

# **(re)viewing bodies: The Walking Dead and Social Constructions in a Post-Apocalyptic Society**

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**Overview**

This paper seeks to explore methods and speculation about social construction and racial structures in a post-apocalyptic society via analysis and evaluation of a non-traditional text, a television series, *The Walking Dead*. Selections from the award-winning television series will be used, in conjunction with W.E.B. Du Bois' 1920 short story, "The Comet" to contrast our current classifications with the suggested speculative constructions provided in these related narratives. Through the evaluation of selected episodes of *The Walking Dead*, students will craft a written piece in which they will speculate conditions, outside of a zombie apocalypse, in which the current social constructions, specifically those related to race and gender, can be decentered and realigned. Critical thinking through the lens of the generic principles explained below will culminate with students completing an evidence-based argumentative essay. Students will connect Du Bois' short story and contemporary photography to further enrich and extend their examination and inquiry into the realignment of the current social constructions of our society. This unit was designed for an academically advanced 9<sup>th</sup> grade Humanities course (English or Social Studies teachers could justify applicability here). Activities are useful for upper-level students and/or can easily be modified to increase difficulty or change the end product.

## **Rationale**

*The Walking Dead* is a television series acclaimed for its superior acting, story telling and special effects. In 2015, the series finished its 5<sup>th</sup> season and celebrates a wide diversity of viewers. Upon conducting an informal poll among my students, over 60% of the student population watches the program on a weekly basis, and 100% of students were, at least, familiar with the premise of the television show. The popularity of this series guarantees buy-in from students and, by extension, enthusiasm and motivation to explore and evaluate it through the framework of social construction. Viewing selected episodes paired with other readings and mediums creates a space in which students can utilize with critical thinking and higher-order processing skills with high-interest, culturally relevant material. One pedagogical study notes, “everyone is affected by mass media in some way or another...the collective effects on society of all these media choices are tremendous” (Tafari 83). Mass media is an inescapable and pervasive element of contemporary society. It is not only pertinent, but also very necessary, to educate students to critically approach all narratives, in all mediums, and the messages they convey.

## **Objectives and Standards**

### Objectives

- Students will be able to understand and apply generic conventions of Afrofuturism and detective fiction to non-traditional forms and narratives
- Students will be able to create an argument and support with evidence a claim that a particular text satisfies the tenets of generic form
- Students will be able to identify, analyze and evaluate social constructions of race within *The Walking Dead*
- Students will be able to apply generic principles across a variety of textual forms, including, but not limited to film, television, graphic novels and video games
- Students will be able to evaluate the validity of the generic forms of Afrofuturistic science fiction and detective fiction, and form and explication their opinion with text-based evidence
- Students will be able to read and understand informational readings about Afrofuturism and detective fiction
- Study television as text and cultural mirror

### Pennsylvania Common Core Standards

This unit seeks to address and satisfy the changing nature of literacy instruction under the Common Core standards that are now in the process of being adopted nationwide.

Specifically, in English Language Arts there is a major focus on the need for students to be able to read a variety of texts, in various formats, as well as, the practice of argumentative writing with supporting evidence. Emphasis on these skills is the foundation of this unit.

Listed below are the standards that the various activities within this unit will satiate:

CC.1.2.9–10.C Apply appropriate strategies to analyze, interpret, and evaluate how an author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

CC.1.3.9–10.B Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences and conclusions based on an author’s explicit assumptions and beliefs about a subject.

CC.1.3.9–10.C Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CC.1.3.9–10.A Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CC.1.3.9–10.G Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment of strategies and tools.

CC.1.3.9–10.K Read and comprehend literary fiction on grade level, reading independently and proficiently

CC.1.4.9–10.B Write with a sharp, distinct focus identifying topic, task, and audience.

CC.1.4.9–10.C Develop and analyze the topic with relevant, well-chosen, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic; include graphics and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CC.1.4.9–10.D Organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension; provide a concluding statement or section.

CC.1.4.9–10.M Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events.

## **Generic Principles of Afrofuturism and Black Detective Fictions**

African-American detective and science fiction have some distinct generic features and conventions specifically concerned with black characters, their communities and histories. Detective fiction seeks to make sense of the world and science fiction speculates upon the anxieties of the current society. Both genres provide thrilling and engaging stories, which also provide a critical lens through which the participant views and interacts with their world.

### **African-American Detective Fiction**

Detective fiction is generally concerned with the understanding the navigations of the criminal and the tracking and reimagining of the criminal movements by a detective, who, like the criminal, toes the threshold of the underworld and is able to stare into the abyss yet come away unscathed.

Criminals are interlopers, with an alternative consideration for the regulations that govern their society. Rules, laws and societal limitations are optional and are never compulsory. Crime occurs whenever a border, be it between the boundaries of class, race or physical locale, is violated. Crimes are also often the product of the uncertainties and insecurities of society. Therefore, the detective becomes not only an investigator but also a social psychologist, assessing and analyzing social ills.

The detective is not a part of a world in which he sees import in “working to preserve social standards and values” (Lock 78). Often, in particular reference to African-American detective characters the detective is often unlicensed, unwilling, and not a sleuth by profession. Often the deputization occurs when the African-American detective is the only figure capable of navigating the cusps of two worlds. Another place this reluctant authorization occurs is in the instance of false accusation in which the quasi-investigator must work to clear their name.

By nature detectives are themselves damaged figures; there is a locus of trauma in their own personal history. Through our modern understandings of psychology, many of these gumshoes may be characterized as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Another hallmark of the genre is the dichotomous nature of the stories told. There are clear distinctions drawn; the good and the bad, the saved and the damned, the upright and the criminal. The detective in this generic mode “fights a lone battle against [social standards and values] while struggling to prevent himself from being infected by the corruption on which they are based” (Lock 78). The result of this is often the detective’s horror at discovering a semblance of his own psyche in the thinking of the criminal mind, which takes a continual, nagging toll on the character. The duplicitous and dark path of the detective is one of constant struggle between two poles, however, the detective’s ability to navigate these paths is also what contributes and aids his/her success.

It worth noting that within the genre of African-American detective fiction often reflects a clear mistrust of authority and the law, in ways that the standard detective characters, like Philip Marlowe or Sam Spade, may be less aware or less engaged with such matters. Simply put, Chandler and Hammett aren't thinking about race, access and social expectation in their hard-boiled detective novels, much less considering the complex and nuanced legacy of violence that exists between the law (and its corporeal embodiment) and the black community. Several critics identify this conflict of double consciousness, first coined by Du Bois, as a key characteristic of the black detective (Lock, Crooks).

In many ways, Sam Spade is the consolidation of whiteness and the culture that accompanied that set in his time. He stands in opposition to one well-known African-American detective, Easy Rawlins, the glaring anomaly to the post-World War Two American Dream. Blacks were erased from the narrative of a happy future. African-Americans were excluded from the GI Bill, redlined out of decent housing districts, and thus forced to struggle to for steady, reliable employment with reasonable compensation. This is the reality Easy lives. He is a man at war with his own weakness, seeking his own aspirations of a home and a family, albeit a family of unconventional assembly. Easy is characterized as being “structured by the drive to accumulate wealth, which drive wedges between him and the South Central community” (Crooks 79). As illustrated in many of Mosley's short stories, the African-American detective is cautious, and often, hyper-aware of their place in the circles they move within, particularly in accordance to their race. The usual protagonist of this genre, the detective, can be but is now always a professional, or even willing, sleuth. These characters are “centered on the degree of difference it attains from white detective fiction and concomitantly on the extents of its formal subversion and social progressiveness” (English 775). These characters are liminal beings to which a quest is befallen, and in response to the call they, wisely, do not bound enthusiastically toward it, rather they slink suspiciously in the shadows.

Generically, the detective is a figure of empathy, often battling their own demons and proclivity for various vices. The detective in this mode recognizes the capability in every human for evil; he just understands that the difference between a citizen and a criminal is the inability to curb this propensity. The black gumshoe “makes friends, loses them, feels the conflicts among his own various interests and ties acutely enough not to set himself on a moral pedestal” (Crooks 84). He is an imperfect being, which both draws the character to the work and is a result of his participation in the work, often simultaneously. Easy Rawlins exemplifies this conception, “juggling the public and private identities” that his involvement in sleuth work demands (Lock 80). The African-American detective often understands the socially constructed motivations for actions of those he/she seeks.

Afrofuturism: Speculative African-American Fiction

From the infant years of our nation, the social narrative of Africans in America circumscribes the body of the African-American as something other than human, quite literally claiming these persons to be only 3/5ths human. Upon this consideration, much of the rhetorical and narrative constructions in the history of America are based on positioning African-Americans as Other. It seems only natural that the generic mode of science fiction is suitable for speculation about the involvement of blacks in an altered or distant future. Working under this consideration, the genre is described as follows:

Afrofuturism used extraterrestriality as a hyperbolic trope to explore the historical terms, the everyday implications of forcibly imposed dislocation, and the constitution of Black Atlantic subjectivities: from slave to negro to colored to evloue to black to African to African American. Extraterrestriality thereby becomes a point of transvaluation through which this variation over time, understood as forcible mutation, can become a resource for speculation” (Eshan 298-299).

Under this consideration, the genre of speculative African-American fiction embraces the narrative of Otherness that our nation’s systemic determination has created. Therefore, it is more than reasonable that this genre would be a space for mediation of alternative histories/realities/narratives involving and written by those who have been institutionally differentiated and outcast. Additionally, in some instances, such as Samuel Delaney’s *Babel-17*, those we deem to be Other are actually not. In these instances, the story is about how one group came to see another as Other, or deconstruction of the process by which the concept of Otherness in conceived. In either mode, speculative fiction is concerned with the exploration of altered or decentered realities.

Though not widely known, as early as the late 1800s, African-Americans have published science fiction. Though this tradition is not widely known about, it does exist. Much of the lack of circulation was also due to issues of access, where Afrofuturists were only able to find an outlet in black-owned publications such as *The Crisis* or *The Pittsburgh Courier* (Yaszek 4). It is, therefore, not unlikely that the lack of proliferation of Afrofuturists through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was an issue of access, not necessarily lack of interested readership.

Science fiction is a global genre, which “explores the necessary relations of science, society, and race and “stakes claim for [writers] and for their communities in the global future imaginary”(Yaszek 1). The goal of this type of fiction, quite often, is attempts to imagine “the possibilities for intervention within the dimension of the predictive, the projected, the proleptic, the envisioned, the virtual, the anticipatory and the future conditional” (Eshun 293). Also, the genre elicits a discussion of value, where shifts in what a society holds important have happened, usually due to some cataclysm. The postulation of “what-if” looms over fiction of this genre.

Much of black science fiction, sometimes referred to as Afrofuturism, is concerned with “counter memory” and adjusting the historical record to reflect a pluralistic perspective on history (Eshun 287). The reconstruction of history paired with the decentering of the white Eurocentric interpretations of history allows a place for racial social constructions can be destroyed and a new meritocratic structure can replace the old.

Additionally, Afrofuturism is concerned with “how much Afrodiasporic subjectivity in the twentieth century constituted itself through the cultural project of recovery” (Eshun 287). The African-American, in the context of text set in the future, is a body navigating spaces in which, perhaps they will be held at higher regard for their contributory value, as opposed to the historical racial discrimination.

Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany do this type of work often, but also, less obviously, this is also found in the novels Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison, as well as in short stories by W.E.B. Du Bois. Butler and Morrison look to “recover lost black histories and how those histories inform a whole range of black cultures today” (Yasek 2). Whereas Du Bois, in *The Comet*, for instance, imagines “how these histories and cultures might inspire new visions of tomorrow” (Yasek 2). In all cases, these elements comprise the summary hallmarks of the genre of African-American science fiction, or the synonymous Afrofuturism. Overall the genre challenges perceptions of what it means to be black and forces one “to think about the relations of the science, society and race” (Yasek 3). Science fiction reflects a desire that is present in our society; a desire to shift cultural perceptions or expectations.

African-American writer and characters have found articulation in this marginalized genre because “the conventions of science fiction...can function as allegories for the systemic experience of post-slavery black subjects in the twentieth century. Science fiction, as such, is recast in the light of Afrodiasporic history” (Eshan 299). The involvement of black characters and writers reflect this supposition. Authors of Afrofuturism “populate their worlds with characters that are without fixed racial or gender roles, and identity is determined by their physical appearance...the physical body is an extension of identity, not the prime determinant” (Nelson 44). This element is found throughout the varied characterizations and plot events of most black speculative fiction.

### ***The Walking Dead*: A Case Study in Generic Principles and Decentered Social Constructions**

The zombie could represent “laboring, enslaved colonial body, to a dual image of capitalist enslavement: the zombie now represents the new slave, the capitalist worker, but also the consumer, trapped within the ideological construct that ensures the survival of the system” (Lauro and Embry 99). Therefore, the zombified body can be read in a many ways, probably even more than are enumerated here, and thus, this topic, and by

connection the selected viewing of *The Walking Dead* is an storehouse of academic avenues for which critical thinking and evaluation can occur. Historically, the zombie “is a colonial import: it infiltrated the American cultural imagination in the early twentieth century”, at the time of the U.S. occupation of Haiti (Lauro and Embry). The fact that the concept of the risen dead is a result of the spread of culture of the African diaspora is another point of relation, reinforcing the pertinence of reading the series through a social (re)construction perspective.

“[In “The Comet”] Dubois is saying that the only way that race relations in American will ever be fixed is through a catastrophe that wipes out black and white people alike” (Yaszek 7). This statement provides a fertile point of initial reflection for this unit. *The Walking Dead* affords an amplified echo for the type of speculation set up in DuBois’ short story. When companioned, the series and the short story illustrate a world in which the standard social constructions of contemporary American society fade into extinction, while a new paradigm of power evolves from meritocratic virtues, such a courage, survivalist skill, extemporaneous decision making, logical and rational thinking and mental stability. In this new world order, mindfulness is the prioritized survival skill in the fallout of the zombie apocalypse, and by extension, economy of action is also prioritized value in the reformulated social construction of society in *The Walking Dead* (Goto-Jones). *The Walking Dead* is identified as: “one of the best meditations on society popular culture has yet produced: what do we need to become in order to protect the virtuous and the innocent?” (Moreman 5). In a similar way, this claim furthers the use of this series in order to create a mode of inquiry, in which students can examine and explore questions of social constructions and paradigm shifts. The two essential questions this exercise postulates are: (1) How are generic conventions maintained and violated in the post-apocalyptic world of *The Walking Dead*? and, (2) under what circumstances could the patriarchal white supremacist social structures be decentered and recreated?

*The Walking Dead* is an example of a social “fascination with the zombie” which is “a celebration of its immortality and a recognition of ourselves as enslaved to our bodies” (Lauro and Embry 88). This corporeal restriction is, perhaps, more complexly developed in the black and brown characters that live on the cusp of a paradigm shift in which physicality only recently becomes an impertinent consideration of social value. Similar anxieties are exploited in stock character types in the zombie narrative the same as in the African-American detective narrative, and the amplification of these anxieties, though different in modality, produce the same reactions: uncomfortability with the lingering on the edge of society, in case of the detective, or humanity, in the case interacting with zombified bodies; post-traumatic stress disorder; fighting and arranging social and personal dualities. Interestingly, in a discussion of the characterization of narratives of the undead, the zombie is described as “anticatharsis”, which is strikingly reminiscent of the discussion of the detective as a figure with trauma as a core psychological affectation (Lauro and Embry 91). There is also a rebuilding of society, which reimagine and reappropriate spaces for people to govern and control. This, among other more obvious



connections, illuminates the elements of science-fiction and Afrofuturism presented in the series.

From the opening of the television series, one of the major characters, Rick Grimes, searches to piece together an understanding of what it means to be in this new world. Rick is constantly seeking to find the answer to the central inquiry: What are the rules in this new world order? This is where the viewer first sees Rick in the mode of unwilling detective. However, by no means, is this the only instance, nor the only character that acts as sleuth. As much as the plot of *The Walking Dead* is about the infestation, it is also about the quest to uncover and/or possibly cure whatever unknown thing cause a human to turn into a zombie. In Season One, Rick, with his newly formed alliances, will attempt to understand and explain what has happened to civilization and humanity, as they know it. However, this journey continues all the way through the most current season, in which Abraham and his crew are determined to get Eugene to Washington, D.C., as he may be able to help uncover or piece together an explanation or cure for the contagion, thus providing a possible, though seemingly far-fetched, attempt at resolution to the horror of the mutation and destruction of modern civilization and humanity. As new alliances formed and new communities are uncovered, most of the characters take on role, varying from curious inquirer to furious investigator. In the new structure that is being resurrected from the ashes of society, as they knew it, all parties become detectives, navigating the physical and cultural world in which they now reside. *The Walking Dead* posits a worldview in which racialized experience becomes irrelevant and instead the remaining citizens of the world must find a new set of governing principles, focused on pragmatism and survivalism. We see interracial couplings and interactions between folks of all color, united under the pretense of survival, resurrection of civilized humanity and if possible, eradication of the unknown root cause of the “walker” infestation.

In this burgeoning society, new governing principles must be determined. Throughout the series, we see a rapid transition from characters attempting to use old social power paradigms and failing. One example of this is Merle using racial slurs against T-Dawg in Season One, Episode Two. This results not only in Merle’s dismemberment but also his exile from the group. In conscious and unconscious ways, the characters that have memory of the social constructions of the past, desperately attempt to cling to the former world, as they knew it, however, the series is very quick to destabilize these notions and posit that these constructions can no longer be functional in the new order that is being reconfigured.

By the end of Season Two, this newly formed society has already formed its own unique hierarchical structures. By exemplum, rationale and strategic thinking becomes prioritized. Superior hand combat skill also becomes a maximized ability and improves one’s functional value, in order to contribute to the group, but also to guard oneself. Darryl, in the same genetic memory of his brother Merle, takes a jab at the Asian character, Glen, playing upon former stereotypes of Asian-Americans. This racial

commentary only remains tolerated by benefit of Darryl's excellent tracking and hunting skill. In other words, he is given a pass on using outmoded racism because he is one of the biggest contributors to the new economy of value.

It is interesting to note, at the near simultaneous moment that Rick is poised as a voice of leadership and authority, he immediately destabilized from that pedestal as he confesses the death of Shane, in a controversial decision to murder a living member of the farm house community. At this same point in the plot line, a new character, a black female artfully wielding a katana, is introduced. The viewer will come to know her as Michonne, and her personal saga unfolds slowly, only after wearing a way an almost mute persona. These parallel moments signal a pivotal instance, which illustrates the value of skill; strategic thinking and rational thought become the paramount quality of leadership and authority in this post-apocalyptic society.

As the series progresses, the former societal values continue to unravel. It is almost a certainty that in the moments that groups of people attempt to reorganize themselves in the typical pre-apocalyptic arrangements will not last. Instead a new world order must be put in place, with a different societal structure and expectation.

The intersection of Afrofuturism and detective fiction and *The Walking Dead* are most pronounced in the close study of Michonne. Her role as detective in a science fiction apocalypse lends to her characterization as a figure of Afrofuturism in the series. She represents the re-appropriation of power from the normative social constructions, including, but not limited to those of race and gender, as well as an ideal model of the new paradigm of skill based valuation. In this representation, Michonne is embodying many tenets of the Afrofuturistic genre, such as existing in a reimagined space for a black body and also in her contribution to rewriting the narrative of what is signified by being a black female in (what remains of) America.

In the new social construction, Michonne has the highest factor of value as she is skillful with a katana, cool and calm on the exterior, naturally suspicious and inquiring, and an excellent detective, tracker and inferential decision maker. For example, her ability to create a cloaking mechanism with her disfigured zombie "pets" increase her chances of success and survival in this new world. Similarly, in social situation, Michonne inscrutable demeanor and even-keeled approach grants her the ability to float between the boundaries of social groups, much like the detective figure described previously.

Michonne is a "complex construction of a black female character", who, "although significant by virtue of the very presence...must be examined within [her] sociocritical contexts and from the standpoint of how they reimagine classically gendered horror movie constructions" (Brooks 467-468). Though Michonne is introduced as a "strong black woman" stereotype in her early appearances in Season Two, by the end of Season

Three she is developed from an outsider, scavenger figure to a highly value figure of rational, pragmatic authority. Michonne gains entry to Rick's group and the prison compound through the demonstration of her value by showing her skill in deflecting zombie attacks, as well as saving the life of one of the group members. As a woman, she demonstrates more value than any of the others in the group, because she can easily defend herself, and therefore, is even less of a burden on the group as a whole. Her social capital in the new world order is in the black for sure.

As she is brought into the fold, the viewer is able to slowly deconstruct Michonne's current façade to understand her sociocritical context, to echo Brooks' early admonition. Michonne "has quickly adapted to the new dangers of a world occupied by zombies, an adaptability Kirkman has heretofore associated only with his male characters" (Brooks 469). Though "Kirkman begins constructing Michonne as a racially gendered stereotype...he beings to complicate her characterization by allowing her explicitly to express vulnerability" as the seasons progress (Brooks 470). Michonne represents a decentering of the values, as well as direct beneficiary of the abandonment of the previous societal mores. In this Afrofuturistic mode, Michonne works as a vehicle for a reimagining of the placement of the black female body, which has historical been erased from literary works and interpretations.

Throughout Season Three and Four, the viewer receives small hints and peeks into the former life of Michonne, as a mother, a "lover", and a friend. It is evident that the persona she has assumed in the post-apocalyptic mode is a departure from her pre-infestation personality. Concurrent with the shift in the culture of power there is also a shift in personal potentiality for Michonne.

By the close of Season Five, Michonne is poised as a possible new leader of the group. As Rick, once again, descends into emotional distress, Michonne steps up as rational, sane and solid. The end of Episode 15, Rick has completely become destabilized, threatening residents with a gun after completing his own type of vigilant justice on a community member. As Rick becomes irrational and aggressive, Michonne swiftly punches him, knocking him out cold and preventing any further unreasonable behavior, for the moment. This moment is critical for Michonne in a power role as the rational counterperson to Rick's loss of sensibility. Also, a black woman acts in violence, and no one reacts in fearful, stereotypical way, nor remarks on the aggression of a black female. In this moment, she has proven her ability to be the sane, level figure of authority, separate and exclusive of her race or gender.

## **Strategies**

Integrating 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

*Google Classroom*

Google Classroom is a self-contained classroom feed, in which the teacher can post announcements, have students upload assignments and share electronic documents, links and much, much more. Each student in the School District of Philadelphia, as well as every teacher, has free access to this program. It is compatible with all operating systems and is also accessible via apps for Android and iPhone. While imperfect in some capacities, the interface is improving rapidly. This is an invaluable tool for teachers whose students have access to a device with Internet capability.

### *ThingLink*

ThingLink is a multimedia, interactive web based application that allows students to upload an image and create virtual annotations. ThingLink is one example of a multitude of these types of applications, which allow students to interact directly with pieces of art, photographs, primary source documents, etc.

### Non-Traditional Text Interpretation

Students in high school classrooms today are natives of the Information Age. This presupposes an understanding of reading and analysis that is never limited to the printed page. Any medium that conveys a story can be read, including television, photographs, video games and comic books. In particular, when using television as a vehicle for cultural analysis, three concepts are of importance to consider:

1. awareness of the constructed nature of representations in both print and visual media
2. knowledge about the economic and political context in which media messages are produced by a number of different institutions with specific objectives and goals
3. awareness and knowledge about the ways in which audiences construct meaning from messages and about the variety of processes of selecting, interpreting and making use of messages in various forms (Hobbs 10).

The cycle of the lessons described below address these considerations in their implementation and the critical lens through which the television show, *The Walking Dead*, will be viewed.

Also, watching television for education purpose creates an opportunity for student to hear model examples of spoken English, which increases the student's ability to inherently discern the sound of proper grammar (Tafari). Also, this type of engagement can spur further reading and analysis of mass media by the student through encouragement by creation of confidence and interest (Tafari 81).

## Notes and Information Organization

Kloze-Style notes provided a structured frame for students to have a guided listening experience during a brief lecture given by the teacher. On the left side of the notes, the main ideas of each section are summarized, with further detail provided on the right. It is recommended that the teacher dictates each section, followed by a student voice summary and brief discussion of the point outlined in the section previously provided. The fill-in-the-blank style is an easy and efficient way for students to take notes on a topic and its analysis in a guided and systematic manner.

Graphic organizers are an exceedingly popular method for students to visually layout and align what they learn. These organizers can be provided by the teacher as a photocopy, drawn on a board for a class creation or students can copy a template into their notebooks.

In addition, outline graphic organizers when writing observations and also when planning writing are an important element of informational organization. These practices will increase the concision and focus of language in student's essays.

For this unit in particular, three triangles (3: before/during/after) linked with arrows can be a simple way to students to take notes of power structures as they watch the selections designated to be used during Viewing Days. Another simple graphic organizer that may be of use for this unit could be a t-chart describing social constructions before and after the zombie apocalypse. These lesson enhancements can be simple created in student's notebooks via pen and paper. Often keeping it simple is the most beneficial way to get something done, graphic organizers included.

## Writing Workshop

Creating a space where students can create and revise a writing piece takes planning and preparation. Teambuilding exercises can be useful to make students comfortable with one another if a strong class dynamic does not already exist. After this tone has been set, students should feel comfortable reading and discussing each other's writing. They set up appointments, get feedback from multiple peers, and also mock score their classmates work. These activities reinforce understanding of the expectations of the assignment, allow students to model and see models of diverse variety of levels and styles of writing, and create a space for open dialogue about their work. Rubrics can be designed to satisfy individual school requirements and discussed and referenced before, during and after the writing assignment occurs.

## Classroom Activities

### Lesson 1: Kloze-Style Structured Notes on Genre

Students complete Kloze (fill-in-the-blank) style structured notes while listening to a brief lecture on the generic principles of detective and science fictions, as well as some basics on Afrofuturism. Notes worksheet provided in the Appendix.

After students take notes, they will be asked to generate examples and apply lens of generic principles to various movies and television series.

To close, students will complete Summary Poem Exit Ticket.

- Students select 10 key words to describe the generic principles of science and detective fiction
- Then, students compose a poem summarizing the genres incorporating their selected words
- Extra time? Hold an impromptu poetry slam

### Lesson 2: Walking Dead Viewing and Thought Experiment

<b>Key Episodes and/or Scenes</b>		
<b>Season, Episode</b>	<b>Scene</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Season 2, Episode 13	Final two minutes of the episode	This is the first moment we see Michonne in the series. Preview and discuss. This is an excellent place for students to make predictions/inferences
Season 3, Episode 4	Entire episode or fast-forward through to scene with Michonne, if time is a concern	Michonne in the role of detective investigating the new encampment of Woodbury and their leader, The Governor
Season 3, Episode 14	Cold open only	Pieces of Michonne's past and role in the pre-apocalyptic world begin to surface.
Season 4, Episode 9	Entire episodes or selected scenes with Michonne	Michonne is continually being revealed as a tortured character with a complex past
Season 4, Episode 11	Middle of episode, scenes with Carl and Michonne	Elements of Michonne maternal instincts and compassion begin to show
Season 5, Episode 12	Interview with Deanna and subsequent appointment of Michonne and Rick as joint constables of Alexandria Safe Zone	Deanna as female leader of Alexandria Safe Zone is an interesting social role. Rick, a white male, and Michonne, a black female, share roles of power.

Season 5, Episode 13	Entire episode	Michonne assumes a role of power over Rick, though both she and Rick have been deputized. Michonne is portrayed as in control and stable, whereas Rick is has become illogical and dramatically emotional.
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Students view selections from the specified episodes, listed in the chart above, in order, over the course of a week. This period is known as “Viewing Days”. While viewing, students will complete graphic organizers (differentiated by teacher for the needs and abilities of students) to summarize and analyze each episode and the social constructions therein. Suggestions for simple graphic organizers are provided under

At the end of each of the Viewing Day, student will complete a journal entry via Google Form, in which they record their own observations and reactions of the episode.

After completing the Viewing Days period, students will use their analyses to complete a Speculative Writing Thought Experiment, addressing the prompt: *What conditions would have to arise in the US in order for our entire social construction paradigm to be reconfigured?*

Using paragraph planner graphic organizers and paragraph chunking techniques, students will create a draft of their response to the prompt, incorporating evidence from their viewing notes.

Students will then workshop their essays with each other, completing writing checklists and glow/grow feedback t-chart

### Lesson 3: Art Analysis and Speculation Writing Workshop

If students have access to Internet enabled devices, direct them go to the website: [http://www.lorinix.net/the\\_city/index.html](http://www.lorinix.net/the_city/index.html)

If Internet devices are not available, the teacher can print out copies of each picture in advance, or project the images on the screen and complete the activity as a class.

Students will view Nix’s photos of deserted urban landscapes. After completing a ThingLink Art Analysis Annotation (procedure and purpose explained in Strategies section above), students will complete a creative story about an object or outside observer of their favorite photo.

The following day, as an opener, student should meet with others who wrote about the same picture they chose. Students will share-out creative stories, then turn their attention to comparing apocalyptic potentiality in the photos and in *The Walking Dead*.

#### Lesson 4: Writing Workshop - Comets vs. Zombies

After completing *The Walking Dead* viewing activities, Students will read W.E.B. Du Bois' short story "The Comet" and complete Venn diagram comparing the principles of speculative and detective fiction in the two very different considerations of the place of African-Americans in a post-apocalyptic society. After all students have read, a seminar style discussion should be held, in which students discuss the similarities and differences of the two narratives they have examined. As further extension, students could write a constructed response, comparing and contrasting the social construction of the two societies discussed.



## **Annotated Bibliography of Resources**

### Resources for Teachers

"African American Science Fiction." *Ethnic American Literature*. Ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson. ABC-CLIO, 43-46. Print.

This encyclopedic entry effectively summarizes and provides a concise description of some of the hallmarks of the genre of Afrofuturism.

Brooks, Kinitra D. "The Importance of Neglected Intersections: Race and Gender in Contemporary Zombie Texts and Theories." *African American Review* Winter 47.4 (2014): 461-75. *Project Muse*. Web. 1 Apr. 2015.

Brooks defines and uncovers spaces for black female bodies in the proliferation of zombie texts in contemporary culture.

Butler, Octavia E. *Kindred*. Boston: Beacon, 2003. Print.

In *Kindred*, the protagonist finds herself being sucked back into time to help the family of Southern planters that owned her people generations before. Weaving historical knowledge, science fiction and social commentary, Butler's novel is a page-turner with a refined, academic sensibility.

Crooks, Robert. "From the Far Side of the Urban Frontier: The Detective Fiction of Chester Himes and Walter Mosley." *College Literature* 22.3, Race and

Politics: The Experience of African-American Literature (1995): 68-90.

*JSTOR*. Web. 01 Apr. 2015.

Crooks examine the urban and racial landscapes of the novels of Chester Himes and Walter Mosley.

English, Daylanne K. "The Modern in the Postmodern: Walter Mosley, Barbara Neely, and the Politics of Contemporary African-American Detective Fiction."

*American Literary History* 18.4 (2006): 772-96. *JSTOR*. Web. 01 Apr. 2015.

English works toward defining the postmodern detective genre thorough an examination of the detective characters Easy Rawlins and Blanche White.

Eshun, Kodwo. "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism." *CR: The New Centennial*

*Review* 3.2 (2003): 287-302. *Project MUSE*. Web. 1 Apr. 2015.

A foundational text on the genre of Afrofuturism, Eshun posits the hallmarks of the genre as centered on a desire to create and identify a diasporic African historical and cultural identity.

Goto-Jones, Chris. "Zombie Apocalypse as Mindfulness Manifesto (after Žižek)."

*Postmodern Culture* 24.1 (2013): n. pag. *Project MUSE*. Web. 1 Apr. 2015.

Goto-Jones conjectures that the quality of mindfulness will be the most valued skill in a post-apocalyptic zombie-infested world.

Hobbs, Renee. "Teaching with and about Film and Television: Integrating Media Literacy Concepts into Management Education." (1998): 1-17. *ERIC*. Web. 1 May 2015.

Hobbs explains the pros and cons of using television as an instructional tool and creates a framework with which to approach analyzing and discussing television that is selected for instructional use.

Lauro, Sarah Juliet, and Karen Embry. "The Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism." *Boundary 2* Spring 35.1 (2005): 85-108. Print.

The *Zombie Manifesto* is an introductory work on the generic contextualization of the proliferation of zombie narratives in contemporary society. The authors explain that reading the zombie as a metaphor response provides a framework to approach the overwhelming popularity of the theme.

Lock, Helen. "Invisible Detection: The Case of Walter Mosley." *MELUS* 26.1 (2001): 77-89. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 May 2015.

Lock identifies the elements and contexts of the characters in Walter Mosley's characters. Lock claims the racialized experiences of black bodies are capitalized upon and defined by Mosley in his novels.

Moreman, Christopher M., and Corey James Rushton, eds. *Zombies Are Us: Essays on the Humanity of the Walking Dead*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011. *Google Books*. 21 Sept. 2011. Web. 1 Apr. 2015.

A varied collection of philosophical essays on the interest, involvement, and speculation of zombie narratives and our society.

Mosley, Walter. *Devil in a Blue Dress*. New York: Norton, 1990. Print.

*Devil in a Blue Dress* is the first book in the now infamous Easy Rawlins detective fiction series. This novel introduces Easy, Mouse and other key characters that will develop over the course of the serialization. The psychology of the African-American detective is made explicit here through the characterization of Rawlins provided by Mosley.

Smith, Darryl A. "Droppin' Science Fiction: Signification and Singularity in the Metapocalypse of Du Bois, Baraka, and Bell." *Science Fiction Studies* Afrofuturism 34.2 (2007): 201-19. *JSTOR*. Web. 01 Apr. 2015.

This article is useful for this course of study only in that it has some discussion on critical viewpoints of Du Bois' The Comet, which is a suggested comparative text to The Walking Dead in this unit.

Tafari, Vilma. "Teaching English Through Mass Media." *Acta Didactica Napocensia* 2.1 (2009): 81-95. Print.

The author discusses various sources of mass media, the importance of this type of non-traditional textual study and suggestions for lesson planning and activity implementation.

Yaszek, Lisa. "Race in Science Fiction: The Case of Afrofuturism and New Hollywood."

*A Virtual Introduction to Science Fiction*. Ed. Lars Schmeink. Web. 2013. 1-11.

Yasek constructs an argument for the intersection of race and science fiction. She identifies some generic principles of Afrofuturism and traces the history of the genre from the 1920s to the present.

#### Resources for the Classroom

Adlard, Charlie, Frank Darabont, Robert Kirkman, and Tony Moore. "Seasons 1 - 5." *The Walking Dead*. AMC. 2010 -. Television.

The award-winning, virally popular television series *The Walking Dead* imagines a future world, where a zombie infestation has overtaken the reachable world.

Du Bois, W.E.B. "The Comet." *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*. Ed. Sheree R. Thomas. New York: Warner, 2000. 5-18.

Print.

A 1920 short story, which paints an apocalyptic vision of a thriving New York City sedated by the gaseous fumes of a passing comet. Two survivors, a white

woman and a black man, meet by chance. Du Bois' narrative magnifies the anxieties of the time period about race and also social norms. This text is an anchor to this unit and one of the earliest examples of Afrofuturistic writing.

Nix, Lori. 2013. The City, [Http://www.lorinix.net/the\\_city/index.html](http://www.lorinix.net/the_city/index.html). Lori Nix: The City. Lori Nix. Web. 5 Apr. 2015.

Lori Nix is a contemporary photographer who specializes projects with themes of desolation and the erosion of civilization by nature. Her project, The City, examines scenes of visualized destruction in a post-civilized society.

"ThingLink: Make Your Images Interactive." Thinglink. Web. 01 Apr. 2015.

An interactive multimedia annotation web-based platform used to annotate and digitally interact with photos and primary source documents

## **Appendix**

Generic Conventions Kloze-Style Structured Notes Worksheet and Key

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Structured Notes: Generic Principles of Afrofuturism and Black Detective Fictions

**BIG IDEAS**

**NOTES**

### 1. Summary#

(Students read/summarize/share-out)

Detective Fiction:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Afrofuturism:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Black Detective Fiction#

a) Detective fiction is about the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_.

b) Crimes happen when \_\_\_\_\_ are \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_ detectives are often \_\_\_\_\_. Many detectives are \_\_\_\_\_ in some way.

d) Detectives can \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to criminality and vice. The African-American detective specifically considers \_\_\_\_\_.

### 1. Summary

African-American detective and science fiction have some features specifically concerned with black characters, their communities and histories. Detective fiction seeks to make sense of the world and science fiction speculates upon the anxieties of the current society. Both genres provide thrilling and engaging stories, which also provide a critical lens through which the participant views and interacts with their world.

### 2. African-American Detective Fictions

a) Detective fiction is concerned with the understanding the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_, who, like the criminal, toes the threshold of the \_\_\_\_\_ and is able to stare into the abyss yet come away \_\_\_\_\_.

b) \_\_\_\_\_ are \_\_\_\_\_, with lack of \_\_\_\_\_ for the \_\_\_\_\_ that govern their \_\_\_\_\_. Crime occurs whenever a \_\_\_\_\_, be it between the boundaries of governance, class, race or physical locale, is \_\_\_\_\_.

c) Often, in particular reference to African-American detective characters the detective is \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ a sleuth by \_\_\_\_\_. Additionally, by nature detectives are themselves \_\_\_\_\_ figures; there is a locus of \_\_\_\_\_ in their own \_\_\_\_\_. Through our modern understandings of \_\_\_\_\_, many of these gumshoes may be characterized as suffering from \_\_\_\_\_.

d) The detective works from a place of \_\_\_\_\_, often battling their own \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_. The detective in this mode recognizes the capability in every human for evil; he just understands that the difference between a \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ is the \_\_\_\_\_ to curb this \_\_\_\_\_. The African-American detective often understands the \_\_\_\_\_ motivations of \_\_\_\_\_ of those he/she seeks.



### 3.#Afrofuturism#

a) American history is \_\_\_\_\_.

b) The genre is concerned about the idea of “\_\_\_\_\_”

c) Specifically, \_\_\_\_\_ hopes to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ a place for the \_\_\_\_\_ of African-American, as well as an imagined \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_

d) Afrofuturism seeks to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ problems of our \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Afrofuturism: Speculative African- American Fiction

a) From the infant years of the United States, the social narrative of Africans in America circumscribes the body of the African-American as something other than \_\_\_\_\_, quite literally claiming these persons to be only \_\_\_\_\_ human. Upon this consideration, much of the rhetorical and narrative constructions in the history of America are based on \_\_\_\_\_ African-Americans as \_\_\_\_\_. It seems only natural that the generic mode of \_\_\_\_\_ is suitable for speculation about the involvement of blacks in an \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

b) Also, the genre elicits a discussion of \_\_\_\_\_, where shifts in what a society holds important have happened, usually due to some \_\_\_\_\_. The postulation of “\_\_\_\_\_” looms over fiction of this genre.

c) Much of black science fiction, sometimes referred to as \_\_\_\_\_, is concerned with “\_\_\_\_\_” and \_\_\_\_\_ of history paired with the decentering of the white Eurocentric \_\_\_\_\_ of history allows a place for racial social constructions can be destroyed and a new meritocratic structure can replace the old.

d) Overall the genre challenges \_\_\_\_\_ of what it means to be \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_. Science fiction reflects a \_\_\_\_\_ that is present in our society; a desire to shift cultural \_\_\_\_\_.

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Structured Notes: Generic Principles of Afrofuturism and Black Detective Fictions

**BIG IDEAS**

**NOTES**

### 1. #Summary#

(Students read/summarize/share-out)

Detective Fiction:

Afrofuturism:

### 2. #Black#Detective#Fiction#

a) Detective fiction is about the crime and the detection of the criminal.

b) Crimes happen when borders are crossed

c) African-American detectives are often non-traditional. Many detectives are psychologically tortured in some way.

d) Detectives can understand and relate to criminality and vice. The African-American detective specifically considers social constructions.

### 1. Summary

African-American detective and science fiction have some features specifically concerned with black characters, their communities and histories. Detective fiction seeks to make sense of the world and science fiction speculates upon the anxieties of the current society. Both genres provide thrilling and engaging stories, which also provide a critical lens through which the participant views and interacts with their world.

### 2. African-American Detective Fictions

a) Detective fiction is concerned with the understanding the navigations of the criminal and the detective, who, like the criminal, toes the threshold of the criminal underworld and is able to stare into the abyss yet come away unharmed.

b) Criminals are intruders, with lack of consideration for the rules that govern their society. Crime occurs whenever a border, be it between the boundaries of governance, class, race or physical locale, is violated.

c) Often, in particular reference to African-American detective characters the detective is unlicensed, unwilling, and not a sleuth by profession. Additionally, by nature detectives are themselves damaged figures; there is a locus of trauma in their own personal history. Through our modern understandings of psychology, many of these gumshoes may be characterized as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

d) The detective works from a place of empathy, often battling their own demons and desire for vice. The detective in this mode recognizes the capability in every human for evil; he just understands that the difference between a citizen and a criminal is the inability to curb this impulse. The African-American detective often understands the socially constructed motivations of actions of those he/she seeks.

### 3.#Afrofuturism#

a) American history is science fiction.

b) The genre is concerned about the idea of “what-if”

c) Specifically, Afrofuturism hopes to reconstruct and reclaim a place for the history of African-American, as well as an imagined future space of freedom

d) Afrofuturism seeks to illuminate and answer problems of our current society

### 3 .Afrofuturism: Speculative African- American Fiction

a) From the infant years of the United States, the social narrative of Africans in America circumscribes the body of the African-American as something other than human, quite literally claiming these persons to be only 3/5ths human. Upon this consideration, much of the rhetorical and narrative constructions in the history of America are based on positioning African-Americans as Other. It seems only natural that the generic mode of science fiction is suitable for speculation about the involvement of blacks in an altered or distant future.

b) Also, the genre elicits a discussion of value, where shifts in what a society holds important have happened, usually due to some disaster. The postulation of “what-if” looms over fiction of this genre.

c) Much of black science fiction, sometimes referred to as Afrofuturism, is concerned with “counter memory” and reconstruction of history paired with the decentering of the white Eurocentric interpretations of history allows a place for racial social constructions can be destroyed and a new meritocratic structure can replace the old.

d) Overall the genre challenges perceptions of what it means to be black and a member of society. Science fiction reflects a desire that is present in our society; a desire to shift cultural expectations.