

**Abstract**

Poet and philosopher Jan Zwicky argues that, “The experience of understanding something is always the experience of a gestalt—the dawning of an aspect that is simultaneously a perception or reception of a whole.” For this piece, we draw on Zwicky’s notion by sharing our negotiations of the competing rhetorical contexts of 2020. As an English teacher-educator and a novice high school teacher, we each have experienced unique difficulties reconciling the absurdities of COVID-19, racial injustice, police brutality, and political corruption with the oftentimes conflicting realities of our jobs. Zwicky continues to note that, “One way the facilitation of understanding may proceed, then, is by the judicious selection and arrangement of elements of that whole. Another is by the setting up of objects of comparison.” In this light, we offer the following project: a messy ensemble of our critical reflections, humble admissions, and pedagogical decisions regarding the role of figurative language in our practice, and how we might employ these linguistic structures to promote a sense of democratic citizenship in our students.

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