A Language of Difference: Reading the Empty Space in Jennifer Egan's "Great Rock and Roll Pauses"
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Abstract: A story about a neuro-diverse youth and his family, Jennifer Egan's "Great Rock and Roll Pauses" (GRRP) is comprised entirely of PowerPoint slides. This article aims to celebrate the interdependence and complementarity of unconventional form and meaning-making in that text. Considering the story from a disabilities studies perspective, the author examines ways that GRRP raises questions about ways that well-meaning, abled persons can variously support or hinder people with impairments. Using a multiliteracies framework, the article also highlights ways that the multiple sign systems invite readers to (1) experience and explore feelings and conflicts central to the text, and (2) interrogate ways that form and literary constructs combine to help them make meaning. Pedagogical approaches aimed at developing participatory literary discourse communities around this complex text, particularly for readers in introductory literature courses who have varying levels of interest and proficiency, are described and discussed.

Introduction

Instructors of introductory literature courses share an important challenge: helping our students read literary texts in literary ways. Students often enter our classes looking for the right or the best answer regarding a literary text, or reading literary texts for information—perhaps about character, plot, setting, or social history. Or, as Caughey writes, inexpert readers of literature sometimes anticipate the discovery of a "deeper message in the bottle" telling them what a text really means (1). Irvine suggests that in their secondary English courses, students often learned either that literary texts are entities complete unto themselves, a-contextual and a-historical (enacting New Critical readings), or that literary works "faithfully represent recreations of reality, scenarios so veraciously similar to the actual world that one is best served using an anthropological or sociological approach" (56).

Literary reading, though, involves readers as participants in creating, not locating, meanings. Literary texts "lead us to live through some moment of feeling, to enter into some human personality, or to participate imaginatively in some situation or event" (Rosenblatt 63). In the best cases, this immersion in the fictional world invites a "trafficking in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties" (Bruner 26). Langer, too, describes literary reading in terms of discovery and as complex cognitive work:
From the moment they begin reading, [successful readers of literature] orient themselves toward exploring.... In doing this, they expand their breadth of understanding, leaving room for alternative interpretations, changing points of view, complex characterizations, and unresolved questions—questions that underlie the ambiguity inherent in the interpretation of literature. (4)

In addition to supporting the kind of immersive reading that allows for such experience and exploration, instructors also try to develop the kinds of disciplinary thinking appropriate to literary studies, the "reasoning processes, strategies, and discourse rules that shape successful readers' and writers' work" (Rainey and Moje 87). Our efforts include helping students consider ways in which a text organizes and enables a "distinctively literary mode of knowledge" in which form is both central and connected to larger social purposes (Caughey 2). Focusing on the story only, while disregarding narrative levels and social contexts, "means that students miss most, and in some cases, all of the richness of the text as a dialogic and revelatory event" (Irvine 56). In our role as instructors, then, we aim to develop readers' abilities at multiple levels simultaneously. While the goals are fairly clear, the challenges lie in how to engage students with both the discursive and the story elements—to draw their attention to and to promote their agency in working with the layers of discourse inherent in story-making.

A text I have found particularly valuable in helping to meet these challenges is Jennifer Egan's "Great Rock and Roll Pauses" (GRRP). Originally written as Chapter 12 of Egan's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel A Visit from the Goon Squad, GRRP stands well on its own as a short story (I both read and taught GRRP the first time without having read Egan's novel). GRRP effectively heightens students' awareness of discursive elements and the ways they form a storyworld. At the same time, it engages students with issues integral to the text and relevant to their own, lived worlds.

Framed as a story written by one of its characters, 12-year-old Ally Blake, GRRP emerges, in part, through established narrative techniques. Character portrayals fall on a continuum from static to dynamic, and a familiar narrative arc is in place as an accumulation of significant events builds to a turning point. GRRP also investigates some common themes, such as identity development and the emotional complexities inherent in familial
relationships. Amid this familiarity, though, GRRP focuses readers' attention on, and invites them to participate with, rich and significant differences. GRRP is the story of a family living with a kind of neuro-diversity, likely Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), exhibited in Lincoln, the 13-year-old son and brother. And Egan presents the story using a medium—PowerPoint slides consisting of SmartArt templates and words—singular in the world of fiction. This unique means of entry into the storyworld thus requires that readers engage differently and use a different array of sign systems as resources as they make meaning (New London Group; Cope and Kalantzis) with this text. As I discuss in more detail below, this unusual mode enables readers to engage with the characters' struggles and to experience the story's compelling silences in ways that more conventional formats cannot.

To help students think about their meaning-making with this unusual format (unusual for fiction) and to help them probe more deeply into the story's themes, I suggest using disabilities studies as a lens. This perspective understands enablement and disablement to be characteristics of a society or a context, not of individuals. While the word "disability" has conventionally referred to a person's congenital or acquired bodily difference (including a cognitive difference such as a traumatic brain injury or an autism spectrum disorder), in disabilities studies, the word *impairment* describes a person's difference. *Disability* then refers to disabling contexts—social, cultural (including, in the case of GRRP, the familial culture), political, economic, or historical—met by persons with an impairment. As such, rather than a focus on rehabilitating or remediating persons who are different, disabilities studies advocates for a more global approach, portraying individuals with impairments as members of, rather than deviations from, their communities. The emphasis is on valuing, including, and empowering those individuals and thus requires a collective response to disablement (Tisdale; "What is Disabilities Studies?").

With the rest of this article, I hope to contribute to other instructors' thinking about ways they might support students' literary meaning-making with GRRP and thereby increase students' active participation in a literary discourse community. I first present a summary of the story, one that emphasizes the ways in which its unconventional mode engages readers in making meaning, particularly involving difference. Following that I share some pedagogical approaches designed to involve students actively in literary discourse about issues and themes in, as well as ways of making meaning with, GRRP. (Since its
Form and Story: Ways of Knowing Difference in GRRP

At first glance, readers of GRRP might question whether they are embarking on a literary endeavor at all, as we encounter a deck of PowerPoint slides. Yet the slides quickly bring us inside the frame of Ally's story as we use her arrangements of words, shapes, and—in the online version—color to enter into two days in the life of the Blake family. For example, slide 3 follows Ally's table of contents and appears just before her first chapter. The sizes, shapes, and relative positioning of the forms on that slide, in combination with very limited alphabetic language, introduce the story's dramatis personae as well as one of its primary themes (Figure 1). The slide shows that these characters, Mom, Dad, and the two young teenagers (Sasha, Drew, Lincoln, and Ally), together form a larger and arguably more significant unit, as the "US" shape in the center dominates the image and connects the smaller elements. This slide, in a position commonly held by an introduction or prologue, tells—shows—that the story about to unfold concerns four distinct individuals who nonetheless form a unified whole, the Blake family, whom Ally calls "US":

Whether ASD or a similar impairment, Lincoln's difference involves silences. Slides in Ally's first chapter indicate that Lincoln does not interact verbally with others in social settings in ways Drew considers normal, and Lincoln is "obsessed with rock songs that
have pauses in them" (slide 10). A central conflict of the story emerges as readers learn of Drew's struggle to adapt to, rather than try to change, his son. Sasha and Ally, unlike Drew, seem ready to work with and around Lincoln's differences: Ally readily answers a neighbor's questions for Lincoln and both Sasha and Ally accept, enjoy, and to a degree share in Lincoln's fascination with the pauses in some great rock and roll music. Drew instead finds Lincoln's persistent engagement with silences—both in social situations and in rock and roll songs—unsettling. In his role as a concerned and responsible father, Drew tries to redirect his son's interests rather than participate in them.

Certainly, the story's silences and their importance could be conveyed effectively and powerfully through words alone, rather than through the affordances offered by PowerPoint slides. Egan, however, relays the silences and makes possible her readers' experience of them through wordless spaces on the slides. For example, when tensions between Lincoln and his father escalate enough to provoke an argument between Sasha and Drew, a "pause" follows that disagreement, and readers engage with it via the image shown in Figure 2. This unusual presentation renders the silence significant and impactful for the characters, and it becomes so as well in the worlds readers create as they make meaning with and "live through" (Rosenblatt 2005; Dewey 1934) this text.

![A Pause While We Stand on the Deck](image)

Figure 2 A Pause While We Stand on the Deck (Egan, 2010, slide 49).

Remarking on her decision to use a PowerPoint format for GRRP, Egan noted that when using a more conventional format—i.e., alphabetic text alone—a writer "can say there is a pause, but of course there is no actual pause for the reader." Instead, a reader is actively engaging with words and sentences, imagining a pause but not experiencing the
actual sensation of pausing. Using slides enabled her "to create visual pauses that forced the reader to pause. There's nothing to look at there" (Lee). Inhabiting the same storyworld as the characters, readers of GRRP experience silence—within the family's conversations, permeating the desert surrounding their home, and in the pauses essential to the music that so fascinates Lincoln—because Egan has given silence a space, via symbol and "language," through the literal absence of words.

This capacity of the medium to evoke silence for the reader becomes increasingly impactful as the tensions around Drew and Lincoln increase. Following the parents' disagreement and the ensuing silence on the deck, Drew and Ally, father and daughter, take a walk together. They venture far into the desert adjacent to their home, increasing the distance between themselves and Lincoln, Sasha, and other concerns weighing on Drew. Here, surrounded by the desert and its deep but animate calm, Ally shares with her father an observation she had made about a pause in one of the rock and roll songs Lincoln was studying. Drew is startled by this; he finds Ally's engagement with the pause, and the depth of her alignment and camaraderie with her impaired brother that it signifies, surprising and delightful. It provokes in him a deep and freeing belly laugh, and at this point in the story, Drew's perspective finally shifts. His understanding of Lincoln deepens, and Drew is finally able to reevaluate Lincoln's capacities. He consequently reinterprets his own role in his son's life, and Drew thus begins to understand that Lincoln needs his father's support to be who he is, not his father's encouragement to change.

When Drew and Ally return home, the house is dark; Sasha and Ally have apparently gone to bed. Drew senses the late-night silence more intensely and values it in a way he had not before. As Ally drifts off to sleep, she hears her father call to Lincoln and ask whether Lincoln can "hear" it—the silence—too. At this point readers engage the following sequence in Ally's PowerPoint:
What I Hear as I’m Falling Asleep

Hey Line.

Yeah.

You hear that sound?

No.

That.

No, Pop.

Here, let’s stand by the window. Listen with me. What does that sound like to you?
In these three slides, silence—both in story and form—envelops and finally connects father and son. Consistent with a disabilities studies perspective, Lincoln is not changed. Rather, Drew has come to understand that his son's fascination with the pauses in the music as well as Lincoln's silences and communicative differences aren't threatening, nor are they devoid of value or meaning, any more than the surrounding desert's silence is empty. The various silences in the story—Lincoln's, the music's, the desert's—are decidedly replete with energy and possibility. Thus, at the story's resolution, Drew is able to reinterpret both his son's difference as well as his own role in his son's life in relation to that difference.

Egan follows the late-night sequence depicted in Figure 3, above, with one final slide in Ally's chronicle of two days in the life of the Blake family. The image (Figure 4) replicates the prologue slide but with one significant exception: "US" is portrayed using Lincoln's language. Powerfully silent, the essence—the cohesion—of "US" remains intact:
Pedagogical approaches

Students in my classes found GRRP's symbols and their interconnectedness with the story's meanings engaging and, frankly, fun. Initially though, some thought reading the text, with its complexity in both story and form, difficult. My intention with the remainder of this article is to help instructors think about ways they might approach teaching this unusual text, particularly with students who have less familiarity with literary reading and the layers of artistry it involves. The pedagogical strategies I describe below are the result, primarily, of my own classroom practice, but they also incorporate ways I would enhance those experiences the next time I teach GRRP. Additionally, these descriptions are shaped by ideas and insights I gained through conversations with fellow instructors who either had taught or were considering teaching GRRP. I include them here not as methods to be followed but rather in the hope that others will find them thought-provoking and generative in terms of their own pedagogy. Specifically, this section provides strategies that address three pedagogical goals related to reading, in a literary way, this story told through PowerPoint. These goals are:

- First, to support students' engagement with GRRP as they create, through the text, the experience of immersion in a fictional world and a *living through*, not simply knowledge *about* that world (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 63).
• Second, to help students interrogate the ways that the story's discursive elements, including but not limited to its multimodal textual features, affect their meaning-making with this text.

• Third, to provide regular opportunities for students to engage in disciplinary thinking and discourse appropriate to the domain of literary studies (Rainey and Moje; Park). This includes developing students' agency both in discerning arguments made through a text and in conceptualizing, supporting, and expressing their own arguments about what meanings they make, and how, with a literary work.

Making Connections to Readers’ Lived Worlds: Prior Knowledge and Essential Questions

To activate, to build upon, and to show respect for students' prior knowledge about living with impairments, specifically neurological impairments such as ASD, I invited class members to share informally their experiences, understandings, and questions about such impairments. We then added to that knowledge through some informational, online research. Students found the Autism Speaks website and the Autism Spectrum Disorder pages on the National Institute of Mental Health website to be readily accessible and valuable. Also as a way to contextualize the story and help students see connections between it and their lived worlds, I provided an overview of disabilities studies, offering it as a lens for conceptualizing enablement and disablement and our roles as participants in societies that include people with impairments.

These activities and thought processes provided underpinnings for our consideration of questions that link the storyworld students were about to imagine to the referential world on which it comments. I suggested that we keep in mind some open-ended questions as we read, and I reminded students that our goal was not to answer them but to let the questions provoke and deepen our thinking:

• What responsibility—if any—do persons without impairments have in creating communities that include, equitably, people with impairments?

• How are social norms formed? In what ways, if any, are persons with impairments involved in helping to form such norms?

And, to further guide our study of GRRP as a literary text:
How do the various aspects of the PowerPoint format affect my experience as I make meaning with GRRP? What other literary constructs affect my meaning-making and understanding?

In what ways is literary reading like and not like other kinds of reading?

Reading the Multimodal Language of GRRP

Multiliteracies pedagogies aim to develop in readers the capacity to search for clues in and to make meanings with unfamiliar kinds of texts, "without immediately feeling alienated and excluded from" those texts (Cope and Kalantzis 203). I found—both through teaching GRRP and sharing it with other readers—that some people "read" the PowerPoint slides but attended almost exclusively to the words and paid little or no attention to cues provided by shapes, color, and composition of the slides. Other readers, though, noticed some details within these sign systems that I had not, even after several close readings. With this in mind, I invited students to interact with and discuss several examples of GRRP’s unconventional format together as a class before reading the work independently. My primary aim here was to increase students’ confidence that, though understandably inexperienced with reading fiction via PowerPoint, they were well equipped to make meaning with the various sign systems present in this text. A second objective at this stage was to help students begin building a layered understanding of the story and especially of Drew, a complex character portrayed as somewhat removed, emotionally, from the other family members. A third was to activate student participation in a literary discourse community. With these ends in mind, we first "read" and discussed a generic SmartArt template that, in format but not in words, mirrored an important slide that helps develop Drew’s character in GRRP (Figure 5):
In response to my questions—"What does this mean to you?" and then "How do the symbols on the template lead you to that meaning?"—students pointed out the evident tipping phenomenon and the imbalance exhibited by the shapes and their arrangement on this slide. They noted the uniformity of the size and shape of the blocks, claiming that this image presents a contrast between the two columns or stacks in terms of the number, but not the kind, of shapes. One student wondered whether "it means anything" that the lower rectangles are darker than those atop the stacks. Students also noted that the grouping on the left looked more stable, while the top two blocks on the right seemed as if they were about to fall off. All agreed that this slide was about balance and stability—and likely an impending loss of both.

We then looked at a slide taken from GRRP that shares the same basic composition as Figure 5: "Ways It Can Be When Dad Comes Back" (slide 33; Figure 6). This version of the template includes words, and students used those words to revise the meanings they had already made with the symbols in the generic template. We discussed the two columns in terms of Drew's two sets of behaviors, expressed in part by the words in the two separate stacks and in part by the contrast the stacks illustrate. One student stated that "the tip-off is the tipping point," explaining that when the top form on the right is present—when Dad "Sits In Car Before Coming In"—it is not going to be a good night for the family. Instead of laughter and storytelling (left column), there will be silence and anger (right column).
Experiencing the Silence in GRRP

Because silences are so significant to GRRP and to initiate discourse about the impact of silence in the story, we took a few minutes to listen to some of the music referred to in the GRRP, focusing particularly on the "great rock and roll pauses" with which Lincoln is "obsessed" (Egan slide 10). I asked students to listen to "Bernadette" and "Long Train Runnin'" and then to respond with "quick writes," capturing their immediate reactions to the songs and their silences. (I prompted them with: How does that pause affect you as you listen to that song? How would the song be different and feel different if that pause weren't there? In what way or ways is that pause meaningful in or significant to this music?) While this felt a little uncomfortable for some because they were uncertain about what to write, it helped impress upon us all the import and effects of the pauses in this music and our ability to consider them in terms of our meaning-making.

To further orient students to the array of cues offered by GRRP, particularly those involving silence, we also undertook what I call the "Staccato Study." We first attempted, in a light-hearted way, to verbalize definitions of the word "staccato." After arriving at a reasonable understanding of the term among all, I asked each student either to draw a representation of what "staccato" means or to write a description of the concept using words. Some students rephrased the verbal definitions we had just communicated, essentially putting those into their own words; some presented a musical symbol for
staccato; and a few illustrated "staccato" by drawing a series of dots or lines, clearly and distinctly separated by spaces. We shared this array of symbolic representations and discussed the challenges intrinsic to communicating silence through symbolic language. We then visited the Wikipedia site for "Staccato" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staccato), which defines the term multi-modally, providing words, symbols, and audio examples to convey the meaning. I asked whether "staccato" can exist without the silences between sounds and, of course, all understood that it cannot; that the "empty spaces" between the notes are critical to the creation of a staccato event and, by definition, both sounds and silences are needed to create "staccato." Consistent with a multiliteracies framework, these two activities—listening and responding to the music and investigating "staccato" multimodally—intentionally and transparently de-emphasized a sole reliance on written, alphabetic text and immersed students in meaning-making with a wider range of modes.

Making the Familiar Strange: Conventional Literary Constructs via PowerPoint

Through the pre-reading exercises and discussions described above, students at this point had considered: ASD and some of its manifestations; the power of silence and its role in certain rock and roll songs; and a variety of modes for evoking meaning, including through significant and vibrant silences. To further help students navigate and consider the form of the text, beyond its multimodal sign systems, I suggested that students look specifically for familiar and conventional storytelling elements as they read independently. We then briefly reviewed definitions of narrative arc, including exposition, rising action, climax, and denouement; and characterization, including dynamic and static characters (who changes and why, and who stays the same?) and explicit and implicit means of creating a character, such as showing vs. telling. We also quickly summarized foreshadowing, setting, point-of-view, and the kinds of conflicts often portrayed in literature. Grounding their inquiry in these literary elements helped students realize how germane the constructs are to the narrative, regardless of the GRRP’s unconventional format.

Students’ Meaning-Making with GRRP

As they read, students were particularly drawn to character development and became engaged with the ways the slides expressed relationships among characters.
Individual students noticed, and together we elaborated on, the ways the text's sign systems, both verbal and nonverbal, created overt and then implicit renderings of individual characters. For example, slide 5 consists of an inner, circular shape and four outer rectangles. The inner circle portrays the feelings and thoughts Ally had during the scene, while the outer rectangles convey the scene's events and dialogue. So, that which would be visible and audible within the storyworld is represented in the elements on the outer portions of the slide, while what Ally feels is shown in a circle on the inner part of the slide. One student said that this physical layout of the slide helped her separate Ally's internal and external experiences. She noted that what Ally and the others did and said contrasted—both on the slide and "really"—with what Ally felt and experienced internally. She noted the efficiency and directness of this nonverbal sign system, saying that it was a relief to understand so much without the use of so many words.

Another example illustrates how the students were impacted by non-alphabetic cues in GRRP and how they linked these cues to other discursive elements in the text to create meaning. Students observed that the arrangement and interrelationships among the slides, not just on each of them, contribute to the design of this literary work. Thus, the composition of the PowerPoint deck serves as another resource available for meaning-making. For instance, slides 5-7 are juxtaposed with slide 8 to express the complex and sometimes difficult relationships among Drew, Sasha, Ally, and Lincoln. Absent Drew, slides 5-7 reveal interpersonal dynamics among the other three family members. As shapes overlap and arrows carry readers through interconnected forms on each slide, each of these three slides in turn creates a sense of movement and interrelatedness. Readers are actively involved, looking at and across these three slides, weighing, comparing, and attending to layered, synchronous cues expressing the interactions and relationships among Lincoln, Ally, and Sasha. Abruptly though, readers then encounter slide 8, with its three simple words against a plain white background: "Dad Is Working." In contrast to the profusion of elements on the previous slides, the barrenness of slide 8 is jarring. Students observed how different that slide felt after the ones before it and noted a building up of activity, only to feel a startling "quiet" or "emptiness" in encountering the plain and nearly blank slide 8. Students observed that, ironically given Lincoln's ASD, a sense of difference and an emotional distance from the other family members became associated with Drew through these contrasting slides.
While individually, each of the four slides provides information about interrelationships among the characters, when considered together they evoke meaning at a more aesthetic and impactful level. Through the juxtaposition presented in these slides, readers reach an understanding—and experience that understanding viscerally—that while Drew is an equal part of "US," he is also in a significant way separate from the others.

Additionally, students used their knowledge of narrative arc and types of characterization as they exchanged ideas about the meanings they made with GRRP. Inquiring into what the story is primarily "about," some students argued that Lincoln is the "main character." Others responded that the character who changes the most is Drew, and that the story engages readers in his struggle, not Lincoln's, and so he is the "main character." The discussions about a narrative arc soon connected to these observations regarding characterization: as students sought agreement on what constitutes the climax of the story, they asked each other questions about which character changes and why. Thus, far more than a list of literary terms learned years earlier, these constructs became a heuristic for students as they developed their thinking and made arguments about what the story "means" and how.

This line of inquiry also helped students interrogate our essential questions through a disabilities studies lens: In the story, Drew, Sasha, and Ally are Lincoln's community. How do we see them treating his difference? Students noticed that Ally and Sasha are generally comfortable with and enjoy Lincoln's uniqueness (though Ally, at times, feeling pressure from her larger society, less so: "If my friends are around, I ignore Lincoln's music. When it's just us, the pauses are my favorite," slide 13). On the other hand, students saw that through most of the story, Drew does not engage with Lincoln around his interest in music but instead tries to help—by changing—Lincoln. Students also readily understood that GRRP achieves its resolution when Drew reaches an understanding of how to meaningfully interact with and to enable Lincoln. As a coda to her story of "US," Ally appends one more set of signs, a series of graphs. At first, only a few students recognized that these appendices harken back to the conversation in the desert between Ally and Drew, mentioned above. Following the parents' disagreement about how best to respond to Lincoln's difference, Drew admitted to Ally: "I've got to do better with Lincoln." Ally then told him that Lincoln had asked for help "graphing the pauses" in the rock and roll songs he was
studing (slide 55). The final four images of GRRP, co-created by Lincoln and Drew, present Lincoln's findings on the persistence, the necessity, and the power of silence (slides 72-75).

Conclusion

Because of, not despite, its differences, GRRP facilitated the kinds of literary meaning-making practices I want my students to develop. GRRP offers an immersive "living through" the text, in terms of both story and form. "Ally" provides readers an insightful portrayal of her brother and a sympathetic, nuanced rendering of Drew. In important ways, readers of GRRP share Drew's journey as they discover and weigh their own responses to Lincoln. Students became involved in the story's developing conflicts as they explored Lincoln's difference and grasped Drew's motives and concerns. GRRP's alternative sign systems—the shapes, forms, and empty spaces as well as the words—yields another means of "living through" the text, as readers engage unfamiliar ways of transacting with a literary text. Further, the multimodal format provides students with an additional link between their lived worlds with the story world as it offers them the experience of being differently enabled as they make meaning; it provides readers a new means of access, and it requires them to adapt in order to succeed. Also, the need to transact with form(s) is quite transparent in this story told via PowerPoint, and the text helped to involve students with, and to heighten their awareness of, connections between form and meaning.

This involvement in turn contributed to a more active and inclusive literary discourse community than I believe my students and I had generated previously. Students' engagement with the text quickly became shared, participatory discourse, as individuals willingly articulated emerging ideas and voiced questions about their meaning-making. Perhaps because the signs on the slides are simultaneously available to all in ways that lines of alphabetic text over a series of pages are not—students can literally point to a textual feature as they discuss it—or perhaps because of students' familiarity with visual sign systems in other disciplines, they readily developed their ideas about this text together. As they considered the effects of GRRP's sign systems as well as the role of more conventional discursive elements that comprise this text, they actively grappled with and developed their own discourse about literary meaning-making.
I also saw that this text enabled different readers differently. Students I thought of as more agile readers of conventional texts were at times slowed, and others who had been less inclined to read previous, alphabetic texts sometimes showed higher levels of engagement with the signs and meaning-making processes of GRRP. There was more interdependence among a wider array of students as they engaged with this text. Viewed through a disabilities studies lens, this too raises some essential questions about a community's opportunity to enable and empower its members. Teaching GRRP has made me think more deeply about questions such as: Whom do I enable via the textual modes I choose? How do the texts I assign limit or enhance the capacity of different students to participate in literary discourse communities along with their differently abled (in terms reading skills) classmates? If I assume that worthy texts are always alphabetic, am I respecting the diversity of voices that have perennially characterized American literature? In addition to helping my students read in literary ways, teaching GRRP expanded my own thinking about enablement, inclusivity, and access to the literary discourse communities I try to create in my classes.
Works Cited


"What is Disabilities Studies?" *Society for Disability Studies,* n.d.