Ubiquity: The Journal of Literature, Literacy, and the Arts,
Research Strand, Vol. 11 No. 1, Spring/Summer 2024, pp. 7-53
Ubiquity: http://ed-ubiquity.gsu.edu/wordpress
ISSN: 2379-3007

Not Even a Maester: Considering *Binge Mode* as English Teaching Practice

Scott Jarvie[1] and Mary L. Neville[2]

[1]Department of English and Comparative Literature, San Jose State University

[2]Teacher Education Division, Wayne State University

Author Note

Scott Jarvie: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0050-5909

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Scott Jarvie, Department of English and Comparative Literature, San Jose State University, One Washington Square, Faculty Offices Building 102, San Jose, CA, 95192, USA. Email: scott.a.jarvie@gmail.com.

Abstract

Multiliteracies scholars (New London Group, 1996; Moje, 2009) have established the need for more expansive forms of literacy that encompass how youth read and write today. One such form is the podcast, a series of digital recordings of conversations. In this paper, we focus our inquiry on one particular podcast, *Binge Mode,* in which hosts Rubin and Concepcion read, discuss, and analyze popular books, TV shows, and movies. What's striking about their approach is the way the hosts blend traditional close reading practices with those that might be enacted in an English classroom organized around multiliteracies. Through our thematic analysis, we find that *Binge Mode* takes seriously the affordances of podcasting as a popular textual form in service to literary analysis. Further, the podcast usefully diverges from some problematic forms of both close reading and multiliteracies instruction by foregrounding fandom as an ethos informing analysis. Our study concludes by sharing both affordances and limitations of such an approach.

Keywords: close reading, podcasting, fandom, English, pedagogy

"That first burst of *Binge Mode* changed things!", explains podcast host Mallory Rubin to cohost Jason Concepcion. "There is a moment," Rubin continues, "in *Game of Thrones* when Jon, contemplat[es] his future:

> 'He followed the creek for a time, then cut across the fields to the King's Road. It stretched out before him, narrow and stony and pocked with weeds, a road of no particular promise. Yet the sight of it filled Jon Snow with a vast longing. Winterfell was down that road, and beyond it Riverrun, and so many other places. Casterly Rock. The Red Mountains of Dorne. The smoking ruins of Old Valyria. All the places that Jon would never see. The world was down that road, and he was here.' (The Ringer, 2021, 2:35)

Rubin explains:

> I have always loved that passage because of what it says about possibility. I think of stories this way: as vessels that can stop us from feeling trapped or alone. That can take us down any number of roads. That can allow us to explore our world and other worlds, too. Of all the things I've loved about making *Binge Mode* with you, that's what I cherish most. You never once made me feel silly for thinking that way. Quite the opposite. You reminded me time and again that the only thing better than finding a way down that road is finding someone to travel it with you. You've taught me so much. (The Ringer, 2021, 3:06)

* * *

Multiliteracies scholars (New London Group, 1996; Moje, 2009) have argued for more expansive notions of literacy that encompass how people read and write today -- with a particular focus on digital literacy practices. The recognition of digital practices as complex literacy forms

is at the heart of assets and justice-based pedagogies which seek to build with the interests and experiences of youth (Nash, 2024; Smith & Parker, 2021; Yoon, 2019). In K-12 literacy classrooms, students and teachers are often inundated with formulaic writing and reading curricula that lack criticality and separate students from the important literacies of their lives (Muhammad et al., 2021; Kinloch, 2010; Masterson, 2022). Digital practices in ELA classrooms can forward assets-based pedagogies (Nash, 2024), because educators employing digital literacies may broaden the curricular lens beyond conventional forms and canonical texts. Digitally-focused curricula instead center literacy practices that many students may deeply understand, such as podcasting and other online texts (Smythe & Neufeld, 2010). In this way, digital practices may bring about a more humanizing framework for ELA classrooms, in that youth and teachers together may learn from one another as they negotiate meaning through digital texts. Freire (2005) argued for more humanizing frameworks that reject the so-called "banking model" (p. 57) of education as well as the hierarchical positioning that often exists between teachers and students.

Of course, the presence of digital practices in the ELA classroom does not automatically ameliorate these separations made between teacher and student; by centering digital practices, however, educators may make space for multiple ways of knowing and being that move beyond traditional, whitewashed texts - a key feature of assets-based pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Marlatt, 2018; WNDB, 2015). In addition, scholars such as Skerrett (2016), Muhammad (2023), Love (2019), and Dunn and Love (2020) have expanded upon the idea of joy, enjoyment, and pleasure as central to assets-based pedagogies, and prioritizing those forms that may bring students joy in English classrooms could help to resist deficit narratives (Low, 2017) and further justice-oriented curricula. One such form is the podcast, a series of digital recordings of

conversations, which, Lee et al. (2008) argue, offers a rich frame to be taken up by literacy educators.

In this paper, we build on the work of others (e.g., Barone & Wright, 2008; Smith, 2018; Williams, 2008) studying podcasting as an asset to literacy pedagogy by focusing on one particular podcast: *Binge Mode.* The concept is simple: hosts Rubin and Concepcion read and discuss, in great detail, the stories they love. Together they summarize, analyze and connect themes across their favorite books, TV shows, and movies, from fantasy phenomena *Game of Thrones, Harry Potter*, and *Saga*, to movie franchises *Star Wars* and the Marvel Universe, NBC's philosophical show *The Good Place* and HBO's *Westworld*. We listened to the podcast through our shared perspectives as English educators and researchers, wondering what we might learn about how to teach literary analysis in ways that resonate with youth today. In a 2019 *New York Times* article highlighting *Binge Mode's* massive popularity, Concepcion summed up the hosts' approach: "We're both extremely analytical people. We love talking about books, talking about stories, and drilling down and examining what it is that we love about the stories in a real lit-crit kind of way" (Borelli, 2019, para. 10).

In other words, they're *close reading*. In each episode of ***Binge Mode***, Rubin and Concepcion engage in the kinds of slow and careful analysis of texts, *looking closely at what is there,* that has been a popular approach of English instruction in US classrooms, particularly in the wake of the rollout of the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). In a general sense, such an approach seeks to develop a more sophisticated understanding of a text through analysis: identifying the parts which make up the whole; considering how these parts work together (or exist in tension with each other) to contribute to the larger work; examining aesthetic choices, as

well as associations and implications of specific languages and images; studying the particular structure of the text; and articulating themes and patterns that emerge across the reading. To be clear, the hosts themselves make no claims that they are practicing a specific approach to textual analysis of the kind codified in scholarship (e.g., Beers & Probst, 2013); rather this inquiry identifies a remarkable similarity between the podcast's approach and that of scholars and educators as they analyze texts. Here we are less interested in the specific texts Rubin and Concepcion comb and catalog than in the implications their approach might have for a secondary English classroom. What is especially striking to us is the way the hosts blend traditional close reading practices (e.g., formalist analysis of texts) with those that might be attained in an English classroom organized around multiliteracies, relational approaches to pedagogy, and a justice-focused curriculum. In this study we engage three broad questions for consideration of the podcast in relation to English curricula:

1. How are texts analyzed in *Binge Mode* in ways that are similar and different than traditional English pedagogies?
2. What might the approach to textual analysis demonstrated in the podcast afford English educators?
3. What complications arise when considering the application of this approach in an English classroom?

Podcasting and Close Reading

We begin from the assumption that relatively new literacy forms which diverge from the traditional texts of English classrooms (canonical novels, drama, poetry), such as the podcast, are crucial to pedagogy committed to the needs and interests of people today (Kress, 2010; Weninger, 2018; National Council of Teachers of English, 2022). Most extant scholarship on

podcasting in English classrooms explores the form's promise in service to student composition (e.g., Rozema, 2007; Goodson & Skillen, 2010; Jones, 2010; Evans et al., 2021; Guggenheim et al., 2021; Curlee & Early, 2023; Early, 2023), offering learners the opportunity to "create content relatively quickly and easily, often collaboratively, with the intention and capacity to reach an authentic audience" (Smythe & Neufield, 2010, p. 489). Such work troubles the digital literacies gulf between teachers and students: As Zheng et al. (2014) note in their study of this gulf, "While most students placed a high value on the ability to produce digital media such as blogs, videos, podcasts, and digital stories, only 29% of teachers shared the same view." (p. 281). Yet little work has considered the promise of podcasts as curricular texts in and of themselves, nor their potential for teaching close reading and textual analysis. Smythe and Neufeld (2010) note that a podcasting multimodal project in their study's 6th and 7th grade classrooms helped improve reading and writing skills through the composition enacted in student-created podcasts. Still, such skills did not assuage the difficulty created for English language learners by the ELA curriculum. Oslawski-Lopez and Kordsmeier (2021) also address how podcasting can impact students' reading in college-level courses, mainly through an increase in what they call "listening compliance," (p. 335) "comprehension," (p. 337) and an increased ability to "focus" (p. 340) on course texts. Burt (2008) examined how and whether student-created podcasts would help increase students' reading "habits, attitudes, fluency, and ability" (p. 7). In other words, many podcasts have been framed pedagogically for their capacity to expand students' notions of writing, and some have also analyzed how student-created podcasts may increase students' reading as well as writing skills. We move with these studies and others, pointing to an opening for teachers to take up podcasting in service to expanding notions of *reading*, too.

Critical questions have been raised as to the approach educators take in integrating these new literacy practices and texts into English classrooms. Leander and Boldt (2013), for example, argue that the uptake of multiliteracies scholarship has led to a co-opting of students' literacy practices, particularly out-of-school, to serve the purposes of schooling. Building on this critique, Skerrett (2016) articulates the importance of students "demanding pleasure" from the literacy work they do in school, an end often ignored in the rush to ensure students attain the types of college and career skills emphasized in standards like the Common Core. Skerrett finds, in a multiliteracies inquiry with transnational youth, a need for "building authentic and caring relationships across difference"; "stretching out time for enjoyment of learning processes and activities"; and "pursuing literate objectives that students and teachers agree on as valuable" (p. 119-120). We see the texts which Rubin and Concepcion highlight as well as the co-hosts' unbridled joy with which they approach these texts as examples of the ways that stories can illuminate and provoke our delight in English classrooms. These approaches to joy and multiliteracies pedagogies drive our interest in *Binge Mode'*s unusual approach to textual analysis, which takes a relational approach to analysis (the two hosts work together) and foregrounds the pleasure and joy fans take in texts.

Recently, scholars have centered the importance of enjoyment, pleasure and purpose (e.g., Skerrett, 2016; Muhammad, 2020; Jones & Storm, 2022) as a foundational value for equity-and- justice-focused English pedagogy. Muhammad (2022) highlights how youth need stories (and curricula) that speak to their interests, that both address the injustices of the world while also prioritizing the joy of their lived experiences. Muhammad (2022) writes, "Joy is the expected result when teachers elevate beauty and happiness within the lives of their students and within humanity when planning for implementing curriculum and instruction" (p. 197). Such a

focus on joy can help students "fully see themselves positively represented in texts, textbooks, and curriculum in schools" (Muhammad, 2022, p. 197). Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019) also write that "all children deserve stories that explore" not only pain but also joy (p. 41). Christensen (2009) emphasizes how the language arts classroom in particular can be a space for fostering joy and justice simultaneously, and that teachers must reject deficit notions of their students by centering their interests and lived experiences within their literacies. Hooks (1994) argues that in order for students to find "excitement" in curricula, they must be engaged and "feel the joy of learning" (p. 204). This orientation differs quite sharply from the oftentimes sterile environment of standardized testing and curricula found in many K-12 literacy spaces (Masterson, 2022).

In all, scholars have argued that prioritizing joy within the present and everyday literacies of youth is itself a form of justice, in that it offers them a more meaningful pedagogy and requires a curricular focus on students' interests (Cunningham & Enriquez, 2022; Dunn & Love, 2020; Love, 2019; Kirkland, 2013; Masterson, 2022; Skerrett, 2016). As Muhammad (2023) offers, the prioritization of joy does not signify simple happiness; instead, joy is "celebration" while at the same time it is critiquing, deconstructing, and improving the deep inequities and harm caused by oppressive societal structures, including those forwarded in K-12 schooling contexts. It is also a focus on "beauty and aesthetics," (p. 71) and it is within this definition of joy in curriculum that we understand the importance of students and teachers noticing the pleasure they take in particular texts - similar to Concepcion and Rubin's joyful readings in *Binge Mode*.

This focus on readers' interests and joys is central to the listening experience of *Binge Mode* and may be useful for English educators to consider pedagogically. While *Binge Mode*

itself focuses more on the enjoyment of the two podcasters rather than youth in a classroom, the definite pleasure and enjoyment Concepcion and Rubin take in the stories reflect what might be possible in an ELA classroom focused on enjoyment. Moreover, an important distinction must be made clear between the texts being centered in *Binge Mode* and the need for a multiplicitous, diverse, and engaging ELA curriculum. Many of the stories that *Binge Mode* highlights do not include works written by authors of Color; in an ELA classroom focused on the interests and important texts of youth, both educators and youth will benefit from including more diverse texts connected to students' lived experiences (WNDB, 2015). Moreover, many scholars (Dunn & Love, 2020; Masterson, 2022; Muhammad, 2022, 2023) articulate a joyful, justice-oriented pedagogy that is more specifically anti-oppressive than what is conceptualized by Rubin and Concepcion; thus, in a secondary classroom, we would encourage educators to further push the concept of enjoyment and close reading to include student interests in ways that more fully support their critical engagement with the deep injustices and inequities of their schooling contexts.

Hosts Rubin and Concepcion's approach to textual analysis in *Binge Mode* also evidences aspects of close reading, a staple pedagogical practice in US English classrooms. As a method of analyzing texts, close reading places emphasis on formal elements of the text, (e.g., tone, imagery, figurative language, etc.) with a goal of objective rigor and authoritative claims (DuBois, 2003; Ohrvik, 2024). Because of its emphasis on the analysis of elements *within* a story, questions remain as to how to reconcile the method with an assets-based pedagogical approach which values elements *outside* the text: the experiences, cultures, and literacy practices students value in and beyond school. In seeking objectivity, close reading approaches can downplay the subjectivities of reader and author, an approach often criticized for the ways it

marginalizes while reproducing the privileged identities of the critics who originally developed the method (largely straight, white, male, anglo, etc.) (DuBois, 2003; Ferguson, 2014). In this formation, close reading seems more harmful than helpful for addressing issues of politics, identity, and ethics with/in literature (Eppley, 2019). Yet the method has proved persistent and even useful to politically-minded theorists (e.g., Gallop, 2000; Jarvie, 2021). Today, close reading has drifted from the "apolitical" method and now "includes a range of textual approaches… [such as] structuralism, deconstruction, ideology critique, and others (Eppley, 2019, p. 341). *Binge Mode,* we theorize, may offer alternatives to some of the method's blind spots; we look to the podcast for the ways it might help us reconsider classroom literacy curriculum and pedagogy.

Binging as Method

Because we were interested in pleasure and joy (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019; Christensen, 2009; Hooks, 1994; Skerrett, 2016; Muhammad, 2022, 2023), our own enjoyment of the episodes became a primary methodological consideration in data collection. As such, we *binged* the podcast. In the advent of TV streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, and HBO GO becoming widely popular in the late 2000's and early 2010s, "binge watching" (Merriam Webster, n.d.) became the term of choice to describe their use, with access to whole seasons and series of shows allowing viewers to watch television non-stop, commercial free, for hours on end. And with other media seeking to capitalize on the popularity of the streaming model, "binging" soon extended beyond TV to other forms of media consumption (e.g., music, movies, and books). We find the term useful here for describing our methodological approach, which found us consuming much of the massive catalogue of *Binge Mode* for the sheer enjoyment of it.

To binge properly, there must be enough content readily available to consume. For this study we collected data by selectively listening across seven seasons of podcasts recorded from 2017 - 2021, during which the hosts have discussed a variety of graphic, video, and literary texts, including: *Game of Thrones* (the five novels and the TV series), *Harry Potter* (seven novels and eight movies), *Star Wars* (nine movies; the TV shows *Clone Wars* and *The Mandalorian*), *West World* (TV series), *The Good Place* (TV series), *Saga* (graphic novel), and 23 *Marvel* films. After listening and taking notes, we met to discuss our experiences, sharing our favorite moments and observations.

As we are both English educators and researchers, often enough these moments were articulated in terms of their implications for English curriculum and pedagogy. While this is understandable given our professions, binging may seem an odd frame for pedagogy: rarely do classrooms encourage this kind of maximalist, total consumption of a series or catalog, uninterrupted by a teacher's intervention. Yet we were drawn to the frame precisely because of its unfamiliarity: How might the practice of binging, central to the podcast, help us see the literacy experience differently? And how might emerging differences in literacy experience usefully inform pedagogy in English classrooms?

During our initial meetings, we found ourselves working to identify what exactly about these English implications we found so interesting. What made these episodes so informative? What made them so enjoyable? So educative? How did they successfully blend these purposes together? Moreover, we considered the ways that we each individually enjoyed separate aspects of the podcast, as well as particular storylines. Mary, for example, found greater interest in *The Good Place* podcast episodes, while Scott was drawn to the seasons covering *Game of Thrones* and *Harry Potter*. These particularities within our separate and collective enjoyment of the

podcast interested us as we considered the pedagogical implications of the joy found in texts Rubin and Concepcion so clearly bolster.

Further, we considered the limitations of our positions: we were interested in the podcast as pedagogy, being educators ourselves, and as English educators specifically we were already personally invested in texts and textual analysis. But how was it that *Binge Mode* got so many people who *weren't* English teachers, students, or reading researchers to spend so much time listening to it? How did Rubin and Concepcion convince the lay person to opt in, during their free time, to rigorous and thorough discussions of texts? Or how might the kinds of textual analysis engaged in on the podcast be significantly different than analysis of texts in classrooms? For example, how might constraints of time and context, or differences in purpose, necessarily differ? And given these limitations, what useful implications might the podcast provide?

Eventually, across iterations of discussions of these questions and repeated consumption of the podcast episodes, we decided to frame our inquiry around three broad questions:

1. How are texts analyzed in *Binge Mode* in ways that are similar and different than traditional English pedagogies?
2. What might the approach to textual analysis demonstrated in the podcast afford English educators?
3. What complications arise when considering the application of this approach in an English classroom?

We listened across episodes of the podcast with these in mind, and eventually decided on several themes for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize the "active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to readers" (p. 80). Because much of our methodological decision-making

centered on enjoyment and attachment to the episodes themselves, we felt that this analytic approach made space for our "active roles" in the process.

Focusing as we were on the relationship between *Binge Mode* and English curricula and pedagogy, we decided on two major themes: (1) Artifacts of English classrooms and (2) Relational close reading. We settled on "artifacts" as a broad enough term for the theme that would encompass various conventional elements of English curricula and pedagogy, including curricular concepts and pedagogical practices. Essentially, we considered the substantial overlap between what Rubin and Concepcion do and what we recognize as being done in English classrooms. The second theme, 'relational close reading', considers in depth one way the hosts intriguingly diverge from English classrooms: in their particular relational approach to textual analysis. Table 1 demonstrates some examples of the two larger themes and patterns associated with each theme, such as "Ask the Maester" under "Artifacts of the English classroom" and "Personal connections to the text" under "Relational Close Reading." As we listened to the episodes and discussed our ideas in researcher team meetings, we made note of ideas that were interesting to us, such as the communal nature of the fandom, continually regrouping these patterns to eventually construct the two larger themes.

Table 1

Data Analysis – Included are some examples of subthemes associated with our two larger themes

Theme 1: Artifacts of the English Classroom		
Subthemes associated with theme	Subtheme explanation	Example from data
"Ask the Maester"	Directly named from Concepcion's "Ask the Maester" lecture style sections of *Binge Mode.* Traditional, authoritative, and monologic form of pedagogy. One "expert" translates jargon,	Concepcion as "maester": "In the books, tourneys in Westeros are interesting events, because there's really not a good way for high lords and ladies of the realm to meet together in ways that don't seem suspicious…but if

	shares lore, and connects episode to canon and media.	you get together at a tournament, you can sneak away and plot things" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2017 June 5, 20:40).
Literary elements in *Binge Mode*	Noted each time an element of literature, as traditionally considered in ELA classrooms, was referenced or used in *Binge Mode.*	Examples included plot, theme, characterization, allusion, and other literary elements. See Table 2 below for further examples.
Theme 2: Relational Close Reading		
Subthemes associated with theme	Subthemes associated with theme	Subthemes associated with theme
"Bathe in the Light of the Seven"	Directly named from Rubin and Concepcion's segment in which they "head to the sept to notice "insights, observations, hindsight, and nuggets" that seem "cool and interesting" to them (Rubin and Concepcion, 2017 June 5, 27:20). We connected this equal attention to both a) the reader's curiosity and b) the text to be an example of the relational close reading possible in ELA classrooms.	"The first thing that stood out to me rewatching the pilot was how much of what's in here really feels like a 'CliffsNotes' for the entire series … what is going to be important, what is going to matter? And one of those instances is the Stag and the Wolf sigil scene, right?" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2017 June 5, 27:39).
Personal connections to the text	Contrasting with traditional understandings of close readings, these included instances in which the podcasters made connections to the text centered in their own individual lived experiences.	Rubin and Concepcion's personal connections to the *Harry Potter* series, as referenced throughout the *Binge Mode Harry Potter* episode, "The Farewell" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2019 Jan 30).
Communal connections to the text	Contrasting with traditional understandings of close readings, these instances included ways that talking and reading these texts built community.	1 - Community built across Rubin and Concepcion's friendship 2 - Community across fandoms. An example includes Borelli's (2019) discussion with Rubin and Concepcion in *The New York Times* in which Rubin states: "I think one of the things that happened during the 'Game of Thrones' run was really saying, 'This can be about anything,

> but the heart of it is about fantasy stories'— the fandom that builds up around that, and the community those stories foster and inspire (para. 9).

Our inquiry examines how this approach offers a compelling alternative to conventional forms of close reading in English classrooms, an alternative that educators might take up in order to foster joy and justice for their students.

Results

In the following sections, we detail findings of our inquiry into *Binge Mode*. Note that we are primarily interested in the process the hosts take in the podcast; while that process depends upon the use of a podcast form, we focus on this podcast, not podcasting generally.

Subtle Moments: Artifacts of English Classrooms

Binge Mode zeroes in on subtle moments in stories when characters expand the "mishmash of different thematic textures" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2020 April 24, 29:06) present in any narrative. In our analysis, we found that many of the different textures present in *Binge Mode* effectively map onto what we call "artifacts of English classrooms." By "artifact," we mean elements of English curriculum and pedagogy, such as: literary devices [i.e. theme, characterization, or point of view]; feelings; pedagogical genres [i.e. an essay or lecture]; or essential questions. In the table below, we provide a list of English curricular artifacts we noticed in our listening. Importantly, these instances are not isolated but rather are representative of multiple examples from the podcast. Here, we analyze one of these artifacts in detail: "characterization."

Table 2

Artifacts of ELA Classrooms in Binge Mode

ELA Artifact	Example in *Binge Mode*
Allusion	*The Good Place* podcast: Rubin and Concepcion (2018, February 1) make allusions and references to numerous works of a number of authors including Jean Paul Sartre and Plato.
Authorial craft	*Saga* podcast (Rubin & Concepcion, 2020 April 24, 28:52)*:* Using Hazel's narration as handwritten text because of the relationship between the narrator and the events. Rubin and Concepcion note that Vaughan and Staples (2017) conceived this idea as Vaughan read bedtime stories to his children.
Contextualization or setting	*Saga* podcast: "It weaves us in and out of the past, present, and the future" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2020 April 24, 29:49)
Characterization	*The Good Place* podcast: There are "clusters" of alike characters (Chidi and Tahani; Eleanor and Jason). Also, "If life is like a ball of yarn, Chidi unravels it until there is nothing left." (Rubin & Concepcion, 2018 February 1, 26:08)
Appreciation	*Half-Blood Prince* podcast: "I remember. So vividly, like my heart pounding as I read this for the first time." (Rubin & Concepcion, 2018 October 11, 1:25:40)
Figurative language	*Half-Blood Prince* podcast: "Think of the long years Harry spent under the stairs, his own cave if you will." (Rubin & Concepcion, 2018 October 11, 1:06:04)
Genre	*Saga* podcast: "*Saga* is a *Game of Thrones*, *Star Wars*, and *Romeo and Juliet* crossover." (Rubin & Concepcion, 2020 April 24, 8:10)*:*
Imagery	*Game of Thrones*, "Winter is Coming" podcast episode description: "Welcome to the towers of Winterfell, the gilded homes of Pentos, and the first episode of the *Binge Mode* podcast." (Rubin & Concepcion, 2017 July 12)
Inversion of common tropes	*Saga* podcast: "*Saga'*s decision to mock the 'meet cute' in rom coms." (Rubin & Concepcion, 2020 April 24, 42:34)*:*
Temporality e.g. "flashbacks"	*The Good Place* podcast: "Part of what makes the show really compelling is that we do get these *Lost*-style glimpses into their lives on Earth" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2018 February 1, 21:15)
Point of view	*The Mandalorian* podcast: "What the camera always does is find Baby Yoda's face so we can see what is happening in his wide eyes." (Rubin & Concepcion, 2019 December 21, 19:53)
Visual reading	*Saga* podcast when Concepcion, discussing Fiona Staples' artwork: "There's an element [of Staples' art] that is kind of like a cross current

	of different themes and different approaches and different textures within the art that creates this kind of vibrant effect" or "vitality" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2020 April 24, 28:29)
Symbolism	*Saga* podcast: "The choice to place this part of the story in a lighthouse." (Rubin & Concepcion, 2020 April 24, 1:07:30)*:*
Themes & motifs	"The defining theme of today's episode is …" ● "Family ties" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2020 April 24, 19:06) ● "Growth and enlightenment" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2018 February 1, 3:00)
Tone & mood	*Saga* podcast: Noting the "spirit and tenor of the story" and discussing how the creators "[weave] in comic levity to a tale that really is bleak" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2020 April 24, 25:05)

Character development as familiarity

When Mary taught middle school English, she often resorted to the acronym "STEAL," a framework borrowed from our class textbook, to help students analyze character development. "STEAL," she would scrawl across our whiteboard. "Speech, Thoughts, Effect on Others, Actions, and Looks (facial expressions)" (this framework is cited in many literature resources; e.g., ReadWriteThink, 2004). These elements, she would tell her students, can help a reader understand a character, pointing, for example, to Regina George in the movie *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004). "When Regina walks through the school hallways in the movie," she recalls asking students, "What kind of effect does she have on her classmates?"

"They run away from her," a student would inevitably reply.

"Right. What does that tell you about Regina?"

"That she is not a nice person, because people are afraid of her."

(Please note these are not direct quotes but rather an example of the type of conversation she had, drawn from memory.) Thus, students engaged in an appraisal of the characters they interacted with in texts. This is not the type of character analysis we find in *Binge Mode*. In the Regina George example, students acted as flies on the walls of those high school hallways, dutifully

noting in their three-ring binders the effect Regina has on others, the actions she takes, the things she says to other people and the way it might make them feel.

For Rubin and Concepcion, character analysis is far more *familiar*, evoking the word's Latin origin as *intimacy*. There is still some distance in *Binge Mode*'s analysis, as there always will be, between the reader, the characters, and the author or creator of a text. But rather than sitting back to analyze how characters act, Rubin and Concepcion discuss characters *intimately*, with sometimes lighthearted affection, sometimes serious understandings of the person, often as if they have all known one another since primary school. There is less space between the podcasters and the characters. This form of character analysis, we offer, happens because of their deep ("DEEEEEEEP!" cries Concepcion in multiple podcast episodes) enjoyment of the texts.

In developing their familiarity with characters, Rubin and Concepcion do not hold back from critique, often mocking Rowling's Professor Dumbledore, for example, and his failure to make Hogwarts a safe refuge for students. Listeners of the podcast frequently hear Rubin and Concepcion's facetious shriek--"No safer place than Hogwarts!"--when detailing a particularly perilous feat happening at the school. This further demonstrates a critique of characters' decisions in a way that lends itself to the familiarity and intimacy between Rubin, Concepcion, and the characters. It also shows how they see characters themselves offering pedagogy, whether good or bad, in ways that are instructive to the reader or listener.

When we suggest that Rubin and Concepcion engage in a more familia(r/l) character analysis than the STEAL approach, we do not necessarily argue that their framework is superior. Instead, we call attention to how, because we analyzed *Binge Mode* as a literary form of enjoyment, we were able to re-envision a common teaching practice, noting the varying distances in each method of character analysis. Our analysis highlighted the contours between

STEAL's "fly on the wall, separate" analytic approach and the more intimate character analysis of *Binge Mode*. The benefit of paying attention to Rubin and Concepcion's analyses, then, is less about ascribing to their form of pedagogical engagement, and more about letting English educators question and wonder about their own pedagogical decisions, as Mary was able to with the STEAL framework. In the next section, we offer another way *Binge Mode* may help us reconsider pedagogy through what we call the curricular architecture of the podcast.

"Ask the Maester": Curricular Architecture of Podcast Segments

One curricular aspect of *Binge Mode* that drew us to the podcast was its structured segments. Regardless of the text being analyzed, the episodes each fall within the following schema, each named differently depending upon the story for that day: spoiler and adult content warnings; reading aloud of a key passage; a plot summary; the revelation of the episode's theme; an extended literary analysis of the text; seven "insights, observations, and foreshadowing" that Rubin and Concepcion enjoyed; a lecture-style format; the unveiling of that day's "champion" character; and finally, a parody monologue to close off the podcast, such as in multiple podcast episodes when Concepcion impersonates Professor ("McGalleon") McGonagall as a sports gambling fanatic. Some of the varying titles of these segments include the following:

- Plot summary: "Climb aboard the Hogwarts Express" (*Harry Potter*); "Take the Kings Road" (*Game of Thrones*); "Get on the train that Janet called for us" (*The Good Place*)
- Lecture-style format: "Ask the Maester" (*Game of Thrones*); "Restricted Section [of Hogwarts library]" (*Harry Potter*); "Help us untie the Chidi-esque knots in our stomach" (*The Good Place*)

In each of these examples, we note the pleasure (Skerrett, 2016) and joy (Muhammad, 2023) the podcasters take in their favorite stories, and we consider how such an orientation of enjoyment

might be possible in secondary ELA classrooms. We see the curricular structure of the podcast, including the segment titles, as contributing to a feeling of being surrounded by the text as one listens to *Binge Mode*. Like a library, or a home, or a cave.

One primary example of the curricular architecture of *Binge Mode* occurs in the recurring "Ask the Maester" segment, in which Concepcion dons the mantle of *maester* (a scholar in *Game of Thrones*) to explain relevant lore of the episode. "Maester," implores Rubin, "teach us everything we need to know" about the episode's topic. Here the podcast's pedagogy is traditional. Concepcion dives into a lecture, recapping, translating jargon, providing examples and sharing extensive readings of associated material, criticism and ephemera which the lay listener likely is not familiar with. He often connects the topic of an episode with the larger canon of the story world. Concepcion cites his sources, often blogs or interviews with Martin himself, as well as supplemental books in the *Song of Ice and Fire* series (e.g., Martin, 2015). These sources further emphasize the fandom of *Binge Mode*, as Concepcion frequently refers to the musings and theories of those who love the story as much as he and Rubin do. Of course, critical scholarship has rightfully articulated problems with teacher-as-expert, and such an authoritative, monologic approach (Freire, 2005). But, interestingly, Concepcion's segment lacks an oppressive feel -- in part, because the podcast situates him as a fantasy character and satirizes his role (a stock harpsichord riff ushers in the segment), but also because his expertise comes from a place of fanatical obsession: Concepcion does the extra reading when most would just watch the show.

The "Ask the Maester" segment is mirrored in further episodes of *Binge Mode*. In the episodes analyzing *The Good Place*, Rubin and Concepcion expertly lay out the many connections between "depictions of philosophy and the afterlife in popular culture" (Rubin &

Concepcion, 2018 February 1, 44:02). In the *Saga* episodes, the lecture-style format offers listeners a historical overview of "proxy wars," with Concepcion asserting, "the use of proxies is as old as warfare itself" and underscoring the central tenet of proxy wars: "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2020 April 24, 1:35:00). Concepcion then analyzes how proxy wars are central to *Saga*, connecting these to historical "fighting primarily done by third parties" such as those completed in the 4th century B.C.E., the Cold War and the most recent U.S. war in Afghanistan (Rubin & Concepcion, 2020 April 24, 1:28:17). Across lecture-style "Ask the Maester" segments, Rubin and Concepcion offer a curricular structure that educators may recognize in their own teaching. Like the example of the "STEAL" structure of character analysis, this pedagogical practice offers an opportunity for English educators to reflect on how enjoyment plays a role in their own practice.

Relational Close Reading

> *Fan* has come to mean any individual who is invested in and engaged with someone else's narrative.
>
> --Jen McConnel (2019), "Fan Spaces as Third Spaces: Tapping into the Creative Community of Fandom", p. 46

It is clear, then, that much of what Concepcion and Rubin do on *Binge Mode* overlaps with English classroom practice, particularly with respect to the mode of analysis, which often falls under the rubric of close reading. Yet as we've noted above, their approach -- and, we argue, its appeal -- significantly diverges from practices in English classrooms and particularly conventional close reading in at least one way: Concepcion and Rubin are *fans*. Both are deeply attached to these texts. During a typical two-hour episode, they laugh, constantly. At least one host cries. Both frequently express excitement and pleasure and, less often, their disappointments

with these stories. The approach reflects their personal attachment to the stories; this is particularly true of the episodes covering *Harry Potter* series. Both sport HP tattoos: Rubin, the symbol of the villainous Death Eaters; Concepcion, a whole panel taken from the pivotal chapter of the penultimate book.

There are important differences between the podcast and the English classroom that we bring to light here. As reviewers of this manuscript helpfully noted, students (often) do not get to pick and analyze texts of their choice. It may be that the teacher is a fan of the texts they choose for students, but that affection might not transfer to students. McConnel's (2019) work on fandom and secondary English classrooms helps here. Their study of online Harry Potter fan communities argues for fandom as a kind of "third space" distinguished from school spaces and out-of-school spaces "that teachers might tap into…to create community, to encourage authentic and collaborative academic literacy practices, and to help students discover ways that fan spaces can benefit their work in school." (p. 45). Thus, while it is important to bear in mind the challenges of comparing fan spaces to school spaces, there is clear promise in considering how classroom pedagogy might learn from the vibrancy of fan culture.

For our purposes, we are interested in the fanatical approach Rubin and Concepcion take in the podcast, one which makes clear their intense personal attachments to the texts they analyze. Such attachments, embracing subjectivity unchecked, are explicitly at odds with close reading traditionally understood. In developing the approach, the New Critics placed strict emphasis on formalist literary analysis, seeking objectivity by ignoring biographical details of either author or reader (Blau, 1993; Myers, 1996; Ransom, 1937). As such, close readings present analyses of textual elements, particularly formal ones, but not emotional, psychological, cultural or personal responses to texts. It's perhaps strange, contradictory even, that *Binge Mode*

takes up close reading then, given that Concepcion and Rubin's reading very much reflects their lives. But the choice to "dive DEEEEEEEEP!" into the formal properties structuring their reading emerges from the significance of each host's experience. Not only does personal history factor into the selection of texts and subsequent analysis, the hosts' affective attachments as fans (particularly the pleasure they take in reading) come to shape, and occasionally even overtake, the analysis itself. During the episode covering the pivotal "Cave" chapter of the sixth *Harry Potter* book, for example, careful explication of Rowling's language gives way to awe and appreciation. After several minutes parsing details of characterization and setting, Rubin reaches a particularly resonant moment. "This is one of those perfect JKR paragraphs" she exclaims in a low voice, her reverence approaching a whisper (Rubin & Concepcion, 2018 October 11, 1:03:59). Rubin then forsakes analysis entirely, in order to read the passage in its entirety. After reading, she pauses. "This book is good." Concepcion agrees.

On its face, this moment -- not at all uncommon across the podcast's engagements with many varied texts -- seems to indicate the absence of close reading and the kind of elevated textual analysis sought by English teachers from their students. But, situated as it is within the host's two-hour binge investigation into the chapter's construction, we actually understand it as an extension of close reading, rather than a divergence from it. The closest possible reading, perhaps, is pure recitation, sheer experience with the text, and extended encounter with the language. Such closeness leaves little space for critical distance of course. It takes the love of a fan to revel at length with a text without moving to analysis, to enjoy it purely for itself and the particular language with which it is built, each word.

Even the criticisms generated by the pair's reading (e.g., inconsistencies and contradictions in the text) often result from their appreciation of the text. In a particularly critical

episode examining Disney's *The Mandalorian*, Rubin explains to her listeners: "We're griping a lot, and it's because we love Baby Yoda and we love this episode" (Rubin & Concepcion, December 2019, 54:02). The gripes, however, generate some of the most poignant results of their analysis, as when Rubin concludes by asking, "Will the show continue to grapple with the political scars [of prior *Star Wars* movies]?". Concepcion then surfaces an important question of his own, imploring the audience to consider the ethical impact of algorithms in the world today, who writes them and with what interests in mind, what kinds of biases, etc. "We need to think about this," he concludes.

Importantly, close reading as envisioned and enacted by Rubin and Concepcion on *Binge Mode* is an extension of their fandom, rather than in tension with it. Textual analysis, through this lens, isn't compromised by the subjectivity of attachments; it is facilitated by it. Love for a text, this approach assumes, does not preclude rigorous, even critical engagement with it. Instead, Rubin and Concepcion exemplify Storey's (1996) finding that:

> Fans do not just read texts, they continually reread them" -- a practice which leads to sophisticated close reading: "rereading thus shifts the reader's attention from 'what will happen' to 'how things happen,' to questions of character relations, narrative themes, the production of social knowledges and discourses (p. 128).

In this sense, our findings after studying close reading practices in *Binge Mode* undermine "the popular consensus that fandom is a stigma -- a label to be attached to adoring audiences that are passive and manipulated by the mass media" (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000, p. 437). Instead, *Binge Mode*'s approach can facilitate insightful analytical readings of pop texts, the kind English teachers hope to see from students. *Binge Mode* demonstrates one model for how fandom supports this work; despite stereotypes around fans' "superficial" attachments to texts. Indeed,

we agree with Alvermann and Hagood, citing Jenson (1992), that "the loyalties literacy educators feel to reading...are no different from the loyalties adolescents feel toward objects of their affection" (p. 437).

This affection and attachment are fed as much by their personal experiences with the text as by the hosts' relationship with one another, the enactment of which plays out over the course of each episode. Large sections of the podcast consist of prepared literary analysis, one host reading aloud their work from a pre-written script, not unlike a conference paper. Rubin and Concepcion take turns doing this. As they do, the other host offers brief affirmations, propelling the reading forward, such as "Yes!" "Right." "Uh huh." In other moments, the two lean on each other to help navigate their emotional responses to the texts. For example, in an episode on the infamous "Tower of Joy" scene in *Game of Thrones*, Rubin, overwhelmed and verging on tears, appeals to Concepcion: "Jason, is this it?" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2017 July 12, 9:00). At the conclusion of their analysis, Rubin expresses similar overwhelming sentiment: "Beautiful, truly beautiful. Now I'm going to cry again, thanks assholes" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2017 July 12, 1:09:19). The use of profanity is not exceptional here (it is a staple of the way both hosts talk) nor is it inconsequential. Instead, we think it is emblematic of the general informality of *Binge Mode*, which defies the norms of rigorous classroom literary analysis through language often marked by overt displays of emotion and vulgar humor. Rubin and Concepcion's form of close reading, consequently, feels more lived in.

A final marker of *Binge Mode*'s approach has been evident throughout our analysis: Concepcion and Rubin's reading depends on each other. As noted above, the two hosts rely on each other for encouragement as they progress through the reading, affirming insights, building on each other's arguments, and occasionally pushing back with differences of opinion. They

model a relational (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2010) approach to pedagogy which assumes that "human relations exist in and through shared practices" and, consequently "teaching is building educational relations" (p. 7), not only between persons (teacher-student) but also between persons and objects, such as texts.

We are particularly interested in what this approach means in the context of the kinds of literary analysis practiced in *Binge Mode*, and how we might envision close reading in English classrooms. A relational approach to pedagogy, Bingham (2010) explains (drawing on Gadamer), hinges on the assumption that "the act of learning depends primarily on the acceptance that the knowledge of someone else deserves a spot in one's own scheme of things" (p. 31). And indeed this is exactly what Gallop (2000) understands as the crux of ethical close reading, or "a reading for ethics, close reading as a means to a more just treatment for others." (p. 17) Practicing close reading, in Gallop's view,

> makes for more ethical reading...for close reading is not just a way of reading but a way of listening. It can help us not just to read what is on the page, but to hear what a person really said. Close reading can train us to hear other people. (p. 12)

Rubin and Concepcion, in practicing a relational approach to close reading on *Binge Mode*, model a mode of literary analysis which relies upon listening, collaboration, and the emergence of shared insight. As Rubin writes in her letter to Concepcion reflecting on the podcast's run to date (and quoted at the beginning of this paper), "You reminded me time and again that the only thing better than finding a way down that road in the first place is finding someone to travel it with you. You've taught me so much." (The Ringer, 2021, 3:06) The hosts' relationship provides the pedagogical foundation from which close reading emerges.

Discussion

Affordances

Binge Mode provides a compelling model for textual analysis, one that has taught thousands how to analyze popular texts since 2017. Given our study of the podcast as a form of literary analysis, we see many affordances to viewing *Binge Mode* as a curriculum. In doing so we follow in the tradition of curriculum studies (Flinders & Thornton, 2021), a field which takes as a foundational assumption that curriculum extends beyond school: outside of the classroom, students are taught (and teach) literacy through innumerable encounters with reading and writing in a variety of senses and spaces. While it is true that *Binge Mode* seems, on its face, to be a text designed to entertain rather than educate, our continued engagement with the podcast troubles the distinction between the two. We find, for example, that the joyful close reading practices of Rubin and Concepcion fruitfully challenge some of the stultifying conventions of close reading in English classrooms. While current conceptualizations of literacy in K-12 schools often rely upon standardized forms of assessment and reading and writing practices are that at times devoid of enjoyment of the texts we encounter (Muhammad, 2022), we see *Binge Mode* as offering an alternate approach: one in which the ways we enjoy a text is central to our literary knowledge and our literacy selves (Kirkland, 2013) .

One initial implication of this study is that podcasting itself is a useful form for teaching literary analysis. The New London Group (1996) offered literacy educators a way to center texts beyond traditional forms of reading and writing in order to forward assets-based pedagogies with youth (Leander & Boldt, 2013). Focusing on multimodal textual forms, like podcasts, can offer space for teachers and students to use their experiences in and beyond school to inform their reading of literature, including popular texts like those analyzed in *Binge Mode*. Moreover,

centering a podcast can help students see the multimodal texts they love as worthy, as valid academic analyses.

Binge Mode itself offers a number of insights into how reimagined close reading practices might translate to English curricula, and how the relationality evident between the two readers and hosts made space for a more thorough close reading of the texts they enjoyed.

First, the relationality experienced via the hosts' close readings invites students to have more equal footing in discussions of texts, and to deconstruct the common and dehumanizing teacher/student hierarchy evident in many "banking" approaches to curriculum and pedagogy (Freire, 2005, p. 57). While English classrooms have often, perhaps unwittingly, taken a "Sage on the Stage" approach to literary analysis, privileging the teachers' interpretation of a text, a relationship-focused close reading approach as seen in *Binge Mode* might bring student input into conversation with the teacher's reading. We see such a flattening of a hierarchical approach interpretation of texts as a step toward more humanizing English classrooms (Paris & Alim, 2017).

In addition, the relational aspects of *Binge Mode* emphasize the ways students in a classroom may themselves serve as teachers to their peers. Students, as we often tell pre-service teachers, teach other students, and some of the best literary insights happen through the dialogic interactions readers have upon engaging with a text (Adler et al., 2003; Caughlan, et al., 2013; Dunn, 2018; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). We see the structure of *Binge Mod*e as not divergent from, but instead building upon, the already-present relational possibilities inherent in English curricula and pedagogy, wherein students might learn in conversation with each other.

Third, our analysis of the central role of joy and pleasure in driving analysis in Binge Mode suggests that those concepts might usefully be similarly centered in an English classroom.

Skerrett's (2016) work corroborates this finding, arguing that students in English classrooms may engage multimodal texts more profoundly when teachers offer literary "pleasure and purpose" (p. 117) in their curricula. What our close reading of Binge Mode found, then, was that enjoyment may be even further emphasized in classrooms that foreground the relationality available between "fans" of texts in English classrooms.

Finally, we are intrigued by the ways that *Binge Mode*'s approach may productively complicate the tensions that many feel with traditional renditions of close reading. While early scholars of close reading downplayed or even discouraged the role of the reader's subjectivities when analyzing literature (e.g., Ransom, 1937), *Binge Mode* allows us to witness a close reading that makes space for the worldviews, desires, and interests of its readers. Indeed, the *Binge Mode* approach to close reading even praises the reader's agency, experiences, and especially desire, as it revels in the ways that we enjoy, love, and are moved by texts (Neville, 2023; Skerrett, 2016). In the first episode of *Binge Mode*, Rubin outlined the initial pitch, stating, "To be clear, this podcast—when we were talking to our bosses, [we said] it'll be about theory and it will be *a place for people to come together to talk about a thing that they love*" (Rubin & Concepcion, 2017 June 5, 16:42). This form of close reading demands attention to the ways that texts are always interacting with the reader's experiences, rather than bracketing off those experiences as irrelevant to the work of analysis. This is beneficial for an English classroom, as it can allow the teacher to similarly ask students about those texts that move them; we agree with Skerrett (2016) that such attention to emotion, pleasure, joy, and interest is central to equity-oriented curricula. While close reading has often been deleteriously enacted in K–12 schools (Hinchman & Moore, 2013), separating identity from the reading of texts, *Binge Mode* recenters the personal within a close reading approach.

Limitations

Amidst the affordances of *Binge Mode*, we see clear limitations. First, the creators love the texts they choose, much like teachers often love the texts they center on (e.g. the entrenchment of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Great Gatsby* in U.S. English classrooms; Applebee, 1988; Newman, 2022). This attachment can make it difficult to see a text, and its author, through a critical lens. Rowling's books provide a particularly sharp example of the need for criticality. In June 2020, the author tweeted comments roundly criticized as transphobic, later doubling down on her views in a 3,600-word blog post on her personal website (Rowling, 2020). In the aftermath of the incident, fans struggled to separate author from text, *Binge Mode's* hosts included (Rubin and Concepcion both strongly and publicly disagreed with Rowling's comments [Rubin, 2020]). As one "devoted Harry Potter fan who also happens to be transgender" wrote, the books themselves warrant criticism:

> It's certainly not the first time I've had to consider this: It was disappointing to see the appropriation of Navajo culture in Ms. Rowling's digital story collection, "History of Magic in North America" and the original books have been rightly criticized for promoting fatphobia, racial stereotyping and more. (Bird, 2019, para. 12)

Yet these topics are not taken up in any substantive way across *Binge Mode*'s 69 episodes devoted to Rowling's books and movies. A less attached, more vigilant and skeptical approach to textual analysis, of the kind fostered by critical literacy and resistant reading (e.g., Borsheim-Black et al., 2014), may have helped Rubin and Concepcion anticipate and identify harmful ideologies embedded in the texts. Borsheim-Black et al. (2014), offer teachers a framework—critical literacy pedagogy—for how they might do this work, demonstrating how students can be positioned to attend to ableism in *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993), for example, through

pedagogical attention to the characterization of disability. While demonstrating the utility of their framework, the authors also point to other work (Janks et al., 2013; Morrell, 2004; Vasquez et al., 2013), which offers concrete ways teachers can foster critical resistance to the problematics they encounter in texts. Inquiring into the possibility of doing this work in the context of children's and young adult literature, Simmons (2012), framing pedagogical engagement with *The Hunger Games* through political lensings of labor and hunger, provides a particularly promising example for teachers seeking to do this work with texts like *Harry Potter*. One way we suggest that teachers do this resistant work, then, is to provide students with critical lenses through which to conduct close reading, channeling careful textual analysis towards just political ends.

We wonder, though, in what other ways do close readings of stories we so enjoy preclude us from interrogating injustice? For instance, we note how *Binge Mode* lacks deep critique of Disney as a corporation that continued *Star Wars* while also engaging in unjust labor practices (Taylor, 2018). We wonder what our love of a text does for the critiques of injustice that may be inherent in these pieces. Relatedly, we caution against blindly valorizing texts that we have loved, as English teachers and school curricula have long forced the texts they value onto students without considering youths' own literacies and interests. Instead, teachers might follow in the vein of much assets-based work in English classrooms in order to build productively on those literacies and interests with students. Coleman (2021), Juzwik et al. (2019), and Knight-Manuel and Watson (2020) provide excellent recent examples, among many others, of what this work might look like in English teaching practice.

A second significant limitation concerns the genre and format of a podcast. Importantly, as we noted in the discussion on fandom, we recognize that a podcast is not a classroom.

Listening isn't compulsory. This means *Binge Mode*'s audience "opted in" to hours of analysis of these texts in ways that students do not opt into literary study. Listeners further likely do so because of their own prior attachments to the texts; they may be themselves devoted fans of Marvel comics, Pixar's *Coco*, or the young adult novel *Ready Player One*, whose fond formative experiences facilitate their engagement with *Binge Mode*. Classroom teachers practicing textual analysis with students have no such luxury. We know that students are, in a crucially distinct way, a captive audience, and reading in school will always inevitably be "schoolish" (Whitney, 2011) in ways that *Binge Mode* may never be. "We can make school more real," Whitney contends, "by first admitting to its 'schoolishness' and then making what we can of that" (p. 60). For teachers this may mean being honest with students about the inauthenticity of classroom reading, asking them to attend to the different kinds of affordances offered by the public experience of reading a text together in a classroom space. Close reading in classrooms does something importantly different for students than they can otherwise experience alone, engrossed in a favorite story or entertained with the familiar voices of a popular podcast. A lesson may never approximate the vivid nostalgia of the literary escapes of childhood or the charming insider chatter of *Binge Mode*, but it can offer something else: namely the type of intentional, sustained, critical dialogue among varied voices that marks the best forms of study. Mirroring the critical literacy and asset-based work noted above, teachers do well to see the context of reading in classrooms for the asset it can be.

We do not see these complications as a deterrent for framing English classrooms through podcasts like *Binge Mode*. Instead, complicating the close-reading of texts we love may offer space for teachers and students to extend close-reading as a justice-oriented, joyful, and multiliterate form of curriculum and pedagogy, one that decenters the teacher as an authoritative

"maester" and instead positions students as equally dynamic and potentially expert readers of the texts they enjoy.

References

Adler, M., Rougle, E., Kaiser, E., & Caughlan, S. (2003). Closing the gap between concept and practice: Toward more dialogic discussion in the language arts classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 47*(4), 312–322. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40014777

Alvermann, D. E., & Hagood, M. C. (2000). Fandom and critical media literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 43*(5), 436–446. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40017080

Applebee, A. (1988), *A study of book-length works taught in high school English courses*. Center for the Learning and Teacher of Literature, University of Albany. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED309453

Barone, D., & Wright, T.E. (2008). Literacy instruction with digital and media technologies. *The Reading Teacher*, *62*(4), 292–302. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27699693

Beers, K., & Probst, R. (2013). *Notice & note: Strategies for close reading.* Heinemann.

Bingham, C. (2010). Let's treat authority relationally. In C. Bingham & A. Sidorkin (Eds.), *No education without relation* (pp. 23–37). Peter Lang.

Bingham, C., & Sidorkin, A. M. (Eds.) (2010). *No education without relation.* Peter Lang.

Bird, J. (2019, December 21). Harry Potter helped me come out as trans, but J.K. Rowling disappointed me. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/21/opinion/jk-rowling-twitter-trans.html

Blau, S. (1993). *Building bridges between literary theory and the teaching of literature*. Albany, NY: National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning. Report Series 5.3. University at Albany. State University of New York.

Borelli, R. (2019, January 30). The hit podcasters breaking down *Harry Potter*, chapter by chapter. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from

https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/30/books/binge-mode-podcasters-harry-potter-game-thrones.html

Borhseim-Black, C., Macaluso, M., and Petrone, R. (2014). Critical literature pedagogy: Teaching canonical literature for critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 58*(2), 123–133. https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jaal.323

Borsheim-Black, C., & Sarigianides, S. T. (2019). *Letting go of literary whiteness: Antiracist literature instruction for white students.* Teachers College Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Burt, D. (2008). The lure of podcasting. *Computers in New Zealand schools, 20*(1), 19–25.

Caughlan, S., Juzwik, M. M., Borsheim-Black, C., Kelly, S., & Goldenring Fine, J. (2013). English teacher candidates developing dialogically organized instructional practices. *Research in the Teaching of English, 47*(3), 212–246. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24397855

Christensen, L. (2009). *Teaching for joy and justice: Re-imagining the language arts classroom*. Rethinking Schools.

Coleman, J. J. (2021). Restorying with the ancestors: Historically rooted speculative composing practices and alternative rhetorics of queer futurity. *Written Communication, 38*(4), 512–543. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/07410883211028230

Cunningham, K. E. & Enriquez, G. (2022). Planning for book joy: Reconceptualizing power in literacy instruction. *Language Arts, 99*(3), 192–194. https://publicationsncte.org/content/journals/10.58680/la202231622?crawler=true

Curlee, A., & Early, J. S. (2023). Teaching the podcast: Using a genre approach to secondary writing instruction. In B. L. Hott (Ed.), *Quality instruction and intervention: Strategies for secondary educators* (pp. 87-107). Rowman & Littlefield.

DuBois, A. (2003). *Close reading: An introduction*. Duke University Press.

Dunn, M. (2018). The complexity of becoming a dialogic teacher in an English language arts classroom. *Changing English, 4*(3), 135–145. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1181094

Dunn, D., & Love, B. L. (2020). Antiracist language arts pedagogy is incomplete without Black joy. *Research in the Teaching of English, 55*(2), 190–192. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27116899

Early, J. S. (2023). *Next generation genres: Teaching writing for civic and academic engagement*. Norton.

Eppley, K. (2019). Close reading: What is reading for?. *Curriculum Inquiry, 49*(3), 338–355. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03626784.2019.1631701

Evans, R. A., Goering, C. Z., & French, S. D. (2021). Soundtracks, songwriting, and soundscapes: Producing the podcast of our lives. *English Journal, 110*(4), 69-76.

Ferguson, D. (2014). Martin Luther King and the Common Core: A critical reading of close reading. *Rethinking Schools, 28*(2). https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/martin-luther-king-jr-and-the-common-core/

Flinders, D. J., & Thornton, S. J. (Eds.) (2021). *The curriculum studies reader* (6th ed.). Routledge.

Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. The Continuum International Publishing Group.

Gallop, J. (2000). The ethics of close reading: Close encounters. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 16*(3), 7–17. https://www.rowanfirstyearwriting.com/uploads/1/2/9/3/12938517/gallop_2000.pdf

Goodson, L. A. & Skillen, M. (2010). Small-town perspectives, big-time motivation: Composing and producing place-based podcasts. *English Journal*, 100(1), 53–57.

Guggenheim, A., Glover, D., & Mejia, A. G. (2021). Voices and sounds heard: Composing through narrative podcasting. *English Journal*, *110*(4), 37-44.

Hinchman, K. A. & Moore, D. W. (2013). Close reading: A cautionary interpretation. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 56*(6), 441–450. https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/JAAL.163

Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.

Janks, H., Dixon, K., Ferreira, A., Granville, S., & Newfield, D. (2013). *Doing critical literacy: Texts and activities for students and teachers*. Routledge.

Jarvie, S. (2021). The black box: Close reading literary life. *Journal of Language & Literacy Education, 17*(2), 1-16.

Jenson, J. (1992). Fandom as pathology: The consequences of characterization. In L.A. Lewis (Ed.), *The adoring audience: Fan culture and popular media* (pp. 9–29). Routledge.

Jones, L. A. (2010). Podcasting and performativity: Multimodal intervention in an advanced writing class. *Composition Studies, 38*(2), 75-91.

Jones, K., & Storm, S. (2022). Sustaining textual passions: Teaching with texts youth love. *Journal of Literacy Research, 54*(4), 458-489. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1086296X221141393

Juzwik, M. M., Stone, J. C., Burke, K. J., & Dávila, D. (Eds.) (2019). *Legacies of Christian languaging and literacies in American education*. Routledge.

Kinloch, V. (2010). *Harlem on our minds: Place, race, and the literacies of urban youth*. Teachers College Press.

Kirkland, D. (2013). *A search past silence: The literacy of young Black men.* Teachers College Press.

Knight-Manuel,, M. G., & Watson, V. W. M. (2020). Humanizing the Black immigrant body: Envisioning diaspora literacies of youth and young adults from West African countries. *Teachers College Record, 122*, 1–28. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/016146812012201304?journalCode=tcza

Kress, G. R. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication.* Taylor & Francis.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995), Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Education Research Journal*, *32*(3), 465-491.

Leander, K., & Boldt, G. (2013). Rereading "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies": Bodies, texts, and emergence. *Journal of Literacy Research*, *45*(1), 22–46. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1086296X12468587

Lee, M. J. W., McLoughlin, C., & Chan, A. (2008). Talk the talk: Learner-generated podcasts as catalysts for knowledge creation. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 39*(3), 501–521. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ791901

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.

Low, D. E. (2017). Not to be "destoried": How an academically marginalized student employs

comics and multimodal authorship to claim a counter-identity. *Ubiquity: The Journal of Literature, Literacy, and the Arts, 4(2), 6–56.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326610064_Not_to_be_Destoried_How_an_Academically_Marginalized_Student_Employs_Comics_and_Multimodal_Authorship_to_Claim_a_Counter-Identity

Marlatt, R. (2018). This is what we do: Emphasizing discipline-specific literacy practices in teacher education. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education, 14*(2), 1-23.

Martin, G. R. R. (2015). *A knight of the seven kingdoms*. Bantam.

Masterson, J. E. (2022). Reading in "purgatory": Tactical literacies in a remedial reading class. *Reading Research Quarterly, 57*(1), 91-109.

McConnel, J. (2019). Fan spaces as third spaces: Tapping into the creative community of fandom. *English Journal*, *109*(1), 45–51. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2303159614?sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Binge-watch. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved January 4, 2024, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/binge-watch

Moje, E. (2009). Standpoint: A call for new research on new and multi-literacies. *Research in the Teaching of English, 43*(4), 348–362. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27784339

Morrell, E. (2004). *Becoming critical researchers: Literacy and empowerment for urban youth.* Peter Lang.

Muhammad, G. (2022). Cultivating genius and joy in education through historically responsive literacy. *Language Arts*, *99*(3), 195–204. https://publicationsncte.org/docserver/fulltext/la/99/3/languagearts31623.pdf?expires=17

08887086&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=0DF005A11FE46D73599B06658932643D

Muhammad, G. (2023). *Unearthing joy: A guide to culturally and historically responsive curriculum and instruction*. Scholastic Professional.

Muhammad, G. E., Ortiz, N. A., & Neville, M. L. (2021). A historically responsive literacy model for reading and mathematics. *The Reading Teacher, 75* (1), 73 – 81.

Myers, M. (1996). *Changing our minds: Negotiating English and literacy*. NCTE.

Nash, B. (2024). Critical inquiry in (and about) media environments: Examining an asset-based digital literacy curriculum. *Journal of Literacy Research*, *56*(2), 133-156. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X241244700

National Council of Teachers of English (2022, April 9). Media education in English Language Arts [Position Statement]. https://ncte.org/statement/media_education/

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/ela-literacy

Neville, M. L. (2023). “I want them to see writing as a joyful thing to do”: Noticing texts as equity-oriented English education. *English Education, 55*(2), 92 – 115.

Newman, A. (2022, September 16). These high school ‘classics’ have been taught for generations — could they be on their way out? *The Conversation.* https://theconversation.com/these-high-school-classics-have-been-taught-for-generations-could-they-be-on-their-way-out-188197

Oslawski-Lopez, J., & Kordsmeier, G. (2021). "Being able to listen makes me feel more engaged": Best practices for using podcasts as readings. Teaching Sociology, 49(4), 335-347. https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X211017197

Ohrvik, A. (2024). What is close reading? An exploration of a methodology. *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2024.2345001

Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (Eds.). (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Ransom, J. C. (1937). Criticism, inc. Virginia Quarterly Review, 13(4). http://www.vrqonline.org/essay/criticism-inc-0

ReadWriteThink (2004). Defining characterization. Retrieved from: http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson800/Characterization.pdf

The Ringer. (2021, March 5). *"I love you 3000" by Mallory Rubin and Jason Concepcion | Binge Mode | The Ringer* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj-xYWKYOU0

Rowling, J. K. (1998). *Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone*. Scholastic.

Rowling, J. K. (2020, June 10). J.K. Rowling writes about her reasons for speaking out on sex and gender issues. Retrieved from https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/

Rozema, R. (2007). The book report, version 2.0: Podcasting on young adult novels. *English Journal, 97*(1), 31–36. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30047205

Rubin, M. [@MalloryRubin]. (2020, June 6). *Harry Potter is about the magic of love, acceptance, belonging. The power of courage. The impact of hope. Trying to* [Tweet]. Twitter.com. https://twitter.com/MalloryRubin/status/127086777307842969

Rubin, M., & Concepcion, J. (Hosts) (2017, June 5). S1E1: "Winter is coming" | Game of Thrones. [Audio podcast episode]. In *Binge Mode*. The Ringer. https://www.theringer.com/2017/8/4/16095460/s1e1-winter-is-coming-game-of-thrones

Rubin, M., & Concepcion, J. (Hosts) (2017, July 12). S6E10: "The winds of winter" | Game of Thrones. [Audio podcast episode]. In *Binge Mode*. The Ringer. https://www.theringer.com/2017/8/4/16098996/s6e10-the-winds-of-winter-game-of-thrones

Rubin, M., & Concepcion, J. (Hosts) (2018, October 11). 'Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince,' Ch. 24-26 | Harry Potter. [Audio podcast episode]. In *Binge Mode*. The Ringer. https://www.theringer.com/binge-mode/2018/10/11/17962944/harry-potter-and-the-half-blood-prince-ch-24-26

Rubin, M., & Concepcion, J. (Hosts) (2018, February 1). Growth and enlightenment in 'The Good Place' season 1 [Audio podcast episode]. In *Binge Mode*. The Ringer. https://www.theringer.com/binge-mode/2018/2/1/16959100/the-good-place-season-1-growth-and-enlightenment

Rubin, M., & Concepcion, J. (Hosts) (2019, January 30). The farewell | Harry Potter. [Audio podcast episode]. In *Binge Mode*. The Ringer. https://www.theringer.com/binge-mode/2019/1/30/18203291/harry-potter-finale

Rubin, M., & Concepcion, J. (Hosts) (2019, December 21). 'The Mandalorian' chapter 7: The Reckoning | Star Wars. [Audio podcast episode]. In *Binge Mode*. The Ringer.

https://www.theringer.com/2019/12/21/21033297/binge-mode-star-wars-the-mandalorian-chapter-7-the-reckoning

Rubin, M., & Concepcion, J. (Hosts) (2020, April 24). 'Saga' book 1 [Audio podcast episode]. In *Binge Mode*. The Ringer. https://www.theringer.com/2020/4/24/21235159/saga-book-1

San Pedro, T., & Kinloch, V. (2017). Toward projects in humanization: Research on co-creating and sustaining dialogic relationships. *American Educational Research Journal, 54*(1), 373–394. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0002831216671210

Simmons, A. M. (2012). Class on fire: Using The Hunger Games trilogy to encourage social action. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *56*(1), 22–34. https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/JAAL.00099

Skerrett, A. (2016). Attending to pleasure and purpose in multiliteracies instructional practices: Insights from transnational youths. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 60*(2), 115–120. https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jaal.571

Smith, B. E. (2018). Collaborative multimodal composing: Tracing the unique partnerships of three pairs of adolescents composing across three digital projects. *Literacy*, *53*(1), 14–21. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/lit.12153

Smith, K. & Parker, L. (2021). Reconfiguring literacies in the age of misinformation and disinformation. *Journal of Language & Literacy Education*, *17*(2), 1–27.

Smythe, S., & Neufield, P. (2010). "Podcast time": Negotiating digital literacies and communities of learning in a middle years ELL classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 53(*6), 488–496. https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1598/JAAL.53.6.5

Steinbeck, J. (1993*). Of mice and men*. Penguin.

Storey, J. (1996). *Cultural studies and the study of popular culture.* University of Georgia Press.

Taylor, C. (December 2018). “Nightmare” conditions at Chinese factories where Hasbro and Disney toys are made. *CNBC.* Retrieved from: https://www.cnbc.com/2018/12/07/nightmare-at-chinese-factories-making-hasbro-and-disney-toys.html

The New London Group (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review, 66*(1), 60–93. https://meridian.allenpress.com/her/article-abstract/66/1/60/31673/A-Pedagogy-of-Multiliteracies-Designing-Social?redirectedFrom=fulltext

Vasquez, V. M., Stacie, L., Tate, S. L., & Harste, J.C. (Eds.) (2013). *Negotiating critical literacies with teachers: Theoretical foundations and pedagogical resources for pre-service and in-service contexts.* Routledge.

Vaughan, B. K., & Staples, F. (2017). *Saga: Book one.* Image Comics.

Waters, M. (Director). (2004). *Mean girls* [Film]. Broadway Video.

Weninger, C. (2018). *From language skills to literacy: Broadening the scope of English language education through media literacy*. Routledge.

WNDB (2015). We need diverse books. United States. [Web Archive] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0010870/.

Whitney, A. E.(2011). In search of the authentic English classroom: Facing the schoolishness of school. *English Education, 44*(1), 51–62. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23238722

Williams, B. T. (2008). Tomorrow will not be like today: Literacy and identity in a world of multiliteracies. *International Reading Association, 51*(8), 682–688. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40012405

Yoon, H. S. (2019). Playful literacies, creativity, and multilingual practices. *The Reading Teacher*, *72*(5), 551–557.

Zheng, B., Arada, K., Niiya, M., & Warschauer, M. (2014). One-to-one laptops in K-12 classrooms: Voices of students. *Pedagogies: An International Journal, 9*(4), 279–299. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1089239

Funding acknowledgement: Authors report no sources of funding and no potential conflicts of interest.

Inquiry does not require IRB approval.

Authorship: Authors contributed equally (50% each) to the article.

Scott Jarvie works as Assistant Professor of English Education in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at San Jose State University. His scholarship studies educational experience, particularly in secondary English classrooms, through perspectives drawn from the humanities, educational philosophy, and curriculum theory. He can be contacted at scott.jarvie@sjsu.edu.

Mary Neville is an Assistant Professor of English Education in the Teacher Education Division at Wayne State University in Detroit, MI. Her scholarship focuses on humanizing English language arts pedagogies and enjoyment in the experiences of youth and teachers. She can be contacted at mary.neville@wayne.edu.