

From Preservice Teacher to Trusted Adult: Sexual Orientation and Gender Variance in an Online YAL Book Club

I have never read a book that is geared around homosexuality. I was kind of expecting it to be in your face, but it's not.

—Ashley, preservice teacher

I always thought that “transgender” and “gay” were the same terms; however, as I read how Liam/Luna felt about his/her body, things became much clearer to me.

—Dawn, preservice teacher

Many of the preservice English teachers with whom I work report feeling enthusiastic but unsure about how to make their classrooms safe and inviting for students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ). Yet little time in English methods courses is devoted to helping preservice teachers understand that schools privilege a culture of heteronormativity to the detriment of students (and adults) who identify themselves as or are perceived to be LGBTQ. Even more frustrating, these same preservice teachers often enter schools in which their colleagues have little awareness of or patience for differences in gender expression and sexual orientation.

This lack of awareness and initiative has very real consequences: students who identify as LGBTQ report feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and gender expression. And the bullying they face is not just initiated by fellow students; various members of the school community make (or silently condone through inaction) homophobic remarks, such as *faggot* or *dyke* or *that's so gay* (GLSEN, 2008).

What are we teaching students when we ignore, downplay, and even participate in these acts of hate and prejudice? Young adult (YA) author Julie Anne Peters finds answers to these questions in emails she receives from her readers and shares this lament: “It saddens me to hear how few trusted adults young people seem to feel they have in their lives” (Bott, Garden, Jones, & Peters, 2007, p. 49).

Future and current teachers must be prepared to be “trusted adults” for *all* their students and to initiate positive changes in their classroom and school communities regarding differences in sexual orientation and gender expression. For English teachers in particular, exposure to YA literature with LGBTQ content is one possibility for initiating those changes. The verisimilitude of these texts and their ability to act as windows that shed light on experiences that may be unfamiliar to the reader make them ideal starting points for a discussion about sexual orientation, gender variance, and the mistreatment and marginalization faced by students who identify as or are perceived to be LGBTQ.

Getting the Books into Teachers' Hands

In the fall of 2008, I set out to facilitate an online YAL book club for preservice secondary English teachers at Kennesaw State University (KSU) where I taught undergraduate methods courses. Located 25 miles northwest of Atlanta, KSU serves approximately 22,000 students, including over 200 undergraduate English Education majors. A book club seemed like a logical next step after my fall 2007 survey of local inservice and preservice English teachers' attitudes toward YAL with LGBTQ content revealed that although many respondents had negative perceptions of the texts, most had never actually read them (Mason, 2008).

Early that semester, I sent an email invitation to all undergraduate English Education majors indicat-

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ing that after the initial book club meeting, all discussions about the texts would take place asynchronously on a password-protected social networking site (www.ning.com). I hoped students would find online participation to be convenient and respectful of their hectic schedules. I

also revealed in the email invitation that the first ten participants would receive free copies of the texts—*Luna* (2004) by Julie Anne Peters and *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun* (1995) by Jacqueline Woodson. I disclosed in the invitation that both of these novels feature LGBTQ characters and content, and I followed up with this statement:

You may be wondering why you should take advantage of this opportunity to add these texts to your personal collection. A 2007 NCTE Resolution notes that “not only do teachers frequently fail to address homophobic remarks when they hear them, but sometimes they also make such remarks themselves.” Reading YAL with LGBTQ content can enhance your awareness of differences in sexual orientation and gender expression and help you to respond more effectively and confidently in situations in which these differences are not respected, regardless of your personal beliefs. After all, it will soon be your responsibility to create a safe environment for all of your students, not just those who share your beliefs and characteristics.

Of the over 200 recipients of my email, only 11 responded to the invitation. Nine of those 11 attended the first meeting, and 6 (5 females and 1 male) ended

up participating in every aspect of the study, which included short pre- and post-participation surveys as well as the asynchronous online discussions about the texts.

Selecting the Texts

Few YA titles feature gender variant characters and themes, and since gender identity/expression is so often ignored in conversations and policies about LGBTQ issues, I wanted to be sure to include a text that addresses gender variance. In *Luna*, 15-year-old Regan's parents raised her and her older brother, Liam, as typical siblings who fit traditional gender roles. Although Liam's gender seems obvious from his physical characteristics, his brain tells him something quite different—that he's actually female.

All her life, Regan has watched Liam struggle to live up to their father's idea of manhood and has watched his true gender identity reveal itself during his late-night visits to her room to try on feminine clothes, apply make-up, and discuss sexual reassignment surgery. She observes his frustration, desperation, and isolation coalesce into an overpowering sense that suicide is the only solution. Their parents choose to ignore the signs that Liam questions his physical gender, while Luna, Liam's female self, emerges more and more frequently. As Liam begins transitioning from male to female, Regan is his only confidant, the only person to whom he can reveal who *she* truly is: Luna, the “girl who can only be seen by moonlight” (Peters, 2004, p. 2). Ultimately, Luna's silence becomes too burdensome, and, on her eighteenth birthday, she confronts her father with these words, “Dad, I'm a transsexual” (Peters, 2004, p. 221).

Of course, her challenges are only beginning, but she has found the strength to admit not just to herself, but to the world, who she truly is. Peters's use of Regan to tell this story allows normatively gendered readers a way into the text, a way to empathize both with Regan and with Luna. This is especially important for teachers who may not have encountered (or been aware of or sensitive to) gender variant people and issues in their prior experience or professional development.

To complement *Luna*, I selected Woodson's *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*. This text introduces readers to 13-year-old Melanin Sun, who lives with

his mom, EC, in Brooklyn, New York. Melanin stands out because of both his appearance and his actions: he has very dark skin, which people often notice and comment upon, and he prefers to keep to himself, observing what's going on around him, writing in his notebooks, and collecting stamps of endangered species. He knows that his hobbies and interests make him different, and that "[d]ifference matters" (Woodson, 1995, p. 3). Although he tries to convince himself otherwise ("I knew it was faggy to collect stamps but I didn't care" [Woodson, 1995, p. 20]), Melanin recognizes that he does care what others think, which is why he reacts so harshly when his beloved mother tells him she is in love with a white woman named Kristin. In Melanin's world, being gay is a cause for ridicule and judgment. In fact, one of his best friends constantly berates him for stepping outside of gendered norms, labeling his actions and thoughts as "faggy," and reminding Melanin that he "could use a little toughening up around the edges" (Woodson, 1995, p. 47).

In her trademark striking, poetic prose, Woodson depicts an adolescent boy who initially rejects and then struggles to understand his mother's life and identity, while reflecting on the prejudice around and *within* him. Throughout the novel, Melanin reflects on various gendered activities that he enjoys, such as writing and stamp collecting, and qualities he possesses, like listening rather than speaking out. Sometimes, he questions the labels society imposes (masculine/feminine, gay/straight); other times, he confirms them in his own mind. His struggle with identity resonates with readers and serves as a positive example of a young adult who is learning to understand the world from multiple perspectives, rather than relying solely on his own viewpoint.

Both *Luna* and *Notebooks* feature heterosexual protagonists. Cart and Jenkins (2006) point out that while this may dilute the impact of the text's ability "to give faces to GLBTQ youth" (p. 91), it may also "provide an easier point of access to the story for straight readers, who are also an important audience for these stories" (p. 92).

Starting the Book Club

Setting the Stage

At the opening meeting, the nine participants signed consent forms, acquired the texts, and learned about

and explored our password-protected Ning site where the asynchronous discussions would take place. I provided each participant with a "Tips" sheet (see Appendix A) that explained how to access the Ning site, established a timeline for reading and responding (participants had approximately 1.5 weeks to read and respond to each text), suggested ways to keep up with the online discussions (e.g., check the site 2–3 times per week while and after reading each text), and set forth expectations for online etiquette. In addition, they completed a short, anonymous pre-participation survey at the opening meeting to gauge their attitudes toward and familiarity with YAL with LGBTQ content.

Other than setting up the Ning site and providing general prompts on the tips sheet, I did not participate in any of the book club discussions; I wanted to see what kinds of topics, questions, and reactions to the texts the participants would share without my input.

Six participants created their own forums and blogs on the Ning site, starting their own discussion threads and responding to those of their colleagues. After completing both texts, participants took an anonymous post-participation survey to gauge their attitudes toward YAL with LGBTQ content.

Searching for Understanding

In addition to exposing participants to quality YAL with LGBTQ content, one goal of this book club was to help students develop an understanding of the experiences of teens who identify as LGBTQ or whose family members do. According to Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2006), "an understanding is best acquired by 'uncovering' (i.e., it must be developed inductively, coconstructed by learners) and 'doing' the subject (i.e., using the ideas in realistic settings and with real-world problems)" (p. 129). I attempted to encourage this understanding by stepping back and allowing the two YA novels to speak for themselves,

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so participants could uncover their own meanings and interpretations. Although it was a challenge for me to refrain from jumping into the online discussions, I

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wanted to see the direction my participants would take on their own—what understandings they would come to—without my guidance or interference, beyond the text selection and discussion prompts. The discussions in which they engaged provided participants with the opportunity to “do” the subject in a

way that was meaningful to their personal and professional development.

I analyzed participant responses on both surveys and in the online discussions using the framework of Wiggins and McTighe’s six facets of understanding, which are both “overlapping and ideally integrated” (p. 84):

- Explanation—“sophisticated and apt theories and illustrations, which provide knowledgeable and justified accounts of events, actions, and ideas” (p. 85)
- Interpretation—“interpretations, narratives, and translations that provide meaning” (p. 88)
- Application—“ability to use knowledge effectively in new situations and diverse, realistic contexts” (p. 92)
- Perspective—“critical and insightful points of view” (p. 95)
- Empathy—“the ability to get inside another person’s feelings and worldview” (p. 98)
- Self-Knowledge—“the wisdom to know one’s ignorance and how one’s patterns of thought and action inform as well as prejudice understanding” (p. 100).

I asked my participants to respond to the surveys and in the online discussions both as readers of the literature and as future teachers. Because I will share excerpts from the surveys (which were completed anonymously) and the online discussions (in which the participants identified themselves), some responses are attributed to participants through pseudonyms,

while other responses are anonymous. Perhaps because of the prompts I provided, participants generally used the discussion board to articulate their understanding in terms of explanation, interpretation, application, and empathy, and they used the pre- and post-participation surveys to reveal understandings in terms of perspective and self-knowledge.

Of the nine participants who took the pre-participation survey, six reported that they had never read YAL with LGBTQ content before, yet all nine expressed enthusiasm for learning more about this genre of YAL as well as the importance of teachers’ familiarity with these texts:

We will have students in our class that are LGBTQ, and I believe that they have been ignored by their teachers. As a teacher, it is important to understand the differences between our students so that we can treat each of them with respect and dignity.

As with urban literature, LGBTQ literature not only reaches a certain demographic of student but can be beneficial to all as it helps to promote multicultural education.

Evidence of Understanding

Explanation and Interpretation

Most of the participants’ responses on the discussion board revealed understandings in terms of explanation (making connections, sharing illuminating examples, explaining why) and interpretation (revealing the significance or meaning of an event or experience) as they responded to and questioned the texts. Some participants critiqued the authors’ choices in characterization, plot, and setting:

I thought the beach scene with Kristen [sic] and Melanin was a bit unrealistic. I felt like [Woodson] was rushing me through to get to the end of the book so it would wrap up “neatly” for her. —*Linda*

I do think [Peters] plays on gender stereotypes a little too much in the beginning, with the dad wanting the son to do the sports, and then asking the daughter to cook dinner. —*Amy*

I agree with Ashley that [Woodson] left us hanging when it came to Angie. I honestly felt a little disappointed since the last thing mentioned about her was right after the fight where she looked “confused and angry.” My only guess for the reason that Woodson did not clear things up is possibly based on the theme that not all things are black and white or Melanin and Sun. Maybe she wanted to leave the reader with a lot of gray areas the way life actually is. —*Adam*

Participants also revealed connections to their own experiences and popular culture. Ashley connected her reading of *Luna* to a popular reality television series, *America's Next Top Model*, Cycle 11, hosted by Tyra Banks; she critically reflected on the treatment of a transgender participant on the show:

On *America's Next Top Model*, there was a transgender girl. Her name was Isis. At first I didn't really think about it. She got voted off, but now I look back and think there were only a few of the girls that treated her like a girl; the others ignored the fact that she was even there. —*Ashley*

In her recollection of this television series, Ashley expresses her newfound understanding that a transgender female, for example, should be treated “like a girl,” a notion, she reveals, she hadn't really considered before reading *Luna*.

In another post, Linda distinguished between tolerance and acceptance: “Tolerance is something I do with my brussel sprouts and Sunday night football. I don't really like either, but I tolerate them for one reason or another.” And Tabitha responded with an example of acceptance from *Luna*: “Regan would go with Luna to the mall to shop and be there for her when she dressed as a girl. THAT is going beyond tolerance.”

Application

Of all the facets of understanding, application (using and adapting knowledge effectively in new, realistic contexts) was least evident in my participants' responses, most likely because the online discussion and surveys didn't ask participants to apply their knowledge in new settings. Most participants did reveal understandings in terms of what I would call hypothetical application; for example, a few shared their plans for including YAL with LGBTQ in their classrooms or discussed how they might respond if they learned that their own children were gay or gender variant:

I wonder if it would be harder to teach [*Luna*] here in the South versus other parts of the country. I imagine parents opting out of letting their kids read it. I wonder how we could deal with this issue. Should we just add the book in and see if anyone complains or ask the parents to read the book first, convincing them to give it a try? — *Tabitha*

[Regarding the mom in *Luna*], I was shocked at first that she was just ignoring the whole thing and then I got really pissed because as a mom (granted, mine are 4 and 3) I could not believe she treated Liam like Luna didn't even

exist. If I caught my son wearing my make-up and clothes I would be like ok, let's talk, not respond with “don't tell your sister.” —*Ashley*

One participant, Tabitha, actually did apply her knowledge of YAL with LGBTQ content in a conversation with a friend after reading both texts:

I spoke to a good friend of mine who would never allow her children to read texts in school with LG content. After describing these books to her, she changed her mind and felt that, yes she would have no problem with it. I think that in talking to parents about teaching this text perhaps it is important how we describe the rationale behind it. —*Tabitha*

Like Tabitha, I have found that the people who have the most negative perceptions of YAL with LGBTQ content are usually the people who have not read any of it themselves. This just further emphasizes the need to get these books into teachers' hands so that they might see for themselves the quality of the literature and its power to reflect and reveal the experiences of LGBTQ youth, their families (of origin and of choice), and their communities.

Perspective

Book club members revealed their understandings in terms of perspective (critically considering multiple points of view) most frequently in the anonymous surveys. Some noted the ways in which YAL with LGBTQ content might assist them in helping their students develop respect and appreciation for multiple perspectives. One participant noted that “these texts force readers to challenge their mindsets and possibly make a paradigm shift,” while another noted that “literature should connect to students' lives and also give them a personal challenge. Dealing with issues that are hard to talk about can help give students a greater view of multiple perspectives.” A third participant discussed the value of such texts in disconfirming negative stereotypes about the LGBTQ community:

Just as multicultural education has recently become a focal

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point in education, I believe that studies regarding LGBTQ content should be added into the curriculum. Students have so many negative stereotypes drilled into their heads by the media about how the LGBTQ community is not worthy of being treated with respect, how they are a disgrace to society; however, as teachers using this content in our class, we have the potential to slowly break down these stereotypes so they do not perpetuate into future generations.

Two other participants also revealed the importance of resisting a culture of heteronormativity in schools and beyond:

Ignoring the fact that not everyone is heterosexual makes those that aren't feel as if they are inferior.

As teachers we need to be careful not to assume that every family consists of the traditional mother and father. The safety of the classroom begins with the teacher educating herself on the realities in the lives of her students.

Empathy

In contrast with developing a sense of perspective, which requires us to remain detached as we critically consider multiple viewpoints, empathy requires us to

embrace another person's worldview and "perceive sensitively on the basis of prior direct experience" (Wiggins and McTighe, 2006, p. 84). Reading *Luna* and *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun* allowed my participants to gain some (additional) experience with the LGBTQ community as they lived vicariously through Regan and Melanin. For example, Tabitha was able to empathize with the challenges Regan

faced in her attempt to support and protect Liam while maintaining her own identity: "Liam/Luna had no one to turn to but his sister Regan, and this was too much to bear for one person." And, after reading *Notebooks*, Amy, who was completing her student teaching experience, revealed her increasing disgust with anti-LGBTQ language:

When students say that things are "gay," something turns that didn't turn so much before. Not that I have not noticed the insensitivity and ignorance of that phrase, but after read-

ing this book it is as if I have been in the seat of a 14-year-old versus this 22-year-old perspective from someone with no real experiences with the gay community. —Amy

Tabitha and Linda expressed empathy for family members of LGBTQ people after reading *Notebooks*:

Melanin's mother's revelation left him wondering about himself and his own identity. On page 63 Melanin thinks, "If she is a dyke, then what did that make me?" This scene points to the possible difficulties in revealing this to a child raised to believe that being gay or lesbian is wrong either through family or his friends. The same reaction is sometimes exhibited by a parent who is told that their child is gay/lesbian. This knowledge may cause them to reflect on their own identity as a parent. —Tabitha

Tabitha, I agree with you that learning that a parent or child is gay must be a difficult time that causes one to reflect on how that person's "gayness" affects them. A father or mother may ask, "Where did I go wrong?" or go into denial, which may be even worse. —Linda

I am impressed by Tabitha and Linda's attempts to put themselves into the shoes of people whose family members embody their LGBTQ identity. If we can demonstrate our understanding of someone's initial response of confusion, fear, disdain, or self-righteousness in the face of difference, we might also be able to help that person see a way to appreciate and celebrate difference, rather than revile it.

Self-Knowledge

In both the surveys and the online discussion, book club members did not hesitate to reveal their own perceived ignorance, changing perspectives, and questions as they demonstrated their understanding in terms of self-knowledge (awareness of one's own ignorance, prejudice, and patterns of thought):

Reading these books has taught me that I have a long way to go before I will be fully equipped and prepared to deal with all problems facing students in the classroom.

I think a teacher walks a tightrope between support and intrusion in students' lives. How do teachers maintain that important professional perspective and be emotionally open to their students? I cannot impose my views and values on the class but I can expose those minds to different viewpoints that will expand their thinking.

In a discussion of their inservice teacher professional development book group, Bruce Parker and Jacqueline Bach (2009) acknowledge that "[c]reating spaces for educators to engage with texts that

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are meant to represent complex identities, without having an expert or access to other perspectives on these experiences, can reify negative stereotypes and assumptions” (p. 97). As my participants articulated their understanding in terms of self-knowledge, some misperceptions and assumptions emerged, causing me to question my methodology of simply observing the discussion, rather than participating in it. In their survey responses, two participants articulated concerns about how to recommend texts with LGBTQ content to students:

I would like to know how to recommend an LGBTQ novel without offending the student. If they identify as LGBTQ, I may not know as a teacher, but only suspect it . . . I'm not sure how to go about offering a book without making them feel weird or uncomfortable, or even angry if they are not LGBTQ, which could potentially get me in a lot of trouble when I was trying to help.

While it is important for teachers to be able to recommend YAL with LGBTQ content [to students], I am more concerned with being put in the role of “counselor” to a LGBTQ student. I certainly want to connect with my students and give them a safe place and a confidential ear; however, I could not just walk up to a gay student and say, “Hey, I have this great book about transgenders . . . wanna read it?” How as teachers do we “know” a student’s sexual orientation in order to be able to recommend LGBTQ books that may interest them?

These are fantastic questions that demonstrate these preservice teachers’ enthusiasm and thoughtful consideration of their students but that also point to misconceptions I need to address in my teaching and in my written response here. First, in the second response, it seems that the participant is conflating sexual orientation and gender identity/expression in the example of providing a “great book about transgenders” to a gay student. Second, it’s not necessary (or particularly worthwhile) for teachers to recommend books with LGBTQ content only to students who identify as LGBTQ. In fact, since the purpose of quality literature is not just to mirror the reader’s reality but to also provide a window into different realities, teachers should attempt to recommend these texts to *all* students—if not as part of a required reading list, then at least during book talks, or as part of book passes, as advocated by Emily S. Meixner (2009). Additionally, teachers should never initiate a conversation about a student’s sexual orientation or gender identity in an attempt to get the student to come out. It’s not our

place to identify or single out students who we think might be gay or transgender, and we should “avoid calling individual students ‘gay,’ ‘lesbian,’ ‘bisexual,’ ‘transgender,’ etc. until [we] have first heard students use a particular term to describe themselves” due to the fluidity of these labels (Weinberg, 2009, p. 50).

Final Thoughts

The 2007 NCTE Resolution on Strengthening Teacher Knowledge of LGBT Issues advocates formal integration of the study of LGBTQ issues in all teacher preparation programs. In addition to this important step toward equal rights for all members of our school communities, teacher educators (and teachers themselves) might also consider facilitating book clubs that feature YAL with LGBTQ content. In my own book club, I was pleased to learn from these preservice teachers’ insights, questions, anxieties, misconceptions, and changes in perspective in relation to these texts. In fact, most of the online discussion participants requested that we continue our study of YAL and our online discussions, and several offered suggestions to improve the discussion itself:

We should do it more often and possibly add nights of viewing plays and movies as a group about transgender identities and sexual orientations.

More face to face meetings, coffee shops, etc. to build a stronger sense of community and make for deeper conversation. A kind of hybrid style would work best.

Although my participants appreciated the flexibility the online forum offered, they also desired face-to-face interactions and additional media featuring representations of various sexual orientations and gender identities. In addition, I would like to be an active participant in the book club next time, sharing my expertise and resources, offering an additional perspective, inviting lurkers to participate, and learning along with my participants.

Another participant noted the value of seeking out the perspectives of members of the LGBTQ community:

It’s not necessary (or particularly worthwhile) for teachers to recommend books with LGBTQ content only to students who identify as LGBTQ.

I would have liked to have gotten an online perspective from someone from the LGBTQ community. (Maybe I did and didn't know it?!)

Even though members of the LGBTQ community cannot act as representatives of the entire group, I appreciate this participant's acknowledgement that we must actively seek out those perspectives. I also appreciate this participant's revelation that a person's sexual orientation and gender identity may not be perceptible without verbal clarification or observed embodiment of the identity.

Book clubs that feature YAL with LGBTQ content are one possibility for scattering light on sexual orientation and gender variance.

Although the response to my book club invitation was lower than I hoped and expected, I am confident that with time and persistence, future and current teachers' interest in LGBTQ issues will grow. For the past three years, I have included YAL with LGBTQ content in book passes in my English methods courses. Each semester

more and more students select those texts to read, teach, and inspire inquiry for class projects like the multigenre research paper.

In its 2009 report, "Stepping Out of the Closet, into the Light," the National Education Association urges educators to pay attention to and take a stand for students, noting that "a single, supportive adult in the lives of GLBT students at school is the most critical factor in increasing the GLBT students' sense of safety and academic achievement and in decreasing the risk of truancy or dropping out" (Kim, p. ix). Book clubs that feature YAL with LGBTQ content are one possibility for scattering light on sexual orientation and gender variance and encouraging future and current teachers to be "trusted adults" for every student.

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After teaching at Kennesaw State University for four years, Katherine Mason, a former middle school English teacher, is now an assistant professor of English Education at Wichita State University. She has presented at professional conferences and published articles on teaching English Language Learners, cooperative learning, effective writing instruction, and young adult literature with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) content.

Appendix A

Tips for Participating in Our Online Book Club

Accessing Our Book Club Site:

Once you have responded to the e-mail invitation and set up your account, you can simply go to www.ning.com and click “sign in” to access our site. You can also go directly to <http://lgbtqyal.ning.com/> and sign in.

Timeline:

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Sept. 30 | Opening meeting: consent forms, survey, explore http://lgbtqyal.ning.com/ |
| Oct. 1-11 | Read and respond (online) to <i>From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun</i> |
| Oct. 12-22 | Read and respond (online) to <i>Luna</i> |
| Oct. 23-27 | Take post-participation survey (I will send link via e-mail.) |

The dates of the readings and discussions are fluid. I would like for you to begin with *Notebooks*, but please feel free to continue responding to it after Oct. 11, and feel free to respond to *Luna* before Oct. 12.

Asynchronous Online Discussions:

Unlike a traditional book club that meets face to face, our discussions will take place online asynchronously; this means we can communicate without being online at the same time. While this adds to the convenience of participating, it does require that you check our site consistently in order to truly participate in the conversation. For example, after reading (or even during your reading of) one of the texts, visit the discussion site to post your initial response(s) and read and respond to other participants’ posts. Check back a few times over the course of the week to see if anyone has responded to your post, and respond to that and other posts as you see fit.

Online Etiquette:

Our book club site is private, meaning that only invited participants can view and contribute to the site. Keeping in mind that we are all colleagues and members of the same program, please check your responses for a courteous tone before posting.

Responding to the Texts:

Please respond honestly to the texts. There are no right or wrong answers, and I’m not “grading” you on grammar and mechanics, so feel free to write freely, focusing more on *what* you want to say, rather than *how* you say it. Here are some prompts to get you started:

1. What surprised (or didn’t surprise) you? Why?
2. What did you learn from the text? What questions does the text raise for you?
3. What connections can you make between the text and . . .
 - your own life—as a student, as a teacher?
 - other texts (including the other assigned text for this book club)?
 - society/the world?
 - history?

In addition to sharing your personal connections to the text, feel free to link to online visual/audio resources and/or URL’s for our reference.

4. What passage(s) struck you as particularly insightful, powerful, provocative, or dubious? Note them in your commentary (include a page number for our reference), and discuss your reaction to the passage(s).
5. How do these readings impact your thoughts about your current or future teaching?