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*Suppressed Home Desires in the Refugee Experience: Literary and Pedagogical Approaches
to Letters to Montgomery Clift by Noël Alunit*

A Thesis Presented

by

Alison Marie Peterman

to

The Graduate School

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This project will be two –fold; it will examine the use of literary devices in queer diasporic themed literature and it will also include a secondary, pedagogical approach to the literature. The first section will be comprised of a critical analysis of the themes and characters and how these aspects work together. Dominant ideology, particularly heteronormativity in terms of gender and sexuality, is often put under a microscope within these works and by encouraging these works in a secondary education classroom, students will be inspired to question. Diasporic journeys to new home spaces and characters' establishments of (new) identities is highly applicable to this generation's young adults since their classrooms are growing more and more assorted in terms of beliefs, race, gender, and ethnicity, among other things. Teaching this genre of young adolescent literature will provide opportunities to teach about bullying, homophobia, and zero tolerance. Literature will be used to create a community of interconnectedness where students work with each other as opposed to against each other to fight language labels and fear or silence. Queer theory and anti-homophobia are important ways to question status quo and encourage students to become active participants that are capable and willing to participate in controversial conversation. I intend to use this project in my future teaching career as well as share it with other teachers to encourage maturity, respect, and a desire to learn.

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I. Introduction

Why Teach LGBTQ texts?

I decided to do research on an LGBTQ text because I wanted to explore nontraditional texts dealing with contemporary issues, research a book that could be highly relatable to students, practice critical reflection about my own pedagogy, and use literature as a tool for educating adolescents about themselves and their society. Though the common acronym is LGBT, the most encompassing version LGBTQQIPA is appropriate for the text I have selected. According to Paula Ressler and Becca Chase in “Sexual Identity and Gender Variance: Meeting the Educational Challenges,” the most comprehensive acronym stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, perceived, and allies” (15).

Student as Social Citizen

The career of English Language Arts educators requires that they teach students how to become active, well-rounded citizens of society through reading and writing. Ressler and Chase argue that of all teachers, English teachers are often the strongest advocates of teaching social justice, especially now that there are texts and pedagogical approaches that are queer-inclusive; LGBT texts are essential for social justice and multicultural curricula (17). It is inevitable that content and discussions will sometimes become debatable as students shape their own values, beliefs, and opinions and learn when to practice making appropriate choices of what is said or written. Viv Ellis describes personal growth in her essay, “What English Can Contribute to Understanding Sexual Identities,” as “conceptual development, criticality, imagination, sociability, empathy, morality, and ethics” (52). Reading, writing, speaking, and especially listening will undoubtedly develop personal growth in both students and teachers. All students

will become more educated and informed about themselves, their peers, and their society by learning about counter-heteronormative gender codes and behaviors. Students should strive to be educated and a teacher's role is to help students use a kaleidoscope lens to perceive multiple perspectives of an issue. I would hope that in creating this project I am learning more about queer theory, pedagogical etiquette in terms of queer theory, and how to be the teacher that knows how to use and show students the kaleidoscope lens in a safe environment. Ressler and Chase call this type of environment a "life-affirming space" where LGBT students can express with dignity and freedom their identities while "straight students learn to understand, appreciate, and support LGBT people" (21).

Closing the Gap

Literary texts addressing homosexuality, bisexuality, or any other non-heterosexual content or theme should be taught in English Language Arts classes because they can help bring confidence and relevance to the marginalized student and bring awareness and tolerance to the hegemonic student. Though LGBTQ students are often the minority in classes and schools, these texts are relatable to all students. Often times, adolescents who might relate to the sexual identity of these texts can be shy about their sexuality and might even keep it a secret from friends and family. Likewise, heterosexual students may feel similarly to these students, perhaps not in terms of gender or sexual identity, but in terms of hobbies, music preference, or really anything else that distinguishes them from the masses. Both groups battle with feelings of judgment, isolation, and marginalization. All students can relate to this feeling of reservation, especially as they are at the age when they are shaping their identities and passing judgments on themselves as well as

others. Heterosexual and LGBTQ students have much in common and using literature to show and remind all students of this mutual respect is always going to be reliable.

Teaching heteronormative texts, like those containing LGBTQ content, can be both beneficial and detrimental: teaching non-heterosexual texts can distance the idea of homosexuality and queerness to a fictional world that students can dismiss as imaginary but also these texts can also be used to educate all types of students that will, in turn, close the distance. Using literature as a way to educate helps introduce and question topics that might appear irrelevant to students at first, yet when they learn as a community of peers, the content becomes relevant and reliable. With the increase of pop culture shows like “Glee” or “The Secret Life of an American Teenager,” adolescents have more secondary encounters with problems that they may be unsure or confused about when faced with in real life, like homosexuality, teen pregnancy, bullying, or racial or religious discrimination. Addressing these topics in an English Language Arts classroom is a safe way to question and possibly dismantle normative stereotypes in a way that promotes social justice.

Why Teach *Letters to Montgomery Clift*?

In *Letters to Montgomery Clift*, Noel Alumit has crafted a multi-dimensional protagonist and novel that lends itself nicely to a kaleidoscope view; every time the reader looks at the protagonist, s/he sees something different. The colors are the same but the patterns are almost always changing; in other words, the characters and places are consistent, but the characteristics and relationships are continuously evolving. Using a text of such caliber can show students that they need to be educated in all aspects of a topic before they pass judgment, and this extends beyond the school life to politics, environmental concerns, community gossip, or current events.

Bong Bong Luwad confronts betrayal, desertion, loss and gain of hope, sexual awareness, and guilt, to name a few obstacles, throughout a very turbulent young childhood in the Philippines and adolescence in America. Depending on the chapter or his interactions with other characters, some of these troubles are more pronounced than others. His coming of age story is so compelling and dynamic that all readers can find some common ground within the pages.

Student Connections

The entire novel is told from memory as Bong Bong begins with a flashback, recalling his memories as well as narrating the memories of others. Some adolescents might find peace and harmony in their childhood memories and some might try to block their memories as a way to prevent hurt and fear, but either way, memory is a major part of adolescence and is especially so for Bong Bong. For him, the only way he can make contact with his home is through these nostalgic moments, though they are sometimes painfully activated through self-mutilation or by a complete disassociation with reality. The way he navigates his life struggles and gains personal growth make him a positive role model for homosexual and heterosexual students. The exercises included in this thesis ask students to reflect on their own memories, home spaces, and individual strengths and weakness as a way to foster the personal growth Ellis advocates. The novel provides a way for students to become active meaning makers who are capable of engaging in discussions and debates with open, questioning minds. Following the primary literary analysis section that excavates the major discussion points of the novel will be the pedagogy section that highlights specific exercises and the theories behind them. There will be four different activities encouraging students to make connections with the text to ultimately create a montage combining all the parts of Bong Bong's identity based on his narration.

II. Literary Analysis

“Rechanneling Pain: Queer Identification and the Search for Home Space”

An Emerging Fantasy Relationship

Noel Alunit's *Letters to Montgomery Clift* portrays a fictional main character whose life is forever changed by the very real history of the Philippines and its ruthless dictator, Ferdinand Marcos. At the center of the novel are Bong Bong Luwad, a queer, Filipino refugee, and his coming of age story that is characterized by coping methods as a result losing his parents at a young age to the Marcos' prison system. To make up for their absence, Bong Bong perpetually seeks comfort and validation that a child would typically find from his parents. The first connection Bong Bong makes in the United States is with the long-time deceased movie star heartthrob, Montgomery Clift, as he was mesmerized by his passion displayed in films. Bong Bong communicates to the actor by letter writing and his bond strengthens as he is gradually more influenced by the actor's movie roles, and eventually his personal life, for empathy and queer identification. I use the term “queer” to describe an individual who experiments with his sexual identification and feels that he exists on the fringes of society as a vulnerable refugee without parents. “Queer” also describes rebellious and defiant behavior as a way of combatting pre-established rules and beliefs existent in a heteronormative society. I argue that Bong Bong uses his queer identification to help him work through the emotional turmoil of growing up feeling abandoned, dislocated and isolated. He turns to self-inflicted violence because like the escapism of his fantasy relationship, the pain allows him to physically consume the hurt, giving him freedom and relief. Without his parents, he lacks a home space with which he can validate his identity and a place where he belongs. I also claim that Bong Bong must use these “crutches” to find a home space, or an emotional and mental state in which he feels a sense of belonging

because his physical home is absent. Ultimately, he must return to his mother in the Philippines in order to find the missing piece of his identity puzzle at which point he finds inner peace and gratification.

Bong Bong's fascination with Montgomery Clift begins as soon as he enters the United States as a young child; the celebrity is the first person to display a desire to protect and care for those who are vulnerable. Regardless of the fact that Montgomery Clift was acting these traits, this is the first connection Bong Bong makes, so it has the greatest impact. The film character possesses traits that have been missing from Bong's life, so in a sense, Clift's movie roles are filling the absence. In the first Montgomery Clift movie Bong Bong watches, the actor plays a soldier who cares for a young boy whose mother was taken away by corrupt people and Montgomery Clift, the actor, keeps the boy safe until his mother returns (*Alumit 5*). This movie is identical to the story lived by Bong Bong; his mother and father were taken away by Ferdinand Marcos' martial law police officers and he is sent to live in America until his parents come to get him. Montgomery Clift is a figment of Bong Bong's imagination that is very much alive, appearing in his mind at moments of nostalgia and comforting the ensuing pain. Bong Bong has a bond with the actor because of the characters he plays, which are often that of protector, guardian, or endearing friend. He begins to write letters to Montgomery Clift as a regular hobby and in a sense, this letter writing is a type of therapy for Bong Bong in that he escapes his real life, absent from his parents and a real home, to communicate with the etherealness of Montgomery Clift.

Watching Montgomery Clift movies and writing him letters allow Bong Bong to forget about all that pains him: "my father's death goes away, my mother's absence becomes nothing to me...I don't want anything to do with the Philippines" (142). Montgomery Clift makes it

possible for Bong Bong to completely disengage from all that haunts him from his past life in the Philippines and all that troubles him in America. There is a sense of reliance on the movie character and his films are central to Bong Bong's life, watching them frequently and repeatedly. This reliance on the movie actor intensifies to the point where Bong Bong begins to have sexual fantasies about him and as Bong Bong gets older, the attachment to the actor guides him through the development of his sexual identity. Like Montgomery Clift in real life, Bong Bong is also very private about his homosexuality for fear of judgment and rejection. He explains that he "took comfort in the life of Montgomery Clift" because he knew that Clift "hid his sexuality, too" and so he understood the "importance of hiding" (110). This concealing behavior is part of the reason why the relationship with him cannot last for long because Clift represents hiding and Bong Bong strives to be acknowledged, particularly by his parents. Montgomery Clift was a notorious, charismatic movie actor who was victimized by society for his sexual orientation and he suffered from drug and alcohol abuse. He often felt he had to hide his queerness from the public because it would make him a marginalized figure in a heteronormative Hollywood society. These characteristics, along with the roles he assumes in movies, are what have the most relevance to Bong Bong's queer identification. Unlike family and friends, Montgomery Clift is always there for him, if not on the television then in his fantasies. In creating a closer connection with Montgomery Clift, Bong Bong is internalizing the comfort of his obsession. As he gets older, Bong Bong's queer empathy strengthens and a correlation develops between his relationship with Montgomery Clift and his childhood; visions of Montgomery Clift evoke memories and painful emotions of his parents while also placating the ensuing feelings of loss.

Bong Bong's Filipino biological parents were involved in investigative journalism and exposing the corrupt politics of the Marcos dictatorship. Though the Luwads are part of Alumit's

fictional story, the Marcos regime is very much a part of real Filipino history. At a young age, Bong Bong witnessed men in police uniforms break into his house and violently beat his parents for their anti-Marcos beliefs. As part of the martial law mandates, his parents were eventually detained, but after Bong Bong had already been sent to California to live with his mother's sister, Auntie Yuna. Bong Bong discovers that his father was detained for his non-violent expression of beliefs, also known as being a "Prisoner of Conscience" (60). Thousands of people, Bong Bong learns, were abducted since martial law was enacted in 1972 and though it has been six years since the fictional Luwads went missing, Amnesty International persists in the search for Bong Bong's parents. Ferdinand Marcos was elected President of the Philippines in 1965 and remained in office until he resigned in 1986. He enforced martial law throughout the entire term of his presidency and he was able to maintain totalitarian authority because of the support he received from bureaucrats, businesses, the military and political leaders across the regions of the Philippines, with the help of the U.S government. According to Albert F. Celozza in *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines: The Political Economy of Authoritarianism*, for those opponents who tried to discourage Marcos' reign, he used armed forces and paramilitary groups that would end up arresting and punishing over 60,000 citizens (1). Because Marcos had total control of the nation and media, he was able to camouflage his brutal abuse to make the nation appear worthy of global support, specifically from the United States who still occupy military bases in the Philippines (3).

Both in the novel and in real life, Amnesty International groups documented various human rights abuses committed by the Marcos government regime. The military used torture and force to investigate suspects, and though this is all part of Bong Bong's fictional life, it holds truth in real life as well. Bong Bong's father wrote for a revolutionary newspaper that told

“secrets” about what Marcos and his wife were doing, like stealing money and murdering thousands of people. One night, a military group barged into the Luwad house and beat up both parents and threatened to kill Bong Bong if they continued publishing disparaging messages about Marcos or his martial law (Alumit 15). The Luwads were victims of the capricious arrests and detention of military groups, though their protests were through non-violent print media. Under martial law, Marcos had full control of all media forms. Because the Philippines is divided across several hundred thousand miles, the vast network of communication is vital to the life of Filipinos. The archipelago was and still is dependent on both radio and newspapers for information and communication. Print media, like newspapers and magazines, and radio media are vital to communication between urban Philippines and the more remote areas of rural Philippines (Celoza 40). If Mr. Luwad organized a newspaper exposing the faults of Marcos’ regime, the information would make a great impact on the way Filipinos perceived the new political rule and could have given the citizens an opportunity to create a unified, large-scale protest. According to martial law, the Luwads were the type of opponents that needed to be removed because they posed a threat and as such, they were imprisoned and their newspaper quickly disbanded. The search for missing persons who were detained during the Marcos regime became known as “salvaging” and it became very common after 1981. “Salvaging” occurs when someone arrested by the military was claimed to have disappeared and then later found killed (Celoza 81). Bong Bong begins salvaging his mother, whom he last saw at the airport as a young child, and father, whom he eventually finds was detained, imprisoned and tortured, and eventually murdered by military groups.

Memories of Bong Bong’s parents and his childhood and visions of Montgomery Clift happen almost simultaneously, indicating that the two fixations are inter-related. Passions for the

Montgomery Clift he watches in movies camouflage deeply suppressed desires to have and feel his parents' love. In moments of loneliness, Montgomery Clift literally appears to give him company, then Bong Bong remembers his life in the Philippines, at which point he disengages from reality. Bong Bong is perpetually haunted with the loss of his parents and the unanswered question about why they never came after him. The older he gets, the more protection he requires from the growing feelings of abandonment. Early in the novel while Bong Bong is still a young child, he has a vision of Montgomery Clift smoking a filterless, Lucky Strike cigarette while he washes dishes in his Aunt's kitchen. This smoke travels around the entire apartment, circling the lampshades, the coffee table legs, and hovers above Auntie Yuna's head:

The cloud of smoke balled together then parted like waves, creating images above me. I saw a tree, a fig tree I used to sit under in the Philippines. I waited for Mama there sometimes. While she cleaned the houses and I was bored, I waited for her under that tree, choosing the ripest figs. I'd bite into one and watch the pink insides ooze out, tasting the sweetness. I saw Mama's face appear in the smoke, and I was numb. I was caught between nowhere and heaven, watching Mama watch me. (Alumit 31)

The smoke from Montgomery Clift's cigarette triggers this childhood memory of Bong Bong and his mother so vividly that Bong Bong imagines his mother literally in front of him. Bong Bong's desires to see his mother are so powerful that a figment of his imagination, Montgomery Clift, is able to evoke this deeper, more suppressed and intense illusion. The natural landscape and the satisfaction he gets from eating the fig symbolize his home as well as the satisfaction of his mother's love. As he "[sits] under the fig tree," he is metaphorically sitting underneath an umbrella of protection, comfort and self-knowledge provided by his mother. This escape from reality is a skill Bong Bong refines as he gets older as his reality is ridden with feelings of loss and abandonment. The memory of his mother transplants him out of Auntie Yuna's kitchen and into a middle space, somewhere between real life and a dream state where he remains until the

sun rises and shines through the windows, dissipating the smoke. He returns to a place “void of Mama’s image, made merely of plaster” (31). Montgomery Clift continually evokes experiences in Bong Bong’s past life and this helps him remember his parents and the love he once felt when with them before he was violently separated.

Evoking Memories through Sensory Stimulation

Bong Bong’s visions of Montgomery Clift become more frequent and more powerful because more time has elapsed since he last saw his parents. The more time passes, the more distant his memories become and the more he needs to be reminded of what he once had with his parents. He fears that his memories will become eroded and with them, the love of his parents. His guardian family’s daughter, Amada, understands his admiration for movie celebrities as she has her own appreciation for Marilyn Monroe, another celebrity of the 1950s. Amada and Bong Bong develop an empathetic relationship for one another and she encourages him to channel Montgomery Clift at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel during a family vacation. She coaxes him to try to summon the ghosts of Montgomery Clift while she channels Marilyn Monroe. Amada claims that the hotel is haunted by dead stars and that some people say they can hear Montgomery Clift blowing his bugle like he did in the movie *From Here to Eternity*. Slowly and softly, Bong Bong starts to hear the bugle and is transported to the set of the movie where Montgomery is beaten up by army men, “I heard the horn. I heard it and cared. A melody that transported me. I found myself in the army barracks where Monty was stationed in *From Here to Eternity*. He was fighting. Some assholes in the army picked on him and decided to beat him up. The sound of fists hitting their target was a horrid sound. I remembered my dad (77).” The sadness of the bugle horn and the images of Montgomery Clift, his hero, getting beaten up in a movie ignite memories of his parents, particularly his father, getting abused by martial law

enforcers. Like the cigarette smoke of the earlier Montgomery Clift dream, this imaginative scenario transports Bong Bong but via a musical melody. Both moments alter Bong Bong's reality to a place where time and space are frozen while his imagination actively plays out his true desire for his parents and his home in the Philippines.

In this case, the sound of the horn and "the sound of fists hitting their target" remind Bong Bong that he has been left behind and the "sound" is symbolic for the heartache he has endured. The sound also suggests violence as both of his parents were beaten and tortured by the military. His parents have yet to come after him and he does not know if this is because they are unable, unwilling, or dead, each possibility being equally intolerable. This separation puts Bong Bong in an abyss of unknowing; he does not know where he belongs in the world and he has nowhere to look to for answers. If his parents are alive, then Bong Bong could assume they have forgotten or disowned him. If they are dead, then the hope he has for their requited love would be dissipated. The bugle horn gives volume to the sadness internalized by Montgomery Clift in this particular movie and by Bong Bong since he has been torn away from his parents. It "transports" him closer to the pain endured by Montgomery Clift, and likewise, his parents. He is essentially helpless in the quest for his parents and this guilt deepens the metaphorical scar growing within him. Bong Bong begins to cry, wondering if the people who have left him in life will ever return, at which point the ghost of Montgomery Clift is seen entering the elevator (78). Like the film stars who haunt the hotel, the isolation and displacement of Bong Bong's refugee status haunt him. Not knowing why his parents never came after him after sending him to America, Bong is tormented by the millions of possible answers. The realm of fantasy in which Montgomery Clift exists is replaced with the realm of reality that is consumed with physical pain and the shifting

realms are part of what create Bong Bong's problems of identity. He struggles to understand an adolescent life devoid of love and consumed by pain.

Bong Bong develops destructive behavior similar to that of Montgomery Clift, except his self-destructiveness is a direct result of his childhood abandonment and not his queer identity, which happened to be the source for the film celebrity. In fact, he admits his queer identity to himself and Amada and she accepts him, which makes it easier for him to feel some self-affirmation. Bong Bong, in one of his letters to the actor, writes that he had read about Clift's "tragedy and joy" and that though Clift had a brilliant career, he "suffered, taking booze and drugs" (111). Bong Bong's association with destructive behavior and substance abuse echoes largely the life of Montgomery Clift, though his homosexuality was not a primary cause of his torment and he grows up about ten years after the film star's death. Gerard Sullivan's article, "Discrimination and Self-concept of Homosexuals Before the Gay Liberation Movement: A Biographical Analysis Examining Social Context and Identity," explains that the 1950s and 1960s witnessed a series of political discrimination campaigns against gay people in order to depict homosexuals as "abnormal and dangerous to society" and generally, as posing a threat to traditional values and society (203). These campaigns naturally heightened prejudices and affected the way homosexuals expressed and accepted their sexuality. The campaigns stigmatized homosexual identities in terms of "self-esteem, sexual relationships, and adjustment to society" (204). Montgomery Clift was greatly affected by these negative associations of homosexuality and as a result, he often denied his own sexual impulses by having relationships with women as well as men. The actor learned to internalize self-hate, a conflict which, in turn, produced "considerable psychological torment" (208). In Alunit's novel, Bong Bong's sexuality is not considered taboo; the first person he tells (Amada) accepts his choices and he is able to

sustain a meaningful relationship after a few trial-and-error experiences. What is considered taboo is his erotic fantasy relationship with the deceased movie actor and though Amada is initially empathetic, she betrays his trust the moment she feels that the relationship encourages Bong Bong's self-destructiveness. For the real-life Montgomery Clift, his sexuality was forbidden and he reacted by internalizing the negative values in the dominant culture that caused him to think of himself with "disrespect and prevented [him] from accepting [his] sexual orientations without guilt and shame" (210). In a way, Clift was a "victim" of the heteronormative and homophobic historical period during this time. Though they had different motivations for self-destructive behavior, Bong Bong comes close to committing suicide one night after drinking heavily; an accident that closely mirrors the actor's climax of self-penance for the guilt and shame in being homosexual. Bong Bong understands Montgomery Clift's life of tragedy and the adaptations he had to make to his true identity and this congruency is what makes Bong Bong so closely attached to the celebrity.

Bong Bong eventually experiments with alcohol, but his physical injuries are what first introduce him to living a life wrought by tragedy. He wonders with curiosity how difficult it is to create a bruise and begins experimenting by accidentally bumping into a door, then walking fast into a wall, then slamming his arm into a bureau, and eventually swinging his arm against the edge of a closet door (Alumit 117). Bong Bong is constantly redirecting the hurt caused by the absence of his parents to external channels and he does this by self-inflicting pain. Self-mutilation is a way to feel the trauma without having to experiencing it, and this allows Bong Bong to physically consume the pain that has taken over his soul. Bong Bong is unaware of how far his bruising will go but has an innate feeling that he just "knew it was the right thing to do." Hurting himself seems "appropriate" because there is "comfort in pain, incredible comfort"

(118). Bodily pain is instantaneous and bruises can last. The instantaneousness of the pain allows him to avoid the mental turmoil of facing a broken heart and the fact that his bruises stay visible prevents him from forgetting the inevitable grief. Unlike the memories of his parents that he is fearful of losing as he spends more time away from them, the bruises remain on the skin as a constant reminder of what he does not have. The bruises are a physical manifestation of the grief and sadness. He does not have visions of Montgomery Clift when he self-mutilates because though the actor provides comfort, the physical pain provides relief and this feeling is more powerful to him. The story of his father's abusive fate in prison constantly plays over and over in his head, and on the nights he cannot sleep Bong Bong lies awake, "scratching, breaking skin, biting what limbs [he could] bring to [his] mouth" (154). He explains that there was "a kind of release" when he did it, "a kind of pain that freed me" (154). Bruises, blood, and scars are ways to relieve the intangible feelings and in making them tangible and visible, Bong Bong is closer to understanding and overcoming them. He is being freed from the pain that lives within him and he uses this release as a coping method to avoid feeling and talking about heartache.

When he tortures himself, Bong Bong is closest to his parents and a feeling of belonging because both his parents were tortured in Marcos prison camps. Bong Bong writes to Montgomery Clift that the last time he saw his parents they had bruises and that when his mother was beaten by the police that fateful night, "the bruises seemed to appear like flowers on a vine." When his father was detained and tortured in prison and his bruises went away, "new ones came along." Bruises and physical pain are the only way he can share experiences with his mother and father. On the mornings after he bruises himself, he relishes in his own "purple flowers" that resemble those of his mother's "garden of purple daffodils" (117). When reflecting on the stories he's heard from other detainees about his parents' torture, he injures himself. By comparing his

and his mother's bruises to something more palpable like flowers, Bong Bong is trying to create joy out of tragedy. He must change the original nature of pain experienced by his mother to a more pleasant feeling, like relaxing in a garden. The first memory evoked by Montgomery Clift also brings together his mother and nature: he remembers sitting under a fig tree while his mother is cleaning a house. His mother is equated with nature and because she is absent from his life, he has unclear notions of identity; in other words, he is unsure of his inborn, innate qualities and character which is why he uses Montgomery Clift as a model, taking on his traits as an actor and self-destructive, closeted homosexual. He lacks a primal connection and is detached from his roots. The pain he exerts on his body is a way of reminding himself of what he is missing: the innate sense of self-affirmation and validation from his birth mother.

In terms of his father and his violent death, the only way Bong Bong can cope with his absence is by imitating the abuse he experienced. In a heated argument with Amada in which he informs her about his father's mistreatment in prison, Bong Bong alternates between punching himself in the chest, smacking himself in the face, pulling out his hair, and throwing himself on the floor. Amada tries to stop him but his ardor is unyielding:

I kept punishing myself. 'They hit [my father] everywhere,' I said. 'They knew he was a writer, so they hit him on the hands. They stomped on his fingers. They did it over and over again. Until his joints were gone. They broke his hands!...They broke his hands so he couldn't write anymore. His hands looked like twisted old branches. Then they tortured him again.' I threw Amada off me and slammed my knuckles against the floor, slamming them until they were red, until my hands were weak and the skin was broken. (Alumit 164).

This passage is followed by Bong Bong drinking copious amounts of alcohol at a bar because drinking helps him forget the images of the Marcos dictatorship to which his family was condemned. He physically abuses himself the same way his father was abused, making him feel

the same pain his father felt without having to experience it mentally and emotionally. He recreates the hurt, and then uses alcohol to forget such mental and emotional turmoil that would typically follow. Bong Bong keeps “punishing” himself because he reasons that he must reprimand himself for not being around to help his father, though this would be unlikely because Bong Bong was so young. The abuse his father endured that he takes out on his own body is a way of coping with guilt because he is able to live while his father was not.

The climax of Bong Bong’s self-inflicted violence comes when he is the closest to understanding that his parents are lost to him undoubtedly. His father was electrocuted numerous times to coerce him to submit to admitting himself as a “communist” to the Marcos regime. While in therapy at the hospital, Bong Bong reaches the conclusion that both his father and Montgomery Clift visit him in his dreams because they are dead, but he is paranoid about meeting his mother in a dream. If he does, then that must mean she has passed away as well and this is a frightening possibility. His first therapist maliciously questions Bong Bong about the possibility of his mother’s death and this has the opposite effect of therapy: Bong Bong becomes the most disturbed he has ever been. He puts his hand over a light bulb, shattering the glass and feeling the electrocution bolt into his body, “like scalding water surging through [his] veins...[he] jerked and jumped.” Immediately after, he remembers his father. Bong Bong hears a voice saying “Stop it” but does not recognize it as his own because he has entered a dream-like realm where he lives in the memory of his father. The electrocution his father experienced “wasn’t enough to kill him, just enough to hear himself scream” and Bong Bong wonders how accurate his recreation is to his father’s torture (175). At this moment, Bong Bong metaphorically disengages himself from his body:

It seemed the electricity chased me away, chased all the feeling
from my body, chased the thoughts of my parents, chased my

anger at Amada, chased the regret, chased the loneliness, making me hollow. Hollow and tired.

I thought of my father. The electricity. I was grateful. I cried. I cried for my father. (175)

This moment is a culmination of all the manifested emotional pain Bong Bong has tried to relinquish. He objectifies this pain as something that can be “chased away” by a powerful force, yet he nearly cries himself to sleep. Bong Bong is the most conflicted because though he tries to keep all the hurt at a distance by being comforted by Montgomery Clift or by the relief of self-inflicted torture, he is deprived of these routine methods of denial at the hospital. He is forced to talk about his parents, thus excavating the wound that has not been able to heal on its own. In order for the scar to vanish, Bong Bong has to reach his lowest point and he does this by bursting into tears and admitting to himself that he is grateful that he continues to live though his father does not. He can also be “grateful” for the bond he once had with his father because at least he has a feeling to remember as opposed to having nothing. He has new understandings of his mother and though she still may be alive and living in the Philippines, her life may have been derailed by extenuating circumstances, controlled particularly by the Marcos dictatorship. He has to become “hollow” to understand that he may never feel the love and sense of belonging inherent in a child-parent relationship. Eventually, a new therapist who empathizes with Bong Bong and his unconventional coping methods is able to coax him into talking about his pain and fears of loss, at which point he learns that his parents’ abandonment is in no way indicative of their love for him.

Mother as Home Space and Catalyst of Internal Peace

Reuniting with his mother brings about the greatest sense of self to Bong Bong. Up until the reunion, Bong Bong is under the impression that his parents were either dead, or they simply forgot about him because they were so consumed in their anti-political campaign. When he finds

his mother, it is as if he has found the glue that will hold all his separate identities together. With his mother he finds understanding. His hesitation to tell her about his troubled life is relieved when his mother tells him, “I’ll take you anyway you are” (235). This single statement is enough to grant Bong Bong satisfaction and validation because unlike Amada, the Arangans, or the hospital therapists, his mother will not pass judgment or want to change his queer identity, his fantasy relationship, or his reclusiveness. Her acceptance of Bong Bong allows him to stop questioning his life choices. His mother is so much an extension of himself that he shows her his very private letters to Montgomery Clift. These letters are what had him committed to a mental hospital because Amada considered his queer relationship destructive. However, Bong Bong’s mother reads them and apologizes for the pain she caused him and cries when she reads he has tortured himself, and she hopes to meet his current boyfriend. She understands that Montgomery Clift played a certain role in his life and does not chastise him for his alternative spiritual connection. With one look from her, Bong Bong’s mother lets him know that his queerness was “okay” and that it did not matter that he preferred men. Instantaneously, he feels a happy release, one that makes him laugh as opposed to a destructive release as when he slams his arm in a door (237). The difference between these two ways of expressing relief is his mother’s love because she symbolizes acceptance and approval of his lifestyle.

Talking with his mother gives Bong Bong hindsight and with this perspective comes inner peace and a sense of belonging. After sharing the details of their separate lives, his mother unknowingly brings him to an epiphany that allows him to self-mend the pain of abandonment from which he was eternally suffering ever since stepping foot in America. Though his father is no longer around, his mother tells him that she tried contacting him through letters when he lived with Aunt Yuna, but once Yuna was relieved of his care, she had no way of finding him, which

explained why she never went after him. He realizes, “We developed new lives, new personalities, new beings. Yet she belonged to me. I belonged to her. No matter how many years separated us, we were still each other’s. She was my family” (238). Bong Bong reaches this conclusion without Montgomery Clift or self-inflicted pain; he listens to himself and in doing so, he gains self-validation. He finally feels the sensation of belonging and true connection with a family member and this is what settles his rebellious behaviors. He finds the answers to all the mysteries that any child who has lived without his parents would have; he sees the physical resemblance, recognizes similar body gestures, and learns that his perception about life and behavior is characteristic of other family members. Bong Bong’s mother tells him:

You know our family has always been a little nuts in the head. Your Uncle Virgilio was known to sit for hours, days and just look out, staring at nothing, then he would snap back to life. Just like that.

When she told me this, an incredible peace came over me, caressing me like a velvet cloth.” (239)

His mother refers to their family as “ours” and discusses his relatives as “yours” and this language demonstrates that he has a true family, not an adopted family with whom he had to force a connection. He shares blood with other people and they are just like him and because of these relations, Bong Bong is no longer abandoned and displaced in the world. He belongs to his family and they belong to him and this is evident in his very own personality traits. The characteristics of Uncle Virgilio essentially mimic the behaviors he has relied on to get through life. Bong Bong has ritually imagined himself out of his reality, whether by Montgomery Clift fantasies, self-torture, or alcohol, to those places that made him feel at home and after the visions vanished, he would “snap back to life...just like that.” His mother is the key to the knowledge he has needed since he was sent away from the Philippine and the protection, comfort, and familiarity that he once found in Montgomery Clift is replaced by the peace he feels in his

mother's presence. The peace "caresses" him "like a velvet cloth" and this description most represents Bong Bong's maturation. This sensation is the first time Bong Bong imagines something in a way that makes the sensation feel better; in other words, the way he summons his past memories are always in a way that makes them more painful or him self-destructive. Bong Bong uses Montgomery Clift to detach from real life and everyone in it and the self-inflicted violence was damaging physically and emotionally. Both of these methods of remembering allowed him to see but never really feel whereas the "velvet cloth" is all about feeling.

The emotional scars of Bong Bong's refugee experience made his late childhood and adolescence a time of deviant behavior that placed him in and out of foster care homes. His fascination with Montgomery Clift gave him the ability to travel outside of his current, pain-ridden reality to a time and place where he was surrounded by love and comfort in memories of his parents and his home in the Philippines. The longer Bong Bong's pain remains untreated, the more damage Bong Bong causes himself in order to cope with the trauma of abandonment. The few memories of his childhood that he did have provide him with the gateway to his identity as a queer Filipino whose parents were detained as a result of their rebellious behavior. Reuniting with his origins and learning about his family members gives him a home space in which he finds belonging and self-affirmation. In a way, Montgomery Clift functions as a temporary surrogate mother during the time Bong Bong was abandoned from his and it is not until he finds his biological mother that he finds the inner peace he continually sought. Bong Bong represents a part of every adolescent searching for the pieces of their identity, faced with obstacles, and forced to look into their memories to be reminded of who and what makes them feel protected, needed and a sense of belonging and importance.

III. Pedagogical Approaches

“Creative Interactions for Critical Thinkers”

Noel Alumit’s novel *Letters to Montgomery Clift* touches on common problems and concerns of all young adolescents from the marginal to the mainstream student. Though it is a challenging text mostly appropriate for grades 10-11, parts of the novel can be adapted to younger or older classrooms because of its diverse content. It can be used to educate students about sexual and gender minorities, false family paradigms, guilt and coping strategies, reactions to love and betrayal, and the strength it takes to reflect on powerful memories to overcome life obstacles. I have created three varied activities that encourage student interaction with the text and their peers. Storyboarding is the first activity followed by a letter of advice, peer response work and finally a celebration collage.

A. Storyboard

Storyboarding Teaches Literacies

Storyboarding is the process of combining text and images in a specific order to produce a visual representation of a storyline, idea, or character before one frame of a picture is filmed. The simplest version of storyboards can be found in comic strips while the most complex versions are pre-filming strategies. Often, storyboarding is used to springboard ideas from paper and pencil to the big screen. With the increase of visual literacy software programs, storyboarders can draft their work to make it similar to a movie without actually making it a movie. For this project, students will have the option of hand drawing their pictures or using a software program called Comic Creator.

Storyboarding is a way to teach visual literacy, along with reading and writing, increase student-student collaboration, exercise multi-modal learning, and differentiate instruction. This concept asks that a student synthesize information (in this case a number of chapters) and put information in a systematic order (in this case chronological). In order for students to synthesize information, a skill ranked high on Bloom's Taxonomy, they must be able to recall information, understand meaning, apply knowledge, and interpret structure, organization and internal relationships. Once all of these bases are covered, the storyboard requires creative thinking to develop new structures of knowledge, in this case in the form of boxed images and minimal use of text. A storyboard is a type of graphic organizer in that these new structures of knowledge are built on old knowledge to create connections between relationships, facts, and ideas. O'Brannon, Puckett, and Rakes argue in "Using Technology to Support Visual Learning Strategies" that graphic organizers are useful tools to help students learn about the structure of their knowledge and the process of knowledge building, or "meta-knowledge" (127).

Creating digital images can help readers envision texts, a skill that more versed readers may take for granted and one that can be scaffolded for struggling readers. Students must read the selected text, choose critical moments for presentation, and reproduce them in a new format. They must map each image to create a concept in its entirety while selecting only a few phrases or labels to pair with the picture. O'Bannon, Puckett, and Rakes believe that before a storyboard is created, students must consider how they will present the information before jumping to production (131). Part of the reason why readers love to read is because they can envision the setting, or costumes, or facial and body expressions as they delve into a text and in doing so, they are interacting with the written word. Storyboarding makes this skill more accessible to all readers and these emerging capabilities allow students to envision, understand and communicate

meaning. Sara Kajder and Janet A. Swenson write in “Digital Images in the Language Arts Classroom” that readers demonstrate increased comprehension after using digital think aloud processes because they have a better understanding of reading strategies, which in turn permits a reader to develop a visualization (18). The type of storyboarding discussed by these particular authors involves transferring the paper version of storyboarding to computer software and students will have the option to hand craft or digitally adapt their work. However, both the digital storyboarding research by Kajder and Swenson and my adapted version of storyboarding involve communication. With the integration of technology, the written word can be introduced in a new format that makes readers active thinkers rather than passive participants. These visual texts are driven by the idea that all literature “provides us with a way to imagine human potential” (21). Creating storyboards elevates the student from a reader to a writer, artist, designer, and author and makes them feel as qualified as the authors they read. As Kajder and Swenson put it, “images allow students to see what they think they know, connect the new to the known, and express their understanding in ways that are visual, scholarly, and powerful” (46).

Using Storyboards to Rethink Composition and Reading Processes

In terms of writing, storyboarding encourages multimodal expression that exists in an alternative format from the five paragraph essay or critical lens monotony. The multimodal approach shows that the use of text is only one of many ways to make meaning. Storyboarding might even become a pre-write strategy for some writers as they sketch out the path of their more traditional essays. This particular assignment asks that students restructure the beginning section of a three part novel so in a way, the burden of invention felt by struggling writers is lessened. They already have the content of the story but now have to sort out their knowledge to pair text

with image, which is why storyboarding can be considered a graphic organizer. Multi-modal learning encouraged by storyboarding asks students to play with visuals and concepts and with that comes a different kind of invention that makes all students academic designers. The beauty of English Language Arts is that there is an innumerable amount of ways to communicate ideas, and storyboarding is a gateway through which writers of all skill levels can enter the conversation. Though content is already supplied, imagination is still at work; in fact this project demands just as much if not more imagination than a traditional essay or reader response.

According to Peggy Albers and Jerome C. Harste in “The Arts, New Literacies, and Multimodality,” imagination “allows us to experience things in our own contexts” and with the act of imagining, images and ideas are “carved in a material that gives them semi-permanence” (10). As our contexts and situations are constantly changing, the art created from imagination represents a moment in time. The storyboards created from this first section of the reading will not represent the same ideas present in the second or third section and the storyboards created by each group will be unique to each. This project will teach students about their own contexts and relationships between the text, the self, and the imagination.

Doering, Beach, and O’Brien explain in “Infusing Tools and Digital Literacies into an English Education Program” that the “shift to active use of multimodal, interactive tools suggests the need to redefine notions of reading, composing, and performing processes to infuse digital literacies that students use daily into English language arts curriculum” (42). Though this assignment does not mandate the daily use of digital literacies, its visual literacy aspect does involve the need to “redefine notions of reading, composing and performing” in an exciting way. Students are required to consider the best ways to present their ideas and opinions in an image no larger than an index card instead of composing a traditional, thesis-driven essay. In order to

succeed, they must rethink the written text, composing processes, and the ways in which they will perform all through the use of pictures. Most importantly, Doering, Beach, and O'Brien state that the composing plan "involves not only what one wants to say, but how one wants to say it, and knowing how to strategically place links that lead to the intertext" (43). Students are learning to contextualize meaning from the original text to create a new text composed of interrogative meanings. They have to convey meaning rather than write it. They must use deduction to evaluate the meaning of the story and induction to create a series of images riddled with intertext clues.

In order to create a meaningful storyboard accurate to the reading, students must slow down their reading and put the content in chronological order based on the memories that arise. Storyboards are a good way to determine how well students are understanding texts because they are visual illustrations of their thinking processes. They are literally re-constructing their thinking to a new format that is more accessible thanks to a media-centered society. David L. Bruce writes in "Framing the Text: Using Storyboards to Engage Students with Reading" that storyboards are especially effective in improving reading skills because the activity counters most perceptions of reading as a passive activity. With storyboards, students must go back and forth between their project and the text which leads them to engage and transact with the text (78-9). They must search the text for evidence that will translate to a visual representation and in doing so, they become more sophisticated close readers, which is a high-demand, portable skill. Students will have to look to the text for guidance in creating visuals as well as corresponding quotes that support their interpretations. The project can become a helpful class artifact, study guide or pre-writing strategy and it shows that reading can be alternative and subjective, not a fixed, droning chore.

A Collaboration of Student Authorities

Student collaboration is essential to creating a positive, community atmosphere in which learners feel safe presenting their opinions in front of others. Students working in groups can practice distributing responsibilities and setting guidelines for themselves, which in turn encourages them to be active participants not only in the classroom but also in society. Working in groups effectively uses peer pressure to set standards and few students, if any, will want to be the weakest link by not fulfilling their expectations set forth by themselves and their peers. Collaboration also works seamlessly with this project because where one student struggles to think creatively, another may prosper, and when they have the opportunity to work together, a community is formed. The creative thinkers might excel at generating accurate images while more traditional thinkers might be most useful in selecting meaningful text to pair with the images as well as organizing the storyboard's narration. While graphic organizers and visual, spatial learning may be a challenge for some students, they will be working alongside their peers who excel at such thinking skills in a supportive, productive manner. In this way, Jason Oher emphasizes in "The World of Digital Storytelling" that such projects "give voice to a number of otherwise quiet students and to students whose skills don't fit the usual academic mold" (45). Simultaneously, storyboarding is a way to differentiate instruction that gives the normally quiet students a chance to take the spotlight in a way that is scholarly, comfortable, and confident.

Storyboarding is an appropriate project for Noël Alumit's *Letters to Montgomery Clift* because the novel's first part opens as a flashback and the facts get filled in in a need-to-know order. The section is not completely chronological, though some scenes are, but by the end of the section the reader has an idea of where the characters are in their lives and how they are related to each other. Memory is an important part of this novel as the protagonist tells the story from his

very descriptive, ever-present memories. Students need to be able to unpack and organize the order of plot points, which is where the storyboard comes in: students will organize the abundance of information in a narrative sequence of events, transcending beyond the written word. The students will have better access to the plot of the text and will develop a more detailed understanding of it, thus increasing their authority. Students gain agency by restructuring the story line and demonstrating their readings as authors of their own work. This novel is packed with themes and conflicts and evidence of these ideas start in the first chapter when readers find out that the protagonist's mother is missing, that he's seen a doctor, that he's ended up in America so it's probably not his native country, and that he needs to reflect on his life story in order to put together pieces of his widely scattered identity. Literally sketching out the life of the protagonist will help bring together connections between the student and the text. This text is focused on the coming of age of a distraught, lonely young boy and it is important to get a sense of his life before moving on to the more layered chapters.

Students will present their group work as well as share with their peers their perceptions of the protagonist. This perception is important because we will need these opinions to springboard our reading of the next part of *Letters to Montgomery Clift*. The novel is split into three parts, possibly because the protagonist goes through three major growths, there are three very different parts of his life, or because the novelist has made a stylistic decision. Three is a significant number for this text and the foundation from the first part needs to be solid in order to move on. By sharing our opinions about the protagonist after the introductory reading, we will more clearly see where he goes in terms of growth and identity.

The storyboard activity is planned so that students will have a few days in-class to work on the assignment with the majority of day one being discussion of the text and distribution of

responsibilities of the group and individuals. Because so much of this activity has to do with personal interpretation, it is important to make sure the assessment does not grade artistic ability or quantity as heavily as it does quality of interpretation. Students will be shown a few good and a few bad examples of storyboards from widely read texts and, with a class scribe, we will record traits of poor, good, and excellent storyboards; from that, an assessment rubric will be made. They will be asked to assess the quality of the images in terms of amount, the balance of text and image, the effort of the storyboarder to produce creative work, and the quality of literary interpretation (Can you identify a protagonist? Are his/her emotions, actions, expressions clear? Do they relate to or represent the text in any way?). After this class work, the teacher will put together a rubric and give it to students prior to the storyboard due date so they will be prepared and aware of how their work will be assessed.



Storyboarding *Letters to Montgomery Clift*

A storyboard is a series of images in sequence that can be supported heavily by text descriptions or sparingly with occasional labels of people, places or things. Storyboards are very similar to comic strips, except comic strips communicate humor while storyboards can be used to visually communicate dramatic scenes for potential filming. For this project, you will work in groups of 3-4 to create a storyboard of Part One of *Letters to Montgomery Clift*. Here is an abbreviated version of a storyboard. Notice that there are large images and the text is brief.



Directions:

- 1) Create a 12-16 panel storyboard
 - 2) Present and explain your storyboard to the class
 - 3) Select one word to describe Bong's state of being at the end of this section of the novel and be prepared to share your reasons
-
- ✓ *Distribute work as a group; the group can work together on each picture or the pictures can be designated to individuals*
 - ✓ *Stick figures are ok! Artistic ability will not be factored into your grade; however, your images need to show effort. You have the option of hand drawing or using Comic Creator*
 - <http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/comic/>
 - ✓ *At least 12 images (16 max); one sentence (or one or two phrases) allowed per image*
 - ✓ *The project will be scored out of 50 points and will be assessed according to the rubric*
 - ✓ *Storyboards must be completed in 3 days.*
 - ✓ *Presentations will be done as a group on the day storyboards are due. Be prepared to discuss your storyboard and any challenges you came across as a group.*
 - ✓ *DO NOT FLOOD STORYBOARDS WITH TEXT. If you think you are relying too much on text to get the point of the image across, ask for help!*

You may want to:

- ⊙ Discuss with your group what you think are the most important parts of the chapter
- ⊙ Arrange in chronological order the sequence of events
- ⊙ Decide if one character will be repeated in every image block or if you will tell the story using different characters in each block

STORYBOARDING RUBRIC

Group Members: _____

Date: _____

Category	10	7	5	2
<i>Concept</i>	Team has a clear picture of what they are trying to achieve. Each member can describe what he or she is trying to do and generally, how his/her work will contribute to the final product.	Team has a fairly clear picture of what they are trying to achieve. Each member can describe what they are trying to do overall but has trouble describing how his/her work will contribute to the final product.	Team has brainstormed their concept, but no clear focus has emerged for the team. Team members may describe the goals/final product differently.	Team has spent little effort on brainstorming and refining a concept. Team members are unclear on the goals and how their contributions will help them reach the goal.
<i>Required Elements</i>	Within 12-16 individual storyboard images; one full sentence or a couple phrases used as textual explanation for each slide; group has decided on one word to describe Bong Bong and has textual evidence for support.	At least 12 individual images; one sentence or one phrase used for each slide; group has decided on one word to describe Bong Bong and has some textual support.	Less than 12 individual images; one sentence or one phrase is used for each slide; group has difficulty deciding on one word to describe Bong Bong and has little textual support.	Less than 12 individual images; more than one sentence used for each slide OR no words used at all; group has not decided on Bong Bong's state of being and has no textual support.
<i>Clarity/ Neatness</i>	Storyboard is easy to read and all elements are so clearly written, labeled, or drawn that another student could create the presentation if necessary.	Storyboard is easy to read and most elements are clearly written, labeled, or drawn. Another person might be able to create the presentation after asking one or two questions.	Storyboard is hard to read with rough drawings and labels. It would be hard for another person to create this presentation without asking lots of questions.	Storyboard is hard to read and one cannot tell what goes where. It would be impossible for another person to create this presentation without asking lots of questions.
<i>Use of Time</i>	Used time well during each class period with no schedule reminders. Group worked productively and efficiently together.	Used time well during most class periods with one or two schedule reminders. Group was distracted and needed one or two interventions.	Used time well but required adult reminders two or more occasions. Group was easily sidetracked and needed two or more interventions.	Used time poorly in spite of several reminders. Group did not use class time appropriately to the point where quality of work was affected.
<i>Creativity</i>	Individual storyboard images and group project as a whole shows great effort, cohesiveness, and creativity. Bong Bong's relationship to other characters is distinct and chronology matches up to text.	Most individual images show a good deal of effort, cohesiveness, and creativity but work as a whole is somewhat lacking organization. Most images depict Bong Bong or his relationship to other characters and chronology is close to text.	Some individual images show effort, cohesiveness, and creativity, but group storyboard is disorganized. Characters and relationships are unclear and chronology is unclear.	Individual and group images lack cohesion, creativity, and effort. Work shows little teamwork and is much disorganized. Chronology is not consistent and characters and relationships are too difficult to distinguish.

Total Score: _____ / 50

B. i. Letter of Advice and Peer Response Workshop

“Dear Friend...”

A letter of advice is a letter in which the writer conveys to the reader suggestions, opinions, and ways to help in times of hardship. In terms of structure, an advice letter can take many different forms. It can open up with an anecdote about personal hardship, or a rehashing of the difficulties at hand, or maybe a detailed plan of rescue. Although students may benefit from a prescribed structure for letter writing, it will be more appropriate for students to have the structure come organically. Because this advice letter to the protagonist requires some personal information to be revealed, students will be better off having full authority of its structure. Though there will be certain criteria that the writers will have to address, the writers will have free reign regarding how the components of their letter will fit together.

Fostering Empathy, Expression, and Creativity with Advice Writing

A letter of advice is an important writing project for a number of reasons. First, it demands that students show and convey empathy and understanding to a friend in need, in this case the main character of *Letters to Montgomery Clift* with whom we have become quickly connected. Students of all learning levels have the ability to feel compassion, so immediately all students will feel they have something important to share. Revealing compassion can make them better friends, family members, and social citizens and it can also make them more qualified to help someone in need, whether it is themselves or a friend. Part of this letter will ask students to tap into their memory boxes and share a personal anecdote that reveals a time in their lives where they faced obstacles and either overcame the obstacles or had to succumb to them. Writing about such times asks that they relive those moments and share those personal connections with the

characters. Also, it asks that they revisit the emotions they were feeling at that specific time, maybe dejection, disappointment, sadness, hope, courage or optimism. In doing so, I hope that this assignment helps them gather a greater sense of self and understanding of what has made them who they are today. It is intended for them to reflect on their own memories and assess the role the memories have taken in shaping their identities. So much of Bong Bong's character is affected by what he can or can't remember of his childhood and he avoids facing the lack of memory by recalling Montgomery Clift or self-inflicting violence, for instance. For this novel, the hardships faced by the character are varied. Not only does he face identity struggle and the absence of a parental unit, the protagonist is a closeted homosexual who really only reveals himself to his guardian family's daughter, whom he eventually considers to be as important as a birth sister. The second part of this novel is more overt in describing the protagonist's homosexuality and students will have to address how they might go about helping the protagonist find trust and self-assurance, regardless of their own sexual orientations.

Homosexuality and queerness in general, for that matter, will be a topic for discussion in the classroom and students will have to address this in part of their letter. They will not be forced to openly share their opinions about homosexuality, yet they will have to understand that it is a part of the protagonist's struggles, memories, and identity and as such it should be addressed in their letters. In order to avoid the possibility of students feeling uncomfortable about sharing their personal stories, their names can be removed from their writing drafts and all peer-response work will be done anonymously. It is important that teachers understand that it may be difficult for sexual and gender minority students to write about their life experiences in a heterogeneous classroom. Paula Ressler and Becca Chase, in "Sexual Identity and Gender Variance: Meeting the Educational Challenges," point out that it is important to create a safe space to engage

students by having them consider multiple viewpoints (20). Students' letters might reveal a more private, personal trait or story and they will also be asked to consider the values and relationships that define Bong Bong. By sharing all of this information, students' will be learning as well as teaching respect, tolerance, and what it means to be a member of a socially diverse community.

Second, letter writing might be an underused form of expression. At a time of battling hormones and shifting identities, adolescents may struggle voicing their opinions and feelings verbally. Emotions can sometimes overpower the senses and whether talking to a parent or a friend, verbal communication is not always the easiest or clearest. Letter writing is an alternative venue for expression. Students can write letters to themselves, their friends, or their parents and in the case of this novel, letter writing is centered on giving advice to a troubled boy just passed early adolescence. The entire novel is based on memories that have been reconstructed through letter writing. The story begins as a flashback with the intent to discover who he was by reviewing letters he has written to himself. This project might make students more open to writing letters to people in their lives, especially themselves, if they feel verbal communication is a challenge. This type of writing would engage critical reflection as writers would have to hold a mirror and/or microscope to themselves and assess what they notice. Letter writing might also encourage students to be more open in general about their own identities. This format can open the gates to journal writing which in turn can heighten a student's sense of self, ability to sympathize, academic writing skills, and confidence. They may build their own character and learn how to be more relatable to friends or family. This character building can be coached through lessons of pathos and ethos. The writer will have to appeal to the reader's emotions through personal storytelling where the values, beliefs, and understanding are conveyed to the reader. In expressing these concerns, the writer, in this case the student will be establishing their

goodwill and permitting the reader, in this case the novel's protagonist, to trust them and therefore listen to their advice.

Third, letter writing is a very authentic form of writing and, like the storyboard, it is more creative than the standard essay. Letter writing is a skill students can use for the rest of their lives and can even be a skill to help improve their lives outside of school. It is a way to show students that there are other forms of writing that will be used in life and that different genres require different elements, in this case compassion, empathy, and understanding. This type of assignment makes it impossible for students to fail because the content is difficult to plagiarize and compassion and empathy are difficult to fake, at least well. Further, this assignment has the potential to be viewed by readers outside of the classroom, perhaps by a friend or a local LGBT community group who may have members familiar with some of the difficulties faced by the protagonist. This letter will have to touch upon issues brought up in the novel besides homosexuality, such as domestic disputes, self-mutilation, and finding love. If they are comfortable, the authors can share these letters with anyone they know who is enduring similar struggles. Even more so, the authors may take their own advice if they find themselves relating to the protagonist in any way, which is the goal.

Writing for Effect and the Need for Relevance

This writing assignment is a suitable project for this novel because of the rewards students will receive. Their notions of writing will be redefined in a more realistic way and they will feel the empowerment that comes from sharing and relating to another person, even if s/he is fictional, and extending a helping hand. They may gain a greater understanding of how people function and how and by what they are shaped. This assignment is especially important because

students will learn lessons for use beyond the classroom, like conveying sympathy through pathos, ethos and logos. Each of these rhetorical tools will inevitably give students empowerment: the letter content requires that students be understanding, that the students must prove that they are trustworthy, and that their life stories are the evidence.

In her article “Ethics as a Form of Critical and Rhetorical Inquiry in the Writing Classroom,” Teresa Henning invites the use of ethics as a mode of inquiry for invention strategies and focusing attention to contexts and relationships (34-6). Ethical inquiry invites students to identify values and relate them to a specific situation (34). In terms of *Letters to Montgomery Clift*, students will have to identify Bong Bong’s historical and cultural values to make sense of how his situation is complicated. Ethical inquiry will help students make this connection and will then integrate ethos, pathos, and logos to write a convincing, responsible letter of advice. According to Henning, ethical inquiry shows students that writing can be a “form of action” and as such, their writing can have repercussions for themselves and others. This idea of action is most important to Bong Bong, especially at this point in the novel, because he struggle to make safe, responsible decisions. Bong Bong needs help rechanneling his alcohol abuse, dangerous motorcycle habits, and self-inflicted violence and students’ letters will be aimed at helping him make this change. Henning believes that ethical inquiry is especially significant “when composing a piece of persuasion urging action on a sensitive issue that has the potential to harm others. Particularly with sensitive situations, ethical inquiry can change a writer’s view and might even make their writing more persuasive (36).

Like Henning, Grant Wiggins values writing that makes a “difference” and has an “effect” in his article, “Real World Writing: Making Purpose and Audience Matter” (30). Often times with classroom writing assignments, the “purpose” is to complete the homework

assignment, the “audience” is the teacher, and the “effect” is a grade. Student writing does not have an opportunity to have consequences, that is, to be seen by real life readers. These types of sheltered writing assignments can create the most deflated writing products and unenthusiastic writers. To improve such a crippled situation, Wiggins reminds us persuasive and specific writing for real life audiences are common in the real world and that teachers should strive to create real-world writing tasks, or at least replicas that show students that their writing can have consequences (31). This writing assignment for *Letters to Montgomery Clift* will have consequences that are both authentic and meaningful. Students will be using their life stories as evidence and though this letter will never be read by Bong Bong, they may use it for themselves or a friend going through troubled times. An advice letter will always be a writing project that carries a true purpose, audience, and effect, whether inspired by a fictional character or not. Wiggins explains that writing cannot be effective if there is no empathy, which is central to this writing assignment. Real world writing can be intimidating because students are writing to people who do not know them or what they know, and as a result, they must write empathetically, concisely, and clearly, otherwise there will be no effect (32). This advice letter provides an opportunity for students to make a difference in another’s life and it gives them a way to make their writing relevant, also known as a writer’s motivation in a real rhetorical situation.

Writing to Bridge Connections

Bong Bong’s ability to remember the entire story, and then remember what he remembered in those moments, shows how powerful memory can be in troubled times. Memory can be used to bring hope by recalling specific moments, like the certain way Bong Bong’s

mother brushed his hair out of his face the last time they saw each other, or it can be used to make matters worse, like Bong Bong recalling the torture of his parents in prison. By asking students to employ their memories, they will be thinking critically about their individualities and the moments or people that make them feel good or equally bad. They will be recalling powerful episodes of their lives and analyzing those moments to educate themselves about what they learned about their past behaviors. In a sense, they will be teaching themselves their own lessons. This letter asks that students contribute some of a personal narrative and personal narratives, which George Hillocks argues are important because they give students the opportunity to engage and sharpen their writing skills and also an educational opportunity to tell stories that reflect on their life experiences (Ressler and Chase 20). This assignment will be assessed based on the questions asked on the assignment prompt, their peer-review sessions, and the quality of their draft changes in addition to the ReadWriteThink Persuasive Letter Rubric, which I adapted for this assignment. Peer-review is a key part of this assignment because it will provide the opportunity for students to practice writing processes, eventually creating a substantial piece of writing of which they are proud.



A Helping Hand



Bong Bong must endure a series of hardships starting with being uprooted from his childhood home and family and continuing through a series of dysfunctional family adoptions, betrayal, self-violence, and alcoholism. For this assignment, you will be composing a letter of advice to Bong Bong as if you would to a friend or family member. Consider the following questions:

- ❁ Why can Bong Bong trust you?
- ❁ What can you share about your life to show him you understand his?
- ❁ Have you faced any obstacles or felt like you needed a helping hand?
- ❁ What do you do to make yourself feel better when you are upset?
- ❁ What kinds of advice can you give him?
- ❁ Why should he take your advice?
- ❁ Are there certain parts of his life that you feel pose a greater concern than others? If so, tell him.
- ❁ What can you tell him to give him hope?
- ❁ In particular, what can you say about his relationship with Montgomery Clift? Is this relationship healthy and beneficial or damaging and misleading?

We will begin drafting these letters in class and you will have class time to continue working on them, but you are encouraged to work on these at home as well. The drafts will be shared with your peers in a peer response workshop. Names will be removed from these drafts so the information you share will be anonymous.

Persuasive Letter Rubric

Name: _____

Date: _____

Category	10	7	5	2
<i>Goal</i>	Strongly and clearly states a personal opinion and clearly identifies Bong Bong's problems and feelings. Explains personal life experiences that fully convince reader to trust writer and advice supplied.	Clearly states a personal opinion and somewhat identifies some of Bong Bong's problems and feelings. Has some personal experience but does not fully persuade the reader with advice.	Personal opinion is not clearly stated. Little or no reference to Bong Bong's life or feelings and personal experience is not connected clearly. Advice is brief and weak.	Personal opinion is not easily understood. Has no reference to the issue and lacks advice altogether.
<i>Reasons and Support</i>	Three or more excellent points are made with good support. It is evident the writer put much thought and personal life research into this assignment. Multiple textual references.	Three or more points are made with support, but the arguments are somewhat weak in places. The writer doesn't show a great deal of textual references.	Two points made; shows some preparation, but weak arguments and little textual reference.	Preparation is weak; arguments are weak or missing; and less than three points are made with no textual reference.
<i>Conclusion</i>	Summarizes personal opinion in strong concluding statements that will make Bong Bong see his life in a new perspective.	Summarizes opinion in a concluding statement that tell Bong Bong what he should do to change his destructive ways.	Concluding statement is a weak summary of personal opinion and leaves out any advice to Bong Bong.	Concluding statement makes no reference to personal opinion or suggestions for advice.
<i>Organization</i>	Sentences and paragraphs are complete, well written, and varied.	Sentence and paragraph structure is generally correct.	Sentence and paragraph structure is inconsistent.	Little or no evidence of sentence or paragraph structure.
<i>Word Choice/Tone</i>	Choice of words that are clear, descriptive, and accurate. Maintains consistent persuasive tone throughout letter.	Adequate choice of words that is clear and descriptive. Demonstrates a persuasive tone in parts of the letter.	Choice of some words that are clear and descriptive. Lacks consistent persuasive tone.	Language and tone of letter are unclear and lacks description.
<i>Peer Response</i>	Peer response sheet is attached to partner's work with thorough explanations and observations about partner's writing. Close reading and help efforts are obvious.	Peer response sheet is attached to partner's work with brief explanations. Close reading and suggestions are less obvious.	Peer response sheet is attached to partner's work with short answers of little effort and help.	Peer response is not attached or attached but incomplete.

Total Points: _____ / 50

Persuasive Letter Rubric is adapted from:

B. ii. Peer Response Workshop

Peer Response Origins

Peer-response is a collaborative writing exercise in which writers share drafts of their papers with classmates and create dialogue about the draft, the writer's ideas, and ways to develop the writing. Peer response has its genesis in the 1980s and has shaped its modern practices from process theories and collaborative learning, according to Kory Lawson Ching in "Peer Response in the Composition Classroom" (303). Ching states that peer response has two origins, one inside the academy in the form of literary societies and writers' clubs, and the other outside the academy in the form of self-improvement groups (304).

This dual origin is an interesting way to consider modern peer response groups; workshops are centered on a tangible text while dialogue transcends the text to improve the writer and his/her ideas. In this model, authority is distributed among peers. Gere suggests that peer response entered the classroom through a "progression from literary society to writers' club to classroom workshop" (305). There is no teacher-centered approach to peer response in this model because there is no teacher technique. Instead, peer response groups were collaborative workshops starting organically among writers themselves. Writing is highly contextual as are writing processes so it makes sense that a writing workshop would be situated as well. Teachers should not be nonparticipants but might serve better in a writing workshop as coaches rather than dictators especially since collaboration between a less experienced and more experienced writer will help a less experienced writer improve. According to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, the difference between what a learner can do with help is as significant as what a learner can do without help. Dialogic exchange in a "constructive, friendly, and respectful atmosphere" creates student "autonomy" and a successful peer response group (306, 314). If the

workshop is guided by the teacher, not only is the session inorganic but students will not be able to reach the level of autonomy in groups convened by peers. In modern practice, peer response groups are successfully arranged at all levels of a writing process and peer response groups can be used multiple times during one project (316). The main difference, though, between past and present peer response groups are that contemporary students are inexperienced with peer response and often need teacher guidance to make drafting effective.

Why Peer Response Needs to be Modeled

In Robert Barron's "What I Wish I Had Known about Peer-Response Groups but Didn't," he expresses his initial stress with peer response workshops because he expected students to already know what to do (24). This is where inorganic groups become troublesome compared to what were once self-motivated, self-guided literary circles that Ching mentions. Students who are unfamiliar with peer response groups will need guidance and coaching to make the sessions productive. At this crossroad, a teacher has the ability to make or break the student as a writer and a peer responder. According to Barron, the most important aspect of peer response "training" is to make sure students understand the purpose of what they will be doing (24). Peer responders are not on a scavenger hunt for grammar errors but are acting as sympathetic readers who should understand that the work they are reading is a work in progress. Nancy Somers and Donald McQuade suggest that students make observations, evaluations, and end comments as a way of providing the writer with guidance to prepare for the next draft (25). Teachers could also employ staged peer response conferences to model the process followed by students responding to early drafts of their own writing (26). While the workshop should be student managed, teacher monitoring is important to keep students on task and provide support. Barron provides another

useful tip at the end of his article, stating that “experience and modification of the [practice] to fit the individual personalities of teacher and student are necessary for success” (34). One model of peer response cannot work for each class as the student dynamic changes every year. For this project, students could be asked to reflect on their past experiences with peer response groups, if they have any. While responses are being shared, a checklist of productive group traits as well as types of helpful criticism can be made to keep students on task. Next, the class could practice responding as a class to certain drafts to practice listening for constructive dialogue, and then individual groups might be formed. In “The Politics of Peer Review,” Mark Hall promotes this type of class response because it shows students that the exercise is worth taking up class time to practice responding constructively and specifically.

When working with each other, students should engage in a two way conversation about global issues at first as most drafts in their initial stage will be revised. Peer review is a time to help each other clarify assignments, brainstorm, develop ideas, organize, and most importantly reflect. Students should reflect on the process of peer review by mapping where they foresee their draft going. Hall argues that the activity of peer review should be used as a “tool” instead of an activity because a tool has the ability to be constructive and can be used for multiple activities.

Peer Response Enhances Classroom Atmosphere

Peer response is an effective exercise for the *Letters to Montgomery Clift* letters because as they write them, students will be learning more about the lives of their peers and this will increase mutual understanding. Peer response groups also make students better readers, writers, and critical thinkers. They will learn ways to give constructive criticism and how to become

skilled close readers. When they work with their peers, students will be looking, at first, for a general sense of an essay and then for specific rhetorical strategies as they complete the “Peer Response Guidelines for Persuasive Letters” worksheet, which is adapted from ReadWriteThink. Students’ reading has a clear purpose and they are aware of it. Students will be better writers because the close reading they practice with their peers’ papers can be applied to their own revision processes. Becoming more comfortable and skilled at close reading can help with understanding and evaluating new texts as well. Students have to be specific in their peer responses and when they recognize the advantages of detailed, constructive criticism, they will be better prepared to continue using details in their writing. Critical reflection, which may be the most key component to peer response because it enables one to analyze, evaluate and restructure their thinking, is a portable skill that can be applied to other subjects besides English Language Arts and situations beyond the classroom.

Peer Response Guidelines for Persuasive Letters

Author: _____

Reviewer: _____

Directions: Read your letter aloud while reviewers listen carefully. When you finish reading, ask reviewers to write any questions or comments below.

Reviewer's Questions/Comments after Listening:

After all group members have read their drafts aloud, the group will read each draft silently and answer the following questions.

1. Identify the intended audience for the letter. How does the writer address the needs and interests of that particular audience?
2. What does the author want the Bong Bong to do? (This should be the writer's goal or thesis statement.) How does the writer convey this to him? What reasons does the writer use to persuade him?
3. How does the writer organize the content of the letter? Do reasons and examples seem to be sequenced in a logical order?
4. Identify something the writer does particularly well.
5. Identify something the writer can do to improve the letter.

Peer Response Guidelines adapted from:



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C. Collage

The Collage: A Powerful Multimodal Exercise

A collage is a combination of many smaller images, words, or collected items put together to create a new image. The individual items do not have to be connected but the final image should show relationships and interconnectedness. The finished product can be scaled anywhere from the size of an index card to a large poster board, and it does not necessarily need to be in the shape of a square. A collage is a creative way to differentiate instruction in that no two collages will be the same because they are dependent on the individual choices made by students. They choose what they want to include or exclude on the collage and since they will be doing a character collage, they will have to consult the text to get the content. Peggy Albers and Jerome C. Harste, in their article “The Arts, New Literacies, and Multimodality,” say that Maxine Greene claims that including arts as part of education can help learners find a “sense of self” as a way of breaking through monotonous, everyday passivity and boredom to a world of color and multiple dimensions (9). It is up to the students to reproduce the content in the way they understand best and in a way that represents their interpretations and individualities.

A collage is an alternative multimodal exercise that strengthens students’ critical thinking skills. It involves using spatial skills to produce a very organized cluster of ideas. The idea behind the collage is that there is one large, over-arching concept that guides the general construction. In a way, a collage is similar to an essay in that both are guided by a thesis idea, except the essay can be linearly created while the collage is more flexible. In both genres, students accumulate information and reproduce the knowledge in a new way. According to Robyn Seglem and Shelbie Witte in “You Gotta See It to Believe It: Teaching Visual Literacy in the English Classroom,” when students break the linear path of collecting research for a standard

essay and have to search for separate images for a collage, they are forced to apply background knowledge to make appropriate connections between the images and the message they hope to convey (220). Similar to an essay, a collage can also improve students' abilities to read and write because students are thinking critically. They have to ask themselves "Ok, what am I missing? What do I still need? How can I show this idea?" Like the storyboard, the collage is an appealing gateway for those students who have special difficulty with print.

Textual Transference

Moving from print text to visual text is not always easy and this activity comes after the storyboard activity for a reason. The storyboard allows the use of text to label or briefly describe the image while a collage is a more challenging concept. Few words belong on a collage and without concrete text, students' ways of communication are forced to go beyond language. Visual learning encourages students and teachers alike to rethink the notion of literacy. Albers and Harste argue that teachers need to find a way to build on the literacies that today's students bring into the classroom. Like the peer response groups, the storyboard and the collage encourage students to be "agents of texts" rather than "victims of text" (7). By incorporating what students know outside of the classroom into these activities, they will have the opportunity to broadcast their expertise. The increase of visual symbols in today's world requires more complex thinking skills than traditional literacy requires and "incorporating visual literacy into the curriculum is vital for student success" (Seglem 217). Visual learning strategies can be practiced by students at all age groups and at all learning levels, so this activity could be adaptable to all grade levels. Collages help empower students to make learning effective and O'Bannon, Puckett, and Rakes further expand this idea to argue that visual learning can make

information more transferable to students. They describe visual learning as a recommended method for “organizing content information, illustrating relationships between complex concepts, and developing higher order thinking abilities” involving illustrations, photographs and other visual modes that make sense of complex information (126). As students create the collage, they will be building on past knowledge to make new connections for new knowledge. The physical act of arranging a collage is representative of a student arranging the structures of their knowledge webs.

Helping Students Think Creatively and Abstractly

Collages provide an opportunity for students to think creatively and abstractly. David Ausubel’s research on visual learning notes that the use of visuals facilitates teaches abstract ideas because the act of constructing a visual image directs attention and reinforces concepts (O’Bannon, Puckett, and Rakes 127). Collages are a useful way of incorporating symbols because each item on the collage will inevitably have a larger meaning as well as multiple relationships. Rebecca Gorman and Gloria Schultz Eastman argue in “‘I See What You Mean’: Using Visuals to Teach Metaphoric Thinking in Reading and Writing” that using imagery and visual metaphors combined with literary texts and writing activities has the potential to channel students into the “rich world of symbols and subjective thought.” This visual linking can facilitate the relationship between student and text (92). Using visual images to represent thought allows for a very personalized textual interpretation. Unlike typical, linear essays, students have full artistic freedom over their collage and this agency might be a way for students to apply themselves, their thoughts, and feelings to make textual connections. The creative freedom that comes with collage making will also help students feel ownership of the work they created,

which in turn, can make them feel empowered about their understandings of the text and abilities to make connections to novels in general. Gorman and Eastman explain that a collage will help show students that one single trait of a character does not resemble their identity accurately and cannot express the full capacity of a rounded character (98). The creativity that students must use to assemble the smaller elements is especially meaningful when students are reading or writing about a character that differs from their own demographic (98). This project provides a multitude of different opportunities that channel and motivate students' creativity and in turn, their ability to think abstractly about concrete texts.

The depth at which knowledge is processed is increased when students have to think creatively and spatially. Students are accustomed to receiving information and communicating in a variety of formats, so it only makes sense that literacy has to go beyond traditional reading and writing to include visual and other elements. Images have broader meanings that take the place of the usual print text. Ausubel's research also shows that with the use of visual learning comes the strengthening of memory (O'Bannon, Puckett, and Rakes 128). Visuals help show connections and by making connections, information is contextualized. Like the storyboard, collages help students visualize the text therefore deepening their reading of the novel. Such interpretative learning allows students the "ability to become more engaged in their reading and use their imagination to draw conclusions, create interpretations of the text, and recall details and elements from the text," scaling down Bloom's Taxonomy (Seglem 217). An exciting aspect about collages is that they are not limited to text or pictures, but can be 'unrestrictively' multi-dimensional. One student might use a piece of a film roll to represent Montgomery Clift while another student could copy the military tag on his costume in *From Here to Eternity*. Collages are a way to externally represent the text and practicing this sort of visualization yields a number

of benefits, like bringing attention to detail, building background knowledge, identifying important details to form references, showing patterns across multiple texts, and improving a reader's ability to share what has been learned with others (218).

Visually Webbing *Letters to Montgomery Clift*

Beside the academic rewards, part of the reason why I chose a collage was because I wanted to celebrate Bong Bong's character and recognize his achievements and struggles. William P. Banks claims that there has to be some substance to an LGBTQ text or character besides the fact that he/she may be queer, because if there isn't any other substance, the text might be irrelevant to students and could create a false perception of what it is like to *be* queer (34). Banks also argues that some LGBTQ texts that end negatively only teach sympathy and encourage readers to feel bad for sexual or gender minority characters that exist only as plot devices (35). A collage is a way to show the fulfilling life these characters and people can and do have. *Letters to Montgomery Clift* is a novel about much more than a homosexual adolescent and his purpose goes beyond that of a plot device. Bong Bong is a human being with thoughts, desires, and interests who comes in to contact with other several characters that teach him something new about himself. He develops into a mature young man who is smart, complex, and courageous and these are the traits that will inevitably be celebrated with this project. Banks goes on to say that texts dealing primarily with individuals conflicted with their sexuality are reductive because they suggest the only problems these characters deal with are personal ones (35). Bong Bong, on the other hand, deals with problems beyond the personal level. He must confront problems with his family, friends, his home country and dictatorship, and the media. Ressler and Chase explain that a world of possibilities opens up when this positivity is

emphasized, when sexuality and gender minorities are treated with respect and dignity, and most importantly when teachers provide opportunities for all students to “explore their gender identities through reading, writing, drama, and other creative venues” (21). By making a collage, Bong Bong’s entire life will be emphasized rather than just the parts with which he struggled or succeeded. Every aspect is given equal value and luckily for us, Bong Bong lives happily ever after. All the separate entities competing for his attention will be mapped in a conceptual framework that shows students’ connections between the elements which, in turn, will deepen their understanding of the text and its multiple lessons. Acutely processed information, as proven by research, will also strengthen students’ memories of the novel and who they were at the time they read the book ((O’Bannon, Puckett, and Rakes 132).



Celebration Collage

A collage is a work of art composed of several smaller elements creating a new, larger image. It can include newspaper clippings, found items, photographs, pieces of arts and crafts, words, drawings, and pretty much anything that can be glued to a poster board. For this project, you will create a collage of Bong Bong's identity. Throughout the novel we get informed about people, places, books, food, events, and names that are meaningful to the protagonist. We also learn what gives him hope and provides him with happiness and optimism. Think about involving these concepts on the collage and consider including some or all of the pictures you included in the storyboard and your letter of advice. You may also consider integrating your own opinions about Bong Bong in the shape of words or pictures. Be creative and most importantly, have fun with this project!!

Consider the following:

- 1) Create a poster board size project that brings together all of Bong Bong's stories and characteristics
- 2) Ask yourself: What makes Bong Bong who he is?
- 3) If Bong Bong were feeling lost, he should be able to look at your collage and be reminded of the movies, people, food, places, books, hobbies he enjoys
- 4) What would make him feel better about himself if he were feeling down? Don't be afraid to share a sense of humor
- 5) There should be at least 20 separate images and/or words
- 6) On a separate piece of paper, construct a list of 5 pictures or words you would include if you were to create a collage for yourself

You will be sharing your collages with the class on the day they are due. For the sake of time, pick 3 or 4 images or words you included and explain why you think they are the most important or the most relevant. You may share the list of items you would include in your collage, though you are not obligated.

IDENTITY COLLAGE RUBRIC

Name: _____

Date: _____

CATEGORY	10	7	5	2
<i>Overall Impression</i>	The collage fully communicates the author's understanding of Bong Bong's growing identity and how it has been changed by specific life obstacles	The collage communicates some aspects of the author's understanding of Bong Bong's growing identity and obstacles.	The collage presents words and images that relate to people, places, or things encountered by Bong Bong from his early childhood to his full maturation.	The collage does not adequately communicate the author's understanding of Bong Bong's identity or character traits.
<i>Specific Words and Images</i>	All words and images are related to the topic and make it easier to understand the author's perspective. All borrowed graphics have a source citation.	All words and images are related to the topic and most make it easier to understand the author's perspective. All borrowed graphics have a source citation.	All words and images relate to the topic. Most borrowed graphics have a source citation.	Words and images do not relate to the topic OR several borrowed graphics do not have a source citation.
<i>Design and Creativity</i>	There are a variety of elements that are trimmed or cropped to an appropriate size with interesting shapes and are arranged coherently with explanation. Care has been taken to balance the pictures across the collage.	Elements are cropped to an appropriate size and interesting shape and are arranged with some explanation. The collage however does not appear as balanced as possible.	Elements have been trimmed or cropped to an appropriate size and shape, but the arrangement of items is not very attractive. It appears there was not a lot of planning of the item placement.	Elements are untrimmed or not cropped OR of inappropriate size and/or shape. It appears little attention was given to designing the collage.
<i>Technical Construction</i>	The collage shows considerable attention to construction. The collage is exceptionally attractive in terms of design, layout, and neatness.	The collage shows attention to construction. The collage is attractive in terms of design, layout and neatness.	The collage shows some attention to construction. The collage is acceptably attractive though it may be a bit messy.	The collage was put together sloppily. The collage is distractingly messy or very poorly designed. It is not attractive.
<i>Nitty Gritty</i>	More than 20 images that resemble part of Bong Bong's story. Student has provided a list of 5 or more ideas for personal collage. Work is punctual.	20 images are used to resemble some of Bong Bong's story. Student has a list of 3- 4 ideas for a personal collage. Work is punctual	15-19 images are used in Bong Bong's identity collage. Student has less than 3 ideas for personal collage. Work is late.	Significant lack of work and effort. Collage does not have an appropriate number of images and student does not have a list attached for personal collage ideas. Work is late.

Total Points: _____ / 50

Collage rubric is adapted from:

IV. Conclusion

Translating Theory to Practice

With this project, I felt it was important to lead off with a discussion so I could better understand the text at hand and create a synchronized final product, even though it is built on several smaller pieces. As with any piece of literature, starting with a discussion and reaction to the text helps readers understand, assess, and make connection to the text. Conversing with peers can put people, places, or themes in perspective to create concrete interpretations with the potential for these interpretations to become meaningful and abstract.

Using Analysis as a Foundation for Meaning

The literary analysis of *Letters to Montgomery Clift* discusses the themes of isolation, abandonment, and the search for a place one can call home as well as feel at home. This landscaping was crucial to the construction of the rest of the project because I needed a narrow focus, not a limitless field, with which to approach the pedagogy activities. Each activity correlates to a certain point in Bong Bong's coming of age story and the final activity celebrates his long struggle and ultimate success and happiness. His self-satisfaction and gratification does not come easily and students will be involved with him on this quest, touching base during at least three different points in their reading.

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