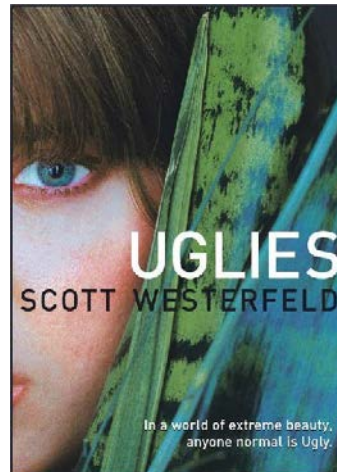


Teaching the Six-Traits of Writing with Middle Schoolers Using Popular Writing as Mentor Texts

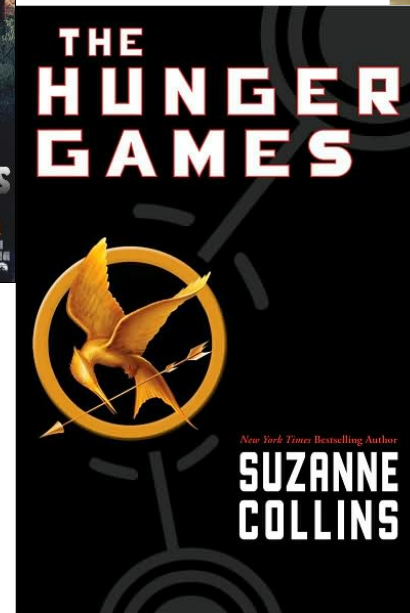
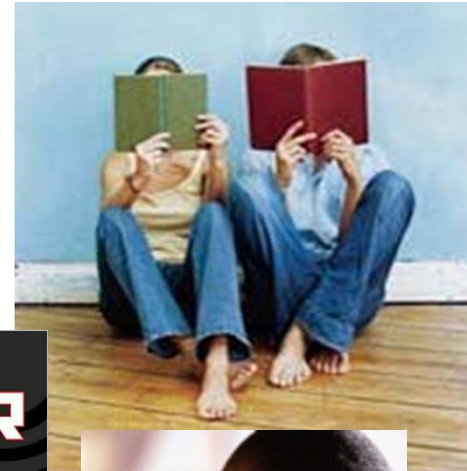
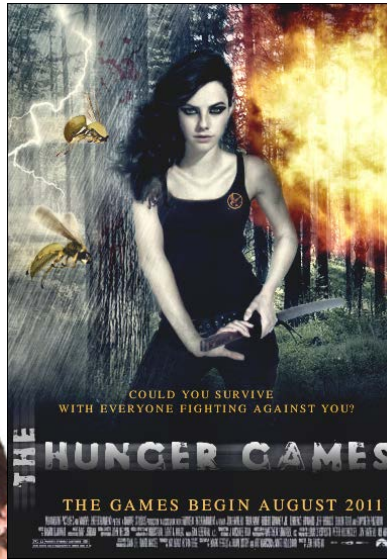
James Blasingame

Arizona State University, Tempe
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
English Education Program

<http://www.public.asu.edu/~jblasin/index.html>

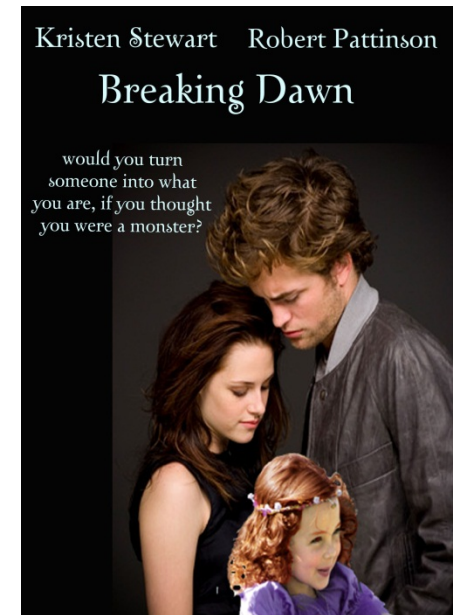


Movies and Popular Young Adult Novels

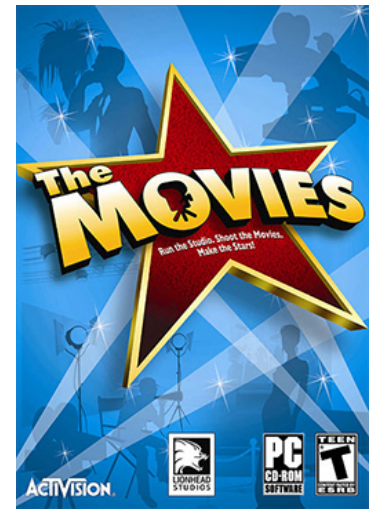


What if we used their interests to develop their writing skills?

- Popular movies
- Movie clips
- Movie reviews
- Six Traits
- Passages from popular books



Young people watch movies often and talk about them constantly. Writing movie reviews would be a way for them to develop their writing skills and, with our help, grow in their understanding of how to use the Six-Trait Model to improve their skills.



Let's take a look at a review of a popular movie, but first let's get a feeling for the film from this trailer.

<http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi2299986713/>

Fast and Furious

“Vin Diesel and Paul Walker reteam for the ultimate chapter of the franchise built on speed—Fast & Furious. Heading back to the streets where it all began, they rejoin Michelle Rodriguez and Jordana Brewster to blast muscle, tuner and exotic cars across Los Angeles and floor through the Mexican desert in the new high-octane action-”

Hmmm. . . Where do you think that appraisal of the movie came from, the company that made the movie or an objective reporter who reviews films?



How do the professionals write movie reviews for the newspaper? Let's take a look at one by Christy Lemire in the *Arizona Republic* and see if we can figure it out.

- <http://www.azcentral.com/thingstodo/movies/articles/2009/04/02/20090402fast0403.html>



Noise, noise, noise. Crunched metal and shattered glass. More noise. Revving engines. Vin Diesel's giant head. Hot chicks in tight miniskirts. Even more noise. The end.

That's pretty much all there is to "Fast & Furious," essentially a remake of the 2001 hit "The Fast and the Furious" with the same cast, except it seems to exist in some parallel universe where the word "the" no longer exists. It also seems to function outside of logic, cohesive plot structure and the laws of gravity, but hey - this being the fourth film in the street-racing series, such niceties have long since been tossed out the widow and run over repeatedly.

Justin Lin, who also directed Part 3, 2006's "The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift," piles on the mind-bogglingly elaborate chase scenes and set pieces. (The opening, in which our rebellious heroes attempt to steal gas from a speeding tanker truck, is admittedly a doozy.) But you've seen a lot of these sorts of stunts in the previous movies - and heard the same kind of cheesy dialogue - so it's strange to witness how seriously "Fast & Furious" takes itself, like it's reinventing the 19-inch wheel or something.

Snarling bad guys, women who pout beautifully and, of course, a wide array of brightly hued, wildly souped-up cars - but not an ounce of creativity or grace. And the fact that it's so repetitive only magnifies how little this latest installment has to offer.

What's the movie about, you ask? Well, not that it matters, but Diesel's fugitive ex-con Dom Toretto is back in Los Angeles and out for revenge. He ends up reluctantly re-teaming with former undercover cop Brian O'Conner (Paul Walker), who infiltrated Dom's gang and dated his sister, Mia (Jordana Brewster), in Part 1.

This time, their goal is to take down a drug kingpin who's behind a murder. Their strategy leads them into a series of ridiculously illegal races, which make the streets of LA more dangerous to drive on than they already are. There's also an enormously convoluted trip into Mexico, which seems to take place only to set up the film's climactic (and claustrophobic) underground-tunnel chase.

Diesel is the same guy here as always: the gravelly, low-key, beefy action hero. He does get to show off his sensitive side, though, when Dom sits awake at night, watching his girlfriend Letty (Michelle Rodriguez) peacefully sleep. Walker, meanwhile, eerily resembles Alex Rodriguez as he inches into his mid-30s: same eyes, same mouth, same blank expression on his face.

If you're into automotive minutiae, you'll probably get off on the details here. And if you're into gratuitous shots of women making out with each other, well, you may sporadically enjoy yourself, as well. But if you like you use your brain . . . dude. Drive on.

Now, let's work in our groups to list the things you noticed about the review of *Fast and Furious* in terms of Organization, Voice, or Ideas. Your handout will give you some help to analyze the writing.

What did you find to be true
about Organization, Ideas and
Voice in this review?

Now, Let's look at another review and see if our characterization of the genre hold true. But first, again, let's get a little taste of the movie:

- <http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi1000931865/>
- <http://movies.nytimes.com/2009/01/16/movies/16paul.html>
- **Now, let's read a review from Nathan Lee and the New York Times about *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*.**

A Hapless Security Guard Runs Amok

By NATHAN LEE



Fat people are funny. Fat people who fall over are funnier. Fat people who fall over and have humiliating working-class jobs? Stop, you're killing me!

This would seem to be the entire guiding principle behind [“Paul Blart: Mall Cop,”](#) a tossed-off comedy from [Adam Sandler](#)'s production company that makes one long for the comparative genius of [“I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry.”](#)

In the title role, Kevin James plays a lovable New Jersey doofus whose dreams of joining the police are foiled by a hypoglycemic condition that causes him to pass out in ostensibly hilarious contexts. Reduced to working security at a huge, bustling shopping mall located in some economically vibrant fantasyland, Blart falls in love with the perky proprietress of a hair-extension franchise (Jayma Mays).

Enter — because why not? — a gang of thieves plotting to hack into the mall’s credit-card profits. Put down the nachos, Paul Blart! It’s time to, well, to fall over some more and bump into things and make silly faces and save the world and get the girl.

“Paul Blart: Mall Cop” is directed by Steve Carr, a man who knows how to put a camera in front of things, if little else, and written, sort of, by Nick Bakay and Mr. James.

Let's return to our group conclusions on Organization, Ideas, and Voice for the review of *Fast and Furious* and see if this review of *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* has the same characteristics.

Ideas

Organization

Voice

Now that we have analyzed the writing in movie reviews for Voice, Ideas, and Organization, it's time to employ our own writing talents to review a recent movie. Remember to make use of what we have learned about the genre and use of the Six Traits in this genre.



- Are there any movies coming to town that you would like to see? Let's look at a couple of trailers.

<http://www.breakingdawn-themovie.com/>

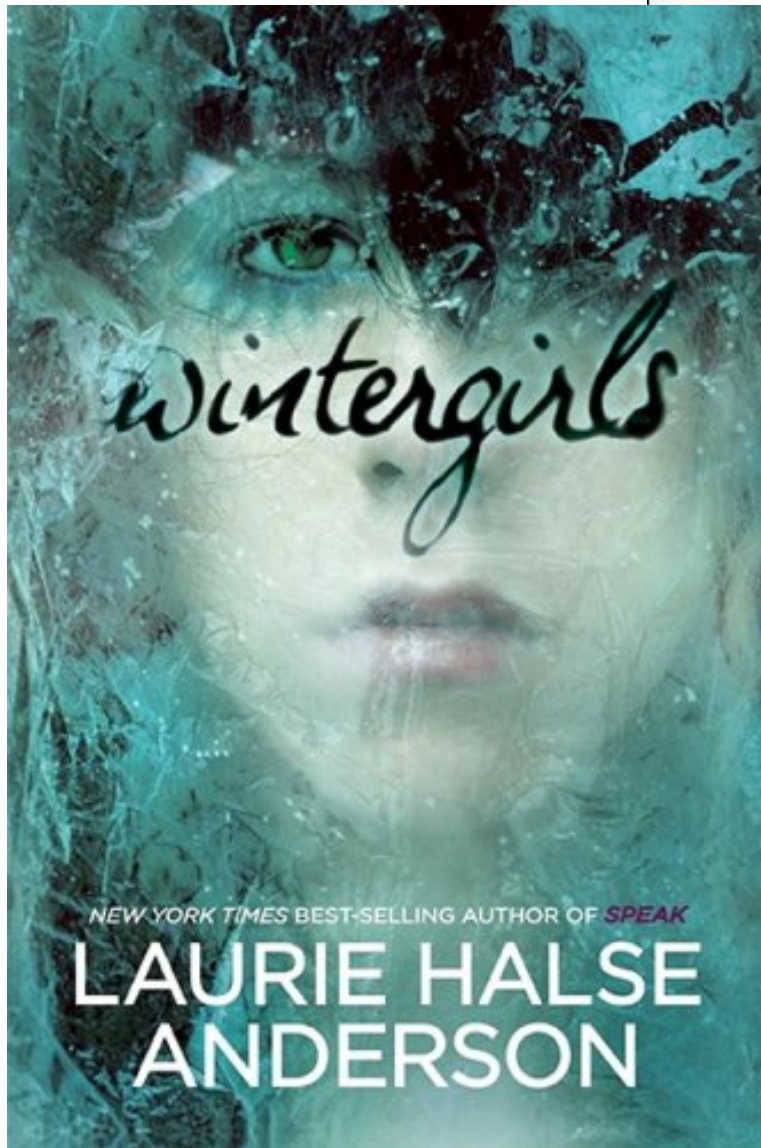
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrbHykKUfTM>

For Wednesday, write a movie review of 700 words or more.

Attempt to accomplish the objectives we listed, attempt to find the right voice to share your opinion in, and make the review rough, not polished.

Another Popular Text for Helping Students Improve Writing through the Six-Trait Model: Young Adult Novels





Arizona Department of Education Scoring Rubric for Conventions: 6

The writing demonstrates exceptionally strong control of standard writing conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, capitalization, paragraph breaks, grammar and usage) and uses them effectively to enhance communication. Errors are so few and so minor that the reader can easily skim right over them unless specifically searching for them. The writing is characterized by

- **strong control of conventions; manipulation of conventions may occur for stylistic effect.**
- **strong, effective use of punctuation that guides the reader through the text.**
- **correct spelling, even of more difficult words.**
- **paragraph breaks that reinforce the organizational structure.**
- **correct grammar and usage that contribute to clarity and style.**
- **skill in using a wide range of conventions in a sufficiently long and complex piece.**
- **little or no need for editing.**

My pop calls me a bum, but that's elitist, don't you think? I can split wood, spread mulch, pour beer, and grow perfect tomatoes."

"Sure you can."

"I'm an ace poker player, a shaman, and a wanderer in search of truth. I can drive a cab, a motorcycle, and ride a bull, but not for long. I shovel manure in an original and artistic manner. As soon as I get my car fixed up, I will become a gypsy looking for a lost world."

"And you're a thief," I add.

"When the situation calls for it." He pulls the syrupy plate back in front of him and dips the toast in it.

"Why don't you just use your powers to win the lottery or make money grow on trees instead of stealing food?"

"That would be boring." He licks syrup off the side of his hand. "Your turn. What are you?"

"Sad." The word falls out.

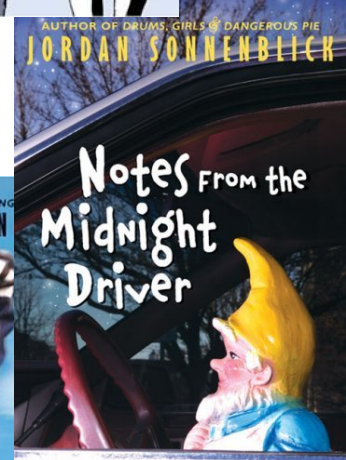
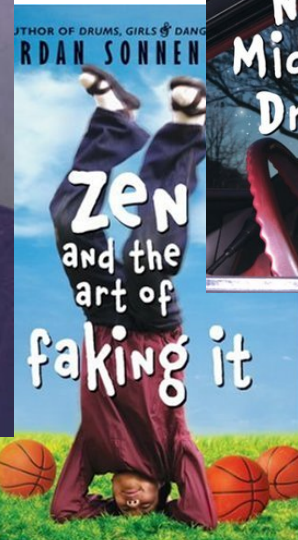
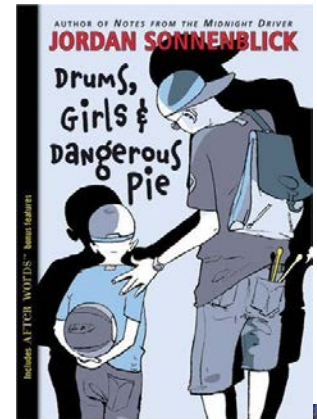
"You knew her well, didn't you?"

The lights flicker behind my eyes. I knew her a whole world. I knew her sleepovers and cookie sales and crushes on boybands and the time I broke my leg riding on the back of her bike and the time I helped her paint her room white after she painted it black without permission.

"Tell me something about her," he says. "Something nice."

"She loved waffles."

"Doesn't everybody?"



The organization enhances the central idea(s) and its development. The order and structure are compelling and move the reader through the text easily. The writing is characterized by

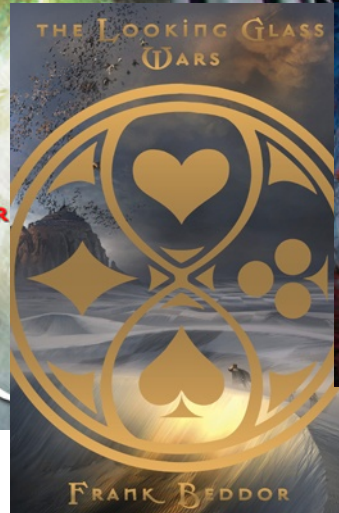
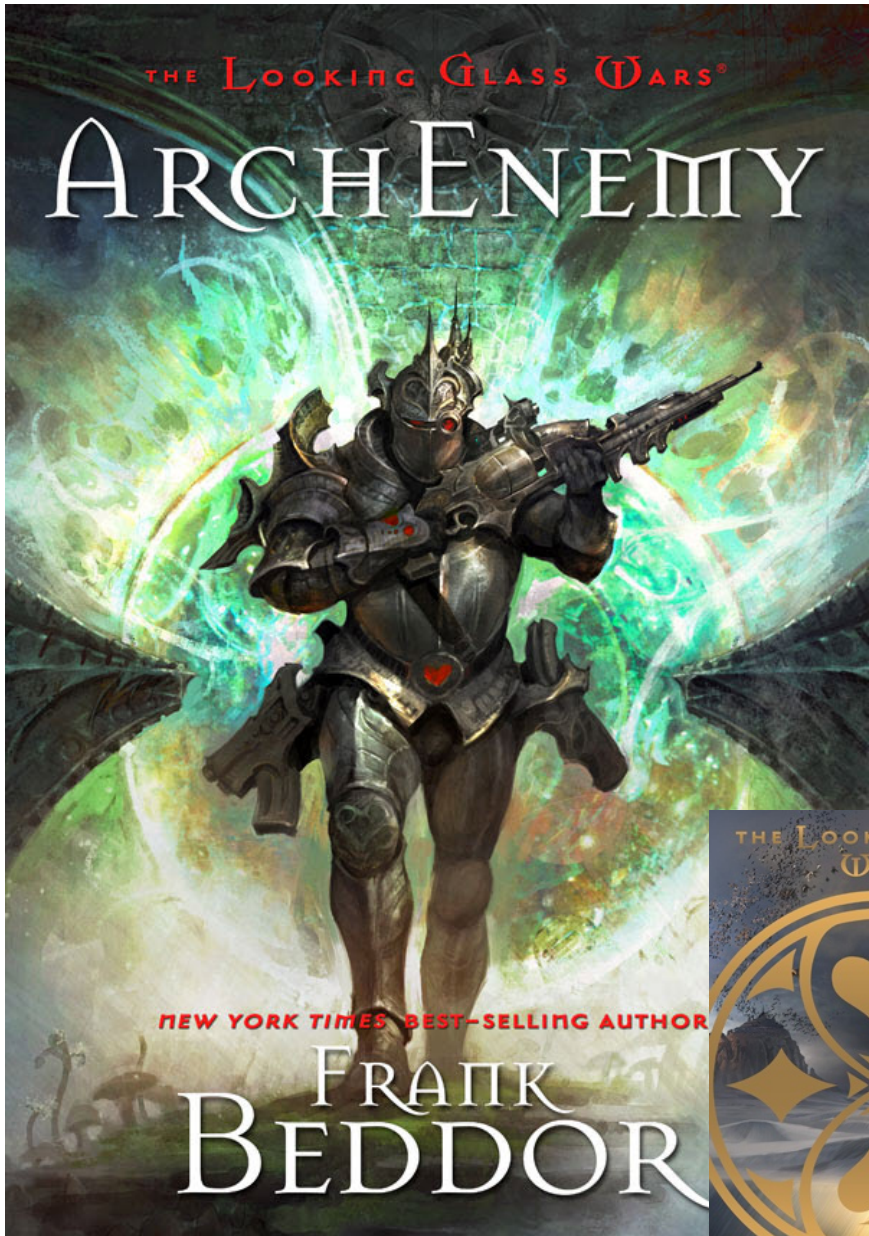
- effective, perhaps creative, sequencing; the organizational structure fits the topic, and the writing is easy to follow.
- a strong, inviting beginning that draws the reader in and a strong satisfying sense of resolution or closure.
- smooth, effective transitions among all elements (sentences, paragraphs, and ideas).
- details that fit where placed.

the pact

The next day in school, everybody was totally going insane over the letters. The math teacher lectured us about how this proved the seriousness of her subject, and how we had to *buckle down* and apply ourselves. I mean, what does that even mean? Are we supposed to strap ourselves to our desks? Tighten our pants a notch? Put on straitjackets?

In social studies, the teacher lectured us for forty minutes on the history of aptitude testing, and how the Nazis tried to use IQ tests to prove their insane racist theories. Maybe this was just a hunch, but I had a feeling she wasn't a big fan of the new rule.

Mr. Laurenzano gave us a whole spiel about how just because science wasn't on the state test, that didn't mean it wasn't an important subject. Plus, he said, we'd be using tons of math and reading skills in our science work, so obviously we should pay



The writing is exceptionally clear, focused and interesting. It holds the reader's attention throughout. Main ideas stand out and are developed by strong support and rich details suitable to audience and purpose. The writing is characterized by

- **clarity, focus, and control.**
- **main idea(s) that stand out.**
- **supporting, relevant, carefully selected details; when appropriate, use of resources provides strong, accurate, credible support**
- **a thorough, balanced, in-depth explanation/ exploration of the topic; the writing makes connections and shares insights.**
- **content and selected details that are well suited to audience and purpose.**

CHAPTER 58

THE INITIAL burst from the Heart Crystal dimmed, calmed to a steady up- and outflow, a fluid column rising from the Iron Butterfly and then spreading out to blanket the clouds, extending to unknown ethereal regions, revealing—

Wonderland's entire caterpillar council. Restored to their rich shades of blue, green, red, purple, yellow, and orange, the larvae of notable girth floated on clouds of hookah smoke, their mouths unstuck from their pipes as they stared wide-eyed at the glittering heavens.

"Everqueen," they said as one.

A disturbance rippled through the witnesses—the remaining legions of Wonderlanders and Boarderlanders, the mercenaries recruited from Earth, Redd's assassins. Alyss

Heart had emerged from the hobblebush and was approaching the Iron Butterfly, the caterpillar council, Dodge. Bibwit scurried out from somewhere and walked along with her.

"Alyss! We thought . . . we didn't know if . . . something's happened to the Heart Crystal. As yet we don't know how bad it is, which is to—"

"The Crystal's destroyed," Alyss said in a tone that caused the tutor's ears to jerk back, startled, then lean tentatively forward.

"You?" he asked.

"Me," she said.

This did little to tame Bibwit's ears, which seemed to be trying to separate from his head as he and Alyss stopped beside Dodge, in the shadow of the caterpillar council. The guardsman turned his battle-weathered eyes from the miraculous sight of dispersing energy and smiled at Alyss. "Not looking my best, am I?"

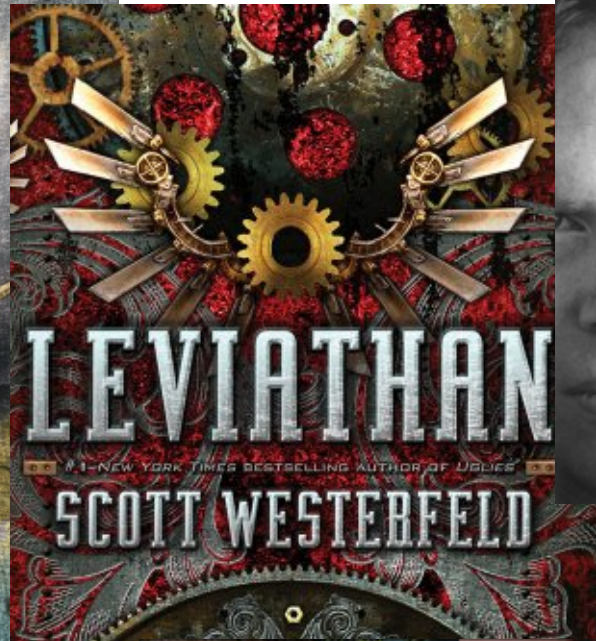
"But you're alive."

She reached out her hand. He took it, interlaced his fingers with hers.

Skittish, Bibwit glanced at Alyss and the caterpillar-oracles. With an uncharacteristic lack of confidence, he began, "Wisest council, while Alyss Heart's mistake is I assume the impetus—which is to say, cause—for this, your unprecedented appearance—"

"You have done what was required for the establishment of Everqueen," Blue interrupted, addressing Alyss.





Steampunk is a sub-genre of [fantasy](#) and [speculative fiction](#) that came into prominence in the 1980s and early 1990s. The term denotes works set in an era or world where [steam power](#) is still widely used—usually the 19th century, and often [Victorian era England](#)—but with prominent elements of either [science fiction](#) or [fantasy](#), such as fictional technological inventions like those found in the works of [H. G. Wells](#) and [Jules Verne](#), or real technological developments like the computer occurring at an earlier date. Other examples of steampunk contain [alternate history](#)-style presentations of "the path not taken" of such technology as [dirigibles](#), [analog computers](#), or [digital mechanical computers](#) (such as [Charles Babbage's Analytical engine](#)); these frequently are presented in an idealized light, or with a presumption of functionality.



Steampunk is often associated with [cyberpunk](#) and shares a similar fanbase and theme of rebellion, but developed as a separate movement (though both have considerable influence on each other). Apart from time period and level of technological development, the main difference between cyberpunk and steampunk is that steampunk settings usually tend to be less obviously [dystopian](#) than cyberpunk, or lack dystopian elements entirely.



Various modern utilitarian objects have been [modded](#) by individual [artisans](#) into a pseudo-Victorian mechanical "steampunk" style, and a number of visual and musical artists have been described as steampunk.



- **Steampunk affinity group website:**
<http://steampunkworkshop.com/>
- **Steampunk online magazine (ezine):**
<http://www.steampunkmagazine.com/>
- **Steampunk clothing and accessory line:**

<http://www.steampunkemporium.com/steam.php?source=google&campaign=steampunk&gclid=CL7BsMCbIZ4CFRESawod-GY4ow>

Arizona Department of Education Scoring Rubric for Word Choice: 6

Words convey the intended message in an exceptionally interesting, precise, and natural way appropriate to audience and purpose. The writer employs a rich, broad range of words, which have been carefully chosen and thoughtfully placed for impact. The writing is characterized by

- **accurate, strong, specific words; powerful words energize the writing.**
- **fresh, original expression; slang, if used, seems purposeful and is effective.**
- **vocabulary that is striking and varied, but that is natural and not overdone.**
- **ordinary words used in an unusual way.**
- **words that evoke strong images; figurative language may be used.**

to see so few of our young men succumbing to common superstition.”

Deryn snorted. A few people—Monkey Luddites, they were called—were afraid of Darwinist beasties on principle. They thought that crossbreeding natural creatures was more blasphemy than science, even if fabs had been the backbone of the British Empire for the last fifty years.

She wondered for a moment if these tigers were the secret test Jaspert had warned her about, and smirked. If so, it had been a pure dawdle.

“But your nerves of steel may not last the day, gentlemen,” the flight captain said. “Before moving on we’d like to discover if you have a head for heights. Coxswain?”

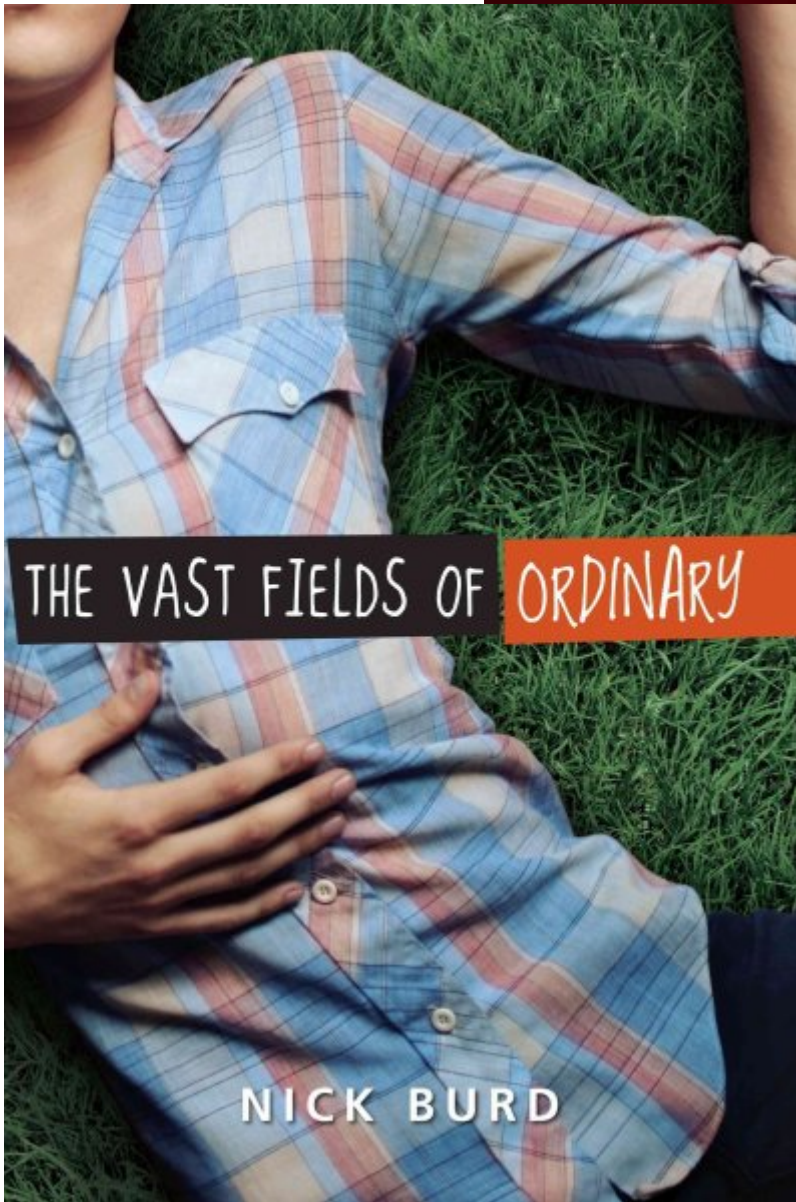
“About-face!” shouted an airman. With a muddled bit of shuffling, the line of boys turned itself about to face the hangar tent. Deryn saw that Jaspert was still here, hanging off to one side with the boffins. They were all wearing clart-snaffling grins.

Then the hangar’s tent flaps split apart, and Deryn’s jaw dropped open. . . .

An airbeast was inside: a Huxley ascender, its tentacles in the grips of a dozen ground men. The beast pulsed and trembled as they drew it gently out, setting its translucent gasbag shimmering with the red light of the rising sun.

“A medusa,” gasped the boy next to her.

Deryn nodded. This was the first hydrogen breather



Arizona Department of Education Scoring Rubric for Sentence Fluency: 6

The writing has an effective flow and rhythm. Sentences show a high degree of craftsmanship, with consistently strong and varied structure that makes expressive oral reading easy and enjoyable. The writing is characterized by

- **a natural, fluent sound; it glides along with one sentence flowing effortlessly into the next.**
- **extensive variation in sentence structure, length, and beginnings that add interest to the text.**
- **sentence structure that enhances meaning by drawing attention to key ideas or reinforcing relationships among ideas.**
- **varied sentence patterns that create an effective combination of power and grace.**
- **strong control over sentence structure; fragments, if used at all, work well.**
- **stylistic control; dialogue, if used, sounds natural.**

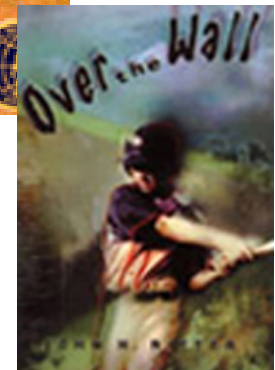
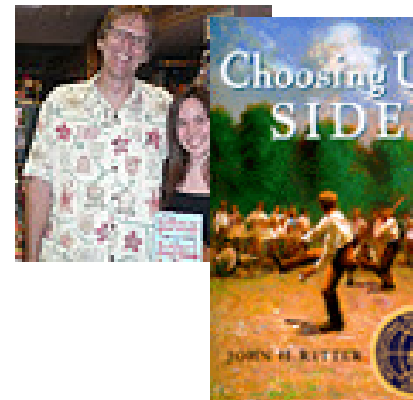
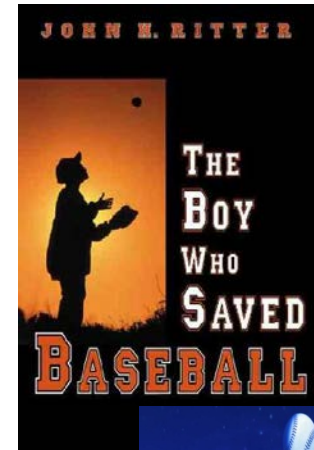
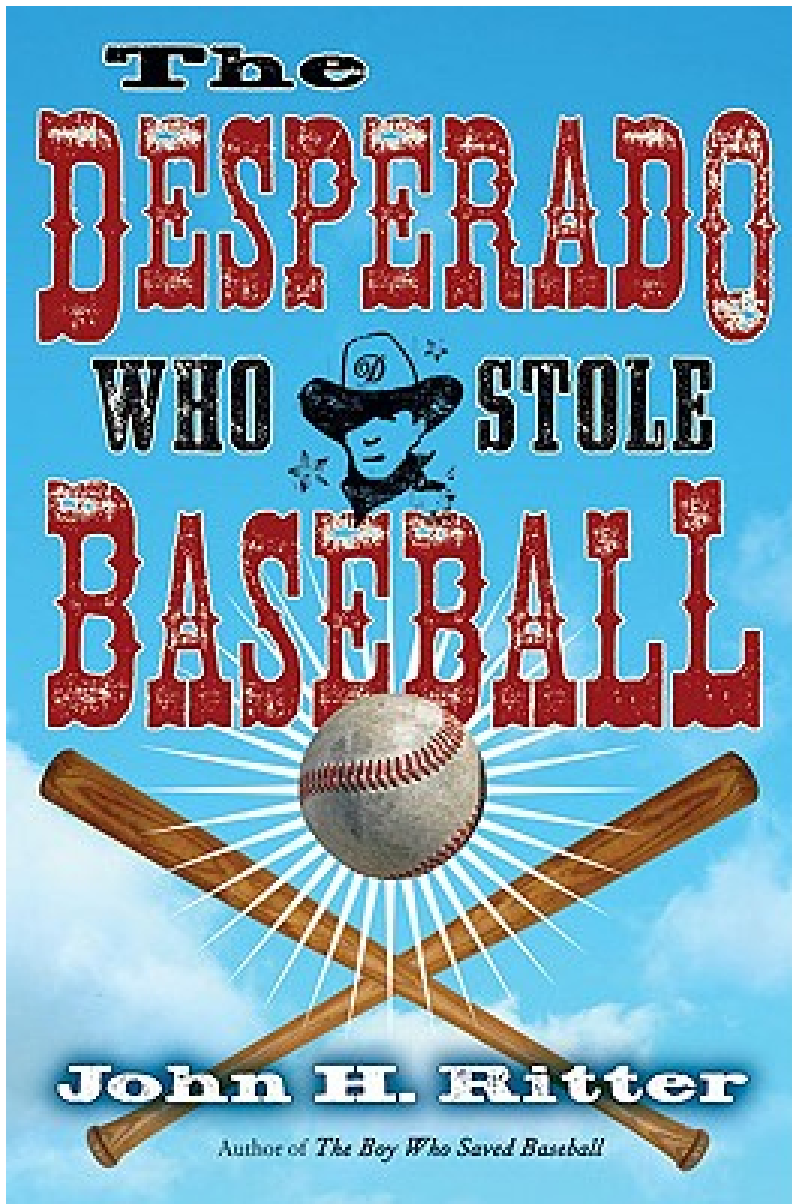
“Fine,” I’d say. “How was yours?”

“Oh, fine. Some private school girl threw a fit when her dad wouldn’t buy her the Mercedes she wanted and I thought I was going to have to call the cops, but other than that it was fine.”

I tried not to look at him as he finished his beer. Sometimes I’d get up and go out to the pool and leave him alone. Other times I’d put on my headphones, turn up the volume, and hope that the music leaking out of them would be enough to send him to another room.

My dad was a loner. It was one of the few things we had in common. He golfed alone, went to movies alone. He had colleagues at the dealership, people that could probably be considered friends, but he rarely associated with any of them outside of work. He stayed at the edges of parties, blank-faced and silent with a sweaty glass of scotch, but ready with a smile and a line about the weather whenever someone approached him. He was handsome enough, an ex-jock who’d somehow held on to his solid physique and unremarkable charm. You could tell that somewhere inside him was the genuine desire for a connection, something to pull him out of his self-imposed isolation, but the fishing trips and tennis games he suggested to other husbands always went unfilled in the end.

I ended up getting a part-time job at the Food World supermarket by the mall. I started out as a grocery bagger and by senior year I was working as a stock boy with my friend Pablo and a few other guys that went to my high school. We spent most of our time smoking cigarettes in the milk cooler and talking about



What is Voice?

- Heart/soul
- Wit
- Magic
- Feeling
- Life and breath
- Personal tone and flavor different from other writers or texts

The killer rode in from the east.

Over desert stone and cactus thorns, over bleached-white oxen bones, the gunman climbed out of the desolate sand and rode up the mountain walls with one idea in mind. He was bound to bring a man to justice, though he might die in the trying.

Donned in black leather chaps atop a black-hide steed, he galloped upslope, into the dry hills of chaparral, over a ridge called Rattlesnake, facing the setting sun.

In his eyes, the sun turned cold. On his chest a silver badge flickered red. In his head, visions of murder for money swung high.

He was a simple man. He was the law of the land, a land where murder was often deemed lawful. In fact, a man could be highly rewarded for executing the deed.



From behind, Jack felt someone grip his shoulder with the clutch of an iron vise.

Jack ducked and spun, to pull away from the stealthy claw.