

BEYOND THE BASICS WITH BAKHTIN:
A DIALOGICAL LOOK AT MARKUS ZUSAK'S

THE BOOK THIEF

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Beyond the Basics with Bakhtin:

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In this paper, I propose a means of scaffolding the many layers of language study using a form of stylistic pedagogy informed by a Bakhtinian Dialogic approach to education.

I will explore the idea of close reading and mentor text, informed by Mikhael Bakhtin's Dialogical Pedagogy. The focus will be on teaching grammar, rhetoric, and language through close reading of Markus Zusak's novel *The Book Thief*. Beginning with a study of word choice and moving up in increments to phrases, sentences, figurative language and rhetoric, the unit culminates in thematic understanding of the novel: the power of language. The second half of the project is a curriculum unit plan in the format required by many school districts. This plan includes essential questions, enduring understandings, instructional strategies and learning targets that are aligned with Core Curriculum Standards, interdisciplinary connections. The curriculum is broken down into four separate lesson plans, which include suggested accommodations and

modifications for differentiated instruction. I have provided supplemental materials such as formative and summative assessments and activities.

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Part I – Pedagogy

Introduction

It is a national concern that students are graduating from high school with skills that are not commensurate with the expectations that are, necessarily, assumed in most colleges. Writing skills and reading comprehension are at the top of the list of deficits, and high school teachers are under scrutiny to rectify this malady, and do it quickly. There is a wealth of pedagogical articles, books, and studies lamenting this shortcoming of our schools, and an equal number of initiatives and workshops offered at the taxpayer's expense to instruct teachers in methodologies which are designed to create avid readers and articulate writers, and culminate in achievement on high-stakes tests such as the HSPA ¹ or other state tests and the SAT.

Educational Reform

In 1981, because of rising concerns about the nation's falling rank in terms of education, Secretary of Education T. H. Bell charged a committee with the task of researching the state of education in the United States. The resulting report, "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform,"² set in motion a continuous series of programs and initiatives with the sole intent of putting the United States back at the forefront of the globe in terms of education, and in turn, of progress and economics. An aftermath is various incarnations of competitive agencies who peddle programs which are promised to benefit the students of the nation. At the 1996 National Education Summit, Governor Thompson of Wisconsin compared the U.S. global educational rankings to the Olympics: "Imagine the reaction if our Olympic athletes were able to finish no better than 13th or 14th this summer in Atlanta. That's about where we are in education. Our Olympic athletes have standards by which to measure their success. Many of our schools don't have standards" (A Review 7). At this point, the government became more heavily involved in effecting educational reform, resulting in the implementation of the Core Curriculum Standards which drive curricula in most states today.

Starting in 1997, an organization called Programme for International Student Assessment (or PISA), which was organized by the global Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (or OECD), began testing groups of 15 year olds every three years, and ranking results by country. In these surveys, the United States has never ranked in the top ten, and in 2012 dropped to 17th in reading, 24th in science, and 31st in math. As a result, there has been an even more fervent movement for change in education to bring the US back to the top, resulting in mandated bills which govern the educational

practices in schools. Some of these bills include the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the institution of Core Curriculum Standards (CCS)³. Lawmakers and business leaders have become involved, and agree with the Department of Education that in order to stay competitive in a global economy, as well as to rise above mediocrity, our country needs to “raise academic standards, and expand testing and accountability systems to provide better data and stronger incentives for higher student achievement” (Summits). The systems, including an overhaul of teacher evaluation and the actual mandate of the Core Curriculum Standards, have been created and are being instituted in most states at the time of this writing.

Committees and sub-committees of educators, administrators, and business leaders were commissioned to create this body of educational standards that would become the requirement for public education. Through many drafts, feedback, and revisions, the final version was published in 2010. The Validation Committee published its final report, indicating satisfaction that these standards would indeed give public educators in the United States the tools needed to bring our skill level back up to a globally competitive level. The committee’s report stated that “the Common Core State Standards represent what American students need to know and do to be successful in college and careers” (Common Core State Standards). According to the introduction of the published standards, they are based on research and data regarding student performance, aligned with college and work expectations, rigorous, and internationally benchmarked.

The English Language Arts Standards include grade-specific objectives in the areas of Reading (both literature and informational text), Writing (including argument,

informative/expository, narrative, analytical, and research), Speaking and Listening (including collaborative and individual presentations), Language (grammar and usage, conventions of capitalization, punctuation and spelling, language function including word choice and variation of syntax, acquisition of vocabulary, interpretation of figurative language, and acquisition of academic and domain-specific words and phrases)[Common Core State Standards]. Explicit directions in measuring text complexity are given in the standards to ensure that the classroom teacher maintains the rigorous expectations of the standards. Districts across the nation have adopted these standards, and both individual educators as well as districts will be evaluated based on the data collected through the standardized quarterly benchmark tests that will be mandated by each state.

Based on these standards, there is clearly a challenge for the secondary school language arts teacher to successfully incorporate all aspects of such a rigorous curriculum. The overcrowding of classrooms due to budget cuts and staff reductions as well as an emphasis on more student-centered and differentiated instruction⁴ creates a daunting task for even a veteran teacher. What is a good way to incorporate all of these skills into a curriculum that does not seem to want to accept literature and story for the sake of story? And how can students and teachers share experiences that will make a more meaningful impact, as well as support the necessary skills that will be tested? A logical answer to this dilemma of teaching multiple skills in a short amount of time is to teach a novel through the practice of close reading - introducing textual analysis that integrates the literary and cultural aspect of a text while reinforcing grammatical and rhetorical approaches.

Close Reading

Close reading⁵ is a way of reading that helps the reader to fully comprehend a short section of any kind of text, including non-fiction, poetry, and novels. It allows students to interact with the text, deepening meaning and facilitating inferential thinking; exactly the goals of the Core Curriculum Standards. According to Dr. Douglas Fisher, Professor of Language and Literacy Education in the Department of Teacher Education at San Diego University, close reading is a “careful and purposeful re-reading of a text.” He suggests providing text-dependent questions that require the students to go back into the text to find answers, but also to make the readers begin to think about what the author is saying and how he says it. It is meant to be a metacognitive⁶ activity, one that causes readers to actually interact intellectually with the text. In his interview with McGraw-Hill, Dr. Fisher indicates that students who learn how to be successful at close reading will in turn be successful on the rigorous new assessments that align with the Core Curriculum Standards. The standards require that students provide “evidence and justification” for their answers. This kind of reading encourages students to “really think about what the author said, and compare that with what they know, what they believe, and what they think” (Fisher). The practice makes logical sense, but the challenge lies in finding a text of the right complexity that will also be enjoyable enough to engage the least motivated students.

By using a text that has a high interest level, an approachable lexile,⁷ and is stylistically sophisticated, a teacher could comprehensively meet all of the required learning targets. In addition, the students can be effectively engaged in a dialogic environment, effectively encouraging cooperative and discursive learning. In this paper, I

propose a means of scaffolding the many layers of language study using a form of stylistic pedagogy informed by a Bakhtinian approach to education. I will explain this approach, suggest the text, *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak, and give examples of the kinds of lessons that will scaffold language learning, working from the basics of word choice, building to syntax and grammar choices, then rhetorical and figurative language, and finally theme. This approach focuses on students' interaction with the text, with each other, and with the instructor in order to create deeper understanding of the choices an author makes at every level of a work and culminates in application of the lessons learned through writing. Following this explanatory essay, I include a curriculum unit plan that follows the current Core Curriculum Standards, individual lessons that can be tailored to the individual classroom to meet the needs of a diverse student population; and finally, worksheets, assessments, and activities that can also be adapted to the needs of the classroom teacher.

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak is a novel with all of the necessary qualifications: high interest, medium lexile range, and very distinct and recognizable grammatical, rhetorical, and literary style. This novel passes the complexity test required by the three factors mandated in the Core Curriculum Standards. Qualitatively, it has complex levels of meaning, it has recognizable yet innovative structure, and is appropriately demanding. Quantitatively, the lexile is measured at 730L, which falls within an acceptable grade level range. This means that it is in the middle of the range from second to third and 11-12th grade reading levels (The Lexile). Finally, it contains acceptable reader variables and task variables, which satisfies the requirement of

matching the reader to the text and task, which will meet the needs of the struggling student but will not bore the advanced student. (Common Core Standards 57).

The lessons will start with close reading and analysis, which encourages interaction between the text and students. In addition, lessons engaging the whole class emphasize the linguistic choices in grammar and rhetoric which have developed and defined the author's style. The goal is to promote the fusion of the teaching of reading with the teaching of writing, thus encouraging students to make their own choices through imitation and discussion, and ultimately to create their own style and voice. Too often, students are given a text that is presented as "classic literature," but are not invited to view the work in terms of the combination of components which make it "classic."

Traditional pedagogy in secondary school language arts promotes the teaching of vocabulary, grammar, writing, and literature in isolated sections. In the past few decades, there has been a movement to integrate these components in order to create a more meaningful experience in language acquisition and mastery for students. In addition, this movement has served to promote students' understanding of the power of words and language at its most basic, as well as building the skills necessary to become articulate adults. Secondary school English teachers are entering a challenging time period, in which expected outcomes and accountability for student performance are becoming more strenuous, as I pointed out in my explanation of the new standards. However, many students enter high school with reading abilities that fall below grade level. In my experience as a high school English teacher, most of these students have been conditioned to approach vocabulary study and writing in a formulaic way, mainly in preparation for standardized tests. According to the new standards, schools will be

required to produce data for the purpose of measurement of student growth and teacher effectiveness. In my district, pretests are given, and data is collected at the beginning of the school year. District created standardized benchmark tests on vocabulary and reading skills are given quarterly, and teachers must collect and analyze data regularly, creating student growth objectives that must be measured and reviewed each marking period. The skills that are tested are dependent upon the students' willingness to attempt to improve, and that is the prevailing factor that creates one of the biggest obstacles for the classroom teacher. This speaks to the challenge of why the choice of a teaching text is so important. In addition to reading and vocabulary, students are also expected to show growth in their writing, specifically in their ability to write persuasive and argument essays, showing proficiency in supporting their assertions by using textual evidence.

Creativity and the opportunity for students to recognize and employ innovative use of language seem to be the lowest areas of importance in the proscribed standards. Many students come to high school with a deficit in their ability to recognize what makes a sentence effective, which increases the challenge for improvement and decreases the opportunity for creativity. Retention of grammar and syntax as it applies to writing instruction is almost non-existent, although it is a prominent part of elementary school and middle school Language Arts curriculum. This deficit in language skills places high school teachers at a disadvantage as they try to meet the standards, which are based on the assumption that students enter high school having mastered these basic skills. Clearly there is a disconnect between the acquisition of writing skills and the isolated approach, but how does one attempt to reinforce knowledge of what has been taught but forgotten, without starting over again from the bare basics? How can one re-teach these skills, and

also cover the required curriculum and prepare students for standardized summative tests that measure specific skills? A possible answer to these frustrating questions lies in the application of the theory of *dialogic pedagogy*,⁸ based on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin.

Bakhtin's Dialogic Pedagogy

Bakhtin was born in a Russian town near Moscow in 1895, was classically educated, and was affected and influenced deeply by the Bolshevik Revolution. Late in his life, his work became acknowledged and published, and he is widely respected as an influential member of the group of literary critical theorists known as the Russian formalists. He is best known for his work regarding the novel, but also for his emphasis on an “interactive and responsive inquiry approach” to the study of grammar and stylistics (Skukauskaitė 59). Although during his lifetime Bakhtin suffered persecution and arrest for his “Socratic crime of corrupting youth through his teachings,” his pedagogical theory has been revisited recently and “inform(s) current scholarship in linguistics, discourse, theory, and literary theory” (Halasek1). In her study on the teaching of composition entitled *A Pedagogy of Possibility; Bakhtinian Perspectives on Composition Studies*, Kay Halasek frames a discussion of Bakhtin’s dialogic principles and the implications of his work on the current call for “student-centered pedagogies, growing emphasis on multicultural education for an increasingly diverse student population, and poststructuralist understanding of language”(3). This dialogic interaction not only creates a democratic feeling in the classroom, but also incorporates the core curriculum standard of Speaking and Listening.

Traditional teaching methods center on one particular skill at a time, with the instructor giving a rule and the student attempting to remember, identify, and use it. Bakhtin identifies this traditional approach as a *monologized*⁹ pedagogical dialogue, where “someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error” (Bakhtin *Problems* 81). This approach only allows for the acquisition of

knowledge to be one-sided – imparted from the instructor to the student. Bakhtin was critical of the traditional practice of a teacher/student relationship in which the teacher is the ultimate authority, provides all of the answers, and never learns anything from his students. Instead, Bakhtin promoted dialogism, a pedagogy in which “the teacher does not look for a student’s errors but rather learns from the student how the student sees the world and him/herself. Disagreements between the student and the teacher are valued, respected, and expected.” (Matusov 7). Bakhtin believes that the truth can be discovered only through dialogics: “Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (Bakhtin *Problems* 110).

In the current educational world of student-centered¹⁰ learning initiatives, Bakhtin’s discursive approach encourages an environment in which students can claim ownership of what they are taught, which contributes not only to significant learning, but also to classroom management. Students who feel that they are respected contributors to what is happening in their classroom are more willing to help the class run smoothly by being attentive and engaged. Rather than being told to read a text and intuit what the author’s purpose or meaning is, students are provided with tools to interact with the text, validating original ideas and opinions. This is “emphasizing intertextuality with (Russian) literature and the student’s writing. Grammar, then, becomes a social and individual meaning-making activity...” (Godley 55-6). Students gain independence and confidence when they are given the autonomy to draw their own conclusions.

If we are to teach students to interact with text, engaging their own thoughts and ideas as they read, we must rid ourselves of the notion of what Bakhtin calls *authoritative*

*text*¹¹. Bakhtin's dialogic approach requires the teacher of language arts, and through this teacher, the reader or student, to abandon a preconceived attitude to reading a text. This attitude is what he calls the "authorial monologue" or "authoritative text" (Bakhtin *Dialogic Imagination* 274). Students are conditioned to approach reading with reverence and awe toward the author's meaning and purpose, which eliminates any original and creative thoughts that may occur during the reading. We are taught to analyze or interpret a text, but we are not invited into an internal dialogue with the text (Halasek 122). This separation of reader and text "implicates readers in their own disempowerment, an act through which readers in effect *will* their right of sovereignty to the author, the expert..." (123). In contrast, Kay Halasek draws the comparison that informs the approach to teaching *The Book Thief* which I will shortly address: the practice of "reading actively and treating texts not as authoritative but as internally persuasive," which empowers students to generate their own meaning and understanding (123). When students read with internally persuasive discourse, they gain ownership and validation of their own ideas, which in turn may engender creativity.

In order to utilize Bakhtin's dialogic theory and create success in the teaching of grammar and writing, we will need to examine the importance of the connection between grammar and style. Bakhtin opens his essay, "Dialogic Origin and Dialogic Pedagogy of Grammar," by stating that "One cannot study grammatical forms without constantly considering their stylistic significance. When grammar is isolated from the semantic and stylistic aspects of speech, it inevitably turns into scholasticism" (12). While teachers are admonished by supervisors and educational experts not to teach grammar "in isolation" and to provide contextual significance for students, the reality is, as Bakhtin has

recognized, that “the instructor very rarely provides, or is capable of providing, any sort of stylistic interpretation of the grammatical forms he covers in class” (12).

Understanding style as a result of grammatical choices that an author makes combines compositional study with grammar. As a student discovers, on his own and in dialogue with his classmates, exactly what effect the grammatical principle being taught creates in a selected example of text, he begins to understand the logical relationship between that principle or form and the meaning it conveys. Taking this principle one step further, if a student is asked to examine an author’s sentence closely, encouraging the internally persuasive and dialogic method of close reading, he may begin to understand and appreciate the style and voice of the author. It would logically follow, through targeted lessons, that students would be able to incorporate the methods used by the author in their own writing, creating a basis for their own style and voice. In the lessons provided in part two of this paper, there are activities that correspond to each grammar lesson which allow the students to experiment with their own language use, targeting the specified skill. According to Bakhtin, “teaching syntax without providing stylistic elucidation and without attempting to enrich the students’ own speech lacks any creative significance and does not help them improve the creativity of their own speech productions, merely teaching them to identify the parts of ready-made language produced by others” (15). Bakhtin emphasizes the importance of teaching grammar and syntax with the purpose in mind of allowing students to employ the language lessons they have learned.

Many English teachers are unable to answer complicated grammatical questions themselves, which causes them to shy away from a dialogic approach, and they may rely

on prescriptive rules in explaining to students why a specific grammatical or syntactical choice is made. Sometimes, a student who questions the logical nature of a compositional rule makes the instructor, who has only a cursory understanding of the rule himself, uncomfortable, which would cause the instructor to avoid such situations and thereby miss out on valuable teaching opportunities. In a dialogic pedagogical situation, the mutual respect and understanding of discursive exchange of ideas would allow the student to learn from not only the author, whose work is being explicated, but also the teacher and his peers. In addition, the instructor would also benefit from the student's insight and inquiry, understanding the thought processes of his students, who would benefit in this type of inclusive approach to teaching.

Bakhtin gives an example of how this practice would work in a classroom, teaching the use of the syntactical construction parataxis. He uses two single examples, one from Pushkin and one from Gogol, whose works the class had read previously. He starts by reading the sentences aloud, exaggerating and using facial expressions and gestures in order to "reinforce its inherent drama" (16). After some discussion, he suggests that the instructor help the students to deconstruct the sentence, rearrange it into other grammatical possibilities, and, through interactive discussion that should be student driven, help the students to reach the appropriate conclusions regarding the construction that is being analyzed.

Reinforcement and application exercises can be incorporated after the concept has been explained and discussed. Bakhtin checked the original sentences his students wrote, and followed up with discussions in class that were "lively and interesting disputes" (22). Because the students had been engaged in the close reading and deconstruction of the

text, they became more interested and invested. Bakhtin reports that the “structure of the students’ language improved significantly” (22). He notes in conclusion that students are successful with this type of grammar instruction, with the caveat that the lessons should be interactive and student driven. This type of lesson is exactly what the educational innovators behind the Core Curriculum Standards are looking for: instead of a teacher dictating a grammatical rule, students, through interaction with the text, each other, and the instructor, come to understand and apply the rule in their own writing. This instructional formula can be applied to any grammatical or rhetorical construction that the instructor would like to emphasize. The instructor would be able to tailor the elements to be examined and taught based on the makeup or academic level of the class, what compositional skills need work, or what time constraints are in place. This type of activity is included in each of the lessons found in Part II. In order to effectively implement Bakhtinian dialogics in the classroom, choosing effective mentor texts is imperative.

Although not a new practice, the use of published works by successful and innovative writers for teaching writing in the dialogic classroom is the key to this approach. English teachers have intuitively done this for many years. For example, while teaching a well-written novel, a teacher may stop the class and examine a particular image the author has created, or point out a unique choice of verb. Most students recognize and admire precise and beautiful word pairings or even sentences. However, if the lesson stops at admiration, a teachable moment has been lost. In examining and engaging students in a true dialogue, where both parties listen to and assimilate what is said, the door can be opened to a multitude of lessons generated from one close reading.

Grammar, rhetoric, vocabulary, point of view, figurative language - all can be taught and understood through the use of one well articulated phrase, sentence, paragraph, page, or work.

Sample pieces of writing that can be used in multiple ways for the teaching of reading and writing are usually referred to as “mentor texts”¹² or, interchangeably, “touchstone texts.” It is unclear exactly where the phrase originated, but it has become an educational buzzword in recent decades. Of course, any piece of writing can be used. There was once a school of thought that used sentences, paragraphs, or even whole essays that were filled with errors, requiring students to edit and revise the incorrectly written piece. There are still those who subscribe to this practice, but recently, educational attention has been drawn to the use of stylistically superior or innovative writing styles in order to teach writing. In this way, the students’ attention is drawn to superior writing rather than emphasizing errors. In studying the modes of discourse and teaching students to write for particular purposes that are delineated in the core standards such as narrative, persuasive, and expository, teachers actively seek specific types of mentor texts.

The text is required to meet the Core Standard rigor and complexity that I mentioned earlier, but it must also have subject matter that will be inviting to a broad range of student interests and backgrounds. Finding works which fit all of the criteria is not difficult, but it does require careful scrutiny. There are many published collections of mentor texts which include short passages, essays, poems, and short stories which focus on one particular aspect of writing. These types of exercises are appropriate in all levels of language arts, and are most effective in middle school in order to introduce the concept and provide the framework for this type of exercise.

Ralph Fletcher, in his methodological workbook *Mentor Author, Mentor Texts*, provides twenty four original pieces, all two pages or less. The works are short; memoirs, essays, poems, and novel excerpts. Each work is equipped with writer's notes, briefly addressing his personal process in composing, and asking questions of the reader. He starts simply, asking what the reader liked in the piece, and progressively leads to questions regarding specific word choice, to arrangement, and finally to revision processes. The concept of using the mentor text is laid out simply and makes a logical progression in the students' understanding of language, although without using sophisticated terminology.

However, as students mature academically, they are expected to be able to progress to a longer, more sustained piece of reading:

The standards establish a 'staircase' of increasing complexity in what students must be able to read so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. The standards also require the progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from whatever they read. (Common History)

Teaching a novel to a junior or senior English class offers the possibility of covering all of these standards. The novel is a culmination of the building blocks of communication, including word choice, arrangement of words, characterization, and universal themes. In order to recognize and apply the analytical skills that are expected in upper levels of education, students should be able to read, comprehend, and recognize all of the elements of writing that comprise a longer work.

One of the benefits of learning grammar and rhetorical figures through close reading and textual analysis is, as Laura Micciche suggests, students' increased ability to recognize through literature "a discourse that takes seriously the connection between

writing and thinking, the interwoven relationship between what we say and how we say it...social practices that have the potential to both reproduce and challenge cultural values, truths, and assumptions” (718). For the upper grade level high school student, a book that encompasses all of the criteria and also has cross-cultural and gender appeal is Markus Zusak’s novel *The Book Thief*. In the following paragraphs I will introduce the novel and give specific examples of how Zusak’s specific and original style is ideal for the type of close reading and language analysis that is proposed in this paper.

***The Book Thief* as Mentor Text**

The Book Thief was published in 2005 in Sydney, Australia, and was marketed for a target audience of adults. Markus Zusak himself acknowledges that he wrote the book without identifying any particular audience; he hoped that the book would have universal appeal. The American publisher Knopf decided to market it in the young adult genre, and it has been almost universally critically acclaimed in the United States as an innovation in young adult fiction (Markus). Most of the reviews exclusively comment on the following aspects of the novel: unexpected and innovative narration, specifically through the point of view of the narrator, Death; the use of color to describe senses and emotions; the power of language; the novel's simplicity; and a Holocaust story emphasizing the presence of humanity and hope in the face of genocide. There is very little, if any, analysis of Zusak's successful use of complex and effective figures to create unique style.¹³

The Book Thief is simultaneously a narrative about a young girl growing up in Nazi Germany, an innovative novel with an unexpected narrator, Death, and a study of the power of language. It can be described as a coming of age novel, a love story, a war story, and a psychological study of human characteristics, relationships, and motivations. As a coming of age novel, we follow the life of the protagonist from her childhood all the way to her death, and experience with her the joys and challenges that are universally recognizable as a child grows from naïveté to maturity. It is a love story because we follow the relationships the protagonist creates and nurtures as she learns about human nature: her childhood sweetheart, her complicated family, and her love and compassion for humanity. It is a war story, as the plot develops against the backdrop of the rising

forces of Nazi Germany, and we follow the political struggles of a family caught between doing what is right and doing what is expedient. It is a psychological study as we watch the protagonist learn her capacity to understand and control her own emotions, desires, and conflicts. The novel clearly fits the qualitative complexity demanded by the Core Standards in its level of meaning and knowledge requirements.

In order to better understand the lessons that will be outlined in the second half of the paper, a brief summary of the novel is necessary to provide context. In the beginning of the book, the protagonist Liesel Meminger is introduced to us by Death, who has taken a strange interest in her as he comes to take the soul of her younger brother. Liesel and her brother, for reasons that are not disclosed yet, are being sent to live with foster parents in pre-Nazi Germany. As Death escorts us to our view of Liesel at her brother's burial, we witness the reason for the title of the book: Liesel, a ten year old, steals a book, *The Gravedigger's Handbook*. We later find out the irony in this theft: Liesel is unable to read. As she is thrown into a new and uncomfortable environment with her foster parents Hans and Rosa Hubermann, she discovers her own inner strength and is taught lessons about life, love, and the power of words.

A childhood friendship is developed between Liesel and Rudy Steiner, a neighbor who becomes her loyal, staunch, and constant advocate. Together, they develop thieving skills, mutual admiration, and a dangerous hatred for the Nazis and Adolph Hitler. As they are juxtaposed against the increasing horrors of the Nazi regime, their antics provide some comic relief. These episodes contribute to the readability of the story, allowing the reader to recognize and relate to Liesel and Rudy's adolescent antics.

Liesel's increasing hunger for books and reading is helped along by her relationship with the Mayor's wife, Ilsa Herrmann, who allows Liesel to read in her voluminous library. As the Nazis gain power, Liesel's world becomes more complicated and dangerous. Hans Hubermann uses a copy of *Mein Kampf* as a prop to transport a Jewish fist-fighter, Max Vandenburg, who hides in their basement. Liesel develops a unique relationship with Max, based on their mutual love of words and books, and ironically, Hitler's words are painted over as Max uses the copy of *Mein Kampf* to write a book for Liesel. As the war crescendos and Liesel grows up, she is faced with sadness as well as hope, and is presented with the opportunity to continue her love affair with books and words. At the end of her life, Death has a chance to talk to Liesel when he comes to take her soul. He ends the book on a somber but truthful note when he tells Liesel: "Humans haunt me." Because of the multiplicity of its appeal, the complexity of its messages, and the stylistic sophistication of its prose, *The Book Thief* provides a perfect example of a mentor text for teaching language to the upper level high school student.

Through the use of examples from *The Book Thief*, the remainder of this paper will illustrate the application of critical tools of analysis to the mentor text. The sections correspond to four main lessons that are proposed and developed in the accompanying Curriculum Unit Plan. These include Lesson One: An Introduction to close reading, focusing on Point of View, Diction and Tone; Lesson Two: Examining Grammatical and Syntactical Structures; Lesson Three: Rhetorical and Literary Devices; and Lesson Four: Theme. Each lesson is designed to include the Bakhtinian dialogic principles and practices that were explained in the earlier portion of this essay. Students should be encouraged to read the text closely, with each aspect of language and style specifically at

the forefront of the lesson. By examining the choices the author makes, and interacting with the text and each other, each focused lesson becomes a metacognitive exercise.

The Study of Word Choice and Arrangement

In their second edition of *Style in Fiction*, Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short observe that “Every analysis of style...is an attempt to find the artistic principles underlying a writer’s choice of language” (60). In chapter three of their book, they suggest a thorough checklist of areas that can provide “stylistically relevant information” (61). They start with the examination of one of the most basic levels, the lexical field, determining if the vocabulary is simple or complex, general or specific, formal or colloquial. In asking students to look only at the author’s words, rather than the larger semantic constructions, they become aware of the significance of each word choice. This type of close reading not only teaches the vocabulary of word choice such as dialect and register, idiom and collocation, formal and colloquial, it also makes a clear connection to the structural elements of the book that is being read and taught, including characterization, relationships between characters, and the inferred meanings behind the characters’ actions.

An example from *The Book Thief* that illustrates this principle is from an early introduction to one of Zusak’s characters. Rosa Hubermann, the main character’s foster mother, is a rough, blustery woman with a foul mouth and a quick slap. The reader learns this about Rosa early in the book, when Liesel first comes to live with the Hubermanns: “With a typical fistful of words, Rosa said, ‘Now listen, Liesel – from now on you call me Mama.’....She seemed to collect the words in her hand, pat them together, and hurl them across the table. ‘That *Saukerl*, that filthy pig – you call him Papa, *verstehst?* Understand?’” (Zusak *Book* 35). In breaking the passage down to simple word choices: “typical fistful,” “hurl them,” “filthy pig,” Rosa’s character becomes clear to the reader

almost subconsciously. As we read, we intuit our understanding of Rosa. As we dissect, we apply the active process of word choice to the act of creation of the character's personality. And that is something that is learned through the experience of close reading, remembered, and may be applied later in students' personal writing.

Having established word choice as the base of the scaffolding that will support tiered levels of close reading and analysis, the next logical area to examine in terms of creation of style are those that fall into the heading of "Grammatical categories," such as sentence types, sentence complexity, clauses, phrases, and word classes. One specific and powerful category within this range is what Leech and Short call "minor word classes" or "function words" (63). A particular subcategory that is effective in contributing to the understanding of overall purpose and is showcased in *The Book Thief* is pronoun choice. In *Rhetorical Style*, Jeanne Fahnestock draws attention to the deliberate use of specific pronouns in order to create what Kenneth Burke called identification between speaker and audience. Fahnestock tells us that "Virtually every normal conversation uses pronouns. But there is much more to the construction and management of the rhetor/audience relationship..." (290-291). A trained reader can infer and consequently understand author's meaning through analysis of pronoun use. In the following passage from *The Book Thief*, students can learn the significance of pronoun use through a close reading activity:

"*They'll* come for us,' Mama warned her husband. '*They'll* come and take us away.' *They*. '*We* have to find it!'" (Zusak *Book* 103 – my emphasis). The repetition and use of the pronoun 'they' is used in distinct contrast to the use of the pronoun 'we.' Through interactive discussion of Zusak's choice to use the pronoun *they* instead of the

antecedent “Nazis,” he clearly yet implicitly emphasizes the fact that Rosa and Hans Hubermann are not supporters of the Nazi party. Pronouns are sometimes considered inconsequential words in a text because of their common use and diminutive size. However, by artful use of these small but powerful parts of speech, writers can imply deeper meaning. Through emphasis in close reading and through Bakhtin’s dialogic process of allowing students to question and experiment with pronoun use, they are able to gain an understanding of the importance of all words, no matter how small.

Zusak has been both attacked and lauded by critics for his lack of sentence complexity. It is a factor that contributes to the low lexile score, which mistakenly indicates that this book is for younger readers. What the critics have failed to notice is the effect Zusak has purposefully created through his deliberate choice in using mainly simple sentences. Many critically acclaimed writers including the likes of Hemingway and Steinbeck have chosen to employ short and simple syntactical constructions, without being accused of childish simplicity. Works that showcase this type of style must be analyzed closely to see if there are any specific effects of the shorter sentences that contribute to the creation of character, tone, or mood. In the case of *The Book Thief*, the persona of Zusak’s created narrator must be considered as foreground. Death is not human. He is presented as an isolated entity who is eternally subjected to the task of trying to understand humans. He is incapable of interaction with humans except to perform his job, but he is able to observe and to report on what he observes. So his language skills, by nature of his lack of ability to communicate interactively, cannot be sophisticated.

The narration is presented in four different forms: announcements, narrative, recounting of dialogue between humans, and short bursts of universal truths based strictly on observation. Zusak presents the announcements through specific format change, which the reader comes to expect. They are set off and bolded, surrounded by three typeset stars on either side. They are not complex sentences, and they do not usually make logical sense in the continuum of the plot. However, the reader begins to realize that they either serve as a larger foreshadowing for something that may happen later in the book, or give hints as to what will happen in that particular section of the book.

Teaching students to pay attention to specific formatting is not the focus of this paper, but it is worth mentioning that in some books, such as *The Book Thief*, placement and format can provide insight, and sentence length can be analyzed in terms of author's purpose. Through a dialogic discourse and interaction with this aspect of the text, readers can learn the importance of placement of words and the powerful effect of the stylistic choices available:

The book thief went and changed into her Hitler Youth uniform, and half an hour later, they left, walking to the BDM headquarters. From there, the children would be taken to the town square in their groups.

Speeches would be made.

A fire would be lit.

A book would be stolen. (Zusak *Book* 107)

The sentences are noticeably short and composed in parallel structure. As a result of the natural intonation of the words when spoken or read as if spoken, the seriousness of the tone is implicit. The sentences themselves are not fragments, but they reflect disparate thoughts and effectively convey the fractured way private thoughts often occur. The repetition and parallelism emphasize the subconscious and unnamed dread that is building in the country. The rise of the Nazi Party is evidenced in the chilling

indoctrination of the children of Molching; the same indoctrination that was occurring throughout all of Germany.

An additional exercise here that could illuminate the effect of using short sentences would be to have students rewrite the passage in a form that sounds more conversational, mimicking the way they might speak, and then ask them to decide which makes more of an impact on the plot and why. For example, students might rewrite “Speeches would be made” to “They made speeches” and “Fires would be lit” to “Fires were lit” and “A book would be stolen” to “A book was stolen.” This is a more common way of speaking, by telling a narrative in past tense; however, in changing the verb tense to past, the suspense and anticipation has been diminished. This is an exercise that Bakhtin uses with his students when studying Pushkin. He introduces Pushkin’s sentence “Sad am I: no friend beside me.” After discussing the possible meaning of the syntactical order: modifier/verb/subject, they changed the sentence, placing the words in the more common order of subject/linking verb/modifier: “I am sad because I have no friend beside me.” A comparative discussion follows, in which the conclusion was made that the restructured sentence has lost its expressiveness and has become “colder, drier, and more logical” (Bakhtin *Dialogic* 16-17). Through this exercise, it is likely that the students would then be better able to recognize the value of deviations from the normal lexical and syntactical patterns in order to produce a specific effect.

All of the lessons that supplement the curriculum unit and the examples given here include an application component. Current expectations of teacher lesson plans include higher level cognitive skills as delineated in Bloom’s Taxonomy¹⁴. A simplistic explanation of these levels can be compared to a pyramid, in which the broad base

includes remembering; the next level up is understanding; followed by applying, then analyzing, evaluating, and finally, creating. The application of each lesson is one or more writing activities in which students can work with manipulating their own word orders and choices to begin creating their own style and voice. The activity follows the “close reading” model, and in short shows a methodological movement from “close reading” to “close writing.”

Rhetorical and Literary Figures

Following the lesson on syntactical structures, the students should be ready to move on to the next lesson, which is the examination of rhetorical and literary figures. The phonological schemes to be examined will include patterns of rhyme, alliteration, and assonance. In Death's introductory speech, Zusak establishes his effective use of these schemes. "I can be amiable. Agreeable. Affable. And that's only the A's" (Zusak *Book 3*). Not only does he appeal to the audience's innate appreciation of words that sound alike, but he also immediately begins to establish the ethos and likability of the narrator by using clever wordplay, indicating to the reader that Death has a sense of humor. Just on the first page of the book, Zusak has provided the English teacher with a venue to introduce the concepts of point of view, word choice, and ethos, as well as a bridge to a connection to the content and cultural meanings that are the larger purpose of the work.

Perhaps the most original and innovative aspect of Zusak's prose is his prolific use of figurative language including metaphor, simile, paradox, and irony. Zusak not only establishes the ethos and personality of his narrator early in the book, he also introduces his trope-heavy style. The reader becomes accustomed to it, and because of its deceitful simplicity, may skim over some of the richest metaphors unless instructed to look for them.

...at some point in time, I will be standing over you, as genially as possible. Your soul will be in my arms. A color will be perched on my shoulder. I will carry you gently away. At that moment, you will be lying there (I rarely find people standing up). You will be caked in your own body. There might be a discovery; a scream will dribble down the air. The only sound I'll hear after that will be my own breathing, and the sound of the smell, of my footsteps. (Zusak *Book 4*)

While the reader is making sense of Death as a narrator who seems to have a heart and a sense of humor, they may miss the metaphor and personification that is being presented unobtrusively and almost slyly. This kind of description is employed in almost every line of the book, giving the reader the option to choose to read quickly and gloss over the richness of the words, yet still comprehend the meaning of the story. Alternately, they may choose (or be instructed) to stop and smell the roses; or more aptly, for this book, smell the colors, because this is where we start to see the importance of the almost physical manifestation of colors that defines Death's perception of the world throughout the book. In keeping with the Bakhtinian theory of dialogism, this is an area in which examining Zusak's transformation and stylistic presentation of sensory details may provoke different types of responses from readers of diverse backgrounds, providing a dialogic opportunity for the readers to, once again, learn from the text, from themselves, and from each other. Perceptions of heavy subject matter such as death and what happens when we die are often difficult ideas to articulate. Using Zusak's figurative language and innovative description as a model for creating personal written images can provide another occasion for the student writer to work with developing their own style and voice, and is a natural bridge to a more in-depth examination of *The Book Thief's* unexpected narrator, Death.

The idea of Death as narrator has been understated by critics who want to neatly call it personification. However, Zusak's narrator is so much more than Death personified, and someone who is teaching *The Book Thief* would not want to miss out on an opportunity to introduce a more sophisticated and classical rhetorical practice, that of invented speakers, specifically the use of what is called *prosopopoeia*¹⁵. Fahnestock cites

Quintilian who tells us that prosopopoeia is used “to display the inner thoughts of our opponents...to provide appropriate characters for words of advice, reproach, complaint, praise, and pity. We are even allowed in this form of speech to bring down the gods from heaven or raise the dead; cities and nations even acquire a voice” (317). Death has long been considered an opponent, so it makes sense to give it a voice and hear what it might have to say, especially in the venue of a time of war and gratuitous extermination of life. Zusak did not set out to write a story with death as the narrator; instead, he created the story first, and tells Annie Coulthard in an interview that “I stumbled upon the idea of Death narrating the story, and it all made sense. Who is constantly hanging around in times of war? Who would have the opportunity to pick up a story penned by a girl in a bombed German city? Death was the right answer...” (Zusak interview). In using this strategy to capture the audience’s attention and place the story in the right framework, Zusak is creating what Neil LeRoux refers to as “presence.”

LeRoux defines “three broad categories of rhetorical function...focus, presence, and communion.” They are all germane, but not mutually exclusive, so I will concentrate solely on presence. LeRoux defines presence as “that which is created through a speaker’s making a subject more impressive, significant, and real to the audience” (35). In his description of the various methods by which the rhetor may create presence, he includes prosopopoeia: “Speakers often dramatize a subject to enliven it in the minds of the audience. A character can be introduced as one who is the origin (or destination) of the evidence. Supporting evidence can then be put into some character’s mouth a statement or a question – hence, we have speaking in character...” (39). In choosing Death as a narrator, Zusak has given his novel a guide and a speaker with a presence that

cannot be ignored; that demands the reader's attention in ways that none of the other characters could possibly have done. Zusak himself explains the progression of his narrator's persona through his writing process: "When I first brought Death into the story, he was sinister. He enjoyed his work a little too much...it hit me that Death should actually be *afraid*...of *us*. The irony of this was exciting, and it made perfect sense. Death is on hand to see the greatest crimes and miseries of human life..." (Zusak interview). The narration begins and ends with Death directly addressing the audience.

In the opening scene of the book, he scares the audience (in bold, capitalized, and starred format, starkly centered in the middle of the page):

HERE IS A SMALL FACT
You are going to die.

He spends the next three pages establishing his credibility and endearing himself to the reader, while simultaneously asserting his thought process through stylistic means. By page 12, Death and the audience have become quite comfortable together, and the narration continues, with the audience never stopping to question why they are actively believing in and listening to Death as a narrator. Zusak has endowed Death with a skillfully intimate narrative style, which exerts a distinctive control over words and consequently our emotions.

The theme of the power of language is addressed in most reviews: "Withholding of words when books are banned and the misuse of words to accomplish evil deeds" (Review); "She was a girl. In Nazi Germany. How fitting that she was discovering the power of words" (Zusak 42 qtd. in Koprince). If the book's most prominent theme is the power of words, wouldn't it be logical to dedicate the reading of the book to the very words that Zusak uses to create his story? After all, the title of the book is *The Book*

Thief, which in itself indicates a subconscious acknowledgement of the need for words that would lead an illiterate girl to begin an innocuous habit of stealing books; a Jewish sympathizer to use *Mein Kampf* ironically as part of a disguise to transport a Jewish fugitive, and a Jewish fugitive to “whitewash the pages of *Mein Kampf* and then paint new words over the pages – literally erasing Hitler’s language until it is ‘gagging, suffocating under the paint’” (Zusak 237 qtd. in Koprince). Zusak’s words *are* powerful, but the more important message is that the power lies in the person who knows how to *use* them, whether by manipulating them or withholding them: “The withholding of words when books are banned and the misuse of words to accomplish evil deeds are an important theme” (Review). It is the ability to make artful and informed decisions regarding the use of words that gives the words the power.

Nazi Germany; Rhetoric and Propaganda

The Book Thief is categorized in many reviews as a holocaust novel.

Pigeonholing it into this category does not do it justice, because it has many more universal themes that can be inferred from the plot and the characters. For the purposes of this unit plan, the overarching theme that all of the sub-categories and lessons fit into, is the power of language. Liesel learns, through her experiences with Nazi sympathizing neighbors, imperious Nazi soldiers, humanist foster parents, loyal friends, and innocent victims, that the means of communication - words and their use and misuse, is the most powerful weapon in the universe. Zusak helps the readers to learn this as well, as we are escorted through the plot by the narrator, Death, who is presented as an omniscient, supposedly impartial observer. Death is ubiquitous in Nazi Germany, and even he is unsure how he became so popular. Teaching the novel provides an opportunity for cross-curricular study in terms of the history, psychology, and sociology of war, and provides a context for an introduction to rhetoric.

A pervasive difficulty for historians and sociologists alike is the inability to logically explain how Hitler and the Nazis convinced so many people to accept and support their plan. There are many contributing factors, but the one that is subtly illustrated in *The Book Thief* is the Nazi use of rhetoric. The term *rhetoric* has, as David Joliffe suggests, an “unsavory” reputation. Many people associate rhetoric with its negative sense, of something that has style but no substance, such as a polished politician’s speech. The popular understanding of rhetoric can even go so far as to indicate equivocation or outright lying or manipulation, as in an effort to effect a reaction or response through the deliberate twisting of words. “In this sense, someone might claim

that Hitler was a ‘good’ rhetorician because he could, through his language and skillful manipulation of events, encourage people to believe the worse cause was the better one” (Joliffe 3). It is no secret that skillful use of rhetoric is the cornerstone of propaganda, and Hitler’s plan for the Nazi rise of power was founded on the combination of “linguistic and discursive dynamics” that were used in Nazi official government agencies, press conferences and print media, affecting the way the citizens of Germany defined themselves and, more importantly, defined racial “others.” Through his Propaganda Ministry’s “directives for the use of language,” Hitler was successful in redefining an understanding of “Germanness” and “Jewishness.” These language directives changed the face of language in Nazi Germany, generating an atmosphere in which genocide could occur (Kaplan 4-5)¹⁶.

The Power of Language

Zusak acknowledges his purpose in using words as a topic to convey meaning: “...I realized that words were a good metaphor for Nazi Germany. It was words (and Hitler’s ability to use them) that contained the power to murder and ostracise. What I set out to create was a character to juxtapose the way Hitler used words. She would be a stealer of books and a prolific reader” (Zusak interview). In light of Zusak’s revelation regarding his purpose, using a book about words to teach the practice of close reading starting with word analysis makes sense.

At this point in the curriculum unit, students have been engaged in this text, and have learned that the reader has the right and obligation to question and understand the novel starting with the basic level of word choice; moving to arrangement of words and use of figurative and rhetorical devices; and finally culminating in understanding and applying meaning. The building blocks of communication have been scaffolded, and the students have, through discursive lessons and practice, begun to find their own style and voice through the basic study of language components. Hopefully, they have learned, through active, dialogic pedagogy, the power and possibility of words; specifically their own words. The final assessment can be one or more of the culminating activities that are suggested in the lesson appendix depending on the academic level of the class.

A Final Close Reading

The last activity should take place after all students have read the entire book, preferably following some active inquiry and class discussion, possibly in the form of a Socratic Seminar. It could be used as either a formative or summative assessment. From the first lesson, the students have learned to approach their reading in a dialogic way, as a “constructive activity that leads to a new and heightened understanding of the issue at hand” (Halasek 4). The issue at hand in this unit is the ability to identify the author’s choices in diction, arrangement, and rhetorical and literary figures in order to communicate their message effectively and artistically. Throughout this unit, students have been trained to read closely, interacting with the text rather than taking the words of the text as authority. They have also been trained to allow themselves to recognize the language constructions that build to create the deeper meaning of the work. The essential question is “What are the choices the author makes in order to create meaning and effectively convey universal themes?” The learning objective for this activity is a written analysis of the passage in terms of the theme of the book – the power of words. A grading rubric for the written outcome should include all or most of the components that have been studied through the course of the unit, and the instructor should specify how many components should be included in the analysis (see appendix). The chosen passage takes place near the end of the book, after Liesel has lost the Jewish young man who has been hiding in her basement, Max, to the Nazis. Because she talked to Max, she was whipped by a Nazi soldier. She is in Ilsa Herrmann’s library once again, but the very words she has sought, learned, and revered have hurt her deeply.

In a close reading of this passage, I will speak from the perspective of possibilities. There are infinite possibilities of interpretation, and in my own experience, students are continually surprising me with new and insightful examples of language analysis. This is one of the teaching benefits of fostering a dialogic environment in the classroom – the opportunity to learn from students rather than bear the burden of always being the authority with the definitive answer.

From *The Book Thief* pp. 520-1.

She slid a book from the shelf and sat with it on the floor.

Is she home? She wondered, but she did not care if Ilsa Hermann was slicing potatoes in the kitchen or lining up in the post office. Or standing ghost-like over the top of her, examining what the girl was reading.

The girl simply didn't care anymore.

For a long time, she sat and saw.

She had seen her brother die with one eye open, one still in a dream. She had said goodbye to her mother and imagined her lonely wait for a train back home to oblivion. A woman of wire had laid herself down, her scream traveling the street, till it fell sideways like a rolling coin starved of momentum. A young man was hung by a rope made of Stalingrad snow. She had watched a bomber pilot die in a metal case. She had seen a Jewish man who had twice given her the most beautiful pages of her life marched to a concentration camp. And at the center of all of it, she saw the *Führer* shouting his words and passing them around.

Those images were the world, and it stewed in her as she sat with the lovely books and their manicured titles. It brewed in her as she eyed the pages full to the brims of their bellies with paragraphs and words.

You bastards, she thought.

You lovely bastards.

Don't make me happy. Please, don't fill me up and let me think that something good can come of any of this. Look at my bruises. Look at this graze. Do you see the graze inside me? Do you see it growing before your very eyes, eroding me? I don't want to hope for anything anymore. I don't want to pray that Max is alive and safe. Or Alex Steiner.

Because the world does not deserve them.

She tore a page from the book and ripped it in half.

Then a chapter.

Soon, there was nothing but scraps of words littered between her legs and all around her. The words. Why did they have to exist? Without them, there wouldn't be any of this. Without words, the *Führer* was nothing. There would be

no limping prisoners, no need for consolation or wordly tricks to make us feel better.

What good were the words?

She said it audibly now, to the orange-lit room. “What good are the words?”

The analysis could start with word choice, and identify some of the words that have been used repeatedly for emphasis in the entire book, not just this particular passage. Zusak refers to “words” themselves seven times in this passage, emphasizing Liesel’s crisis with the objects of her desire at this point in her life. In the style the reader has come to know and expect, he uses unlikely descriptions, such as a “woman of wire” and “Stalingrad snow.” These phrases draw attention to themselves because of their incongruity, but the informed reader notices that they also contribute to imagery, setting, and characterization. The reader recognizes that the woman of wire is Liesel’s mother, a thin but strong woman who was introduced in the beginning of the book. The snow was what killed her brother in Stalingrad. In the brief description of the horrifying and defining moments of Liesel’s life, and what she “saw,” Zusak has placed the characters and events with a precise economy that showcases his control of language.

His choice of verbs such as “stewed” and “brewed” clearly illustrate the building pressure Liesel is experiencing as she starts to project her anger onto the very thing she loves; the words which have betrayed her. The chronology makes use of anaphora, repeating the phrase “she had seen” at the beginning of each image, reinforcing to the reader that Liesel was a witness to these horrors. The reader becomes aware of the focus of her blame as she ends her list of collective memories by saying, “And at the center of all of it, she saw the *Führer* shouting his words and passing them around.” Her lovely words have gone to work for Hitler, and she does not think she can ever trust them again.

Zusak connects the sequence of memories to the sequence of Liesel's gradual understanding of the horror that is Nazi Germany by creating the metaphor "those images were the world." Cumulatively, the scenes that have just replayed in her head have become for Liesel the sum of humanity, and she has lost her faith in words as well as her faith in humanity.

Liesel's anger is expressed in her short sentences: "You bastards...You lovely bastards." And again: "Don't make me happy. Look at my bruises. Look at this graze." She is articulating her fury in the same way that an angry lover would admonish a cheating spouse, almost reduced to animal emotion, barking her words. This is clearly a breaking point for Liesel. This image of a betrayed girl striking out continues with her questions to the words, personifying them as she asks "Do you see...do you see?" And finally she shows her vulnerability as she tells the words "I don't want to hope...I don't want to pray..." This is the very thing that Hitler, with his words, was taking from the world – hope. Zusak's recognizable structuring of the words that illustrate Liesel's collapse helps the reader to identify with her very human response. Because of our own experience, we can empathize with Liesel's despair.

At the end of the passage, Liesel's ire is spent. She is now going to punish the words. Zusak uses the verbs "tore" and "ripped" to show the violence Liesel projects onto the words, by destroying first the pages, then the chapters, and ultimately the entire book, in much the same way that Hitler systematically destroyed Germany, one piece at a time. Liesel's final observation in this scene is that "Without words, the *Führer* was nothing."

At the end of the close reading analysis, students would be expected to make some kind of reference to the ending of the book, even though this passage is not the end.

After she poses the question to herself: “What good were the words?,” Liesel experiences even more loss. The war ends, but Liesel, along with Germany and the rest of the world, begins to put her life back together. And Liesel is able to heal and move on because of words as she writes her own story.

Conclusion

As educators of the 21st century, we need to be mindful of the focus which has shifted from monologic to dialogic, from authoritative to intertextual. Through a basic Bakhtinian dialogic approach to reading, high school students can be empowered in their own use of language and rhetoric in order to meet the expected standards that will provide personal success in the college setting. As Kay Halasek states, the classroom should be a “dynamic site of education and intellectual challenge that recognizes both the constraints and possibilities of language in students’ struggles to locate themselves in the university” (115).

Part II – Methodology

Many school districts nationwide have adopted a comprehensive curriculum writing plan that is markedly different from the traditional models. In the past, an outline of skills and the texts that would be used in order to teach those skills was considered sufficient. In 1998, Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe published a ground-breaking new approach to teaching, lesson planning, curriculum writing, and ultimately student learning. It was adopted by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and is called *Understanding by Design (UbD)*.

The main idea of the plan is based on the premise that “Educators need a model that acknowledges the centrality of standards but that also demonstrates how meaning and understanding can both emanate from and frame content standards so that young people develop powers of mind as well as accumulate an information base” (Tomlinson 1).

UbD proposes a very Bakhtinian notion; it posits that “Teachers are coaches of understanding, not mere purveyors of content knowledge, skill, or activity. They focus on ensuring that learning happens, not just teaching (and assuming that what was taught was learned); they always aim and check for successful meaning making and transfer by the learner” (McTighe). Mikhail Bakhtin promoted a dialogic classroom atmosphere rather than a monologic one. He also promoted reading intertextually rather than viewing a text as being authoritative. Bakhtin’s goal was to promote classroom learning that was interactive and dynamic, resulting in students who were engaged and invested in their own learning process. This is also the ultimate goal of the UbD framework, and in order

to achieve that end, Wiggins and McTighe propose what they call “backward design” (McTighe).

Rather than organizing curriculum starting with skills and then building to the larger ideas and goals, UbD suggests a three stage backward design process. Stage One requires the curriculum writer to identify the desired results, in terms of what students should know, understand, and be able to do with what they have learned at the end of the unit. It focuses on “transfer of learning,” helping them to “develop and deepen their understanding of important ideas and processes that support such transfer.” Stage Two involves determining how we will know if students have achieved the desired results. This includes evaluation and assessment of the skills and objectives and measuring the students’ understanding and ability to transfer their learning. Stage Three involves the planning of lessons and learning activities that address the desired results (and common core standards) that were identified in Stage One.

In part one of this paper I described the scaffolding of skills that could be taught by using *The Book Thief* as a mentor text, building from the smallest building blocks of language up to studying the work as a whole. In planning the curriculum according to UbD, I worked backwards, first identifying the essential questions and learning targets, aligning them to the common core standards. The next step was to create the formative and summative assessments that would provide evidence of the skills and application or transfer of knowledge, including all of the levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. The last part of the process was to plan and create appropriate lessons and activities to address the goals. This stage of the planning illustrates Bakhtin’s Dialogic Principles, ensuring that the students do not simply rely on the instructor to impart knowledge, but that instead they

“actively construct meaning for themselves.” The lessons must facilitate opportunities for students to “apply their learning to new situations and receive timely feedback on their performance to help them improve” (McTighe). The next section is a comprehensive curriculum unit, organized in the “Understanding by Design” recommended format, providing detailed descriptions of the larger framework of the lesson, narrowing down to the targeted skills, aligning with the core content standards, and finally, providing texts and activities to reinforce the learning objectives. The following curriculum unit plan and the lesson plans that follow are in the required format of my place of employment, The Black Horse Pike Regional School District in Camden County, New Jersey.

In order to achieve the interactive aspect of Bakhtinian pedagogy, each of the following lessons is set up as follows:

1. Whole class instruction, where the teacher explains and models the subject of the lesson
2. Individual application.
3. Pairing and sharing/exchanging results.
4. Whole class discussion.
5. Individual practice exercises for reinforcement (class work or homework).

In order to facilitate the transition from close reading to close writing, each student has a writer’s notebook in which the activities are applied from concept to product. The entries provide a personal space for the students to practice their craft, experimenting with their own word choices and arrangement. At the end of the unit, the students have a wealth of ideas to draw from for the culminating creative writing assessment.

CURRICULUM UNIT: *THE BOOK THIEF* BY MARKUS ZUSAK

Part I: Rationale

Why are students learning this content and these skills?

Unit Summary:

Recognizing, developing, and harnessing the power of language is an important skill for a high school student who hopes to succeed at the next level of academics. Learning to recognize all of the choices available in order to articulate and communicate thoughts and ideas in the most accurate and concise way, in addition to learning to create personal and unique style and voice, is the ultimate goal for all students. In order to achieve this monumental task, the practice of close reading and textual analysis through novel study combines the study of literary analysis with the study of grammar, rhetoric, and composition. Using the novel *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak, students will: be introduced to the concept of close reading; learn to recognize and use specific diction to create meaning and beauty; identify and create varying syntactical structures; identify and create rhetorical tropes and schemes in order to develop voice and style in their composition; and recognize an author's utilization of the manipulation of language to impart the universal theme of the power of language, for good or for evil.

<p>Essential Question(s):</p> <p>Why and how does point of view affect the overall tone of a story? How can the plot of a story imply the power of language?</p> <p>What are the elements of analysis in a work that has a nontraditional approach, in which characters and description do not follow expected rules?</p> <p>How do writers create unique and beautiful works?</p> <p>What are the elements of voice and style, and how can writers improve in creating these elements? How can discussion of themes and author's purpose clarify personal interpretations?</p> <p>What are the categories of an author's choices in diction?</p>	<p>Enduring Understanding(s):</p> <p>Reading Literature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding that establishing point of view scaffolds the perspective of all characters • Recognition of themes and motifs that apply directly to both the plot as well as the delivery creates understanding of the relationship of the use and abuse of words and their usage • Understanding of the relationship between point of view and theme and reader's response to the plot; recognition of alternate means to tell a story <p>Writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of diction, grammar, and rhetoric can lead to further understanding of the creation of voice and style • Modeling an author's style can result in improvement of a writer's personal voice and style <p>Speaking and Listening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group discussions, specifically using Socratic questioning methods, give students opportunities to practice articulating their ideas and listening to others' opinions, thereby allowing them to expand their points of view and clarify their own analysis of textual meaning.
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<p>What are the different syntactical choices an author makes, and what effect do these choices have on the reader's investment in the characters as well as the plot outcome? How can knowledge of these choices improve writing?</p> <p>What are the figures of speech that an author uses in order to create unique style?</p>	<p>Language: (grammar and vocabulary) Study of the following categories can create a more discerning awareness of word choice in writing as well as in analyzing text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lexical categories in vocabulary such as emotive vs. referential, simple or complex, descriptive or evaluative, and general or specific • Determination of types of nouns such as abstract or concrete, proper names, or collective • Adjective type such as psychological, physical, visual, auditory, color, referential, emotive, evaluative • Verb type such as stative or dynamic; transitive or intransitive; linking • Pronoun use <p>Learning the following parts of a sentence as well as the ways to vary sentence structure allows the reader to decode and infer meaning, become engaged in the text, and provides a model for practice in utilizing these choices in composition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phrases • Clauses • Complexity <p>Knowledge of the following ways to arrange words which appeal to the audience creates deeper appreciation for the craft of the author as well as providing models for practical application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammatical & Lexical: anaphora, repetition, parallelism • Tropes: semantic, syntactic, metaphor, simile, paradox, irony <p>(Leech & Short 61-64)</p>
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Part II: Instructional Strategies and Resources

Describe the Learning Targets.

After each target, identify the Common Core Standards that are applicable

<u>Learning Target</u>	<u>CCS</u>
<p><u>Reading Literature</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify close reading and literary analysis tools such as point of view, diction, tone, and figurative language in order to understand author's purpose, style, and themes in <i>The Book Thief</i>. 2. Assess and apply a variety of reading strategies that are effective for analyzing literary works. 3. Analyze author's use of plot structure, characterization, and figurative language to create meaning. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. RL11-12.1-7, 9 2. RL11-12.1-7,9 3. RL11-12.
<p><u>Writing</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Examine author's choices that create meaning and effectively convey universal themes 2. Create original sentences and compositions, utilizing the language choices examined in the text 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. W11-12. 2. W11-12.
<p><u>Speaking and Listening</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate, compose, and create questions for discussion based on language choices found in the text. 2. Express ideas regarding author's use of language choices; express and explain the effects produced as a result of these choices through discourse with classmates in small groups as well as seminar settings. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SL11-12.5 2. SL11-12.1-3,5
<p><u>Language</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analyze the effect of diction, syntax, and stylistic devices in conveying author's purpose and themes in writing. 2. Identify meaning of new words in the context of reading. 3. Analyze how works of a period reflect prevailing historical, social and political conditions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. L11-12 1-3,5 2. L11-12.4,6 3. L11-12.1-6

Inter-disciplinary Connections:

History (World War II); Sociology (Human behavior); Art (color and composition)

Students will engage with the following text:

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak

Students will write:

Informal Writing: writer's notebook reflections on author's style; emotional responses to characters, plot and theme; practice mimetic sentences and paragraphs emphasizing a stylistic, grammar, or rhetorical device

Formal Writing: timed essays and open ended responses that analyze diction, tone, mood, syntax, imagery, and figurative language in *The Book Thief*

Part III: Transfer of Knowledge and Skills

Describe the Learning Experience

How will students uncover content and build skills.

Learning Activities:

Whole-Class Instruction:

- Cornell Notes¹⁷
- Socratic Seminars¹⁸

Small Group Collaboration - Students will explore the following topics through collaborative activities:

- Effectiveness of the author's style
- Characterization, theme, and plot development through use of stylistic devices

Individual Assignments:

- Text annotations and close reading
- Mimetic exercises concentrating on grammatical and rhetorical choices
- Reflective pieces

Part IV: Evidence of Learning

Identify the methods by which students will demonstrate their understanding of content and their ability to apply skills. Apply Bloom's levels.

Formative Assessments:

The following assessments will be used to gauge students' understanding of key concepts, as well as students' abilities to use their knowledge to engage in analysis and evaluation. These assessments require students to think independently as well as collaboratively. Teachers will use these assessments throughout the unit to determine where interventions and modifications are necessary in order to prepare students for summative and performance assignments.

1. Close reading activities including opinion, analytical, and inferential questions on text
2. Formal and informal discussions through pairs, groups, and Socratic seminars
3. Analysis of language use through repetition and imitation of text
4. Written analysis of author's choices

Accommodations/Modifications:

Extra time and help or slower pacing; peer mentoring if necessary. For lower level learners, each lesson could be broken into two or possibly three lessons. Vocabulary in context could be taught as well, depending on the level of the class (see appendix).

Summative Assessments:

Objective analytical test including multiple choice and open ended responses (see appendix)

Accommodations/Modifications:

Extra time; fewer questions; modified analytical elements; modified vocabulary.

Performance Assessments:

Written mimetic description with accompanying visual to represent one aspect of the text (see assignment and rubric in appendices)

Accommodations/Modifications:

Modified rubric; extra time

Lesson One: An Introduction to Close Reading: Point of View, Diction, & Tone.

WHAT?

Essential Question: What are the elements necessary to analyze a selected piece of text?

Behavioral Objective: examine the author's word choices in a selected piece of text; identify the unique arrangement of sentence elements used; evaluate the effect of these choices on the audience's experience

HOW?

Warm-up Activity: Writer's Notebook Entry: "How can language be used for good, and how can it be used for evil? Can or should language be monitored and censored? Give examples to support your position."

Instructional Methods and Lesson Description:

Individual: writer's notebook entry

Pair/Share: discuss responses, incorporate references to language control and manipulation in Nazi Germany

Whole class: Instruction on close reading, using appendix 1 "What is close reading?"

Individual: Read *The Book Thief* page 3-5; complete worksheet on aspects of text using appendix 1

Pair/Share: Discussion of answers

Whole class: share answers; generate list of responses; give instructions for homework assignment in continuation of close reading

Vocabulary: Close reading; diction & tone; point of view

Assessment: homework: Read pgs. 6 - 15; complete close reading worksheet (Appendix 1)

Modifications/Accommodations (if applicable): extra time and help; peer mentoring if necessary. For lower level learners, lesson could be broken into two or possibly three lessons. Vocabulary in context could be taught as well, depending on the level of the class.

WHY?

Real life applications: increased ability to read discriminatingly and to employ and mimic authors' styles and strategies

Lesson Two: Examining Grammatical and Syntactical Structures (three to six class periods).

WHAT?

Essential Question: What are the basic building blocks of language, and how can we utilize our grammatical and syntactical choices for clear and emphatic articulation?

Behavioral Objective:

1. Name and define the basic choices for clearly creating meaning in writing: lexical categories such as emotive vs. referential, simple or complex, descriptive or evaluative, general or specific
2. Determine types of nouns: abstract or concrete, proper, collective
3. Differentiate between adjective types: psychological, physical, emotive, visual, auditory, color, evaluative
4. Evaluate verb types and assess the impact the choice makes on meaning: stative vs. dynamic, transitive vs. intransitive, linking
5. Recognize choices of pronoun use and their implications
6. Identify the components of phrases and clauses, distinguishing from complete sentences including dependent/subordinating and independent clauses
7. Recognize and evaluate uses and effects of the complexity of sentences, including simple, complex, compound

HOW?

Warm-up Activity: Sentence analysis worksheet, comparing pairs of sentences and differences in meaning based on word choices (appendices 3-6)

Instructional Methods and Lesson Description:

Individual: sentence analysis

Pair/Share: discuss responses, identifying tone and meaning changes for each pair

Whole class: Instruction on each lesson: lexical categories, (appendix 3); noun types, (appendix 4); adjective types, (appendix 5); verb types, (appendix 6); pronoun use, (appendix 7); phrases, (appendix 8); sentences (appendix 9)

Whole class: review of findings; define terms, examine further examples; model mimesis exercise; practice exercise in class previewing homework assignment for independent mimesis

Vocabulary: lexical, syntax, emotive, referential, simple, complex, descriptive, evaluative, general, specific, abstract, concrete, proper, collective, psychological, physical, emotive, visual, auditory, color, stative, dynamic, linking, transitive, intransitive, factive, dependent, independent, subordinate, phrase, clause, simple, complex, compound

Assessment: homework: Mimesis exercises for each category, pace to be determined by progress in class instruction (found on corresponding appendix)

Modifications/Accommodations (if applicable): extra time and help; peer mentoring if necessary. For lower level learners, lesson could be broken into any number of shorter lessons; terminology could be limited and/or modified as well.

WHY?

Real life applications: understanding of the structure of language and the impact choices make on meaning allows students to create clearer and more meaningful sentences.

Lesson Three: Rhetorical and Literary Devices (two to five class periods, depending on level of class and depth of examination).

WHAT?

Essential Question: What are the compositional choices available for enhancing meaning and appealing to the audience?

Behavioral Objective:

1. Define, analyze, and apply the following grammatical/lexical schemes:
 - a. Repetition
 - b. Parallelism
 - c. Anaphora
2. Define, analyze, and apply the following Rhetorical tropes:
 - a. Metaphor
 - b. Simile
 - c. Paradox
 - d. Irony

HOW?

Warm-up Activity: Read pages 520-521, annotate

Instructional Methods and Lesson Description:

Day One

Individual: annotate text

Pair/Share: discuss responses

Whole class: Define and give examples of repetition, parallel structure, and anaphora. Class discussion regarding the effect and author's intent

Individual: Writer's notebook: identify a specific visual memory; write a series of sentences that convey the memory, using repetition, parallel structure, and anaphora

Pair/Share: peer conferencing, discussing the images created

Day Two

Whole class: Define and give examples of metaphor and simile. Discuss the impact created by the choice of comparison.

Individual: Writer's notebook: create unexpected metaphors and similes for yourself, an emotion, and an everyday item.

Pair/Share: peer conferencing, discussing the comparisons

Day Three

Whole class: Define and give examples of paradox. Discuss the implications in terms of characterization and theme.

Individual: Writer's notebook: pick one of the examples, identify the paradox, and explain, in reference to the plot, what is significant about this contradiction

Pair/Share: peer conferencing

Day Four

Individual: Read pages 115-116

Whole class: Define and give examples of irony.

Groups: Discuss the following questions: How is this an example of irony? What is unexpected about it? What does the reader know that Liesel does not?

Individual: Writer's notebook: Why did Hans slap Liesel? What was the effect of his punishment? List some times when you have been punished and it seemed unfair but in hindsight was effective.

Vocabulary: repetition, parallelism, anaphora, metaphor, simile, paradox, irony

Assessment: Focused Content Area grading in writing assignment

Modifications/Accommodations (if applicable): extra time and help; peer mentoring if necessary. For lower level learners, lists of terminology could be shortened. Each aspect of the lesson could be expanded, and pacing could be altered according to student comprehension.

WHY?

Real life applications: increased ability to read discriminatingly and to employ and mimic authors' styles and strategies

Lesson Four - Theme

WHAT?

Essential Question: How can discussion of themes and author's purpose clarify personal interpretations?

Behavioral Objective: Through close reading and literary analysis tools such as point of view, diction, tone, and figurative language, use dialogue to clarify and understand author's purpose, style, and themes in *The Book Thief*.

HOW?

Warm-up Activity: set up for Socratic Seminar. Class should have read the chosen selection (pg. 520-521), desks should be arranged into two circles, class should be split in half.

Instructional Methods and Lesson Description:

Whole class: Review of Socratic Seminar procedure and protocol.

Individual: Inner circle: listen and contribute to a dialogue centering around the theme of

The Book Thief. Outer circle: listen and monitor the conversation of the inner circle;

annotate in preparation for follow-up.

Whole class: engage in Socratic Seminar

Individual: self-assessment in reflection exercise

Vocabulary:

Assessment: written: completion of reflection and annotation. Oral: quality of participation

Modifications/Accommodations (if applicable): extra time for responses, assistance in articulation and evaluation

WHY?

Real life applications: Developing analytical tools and ability to engage in a civil, mature discourse, articulating ideas and using textual evidence for support.

Appendix 1 – Supplemental Materials for Lesson One

An Introduction to Close Reading: Point of View, Diction and Tone

Classroom Activity

Read page 3-5 *only* of *The Book Thief*, and answer the following questions.

1. What is out of the ordinary about the first subtitle, DEATH AND CHOCOLATE?
2. How did you feel after you read the first six lines of the book?
3. What do you know about the book based on the first page?
4. Who is telling the story? How do you know?
5. How do you feel about this narrator? How would you describe the narrator's personality? Does the narrator act in a way that you would expect? Explain your answer.
6. **Diction** is defined as an author's choice of words. What words contribute to the relationship the author is trying to create between the narrator and the reader?
7. **Tone** is defined as the attitude an author takes toward his subject. An author's diction contributes to the reader's identification of tone. What is the tone you think the author is creating? What words contribute to this tone?
8. What is the narrator's relationship with color? List some examples of the use of color. Are they what you would expect? Why or why not? What effect does the author's unexpected use of color have on your reaction to the novel?
9. Consider the following sentence: "...a scream will dribble down the air." What is unexpected about this sentence? Why is it unexpected? How does it make you feel?

Writer's notebook activity

Read pages 6 – 15 of *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak. Answer the following questions; be prepared to share your responses with the class.

1. List words or phrases you find that are different and unexpected; identify the page number.

Example: juicy red face (7); with cluttered breath (10); the graying light arm-wrestled the sky (11).

- From your list, choose five that you like best. Explain, in sentence form, what the effect is that the author accomplished by using that particular word.

Example: juicy red face (7). The word juicy makes me think of some kind of fruit or vegetable, especially when it is paired with the color red. Juicy is not a word that anyone would normally use to describe someone's face, but it makes me see someone who is possibly angry and ready to explode, causing his face to be red and maybe sweaty. I get a clear picture of the personality and mood of this person who is being described.

- How many of the words you listed include a color? Would they have been as noticeable if there were no references to color? What is the narrator's relationship with color?
- What information about the girl do we learn in these pages? And what is the relationship between the narrator and the girl?
- What do you notice about the way the book is laid out, physically? What do the subtitles mean, and what do they do for the reader? Do they make it easier or more difficult to understand what is going on?
- Choose an image of one to three sentences that you especially like. Create an image in the same style, and explain what makes it unique.

Example from the text:

The smiling bear sat huddled among the crowded wreckage of the man and the blood (10).

My image:

A bouncing bobble-head lay shivering on the destroyed dashboard of the wrecked car.

Explanation:

The contrast of an innocent child's toy, oblivious to death, is described in the middle of a bloody plane-crash scene. The verb huddled is used, subtly indicating fear. The opposition amplifies the horror of the accident. In my example, I picked another innocent and oblivious symbol of the time before the crash. It had probably been on the dashboard, happily bobbing away before the crash. After the devastation, it is still bobbling, but I used the verb shivering to imply the difference between the carefree feeling before and the horrified feeling of after.

Appendix 2 - Supplemental Materials for Lesson 2

Examining Grammatical and Syntactical Structures

These exercises can be separated into as many or as few lessons as desired, depending upon the level of the students.

Classroom Activity

A. Lexical Categories

Read the following, and compare the italicized words in each pair. How does the word choice change the feeling you get?

1. Man – Papa
2. People – Nazis
3. People – Jews

Words that create specific feelings or emotions are called emotive. Words that provide factual information are called referential.

Writer's notebook activity: write one (or more) corresponding emotive word for each of the following referential words.

1. House
2. Woman
3. Girl
4. Boy
5. City
6. Party
7. War

B. Types of Nouns

This activity can be made more challenging, depending on the level of student. For a modification, the categories could be assigned before the students sort the words.

Sort the following nouns from page 391 into two categories. You must decide what the categories are.

Jew German country anguish despair wheelbarrow bone skull
torment book

C. Types of Adjectives

This exercise can be done literally with any page of the book. Give examples, and ask students to identify what category the adjective emphasizes: psychological, physical, visual, auditory, color, emotive.

Examples:

- 1) *Cardboard* face (211) – psychological, physical
- 2) watched with *metallic* eyes (203) – emotive, color
- 3) *iridescent* fear (199) – color, visual, emotive
- 4) *Dripping* sun (384) – visual
- 5) *Noisy* breath (370) – auditory

Writer's notebook activity: choose one page of *The Book Thief*, and list as many adjectives as you can find. Categorize each. Then choose five that you like, and explain why they are interesting to you. Then pick five random objects, and create your own interesting adjectives for them.

D. Verbs

Have students read the following passage on pages 102-3, where the local Nazis prepare for the *Führer's* birthday celebration by parading through the town of Molching, and the Hubermanns scabble desperately to find their flag. Instruct them to highlight or underline the verbs.

“The flag cloaked his back from the top of the window... In some places, like Frau Diller's, the glass was vigorously washed, and the swastika looked like a jewel on a red-and-white blanket. In others, the flag trundled from the ledge like washing hung out to dry. But it was there.”

Which verbs are vivid? Why?

*Depending on the level of the class, either have the students change the verbs, and generate a discussion from there, or ask directly how the meaning of the passage changes if the verb cloaked is replaced with covered, and if the verb trundled is replaced with hung.

After a discussion of the effect of verbs, a lesson on types of verbs, can be taught.

Example:

Active vs. Stative

1. Which verbs are performing actions? (cloaked, trundled)
2. Why isn't *washed* an action?
3. Why isn't *looked* an action?
4. What is the verb *was* telling us?
5. Does a flag have the ability to act? What does Zusak accomplish by giving the flag this ability?
(this discussion could lead to the implication that the flag represents the larger entity of the Nazi regime)

Writer's notebook activity: Rewrite the following sentence, replacing common verbs with out of the ordinary verbs that retain the same meaning, yet give more emotion and meaning to the sentence.

After the last of his family members left the house, Spot looked out the window one last time, got down off of the sofa, and lay down on his blanket, ready to spend the afternoon by himself.

E. Pronouns

In the same passage from page 102-3 describing the Hubermanns' panic at not being able to find their flag, Zusak clearly demonstrates their lack of complicity with the Nazis: "'**They'll** come for us,' Mama warned her husband. '**They'll** come and take us away.' **They**. '**They'll** have to find it!'" (Zusak 103 – my emphasis).

When Mama uses the pronoun "they," who does she mean? Who does she mean when she says "we"?

Why doesn't she say the name of "they"? Why does Zusak repeat the word "they" in between Mama's sentences? What is the implication Zusak makes?

Writer's notebook activity: Write about something that has happened to you that you felt was unfair, or about something you are afraid someone will do to you. Write as if you are telling someone about the episode. Do not use nouns, only pronouns.

F. Phrase - a group of related words which usually forms part of a sentence. It does not contain a subject and a verb, and so does not convey a complete thought.

G. Clause - a group of words that includes a subject and a verb

1) Dependent clause (or subordinate clause): one that cannot stand alone as a complete sentence, because it does not express a complete thought

2) Independent clause: one that can stand alone as a complete sentence

H. Sentences

- 1) Simple – a simple sentence is one that comprises only one clause (although it could be a long clause).
- 2) Complex – a complex sentence comprises one independent clause and one dependent (subordinate) clause.
- 3) Compound - A compound sentence comprises at least two independent clauses. The two clauses are joined together using a conjunction with a comma.

The following examples could be given to groups, pairs, or individuals. The instructions would be to find the subjects, verbs, phrases, and clauses, identify what kind of sentences are used and explain the effect of the author's choice of sentence structure. For a more in depth lesson, students could be required to diagram the sentences.

1. I climbed through the windshield of the truck, found the diseased man, and jumped out the back. My feet landed loudly in the gravel, though not a sound was heard by a soldier or prisoner. But they could all smell me (389).

2. Slowly at first, the street of children walked toward the magnetic sound, up toward Frau Diller's. Once in a while there was added emphasis in the shouting (390).

3. More people appeared on the street, where a collection of Jews and other criminals had already been shoved past. Perhaps the death camps were kept secret, but at times, people were shown the glory of a labor camp like Dachau (391).

4. He realized, however, that the girl was determined to stay, and perhaps it was something she should see. In the breezy autumn air, he stood with her. He did not speak (391).

Writer's notebook activity:

- a. Rewrite one of the examples, changing the sentence structure without altering the meaning.
- b. Choose one memorable moment from your life. Briefly recount that moment in a paragraph, using at least one simple sentence, one complex sentence, and one compound sentence. Label the sentence types.

Appendix 3 - Supplemental Materials for Lesson Three

Examining Rhetorical and Literary Devices

A. Grammatical and lexical schemes

Define the following:

- e. Repetition
- f. Parallelism
- g. Anaphora

What do you notice about the following sentences from page 520?

She had seen her brother die with one eye open, one still in a dream...

She had said goodbye to her mother and imagined her lonely wait for a train back home to oblivion.

She had watched a bomber pilot die in a metal case.

She had seen a Jewish man who had twice given her the most beautiful pages of her life marched to a concentration camp.

Why did the author repeat the beginning of each sentence? What does this emphasize?

Writer's notebook activity: Using repetition, parallelism, and or anaphora, write a series of sentences that recount a clear memory you have of a time when you experienced something memorable, either positive or negative.

B. Rhetorical tropes

Define the following:

- 1) Metaphor:
Examples: accordion face; cardboard face; Those images were the world (520)
- 2) Simile:
Examples: bones like smoke (391), A woman of wire had laid herself down, her scream traveling the street, till it fell sideways like a rolling coin starved of momentum (520)

Writer's notebook activity: write an unexpected comparison for yourself, an everyday object, and an emotion.

- 3) Paradox:
Examples:
pg. 168: If they killed him tonight, at least he would die alive.
215: Christmas came and went with the smell of extra danger. As expected, Hans Junior did not come home (both a blessing and an ominous

disappointment), but Trudy arrived as usual, and fortunately, things went smoothly.

205: The idea of being caught out plagued and enthused her at the same time. She dreaded it. She invited it. Only when Mama called out to her could she drag herself away, simultaneously soothed and disappointed that she might not be there when he woke.

Writer's notebook activity: pick one of the examples, identify the paradox, and explain, in reference to the plot, what is significant about this contradiction.

4) Irony:

Read pages 115 – 116, which recounts the only time Hans Hubermann slapped Liesel. How is this an example of irony? What is unexpected about it? What does the reader know that Liesel does not?

Writer's notebook activity: Why did Hans slap Liesel? What was the effect of his punishment? List some times when you have been punished and it seemed unfair but in hindsight was effective.

The study of paradox and irony transitions well to the study of theme – the paradoxes and ironies that are littered throughout the book can be tied to the paradoxes and ironies of the war itself.

The following are examples of passages that can be assigned for close reading that include paradox and irony and are clearly tied to the theme of the power of words:

- 1) Page 84 – this passage is a lead in to the scene of Nazi book burning on Hitler's birthday, where Liesel discovers her hatred for the *Führer* and steals her second book.
- 2) Pages 175 – 6 – Hans Hubermann's experiences in WWI
- 3) Pages 208-9 – Max Vandenburg comes to live in the Hubermann's basement. He is portrayed as a human paradox, emphasizing the will to live with its price of guilt and shame.

Appendix 4 - Supplemental Materials for Lesson Four

Theme

Once again, depending on the level of the class, the study of theme can be basic, beginning with identifying the difference between a subject and a statement of theme and utilizing practice exercises before attempting to discuss or write about the themes found in *The Book Thief*. This lesson is prepared for an upper level (11th or 12th grade) class with a fundamental knowledge of theme.

Classroom Activity – Socratic Seminar

For preparation, have the students re-read the passage found on page 520-521. It may be reproduced so that they can freely annotate.

Allow for five minutes in the beginning of class to arrange the groups and explain expectations, and five minutes at the end of class for reflection.

Divide the students into two groups. (This should be done in advance to save time). Arrange the seats in the classroom into two circles – one outer, one inner. The students on the outside are observers, and are not permitted to participate in the conversation. They are responsible for monitoring how many times each person on the inner circle speaks, and they can write down questions that they think of as the discussion ensues.

The students in the inner circle respond to questions that the facilitator (instructor) poses, based on the passage that has been read and annotated. The students respond to each other by listening, restating, and positing their ideas and opinions, using the assigned text as reference. The goal is for mutual respect and discourse. The goal of the instructor is to intercede as minimally as possible.

Halfway through the period, the outer circle changes places with the inner circle. The process is repeated.

Questions:

- 1) Why is Liesel angry at the words?
- 2) Why does she say that the world does not deserve Max or Alex?
- 3) What do the images represent?
- 4) What exactly is stewing and brewing inside of her?
- 5) What does Liesel blame for the war? How do you know?
- 6) How does Hitler “shout his words” and “pass them around”?
- 7) What is the irony of the object of Liesel’s anger?
- 8) What is the theme of the book? What evidence can you find in this passage?

The students can complete the reflection as homework, or at the beginning of the next class. Depending upon class size and quality of discussion, the seminar can be divided into two days.

Reflection:

- 1) How did you contribute to the discussion?
- 2) Were there any questions you would have liked to answer that you did not?
- 3) If the answer to two was yes, why were you unable to answer?
- 4) What goal do you have for the next seminar?
- 5) What ideas did you have or which ones were clarified for you through this seminar?

Appendix 5 - Assessments

The following assessments can be altered based on class levels or needs. Any selection can be used for a close reading, and the instructor can specify the component that will be the focus.

A. *The Book Thief* Assessment – Short Answers

Write a concise yet thorough answer for the following six questions. Please be sure to answer in complete sentences, do not simply retell the plot, but remember that you are trying to “prove” to me that you read the book in its entirety. Each question is worth 10 points. You will only have ONE class period to complete this portion of the assessment, so budget your time.

1. From whose point of view is the story being told, and what is the advantage of Zusak using such an unusual perspective?

For numbers 2 – 6, discuss/explain Liesel’s relationship with each of the following characters:

2. Hans Hubermann
3. Rosa Hubermann
4. Rudy Steiner
5. Max Vandenburg
6. Ilsa Hermann

B. *The Book Thief* Assessment – Multiple Choice

Read and annotate the following passage from pages 390-1. Then answer the questions based on your knowledge of the *ENTIRE* book.

1 On Himmel Street, Liesel was playing soccer when the noise arrived. Two boys were fighting for the ball in the midfield when everything stopped. Even Tommy Müller could hear it. “What is that?” he asked from his position in goal.

5 Everyone turned toward the sound of shuffling feet and regimented voices as they made their way closer.

“Is that a herd of cows?” Rudy asked. “It can’t be. It never sounds quite like that, does it?”

Slowly at first, the street of children walked toward the magnetic sound, up toward Frau Diller’s. Once in a while there was added emphasis in the shouting.

10 In a tall apartment just around the corner on Munich Street, an old lady with a foreboding voice deciphered for everyone the exact source of the commotion. Up high, in the window, her face appeared like a white flag with moist eyes and an open mouth. Her voice was like suicide, landing with a clunk at Liesel’s feet.

She had gray hair.

The eyes were dark, dark blue.

15 “*Die Juden*,” she said. “The Jews.”

*****DUEN DICTIONARY MEANING #6*****

Elend – Misery

Great Suffering,

Unhappiness, and distress

20 ***Related words:***

Anguish, torment, despair,

Wretchedness, desolation.

More people appeared on the street, where a collection of Jews and other criminals had already been shoved past. Perhaps the death camps were kept secret, but at times, people were shown the glory of a labor camp like Dachau.

25 Far up, on the other side, Liesel spotted the man with his paint cart. He was running his hand uncomfortably through his hair.

“Up there,” she pointed out to Rudy. “My papa.”

30 They both crossed and made their way up, and Hans Hubermann attempted at first to take them away. “Liesel,” he said. “Maybe...”

He realized, however, that the girl was determined to stay, and perhaps it was something she should see. In the breezy autumn air, he stood with her. He did not speak.

On Munich Street, they watched.

Others moved in around and in front of them.

35 They watched the Jews come down the road like a catalog of colors. That wasn’t how the book thief described them, but I can tell you that that’s exactly what they were, for many of them would die. They would each greet me like their last true friend, with bones like smoke and their souls trailing behind.

40 When they arrived in full, the noise of their feet throbbed on top of the road. Their eyes were enormous in their starving skulls. And the dirt. The dirt was molded to them. Their legs staggered as they were pushed by soldiers’ hands – a few wayward steps of forced running before the slow return to a malnourished walk.

Hans watched them above the heads of the crowding audience. I’m sure his eyes were silver and strained. Liesel looked through the gaps or over shoulders.

45 The suffering faces of depleted men and women reached across to them, pleading not so

much for help – they were beyond that – but for an explanation. Just something to subdue this confusion.

Their feet could barely rise above the ground.

Stars of David were plastered to their shirts, and misery was attached to them as if assigned. “Don’t forget your misery...” In some cases, it grew on them like a vine.”

50 At their side, the soldiers also made their way past, ordering them to hurry up and to stop moaning. Some of those soldiers were only boys. They had the *Führer* in their eyes.

55 As she watched all of this, Liesel was certain that these were the poorest souls alive. That’s what she wrote about them. Their gaunt faces were stretched with torture. Hunger ate them as they continued forward, some of them watching the ground to avoid the people on the side of the road. Some looked appealingly at those who had come to deserve their humiliation, this prelude to their deaths. Others pleaded for someone, anyone, to step forward and catch them in their arms.

Based on the selection given, choose the BEST answer for each question.

_____ 1. What figurative devices are found in the following: “Up high, in the window, her face appeared like a white flag with moist eyes and an open mouth. Her voice was like suicide, landing with a clunk at Liesel’s feet” (lines 10-11).

- Simile and oxymoron
- Simile and personification
- Simile and repetition
- Simile and zeugma
- Simile and paradox

_____ 2. Lines 10-11 are significant because Frau Diller

- Feared for the Jews
- Wanted to warn Liesel and Rudy
- Was hiding a Jew
- Hated the Jews
- Was herself a Jew

_____ 3. “They both crossed and made their way up, and Hans Hubermann attempted at first to take them away. ‘Liesel,’ he said. ‘maybe...’

He realized, however, that the girl was determined to stay, and perhaps it was something she should see. In the breezy autumn air, he stood with her. He did not speak.”

These lines (27-30) are representative of Hans Hubermann’s typical behavior because:

- He always tries to shield Liesel from discomfort
- He always understands intuitively Liesel’s thoughts and feelings, and acts accordingly
- He knows that he might endanger Liesel
- He is afraid of what Rosa will do to her if she knows he let her stay
- He wants Liesel to know what might have happened to her mother

_____ 4. The lines “Stars of David were plastered too their shirts, and misery was attached to them as if assigned. ‘Don’t forget your misery...’ In some cases, it grew on them like a vine” (44-5) serve to emphasize:

- a. The cruelty of the Nazis’ treatment of the Jews
- b. The overwhelming nature of the misery they were forced to endure
- c. The humiliation of the Jews
- d. The coldness of the citizens of Himmel Street
- e. The inevitable ending of Zusak’s story

_____ 5. “Some of those soldiers were only boys. They had the *Füerer* in their eyes.” These lines (46-7) can be considered to be foreshadowing because:

- a. Liesel will be forced to join the Hitler Youth.
- b. Rudy will be forced to join the Hitler Youth.
- c. Both Liesel and Rudy will be forced to join the Hitler Youth.
- d. Liesel and Rudy’s son will be a Nazi.
- e. Liesel eventually confronts Rudy after he betrays her, and she calls him “Hitler.”

_____ 6. In lines 54-57 “Once in a while...fleeting” includes which of the following stylistic devices that contribute to the tone of the scene:

- a. Irony and metaphor
- b. Epithet and personification
- c. Simile and alliteration
- d. Repetition and onomatopoeia
- e. Irony and simile

_____ 7. In lines 79-80, Zusak’s placement of the words “Then, one human. Hans Hubermann” emphasizes:

- a. Liesel’s father as a representation of humanity
- b. Our enjoyment of alliteration
- c. How Hans was a follower
- d. Liesel’s admiration of Hans
- e. Liesel’s disdain for Hans

_____ 8. In lines 85-90, Zusak uses the repetition of the word “watch” to draw attention to the paradoxical contrast and similarity between:

- a. The Jew and Liesel
- b. Hans and the Jew
- c. Hans and Liesel
- d. Nazis and Jews
- e. Jews together with bystanders, and Hans Hubermann

_____9. Lines 101-103 “When the elderly Jew...human” uses which of the following to emphasize the humanity of the Jew:

- a. Repetition
- b. Antithesis
- c. Parallel structure
- d. A & B
- e. A, B & C

_____10. The imagery created by Zusak in lines 106-110 provides which of the following:

- a. Contrast
- b. Foreshadowing
- c. A feeling of helplessness and hopelessness
- d. A & B only
- e. A & C only

C. Close Reading Analysis Essay

This can be used as either a formative or summative assessment throughout the unit, and the instructor can choose focused content areas to grade.

Text, Author, and page number(s): _____

Due Date: _____

Counts as: _____

1. Choose one of the passages indicated.
2. Using the definitive stylistic, rhetorical, or syntactical strategies you identified (or more!), write a one page essay in MLA style discussing the author's use of these strategies, being sure to discuss the EFFECT produced.

D. Creative Writing Assessment

Using your Writer's Notebook Entries as a springboard for ideas, choose one genre, and write an original piece, using three or more of the figurative and rhetorical devices we have studied in this unit. Your inferred focus should be the power of language.

1. Poem: must be at least 14 lines, have a distinct point of view, clear focus, and imagery
2. Persuasive essay: must be two pages, double-spaced, and include an introduction with a clear thesis indicating your position, two to three well developed support paragraphs, and a conclusion.
3. Personal narrative: must be a single, focused event from your life, in which you learned something valuable about yourself. Should be at least two pages but not longer than four.

¹ **HSPA** –High School Proficiency Assessment. A standardized test given by the New Jersey Board of Education to Juniors in order to measure skills in Math and Language Arts.

² “***A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.***” 1983 government sponsored report on the state of education in the US, which contributed to the ongoing educational reform movement. To read the report, see <http://datacenter.spps.org>.

³ **PISA/OECD** Program for International Standard Assessment; coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. See National Center for Education Statistics (nces.ed.gov).

NCLB – No Child Left Behind an act passed in 2001 with the intent to “close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind.” For information, history, data, and policies see www2.ed.gov.

Common Core Curriculum Standards- a U.S. education initiative with the intent to align the curricula of all the states by adhering to the same skill standards. See www.corestandards.org for more information and history and a link to the standards.

⁴ **Differentiated Instruction** - “a framework for addressing learner variance as a critical component of instructional planning” (Tomlinson 1-2). For a concise and user-friendly explanation, visit the website *teachnology* <http://www.teachnology.com/tutorials/teaching/differentiate/>– or refer to Tomlinson & McTighe’s *Integrating Differentiated Instruction & Understanding by Design*

⁵ **Close Reading** – reading a selected passage carefully, paying attention to the specific rather than the general. Originally developed by I.A. Richards and William Empson, commonly taught in colleges

⁶ **Metacognitive** – adjective taken from the psychological term *metacognition* meaning “knowing about knowing,” or thinking about what and how we know and learn.

⁷ **Lexile** – quantitative measurement of the difficulty of a particular text. To find the lexile of a text or to read in more detail how and why a lexile is determined, see lexile.com, specifically https://d1jt5u2s0h3gkt.cloudfront.net/m/cms_page_media/123/Lexiles-in-the-Classroom.pdf.

⁸ **Dialogic**- mainly from Mikhail Bakhtin’s work; based on interaction. According to Bakhtin, any study of literature is prefaced on an internal dialogue with other works that the individual has read previously. In order to understand this philosophy it is necessary to read Bakhtin; see works cited.

⁹ **Monologic** – a one-way model of communication, shutting down any interaction between participants.

¹⁰ **Student-centered learning** – an educational approach that minimizes the teacher’s role in imparting knowledge and encourages students’ cognitive process in acquiring knowledge. Requires increased learner responsibility and thus better outcome

¹¹ **Authoritative text** – text that is removed and distant from the reader; a reader’s approach towards a text that does not invite interaction of thoughts or ideas. See Kay Halasek’s work *A Pedagogy of Possibility* for an insightful application of this concept in terms of the teaching of reading.

¹² **Mentor/touchstone text** –a piece of writing that can be used as an example of quality writing or to illustrate a particular skill or lesson.

¹³ **Reviews of the novel included in the discussion of Zusak's critical acclaim include:** 1. The Compulsive Reader. Janet Maslin: "Stealing to Settle a Score With Life." 2. *Books of the Times: The Book Thief*. *The New York Times*. 3. A Reader's Respite: Review: *The Book Thief* blogspot 4. Book Review: *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak. Songbird hubpages. 5. Green, John. "Fighting for Their Lives." *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak. *The New York Times* 6. "The Book Thief by Markus Zusak (A Review)." Annart hubpages.

¹⁴ **Bloom's pyramid of cognitive skill hierarchy:** Level I Knowledge, Level II Comprehension, Level III Application, Level IV Analysis, Level V Synthesis, Level VI Evaluation. For more information see <http://www.bloomstaxonomy.org>.

¹⁵ **Prosopopoeia** – a rhetorical device in which a speaker or writer presents as another person or object in order to give another perspective. See Jeanne Fahnestock in *Rhetorical Style* p. 317-9, 323.

¹⁶ **Nazi use of language in propaganda** - For more information, see Victor Klemperer's *The Language of the Third Reich. LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii* (London: Athlone Press, 2000), 192, 61.

¹⁷ **Cornell Notes**- a note taking system developed by Cornell professor Walter Pauk, emphasizing organization, questions, and summarization to facilitate retention of material. For more information and note taking templates, see www.cornell-notes.com

¹⁸ **Socratic Seminars** – student led discussions following the Socratic method of questioning, encouraging student inquiry and thinking. For a more in-depth explanation see Readwritethink.org.

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