

ODDS IN YOUR FAVOR: TEACHING INFORMATION LITERACY THROUGH DYSTOPIAN FICTION FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Don Latham & Jonathan M. Hollister

School of Information

Florida State University



INFORMATION LITERACY (IL)

- Standards
 - ACRL's *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000)
 - P21's *Framework for 21st Century Learning* (2009), especially "Information, Media and Technology Skills"
- Importance of multiple literacies and context
 - The New London Group's (1996) emphasis on linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and multimodal meanings
 - Situated practice

CHALLENGES OF TEACHING INFORMATION LITERACY

- Difficult to teach without a context
- Often associated with the research paper in English classes
- Students may think they already have the skills—although research by Gross & Latham (2012) suggests that they greatly overestimate their skill levels.
- Wouldn't it be great if learning IL was as popular with young adults as, say, reading dystopian fiction?

POPULARITY OF YA DYSTOPIAN FICTION

- Works like The Hunger Games series, The Maze Runner series, the Divergent series, *Epic*, etc.
- Bleak world mirrors the YA world in which the adults are in control (Miller, 2010).
- Dog-eat-dog environment mirrors the typical high school environment (Miller, 2010).
- Maybe teens are drawn to the game-like aspects of much dystopian fiction, in which skills and wits are required for survival (Latham & Hollister, 2014).

IL = SURVIVAL SKILLS

- Gaming and literacies

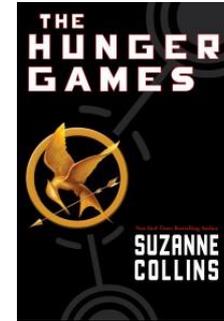
“In my view, in the twenty-first century we need the following—and we need them fast and all at once together: embodied empathy for complex systems; ‘grit’ (passion + persistence); playfulness that leads to innovation; design thinking; collaborations in which groups are smarter than the smartest person in the group; and real understanding that leads to problem solving and not just test passing. These are, to my mind, the true twenty-first century skills.”
(Gee, 2009, p. 4)



Stacking the odds in your favor

THE HUNGER GAMES

SUZANNE COLLINS



- Katniss Everdeen volunteers as tribute, in place of her younger sister, and is forced into a death match against 23 other young adults. Known as the Hunger Games, this annual event is mandatory viewing for the populace of Panem in order to remind them of their powerlessness, instill fear, and ensure obedience to the totalitarian government, the Capitol.
- Both inside and outside of the Arena, Katniss relies on her IL and critical thinking skills for survival:
 - She comes to understand what information her words and actions provide to others across contexts.
 - She learns to interpret signs and codes from her mentor Haymitch with the offering or withholding of resources in the Arena.
 - Upon befriending Rue in the Arena, Katniss learns more about the extent of control of information and media between the districts that the Capitol has as well as information on the status of the remaining combatants in the Arena.

THE MAZE RUNNER

JAMES DASHNER



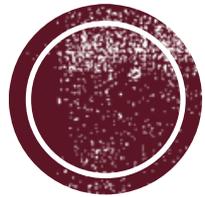
- After being unceremoniously delivered into the Glade without a memory, Thomas joins a group of young men living in the center of a gigantic shifting maze inhabited by ferocious techno-beasts known as Grievers. After the final person, Teresa, is delivered to the Glade, the gates no longer close at night and force Thomas, Teresa, and the others into trying to make their escape before they run out of supplies or, more likely, be killed by the Grievers.
- Each Glader arrives with little or no memory of the past; the Gladers gather and use information in a variety of ways:
 - Thomas voluntarily gets stung by a Griever in order to access the information locked in his memories.
 - Thomas utilizes his telepathic connection with Teresa to share information about their pasts without startling the others.
 - Using information from Teresa and maps created by Minho and the other Runners, Thomas unlocks the code of the Maze.

EPIC

CONOR KOSTICK



- On New Earth everyone plays Epic, a virtual game that determines both real and digital quality of life, education, career path, and is also used by the government to settle disputes and control the population. After Erik's father is sent back into exile, Erik rebukes norms and embodies a new character, a female swashbuckler he names Cindella, and sets off on a risky quest to slay a dragon and rescue his father.
- In order to complete his quest, Erik effectively seeks and uses information both within and outside the game:
 - Erik is a frequent user of the Hope Library to research Epic.
 - Erik spends hours researching and devising a strategy to defeat Inry'aat, the Red Dragon.
 - Erik searches for and barter important information.



STRATEGIES

Opening gateways to information literacy

ANALYZE . . .

- **Characters' IL skills/practices in a particular book**
- **Context(s) in which IL skills/practices occur**
- **Use a particular framework as the basis for the analysis, for example:**
 - **ACRL Standards**
 - **21st Century Skills**

COMPARE . . .

- IL skills/practices of two or more characters in the same book
- IL skills/practices of two or more characters in different books—in the same or different series
- IL skills/practices in different contexts
- IL skills/practices as portrayed in the book and the movie (of *The Hunger Games*, for instance)

REFLECT...

- Ask students to keep an IL skills/practices journal
- Ask them to consider their IL skills/practices in different contexts
- Ask them to compare their IL skills/practices to those of characters in books and/or movies
- Ask them to share their journals and compare their own IL skills/practices with those of their peers

CREATE...

- Ask students to write fan fiction based on their favorite book, illustrating IL skills/practices
- Ask them to write themselves into their favorite book, showcasing their own IL skills/practices
- Ask them to create different contexts in which various characters have to demonstrate IL skills/practices
- Ask them to develop a list of IL skills/practices they would look for if putting together a team in a book (*The Maze Runner*, for instance)
- Ask them to create a game based on demonstrating effective IL skills/practices

SUMMARY

- Teachers and librarians can foster IL awareness and skills by capitalizing on the popularity of dystopian fiction.
- A lot of dystopian fiction depicts IL skills/practices in action.
- Identifying and analyzing these IL skills/practices can also foster close reading, literary analysis, and analytical and persuasive writing skills.

REFERENCES

- Association of College and Research Libraries. (2000). *Information literacy competency standards for higher education*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency>.
- Collins, S. (2008). *The hunger games*. New York: Scholastic.
- Dashner, J. (2009). *The maze runner*. New York: Delacorte.
- Gee, J. P. (2009). Games, learning, and 21st century survival skills. *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*, 2, 3-9.
- Gross, M., & Latham, D. (2012). What's skill got to do with it?: Information literacy skills and self-views of ability among first-year college students. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology*, 63, 574-583.
- Kostick, C. (2004). *Epic*. Dublin: O'Brien Press Ltd.
- Latham, D., & Hollister, J. M. (2014). The games people play: Information and media literacies in The Hunger Games trilogy. *Children's Literature in Education*, 45, 33-46.
- Miller, L. (2010, June 14). Fresh hell: What's behind the boom in dystopian fiction for young people? *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/06/14/fresh-hell-2>.
- New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66, 60-92.
- Partnership for 21st Century Skills. (2009). Information, media and technology skills. *Framework for 21st century learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework/61>.

THANK YOU!

Don Latham

dlatham@fsu.edu

Jonathan M. Hollister

jmh09k@my.fsu.edu

