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# Writing in Other People's Worlds: Two Students Repurposing Extracurricular Fan Fiction Writing to Fulfill Curricular Assignments

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Writing in Other People's Worlds: Two Students  
Repurposing Extracurricular Fan Fiction Writing  
to Fulfill Curricular Assignments

Alison Carol Blackburn

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Writing in Other People's Worlds: Two Students Repurposing Extracurricular Fan Fiction Writing to Fulfill Curricular Assignments

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Through interviews and writing sample analysis of two secondary students who are fan fiction writers, this article examines the tensions between curricular writing and extracurricular fan fiction writing. This study finds students have rich extracurricular writing lives, and they repurpose familiar practices from fan fiction writing for the classroom. This study further discusses the role of genre in effective repurposing. This study argues students who develop genre awareness repurpose their extracurricular writing more effectively to fulfill curricular assignments.

Keywords: Extracurricular Literacies, Fan Fiction, Repurposing, Genre

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Writing in Other People's Worlds: Two Students Repurposing Extracurricular Fan Fiction  
Writing to Fulfill Curricular Assignments

When Mary (a pseudonym) feels frustrated with her fan fiction writing, she goes online to a message board called *Unsent Letters* to vent her frustrations to other writers who offer comfort and support. Through this website, she reconnects with the people who are waiting for the next installment of her *How to Train Your Dragon* fan fiction, and they help her work through the writing process. Most days Mary hurries through her assignments in architecture and technology classes, which are both in computer labs, because once done, she is given free time which she uses to write. In the same school, Tate (a pseudonym) reports spending his in-class reading time writing *Monk* episodes, and he writes more when he goes home after school. Tate enjoyed the time he spent together with his sister watching the television series, and now he wants to write more about the show. Both students are writing fan fiction, which is the “creation of new narratives by fans using the character, plot, setting, or other aspects of an existing media property” (Barnes 70). Tate and Mary are bringing their extracurricular literacies to class with them. Not only do these extracurricular literacies affect the way they write in school, but they capture the students’ imagination and attention during class time as well as after the final bell has sounded.

Over the past forty years there has been significant research into the extracurricular literacy activities of students. Researchers such as Street, Brandt, Roozen, and Mahiri and Sablo, have all studied extracurricular literacy activities that inform students’ attitudes and behaviors both inside and outside of school. These studies indicate students are subject to social and contextual factors that affect their literate development. Furthermore, educational researchers recognize the need to bridge the gap between extracurricular and curricular literacies, suggesting

that these out-of-school experiences can complement curricular learning (Hagood, Alvermann, Heron-Hruby).

Parallel to these studies, discourse communities (Swales), fan communities (Black), and fan fiction writing (Jenkins) have become the subject of increasing academic inquiry. And still others have addressed the interplay between extracurricular literacies and curricular engagement (Hagood et al, Roozen). Researchers have developed new theories about fan fiction and other technology-mediated, youth-led communication practices that may inform student identities and can also inform pedagogical approaches for teachers (Black, Barnes). Developing theories of genre may help shed light on how some students' extracurricular writing inform their curricular experiences. Additionally, some education research argues that teachers should help students connect their school writing with real life situations and write in genres and styles that respond to social context (Dean).

The interplay between extracurricular and curricular writing and their impact on students' literacy development merits continued study as there is still much that can be done to more fully connect the rich extracurricular writing lives of students to curricular instruction. The developing field of fan studies and the growing field of extracurricular literacy research can be enhanced by using theories of genre as a heuristic for understanding the social actions students are making when they write in different genres. Genre researchers like Charles Bazerman, Amy Devitt, and Paul Prior and Jody Shipka theorize genres as more than just text types but as responses to the recurring needs of similar social experiences. Bazerman explains genres are speech acts carried out in patterned, typical, and therefore intelligible textual forms (368).

Extracurricular literacies and genre studies intersect as a point of inquiry in this study as I explore the curricular and extracurricular writing experiences of two high school students who

write fan fiction outside of school. Through a series of semi-structured interviews, observations, and writing sample analyses, I identify instances of these students repurposing what they know about writing fan fiction--a familiar extracurricular genre—to answer the expectations of writing assignments—unfamiliar curricular genres. The study participants, Tate and Mary, both write fan fiction outside of school, but feel less engaged with in-school writing. However, when the right conditions are met, they repurpose what they have learned through writing fan fiction to meet curricular expectations and successfully complete school assignments. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the differences between the students' curricular and extracurricular literacy experiences?
2. How are Tate and Mary repurposing fan fiction for curricular use?
3. How do these students use their knowledge of the fan fiction genre to explore unfamiliar writing assignments?

#### REPURPOSING, POACHING, AND GENRE THEORIES

Although curricular and extracurricular writing may seem like exclusive activities, recent research has highlighted areas of overlap. Students are reusing ideas, formats, and connections developed through writing fan fiction across contexts. Kevin Roozen uses the term “intertext” to show how a student repurposes certain practices as she fulfills curricular writing assignments. Sociocultural theorists have long understood text as a product of experience and context, but Roozen’s study seeks out specific examples of a student repurposing tools she has developed in extracurricular contexts for curricular purposes. Roozen’s intertext approach is particularly helpful in understanding the relationship between Tate’s and Mary’s fan fiction and curricular writing.

Given the rise of fan fiction writing, especially among younger students, it is essential to consider how extracurricular writing is informing curricular writing. Henry Jenkins' pioneering research on fan fiction overlaps with Roozen's in terms of understanding the relationship between curricular and extracurricular writing. In one of the foundational texts on fan studies, Henry Jenkins uses a poaching metaphor to describe fan fiction writers. He claims, "Like the poachers of old, fans operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness" (28). However, he claims, fans poach from existing media properties for usable materials to supplement their paucity of means when it comes to cultural production. Fan fiction studies then celebrates the use of existing media properties in the creation of new non-commercial productions. Fan studies may use the idea of poaching to delve into the economic means of production, but the idea of poaching is helpful when we think of what fan fiction writers are doing as they repurpose aspects of fan fiction as they write in different contexts. Many studies show that when a writer lacks a skill or disciplinary knowledge necessary to complete a writing task, they poach from existing texts (Roozen, McCarthy, Prior and Shipka). In writing studies, the idea of poaching can be called repurposing, or "the reuse and transformation of some text/semiotic object" (Prior and Shipka 17).

If fan fiction scholarship is built upon a poaching metaphor, then genre scholarship might be built upon the metaphor of place. In "The Life of Genre, the Life in the Classroom," Charles Bazerman claims "[Genres] are locations within which meaning is constructed" (19). In this study, I situate my thoughts about the repurposing of fan fiction in theories of genre. Bazerman's "Speech Acts, Genres and Activity Systems" can be used to understand repurposing among student fan fiction writers. Bazerman argues genres can do things in the real world and suggests that genres (such as memos) create actual change by outlining new rules or expectations. When



certain felicity conditions are met, writing makes new social facts through genres which are “recognizable, self-reinforcing forms of communication” (372). Bazerman explains genres are “social facts about the kinds of speech acts people can make and the ways they can make them” (373). Conceiving of fan fiction writers writing in the various fan fiction genres reveals something about the kinds of speech acts fan fiction writers can make and how they can make them.

The fan fiction writers in this study are adept at using specific speech acts in certain ways. Bazerman points out that one of the methodological dilemmas of identifying speech acts in written texts is making “sense out of the complexity, indeterminacy, and contextual multiplicity a text presents us with.” Furthermore, Bazerman calls for more examination of texts to show how genre helps us overcome these dilemmas (376). In response to Bazerman’s call, this study highlights instances of fan fiction writers repurposing fan fiction to address the complexity, indeterminacy, and contextual multiplicity they face as they write in a curricular setting. If genre organizes human behavior in a specific way, then the genre of fan fiction can be shown to organize students’ behavior in relation to many writing tasks.

Studying instances of repurposing fan fiction for curricular assignments is valuable for many reasons. First, this study has pedagogical implications because it sheds light on the power of some genres to change the literacy experiences of student writers by changing both student perceptions and behaviors in relation to writing. Second, viewing fan fiction as an extracurricular writing practice responds to Bazerman’s call to increase genre research. It also responds to Black’s call for more academic investigation into fan fiction. Finally, studying repurposing practices adds to the existing body of work exposing the complex connections between extracurricular and curricular literacies.

## METHOD

### *Participants and Setting*

The study took place at Canyon Bridge High School (a pseudonym). The school is a Title one school with a large ESL and ELL population and about 45 percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch. The school reports test scores and graduation rates that are comparable with the national average. The aging school building is set to be demolished and rebuilt in the next few years, but the area in which both students whom I study live is generally safe. Both students and their parents provided consent to be interviewed and observed in relation to their writing practices.

I met the first participant, Tate, a sixteen-year-old male, while working as a research assistant in one of his classes. Tate could be described as a jock, as his interests were all steeped in sports, especially football, basketball, and weightlifting. Tate has two older brothers and an older sister. He is the youngest child in his family and lives at home with his parents and one brother. His family is active in their community and church, and Tate feels connected to the area and knows many of his teachers as neighbors or fellow church members. During one interview, I asked Tate to narrate what he does when he is supposed to be reading in class. I expected him to respond that he picks up a book and pretends to be reading while actually daydreaming, or he just puts his head down and sleeps. His actual answer, though, was that he would usually take out some paper and write stories. He said, “Last semester I had this class that was just like studies but with business. It was a dumb class. I would get so sick of reading, so I would just take out my notebook and write.”

Visualizing Tate, a football-playing sports fanatic, writing “stories” seemed totally out of character. Tate’s grades weren’t very good and his interviews exposed attitudes about reading

that may have been even worse, but fan fiction writing, I was soon to find out, was playing a large part in his life. Tate explained that he liked to write scripts for his favorite television show, *Monk*. While he hadn't heard the term "fan fiction," and he hadn't ever written for an online fan fiction community, Tate wrote new scripts that developed the backgrounds of some of the characters from the show. As I observed Tate in his classroom throughout the semester, I could see that he brought flair and characterization to his curricular writing that many of his peers did not. Tate particularly excelled in writing character descriptions in class, which I soon learned was one skill he used a lot when writing fan fiction. With a new focus, I asked Tate if I could ask him some additional questions about his fan fiction writing.

When I shared my interest in chronicling fan fiction writers with some faculty at the school, I was pointed to another fan fiction writer, Mary. Mary is a sixteen-year-old female student who lives with her mother and step-father. She is the oldest child in her family and has two younger half-brothers and a younger half-sister. Mary has mild Asperger Syndrome and says she uses writing to understand social situations that are challenging to her because of her condition. She gets good grades, but she still claims to dislike school as she often feels her teachers do not care about her or her interests. Mary is actively involved in online "fandoms" or fan fiction writing communities as well as an online novel writing program. Mary's experience writing fan fiction is more structured than Tate's experiences because she is involved in many online writing groups and has friends that write fan fiction as well. She is very articulate about the role writing plays in her extracurricular life and was excited to share her fan fiction writing samples with me.

### *Data Collection*

I conducted three interviews with Tate and obtained one sample of his fan fiction writing. I collected three samples of Tate's curricular writing because I was working in his class and had access to his assignments, and I observed him in class several times. Tate's interviews took place in the principal's office or his teacher's office at his high school.

Shortly after beginning my work with Tate, I began interviewing Mary. I interviewed her twice, collected two fan fiction writing samples, and observed her in class twice. I did not collect any samples of Mary's curricular writing because I wasn't working in her classroom. Therefore, any analysis about her schoolwork is based solely on the school experiences Mary discussed during her interviews. Mary's interviews took place before classes in the school's library.

The first interview I had with each of the students was about his or her personal life, living situation, literacy history, interests, friendships, and curricular writing experiences. The second interview focused almost solely on their fan fiction writing, the decisions they made while writing, their writing values, and their publishing venues. Because the interviews took place at their school during busy periods of the day, they were often interrupted by announcements or friends walking past, so their interviews, at times, lack focus and clarity, and their answers may not have been as in-depth as they could have been if the interviews had taken place in a different location. Each interview was about twenty to thirty minutes long. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix A.

### Analysis

After collecting writing samples, observing the students in the classroom, and conducting interviews with the study participants, I examined the interview transcripts and my own observational notes for instances of Tate and Mary repurposing fan fiction to fulfill curricular assignments. Through a thematic analysis of the data, I identified several instances of the

participants repurposing their fan fiction skill set as they attempted to complete their curricular assignments.

To analyze the data, I chose a Thematic Analysis method because it's a rigorous and systematic method for understanding themes or patterns in research. The method, which Braun and Clark pose is an "accessible and theoretically flexible approach," is applicable to writing studies as it does not seek to build specific theories but to understand the themes that are relevant to the data (77). Using this approach, I coded for the following items: 1) descriptions about personal life, 2) curricular writing descriptions, 3) fan fiction writing descriptions, 4) perceptions of self as a writer, and 5) perceptions of self as a student. Additionally, I read their fan fiction writing samples and Tate's curricular writing samples to identify places where the students applied the concepts or ideas they described in their interviews.

Mary's coded transcripts revealed a theme about her perceptions of herself as a student. When Mary writes in school, she doesn't see her writing offering meaning to an audience or serving a purpose. Several times in her interviews she claims that her school writing doesn't matter to anyone. Conversely, almost every time she talks about fan fiction writing, she claims that her writing is meaningful and important to an audience. Similarly, Tate's transcript reveals words like "boring" and "stupid" when he talks about his curricular writing, but he uses words like "interesting" and "inspired" when he talks about fan fiction writing. Ultimately, three themes from their interviews were clear: 1) the students' perceptions of themselves as writers is different according to context; 2) they use the same strategies and techniques that we see in their fan fiction to address unfamiliar writing tasks, and 3) when the students understood genre expectations, their writing was more effective for the situation.

## FINDINGS

In this section, I discuss the themes from the analysis. First, Tate and Mary both have rich extracurricular writing lives. Their writing is shaped and influenced by audiences, and they write fan fiction because they can perceive of their writing answering a need of a certain audience. Second, because Tate and Mary are so familiar with and comfortable writing fan fiction, they repurpose those familiar practices in a curricular setting with varying levels of success. Finally, we see that genre plays an important role as Tate and Mary repurpose certain habits and preferences from their fan fiction writing. When they face new writing tasks, they go to a familiar place or genre, and that genre influences the way they see and engage with new writing environments.

#### *The Participants Literacy Experiences Differ According to Context*

The first finding of this study is that Tate and Mary have different perceptions of themselves as writers in an extracurricular setting than they do in a school setting. Tate perceives of a purpose for his extracurricular writing that he can't seem to find in relation to his school assignments. Similarly, when Mary writes fan fiction, she sees her writing fulfilling the needs of an audience, but when she writes to fulfill an assignment, she fails to conceive of an audience who cares about her writing.

Tate's first foray into the fan fiction world happened when he was given a notebook for Christmas, and his family encouraged him to write his thoughts or experiences like a journal. He described wondering how he would fill the pages until, after watching a *Monk* episode, he decided to write a similar story—or fan fiction. Tate's imagination was focused on the *Monk* series because he watched all the episodes with his sister while she was on break from school. In Tate's interviews, he described his relationship with his family as a motivating factor in the way he viewed most literacy activities. He described reading certain types of books because his

father or other family members valued those genres. His family shaped the way he engaged with literacy, and they have also shaped his interest in fan fiction by encouraging him to write. Tate wanted to fill the notebook he was given, he wanted to continue the experience he had watching *Monk* episodes with his sister, and he wanted to incorporate some of his family's favorites—like the Detroit Lions—into the stories he writes and shares with his family. When Tate talked about his extracurricular writing, he described writing with a purpose. He was willing to research and revise because he was motivated by interest in the content, and he could perceive of his writing meaning something to those he cares most about.

One exchange during an interview with Tate shows that he doesn't view curricular writing the same way he sees his extracurricular writing. When I asked him about what kind of writing he does in school, he said, "Well, my classes are harder this year so I don't have as much time to write." I pressed him further and asked him if his harder classes required him to write more. He replied, "[If] I don't have homework I [can] just bust out a paper and start writing." Later he said, "[I write] when I'm bored or something." After being questioned about his curricular writing several times, Tate finally described writing in school when he said, "I sometimes have to write in a journal or about my memories." Tate's interview suggests he labels his fan fiction as writing, but calls his curricular writing by different names. He described harder classes as a barrier to writing, and he explained writing is something he does when there aren't other things (like homework) to do, and sometimes, he finally realized, he did some personal writing in school. Because Tate claimed he could write when he is less busy with schoolwork, we see his perceptions about himself as a writer and his perceptions of the act of writing differ according to context. Furthermore, Tate's explanation about being motivated to change *Monk* episodes or write new ones makes it clear that when his interest and imagination were engaged,

he perceived of a purpose for his extracurricular writing. His perceptions of what was happening in school and what was happening on his own were at odds when it comes to his writerly identity.

Mary's writerly identity also varies by context. When Mary explained the value of writing fan fiction, she described being part of an online community. She wrote because it mattered to her, and there is a discourse community interested in her texts. She explained, "For me there's this community aspect of everyone who is like me who likes this stuff and likes writing stories who can kind of congregate and we can all share our stories. And there's this kind of community element to it." In other words, her fan fiction writing was meaningful because she conceived of an audience invested in her writing. In other parts of the interview, she explained the value of sharing her writing and getting feedback during the composing process (something students who write in school don't always get until the final draft), and she explained her writing is important to her online writing community as well. Mary valued writing for an audience of her peers instead of just writing what she thinks a teacher wants to hear.

Conversely, when I asked Mary to tell me about the writing she does in school, she answered that she likes to write essays that require argument and analysis but that she hated research papers. I asked her if she felt research papers didn't require argument and analysis to which she replied, "Well, no, I do like analysis and to give my two cents, but with research papers, it's like 'here look everyone knows this thing but reiterate it in fifteen pages for the rest of the class because nobody actually cares what you're talking about and they're all asleep.'" Mary expressed the belief that her school assignments don't have an involved audience. She stated several times during her interview she felt her curricular writing doesn't matter to anyone.



When describing her perceptions of curricular writing assignments, Mary uses the terms “a hoop to jump through” or explains it’s an activity to “spew back” what has been learned in class.

*Students Repurpose Extracurricular Writing with Varying Results*

Tate and Mary’s writerly identities differ by context, and they both draw upon the fan fiction genre as they attempt to complete complex and indeterminate writing tasks in the classroom. This section shows instances of the students repurposing elements of their fan fiction writing to address new and confusing writing tasks with varying levels of success. It will discuss an instance when Tate repurposed writing a character backstory for one assignment and was praised, but, when he used the same skill for another assignment, he received a poor grade. Similarly, Mary repurposed her ability to write for an audience in a classroom setting, but when she couldn’t perceive of an interested and invested audience, her assignment didn’t meet the mark.

In his interview, Tate described writing a backstory about a *Monk* character called “Dale the Whale” that would change the audience’s perception about the villain. To create this character, he had to engage in meaningful, extended research to describe the character with concrete details, and show fans that “Dale the Whale” wasn’t always the way the existing *Monk* episodes portray him. When Tate provided a writing sample for the study, he submitted a scene where “Dale the Whale” is a young man with a promising future, a creation which questions the motivations of *Monk*’s villain.

During one classroom observation, I saw Tate repurposing his characterization skills to fulfill a curricular assignment. Tate’s class was assigned to research and write about someone from a medieval social class. After the students drew a social rank from a hat, they were assigned to research the life of a person of that rank and write a one-page report on their findings. Tate

was assigned to write about the life of a knight. Instead of developing something that would fit into the report genre, Tate developed a scene about a knight. He used his understanding of character development from his fan fiction, which is an instance of his fan fiction writing being repurposed to fulfill a curricular writing assignment. For the assignment, he wrote:

Today was not simple. All of us needed to train for war and combat. I'm good at all of it but horse riding. I'm horrible at riding, but I have to keep trying because without it they would not let me in....In the middle of my horse training, I specifically got summoned to the king.

Although Tate had been assigned to write a report about a knight, he wrote a scene about a knight learning to ride a horse. Though Tate's teacher had asked for a report, she left enthusiastic comments about the characterization Tate turned in, and she praised the detail of the horse riding struggle. Tate created a character to report upon the life of a knight, and the teacher praised his efforts because the informal nature of the assignment allowed him to write whatever he wanted to describe what he found through research. By repurposing his fan fiction writing, Tate addressed a complex task of researching, synthesizing, and presenting information in an interesting and informative manner, all of which used skills Tate developed writing fan fiction.

While Tate successfully repurposed his character development skills to address the complexity of reporting about a knight, when he faced another unfamiliar writing task, he repurposed the same skill but experienced different results. Tate explained a less successful book report assignment during an interview. He said that he was supposed to write about the book *Unstoppable*, which is a book about a football player who has cancer. Instead of reporting on the book, however, Tate wrote a fan fiction piece about the main character in the book. Although the knight characterization received praise, Tate expressed surprised at the poor grade he got on the

book report. He said, “Maybe [that teacher] doesn’t like sports.” Whether or not the genre expectations were explained to him, Tate didn’t see how different writing situations require different genre approaches. He attributed his poor grade to the teacher’s personal preferences instead of recognizing he didn’t fulfill the genre requirements for the assignment.

Similarly, Mary had mixed results repurposing her fan fiction writing skills. Fan fiction appeals to Mary because she likes writing for an audience. She explained that one of the fan fiction writing samples she submitted for this study was written to subvert some clichés that had developed within her fan fiction community. In response to what she perceived of as a need in the fan fiction community, she wrote a piece with the intention of subverting a familiar fan fiction plot line. She describes her choices this way: “I started the story in a different point in the movie so the point of divergence happens earlier in the movie and the outcome of events is drastically different. I’ve had all sorts of people commenting on how original it is, and how it’s a nice break....” Mary focused her writing on audience needs, and made conscious choices about subverting clichés and appealing to an audience by giving them a new take on an old topic. Mary’s interview and fan fiction writing sample show her ability to write with purpose and for an audience.

Writing for an audience is one thing that makes Mary interested in fan fiction. When writing fan fiction, Mary perceives that her writing has value to a community. Her ability to write for a specific audience was repurposed when she wrote an argumentative essay in one of her school classes. She described the assignment this way:

It was an argumentative paper, but it was also a research paper about the ‘Free Tillicum’ whale crisis thing. So, I watched *Blackfish* and I put together a really comprehensive argument that was several pages long.... I remember really loving this assignment...and

looking at it and being so proud that I had put together such a good argument, that I was going to convince people and I have. When people talk to me about *Blackfish*, I pull out my phone and I pull up that article and I show it to them. And they read it and usually by the end they're like, "Oh, ok. I understand now. I get it now."

Mary repurposed the same audience-centered approach she used in fan fiction to write an argumentative research paper in school. She experienced success as a student when she repurposed her ability to write for an audience.

Like Tate, Mary has also had poor experiences attempting to repurpose fan fiction for curricular purposes. When I asked her to describe a curricular assignment that didn't go well, Mary described an essay she was assigned to write about a novel she read in class. She states, "It was one of those rigged assignments with crappy prompts. It was something about 'sarcasm in the book' or what not. I was like, this isn't a real prompt." I asked her why she felt it wasn't real to which she replied, "It was the way it was phrased. I had to go to my teacher and ask, 'what does this mean? What are you looking for?' And I wrote the paper and I completely BS-ed it because I did not care. I got a horrible grade on it." Mary couldn't conceive of her teacher's expectations or an audience that would read her essay. Her claim that the prompt wasn't a "real" prompt, highlights her inability to determine which writing skills or strategies could be repurposed to meet the needs of the situation. Although Mary had been able to successfully repurpose fan fiction skills for school assignments before, when she failed to see the purpose of a text, she expressed frustration with her ability to fulfill the assignment. Additionally, when she did recognize her teacher as her audience, Mary asked the teacher what she wanted from the prompt. Ultimately, Mary couldn't perceive of how to write the paper to meet audience expectations, so she "BS-ed" it. Mary's perception of the social action of a text in a community

plays into her ability to repurpose. When Mary perceived of her text doing something in a community like convincing an audience to take a stance on whale captivity, she could successfully repurpose fan fiction writing skills, but it was much harder for her to bring her writing skills to bear when she failed to see the purpose or audience for the literary analysis text.

### *Genre Awareness Facilitates Good Repurposing*

The final finding is that when students are aware of genre expectations, they repurpose more effectively. When Mary practiced writing in a new genre and conceived of that genre fulfilling the needs of an audience, she repurposed her writing abilities to meet the task. When Tate's assignment aligned with his ability to write character backstories, he also effectively repurposed his fan fiction skills for the classroom.

One theme from Mary's interviews was that audience and purpose were motivating factors for writing fan fiction. She said, "For me there's this community aspect of everyone who is like me who likes this stuff and likes writing stories who can kind of congregate and we can all share our stories. And there's this kind of community element to it." Mary's fan fiction community or her audience was a guide for her texts. She understood the purpose of her writing, and the audience that would read it. She also understood what the audience expected from a text because of her relationship to the community.

Similarly, when Mary understood genre expectations in relation to an assignment, Mary successfully repurposed her fan fiction skills for classroom use. In the last section, I discussed one writing assignment that went well for Mary. When she talked about good school assignments, one theme that emerged was that she could understand the genre expectations. She explained one teacher gave them different prompts and guided them to choose one that would hold their interest throughout the research process. Then, Mary explained, the teacher showed the

students the argumentative essay structure, and they practiced the genre on several small assignments before they attempted the more extended version. Mary said, “She kind of helped walk us through the different, finer points of argument writing.” Furthermore, Mary’s teacher helped the students understand that their writing may affect the opinions and behaviors of audiences. When Mary’s teacher helped her understand a new genre, it facilitated Mary’s ability to repurpose strategies appropriate for the new discursive landscape. Mary’s curricular writing in this successful instance shows that when she was aware of genre expectations, she could perceive of a text doing something within a community.

Tate was also successful when he repurposed the right skills for the right genre. Tate’s transcripts reveal he usually goes to the same place or genre when he is faced with a writing task. For instance, in the same class when he wrote a fan fiction piece for a book report, he wrote a short story for a creative writing assignment. In the short story, like most of Tate’s stories, he made up a personal history for a current NFL player. Tate’s tale showed the player growing up without a father because the father had died in an accident in a steel mill in Pittsburgh. The story, another instance of character development, fulfilled the genre expectations for the short story assignment and he got a good grade. This time, instead of assigning blame for a poor grade on the teacher not liking sports, Tate explained that his teacher praised him, and asked him if the story he had written was true. Almost every time Tate wrote something or explained writing something during our time together, he had invented a character backstory. Sometimes, usually fortuitously, his favored genre netted him a good grade. These instances show Tate’s lack of genre awareness. When a curricular assignment aligned with his habit of writing character backstories, he was successful at repurposing his fan fiction writing for classroom use. However, whether a teacher taught genre or not, Tate’s unawareness at times led to unsatisfactory school

assignments. Therefore, when his most familiar genre aligned with what was happening in school, he was successful at repurposing, but he was unable to apply the skills he had developed writing fan fiction in a way that fit with new and unfamiliar genres.

Both Tate and Mary repurposed their fan fiction writing skills in the classroom, but their repurposing was not always successful. When they wrote fan fiction, they were both able to understand the purpose and audience for a genre. However, when faced with an unfamiliar rhetorical situation, the students explored the new situation through a familiar genre. When a teacher helped Mary examine the expectations of a new genre, she was able to successfully repurpose her skills in a new setting. Tate, however, only experienced successful writing experiences in school when the teacher accepted his favored genre. Ultimately, repurposing works for some assignments but not others, but the students kept trying to repurpose their fan fiction writing when they lacked knowledge of another approach.

#### DISCUSSION: UNDERSTANDING AND REPURPOSING GENRES

This study reiterates many existing findings from previous writing studies about extracurricular literacies, repurposing, and fan fiction. In this section, I contextualize the findings in this existing research, and because genre played an important role in student repurposing, this section will highlight genre's role in repurposing extracurricular literacies.

##### *Genre's Role in Students' Repurposing Extracurricular Literacies*

Students should understand genre both to successfully repurpose writing skills and to better access the skills and strategies a writing situation requires. Genre plays a powerful role in a student's ability to successfully repurpose extracurricular writing skills. Mary is aware that she uses existing fictional worlds to mitigate the indeterminacy of a setting or a plot line in her fan fiction writing, but she hasn't learned different curricular genres can provide that same short cut

for the writing she does in school. When she struggled on a writing assignment and asked her teacher “what does this mean? What are you looking for?” it feels as if she was asking for access to the strategies, choices, and cultural expectations that could come from better understanding different genres, especially curricular genres, and the audiences that read them. Like genres in general, fan fiction genres provide an easy inroad to an audience’s expectations and the purposes of a text. Mary explained one reason she likes writing fan fiction is that, “We get to have these stories that we can work out with characters that are already developed—worlds that are already built.” Instruction into genre expectations can provide this same structure for students. Amy J. Devitt writes, “In simple terms, genres become what they are because writers faced with similar writing tasks (‘recurrent situations’) make similar strategic choices (‘rhetorical actions’)” (146). Understanding genre is like understanding the setting for fan fiction writing: or, as Mary claims, “It’s like writing without having to do the hard part.” Knowing the features of a new genre provides the same structure Mary values when writing fan fiction. It gives her access to choices about what can happen in a theoretical place.

Students should be connecting what they are learning in school with their extracurricular literacies to be more confident, motivated writers in the classroom. Genre scholar Charles Bazerman, explains, “When we travel to new communicative domains, we construct our perception of them beginning with the forms we know. Even our motives and desire to participate in what the new landscape appears to start from motives and desires framed in earlier landscapes” (19). Tate and Mary’s participation in new discursive landscapes was based upon a previous writing landscape. When Tate’s knight characterization was met with praise and when Mary’s whale argument affected her friends’ opinions on the issue, they recognized their writing as useful and valuable to an audience. Education scholars Curwood, Magnifico, and Lammers



claim, “Young people who feel confident in their abilities are much more motivated than their peers in terms of their effort, persistence, and behavior” (677). When the students felt confident because they understood the audience and purpose of a genre, they felt motivated to engage in curricular assignments.

Furthermore, students should use their familiarity with extracurricular genres to explore new curricular assignments. Bazerman explains, “Genres are...the guideposts we use to explore the unfamiliar.” One guidepost Mary used to explore an unfamiliar context was to look at an audience. When Mary couldn’t conceive of an audience for the literary analysis paper, she felt like her teacher had given her a “rigged prompt.” Conversely, when Mary perceived of an audience for her argumentative essay, she was motivated and involved. Curwood, Magnifico, and Lammers suggest, “By actively participating in affinity spaces around a shared passion, young people can easily access an authentic audience who reads, responds to, and even critiques their written work” (677). Because Mary had written in online spaces with involved audiences in the past, her motivations to participate in school writing were informed by these past experiences. When certain conditions were met—like an understanding of genre, audience, and purpose—Mary was motivated to engage the new task. Genre theorist Amy J. Devitt claims, “When teachers make students aware of genres as rhetorical, they give them access to strategies and choices as well as cultural expectations. Genres make rhetoric visible” (146). Mary’s successful argumentative essay shows that when her teacher made her aware of genre, she could see the strategies needed for the situation and make effective rhetorical choices. Conversely, her less successful repurposing example shows that when she wasn’t aware of the genre expectations, she failed to repurpose her fan fiction skill set effectively.

Conceiving of genre expectations will help students with successful repurposing. Bazerman explained, “In our role as teachers, we constantly welcome strangers into the discursive landscape we value. But...students bring with them their own landscape of familiar communicative places and desires” (1). If we apply Bazerman’s metaphor to Mary and Tate as they enter the discursive landscapes in the classroom, their participation in these landscapes was influenced by their fan fiction writing—their discursive pasts and preferences. This study shows fan fiction (a past discursive landscape) informed Tate and Mary’s interaction with curricular genres (new discursive landscapes). Conceiving, as Bazerman does, of genre as a place shows us that Tate goes to the same place to deal with the complexity and indeterminacy new writing assignments require. When Tate was supposed to write a book report about *Unstoppable* or about a knight, he turned in a character backstory piece which netted mixed results in the classroom. When unable to easily determine expectations, Tate goes to a familiar genre and repurposes what he knows works in that place to attempt writing in a different context. In the successful instances of repurposing, Tate and Mary’s curricular writing either aligned with fan fiction writing, or helped them see those skills could be used in new contexts. Conversely, when the students weren’t successful in repurposing, they expressed confusion about the assignment expectations. Therefore, when students understand the expectations of the new genre, they are more likely to successfully repurpose what they know from extracurricular genres.

### *Genre’s Role in Effective Writing Instruction*

Both students could have benefitted from more genre instruction and more guidance into the genre expectations associated with curricular work. When teachers help students understand genre, they unlock the power for students to understand how writing responds to certain situations and help the students pick the strategies that will be most appropriate for the situation.

Mary and Tate's engagement in school writing assignments depended on the way the teachers presented new genres and set up curricular assignments. The students in this study lead rich extracurricular lives and they repurpose elements from their extracurricular lives for curricular purposes, but that repurposing could be more successful if they were more attuned to different genre expectations, which may indicate a need to teach different genres more explicitly in the classroom. Mary felt prepared to write an argumentative essay because her teacher helped her understand and develop experience with the new genre. However, Tate continued to write character backstories instead of adhering to new genre guidelines because he had yet to learn the rhetorical nature of genre. The students' grades were affected by their inability to write in different genres, but they lacked understanding and instruction in those different genres.

Teachers should be aware of repurposing and help students see instances of successful and less successful repurposing. As Roozen proposes in "Tracing Trajectories," students shouldn't be expected to replace all of the habits and strategies they have developed in extracurricular capacities but should be encouraged to adapt those skills when needed, and begin developing new skills that will work in new discursive domains. For instance, Jennifer Barnes' fan fiction research, which claims imagination continues after a narrative ends, helps explain Tate's fan fiction writing experience. Tate explained that when he was done watching *Monk* episodes, he couldn't stop thinking about the characters. His imagination continued to play with the narrative despite the end to the series. Barnes argues, "The analysis of fan fiction may provide a window into the ways in which an audience can 'play' with a narrative" (70). Tate's desire to imagine character backstories informed his perceptions of curricular writing, and a savvy teacher who understood the power of extracurricular literacies could have guided his repurposing, and helped him see how this past discursive landscape continued to inform his

writing decisions even in a classroom. When Tate couldn't determine an assignment's expectations, he repurposed his fan fiction experience, creating character backstories because his imagination continued to be engaged with extracurricular stories and experiences. Teachers who are aware of student repurposing can help their students identify instances of successful repurposing in a way that will better be able to harness the imaginative power of their students.

Teachers who helped students understand genre affected the perception and behaviors of the student writers. When the students understood the genre, audience, and purpose of a writing task, they were able to bring their extracurricular writing skills and experiences into the classroom. The intent of this study is not to suggest that teachers begin assigning fan fiction writing or otherwise co-opt some form of fan fiction for the classroom, but it is to present information about what conditions, if met, can help students transfer their extracurricular writing skills and experiences to the classroom. This study suggests that when students are explicitly made aware of genre requirements, they can then make rhetorical choices related to their writing. Furthermore, a valuable practice in the classroom is helping students understand, compose for, and share their writing with an authentic audience with a specific purpose. If educators make students aware of the characteristics of different genres, the students are better able to understand what can be said about a thing and how they can say it.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms existing research about the extracurricular literacy practices of secondary students, recognizing that students are engaged in rich literacy environments in their extracurricular lives, affirming that extracurricular literacies are shaping their perceptions of and engagement with curricular writing. The study extends this research by demonstrating the value of fan fiction for sites of additional research into extracurricular literacies. Although this study

focuses primarily on repurposing fan fiction for curricular uses, it suggests that fan fiction and fan fiction communities are rich sites for additional research about the tensions between curricular and extracurricular writing. Additionally, because more students are engaging in writing in these communities and repurposing their writing for curricular assignments, writing studies scholars would benefit from continuing to integrate research on writing with research on fan fiction. Finally, this study suggests directions for a pedagogy that helps teachers see how extracurricular genres are informing curricular writing so that they can help students identify successful instances of repurposing, and help students repurpose appropriate writing skills and strategies in different contexts.

Future research into the extracurricular literacy practices of students will continue to make visible the extensive and rich literate histories each student brings to class. As students understand how their discursive pasts affect their ability, attitude, and behaviors in relationship to curricular genres, they will develop a critical perspective about their relationship with different genres, and understand how their discursive pasts add value and perspective to new discursive landscapes.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

### Family and Home Environment

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. Who is in your family? Who lives with you?
3. What do your parents do?
4. What is their education history?
5. In your social sphere who else writes?
6. Do those in your family and social sphere support your writing? How do they display support or lack of support?
7. With which extracurricular activities are you involved?
8. What do you spend most of your time outside of school doing?

### Literacy History

1. Tell me your earliest memories of reading and writing.
2. What are your earliest memories of learning to read and write?

### Educational Experiences

1. Tell me about school.
2. What are your favorite subjects and why?
3. What classes do you dislike and why?
4. What are your education goals?
5. What are your career goals?

### General Writing Experiences and Perspectives

1. What authors influence your writing?

2. How has writing affected the way you see yourself?
3. Tell me about your writing philosophies.
4. What is your writing process?

#### Curricular Writing Experiences

1. What does a curricular writing assignment look like?
2. What is your process when writing curricular assignments?
3. Tell me some curricular writing assignments that went well.
4. Tell me about some curricular writing assignments that were less successful.
5. How do your teachers help you understand and accomplish curricular writing tasks?
6. How is your curricular writing different from your fan fiction writing?
7. Outside of English class, where do you do the most curricular writing?

#### Fan Fiction Writing Experiences

1. What motivates you to write fan fiction?
2. Who is your fan fiction audience?
3. Which sites/fan fiction communities are you involved with?
4. How do fan fiction websites and online fan fiction communities help with writing and the writing process?
5. How is fan fiction writing different than curricular writing?
6. What is your role in your online fan fiction community?
7. Have you ever won a fan fiction writing award from a website? Which one? Why?
8. Which genres do you like to write and why?
9. When do you know a piece is ready to be published?
10. Summarize a fan fiction piece you have been working on.