



Minding the Pedagogical Gap: Creative Writing Studies, Common Core Standards, and the Secondary Creative Writing Moment

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I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, pedagogues have asked a variety of important questions regarding how creative writing should be taught, and though such questions can rarely be answered conclusively, the ensuing conversations have furthered our discipline by complicating and improving approaches to instruction, scholarship, and professional discourse in ways similar to those enacted by composition theorists during the 1970s and '80s. Today, interested parties can find books and articles addressing underexplored intersections between creative writing, composition, and literature, arguing against the primacy of the creative writing workshop, championing creative writing as a tool to engage marginalized populations and voices, using technology to broaden the definitions of “text” and “audience,” and considering the benefits across curricula of focusing on process rather than finished creative texts. Overall, creative writing studies are enjoying a renaissance of sorts, if not an overdue, proper introduction to the larger academy. Despite this impressive work, however, one area of pedagogical importance has been largely overlooked: secondary English/Language Arts (ELA) instruction.

Tim Mayers writes that “many who teach creative writing are unaware of the emergence of new scholarship in the field” (42), and while this is often true for college instructors, it is even more accurate for secondary English teachers, who not only have little access to ongoing conversations in creative writing pedagogy, but also face workdays repeatedly packed with disciplinary matters, parent emails, and extracurricular commitments. Certainly, during my time as a secondary English teacher, it was rare to find time to peruse professional journals, let alone begin a systematic consideration of a pedagogical field.

As is often the case in secondary education, this concern is exacerbated by others, and none more forcibly in the current educational climate than academic standards. Recent political and educational

developments have set the Common Core standards as the benchmark in thirty-eight states, with several other states' independent standards mirroring their language. Because Common Core is viewed as STEM-centric and college/career prep-focused, there are concerns that creative writing has been devalued in the ELA standards, or even become unsuitable for current English education frameworks that favor exposition and argument over creativity. As Common Core rose to educational prominence, James Arnold, a Georgia public school superintendent, voiced his opposition, arguing that "Standards, by their very nature, insist that if anything at all must be excluded because of the constraints of time in class...it must not, at any cost, be the standards themselves. Creativity will no doubt be the first casualty." While the scope of his concern included all primary and secondary instruction, it was more specifically focused on ELA in a 2014 issue of *English Journal* dealing with "The Standards Movement." In it, active secondary ELA teachers described the effect of Common Core on their classrooms, arguing that "the practice of common formative assessments has the potential to limit how freely we think, how creatively we operate" (Heller 24), and labeling the standards as "omnipresent and restrictive" (Gilbert 27). Many teachers noted Common Core's required shift from students reading (and by extension, writing) fiction and poetry to the careful study of "informational texts" (Glaus 49) that emphasize process and argument over aesthetic concerns. As Robert J. Sternberg writes, "very few implementers of the Common Core...will teach the Common Core in a way that promotes creativity" because "very few standardized tests make any provision for, or even encourage in the slightest way, creative thinking" (xi). An evaluation of "curriculum maps" based on the Common Core standards supports these concerns. *Common Core Curriculum Maps in English Language Arts, Grades 9–12*, one of many curricular tools available to educators nationwide, includes a Grade 9 map focusing on literary forms including the short story, poetry, and drama. The "sample activities" offered for the short story unit include the following: informative/explanatory writing (4 discrete activities), class discussion, speech, seminar question and writing, research, grammar and usage, and mechanics (5–7). In all, nine activities are provided, none of which include creative writing of any kind. In the yearlong map for studying genres of creative writing in the ninth grade, only four of seventy activities include a creative component. In the Grade 10 map, two "narrative" (the preferred Common Core term for creative writing) assignments are provided for the full year, while in the Grade 11 map, only one is provided. None are included in the Grade 12 map, which is focused almost entirely on informational and argumentative writing. In the age of Common Core, scholarship and curricular material both suggest that, as Maria Shreve writes, "narrative has become a four-letter word" (19).

However, in my current work training future secondary English teachers, teaching creative writing, and supervising Indiana State University's dual-credit English program, I have seen that when teachers encounter sound creative writing pedagogy, they are excited to introduce it into their classrooms, regardless of perceived curricular limitations. For instance, a veteran English teacher from a nearby high school recently enrolled in my graduate fiction workshop. At our first individual conference, I asked how her classroom teaching was going. Good, she said, but she wished the high school curriculum made more room for the kinds activities she experienced in our workshop. When I suggested

there might be more room than it appeared, she grinned and admitted she'd already begun planning ways to import some of our workshop practices, such as the workshop letter and the opening round of positive commentary. Likewise, when I discuss best practices for teaching literature with my English Teaching undergraduates, I start by asking how it was taught to them, and I'm often surprised by their answers. To repurpose a phrase from data-storage jargon, literature was approached as "read-only," and my students are often exhilarated to learn that writing in these genres can be an integral approach to studying them. Both situations suggest that a central barrier to effective secondary creative writing instruction isn't lack of interest, or even the Common Core, but a lack of sound, innovative pedagogical training.

This article will argue that creative writing's apparent decline in the secondary ELA Common Core classroom has been greatly exaggerated and is based on this lack of training and shortsighted readings of the standards themselves. I will instead demonstrate, through an examination of thematic groupings, that teaching creative writing can satisfy a majority of the current secondary ELA Common Core standards, either independently or in collaboration with other English disciplines. I will also illustrate the urgency for creative writing scholars and their pedagogies¹ to become more influential within secondary teacher training programs. Treatment of these considerations here will be necessarily brief, given the high number of relevant standards. Articles and books can (and hopefully will) be written on any of the following sections. My purpose is to demonstrate creative writing's applicability in, and the necessity of its export to, the secondary English classroom.

II. THE SECONDARY CREATIVE WRITING MOMENT

The current devaluation of secondary creative writing instruction overlooks the fact that it was once considered an integral part of learning how to read and write at the secondary level. The first courses labeled "Creative Writing" originated in American high schools, growing out of the teaching of William Hughes Mearns, a professor at the Philadelphia School of Pedagogy in the early twentieth century. As D.G. Myers explains in *The Elephants Teach*, "Schoolchildren everywhere were invited to try their hands at poetry, but the business of making professional poets—something with which Hughes Mearns had never the least interest—was left to take care of itself" (121). It's important to note that he was not

¹As creative writing pedagogues, we constantly stand on the shoulders not only of those who came before us, but often those who currently stand with us. For this article, I've drawn a good deal of material from three recent anthologies that are particularly valuable to current creative writing pedagogy: *Creative Writing Pedagogies for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Alexandria Peary and Tom C. Hunley; *Creative Writing in the Digital Age: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy*, edited by Michael Dean Clark, Trent Hergenrader, and Joseph Rein; and *Dispatches from the Classroom: Graduate Students on Creative Writing Pedagogy*, edited by Chris Drew, Joseph Rein, and David Yost. These texts contain authoritative voices in current creative writing pedagogy, as well as the perspectives of many thoughtful emerging scholars. These writers and their works can serve as pedagogical primers for secondary teachers and as valuable tool kits for their practical classroom activities.

interested in creating poets at the secondary level, but rather exposing students to creative writing as a learning tool with a variety of applications. In other words, creative writing, alongside composition and literature, was considered central to secondary English teaching. Together, they offered students what none could by itself—a holistic approach to understanding and creating written texts.

As the influence of Hughes Mearns and reformers such as Thomas Dewey waned, it was replaced in the 1950s by a new emphasis on science and technology brought on by the political realities of the Cold War and the space race. Educators pushed American students to prepare for productivity in a changing economy, and within the field of secondary English this meant a renewed emphasis on expository writing and reading comprehension. This shift toward practical workforce preparation caused secondary English teachers, as well as those training them, to lose sight of the pedagogical value of creative writing. It eventually came to be viewed as a less rigorous discipline, either tacked onto a larger unit or treated as an educational palate-cleanser. Generally, this de-emphasis has not been the fault of teachers, who continue to approach their classroom activities as advised by their training programs. Unfortunately, teacher training curricula for the last fifty years have tilted strongly toward literature and composition, not only because of this mid-century shift and the secondary education standards it eventually produced, but because those in college-level creative writing programs have not been as interested as they should be in demanding a seat at the curricular table. Without such representation, creative writing has been estranged at the secondary level from the pedagogical values it once championed.

New developments in creative writing pedagogy challenge this schism, working to treat the writing of poems, stories, and creative essays not as an activity with an end-goal of professional, publishable work, but as tools to explore the nuances of writing and better understand the variety of texts students will encounter moving forward. Alexandria Peary and Tom C. Hunley suggest it is “good for individual teachers, good for the profession, and above all good for students to have creative writing instructors reflecting upon and refining their practices” (5), and this reflective approach has “caught on” at the college level. However, because most secondary English teachers came to their positions through traditional teacher education programs valuing literature and expository writing, they can’t reflect on what they weren’t taught. Some English Teaching majors make room in their dwindling elective allotment for a workshop or two, but that creates its own problems. As Anna Leahy writes, “With few exceptions, creative writers have not studied, documented, and analyzed their teaching. The danger for the larger field, then, is the presumption that writers can learn to be good teachers merely through their participation in workshops as students” (xi). My graduate student mentioned earlier will no doubt take her workshop experience back to her classroom, but that is only the first step of a weightier expedition. We can’t expect future secondary teachers fortunate enough to sit in a workshop to have learned everything necessary to teach creative writing. They need to understand not only why it’s taught that way, but also how it can be taught in a variety of other ways.

Similarly, the most common approach to creative writing in secondary classrooms—an occasional

story or poem assignment for a change of pace, with scant pedagogical grounding—has little use in today’s standards-based classroom. If that’s the only way creative writing is implemented by secondary teachers, then its removal from the curriculum will be no great loss. However, if it is instead approached through the lens of current pedagogy, it will meet, and likely exceed, the expectations established by Hughes Mearns and others. One reason creative writing is special in the classroom is because it interrelates with, and broadens understandings of, its sibling disciplines of literature and composition. Mayers writes that creative writing “offers ways of knowing and ways of being that are active, dynamic, and participatory” (48), and turning it toward Common Core will enrich secondary curricula, adding a much-needed tool to teachers’ toolboxes. If creative writing pedagogues can capitalize on this current moment of overlap between their interests and the needs of secondary curricula, they can broaden the scope of their field through collaboration with secondary teachers, and in the process, extend their work to address a majority of Common Core ELA standards.

III. COMMON CORE, CREATIVE WRITING, AND RECIPROCITY

Before examining individual Common Core standards, it is important to understand them more generally. Common Core itself proclaims that the purpose of the ELA standards is to “help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school” (National Governors Association 3). The sorts of literacy the goals target, however, are a product of their origins. Common Core grew out of the National Governor’s Association in the 1990s, as increased citizen mobility and federal testing standards convinced state governors and other officials that a shared set of education standards would help ensure quality education throughout the United States. The governors were particularly interested in shoring up American secondary education in science and math to help produce a more highly trained workforce that could keep pace with growing international competition. Springing from the Cold War curricula preceding it, Common Core’s primary ELA focus is the informational and expository literacy of STEM, college preparation, and job readiness.

Common Core also resulted from passage of the No Child Left Behind law in 2001, which mandated a rigorous schedule of standardized testing in targeted grade levels. Because a shared set of standards would ensure these tests’ uniformity across the country, a renewed push for Common Core resulted in the completion of standards in English Language Arts in 2010. Current ELA standards are divided into categories that include reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language, and as the Common Core document states, “students who meet the Standards develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression of language” (3). It is worth noting that, despite the perception that creative writing has been deemphasized in the ELA standards, the language used here values creativity enough to include it in the standards’ statement of purpose. Still, due to the initial impetus of STEM and workforce preparation, as well as the difficulty of translating creative activity into standardized scores, creative writing in

Common Core ELA standards remains largely excluded in favor of literature, expository writing, and informational analysis. However, Graeme Harper writes that “creativity and critical thought are reciprocally connected, more like each other than they are separate from each other” (10), and if inroads are to be made by creative writing in the secondary classroom, this link will be at the heart of it. What follows is an attempt to map the Common Core standards to current practices in creative writing pedagogy using Harper’s reciprocity, and to demonstrate some of the myriad approaches that grow out of it.

IV. THE EXPLICIT CREATIVE WRITING STANDARDS

Despite the general belief that creative writing has little currency in the Common Core standards, there are two standards within the larger body of forty-two that explicitly address creative writing concerns and value their presence in the classroom above other disciplines. The first is a catch-all that is applicable to any genre of creative writing, though, probably most directly for secondary teachers, fiction and creative nonfiction:

- *Writing Standard 3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. (41)*

For teachers who like to assign “story writing,” this is their justification, but a thoughtful teacher will see the value of specific craft lessons. In fact, the second half of this standard opens the door to the craft criteria I use in my own workshop: point of view, detail, setting, stakes, voice, dialogue, and structure, among others. Secondary teachers with even a bit of creative writing experience will see this standard as an opportunity to teach these components through creative exercises and assignments.

It is notable that, as with many Common Core ELA standards, more specifics are provided for this standard within specific grade divisions (grades 6, 7, 8, 9–10, and 11–12). In this case, the subpoints for the general standard at the middle school level include attention to dialogue, pacing, description, and narrator (43), while the high school subpoints include stakes (though not identified by that name), tone, and suspense (46). In order to maximize the value of creative writing in the classroom, teachers at these grade levels might consider moving past the “write a story” assignment and instead create targeted, formative lessons focused on these craft elements, how to create them, and what purposes they can serve in narrative writing. Such lessons, if carefully constructed, will also be applicable beyond the writing standard above. Steve Healey, for example, discusses his approach to teaching repetition in poetry, in which he not only discusses the technique’s value in the work his students write but also asks what value it may have in “other forms of communication that use repetition, such as songs, prayers, sermons, speeches, and lists” (171). This leads to a discussion of the effects of such repetition in these genres, but the broader lesson is rooted in the observable craft of creative writing.

The second standard directly related to creative writing is found in the language section of the standards:

- *Language Standard 5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. (51)*

If the previous standard is an explicit narrative standard, then this could be viewed as the corresponding poetry standard, though such a binary is dismissive of the value of such language considerations across the creative spectrum. Teachers can design a variety of activities that prompt students to create examples of the components mentioned in the standards, and once again, the subpoints in the grade-specific standards provide further guidance, focusing on personification, connotation, allusion, irony, euphemisms, and hyperbole, among many others (53, 55). David Yost and I have previously written about a type of Mad Lib activity using Wilfred Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum Est,” in which specific words have been removed and replaced by fill-in-the-blanks, which are then completed by the students (204–205). Originally an exercise used to explore concepts of authority in creative writing, it can also serve as a useful tool for engaging students in the nuance of specific and creative word choice. Because students first choose their own words, they usually compare them to Owen’s after his are revealed, which leads to useful comparisons between their meanings and effects on the page. While this standard can also be addressed through the study of literature alone, the inventive nature of creative writing in activities such as this helps foster a more holistic understanding of figurative language and other less quantifiable aspects of English.

V. ADDITIONAL STANDARDS ADDRESSED BY CREATIVE WRITING

While the previous section’s standards are most clearly related to creative writing, three more can also be addressed through a wide variety of creative assignments and activities, though these standards should not be viewed as exclusively creative writing-based. Connecting these standards to creative work, however, becomes particularly useful for teachers struggling to cover all of the standards in a meaningful way over the course of a school year. If teachers have already successfully built creative work into their curriculum, then the methods available for meeting these three goals have widened, removing limitations on where and when they can be met. Additionally, the inclusion of creative writing broadens students’ understanding of how these targeted practices can be implemented.

The first standard is writing-based:

- *Writing Standard 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (43)*

This standard is applicable to all types of writing, but its language evokes the sort of process-based writing long championed in composition. However, a good deal of work has been done in recent creative writing pedagogy to value process-based writing over the finished products traditionally expected. A later section of this article will deal with a number of more specifically process-based standards, but it's generally important to note that creative writing-oriented applications of Writing Standard 4 should not be overlooked in favor of exclusively expository assignments. A closer analysis of the standards themselves supports this reading. While the generic standard reads exactly as cited above, in each grade-specific standard, the language is followed by a parenthetical: "Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above" (43, 46). Writing Standards 1–3 focus on three types of writing: argumentative, informative/explanatory, and narrative (41). So, not only is creative writing a viable avenue for meeting this standard, but according to the standards themselves, it's a necessary requirement for doing so. What's more, it broadens students' understanding of the writing process. The specifics of the standard bear this out: appropriateness of style is a universal concern—one that is not adequately addressed by only developing the "academic" voice of typical secondary expository writing—and audience is an equal consideration between creative writing and other types of writing. In fact, such consideration is often more nuanced in creative writing, given its common lack of an explicit thesis.

The remaining two standards in this section are included in the language category:

- *Language Standard 1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.*
- *Language Standard 2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. (51)*

Many teachers address these standards as part of expository writing assignments, in-class writing, and worksheets. Realistically, though, any time students write, these language standards can be taught and assessed, as long as it's made clear to students that it is occurring. It is less common for secondary teachers to attach these standards to creative work, not only because they are more readily associated with traditional essays, but also because creative work is also often considered to be less stringent about such requirements. However, this is a strength of creative writing in relation to these standards. Not only can teachers require correct use of conventions in a poem or narrative, but they can also create space for intentionally designed alternative conventions—slang in dialogue, for example, or unorthodox poetic punctuation—and such subtlety can broaden students' understanding of such concerns. For example, Liane LeMaster argues for a variety of creative exercises related to language choice. "While our students might not be as fascinated (obsessed?) as I was with linguistic phonology," she writes, "we can help them understand that what someone says is as important as how they say it by placing

dialogue in its rhetorical context, examining the purpose of the conversation as an extension of the development of character and conflict” (140). Consideration of such details adds a dimension to typical lessons on “standard” grammar and vocabulary.

Grafting convention concerns onto creative work can also provide useful context for such lessons. Worksheets are a common teaching tool for meeting language standards, but such isolated treatment of grammar and punctuation is much less successful for transferring such rules and expectations to long-term memory. Students simply complete the worksheets without understanding the situational value of the information. As Hunley and Sandra Giles write, “It would be much more useful to design class activities and discussions around the rhetorical functions of grammatical choices than memorizing and naming the categories. This is applicable, we argue, not just for the creative writing class, but for composition and other writing and communication courses as well” (20–21). David Bartone shares a useful practical example of this by addressing students’ “homophonic sensibilities” (122). In his activity, he asks his students to completely rewrite a line of poetry by replacing each word with another of the same part of speech (124). Because the new line of poetry must make sense and maintain relative metrical integrity, students must not only consider the poetics of the line, but also understand its grammar and syntax. By embracing such activities, the relevant language standards can be met creatively and contextually, rather than through rote memorization, leading to better concept retention.

VI. THE WORKSHOP STANDARDS

The workshop model pioneered by the Iowa Writer’s Workshop and canonized by MFA programs throughout the country has been the primary pedagogical tool of postsecondary creative writing instruction for decades. Recent scholarship, however, suggests that this model is limited in its value and effectiveness. Adam Koehler argues that the traditional transmission-oriented workshop, with its expectation that students will simply learn how to become better writers through being taught by better writers, “turns creative writing students into replicated automatons, all reaching for the same aesthetic goals” (18). This is an important and timely criticism of creative writing departments, where it is past time for an increased variety of pedagogical approaches. However, the workshop model has not generally been implemented in secondary classrooms, where most teachers have neither been taught creative writing pedagogy nor participated in a workshop, since such activities are not usually part of their required training. If we accept that the workshop still has instructional value, it is important to consider its specific benefits in the secondary classroom. After all, even if the modeled information communicated by workshop teachers can be limiting, “reaching for the same aesthetic goals” is still useful to beginning writers. To be clear, there are important discussions continuing to take place among pedagogues on the limitations of the workshop model that can (and should) be disseminated to secondary teachers as they continue. For secondary students who are often put into peer review groups and simply asked to respond to their classmates’ writing in general terms, however, the specific procedures of the

traditional creative writing workshop, even with its problems and limitations, can help them consider others' texts in more useful ways while meeting Common Core standards in the categories of writing, language, and speaking & listening.

The writing standard addressed in this category centers on one of the central workshop artifacts—the workshop letter:

- *Writing Standard 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. (41)*

For beginning writers, the workshop letter is treated primarily as a resource for improving their work. Certainly, when I collected my first batch of letters as an MFA student at Oregon State University, I viewed them more or less as an instruction manual. As the workshop continued, however, I began to find more value for me as a writer in the letters I wrote than the letters I received, because workshop letters are hard to write well. It's easy to fall into the platitudes of "I really liked this" or "I didn't get it," but to offer truly substantive feedback, a student must not only read a story or poem carefully (usually more than once) but also consider it deeply enough to offer substantive criticism. This is a central purpose of Writing Standard 9. It identifies the text under consideration as "literary or informational," which teachers often translate as published stories or essays, but a student-written story or poem is also literary and often more approachable for secondary students than published texts. If students are carefully taught how to write a workshop letter, including its necessary focus on specific textual evidence, it becomes a central tool for meeting this standard. In my Intro to Creative Writing course, I spend considerable time making sure students understand how to respond to their peers in useful, text-oriented ways using detailed illustrations from the writing itself. Additionally, Janelle Adsit suggests that the student authors themselves could be asked to provide a "cover sheet" for their works, giving a reflective sense of their own writing processes and goals for their texts (178). This approach not only complicates the traditional workshop technique of the "silent author," in which the workshopped writer does not speak, but it also adds a level of analysis for this standard, since both the readers and the author engage the text critically.

The next two workshop standards are found in the language category:

- *Language Standard 3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.*

- *Language Standard 6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression. (51)*

Through both written feedback and the accompanying discussion, these goals are met by a well-structured workshop. Students can't talk about the language choices in a given story or poem without understanding them, at least rudimentarily. The additional grade-specific language contained in the standards document affects the sophistication with which students can be expected to articulate such concerns, but even middle school students are capable of discussing the particular connotations of word choices or phrases, especially when a talented teacher actively draws their attention to them. Seeing such criticism modeled by their classmates (another value of the workshop format) will reinforce this skill, and the disagreements that invariably arise regarding such choices will help demonstrate to students the contexts mentioned in the first standard—that each may view the given text through a different contextual lens.

Beyond the fact that creative writing itself is a different context from composition or published literature, the first standard can also be met by considering the different contexts contained within a single story or poem. For example, the way language choices function within dialogue and narration are often different, especially when they portray notably different voices. Similarly, language choices used to render scene are not always approached with the same considerations that affect choices within summarized passages.

Language Standard 6 is also addressed by both written and spoken commentary in the workshop. A classroom committed to considering the craft of creative writing will spur students to conversations about voice, point of view, stakes, dramatic structure, types and stereotypes, setting, metaphor and symbolism, and dozens of other domain-specific terms. Because many of these concepts also have applicability outside of creative writing, preparation for “college and career readiness” is occurring in such discussions. Finally, because of the personal, individualized approach to writing workshop letters, as well as the free-flowing exchange of ideas in discussions, the “independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge” is demonstrable in letter creation.²

The final two workshop standards come from a section of the Common Core not yet considered—the speaking and listening standards. These standards fall generically under the auspices of speech and communication, which, due to testing and budgetary concerns, have often been removed as stand-alone classes in secondary schools. Today, they are more likely to be housed within the broader English curriculum. Because the teaching of such skills is not always explicitly addressed in English Teaching programs, many secondary teachers find themselves underprepared to address them in their own classrooms. Creative writing is

²Of course, such independence is also present in the creative writing process itself, since students are responsible for creating individual textual voices.

uniquely suited to foster speaking and listening skills, not only due to its often-overlooked performative nature, but also the critical role of effective speaking and listening in a successful workshop. Two specific speaking and listening standards are addressed in such an environment:

- *Speaking and Listening Standard 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.*

- *Speaking and Listening Standard 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (48)*

Standard 1's emphasis on "conversations and collaborations" gets to the heart of what occurs in an effective workshop, and the "diverse partners" are not only the variety of students themselves, but also the unique backgrounds and voices those students bring to their writings. The necessity of "building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively" is practically a course objective for a workshop-based class, and certainly would be addressed in a properly implemented secondary workshop environment. It is also worth noting that teachers who embrace the "silent author" aspect of the workshop create an opportunity to engage the "listening" aspect of the speaking and listening standards more thoughtfully and directly than most secondary English activities.

Additionally, by bringing workshops into the English classroom, secondary teachers have an opportunity to reject the idea of creative writing as an isolated activity, which has been largely dismantled at the college level by scholars such as Alex Pheby, who argues that "the writer is not and never has been isolated from other writers" (52). Embracing collaboration and interaction opens creative writing to more possibilities than many secondary teachers have had the training to consider, and also builds exactly the kind of speaking and listening skills that prepare students for collaboration in the workplace and college—still the overarching goal of the Common Core initiative.

A final thought on secondary workshops: if teachers are trained to conduct them correctly, based on sound and current pedagogy, they will also have an opportunity to broaden their teaching repertoire and take a position as a co-reader in the workshop group, especially once expectations have been clearly established. This decentering can engage students in ways a more teacher-centered classroom often can't. In a discussion of collaborative writing, Jen Webb and Andrew Melrose point out that teachers "are usually more accustomed to being in control—to being the single core or center of the group—and to being responsible for students' learning and their experience. It can be a risky, but a salutary, approach to identify ourselves as co-members and co-learners, rather than as directors of a course of study" (109). This central concept also applies to the unique environment of the workshop, itself a form of collaborative writing and reading,

and creates a learning space especially suited to meet these five standards.

VII. LITERATURE-BASED STANDARDS THAT ENGAGE CREATIVE WRITING

Because the creative writing workshop approaches student work as a literary artifact, it must be clear from the outset that the seven standards addressed in this section can all also be nominally met by a successful workshop. However, because these standards are more clearly focused on the traditional act of reading published literature, they warrant a separate consideration. A central goal of creative writing pedagogy in secondary schools should be to break down barriers between literature and creative writing, both of which are focused on understanding constructed texts. Creative writing is an important component of literary study because examples can only teach so much. As the earlier discussion of Hughes Mearns' approach to poetry makes clear, creative writing has long been a central tool for understanding literature. Medical students can only study anatomy for so long before engaging it, and architects can't just pore over blueprints for an entire career. To fully understand an art or science, it must be practiced. In fact, the origins of the Iowa Writer's Workshop, the progenitor of most modern creative writing programs, are tied closely to the study of literature. One of its creators, Norman Foerster, "believed that students studying literature should know something about how literature is made. He thus saw creative writing as an essential counterpart to interpretive criticism, and believed that students should have practice in both" (Mayers 38). Unfortunately, this natural alliance between disciplines has largely been lost, especially at the secondary level. As mentioned earlier, my English Teaching students were generally taught poetry by reading the greats—Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Dickinson, Poe—and even when they were taught meter and rhythm, it was nearly always taught as an observable phenomenon, not as a craft they could practice. On the rare occasion they were taught poetry beyond reading selections, it was usually as a sort of cultural study or appropriation.³ Almost none of them were taught how to write poetry, or any other genre, likely because their teachers either didn't see room for it in their yearly schedules or they weren't comfortable teaching it.

While current creative writing pedagogy is rightly focused on how to teach creative writing, a second consequence is that these advancements have created new opportunities for broader aspects of teaching English. The seven standards below can be applied solely to published texts, but how much more valuable might they become if turned toward students' in-progress work? How might practicing these standards alter student understanding if applied as revision considerations to their own texts rather than simply analytical considerations of canonical writing? The word "author" appears over forty times in 6–12 grade-specific ELA standards. What if students were encouraged to apply this term to themselves and their classmates, as well as Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Dickinson, and Poe?

³I can't believe how many of my students were taught that snapping is the only appropriate reaction to a live poetry reading.

For this section, it seems most useful to consider all seven relevant standards together:

- *Reading Standard 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.*
- *Reading Standard 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.*
- *Reading Standard 3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.*
- *Reading Standard 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.*
- *Reading Standard 5: Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.*
- *Reading Standard 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.*
- *Reading Standard 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take. (35)*

While the nuances of these standards are too numerous to discuss in detail here, a cursory perusal makes clear how closely aligned they are with central components and purposes of creative writing instruction, including close reading, textual evidence and development, theme, interpretation, structure, point of view, and intertextuality. What's more, as students become more adept at identifying the elements discussed in these standards through workshop and revision, a careful teacher can create assignments that ask students to transfer these understandings from their own works to the more complex ones found in published literary texts. It's common knowledge among creative writers that to be a good writer, students must also be good readers, but this bon mot is more circular in practice, since being effective writers also equips students to be better readers. Imagine, for example, these standards being applied to a multidisciplinary unit that considers both published and student texts, allowing lessons learned from each to be applied discursively to the other.

It would be reductive and limiting to attempt to meet these standards exclusively through creative writing. Instead, teachers should recognize that literature is often best taught with a creative component to help students not only appreciate it, but also understand its construction on a craft level. It's no coincidence that most college English departments include literature courses taught by creative writing faculty. These so-called "craft courses" and their faculty should take the lead in helping secondary teachers appreciate the unique tools creative writing offers for studying literature. As Mayers points out, "One of the most important things an undergraduate creative writing course can offer to students as part of a well-rounded literary or liberal arts education is a way of looking at fiction, poetry, and literature that differs from the way such things are often looked at in school settings" (48). This is no less true in secondary schools, but much less utilized as a pedagogical approach.

Hunley and Giles also echo this sentiment, drawing on more venerable practices: "The ancient art of stylistic imitation provides a mechanism for consciously learning aspects of craft from other writers. It makes our reading time more productive, enabling us to read as writers" (18). They follow this statement with a handful of sample activities that effectively blend the study of literature and creative writing, including a writing prompt that can only be completed after reading George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" (25), and another that requires students to first read and consider Molière's *Tartuffe* (26). In my own secondary classrooms, I was often fond of the "bridge chapter" activity, where students wrote a brief passage between two existing chapters of a book separated by time. For instance, what did Scout Finch do during the summer between those chapters in *To Kill A Mockingbird*? Students' consideration and creation of these possibilities not only led to interesting writing, but a deeper understanding of Scout as a character and Maycomb as a setting. Another option involves bringing craft essays written by published authors into the classroom,⁴ preferably in conjunction with their fiction or poetry. If students are reading "A Rose for Emily," for example, bringing in a William Faulkner interview or his Nobel acceptance speech not only helps students understand the creative writing process more deeply but also creates an opportunity for further appreciation of the story itself.

VIII. A STANDARD ADDRESSED BY CREATIVE NONFICTION

The central focus up to this point has been on poetry and fiction for two reasons. First, the obvious creative writing standards in the Common Core relate most clearly to these two genres. Creative nonfictionists might disagree, but that informs the second reason: if few secondary teachers have training in how to teach poetry and fiction, that number decreases dramatically in relation to creative nonfiction. In fact, "creative nonfiction" as a term is not common in secondary textbooks or English Teaching curricula. Of course, similar terms can be found—essay, personal essay, memoir, literary journalism, narrative nonfiction, etc.—but whereas secondary teachers are amply familiar with poetry and fiction, creative nonfiction as a unified genre containing these subgenres keeps its home more fully in college

⁴This approach is particularly useful for meeting Reading Standard 9's emphasis on intertextuality.

English departments. While creative nonfiction's centrality within those departments has long been established, however, the current "boom" in the genre is a more recent development. When I began my MFA studies in 2005, few of the programs I considered had dedicated faculty for creative nonfiction, and when I began editing *cream city review* during my PhD studies at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, the number of submissions for creative nonfiction was typically 5–10% of those for fiction. By the end of my editorial tenure, that number had increased dramatically and has likely continued to climb. As creative nonfiction has become ensconced in college creative writing departments alongside fiction and poetry, an opportunity has largely been missed to export its development to the secondary classroom, where change is even more glacial than at the postsecondary level.

Though the term may be uncommon among secondary teachers, the components of creative nonfiction have been taught in one form or another in secondary classrooms for decades. Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" makes frequent appearances, as do Elie Wiesel's *Night* and Dave Pelzer's *A Child Called "It."* The speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* are included in many secondary curricula. Quality teachers will recognize the opportunity to create engaging writing assignments modeled on such readings, but these often take the form of expository essays. Familiarizing teachers with the craft-based aspects of creative nonfiction will allow for many of the standards-based approaches to creative writing to resonate more usefully in such assignments. Additionally, one Common Core standard is particularly suited to creative nonfiction:

- *Writing Standard 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. (41)*

The obvious approach to meeting this standard is to assign an expository essay, and certainly, that effectively addresses the "informative/explanatory" aspect of the standard. Again, there is no reason to argue that creative writing is exclusively suited to this situation. However, creative nonfictionists should be making the case that there are equally useful options. No one would dispute that Joan Didion's "At the Dam" or John Hersey's *Hiroshima* don't inform or explain, and the creative artistry they maintain is integral to conveying particularly complex ideas—those that go beyond simple research or opinion and reach for something less concrete. Secondary students won't often master such elements, but if they can see the full spectrum of "selection, organization, and analysis" present in these texts, their own writing will benefit from it.

The trick for secondary teachers, much like their college counterparts, is to caution students on navel-gazing. The best creative nonfiction assignments often force students to look outward, but with a clear connection to the self. Teaching King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," for example, with an eye toward creative nonfiction, offers opportunities that augment the necessary analysis of civil rights.

When attention is paid to King's particular lens, it becomes about this man, in this cell, in this year, in this country, and how creative evocation of all of these particulars both broadens and specifies his purpose.

IX. CREATIVE WRITING PROCESS-RELATED STANDARDS

Too often, creative writing at the secondary level is treated as a short break from more serious or substantial work, and because of resulting time limitations, the creative writing activities teachers do embark on are necessarily product-oriented. "This week, we're going to write a short story" implicitly directs students toward a finished product five days later. However, longer, pedagogically thoughtful creative writing lessons and units can focus more on process, meeting standards commonly assumed to address expository writing. As Harper writes, "Whereas linear creative writing pedagogics predominantly rely on notions of material completion, achievement defined by reaching a material end point, nonlinear pedagogics can produce a wider variety of results in the area of creative writing understanding and knowledge" (9). While the "creative writing understanding and knowledge" he discusses is focused on college-level programs and objectives, it is equally relevant to secondary classrooms and the Common Core standards. The writing processes in creative writing and composition are more similar than different, with their shared emphasis on drafting, revising, and editing. Certainly, the specifics of those activities vary between the two disciplines, but the same is also true of individual students within a single discipline. The value of the creative writing process can be found in a variety of pedagogy-based activities, but is particularly clear in the workshop because its successful completion requires students to view their drafts as unfinished. As Priscila Uppal writes, "To benefit from the workshop environment, student writing has to be assessed in terms of progress rather than product" (34). The current explorations of process-based writing in creative writing pedagogy, whether via workshop or newer methodologies, will help secondary students look beyond product-based concepts like the finished story or poem and focus instead on the learning opportunities embedded in steady writing progress.

A second reason to stress process over product in secondary creative writing springs from a similar, growing impetus in introductory college creative writing courses, and especially ones that meet general education requirements. Trent Hergenrader writes that, "From a disciplinary perspective, instructors must also recognize that many undergraduate students in our creative writing classes have no intention of seeking a career in literary publishing" (46). For too long, approaches to creative writing instruction have trickled down from the workshop, where the focus often is on publishable product. This is rarely the case in intro college courses, and even less so in secondary classrooms. Additionally, students who are interested in pursuing creative writing will still be enriched by creative work in the English classroom, while a focus on process over product will add considerable value for the majority of students who will not become published creative writers.

The first writing standard addressed by the creative writing process focuses on the generic components of nearly any writing method:

- *Writing Standard 5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. (41)*

Mayers' "Creative Writing and Process Pedagogy" is a central text for considering the uses of process in creative writing, and in it he writes, "When process is discussed, students usually seem to find it interesting and helpful, especially because it constitutes a way of looking at poetry and fiction that differs dramatically from what they encounter in their literature classes" (46). Because students are too often trained to consider literature as a finished product, preserved in their textbooks for generations of students, they can incorrectly assume a text sprang from the author's imagination more or less fully formed. By asking students to explore the writing process through creative work and its nonlinear nature, teachers can meet the above goal while also connecting their activities to the literature standards discussed earlier. Additionally, activities can be designed to show the overlap between writing processes in creative and expository writing, considering not only their shared components, but also how, say, planning might look different for a story than a comparison/contrast essay.

Similarly, the second process-based standard creates an opportunity to weave creative writing activities into established curricula:

- *Writing Standard 10: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. (41)*

This standard addresses the variety of creative writing activities that can be brought into the classroom, including not only full-scale works that explore the potential spectrum of the writing process, but also shorter, in-class activities that target individual aspects of creative writing. Many of the activities used to meet this standard grow out of the writing prompts utilized in intro courses and can again be tailored to fit units that include a literature component. Asking students to write a paragraph from the point of view of a character with no narrative voice in a novel, for example, addresses this standard while also helping to enhance students' literary analysis skills. Teachers might also construct brief, tailored exercises to help students explore figurative language. As Hunley and Giles write about such prompts, "As with any creative writing exercises, these may or may not lead to polished, publishable literary works, but we would argue that the process is more important than the literary product" (17). If students can better understand metaphor by writing original examples during part of a class period, regardless of whether those metaphors are later reused, then Hunley and Giles' point is proven, and the writing has accomplished its purpose.

X. THE PUBLICATION STANDARD

A subfocus of Common Core standards is an emphasis on engaging technology, which is often an integral component of college and career preparation. One of the technology-oriented ELA standards can be met by exploring publication options for creative work:

- *Writing Standard 6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others. (41)*

A good deal of this article has been spent championing process over product in secondary creative writing, but the discipline is malleable enough to support both approaches when appropriate, and the standard above creates space for some focus on product. If a teacher has spent time exploring the process-based opportunities of creative work, an eventual shift to product is reasonable, especially if it can be used to address a standard that is sometimes difficult to successfully engage. Students are often more adept at technology than their teachers, but they don't always see its educational value. Likewise, they enjoy creative writing, but don't always understand its purpose beyond the classroom. In discussing Barriss Mills' thoughts on process pedagogy in the 1950s, Mayers considers the value of students knowing there's an end game for their work:

Outside of classroom settings, Mills asserted, writers and readers are always guided by purpose; writers have specific reasons for writing, and these reasons guide virtually every choice they make, from the genres in which they write to the topics they write about to the stylistic and mechanical conventions they follow.... In far too much school writing, however, this sense of purpose is missing. (33)

This sense of purpose can be a valuable motivator for students to take creative work seriously, and can also encourage them to consider the sorts of publication opportunities referenced in Writing Standard 6.

What might such collaborative, technology-based opportunities look like in practice? Current pedagogy offers numerous possibilities, but two seem particularly suitable for the secondary classroom. The first is creative use of presentation software. In their article, "Concentration, Form, and Ways of (Digitally) Seeing," Leahy and Douglas Dechow describe the use of the online software Prezi to create a shareable poetry portfolio. They write, "Most exciting...was the variety among the portfolios when students moved off the 8 ½-by-11 format. Each portfolio had a different look, pace, and feel—worked differently with form, space, and time—and students recognized and took advantage of developing a distinct project" (37). Here, not only do students clearly meet Writing Standard 6, but they also construct and view their own work in new ways. Meeting the technology standard, too often the shallowest type of learning, in this case leads to deeper consideration and understanding.

Social media offers another useful avenue to address this standard, and though many teachers and parents are rightly cautious of its misuse in a secondary environment, careful design and implementation make

it a suitable teaching tool. In many ways, social media is uniquely suited to creative writing. Adsit writes that “one can place social-network updates in a lineage that is shared with memoirs” (106), and a closed Facebook group activity could pick up this thread, asking students to generate and respond to brief, thematic personal narratives. Similarly, students could adopt characters from a particular novel, play, or cultural event and create fictionalized social media conversations among them. This is a common meme in social media, and a brief Google image search for “fictional Facebook conversations” returned examples that include conversations between Arthurian characters, Internet browsers, NFL quarterbacks, Harry Potter and various Weasleys, and a variety of Disney and Marvel characters. Using appropriate selections as examples, students could generate similar conversations between characters in *Our Town*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *My Ántonia*, or any number of common secondary English texts. Such activities would not only address Writing Standard 6, but also a number of the literature-based standards.

XI. THE RESEARCH STANDARD

Perhaps no Common Core standard seems as clearly tailored for a specific type of writing as this one:

- *Writing Standard 7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation. (41)*

This standard is most clearly met by asking students to write a traditional research paper, but for teachers interested in creating research-based assignments that broaden students’ understanding of what research can look like and how it can be used, current creative writing pedagogy offers intriguing possibilities that challenge not only typical readings of Common Core standards, but also established ideas regarding creative writing. It’s a commonly held axiom in creative writing classrooms that students should write what they know, but as Joseph Rein writes, sometimes it’s important for students to write what they don’t know (111). More specifically, he says that

instructors often overlook creative research as an important lesson, applauding it when it appears but never deliberately bringing it into the classroom. By making research an explicit goal in my course, however, I can equip my students with the skills to compose not only pseudo-personal poetry, prose, and drama, but also works that delve into unfamiliar worlds and promote discovery, investigation, and exploration. (112)

If the goal of a lesson or unit is to teach formal research, replete with citations and references, the research paper functions better than the activities Rein mentions here. If, however, the purpose is a more general familiarity with avenues of research, including less formal ones, creative writing not only offers a broader palate of primary and secondary research, but also the added interest and motivation that can come with creative work. Peary argues that the contextualization required to integrate

research into imaginative writing leads to a deeper consideration of the information than in summary- or analysis-based writing, resulting in what she calls “the critical distance made possible by creative writing” (67). If teachers accept that formal research is only one possible avenue for meeting Writing Standard 7, a wider variety of learning opportunities becomes available.

Beyond secondary research, creative writing also offers opportunities for primary research. Stephanie Vanderslice and Carey E. Smitherman argue for authentic learning opportunities that can also be used as research for creative work—specifically, that students “will have the chance not only to read about the topics they are interested in, but...also be able to conduct primary research (i.e., observations, interviews, etc.), and, through these experiences...become experts in their own right and have their own ideas to share” (155). Such activities are related to the familiar assignments asking students to interview a grandparent or community member and write a report about it, but again, Peary’s “critical distance” and the accompanying contextualization helps create the expert students Vanderslice and Smitherman discuss.

XII. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

While explorations of creative writing pedagogy must continue at the college level, the perceived shunting of creative work in middle and high school English classrooms by Common Core and similar standards creates a critical need for these conversations to expand into secondary environments. This article is a first step in articulating what that expansion might look like within current frameworks. Additionally, it is important to make ourselves part of ongoing discussions regarding further revisions of state standards and English teacher training programs. The current, evolving body of work in creative writing studies can be a powerful tool in rethinking what secondary English programs might look like, and it is critical that those of us involved in creative writing pedagogy secure seats at the relevant curricular tables.

However, such explorations are also a form of self-preservation. If the standards-based emphasis on career and college readiness continues to deemphasize creative work in the secondary classroom, such viewpoints will eventually creep upward as postsecondary institutions become more focused on job training at the expense of the liberal arts. Creative writing has successfully worked to illustrate its value within the academy, and this is an additional opportunity to show how essential pedagogical work in our departments can be usefully applied to secondary classrooms—adding value at the college level, broadening teaching opportunities at the secondary level, and working to restore creative writing as a discipline to one of its original homes.

Moving forward, there are many discussions we must have. How can creative writing be adequately assessed in relation to standards such as Common Core? What might such assessments look like? How might secondary curricula be redesigned to better incorporate creative work, and what practical

activities and assignments can be designed to accomplish this? In what ways might secondary teachers approach the creative writing workshop? How might those of us active in creative writing pedagogy at the college level successfully reach out to our counterparts in secondary classrooms, and how can we best demonstrate on a practical level the value of the work we do? As we begin to answer these questions, the scope of our work will widen considerably.

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