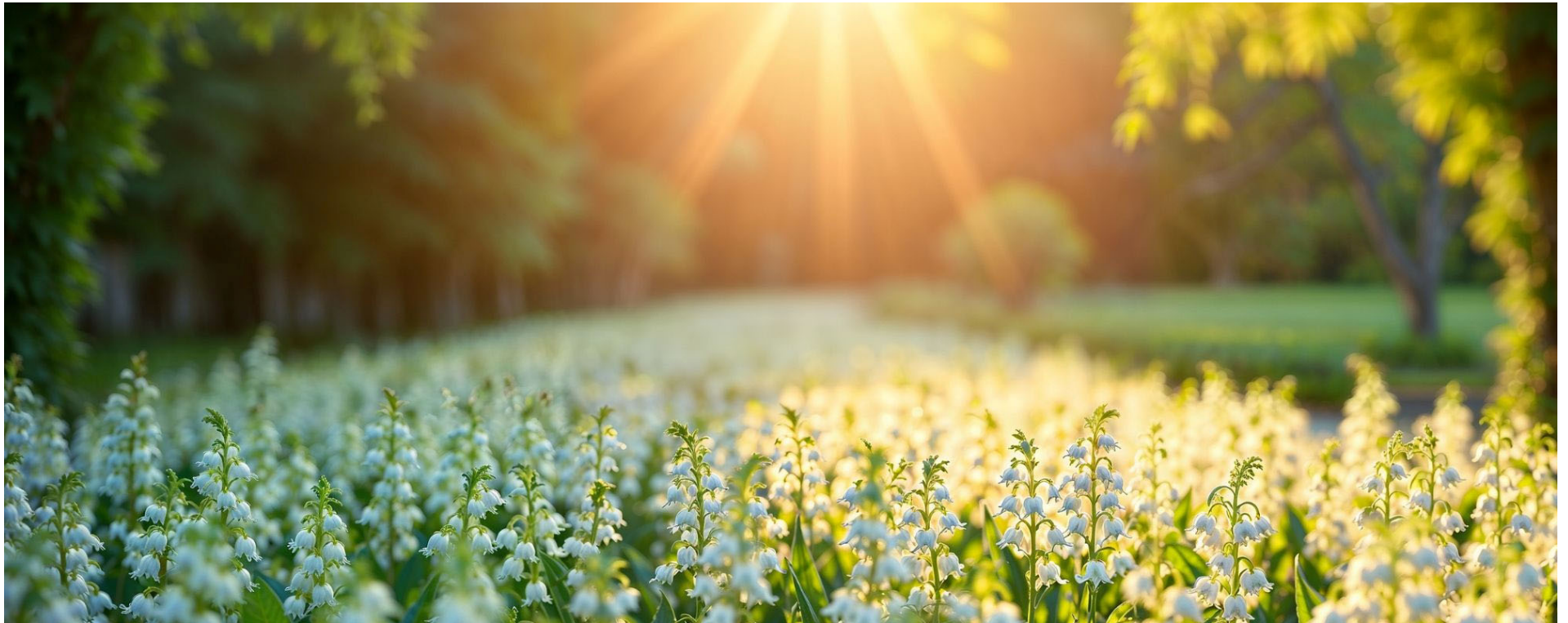


*strong green growth  
will rise here  
trees back to life  
native flowers  
pushing the fragrance of hope  
– bell hooks*

# English Department Capstone Conference



# ENG 495 *Capstone Conference*

**24 April 2026**

**Kirkhof Center**

**Grand Valley State University**

**Allendale, Michigan**

## 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 (reflective writing); 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: 10-10:50 a.m.

*Panel A & B*

Session Two: 11-11:50 p.m.

*Panels C, D & E*

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

*Panels F, G & H*

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

*Panels I & J*

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

*Panels K & L*

## Notes

Students will present in the order in which they appear in this program; a question-and-answer session will follow once all students on the panel have presented their papers.

Should you have questions, issues or concerns during today's program, please contact faculty in KC 2264.

**Panel A**  
**KC 2266**

**Warrior Women**

Facilitators: Dr. David Álvarez &  
Dr. John Gibbons

**Kayla Coats**  
**‘Regaining What Was Stolen: Female Space & Bodily Autonomy in Kawakami’s *Breast & Eggs*’**

This paper examines Kawakami’s book, *Breasts & Eggs*, and how its characters embody themes of existential feminism. The bodies of the women in this novel are being restricted by forces driven by the male gaze: Japanese artificial insemination/reproduction regulations in a patriarchal society encompass this. To restructure the patriarchal narrative and regain their bodily autonomy, the characters occupy (environmental/situational) spaces. Despite the oppressive forces, the main character, Natsuko uses space to navigate her decision to reproduce as a single mother and regain her autonomy by choosing to have a child through artificial insemination. Natsuko’s sister, Makiko’s, wish for her is to reproduce with a partner reinforces patriarchal/heteronormative narratives that prevent women from achieving their aspirations. Concurrently, while this sort of narrative has damaged Makiko’s welfare, she is on a journey to retake her bodily autonomy—through breast implants—which will allow her to take charge of her bodily existence and take up physical space in a patriarchal world. Through the lens of existential feminism, we can understand that these women are able to make meaning of their feminine bodies/identities despite their society’s patriarchal expectations by taking charge of their own bodies and finding solidarity among one another.

**Catherine Elian**  
**‘Marginalization of Women in Lebanese Civil War Literature’**

The Lebanese Civil War (LCW) reshaped the lives of all its people, yet the literature presented about it often marginalizes women’s roles, portraying them as passive figures rather than active participants in the conflict. This thesis examines female representation in LCW literature with a focus on *De Niro’s Game (DNG)* by Rawi Hage and *Sitt Marie Rose (SMR)* by Etel Adnan. Through close analysis, I argue that *DNG* highlights female characters through the male protagonist’s eyes, limiting their roles, while *SMR* depicts them as politically and socially engaged in the war. Drawing on historical context and employing a feminist lens, I will

highlight the gap between women's roles in the war, such as joining militias, activism, and helping communities survive, and how rarely these roles appear in literature. This is important because it demonstrates that male-centered war narratives reinforce patriarchal structures, and that incorporating female perspectives challenges such structures and is essential to fully understanding the LCW.

**Ellen Batty**  
**'Female Power  
Between Patriarchy  
& Defiance in  
*Medea & Antigone*'**

This paper considers the paradoxical role of women in fifth-century Athenian tragedy, focusing on *Medea* and *Antigone* as central cases. Although in classical Athens women were largely excluded from public and political life, Athenian tragedy repeatedly places female characters at the center of moral, social, and political conflict. Drawing on Feminist theory and criticism, as well as other existing scholarship, this paper argues that women in Greek tragedy operate simultaneously as a challenge to patriarchal authority and as a mechanism to reinforce it. By combining close textual analysis with historical context, this paper shows how *Medea*'s transgressive violence and rejection of social and maternal norms, along with *Antigone*'s politically motivated defiance in pursuit of justice, reveal anxieties about gender, power, and civic order while reinforcing and challenging the limits placed on women in Athenian society. Tragedy thus becomes a space where patriarchy stages both its fears and its control.

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**Panel B**  
**KC 2270**

**The Critical Role of Critical Theory**

Facilitators: Dr. Tierney Powell &  
Dr. Brian White

**Riley Vreeland**  
**'Reviving the Author:  
An Analysis of the  
Role of Authors in  
Literary Education'**

Literary interpretation and criticism has long since locked away the author in terms of comprehensive and analytical importance. Historicists famously utilized the historical context a work was placed in to analyze and critique works of literature, whereas New Critics advocated for the criticism of literature to only take into account what was written on the actual page. The strife between New Critics and Historicists during the early 20th century highlights these intellectual conflicts and offers insight into the perspectives held in the modern day about literary interpretation. Especially in the context of education and within the Common

Core Standards, literary criticism has abandoned the author in favor of emphasis placed onto the text. This thesis will explore how this emphasis is misguided, and at best negligent, when attempting to develop secondary students into competent critics and readers. In addition to arguing for the reemergence of authors into literary criticism, this thesis will also provide readers an in-depth framework in which to incorporate authors into literary criticism in classrooms.

**Nicholas Lowery**  
**‘Applying Critical Lenses Authentically: Teaching Literary Theory in the Secondary Classroom’**

Common Core State Standards often fail to fully recognize or support the diverse identities and interests of modern students. To enrich student learning, educators must recentralize students within the curriculum and create authentic purposes for learning. This thesis examines the current implementation of various literary theories in secondary classrooms, exploring how explicit instruction of critical lenses can support students in personal meaning-making. Drawing on research in project-based learning, this paper proposes an adapted project-based writing framework that enables students to explore critical theory beyond teacher-centered instruction. By recentring student interests and valuing their existing funds of knowledge, this approach deepens student engagement with complex critical theories and recognizes their socially complex identities.

**Eliana Burgess**  
**‘Weaving New Threads: Ovid’s Minerva & Queer Theory in Translation’**

Though Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* has been extensively studied, the work—overflowing with queer perspectives and complex fluidity—has only recently become an interest for queer and feminist scholars to examine through their own lenses. This presentation investigates the representation of goddess Minerva within the first six books and examines how the language explores the complex interplay of power binaries in the ancient Roman world. Through reviewing relevant literature on Roman culture, examining the original Latin text of the *Metamorphoses* for representations of Minerva as both hegemonically feminine and masculine, and analyzing a collection of published translations, an understanding of how both ancient and contemporary works interpret and interact with atypical and queer gender presentations can be woven.

**Panel C**  
**KC 2259****Social & Emotional Literary Learning**

Facilitators: Dr. Jesse Cook &  
Dr. John Gibbons

**Makenna Conklin**  
**'Reframing Romance:**  
**Consent, Coercion,**  
**and Conditioning in**  
***Romeo & Juliet***

For decades, *Romeo and Juliet* has been taught as the ultimate love story, but that familiar framing can obscure a far more troubling pattern of secrecy, pressure, and boundary-crossing. This presentation argues that secondary ELA classrooms should read Shakespeare's play not as a romance to celebrate, but as a text that invites urgent conversations about consent, coercion, and grooming. Drawing on scholarship in Shakespeare studies, grooming research, and sexual violence prevention, the session shows how Romeo's rapid escalation, insistence on secrecy, and emotional intensity can be read as more than passion. Historical context surrounding marriage, gender, and Juliet's age further reveals the vulnerability built into the play's relationship dynamics. Rather than sanitizing these tensions, teachers can use them to deepen literary analysis and help students recognize harmful relationship scripts in both literature and contemporary media. The presentation also outlines a standards-aligned unit for grades 9-10 that combines close reading, discussion, and argument writing. Ultimately, it makes the case that teaching *Romeo and Juliet* through consent is not a radical departure from English instruction, but a necessary act of critical literacy.

**Justin McCree**  
**'Literature as**  
**Equipment for**  
**Teaching: An Approach**  
**to Social Emotional**  
**Learning'**

Adolescents are constantly dealing with stressful situations that their teachers and peers may not be aware of. For example, immigrant students who are struggling to understand the language well, or students suffering from undiagnosed dyslexia, both groups struggle to get work done. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is a skill that can benefit students so they understand how to help their classmates. There are several methods of ensuring youth are growing from what they are watching and reading. However, this paper will address how Social Emotional Learning (SEL) can be an effective method of doing so. Using literature as a means to teach SEL to youth will better prepare them to handle situations in and outside of

the classrooms. The five key components of SEL consist of: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These can be seen through the different works of literature like in *The Circuit*, *Fish In A Tree*, and *Lord of the Flies*. By exploring these different works, youth will be better prepared to understand contemporary topics such as social and economic struggles, culture, and sexual orientation. In addition to teaching youth SEL strategies through literature, it is just as important to measure their growth after these strategies are taught. This essay will demonstrate how to teach SEL through literature and methods of how to measure its effectiveness.

**Aeriana Clark**  
**‘Teaching in the Noise:  
Addressing Adolescent  
Mental Health Through  
Literature in a Digitally  
Saturated Generation’**

This thesis explores the growing mental health crisis among adolescents, drawing attention to how constant digital stimulation can deepen feelings of anxiety and disconnection. Educators have a critical responsibility to implement classroom practices that guide students to slow down and reconnect with themselves. One effective practice is trauma-informed pedagogy, an educational approach that is sensitive and responsive to the trauma and experiences of students. These practices are especially critical when engaging in literature. When paired together, reading transcends its traditional academic role, becoming a powerful tool for emotional processing and understanding. Centering *Challenger Deep*, this study illustrates how young adult literature can cultivate empathy, invite introspection, and open meaningful dialogue surrounding mental health in the classroom. By reintroducing students to the slow and immersive experience of engaging with a physical text, educators can respond to both the healing of the adolescent mental health crisis and the harmful impacts of digital overexposure to foster an environment where students feel supported and understood.

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**Panel D**  
**KC 2266**

**The Power of Representation**  
Facilitators: Dr. Lindsay Ellis &  
Dr. Brian White

**Lauralynn Jacobs**  
**'Discussing Identity in**  
**Secondary Education:**  
**The Importance**  
**of Biracial**  
**Representation in**  
**YA Literature'**

Biracial and multiracial individuals have been struggling with the binary of racial identity throughout history. From the one-drop rule to the United States census, hybrid persons have been othered, leaving them to inquire the terms of their racial and ethnic identity, "What am I?" The question of identity has demonstrated negative behavioral and mental distress in multiracial and biracial youth, with effects carrying into adulthood development. This prolonged issue exhibits the desperate and necessary need for intervention in our society's systems. In response, the issue of biracial and multiracial individuals' identity can be most effectively addressed and intervened at the critical point of identity development: the adolescent period of secondary education. Through representative biracial and multiracial models in young adult novels, educators can promote essential positive identity development for mixed students in the classroom. Instead of conforming to the binary, hybrid individuals create a *third space* identity, an identity marked through the unique experiences of a mixed individual.

**Myah Grant**  
**'Representing**  
**Deaf Culture in**  
**Secondary Education'**

In most secondary education classrooms around the country, the same canon works are used to teach valuable lessons to students. Using the same works of literature year after year prevents various diverse groups from being recognized in the classroom. There are countless cultures that exist around the world, unique in their own ways. A minority culture that often goes unnoticed is Deaf culture. Deaf culture is a combination of history, values, beliefs, language, traditions, behaviors, and much more regarding people in the Deaf community. There are many works of fiction representing Deaf characters that successfully convey crucial messages and essential themes. This paper examines the effectiveness of inclusive content by analyzing various novels, such as *El Deafo* by Cece Bell, *The Silence Between Us* by Alison Gervais, and *True Biz* by Sara Novic. This paper argues that representing Deaf Culture accurately in the works of literature in secondary education classrooms is critical to teaching skills such as critical thinking, self-identity, and empathy. Thus, leading students to be culturally competent individuals.

**Natalie VanAtta**  
**‘Visibly Nonbinary:  
A Comparative  
Analysis of Nonbinary  
Representation in  
Modern Comics’**

The Comics Code Authority of 1954 banned explicit depictions of “sexual abnormalities” and “sex perversion.” Nearly forty years later, in 1989, with the revision of the code, comic artists and writers were finally able to portray queer identities in obvious detail. As of now, there are well over 785 titles that feature queer characters, 166 of which include the experiences of nonbinary or genderqueer individuals (Queer Comics Database). Using queer theory as an analytical framework, this paper aims to dissect how nonbinary/gender-expansive identities are represented through the medium of comics via comparative analysis of three works: *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe, *Prokaryote Season* by Leo Fox, and *Spirit World* by Alyssa Wong. Each of these works explicitly presents the main character as nonbinary/gender expansive, allowing for a more nuanced comparative analysis in light of the higher volume of nonbinary themes, as opposed to works that present nonbinary/gender-expansive side characters. Bearing in mind genre conventions, authentic authorship, and audience, this paper argues that nonbinary plot devices and visual storytelling techniques, such as focalization found within each of the comics, index participation in recurring nonbinary/gender-expansive forms of representation found in contemporary comics.

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**Panel E**  
**KC 2270**

**Studying & Learning from Literary  
Characters**

Facilitators: Dr. David Álvarez &  
Dr. Brian Deyo

**Alison Dreese**  
**‘The Hunger Games:  
Teaching War Theory  
& State of Nature  
Through Character  
Studies’**

In public education, it is quite common to come across *The Hunger Games* novels, usually seen in English Language Arts for 9th graders while doing genre studies due to the original trilogy being one of the most acclaimed dystopian series. Unfortunately, when teachers limit the series to a “YA dystopian novel,” it disregards the symbolism and intricate works that Suzanne Collins intended. This paper intends to shift the lesson plans around the series from frameworks of dystopian novels into critical understandings of war theory and the state of nature. These more complex topics can be best understood by conducting character studies of Peeta Mellark, Gale Hawthorn, the two love interests of the first trilogy and their relationships with

Katniss. As well as Dr. Gaul, and Lucy Gray Bard, the two women who confront Coriolanus Snow with their contrary perspectives. The first trilogy focuses on different approaches of war theory, whether or not a war or violence can be justified. Then *The Hunger Games: Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* discusses if humans are born good or evil and what kind of government they need in response. Students need these type of topics to critically think about the world around them and respond to possibly confusing acts of war and violence that are brought up in these books. *The Hunger Games* needs to be held in higher regards in the education setting.

**Travis Huey**  
**‘She Never Drives:  
An Analysis of *Lost  
Children Archive*’**

This paper analyzes the characters in Valeria Luiselli’s *Lost Children Archive*, a postmodern multimodal novel about America, family, the migrant crisis, remembrance, recognition, and distance. This paper’s goals are to restore humanity to the characters that other critiques of the novel sidestepped and to close the emotional distance between the readers’ comfort level and the novel’s events. Much of the current discourse surrounding the novel centers on its socio-political nature or its multimodal form, thereby obscuring the humanity of its characters. After reviewing this body of analytic work, this paper attempts to rectify these dehumanizing approaches by focusing on how each character constructs and interprets their own archive. This paper, using *Lost Children Archive* as an example, reveals how emotional and narrative distance shape recognition and ultimately position storytelling as a means of bridging fictional, personal, and national histories, while forming a greater narrative within the tapestry of Americana. *Lost Children Archive* strives for a mature empathy as it seeks to reconcile our nation’s past with its present to best preserve a more just and equitable future for all people. Thus, demonstrating that recognition, empathy, and pathos can reconcile the past with the present and enable a better future.

**Keerstin Wolters**  
**‘To Speak Without  
Speaking’**

This literary analysis examines Andre Aciman’s, *Call Me by Your Name*, and how subtleties can be examined and translated to declarations of love. A secret romance amongst Elio and Oliver spans across only one Italian summer, not to crash and burn, but lit with ease and to linger across time and through Elio’s retrospective narration. Using elements of settings and

music, accompanied by a close reading of the novel, intimacy and desire is articulated through the spaces in between and desire, the permanence of their love, living in memory. Rather than dramatic declarations of love, Aciman's depictions of desire and the restraint and private recognition used makes every private moment that much more intimate and emotionally charged. The novel suggests that love doesn't need to be spoken loudly to be felt deeply. Instead, the beauty comes from vulnerability, secrecy, and the way it remains alive in memory even after the summer ends.

12 p.m.

SESSION THREE

**Panel F**  
**KC 2259**

**Reaching & Teaching Today's Students**

Facilitators: Dr. Brian Deyo &  
Dr. Lindsay Ellis

**Logan Welch**  
**'Teaching the**  
**Tortured Poets:**  
**How Poetry**  
**Instruction Must**  
**Evolve Through**  
**Contemporary**  
**Literature'**

Poetry has historically served as a tool for developing key qualities within students including critical thinking. However, common teaching approaches rely on traditional texts and methods that fail to resonate with modern learners and their lived experiences. This thesis examines the role of poetry in secondary education and argues for a shift of instructional practices in order to better engage students today. Analyzing research in poetry instruction, mental health, and innovative teaching practices. This thesis highlights a gap between the documented benefits of poetry and its classroom implementation that must be bridged by teachers. Focusing on confessional poetry as a framework, this thesis positions *The Tortured Poets Department* by Taylor Swift as a contemporary reconfiguration of the genre. An analysis of Swift's work as compared to traditional confessional poets displays that her writing reflects a transformation shaped by celebrity culture and digital connectivity. Ultimately, this thesis proposes that by incorporating contemporary poetic texts such as *The Tortured Poets Department* alongside innovative, student-centered teaching strategies, educators can enhance engagement and better align poetry instruction with the needs of contemporary students.

**Gabriella Mainhardt**  
**‘The Vibes Are Off:  
Realigning English  
Pedagogy with Gen Z  
Learners’**

Current approaches to teaching literature are increasingly misaligned with the learning styles of Generation Z students, contributing to the widespread belief that this cohort is distracted and disengaged in the English classroom. These deficit-based assumptions of Gen Z are challenged by reframing traits such as digital literacy, multi-tasking, and desire for real-world relevance as opportunities for reimagining English pedagogy. This study conducts an analysis of Gen Z’s unique upbringing paired with an interdisciplinary research review on both innovative and traditional literary-teaching methods to reveal the necessary pathways for effective pedagogical adaptation. The results present a multifaceted approach to literary instruction that is required to adequately adjust to the needs of Gen Z while preserving the core values of literary study.

**Ella Mccully**  
**‘Why Teens Need  
Libraries: Developing  
Literacy & Community-  
Development Skills  
Through Public  
Institutions’**

Between falling literacy rates and the growing disconnect between teens and their local community, it is a critical time to find a solution to provide support for teenage students. The focus of this paper is to explore ways to develop literacy and community involvement in adolescents. The paper centers the public library as a primary setting for this solution by calling for the revitalization of the programs, services, and materials available for teenagers. This essay traces the development of public libraries in America before addressing the current relationship between teenage patrons and local libraries. By examining numerous causes which inhibit teenagers from participating or taking advantage of library services and programs, I identify ways in which libraries can support students academically, socially, and emotionally. Through the examination of case studies of libraries across North America who have implemented new programs and strategies, this essay makes numerous suggestions about what developments are most effective and applicable for public libraries. This thesis also situates the need for inclusive programming and materials within the current political climate, where there is intensifying discourse surrounding public libraries and what media is available to patrons.

**Madeline Vanderband**  
**‘Rethinking the**  
**Ordinary: Role-Playing**  
**Games & Critical**  
**Thinking in English**  
**Language Arts’**

Game-Based Learning (GBL) transcends the average classroom environment by providing students with a low-stakes, creative, and interactive learning space, yet research on its application in secondary English language arts (ELA) classrooms remains limited. The essay claims that role-playing games (RPGs), a form of GBL, in an ELA classroom provide a framework that supports students’ critical thinking. Critical and dialogical pedagogies, defined in Paulo Freire’s *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, form the foundation of the research. My research connects multiple examples of RPG use in educational settings to critical pedagogy by examining the game’s immersive, cooperative, and reflective nature. This framing demonstrates how RPGs support students’ critical thinking, as they immerse students in stories and the lives of characters, moving beyond superficial reading toward deeper analysis and reflection.

**Kaylee Wessels**  
**‘Literature in *Fallout 4*:**  
**The Educational**  
**Value of Reading a**  
**Video Game as a**  
**Literary Text’**

The age of video games has become an expansive universe that transcends the entertainment industry to another medium of expression. This particular expression as an art form continues to inspire and encourage players to delve deeper into stories that may be unlike their own. Video game creators continue to design their mechanics and storytelling with more complexity. Game dialogue can provide the majority of the information pertinent to engage players on a deeper level of responsibility to the in-game universe. *Fallout 4* is not the only game to use these devices to engage their player base to reflect on their actions as they move through the universe. However, viewing this particular game as a literary text highlights the effective usage of literature inside the video game space. In order to provide players an introspective mindset, *Fallout 4* uses the messages found in abandoned vaults, notes from survivors, and pre-war tech that describe a complicated war-torn environment. This essay explores the literature found throughout the *Fallout 4* universe as an active discussion of how video games can be read as a literary text through its use of difficult topics, including: oppression, discrimination, power, fear, death, and war.

Facilitators: Dr. Dan Brown &  
Dr. Shinian Wu

**Grace Banuelos**  
**'Bridging Languages:  
Encouraging the Use  
of Translanguaging  
in Secondary  
Composition  
Structure'**

Bilingual and multilingual students continue to encounter persistent challenges in composition writing within ELA classrooms, where monolingual norms are often reinforced through the expectations of exclusive Standard English use. These constraints limit students' ability to fully articulate their ideas and diminish their sense of agency within the writing process. Drawing on personal experience and research in multilingual education, this study specifically examines Spanish-English bilingual students and argues that translanguaging is not a barrier to academic success, but a valuable pedagogical resource. By allowing students to use their full linguistic repertoires, translanguaging enhances engagement, fosters idea development, and promotes authentic expression. Through an examination of existing research and classroom practices, this thesis advocates for a shift toward more inclusive and equitable writing instruction. Integrating translanguaging practices not only supports multilingual learners but also strengthens their development of essential academic writing skills.

**Nathan Jenkins**  
**'Black English in the  
Classroom'**

Dialect discrimination in the classroom reflects centuries of American anti-Black racism. As Black Americans are oppressed by systemic white supremacy, Black English is devalued by hegemonic classroom standards. Educators can acquiesce to dominant power structures, mandating Standard English as the sole correct English variety, or educators can use their classrooms to address dialect discrimination head-on. Over 50 years after the Conference on College Composition and Communication affirmed students' rights to their own language, many teachers still choose the former. Scholars have widely condemned methods that reproduce linguistic hegemony including subtractive bilingualism, code-switching, and contrastive analysis. In this thesis, I critically examine Baker-Bell's, Young's, Smitherman's, and other linguists' proposed alternatives to these methods. I look specifically for inconsistencies, vagueness, and questions that remain unanswered. Building on this

**Andrew Demers**  
**'Breaking Down the Wall: An Examination of Community-Linguist Relationships in Language Revitalization Programs'**

critique, I create Classroom Language Norms—a set of criteria that secondary English teachers should meet—and provide a model of their practical application.

As the world becomes more interconnected through the use of the internet and social media, people all around the world are slowly learning common languages in order to communicate with one another. This has led to a drastic increase in the amount of languages becoming dormant. Linguists all agree that community involvement in language revitalization programs is vital to their success. These speech communities and linguists are now looking for ways to stop this mass die off of linguistic and cultural knowledge. However, often, the differing cultures and goals of the outsider linguist clashes with those of the communities that speak these dying languages. By looking at the history of different revitalization movements and how linguists interacted with the local communities, I argue not just for community and linguist collaboration, but for linguist immersion as well.

**1 p.m.**

**SESSION FOUR**

**Panel I**  
**KC 2266**

**Breaking Binaries in Language & Literature**

Facilitators: Dr. Corinna McLeod & Dr. Tierney Powell

**Bri DeLange**  
**'From *Tim Lam* to Tinker Bell: Fairy Mythology from the Medieval Period to the Modern Age'**

Fairies today are girlhood fixtures, covered in sparkles and clad in flower-petal dresses. But behind the glitter lies a mythology spanning centuries. Medieval fairies are dangerous tricksters, kidnapping children and leading travelers to their doom. Victorian fairies are ornery and volatile, but sometimes reward good behavior. Traditional modern fairies are tiny, sparkly things that paint ladybugs and use flowers as umbrellas. Many of today's fairy writers reject the modern mythos in favor of older traditions, creating neo-medieval and neo-Victorian fairies. In every age, fairies are liminal beings, breaking binaries and resisting categorization at every turn.

**Vincent Battaglio**  
**‘Using Literature to**  
**Examine Essentialism:**  
**The Language**  
**Structure of**  
**LeGuin’s *Earthsea*’**

In the early young adult novels of Ursula K. Le Guin, language is presented as structurally relational rather than an innately separate series of categories. While later entries of the series have garnered more acclaim, the opening novels, *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Tombs of Atuan*, highlight the harm of separating certain linguistic categories as a form of viewed essence from the overarching language structure. This depicted language structure is analyzed by the incorporated theories of linguistic structure and deconstruction as outlined by Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida. Through an assortment of literary and linguistic sources, the depicted language of the *Earthsea* series is further explored revealing Le Guin’s philosophical approaches, the use of language as an instituted system of magic, the historical conventions and restrictive ideologies of that system, and the benefits of developing a sense of structural awareness through deconstruction. Ultimately, Le Guin’s early novels of the *Earthsea* series illuminate the detriments of essentialist notions of linguistic separation by emphasizing awareness. The characters of the novels are taught to recognize the structure of language and develop more accurate and empowered lives through their awareness of language relation than notions of innate separation.

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**Panel J**  
**KC 2270**

**Do Texts Like These Belong in the**  
**Classroom?**

Facilitators: Dr. Brian White &  
Dr. Shinian Wu

**Olivia Massey**  
**‘The Relevance of *The***  
***Handmaid’s Tale*:**  
**Challenging**  
**Censorship &**  
**Promoting Student**  
**Social Participation’**

Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* provides teachers with a framework that reflects upon feminism, human rights, religious patriarchy, and sociopolitical ideologies. However, when Secondary English Language Arts teachers are attempting to undertake this controversial text, increasing political oversight and censorship creates an additional obstacle for taking on its relevant issues within their classrooms. Censorship lessens the novel’s educational relevance, especially because *The Handmaid’s Tale* provides contextual explanations and addresses conservative censorship. Consequently, it is being taught in an apolitical manner that does not address

the sociopolitical content. But, it is now more crucial than ever to implement *The Handmaid's Tale*. This text can permit educators to inform students of the events that have occurred, and are resurfacing, with the goal of inspiring them to dive deeper into these ideas on their own terms. Conclusively, leading young minds to question whether these injustices are going to be a permanent part of our system, or an obstacle that can be overcome.

**Ella Rozeboom**  
**'The Bible as Literature:  
A Course Proposal'**

The Bible is alluded to more often than any other book (Hogan 1965). Currently, Grand Valley State University (GVSU) offers several religion courses; however, none of these focus strictly on the Bible as a piece of literature, leaving students without structured exposure to a foundational text. Many English literature courses at GVSU include literary works with strong connections to the Bible, but students who have not been taught the Bible cannot comprehend these connections. The authentic voices and perspectives of many influential authors are often misunderstood or weakened when readers lack the background knowledge needed to understand them. This thesis considers the academic justifications for a "Bible as Literature" course and goes on to propose a Syllabus of Record (SOR) for how this course could take shape at GVSU. It acknowledges the controversial topics that a "Bible as Literature" course may present and ultimately advocates for a class that does not promote any belief system, but gives students the necessary resources to understand and apply one of the most impactful texts in Western literature.

**2 p.m.**

**SESSION FIVE**

**Panel K**  
**KC 2266**

**Representing the "Difficult" & the  
"Disordered" in the Classroom**

Facilitators: Mr. Roy Black &  
Dr. Corinna McLeod

**Alexandra O'Brien**  
**'Accurate**  
**Representations:**  
**Better Understanding**  
**Dissociative Identity**  
**Disorder'**

In 1973, the allegedly non-fiction book *Sybil* by Flora Rheta Schreiber was released, selling over 11 million copies. *Sybil* was a young woman with dissociative identity disorder and had sixteen distinct personalities, bringing what was then called multiple personality disorder to the forefront of psychological discussions. This story and the revelation of its falsehood, along with other troubling literary depictions of multiple personalities such as in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Psycho*, which came before *Sybil*, and *Fight Club*, published after *Sybil*, have contributed to the controversies surrounding dissociative identity disorder that have existed since its inception. It is commonly believed that dissociative identity disorder is fake or a fad, that those with dissociative identity disorder are aggressive, and that the switch between personality states is extreme and noticeable. These myths must be corrected by more accurate literary representations of the disorder, or those with it will continue to be misunderstood and fail to obtain helpful treatment.

**Olivia Xenos**  
**'Who is Labeled**  
**Different?: Exploring**  
**the Impacts of Labels**  
**on Student Behavior &**  
**Classroom Climate'**

Students are expected to sit still, focus, follow the rules, and participate in class or run the risk of being labeled “difficult”. But who is labeled “difficult”? What are the criteria students need to meet to be labeled “difficult”? When given this label, students use it as their new identity in and outside of the classroom. Labeling negatively affects student performance, participation, and self-esteem. Researchers have found teachers' unconscious biases are a leading influence in creating these labels for students. Instead, English Language Arts teachers should find ways to eliminate them and promote an inclusive classroom environment. Using representative literature in the classroom, addressing the “why” behind the label, and modeling inclusive language can help to reduce the number of students being labeled “difficult” in the classroom. *The Absolutely True Diary of A Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie features a “difficult” student who is part Indian and chooses to leave the reservation school to go to a white public school. Through this decision, his friends from the reservation feel hurt and betrayed and we see the character battle with his sense of identity. This young adult novel is a great resource for including representative literature in an English Language Arts classroom.

Facilitators: Dr. Lindsay Ellis &  
Dr. Shinian Wu

**Sydney Foreman**  
**'The Reading & Writing**  
**Workshop: Promoting**  
**Strong Readers &**  
**Writers in the**  
**Middle Grades'**

The middle school reading crisis, and its consequences that challenge students' preparedness for high school and the years beyond, is well-documented in research. Educators and administrators face the dilemma of determining how to best promote strong readers and writers who are equipped for success. This paper argues the beneficial impact of the reading and writing workshop in the middle grades and its ability to instill strong comprehension, fluency, and prosody skills during a critical stage for readers. Reading and writing skills are concomitant. When schools promote skilled readers, writing skills follow suit. In an effort to determine how to best prime readers and writers in the middle grades, this paper showcases the benefits of a workshop consisting of mini-lessons, in-class conferences with individualized instruction, and ample reading and writing time.

**Dana Wadkins**  
**'The Power of Comics:**  
**Why Comics & Graphic**  
**Novels Belong in**  
**English Education'**

Although studies have proven that comic books have many educational applications, some English teachers dismiss their worth in the classroom because they believe that comic books are for children and have little educational value. However, my thesis argues that comic books serve as a transformative instructional tool, creating engagement, promoting empathy, and providing an ESL-positive learning experience in English literature classrooms. They are useful pedagogical tools because they offer engaging content, graphics that convey meaning, room for inspiration, and teach empathy by implication, which is not present in the traditional literary canon. Through close analysis of three exemplary works, this essay argues that comic books provide much educational value, which not only keeps students engaged but also promotes empathy and nurtures English Language Learners.







**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 \$100, second-place prizes of \$75, and third-place prizes of \$50 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, 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 entry itself.
- Entries are submitted via the English Department website.

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 (104A STU). Entries are accepted online through the English department website.

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

**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.

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

**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**

Each student must submit:

- An essay of up to 1000 words explaining why the applicant chose to major in English.

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

**Eligibility Requirements**

- 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

**Application Requirements**

Each student must provide answers to the following questions:

- Are you the first person in your immediate family to pursue a college degree (neither parent/guardian(s) has a four-year degree)?
- 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.

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

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

**Eligibility Requirements**

- 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>).
- 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).

**Application Requirements**

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

**Shinian Wu Study  
Abroad Scholarship  
A Scholarship  
Created to Assist  
Students who  
Express Interest in  
Studying Abroad**

**Eligibility Requirements**

- Candidates should be accepted or currently enrolled at GVSU;
- Must be an undergraduate or graduate student in English Studies and have been accepted into one of the faculty-led study abroad programs offered by the English Department.
- Financial need may be considered, as evidenced by filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

**Application Requirements**

Each student must:

- Complete the Shinian Wu Study Abroad Scholarship application

Banuelos, Grace — 15	Wadkins, Dana — 20
Battaglio, Vincent — 17	Welch, Logan — 12
Batty, Ellen — 5	Wessels, Kaylee — 14
Burgess, Eliana — 6	Wolters, Keerstin — 11
Clark, Aeriana — 8	Xenos, Olivia — 19
Coats, Kayla — 4	
Conklin, Makenna — 7	
Delange, Bri — 16	
Demers, Andrew — 16	
Dreese, Alison — 10	
Elian, Catherine — 4	
Foreman, Sydney — 20	
Grant, Myah — 9	
Huey, Travis — 11	
Jacobs, Lauralynn — 9	
Jenkins, Nathan — 15	
Lowery, Nicholas — 6	
Mainhardt, Gabriella — 13	
Massey, Olivia — 17	
McCree, Justin — 7	
Mccully, Ella — 13	
O'Brien, Alexandra — 19	
Rozeboom, Ella — 18	
VanAtta, Natalie — 10	
Vanderband, Madeline — 14	
Vreeland, Riley — 5	