



QWERTY Curriculum © 2024 by University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, Rachel La Due, Anushmita Mohanty, Ryan Vojtisek is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

QWERTY Curriculum

Lesson Title: Genre, Audience and Multimodality

Prepared by Anushmita Mohanty

Themes: Technology, Multimodality, Genre, Zines, Feminist Pedagogy, Indigenous Rhetorics

Purpose:

1. To introduce students to threshold concepts of genre and multimodality
2. To enable students to construct and reconstruct generic conventions
3. To create multimodal print objects, zines, to understand the interactions and uses of different modes.
4. To interrogate Eurocentric understandings of technology through indigenous rhetoric and perspectives.

Pedagogical Activities:

1. Discussing Genre through Science Fiction, Technology, and QWERTY

Prompt: Using the science fiction genre as a base, arrive at a deeper understanding of generic conventions and subversions. This is aided through reflections of technology, requiring students to compose their own science fiction story with the typewriter as a central technology. This class can be an introductory unit for a course designed around QWERTY and writing technologies.

[Reading: “A Rant on Technology”, by Ursula Le Guin](#)

Time: 75 minutes

Materials Required: Giant wall sticky notes, markers.

Introduction:

Western science fiction as a genre proceeds largely on a specific understanding of technology, rooted in colonial modernity. Technology in this genre is futuristic, advanced, and often used for warfare and the promotion of Western lifestyles: it is used to contrast the West from indigenous, Non-Western, “primitive” societies. This view of technology has been complicated by writers such as Robin Wall Kimmerer, who posits in *Braiding Sweetgrass* that sweetgrass baskets are as much technology as anything else. In the essay “Indigenous Interfaces”, Kristin Arola asks what a Facebook designed by and for Native Americans would look like. Arola points out the white-coded design choices in everyday technology that often become invisible

and normal. Although this lesson plan does not explicitly draw on these two texts, it provides inroads for a longer discussion on technology as interrogated through indigenous rhetorics. This lesson primarily unpacks the concepts of genres and technology, but is rooted in the works of the theorists mentioned above.

Goals:

1. To understand the definitions, conventions, and usefulness of genre as a threshold concept
2. To complicate Western, colonial understandings of technology through creative work based on the QWERTY keyboard
3. To prompt reflection on the role of QWERTY and writing technologies in our lives.

Steps:

Serial No.	Time	Step
1.	5 minutes	Form students into groups of 6, with 4 students in each group. Ask them to pick a science fiction movie they have all watched or are familiar with, and identify some generic characteristics of the movie. Alternatively, list some popular science fiction movies (<i>Interstellar</i> , <i>Arrival</i> , <i>Everything Everywhere All At Once</i> , <i>Star Wars</i> , <i>Dune</i> , <i>ET</i> , <i>Jurassic Park</i> , <i>Matrix</i> , <i>Transformers</i> etc.) and group students according to their interest in the movie.
2.	10-15 minutes	In groups, ask students to identify characteristics of the movie they chose that fit with the science fiction genre. These could be futuristic societies, scientific advances, aliens, technology, space, wars, action etc.
3.	15 minutes	Coming back together as a class, list all the characteristics the students generated on the board, discussing whether they fulfill, depart from, or subvert what is understood to be as science fiction. This can lead to a larger conversation on genre as a contract between the rhetor and audience, genre conventions, and generic changes over time.
4.	5 minutes	Then, ask students to list some examples of technology they might encounter in a science fiction film. This might include lightsabers, robots, androids, spaceships, weapons, cars, laboratory equipment, spacesuits, oxygen masks, time machines, smartphones, nuclear weapons, etc.
5.	10 minutes	Individual work time: give students time in class to read the short essay “A Rant on Technology” by Ursula Le Guin. This essay criticizes generic distinctions between hard science fiction (which deals more with technology) and soft science fiction (which deals more with

		society and culture). Use this essay to explain subgenres, and complicate generic boundaries.
6.	5 minutes	Ask students if reading the essay altered their view of what technology is, and ask them to list examples of technology based on the essay (technology is anything that makes human life easier. This might now include pens, paper, pencils, yarn, typewriters, baskets, etc. This can lead to a class discussion on constructions and perspectives on technology.
7.	15 minutes	Now, assign each group to a giant wall post-it. Ask them to come up with a premise for a science-fiction story based on one piece of technology: the QWERTY typewriter.
8.	10 minutes	Coming back together as a class, ask each group to pick a student to narrate their premise. The whole group then discusses how the addition of the QWERTY typewriter influenced their story, and which of the generic characteristics of science fiction they drew on. The intended audience for their story can also be talked about. This can also be a chance to discuss prevalent concepts of gender, race, class, etc. in science fiction films.
9.	5 minutes	An exit ticket for this class can be a short reflection on how the class a) affected their understanding of genre, and b) affected their understanding of technology.

Limitations: This class relies on students having previous experiences and knowledge of science fiction films, which might not be the case, especially for students coming from non-Western contexts. To mitigate this, consider giving students a heads-up about this activity in a previous class, asking them to collect examples of or think about science fiction films to begin with.

2. Zine-Making Workshop to Understand Genre and Multimodality (adapted from Amber Chavez’s QWERTY Zine Event)

Prompt: Create an 8-page zine based on a theme related to QWERTY and write a short, 3-paragraph reflection on the process, and how it added to your understanding of multimodality.

Time: 2 classes of 75 minutes or 3 classes of 50 minutes

Materials required: Markers, stickers, scissors, glue, printer paper, acrylic frames (to display prompts with), pens, old magazines, cards, brochures etc. for collage-making

Introduction

Zines can be defined as “non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves” (Duncombe 6). Zines are inherently multimodal: they require the utilization and synthesis of visual, gestural, tactile, and imagistic modes. The zine is a genre that occupies a specific space—they are more informal,

creative, and embodied than traditional research papers, but are also physical objects that can be created and circulated in the classroom, unlike Internet blogs.

Zine-making is inherently rooted in feminist pedagogies, defined as “a method of teaching and learning, by employing a political framework that involves consciousness-raising, activism, and a caring and safe environment. Implicit in this form of teaching is an understanding of the universality of gender oppression and a critique of Western rationality, male-centered theories, and unequal social power relations. In addition, the practices that flow from feminist pedagogy center on connected teaching (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986), in which teachers and students jointly construct knowledge, engage in self-reflection, and practice self-revelation (57). The four principles of feminist pedagogy that zines draw on are:

1. Participatory learning and collaboration
2. Critical and reflective thinking and research about normative categories and personal identity
3. The validation of personal experiences, creativity, subjectivity, and individual voice
4. The DIY (Do-It-Yourself Aesthetic) which is “a specific dimension of feminist expression centering upon grassroots politics and autonomous cultural production” (Kempson 4).

Goals:

1. To produce a multimodal project in order to gain familiarity and experience with the interaction between different modes
2. To remix research from the White Paper to create an entirely new, public-facing genre about QWERTY.
3. To reflect on the stakeholders, audience, modes, and the affordances and constraints of the zine as a genre
4. To collaborate on an embodied, creative, multimodal, and multilingual activity
5. To critically evaluate and intervene in the information cycle on QWERTY research and conversations.

Steps:

Serial No.	Time	Step
1.	10 – 15 minutes	Introduce students to the history and concepts of zines, showing examples of zines (attached at the end of the lesson plan), and discuss the genre's roots in feminist pedagogies.
2.	10 – 15 minutes	Discuss the characteristics of the zine as a genre (tactile, multimodal, creative, political etc.), and the different modes that can be identified within the zine genre. What are some of the affordances (easy to circulate and produce, accessible, creative) and constraints (smaller audience reach, unpublished, ephemeral) of this genre?

3.	10 minutes	Spend some time brainstorming on the themes linked to QWERTY that students can cover in their zines, such as the relationships between typewriters and gendered labour, histories of Milwaukee, the influence of technology, local technologies, the history of the typewriter, the QWERTYFest, etc. This step can be skipped if students already have a Segment Two Project on QWERTY.
4.	5 minutes	Ask students to begin thinking about the Stakeholders and Audience for a Zine. Would they be the same as the Stakeholders for their Segment 2 Project? Why/Why not? What Stakeholders would be interested in a zine based on their specific topic?
5.	5 minutes	Ask students what main points and subtopics from their White Paper they should include in their zine. What should they add?
6.	5 minutes	Ask students how they will organize the information in their zine. How will they use the various affordances of the zine, such as pictures, text, and writing, to make the zine more public-facing and appealing to their audience
7.	5 minutes	Students will now think about and source visuals that they will include in their project. Why is the visual mode most important in a zine?
8.	5 minutes	Ethos in a Zine: Ask students how they will convey academic ethos in their zine. What citation system will they use?
9.	40 minutes	Introduce students to the physical process of creating a zine, linked here . Go around the classroom surveying student work, encouraging them to experiment with composition, assembly, space, and writing.
10.	15 minutes	Once the students have created zines, ask them to pass around their zines to one another for peer discussion and feedback. This can be an informal conversation.
11.	10 minutes	Ask students to compose a short reflection on their zine-making experience, discussing what they learnt about the genre, its multimodality, its limitations, its possibilities, their writing and design choices, how they conveyed academic ethos, and how they plan on circulating the zines they made.

Limitations:

1. This is a time-intensive project and requires a lot of initial class-time investment to explain the form of a zine to students.
2. It might also be difficult to access examples of zines, although some are given here.
3. Students might find the creative aspect challenging, so it is necessary to explain that it is only their writing that is being assessed, not their design skills. What is more important is the design/writing choices that they make.
4. Given the project's roots in subjectivity, DIY, and feminist pedagogies, traditional assessment methods might not be commensurate with the project. Therefore, a labour-based or complete/incomplete model of grading is suggested.

Zine Resources:

1. Microcosm Publishing
2. People of Color Zine Project
3. Student's Guide to Making Zines
4. Teaching with Zines
5. Zine Libraries

Cited:

Creasap, Kimberly. "Zine-Making as Feminist Pedagogy". *Feminist Teacher*, 2014.

Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes from the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. Verso, 1997.

Kempson, Michelle. "My Version of Feminism": Subjectivity, DIY and the Feminist Zine", *Social Movement Studies*, 2014.