

1. Hi Everyone and welcome to the third Monday update. I'm trying a different way to deliver content to you. Instead of you having to read through the update, you can listen to this. I thought it might be nice to hear my, albeit shrill, voice. Online teaching can be pretty blank, I thought hearing my voice might make things feel more, I don't know, maybe homey or kind. But, anyway, if you need a transcript, one is included on the website just under the file that you are listening too right now. This update will take you no more than 6 minutes to listen to. I know because I timed it. Also, I apologize for the memes. I am not super into memes. I never think they are as funny or clever as other people, but I need some sort of visual and I know a fair number of you are animal lovers. They do make Monday better.
2. So, here is a little bit of collective feedback on your work from last week. I think it was pretty great. I know a lot of folks were worried about doing it wrong, but it seemed to me that everyone who posted (and most people—though not all people—posted) took on the work of thinking about these texts as literary and did a solid job. Ditto for the teaching discussion. I want to go into more detail about each of these individually, and I will in a minute, but I wanted to say at the outset that folks are definitely on the right track. Don't forget to respond to your fellow classmates at least once in both the book club/reading journal space and the teaching discussion.
3. So a bit more about what folks posted in book club/reading journal google.docs. What I'm trying to do here is briefly summarize what I saw as the main themes across all of the book clubs. Gender, obviously was a big one. Most folks talked about how the two texts offered commentary on gender and identity and, also, how one learns about what it means to be a woman or a man. A few students, looking at you Colby Nilson, but not just you, talked about how, in "7th Grade" there is also a lot to think about in terms of race and class. A few students talked about *how* the two characters learned how to essentially act like a man or a woman, how it is directive in *Girl* (the use of the imperative, the structure of one long sentence) and how in 7th Grade it is more passive. A good number of you talked about how much more violent "Girl" is than "7th Grade," a point I returned to a lot in my comments (which, by the way, I made using the comment function, and which you'll be able to read when you go back to the google.doc to post this week's journal—more on that in a minute as well). You used words like "ambush" and "overbearing" and "whiplash" to describe what happens in *Girl*. A few of you pointed out that it felt like the speaker was explaining how not to be a slut to someone the speaker already assumed was and would only ever be a slut. Whereas the collusion of the teacher (the white, middle class teacher) at the end of 7th grade felt, well, sort of sweet, but also, and this is my language, though Sam Colon agreed with me, like a kind of Boys Club type thing. This meme about 7th Grade is not funny to me, but terrifying and suggests, I think, what both of these pieces really drive home: being at that middle school/tween age is incredibly difficult and frightening—not yet an adult, not really a child because the world makes you grow up so fast. So thinking about how we teach texts, inspire literacy, take the best care of our students' hearts and minds, that's a fraught undertaking.
4. Which Brings me back to week one's post: YA is, as you can see from that quote, immensely popular, but it's also been around a long time. We are reading one of my

all time important books of my life this week and as you see in the images on this page, *Are You There God, It's Me Margaret*, is another one of them. Maybe some of you have also read Judy Blume. The images demonstrate the kind of timelessness of her story. It's found a readership with every generation of readers since it's publication in 1970. I want to spend a little time coming up with a class definition of YA lit. Some of this, you'll notice, is pulled directly from what you all had to say, and some of it I'm adding and or, a little bit, course correcting us away from. So, here goes:

YA lit is typically some sort of "Coming of Age" story, in the literary sense. This is a quality that is shared with other texts (like *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Catcher in the Rye*), that are not written as YA texts but, because of this feature, are often read as YA lit. There was some confusion about this as a literary term. The literary term for this is, of course, *bildungsroman*.

They are Conflict Driven. Of course, most novels are. The conflicts in YA novels tend to be focused on *a relationship to authority*. We see this in a ton of popular YA novels, and in every one we read this semester (interesting to think about in *little women* actually). Young people are typically in a place in their lives where they are trying to define who they are. And that is often in opposition to those people and things that have control over their lives. Conflict can come from different places, but a relationship to authority is a primary one for YA fiction.

The Power of Firsts is a strong influence on YA Lit. Not unrelated to the above, YA characters are trying to figure out who they are and that often involves encountering myriad emotions and circumstances "for the first time." Much of the conflict and drama of the stories comes from these firsts.

They have elements of Melodrama. When we say melodrama, here again, we mean in the literary sense. If you are on the transcript for this you can click on the link for a literary definition of melodrama. **Here is a link to a working definition of "melodrama" for that purpose.** Essentially, melodrama relies on stock characters and typically, despite any tragedy, ends with all the loose ends tied up—and typically in a happy ending bow. It's probably not entirely fair to say all YA characters are stereotypes (though a lot in very popular fiction are), but they are often characters that young readers can easily identify as either themselves, people they know, or kinds of characters they've encountered in other genre and media.

5. So reading this, I think we get a sense of what makes it "literature" or at least what makes it valuable to look at critically (though I think any text is worth that—but I'm a compositionist by training not a lit person). And, as this quote demonstrates, a lot of adults read YA. A lot a lot. Ethan Childe was getting at this question in his book club reading journal post. What makes this kind of writing young and adult?

YA is aware of who YA is for. Unlike texts written that can serve as YA literature, YA literature that identifies as written for the genre is hyper-aware of who it is being written for—they have an age range 12-18, a sense of range of experience, knowledge of all of those

firsts mentioned in number three. This isn't a bad thing and it doesn't mean all readers of whatever age might not find value in reading YA, it just means that, like "women's fiction" is written with women in mind and sci-fi and fantasy write for readers of that genre, YA knows who it's reader is and writes with them in mind.

So, notice what does NOT appear in our list: YA novels are *simple*. YA novels are *easy*. YA novels are *straightforward*. Because none of that is what makes YA. **Which brings me to my last point YA is aware that it is a kind of "teaching" text.** And that's not necessarily a point the essays were making head on, but it's a point I'm trying to drive home. It's going to play an important role in our class. YA texts essentially teach young readers how to read a next text—whatever that text is. So choosing a text that is manageable and yet a challenge to a young reader becomes vitally important.

The folks in this slide are two of my teaching heroes. If you've taken a class with me then you know who they are. Louise Rosenblatt and Paulo Freire. Rosenblatt worked in the CUNY schools and developed a theory of, as her book title indicates "Literacy as Exploration. She argues that we must create classrooms where young readers become literate through their own exploration of a text. The role of the teacher is to create the right setting to select the right texts and to essentially craft a class experience that demands that the student reader make decisions about what a text means. So ownership over meaning-making.

And the old guy with the beard there is Freire, the great Brazilian educator who was actually jailed for teaching his students in their native language. Rosenblatt is by and large talking about the classroom, but Freire is the father of critical literacy, which is the ability to read the world around you as a text, to be able to decide how it is affecting you and then respond to the world (the text) with that knowledge. It's pretty heady stuff. And it's more complicated than that, but we will be exploring both these scholars later in the semester.

Ultimately excellent YA texts in the classroom have a responsibility to it's readers to provide, this is a quote, "context for students to become conscious of their operating world view and to examine critically alternative ways of understanding the world and social relations" which is in an essay we'll read later in the semester called "Teaching Social Justice Through Young Adult Literature". This ties in to the rigor with which we need to teach YA, the intensity of analyzing these texts that we need to require. That's true literacy; that's critical literacy—not passing a class or a test literacy—though if you are teaching students critical literacy, passing MCAS is a part of that. .

6. So that's quite enough of an information dump right now, I want to segue way to talking about what is due this week. First up, for your book club/reading journal post to your book club google docs, I'm asking you to think about some of the thinking and writing you've been doing so far and consider the novel in that light. *Little Women* can be called a classic on many levels. I'd like to think about that this week. So, this week, as your reading journal respond to this prompt: In what ways is this text "young" and "adult" and "literature"? Also, what YA tropes do you see in *Little Women* that, in your reading experience, you see in recent YA titles?

7. Don't forget the scholarly article included on the syllabus entitled "Who Are Your Heroes" as you respond. You can access the article directly from the syllabus. It's a live link that takes you to the log in for BSU's library portal to Jstor. If you have trouble with it let me know on the Q&A discussion board for this week. I can pdf it and post it as a file on the syllabus if need be.
8. I most sincerely hope that what I'm about to ask you to do is fun and doesn't make you all scared and nervous. I mean it to be fun. You don't need to be Shakespeare or Greta Gerwig to do a good job at this. Instead of a Teaching Discussion this week: On the [Class Discussion Board](#), In 300 words, provide a synopsis of *your* 2020 version of the classic *Little Women*. RESPOND in 200 words to at least one of your colleagues by either building on their update idea and/or suggesting why you think, as a reader or a teacher, this would work as an update (or wouldn't). I promise to play along with you. I've got like 8 versions of this in my head. Incidentally, you have fellow classmate to blame for this assignment because she alerted me to an update called Jo & Meg that is currently out for our reading pleasure.
9. So I hope you notice how many times I write that the Flash Memoir is not due this week. Because it is not due this week. But I want you to read about the assignment and start to think about how you might go about meeting the requirements this week, and to ask me questions on the Discussion Board Q&A this week, so that next week, when you have to write and post a draft to the book club reading journal space you will feel confident and ready to write. I've included the link to two sample flash memoirs on the assignment page, one is by Ray Bradbury and the other by a lesser known author. We should all convince classmate Becky Tynan to share a version of this assignment she wrote last semester because it was so great.
10. By the time you've gotten through this, all of this week's discussion boards should be live and ready for you to respond. As I already said, I've commented on the individual book club/reading journal google.docs directly in the doc. You can jump in with your journal on Little Women in response to the prompt whenever you are ready to go. About the discussion board: I know some folks have been having trouble. I am in touch with Weebly to see what's happening. In the mean time, if you can't get it to work, send it to me and I'll post. That's for the discussion board only. You all should be able to get to your google doc using the link I emailed out to all of you last week.
11. A few last minute things. Some of you have already noticed that I'm going to ask you to do something called a Pecha Kucha and you are wondering what that actually is, well, this, this thing you are almost done listening to, is a Pecha Kucha. It's done using PowerPoint (not google slides) and using the "record slide show" function to time and record a script. The transcript that you have access to on the website is the script. This is not a perfect pecha kucha. It's not twenty slides and each slide is not 20 seconds long, but, generally, this is sort of what it looks like—though you don't need to use as much text as I've used here. Anyway, this took me roughly 6 hours total—to write the script and find the images and all of that. So think about that as we approach this assignment around midterm. But most of all, don't freak out about it. If I can do this you can do it. I

did this assignment with middle schoolers and we all survived.

12. Last and finally, the BSU community lost another student today. I've lost count of how many emails I've gotten from the Dean of students letting me know that another one of you is tragically gone. I feel this loss keenly, even though I didn't know this student, and should you have known her, you have my deepest sympathies. If we were seeing each other in class I would tell you that school is never as important as your health, mentally and physically, or your family's health, mentally and physically. I believe that and I mean that. If you are struggling, let those of us in the BSU community help you through. I've been on this campus for 20 years this fall. Let me put my knowledge of this place at your service. We barely know each other, and we can't even see each other, but I mean it when I say, I am in your corner.