

From Keats to Kanye: Romantic Poetry and Popular Culture in the Secondary English Classroom

Megan E. Bowmer, Jen Scott Curwood

How can teachers use popular culture to engage students and foster relevance? This article explores what happens when traditional literature is taught alongside popular culture in high school.

Today's young adults are born into and live in a digital world saturated with multimodal texts and feel that their generation is distinctive for their technology, their music, and their popular culture (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Although much research exists about the educational implications of young people's engagement with digital tools and online spaces, the synthesis of popular culture texts with canonical literature in English has been underresearched (Beach & O'Brien, 2008; Dowdall, Vasudevan, & Mackey, 2014).

Prior research has found that the majority of Australian high school students find English boring and that this is due to irrelevant content (Willms, 2014). In particular, students dislike studying poetry (Beavis, 2008; Weaven & Clark, 2009). We propose that popular culture can be used to complement traditional literature in English to bridge the gap between students' home and school worlds. This study extends the work of Curwood and Gibbons (2009) to discover how students creatively blend canonical literature and popular culture through remixing, which means "to take cultural artifacts and combine and manipulate them into new kinds of creative blends" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008, p. 22).

To address these issues, this study had two aims: to make high school English more relevant and enjoyable through popular culture and to discover how remixing facilitates student engagement and promotes agency over their learning. Australia's current emphasis on high-stakes assessment often serves to narrow the curriculum; in contrast, this study focuses on the potential for students to be creative and play with words,

modes, and concepts. Drawing on sociocultural theory and a qualitative methodology, we asked two research questions:

1. How does studying popular culture texts alongside Romantic poetry make secondary English more relevant for students?
2. How can remixing Romantic poetry with popular culture texts promote student agency and engagement?

Theoretical Framework

From a sociocultural perspective, learning occurs through interactions with people and their environments. Aspects of young people's surroundings, such as the popular culture they listen to and watch in their free time, shape the way they understand, exist, and make meaning in the world (Vygotsky, 1978). Gee (1996) posited that literacy is not just about reading and writing but also involves using semiotic tools to make meaning

MEGAN E. BOWMER is a high school English and English as a second language teacher at the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities, Sydney, Australia; e-mail mbow3193@uni.sydney.edu.au.

JEN SCOTT CURWOOD is a senior lecturer in English education and media studies at the University of Sydney, NSW, Australia; e-mail js.curwood@sydney.edu.au.

in different social contexts. In the 21st century, culture is produced and shared not only through print texts but also through digital, visual, and auditory modes (New London Group, 1996). Drawing on this notion of literacy, the present study sought to investigate students' wider engagement with multimodal popular culture texts within an English classroom.

Popular culture is a sociocultural construct, and Fiske (1989) argued that popular culture texts are "activated or made meaningful only in social relations and intertextual relations" (p. 3). Notably, popular culture is both time and context specific. For example, whereas William Shakespeare's work is now considered high culture, in Elizabethan England, his plays were popular culture. Storey's (2006) six definitions neatly summarize the various theoretical understandings of popular culture:

1. Liked by many people
2. The culture left over after high culture
3. Mass culture mass-produced for mass consumption by a passive audience
4. Of the people rather than being imposed from above
5. A struggle between minorities and dominant capitalism
6. A reciprocal blend of high and low culture according to Postmodernism, which is a circular and reciprocal process

All of these definitions contributed to the conceptual development of this study, and our research is a response to the assumption that popular culture exists in opposition to traditional literature. Through interrogating this assumption, we consider the potential for reciprocity between popular culture and Romantic poetry as students study these simultaneously. This approach aligns with Hagood, Alvermann, and Heron-Hruby's (2010) recontextualized model of popular culture, which situated popular culture within the school curriculum.

Literature Review

Relevance: Bridging School and the Everyday

There is strong consensus among scholars that students' home and school lives are disconnected and that making school more relevant can promote student engagement (Dowdall et al., 2014; Duncan-Andrade, 2004). Notably, for many students, relevant texts are no longer print based. Building on the New London Group's (1996) seminal work on new literacies, Lessig (2008) suggest-

ed that in this multimodal world, television, film, and music videos "are the kinds of 'writing' that matters most to most" (p. 68). Our study extends this scholarship to explore what happens when students learn about multimodal popular culture texts alongside print-based Romantic poems.

Although most of the academic literature in this area is American-centric, the Australian education context recognizes the importance of relevance. Relevance is prioritized through the dimension of significance in the New South Wales Department of Education and Training's (2003) Quality Teaching Framework. Furthermore, Willms's (2014) quantitative study of 172 Australian high schools revealed that relevant content had a .81 correlation with students' level of interest and motivation in English. This concern about irrelevance aligns with sociocultural theory, which advocates for the interconnection between formal and everyday learning (Salomon & Perkins, 1998).

Teaching Popular Culture

Previous studies about popular culture in education have revealed two key ideas: First, educators are concerned that popular culture will divert students from traditional literature. Second, using popular culture in the classroom requires teachers to consider their own and their students' subjectivities (Alvermann & Moon, 2011; Hagood et al., 2010; Morrell, 2002).

Research has indicated that although there are perceived tensions between popular culture and traditional literature, the binary of high and low is increasingly blurred (Beach & O'Brien, 2008; Beavis, 2008). Traditionalists are concerned that through including popular culture in English, the sanctity of the canon will be compromised (Browne, 1989). However, Postmodern thought challenges the high/low cultural binary and seeks to reduce the gap between these constructions (Allender, 2004). For instance, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2004) studied how hip-hop and a broad range of poetry could be used to develop the transfer of academic skills in the lives of urban youths. Although many studies exist about the use of hip-hop as a counterhegemonic curriculum for disengaged youths, there remains a need to research other forms of popular culture.

There are multiple challenges associated with incorporating popular culture into the classroom, as both students' and teachers' subjectivities are accentuated (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Beach & O'Brien, 2008). Hagood et al. (2010) reminded teachers that their personal popular culture tastes hugely influence their pedagogical approach to teaching it and will influence

student engagement. The work of Alvermann et al. revealed that because popular culture is a crucial part of teenagers' interests, teachers need to acknowledge students' expertise in this area. Popular culture can therefore create classroom tensions, as students' interests may be at odds with the beliefs of teachers, who traditionally assume an expert role. However, although Alvermann et al. advocated for students to be authoritative with popular culture, they also acknowledged that deferring authority to teenagers can be problematic. Our case study aimed for a synthesis of these approaches: The unit of work predominantly featured teacher-selected texts but also allowed students to choose their own popular culture when remixing.

Remix: "Literacy of Fusion"

Remixing refers to the "practice of taking cultural artifacts and combining them in new and creative ways" (Curwood, 2013, p. 84), and the term has origins in the music world. Prior studies about remixing have suggested that there is powerful potential in this practice (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008). Curwood and Gibbons's (2009) case study analyzed how a digitally remixed poem expressed the identity of a student who identified as gay, Asian, and an immigrant. In addition to the potential of remixing to express identity, Lessig (2008) argued that the act of combining and manipulating texts helps foster understanding of the older, original text being remixed. Millard (2003) called remixing an enriching "literacy of fusion" (p. 3), as it "fuses aspects of school requirements and children's interests into what becomes a more tasty and nourishing diet" (p. 6). As a sociocultural practice, remixing deconstructs the artificial binary of popular

culture/traditional literature and can also be a way of merging students' home and school lives.

Methods

Research Context and Participants

This case study focused on one year 9 mixed-ability English class at Culture City High School (all names are pseudonyms), a public performing arts high school in metropolitan Sydney, Australia. Most of the school's approximately 1,000 students are of middle to high socio-economic advantage, and 26% of them have a language background other than English (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013). Within the school's English curriculum, all year 9 students complete a unit of work on Romantic poetry. This study used purposive sampling, as an English teacher at the school had planned to incorporate some popular culture texts alongside Romantic poems. During the nine-week unit of work, the year 9 class met two or three times per week for a 77-minute period.

The teacher participant, Mr. Thomas, is an enthusiastic early-career teacher, and he identified critical media literacy as a professional interest. He described his year 9 English class as "a hugely various group of students with very different ability levels, very different interests." Of the 29 students in the class, 26 participated in the study. Four students—Mia, Harry, Lucy, and Zach—served as focal participants, and their varying degrees of engagement in English represented a range of learning experiences in the class (see Table 1).

In all qualitative research, the process of data collection and analysis is informed by the researcher's predispositions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). We

Table 1
Student Participant Profiles

Pseudonym and age	Self-description	Enjoys English?	Remix combination	
			Romantic poem	Popular culture song
Mia, 15	"I'm a dancer....I don't really enjoy English."	Disagree	"I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" by William Wordsworth	"Walking on Air" by Katy Perry
Harry, 15	"I do lots of drama outside of school....I like writing."	Agree	"The World Is Too Much With Us" by William Wordsworth	"I Want You Back" by The Jackson Five
Lucy, 15	"I dance outside of school....I love art and reading."	Strongly agree	"Holy Thursday" by William Blake	"Same Love" by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis
Zach, 15	"I play soccer and I dance.... Maths and English—I guess I'm just good at both of them."	Agree	"To Autumn" by John Keats	"To Build a Home" by The Cinematic Orchestra

recognize that this subjectivity was heightened in our case study, as Megan (first author) adopted multiple active roles as researcher, participant-observer, curriculum designer, and teacher. Consequently, we undertook multiple precautions. Methodological triangulation allowed us to understand the data from diverse perspectives, and self-reflexive field notes enabled Megan to monitor and cross-check her observations with other data sources. We also engaged in a thorough, nonlinear process of coding and recoding to better understand the data.

Research Design

In alignment with this study's sociocultural framework, the case study design involved multiple data sources and was situated within a complex classroom context (Merriam, 2009). In the study, Megan collaborated with Mr. Thomas to refine his existing unit of work about Romanticism. They codesigned the final unit, which focused on three concepts: social justice, environmental sustainability, and creative genius (see Table 2). Environmental sustainability and social justice were selected because they are real-world concerns and cross-curricular priorities (Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW, 2012). Mr. Thomas and Megan selected the theme of creative genius for its novel and creative potential to engage students. To conclude the unit of work, students completed a formative assessment task that required them to select a poem studied in class and remix it with a self-selected popular culture text.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study involved the collection of multiple data sources: observations of 13 lessons over a six-week period; student surveys, involving both Likert-type scale and open-ended questions; semistructured 30-minute interviews with four focal students and one teacher; and artifacts, including student essays, journals, and remix-

es. This range of data allowed for a holistic exploration of this specific classroom context in all of its complexity and richness, offering insight into how studying popular culture alongside Romantic poetry could make English more relevant, engaging, and enjoyable for students.

The first cycle of coding involved analyzing data from interviews and surveys. Key moments in interviews were analyzed using a combination of thematic and descriptive codes such as "connectedness" and "remix = freedom = fun." We also used *in vivo* codes (Saldaña, 2013) such as "doesn't relate to anything," allowing us to understand the students' perspectives through their language. With the development of preliminary categories from interview data, we then conducted thematic analysis of open-ended survey questions and used quantitative analysis on Likert-type scale survey questions.

In the second cycle of coding, we thematically coded student focal participants' journal entries, essays, and remixes. These artifacts provided insight beyond students' own articulations, and subsequently, we reduced infrequent codes. During this cycle, we used focused coding to reanalyze the interviews, and after organizing codes into categories and subcategories, we identified the dominant themes. After this, we cross-checked the emergent themes with our observation notes to ensure that our preliminary findings reflected our classroom experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Findings and Discussion

This study offers three key findings related to how students engaged with popular culture and Romantic poems. First, students articulated connectedness among Romantic concepts, Romantic and popular culture texts, and society in diverse ways. Second, the extent to which students understood Romantic concepts through poetry and popular culture was influenced by personal, textual, and educational factors. Finally, the remix assessment task allowed students to demonstrate connections between popular culture and Romantic poetry and

Table 2
Overview of Concepts and Texts in the Unit of Work

Concept	Romantic poetry	Popular culture text
Social justice	"Holy Thursday" and "London" by William Blake	"Where Is the Love?" by The Black Eyed Peas (music video) and "Changes" by Tupac Shakur (song)
Environmental sustainability	"I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and "The World Is Too Much With Us" by William Wordsworth and "To Autumn" by John Keats	Avatar directed by James Cameron (film)
Creative genius	"Kubla Khan" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge	Runaway directed by Kanye West (musical short film)

also generated feelings of autonomy, engagement, and enjoyment.

"It Doesn't Relate to Anything": The Problem With High School English

Mia expressed a strong dislike of high school English, explaining that it "doesn't relate to anything." Her perception that the content and texts studied in English seem disconnected from her life and world has been echoed in prior research (Curwood & Cowell, 2011; Willms, 2014). Connectedness was a recurring theme throughout the study, and there was great variation in the ways that students believed Romanticism was applicable to their lives. Although all focal participants made links among Romantic concepts, texts in the unit, and the modern world, only Mia articulated a personal connection to Romanticism. The idiosyncratic perceptions of connectedness were exemplified with Zach; unlike the other students, he believed that relevance was intertwined with preparing him for the workforce. Notably, not all students perceived links among English texts, concepts, and their personal lives, despite the inclusion of popular culture texts in the unit.

Survey responses highlighted students' different perceptions about how Romanticism was relevant to them. The most frequent codes revealed that some students credited popular culture texts for ensuring that Romanticism stays relevant, as one student shared: "Much of what we see today incorporates elements of Romantic poetry." However, other students believed that it is the strength of Romantic ideas, such as the beauty of nature, that makes Romanticism relevant today. In contrast, some students did not believe Romanticism was relevant to them at all.

In an interview, Mia offered revealing insights about her learning in the unit of work. Despite identifying herself as someone who "didn't like English," she spoke passionately about the connections between popular culture and Romanticism. Unlike other students, she framed her learning using language that emphasized the links between texts, and she extensively articulated a strong connection among the Romantic concept of environmental sustainability, the outside world, and the movie *Avatar*. Initially, Mia did not believe that these concepts and texts personally related to her: "Romanticism connects with pop culture. I see how that works with the beauty of nature and *Avatar*, and it all connects like that, but it just didn't relate to me."

Similarly, Harry and Lucy explained that although Romanticism's environmental and social justice messages were important to society, it did not directly impact

them. Although Harry and Lucy consistently maintained this view, later in Mia's interview, she shared a personal connection to Romantic concepts:

For the Romantic period, you can connect anything to it. Like injustice, you can connect *Dance Moms* to it. It's all about injustice: Abby Lee Miller holds all the power over the mums and everything, and if they try and fight, she breaks them down. She's like the Church, and she rules over everything and holds power over everything.

Mia connected the TV show *Dance Moms* to the Romantic concept of injustice by drawing on her funds of knowledge as a dancer (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Although she did not initially perceive Romanticism as relevant to her, she demonstrated a personal connection in the way she spoke passionately about her favorite television show, independently linking it to concepts studied in class.

Although Mia's depth of personal engagement with the unit was exceptional, in Zach's explanation of why Romanticism was irrelevant to him, he articulated sophisticated ideas about the purpose of schooling. To Zach, relevance was tied to how much school could help him prepare for the future: "At the end of the day, it should help me somehow. That's why we go to school, to learn and get ready....Otherwise, why would we come to school? To have fun?" He linked relevance to deeper, philosophical questions about the purpose of school. Furthermore, he thought that studying popular culture texts alongside Romantic poetry was not useful, and he wanted the opportunity to develop skills that would be relevant in the modern workforce (New London Group, 1996). Consequently, it is clear that English teachers have to explicitly articulate how texts and concepts studied in English relate to both students' personal and professional lives.

From Clear to Obscure: Considering Accessibility, Subjectivity, and Assessment

At the end of the case study, it was evident that some features of the unit of work had been more successful than others: Whereas some text combinations and activities helped students learn, others did not. Through thematic analysis of interview and survey data, we identified three indicators that led to the success of exploring popular culture alongside Romantic poetry: the accessibility of the popular culture text's form and content; the subjectivities, or personal tastes, of the students; and the way that students' understanding was assessed. In other words, this section is about what worked in the unit and reflects on possible reasons why other elements did not.

Students readily engaged with *Avatar*, and this was due to their familiarity with the film medium and the skills required to analyze films. Mr. Thomas reflected on how teenagers are accustomed to engaging with audiovisual forms of popular culture: “Video games, film, music video clips—I think those are the kind of texts students are more familiar with. They already have those skills in decoding and reading these sorts of texts, so I think they’re very beneficial.” His idea that students would be more confident in analyzing and understanding familiar popular culture texts was corroborated by the survey, as 84% of student respondents ranked *Avatar* as their favorite text in the unit. Survey responses revealed that the majority of students “enjoyed watching” the film and found it “easy and fun to understand and analyze.”

In addition to familiarity and confidence with the film medium, *Avatar* was also successful because students believed that the environmental message of the film was clear and applicable to modern society. In class, we observed students empathizing with the Na’avi when their land was being destroyed, and being silently captivated by the film’s Romantic portrayal of nature. This was reflected in the survey, as one student shared, “I really liked the sublime idea surrounding *Avatar* and what the environment looks like in it.” In contrast to the popularity and success of *Avatar*, students found that abstract texts and concepts were difficult to analyze, particularly in the creative genius section of the unit. Both Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem “Kubla Khan” and Kanye West’s musical short film *Runaway* were challenging for students, and in hindsight, Mr. Thomas said that these texts were “very idiosyncratic and quite obscure.” In reference to “Kubla Khan,” one student said, “I don’t even know what it’s about.”

The creative genius section of the unit highlighted the role of students’ subjective opinions and individual tastes when studying popular culture. In addition to being a conceptually and visually abstract text, students struggled with *Runaway* because of negative feelings toward its director. Megan taught the first lesson on creative genius using *Runaway* and introduced West into the unit in the third of a series of agree/disagree statements. The statement “Kanye West is nothing more than a celebrity rapper” was aimed to provoke discussion about whether creative genius was innate. However, most students loudly responded to this statement, with many viewing it as an opportunity to share their animosity toward West. The delicacy of student subjectivities in this study is supported by prior research, which has argued that teenagers feel protective over popular culture and that this can create unwanted classroom tensions (Alvermann et al., 1999; Luke, 1994).

In addition to the role of personal subjectivities, the ways that students’ understanding was assessed were crucial to the success of the unit of work. In particular, collaborative and visually oriented tasks allowed students to articulate basic understandings about texts in the creative genius section of the unit. After viewing an excerpt of *Runaway*, groups of students identified poetic techniques such as rhetorical questions and repetition, and they also linked screenshots of the film to correlating lyrics. In the next lesson, after Mr. Thomas led the class in a line-by-line analysis of “Kubla Khan,” students worked in small groups to construct visual representations of the poem. From our observations, it was clear that students effectively reinterpreted “Kubla Khan” through images; students worked together and had ideas about how to visually represent the poem’s stanzas.

Although collaborative, visual tasks effectively developed students’ understanding of both popular culture and Romantic poetry, the written assessment tasks did not allow most students to express their learning. Of the analytical writing process, Mia said, “You have to spend so much time analyzing texts and writing essays. It’s like ugh.” In addition, we observed that students found the task repetitive, as they had already written multiple essays for the unit, and students lacked some poetry analysis skills required to complete the task. In a subsequent lesson to the visual “Kubla Khan” activity, students wrote an essay in response to the following statement: “The concept of the creative genius is a Romantic construct still with us today.” Many students struggled to reply to this statement, and their reflective journals revealed that they felt confused and found comparing texts to be difficult. In contrast, when students made visual connections, they exhibited clear signs of engagement and comprehension. It is evident that the design of assessment was crucial to the way that students articulated their understanding (Curwood, 2013); upon reflection, we may have needed to check students’ comprehension of the concept of creative genius and modeled additional ways that they could draw parallels between Romantic texts and popular texts.

“I Really Enjoyed the Remix”: Having Fun While Deepening Understandings

The remix assessment task at the end of the unit promoted a sense of enjoyment in the creative process, fostered motivation, and gave students autonomy in their learning. Extending the work of Curwood and Gibbons (2009), in which remix was used to challenge dominant narratives, the task invited students to blur the lines between “high” and “low” culture. In this task, students worked

in class to select a popular culture text and a Romantic poem and then mix them together to present to the class. In explaining the task, Megan provided an audiovisual example of a remix from Curwood and Gibbons's research and also presented a print-based example of two texts that she had remixed. Students had the choice of completing the remix in two ways: They could complete a digital remix or construct a written remix using lines from the texts.

Through *in vivo* coding of students' reflections about their remixes, it became evident that remixing provided an opportunity for students' rich, complex understandings to emerge, particularly in relation to Romanticism and modern social issues. For example, Lucy and her partner remixed William Blake's poem "Holy Thursday" with Macklemore and Ryan Lewis's song "Same Love" to create their own modern Romantic text that showed knowledge of poetic language and form. Although these two texts are about different issues, Lucy and her partner believed that the texts shared a concern for social injustice, and the first stanza of their poem reflects this (see Figure 1).

As this remix demonstrates, lines from the two texts were carefully selected and edited, and there is conceptual cohesiveness between the texts. In her interview, Lucy provided a rationale behind her and her partner's remix:

"Holy Thursday" is about money, and whereas "Same Love" is about gender and a bit of race and sex mainly..., we mixed them, and they're both kind of saying that it should be different: Why is it the way it is at the moment?

Here, Lucy acknowledged that whereas Blake's text is about religious power and Macklemore and Ryan Lewis's is about sexuality, they share a fundamental concern for social injustice. More than any other activity in the unit, the remixing process allowed students to better understand Romantic concepts and develop a deeper understanding of the original texts (Gainer & Lapp, 2010).

Figure 1
Stanza 1 of Lucy and Her Partner's Remix

Is this a holy thing to see,
In a rich and fruitful land,
 A world so hateful
*Some would rather die *first hand**

Note. Underlined text is from William Blake's poem "Holy Thursday," plain text is from Macklemore and Ryan Lewis's song "Same Love," and italic text is the students' additions.

Lucy's sentiments were shared by many of her peers. For instance, Jasmine remixed John Mayer's song "Waiting on the World to Change" with Blake's poem "London," and Mr. Thomas identified this remix as one that "drew very strong parallels." In her reflection, Jasmine wrote,

Through studying the Romantic period this way, it has opened up my eyes to so many different things. It shows how history is repeating itself, and that the problems that were big in the Romantic period still play a massive role in life as we know it today.

Jasmine's reflection shows how this task enabled her to conceptualize the legacy of Romantic concepts through a deeper and more personal lens. For other students, the remixing process facilitated self-reflection and metacognition, including an awareness of how they learn and compose texts.

Our research highlights the importance of creativity in a culture of accountability, and we argue that students' enjoyment in a task increases their motivation and engagement, thereby deepening their understandings. In early childhood education, play *is* learning, and for young adults, having fun and engaging in interest-based learning can be forms of problem solving (Jenkins, 2006). Whereas Honeyford and Boyd's (2015) study provided opportunities for adolescents to creatively play and experiment with their identities, our study encouraged students to experience enjoyment and personal investment in the creative process of remixing, particularly working with canonical texts that they previously found inaccessible.

In consultation with Mr. Thomas, we believe that part of the remix's success was the collaborative, informal nature of the task. Most students worked with a friend, and we observed that this meant students were intrinsically motivated, as cooperative situations increase students' feelings of competency (Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). This was not a graded assessment task, so students were allowed to have fun and create texts without external pressure. As in Honeyford and Boyd's (2015) study, the low-stakes nature of the task meant that students were less focused on the product and more invested in the experience and the creative process. As Olivia shared, "Once I got started, I found that the creative process wasn't like other processes I have gone through, especially in English. Mixing the two texts together gave us bigger and better ways of combining the two each time." She remixed Beyoncé's song "Pretty Hurts" and Blake's "Holy Thursday," and her personal investment in the chosen texts provided interest-based opportunities for genuine engagement

and motivation in the classroom, as she was determined to create something “bigger and better.”

Conclusion and Implications

Although the New South Wales English syllabus for years 7–10 declares that “language shapes our understanding of ourselves and our world” (Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW, 2012 p. 10), this study reveals that students do not always perceive this to be true. Rather, students articulated varying notions of connectedness among texts studied in English, their society, and their lives: With popular culture, most students believed that Romanticism was related to their world but not to them.

Students framed their experiences of remixing as a rare opportunity to exercise agency in what they perceive as a teacher-controlled curriculum (Dowdall et al., 2014; Hagood et al., 2010; Luke, 1994). After articulating discontent about some popular culture texts—namely, West’s *Runway*—students were visibly excited to have the chance to choose texts for their remixes. Students seized the opportunity and selected texts that reflected their personal interests, ranging from Beyoncé to Macklemore and Lewis. Even when students did not thoroughly understand the concepts, they still appreciated freedom within the task. Although not all students produced a remix that clearly explored Romantic themes, each text reflected student interests and offered evidence of sustained engagement in the creative process.

This case study has clear pedagogical implications for English teachers in terms of curricular design and text selection. The study built on existing literature to encourage teachers to reflect on their own subjectivities when they select texts for students to study, as this will greatly affect students’ perception of English (Hagood et al., 2010; Morrell & Duncan- Andrade, 2004). We also recommend that teachers should survey students at the beginning of a unit to better understand their popular culture interests, as we found that if the majority of students strongly dislike an author, it can act as a barrier to engagement.

Over 50 years ago, Maloney (1960) argued that “A twentieth century job needs to be done with some twentieth century tools, and thus far English teachers have been neglectful of using them” (p. 579). Today, this statement resonates, as current research about popular culture suggests that many English teachers are still not using today’s cultural tools and multimodal texts. This study calls for educators to make secondary English more meaningful and relevant for students, and it champions popular culture as one way of doing this. Popular culture

TAKE ACTION!

1. Survey students’ popular culture interests at the beginning of a unit of work. Use this information to better understand their textual diets and consider how they could connect with topics and texts studied in class.
2. Encourage students to reflect on their own popular culture interests. For example, students can create an anthology of their favorite popular culture texts over time. This could act as a powerful way for students to consider the texts that have influenced their lives.
3. Provide weekly opportunities for students to share a recent item of popular culture that they have engaged with. This will help foster a collaborative classroom culture and broaden students’ textual interests.
4. Consider the potential for remix in the classroom. Give students the freedom to blend popular culture images, lyrics, and videos with curricular content.
5. Provide opportunities for students to share their conflicting perspectives about popular culture. Promote critical literacy through a debate of prominent events and figures within popular culture.
6. Encourage students to collaborate using popular culture. For example, groups of students could create a podcast or blog about popular culture in their lives.

is a complement to, not a substitute for, traditional literature and is a way of making seemingly impenetrable poetry relevant to our students today. As Harry said,

Popular culture made it relevant, and that’s what you need to do, because most people don’t read Romantic poetry nowadays. I think you need to keep doing this because it will introduce Romanticism to a new audience, a new group of people.

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