Irish practitioner researcher with close ties to the community where our study took place. As a graduate of this particular high school and as a language arts teacher, Annmarie was positioned as an insider in the classroom space and the surrounding school and local community. Ashley self-identifies as a white woman, co-researcher, and co-teacher invited into this school community. She came to the classroom with many privileges, especially her whiteness and educational status, and therefore worked to position herself an enthusiastic visitor and volunteer in the classroom first and a researcher second.

Our Unit

In our thematic unit, we asked students to consider the purposes of allegory, the concept of life’s journey, and the various ways in which the afterlife has been explored through literature, art, and other media. This focus on multiple ways of addressing central topics supported students in critically approaching big ideas and individual texts. The unit’s culminating project was multimodal in nature, inviting students to take on the role of a designer in creating their own interpretations of the afterlife. Students were encouraged to draw on multiple modes and media forms of their choosing, using the unit’s texts as Available Designs\textsuperscript{4} for this work. This creative work was accompanied by a formal artist statement in which students explained their creative

\textsuperscript{4} As noted above, Available Designs are any resources that can be used for making meaning. We wanted all of our texts to be positioned as resources, rather than as items that were already concrete and unable to be questioned or altered.
choices in respect to their own belief systems and the texts. We hoped multimodal composition would not only privilege students’ cultural backgrounds and ways of knowing, but also allow them to critically evaluate and speak back to other authors and artists’ representations of the afterlife through the creation of their own.

The unit included *Inferno*, *What Dreams May Come*, and *Lowriders to the Center of the Earth*. Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno*, a canonical poem centering a dominant white European perspective and heavy religious influence, was a curricular requirement. We placed equal focus on the two other texts in the hopes that students could use a variety of perspectives to subvert and interrogate the singular view of the afterlife presented in *Inferno*. The film *What Dreams May Come*, directed by Vincent Ward, was purposefully shown after reading *Inferno* to offer a more personal, less-structured, artful view of the afterlife without specific religious connotation. The film supported our aim of diversifying media in this unit, even as we acknowledged its primarily white cast and dominant perspectives. As teachers, then, we were most excited about ending our unit with the graphic novel *Lowriders to the Center of the Earth*, written by Cathy Camper and illustrated by Raúl the Third. Because so many of the students in the classroom identified as Latino/a, this was a text we hoped students would be able to see themselves in.

While part of a series, *Lowriders* can be read on its own. Filled with Latino/a and Aztec cultural references, this story follows three friends on an adventure to rescue their cat (see Dallacqua and Sheahan 2019). The central characters—Lupe Impala, Elirio Malaria, and El Chavo Octopus—are deceptively childlike at first glance; however, when readers dig in, they see the characters take a journey in their signature lowrider into the underworld. Both text and images draw on Latino/a histories and allusions as well as the Spanish language. The graphic novel is “packed with subversively playful cultural references that affirm a vibrant Chicanx
cultura” (Morales 217). Additionally, the detailed and layered illustrations done with three colors of ballpoint pen won the Pura Belpré Award in 2017 for its excellent illustrations celebrating the Latinx cultural experience. Both comical and fantastical, this text offered our students a challenging yet familiar read rooted linguistically and culturally in student ways of knowing.

Data and Analysis

Data includes field notes, video-recordings of in-class lessons and small group discussions, and material artifacts including teaching materials and student work. Both authors engaged in data collection and analysis work.

Engaging in analysis through memoing (Heath and Street 80), we located initial themes for coding. Memoing was our process for writing about connections we were making and generic ideas that were coming from our reading of the data. Our initial memo writing highlighted ideas like representation, multiple perspectives, and artistic choices as themes we wanted to keep exploring. Thematic coding of all data sources continued with these themes in mind “to find and follow the story of our data” (Shagoury and Power 158). Focused transcription of video data was completed, followed by coding, a recursive process, of all data sources. Smaller but significant codes were identified within the larger themes, including audience and familiarity. We also revisited the student work, noting how students discussed the unit texts as Available Designs. Our investment in critical multiliteracies in practice led to our reorganization of codes into the following conceptual categories: the impact of Lowriders, the act of designing, and Lowriders in a text set (Hubbard and Power 99; Glesne 194).

Findings

The Impact of Lowriders
Students’ personal connections to and investments in the texts stood out to us as teachers and researchers. Though student engagement in all three texts was high, we were particularly interested in their engagement with Lowriders because of the connections they made to its racial, cultural, and linguistic representations. Students made clear personal connections to this text, describing it as “familiar” and “comfortable.” This was evident in conversations the students had surrounding the graphic novel’s visual and textual allusions to El Chavo del Ocho (Spanish television show), la llorona (the weeping woman), and chupacabra (a creature from Hispanic folklore about whom mythical stories were told to young children to scare them and enforce good behavior). Additionally, the graphic novel is written in Spanglish, a blend of Spanish and English, which the students comfortably use in both academic and nonacademic conversations.

Though the book was full of familiar references for the students, they acknowledged that “probably a lot of people don’t know” the cultural narratives and Spanish words prevalent throughout it. Students considered how the book could speak to audiences who did not grow up speaking Spanglish or hearing the same stories. “It’s helpful,” one student shared in reference to the in-text Spanish to English translations available to an audience who might want to learn and engage in something new. The translations on the page, which privilege white, English-speaking readers, were not necessary for most of our readers, but the students also found value in them. The personal connections mattered to these students, but so did the realization that this text targeted a wider audience. Another student explained that these translations were valuable because the graphic novel is “so thick with a lot of references and stuff that only certain people understand . . . It still tries to explain it somehow . . . I think it’s so cool that they try to include
as many people as possible.” These stories, which mirrored personal histories for many students, were being positioned as important and valued resources.

Students also recognized that, although *Lowriders* took up similar themes of journeying through the underworld, the mood, tone, and medium was a shift from the other two texts explored in the unit. This positioned *Lowriders* as a text that invited students to do new and different work. They noted that the “aesthetic of the entire book” made it accessible, which spoke to their being potential composers. They shared that perhaps the artist’s choices, such as the use of pen and parchment paper, were made so that they and others “could draw inspiration from it” and “do their own work.” One student described it as a book “someone just, like, threw together in their own home… This feels like paper you could find at an art store or something.” The students connected with the familiarity of the book, and while it is clearly not thrown together, its sketch-book quality made the text feel authentic and real, providing access to the artist’s work on a more intimate level. Its aesthetic spoke to readers as designers. April Spisak notes of the graphic novel, “It’s impossible to overstate the impact that the artwork has in this book—it elevates everything while also remaining accessible. The artist’s low-tech approach to drawing […] reminds readers that it isn’t necessary to have expensive art software to produce brilliance” (561). *Lowriders* did not feel like other books or graphic novels that the students had read. Instead, it was something that felt homemade and offered possibilities for students to access stories and tell their own.

*The Act of Designing*

By including *Lowriders* we hoped that the familiarity of the content and the accessibility of its aesthetic would inspire students to take risks as designers. The final part of our afterlife unit asked students to draw inspiration from *Lowriders, Inferno*, and *What Dreams May Come,*
as well as from their individual belief systems and ways of knowing, to compose and create. They were invited, as artists, to create or design (New London Group 15) their own representations of the afterlife. In this project, we did not ask students to tell us what happens when an individual dies. Rather, we asked them to consider how the authors and artists we studied took up the themes and ideas in the unit, and we gave them the opportunity to present their own ideas as equally valid. Positioning students as authors and designers, we asked them to add their creative voices to those of the composers we studied (see Dallacqua and Sheahan 2019). Students were invited to draw inspiration from and speak back to the three unit texts, making sense of them by “critically reinvent[ing]” or redesigning the canonical and other narratives we had read (Low and Campano 27).

Students wrote poems and short stories, painted, and drew their work, and they paired these multimodal pieces with artist statements that described their choices and influences. Though we were excited by the breadth of the creative multimodal projects turned in, we were surprised that during their sharing of the final projects, few students listed the unit’s multimodal text, *Lowriders*, as influential (we discuss this in more depth in the following section). While we were surprised (and a bit disappointed) that students did not recognize the direct content-related and artistic influences of *Lowriders* in their projects, many students did set out to create new stories and new representations.

One student, Lin, chose to take up painting as a medium, explaining it “can show my view of the afterlife in a way that wouldn’t be possible with words.” She shared that her concept of the afterlife was shaped by the religious beliefs she had been exposed to: Christianity, Buddhism, and Catholicism in particular. Accordingly, her painting relied on imagery such as cherry blossoms, symbolizing rebirth (a concept also in *What Dreams May Come*), and the sun,
symbolizing hope and righteousness (as in *Inferno*). Lin cited both of these concepts in her artist statement without drawing any connections to *Lowriders*. Yet, we argue that having *Lowriders* as a visual artistic medium in this unit created an opportunity for Lin to open up and take risks as a designer, positioning her imagination and personal cultural capital as valued texts to draw from for her project.

Just as Lin recognized her ways of designing, she also saw her composition as having new meaning, as something redesigned, as a “version of the afterworld [that] is vastly different from anything I’ve seen in other texts” (Lin’s artist statement). In class, she described her deliberate decisions regarding the clouds in her work, for example. She shared, “I believe in two religions—Buddhists don’t believe in a heaven so that’s why I drew this… Because, versions of heaven have lots of clouds. I didn’t imagine mine to be like that because half of my family doesn’t, you know, believe in heaven.” Not only was Lin drawing on her beliefs, she was also working in opposition to them to position her design as reflective of the multiple beliefs, cultures, and interpretations that have influenced her thinking about the afterworld. In doing so, Lin was firmly placing herself among the other artists and authors we were valuing and learning from.

*Lowriders in a Text Set: What Worked and What Didn’t*

As we engaged with *Lowriders* in this unit, we saw students excited to read and deeply interested in the artform of the text. Looking across multimodal compositions like Lin’s, we were encouraged by the creative moves students made as designers. Yet, pairing *Lowriders* with our other unit texts brought both successes and misses. Students acknowledged and even embraced the layers of perspectives that reading across texts invited. One student reflected that accessing multiple texts as resources for learning “allows you to be more fluid” in ideas and
understandings. Having the freedom to think in both fluid and flexible ways was a departure from school as the students had come to understand it. “That’s how other teachers teach. They give you one thing, and you base everything you know off of that one thing,” one student explained. Students were used to being told what they needed to learn and understand, often single, narrow ideas that they were supposed to absorb, rather than complicated ones. Including *Lowriders* was particularly impactful as so many students saw not just a text that was different from what they were used to reading, but a text that reflected their own lives and experiences. In this way, being exposed to many perspectives, including new and personal ones, “exposed hidden agendas, political overlays, top-down discourses” operating in schools (Collier and Rowsell 15).

Students brought flexibility to their discussions and to their creative multimodal responses to the texts. One student shared that seeing new and different representations of morality supported her in becoming more open and flexible in considering others’ ideas, whether they differed or aligned with her own. *Lowriders* continued to be particularly valuable in this sense by representing something familiar but formatted as something wild, different, and imaginative. Pairing *Lowriders* with more conventional texts within the context of a school space pushed boundaries and gave students permission to do the same. Students appreciated opportunities to “explore our own understandings and each of our own imaginations” as they read, viewed, designed, and redesigned.

Though *Lowriders* sparked enthusiasm in class discussions and helped students find the freedom to take up flexibility and creativity in their multimodal projects, we were surprised to see that few students actually referenced the graphic novel as influential in their work within their artist statements. We had observed and documented students’ heightened engagement and
personal connections with *Lowriders* in class, yet their compositions and artist statements did not evidence those connections. Only four of the fifteen artist statements that accompanied the projects explicitly referenced *Lowriders* as influential; fourteen referenced *Inferno* and twelve referenced *What Dreams May Come*.

As evidenced by our own fieldnotes and in-class data, students clearly viewed *Lowriders* as a text equal in value to *Inferno* and *What Dreams May Come* throughout our class discussions, but they did not privilege it equally as an influence on their creative projects within their more traditional writing. As we critically reflected on what the data from our students’ artist statements was revealing to us, we realized that even though we had succeeded in decentering a canonical work (*Inferno*) across the students’ discussions and creative projects, they were still reluctant to decenter dominant texts in their structured writing. We, as teachers, noted the rich references that students drew from and pointed to (e.g., Catholicism, language, family, and culture), yet students did not connect that work back to *Lowriders*. One student noted that none of the unit texts influenced him in his creative composition, in part because his goal was to offer “a different perspective of the afterlife.” Though we were once again surprised that the graphic novel did not come up in this student’s statement as influential, we appreciated the possibility that perhaps the inclusion of multiple texts, including *Lowriders*, influenced him to make something different, something entirely his own. But when it came to crediting the graphic novel in the more formal, academic writing portion of this unit, *Lowriders* was mostly left out.

**Conclusion**

“The *We Made It to the Center of the Earth and Back*”

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5 Camper and Raúl the Third 122.
As co-teacher researchers, our findings leave us with many questions. If we had read *Lowriders* first, would it have been more effectively positioned as a lens through which students could read and challenge *Inferno*? In asking students to write academic, traditionally structured artistic statements alongside creative compositions, were we devaluing what their projects did on their own? Or by pairing *Lowriders* with other texts, were we positioning it as a text that would not stand alone in an ELA unit? Such inquiries generate larger questions concerning the types of texts students are taught to position as “valuable” within aspects of conventionally academic classroom activities. This positioning impacts how students view themselves as designers. We saw students taking creative risks, drawing on their own backgrounds, personal knowledge, and cultures. Yet they relied on references to already “accepted” academic texts such as *Inferno* or stories told primarily from the white perspective such as *What Dreams May Come* for their academic citations. Were they still feeling a need to justify or legitimize their own redesigned stories? Much must be learned and unlearned, even in spaces that privilege multiple texts and voices, for nontraditional works like *Lowriders*—and thus students’ own cultural epistemologies—to be seen as both personally and academically essential.

Despite the many questions we are left with, we are still inspired by the students’ work, which, while influenced (directly or indirectly) by a range of texts, voices, and modalities, did not replicate them but were designed into something new. By examining how students reinvent and reimagine creative practices within their own classroom spaces, we can consider how to better serve their voices, histories, and literacies. As we look to the future, we hope to position *Lowriders* in ways that more effectively and clearly help students to challenge texts, authors, and stories that already have an assumed place in school. In doing so, we want students to be empowered to ask not just why a text is taught, but why a text like *Inferno* is in the
recommended reading curriculum when *Lowriders* is not. What’s more, we want students to be emboldened to include their own voices and narratives as valued texts in the classroom, potentially displacing dominant, canonical texts altogether. As we do so, we can also explore what it means to support students in decentering and destabilizing dominant narratives not only in classroom conversations and creative assignments, but in more conventional writing activities as well.
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Sheahan and Dallacqua: Centering Students as Designers


