

BLTN End-of-Summer Report 2021

Leslie Schallock

lschallo@staunton.k12.va.us

Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center

svjc.org

Connecting Coursework

This summer I took a tutorial with Dr. Holly Laird focusing on the text *How Long 'Til Black Future Month?* By N. K. Jemisin. This collection of speculative short fiction is exactly what I've been waiting to read to bolster my Afrofuturism/Black Futures Month unit. I took this class because I have found some success in captivating student interest and student creativity in Afrofuturist stories that I haven't found in others. I wanted to get outside my comfort zone in order to help my students think in new and creative ways.

While our tutorial focused on Jemisin's texts, each tutorial member recommended outside speculative fiction reading. These, along with recommendations and highlights from our professor, made for a wide exposure into the land of sci-fi and speculative fiction. For my final project, I focused on Jemisin's portrayals of internalized racism within her characters. Jemisin wrote a personal essay admitting to her own internalized racism (which she terms "subconscious resistance"), and how she found her antidote. In her stories she showcases ways to combat this type of oppression.

Looking back on the tutorial, I see how I've learned to appreciate fantasy more as a way of expressing interior struggles that aren't obvious from the outside. While it is harder to comprehend complex world-building, this genre allows students the silliness and the bravery to think outside harsh realistic fiction and into realities of hope. Jemisin creates characters with such authentic voices that I think my students will find her works empowering. It's certainly empowered me to think more about language in my course texts and how students can see their own language celebrated.

Action

- 1. Critical Language Awareness Unit/Activities:** I plan to collaborate with Erin Tabor (BLTN, Detroit) on a Critical Language Awareness unit or series of activities. This collaboration will be teacher-to-teacher with planning this unit as well as student-to-student as we exchange language samples and responses.

Inspired by Dr. Shawna Shapiro's BLTN Zoom talk and our experience taking Dr. April Baker-Bell's Antiracist Writing Pedagogies class together (2019), we would like to develop CLA exchanges that examine:

- Descriptive Grammar (over prescriptive grammar)
- "Own voice" texts
- Language & Power Research projects
- Idiolect (& Your Identity) projects

- 2. [Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration](#):** Inspired by this text (linked), I'd like to find a

way to forge an exchange between the incarcerated youth I teach in a juvenile detention center to youth in non-incarcerated communities. Since mass incarceration strips students of their voice and connection to others, I'd like to use a website to document student visual media for others to respond to. Responses could be letters back to the artist, interpretations of the art's meaning, or ekphrastic writing (poem or story).

The purpose is really to work on how the non-incarcerated see the incarcerated by counteracting stereotypes, humanizing, and resisting the erasure of the marginalized.

This exchange will begin between my students and those of Michelle Fountain (BLTN, Vermont). This could potentially be unlimited in collaborators, since it is virtual and asynchronous.

3. **BLTN Antiracist Book Circle:** This is a continued exchange with Alex O'Brien (BLTN, What's the Story, VT?) and group members Monica Rowley, Jamie Wilber, and Michelle Fountain. We plan to continue our book circle on *Me & White Supremacy*. We will meet every other week this time and plan to finish this fall semester.

I will continue to touch base with Alex about how groups are going as well as discussing new antiracist texts for future groups.