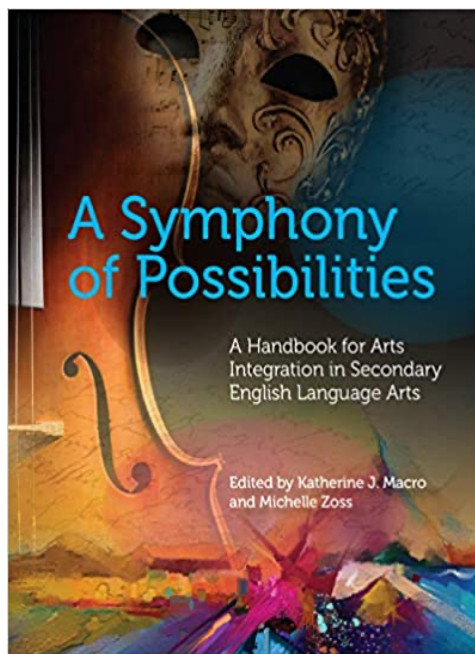


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## ***Review of A Symphony of Possibilities: A Handbook for Arts Integration in Secondary English Language Arts***

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Marco, Katherine J. & Zoss, Michelle (Eds.) (2019). *A symphony of possibilities: A handbook for arts integration in secondary English language arts*. National Council of Teachers of English.

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## Overview

This book is a compendium of resources providing exhibits and templates of arts integration, specifically for secondary English teachers. In individual chapters, authors weave together foundational principles of artistic modalities (including drama, visual art, poetry, and music) with classroom demands in ways that should be accessible to teachers who are beginning to test the waters of arts integration as well as teachers looking to infuse new energy into existing arts integration practices. The book begins with an introduction by the editors of the collection, followed by ten chapters describing various examples of art integration rooted in classroom examples, grouped according to artistic discipline.

## Introduction

Michelle Zoss and Katherine Marco begin this volume on integrating arts into the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom with two descriptive scenes, geographically placed in New York State and Georgia but rhetorically framed as common to secondary ELA classrooms across the United States: scenes where students write compulsorily, silently, for the purpose of standardized testing meant to evaluate students, teachers, schools, and districts. The argument of this book hinges on contrasting students' experiences of reading and writing within a testing culture with the possibilities for hope, joy, relevance, engagement, and meaningful learning that arts integration can provide. The book's rationale is that by supporting ELA teachers in the secondary classroom in the implementation of arts integration, students will experience the English Language Arts in ways that are more meaningful, joyful, and personally relevant, while still meeting standards for reading, writing, and critical thinking.

## Chapter 1: Musical Adaptations and Explorations in English

In this chapter, author Timothy J. Duggan calls upon teachers to “seek ways to develop students' abilities to produce original artistic texts themselves” (p. 1) in response to literature towards the end of activating student creativity while also developing critical, analytical, and interpretive skills.

This chapter outlines the author's M.A.S.T.E.R. framework (Duggan, 2016), proposing six elements that can be used individually or in combination to guide student assignments: mnemonics, adaptations, settings, themes, extensions/explorations, and recital. Then, the author gives detailed examples, including activities, graphic organizers, and scaffolds, for how teachers can implement adaptations and explorations of text through music in the secondary classroom.

Across this chapter, Duggan anticipates common teacher concerns (i.e., broad participation in group work, assessment) and references useful theoretical and practical frameworks.

## Chapter 2: “I am Arkansas”: Social Activism through Protest Songwriting

In this chapter, authors Christian Z. Goering and Amy Matthews describe a specific songwriting unit rooted in the M.A.S.T.E.R. framework detailed in Chapter 1. The authors outline a five-day unit in which a whole class was engaged in writing protest songs. The authors then reflect on the strengths of that unit. The chapter also includes pre- and post-workshop questionnaires used in a process- and experience-focused evaluation.

This chapter is useful in its highly detailed description of process from beginning to end, as well as in its supports and encouragement for teachers who are not personally steeped in musical practices

to introduce those practices in their classrooms. Additionally, this chapter offers a case illustrating how arts can serve as a meaningful expressive vehicle for students to process and communicate emotions, furthering the argument of the book as a whole.

### **Chapter 3: Exploring the Art of Spoken Word Poetry with Students: A Sample Unit**

Author Wendy R. Williams opens this chapter with three vignettes, depicting three adolescent spoken word artists across a spectrum of experience and confidence levels performing their poetry in front of an audience. The author goes on to summarize research findings on spoken word's effectiveness in helping young people connect with literacy practices, as well as findings showing promising results on the efficacy of using spoken word practices in classrooms. The author centers spoken word poetry as a practice that is culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining for students' culture, language, and experience (p. 38). The chapter then outlines basic beats of a unit that could be used with students in a secondary classroom. The beats of the unit take students from a teacher-modeled example, to developing a working definition, to investigating the history of spoken word poetry, then through a writing and performing process that culminates in a poetry open mic and is followed by reflection. The unit outline could be reproduced and adapted in a variety of contexts. The chapter offers forms teachers could use to facilitate peer review and group reflection.

### **Chapter 4: Dadaism, Found Poetry, and Close Reading in English Language Arts**

In this chapter, author Toby Emert translates the Dadaist found poem form for a high school literature classroom with the purpose of giving students an opportunity to engage in close reading and reflection. Rather than following exactly Tristan Tzara's directions for a found poem (which involves taking scissors to a text and selecting the separate words

from a bag at random in order to create a new poem) the author of this chapter describes a procedure in which students annotate a text, then analyze their annotations to find relationships, themes, metaphors, and questions that emerge from this assemblage of their own noticings. In translating Dada randomness and chaos to intentional composition from select annotations, the author foregrounds the potential of Dadaist assemblage and juxtaposition to surface deeper meanings and new perspectives

### **Chapter 5: Integrating Drama: An Embodied Pedagogy**

This chapter lays out three principles of a drama-based pedagogy: "embodiment", "identity", and "multimodality". Katherine J. Marco draws on a wealth of classroom experiences to argue that these principles create a shift in the learning environment, engage students in active learning, and are accessible to teachers of all levels. The author then provides descriptions for facilitating activities centered around each principle and connecting those activities to ELA content, including using the activities as assessments of students' understanding and analysis and as catalysts for creativity in writing. While the activities are well-described, the author agrees that teachers with experience in dramatic arts will find greater ease in facilitating them than will teachers who are newcomers to the practice.

### **Chapter 6: Arts-Based Pedagogy: Exploring Shakespeare Study in the Classroom**

The study of Shakespeare's plays is a stalwart of many ELA curricula. In this chapter, Laura B. Turchi and Pauline Skowron Schmidt relate practices for enhancing students' understanding of literature by putting them in the roles of "players" — creative interpreters of the dramatic work. The authors offer performance approaches for multiple stages of study and purposes, including introducing a play, exploring

power and status, interpreting multimodal productions of the plays, writing, and producing multimodal interpretations of the text. The authors close by considering the power dramatic exploration of Shakespeare could have for adolescents' reflection on their identities and lives.

### **Chapter 7: Exploring the Possibilities and Tensions of Visual Responses to Literature**

Although common in the elementary classroom, invitations to respond to literature with visual art may be dismissed at the secondary level as less serious or worthy of students' and teachers' time. To counter such dismissals, author Alisha M. White reflects on the power and possibility of visual responses to literature in the secondary classroom by relating cases from her classroom teaching experience. The author introduces several affordances of and tensions surrounding visual response to literature, elaborating on or pushing back against each with classroom examples and a detailed description of an approach to visual response. The author concludes the chapter with a list of creative response prompts that could be used with young adult literature, inviting readers of the chapter to iterate on these or even invite additional prompt ideas from students.

### **Chapter 8: Using Artistic Response Strategies Meaningfully in the English Language Arts Classroom**

In this chapter, authors Pamela M. Hartman, Jessica Berg, Brandon Schuler, and Erin Knauer home in on the idea of effective use of artistic response. To do so, they dig into Rosenblatt's (1978) transaction theory and Wilhelm's (2008) extension of that theory into dimensions of response that fall into categories as connective and reflective (both described as common in classrooms), and evocative (responding by engaging with the world of the text). The authors of this chapter make an argument that the evocative

dimension is a vital step that should precede connective and reflective summative assessments. Further, they argue that artistic response is a useful tool to engage in evocative response, while also valuable in its own right as a tool to enhance students' enjoyment of texts.

The authors then describe three examples of what they call strategic artistic response. Each response they describe relates to representing student understanding of characters in a text using various visual techniques: layered character portraits, character illustrations, and customizing a tennis shoe with a character in mind. In their conclusion, the authors state, "Understanding how and why a strategy works is key to its success." (Marco & Zoss, 2019, p. 135) They emphasize, therefore, the importance of rationales and reflections in the design of arts-based responses to literature, in order to understand for oneself and communicate to students the theories underpinning the practice.

### **Chapter 9: Teaching High School English with Drawings and Large-Scale Visual Projects**

In this chapter, the author Michelle Zoss describes high school students responding to texts by creating murals on craft paper hung from classroom walls. The author presents a rich description of how she came to use drawing in the English classroom, first by encouraging her students' marginalia doodles and visual notes, then with having students create large-scale reproductions of the art of ancient South and Central American communities, and eventually in an embodied, participatory recreation of the Greek underworld, complete with offering visitors tokens to secure their passage across the river Styx. While the activities presented in this chapter seem vibrant, intellectually stimulating, and engaging to students, the author describes that she later learned that the administration at her school was not supportive of art in the English classroom. The author describes how she would argue today with unsupportive leadership,

presenting the descriptions in the chapter alongside a litany of research showing all that is learned through collaborative art response to literature: the opportunity for expression, for critical process, for planning and organizing.

### **Chapter 10: Putting the Public in Publication: Guerilla Art in English Language Arts**

In this chapter, author Stephen Goss describes making public art projects *en masse* with students, using repeated forms and images to transform the insides and outsides of school spaces. The work was personally meaningful and presented to public audiences: fellow classmates, other teachers, parents, and community members. Works described include references to popular culture that mattered to students (sneaker design, an image of a boombox from Jay-Z's biography) as well as interactions with canon texts (Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail"). In Goss's hands, a district requirement to post vocabulary words on a wall in a cafeteria becomes an opportunity for students to connect personally with vocabulary words and create an uplifting visual display. In visual and audio media, and by finding public space to present their work, students engaged their personal and collective agency and enhanced their sense of classroom community.

### **Chapter 11: Radical Visions for the Future**

In this final chapter, the editors restate the collective argument behind this collection of approaches to arts integration in the secondary ELA classroom: that arts integration is an effective part of the ELA classroom. They aim this argument at administrators who might balk at the expense of art materials or the investment of time in arts approaches, or who might believe arts integration techniques are well and good for elementary school children, but that the same sense approaches, this book provides a broad, yet not overwhelming, selection of multidisciplinary

of play and value of imagination has no place in the serious realm of secondary school especially when students and administrators are faced with the pressures of high-stakes standardized tests. The classroom examples provided in this book illustrate that arts integration in the secondary ELA classroom can create opportunities for deep meaning-making, community-building, and development of collaborative and organizational skills.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion**

Much of this book's rhetorical argument is aimed at barriers that teachers will face because of high-stakes testing culture and unsupportive administration. An administrator who deems wasteful the cost of markers and the investment of time in students' opportunity to create and places primary importance on students' test scores may not be persuaded by this volume: the value system implicit in such a stance likely rests on a very different set of assumptions than the authors' stance that students' humanity, capacity for critical thought, and room for complexity in assessment and evaluation are vital parts of a radical vision for the future of ELA classrooms. At the same time, it is important that the authors acknowledge the resistance teachers may face when trying to implement the ideas and approaches of this volume, and each chapter in this book is rich in research citations that might persuade a questioning administrator who wants to know that there is grounding to the claims that students will benefit from the opportunity to engage with literature through art, drama, poetry, and music.

To a secondary ELA teacher or a department of teachers already bought in to the value of arts integration, the chapters of this book will provide points of access and inspiration for iteration. To a teacher entirely new to arts-based practices or possibilities. At the same time, it may lack some supports in planning, facilitation, and approaches to

critique for teachers who have no experience in producing or participating in music, drama, or art. Teachers in need of such support might find it by approaching the activities in this book as part of a reflective team or learning community.

The subtitle of this book proclaims it to be a “handbook,” suggesting it might serve as a sort of operator’s manual for the teacher embarking upon arts integration. Across the varied chapters, common points of guidance include the importance of fitting a text to a task, having students to produce reflective statements as a tool of both assessment and encouraging metacognition, and inviting students to connect personally with texts through the arts. Including a chapter or resource that synthesizes the disparate approaches to these vital issues contained across the chapters might enhance this book’s function as the kind of at-the-ready handbook a teacher often reaches for when developing a new project or idea. Still, this text provides vivid, caring descriptions of classrooms many teachers aspire to have: ones where students joyfully and curiously engage with literature and produce original texts of their own.

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