


# Chapter 8


## Literacy Learning Through Film

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter presents both practical and theoretical support for educators to incorporate literacy learning into elementary classrooms. Clear connections between fanfiction and mentor texts provide examples of how film can mentor student writing. Multimodal classroom activities, focused on literacy skill development, showcase a variety of instructional strategies related to both reading and writing. Each literacy activity utilizes film as a foundation for student understanding of skills and to support successful completion of assigned tasks.*

### INTRODUCTION

Literacy, once thought of as simply reading and writing, has become so much more. The International Literacy Association's online glossary (n.d.), provides that literacy is "the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context" (para. 14). This definition offers literacy as something beyond academics, as it provides connections across materials, methods, procedures, processes, techniques, systems and/or modes. Connection in this way, often thought of as multimodal literacy, supports a variety of ways to learn concepts (Philippe, et al., 2020) while reinforcing memory and cognition (Lazar, 2008). According to Tussey et al. (2021), "multimodal learning opportunities across content areas allow students to experience elements of control over the time, place, and path within integrated learning environments" (p. 193). These types of experiences may include, but are not limited to, fanfiction writing, podcasting, vodcasting, and gaming (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Haas & Tussey, 2022; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Steinkuehler, 2008).

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Respecting literacy experiences that happen outside of academia offers opportunities to link home, school, and community (Gee, 2007). Linking the different faces and places of literacy engagement elevates it beyond communication skills and situates it as cultural practice (Gavelek, et al., 2000). According to Haas and Tussey (2022), literacy as cultural practice offers purposeful and authentic opportunities for literacy engagement and growth. Bippert (2017) suggests that student “goals for reading and writing may not be directly connected with school achievement, so educators need to tap into these existing skills in order to make literacy meaningful to the students” (p. 19-20). Therefore, educators’ awareness of the links between cultural practices and literacy engagement, as well as the skills associated with incorporating this knowledge into the classroom, offers opportunities to bridge the engagement gap (Alverman, 2008).

## **Fanfiction and Mentor Texts**

Student interest in cultural practices connected to popular culture, such as the experiences associated with movies, has the potential to support academic literacy development (Bahoric & Swaggerty, 2015; Jennings et al., 2021). Fandoms, which are based on shared interests or activities within cultural practices, are often associated with movies and/or other popular culture mediums. Movies offer educators opportunities to capitalize on pre-existing narratives for literacy development. One way literacy skills can be practiced via movies is through the creation of fanfiction. Jamison (2013) offers that, “today we largely understand fanfiction as writing that continues, interrupts, reimages, or just riffs on stories and characters other people have already written about” (p. 17). In terms of literacy development, an original work, such as a movie, may act as a mentor text to be explored and altered. The alteration may comprise of one or more features which could include characters, conflict, plot, point of view, or setting (Jamison, 2013). Therefore, original works become mentor texts for fanfiction writers. Haas and Tussey (2021) provide that

*Mentor texts take the full cognitive load of creation off students and allow for focused attention on one particular aspect of writing. For example, when a popular comic book is chosen as a mentor text, students can focus on developing the point of view of a less developed or minor character without also needing to focus on setting and plot (para. 4.).*

Fanfiction can be seen throughout history. One of the earliest examples is Milton’s *Paradise Lost* which is based on the Bible. Milton’s focus is on perspective, as he takes a familiar story and presents Satan as a tragic hero. Another early example is Virgil’s *The Aeneid* which is based on *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*. In this example, a minor character within the original works’ world is more fully explored. More modern examples include movies based on fanfiction are *10 Things I Hate About You* based on *Taming of the Shrew*, *Galaxy Quest* based on *Star Trek*, and *The Mortal Instruments* based on *Harry Potter*.

## **Overarching Literacy Standards**

For the purposes of this chapter, activities and strategies will be based on overarching standards that are recognized as important for literacy skill development. One set of standards will not be specifically referenced, as there are a plethora worldwide. Rather, literacy skill pillars needed to support the communication, creation, and interpretation of visual, audible, and digital literacy will be provided. These include character development, dialog, plot, point of view, and setting. Additionally, activities focused

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