CHAPTER 5

PEDAGOGY OF THE DEMONICALLY POSSESSED

Critical Pedagogy and Popular Literature[1]

In his notable, if under-read, treatise *The Miseducation of the Negro*, Carter G. Woodson (1933) writes:

> When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary. (p. 84)

For Woodson, the way education plays a controlling force in the lives of a marginalized and oppressed group of Americans helps clearly articulate a legacy of racism and privilege that is at work in today's society still. As an avid reader of contemporary YA, however, I am struck by how Woodson's words are made manifest in the most popular of today's titles. Series like Veronica Roth's *Divergent* and James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* play deliberately with plot conceits involving mind control. In particular, savvy and able-bodied youth are at the mercy of sinister adults to takeover or destroy the livelihood of many. Even in Suzanne Collins' trilogy *The Hunger Games* shadow government officials sway the actions of youth for large, power hungry plays at control. The controlling of a person's thinking is alive and well in the best selling titles of YA today.

And while I'm sure that Woodson never intended for his words to echo across the dystopian novels that are filling shelves in bookstores today, I see a powerful and transformative opportunity to help youth understand connections *across* these two different texts.

Careful and deliberate facilitation of YA discussions in classrooms can help foment a critical consciousness articulated by Woodson and other critical theorists. Popular and critically acclaimed books such as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 1999), for instance, teach powerful lessons of identity and civic participation when reinforced through transformative pedagogy. This chapter looks at opportunities to engage with YA literature in classrooms utilizing a critical pedagogy. Henry Giroux (2001) defines critical pedagogy as "an entry point in the contradictory nature of schooling, a chance to force it toward creating the conditions for a new public sphere" (p. 116). Looking at specific practices and using example texts, this chapter provides a theoretical framework for both critique and textual production using YA books in English classrooms.

CHAPTER 5

WHO IS FREIRE AND WHY WOULD HE CARE ABOUT YA?

A discussion of critical pedagogy often begins in Brazil in the late 1960s. Working to teach a working class adult population to read, educator and theorist, Paulo Freire helped spark a revolution in ways to foment literacy and education. He framed reading, writing, and communicating as tools for a working class to wield and reshape the society around them. Writing in his now canonical text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, first translated into English in 1970, Freire describes how social change through the teaching of literacy is not only possible, but a mandate for how critical educators must approach their craft. A pedagogical and theoretical perspective on education at large, *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* may not seem like an immediate entry way into interpreting young adult literature. However, while many tend to see critical pedagogy as starting and ending with Freire, it is important to recognize the long-line of scholarship and critical thought that has preceded and followed the work of Freire. In *Critical Literacy and Urban Youth*, Ernest Morrell (2008) traces critical scholarship back to Socrates, an important reminder for educators and students alike to see the long line of shoulder-standing the field of education builds upon.

By definition, critical pedagogy is not a literary tool. It is, as suggested by its title, a pedagogy–a method and practice for teaching. Though it is often discussed in theoretical terms, critical pedagogy *should* be an approach that can be pragmatically applied in educational contexts. While I delineate my current understanding of critical pedagogy below, I do so with the express purpose of looking at intersections between teaching practice and young adult literature. How can literature be used to push forward an inclusive and contemporary critical pedagogy? How do some YA texts illustrate a critical pedagogy and opportunities for its application? Unlike *critical theory*, a critical pedagogy is not intended as a lens to scrutinize verbiage or themes; critical pedagogy is to be enacted and experienced and challenged.

In the abstract, critical pedagogy is not easy to pin down. Ira Shor (1992) characterized it as:

> Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal circumstances of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media or discourse. (p. 129)

The sprawl of this definition can be a useful means to find myriad access points for classrooms, however it also makes delineating clear guidelines tricky. I would argue that while critical pedagogy shies away from decontextualized explanations, it is a responsive pedagogy that inverts power structures of marginalized voices in learning contexts. At the heart of critical pedagogy is the urge to not simply resist but also push against hegemonic ideology. For example Freire and Macedo (1987) explain:

> It is also important to stress, for instance, that the understanding of a subordinated groups' cultural production is indispensable in any attempt to develop a type of emancipatory literacy. To do otherwise would be to develop pedagogical structures under the guise of a radical pedagogy that has hidden goals for assimilating students into ideological spheres of the dominant class. (p. 136)

It is with this emancipatory reading and critiquing of texts that I see the largest potential for teachers to transform educational paradigms through young adult literature. Instead of simply reading and advising youth to engage with acclaimed multicultural texts, I feel it is important for students to be able to dive into the contested and contentious waters of YA texts that reinforce white privilege and minority subordination.

Critical pedagogy is directed at the process of learning and can be read as a critique of capitalist schooling structures. And while the rhetoric of critical pedagogies focuses on students, teachers, power, and subordination, the lessons that critical pedagogy reveals vis-à-vis the nature of inequality and education are just as appropriate to consider when looking at the nature of young adult literature and its power of influence over impressionable youth. For instance, in explaining how power functions within schools, Henry Giroux (2001) notes, "it is … important to remember that ideologies are also *imposed* on students who occasionally view them as contrary to their own interests and who either resist openly or conform only under pressure from school authorities" (p. 91).

Fundamental to the genesis of critical pedagogy is Freire and Macedo's (1987) understanding that "the dominant curriculum is designed primarily to reproduce the inequality of social classes, while it mostly benefits the interests of an elite minority" (p.125). With the assumption that such a dominant curriculum is not in the best interests of most students, an adoption of critical pedagogy begins with a look at how to create change and instill an efficacy toward change within students. This fomentation of critical consciousness is brought about through dialogue, reflection and praxis–theory put into practice. Like Critical Race Theory discussed in Chapter Two, the theories underpinning critical pedagogy are not rooted in a literary tradition. The scholars mentioned in this chapter thus far–Woodsen, Freire, Macedo, Giroux, Shor–are activist scholars. Theirs is a corpus of research that reflects how to engage, interpret, and respond to the unique contextual challenges of education and social transformation for a given society. Though the principles and the focus on shifting power remain the same, a 21st century critical pedagogy for the youth in U.S. society is going to be markedly different than the model of education enacted by Freire in Brazil in the '60s.

As critical pedagogy actively pushes against the dominant cultural practices of education that debilitate large populations of student, the role of literature as a controlling mechanism can be inferred. If the majority of the texts that are available by mainstream media simply reify mainstream practices, their consumption by youth of color, youth of varied sexualities, and youth that–in any way–deviate from white

supremacist, capitalist patriarchal values are subordinated. Like schools, I would argue that the ideological space carved out by popular books like aforementioned *Gossip Girl* and *I am Number Four* "have to be viewed as contradictory social sites, marked by struggle and accommodation, which cannot be viewed as totally negative in terms of their effects on the politically dispossessed" (Giroux, 2001, p. 115).

THE DEMONICALLY POSSESSED: CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND *TWILIGHT*

Like the *Perks of Being a Wallflower* (discussed below), Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series was a tremendously popular book franchise. Creating a series of popular films, additional spin-off and copycat texts, *Twilight* is YA genre fiction that helped propel YA into mainstream, adult interest. Following the family-friendly franchise of Harry Potter, Meyer's *Twilight* series explored a paranormal world of vampires, werewolves, and hormonally-energized teenage girls. Though the books advocate against premarital sex, it is a series about sexuality, beauty, and the tensions that arise because of them. The soap-opera-like storyline is one that made *Twilight* a huge crossover text for adult readers.

Briefly summarizing the work, the Twilight series follows clumsy high school student Bella who quickly becomes the competing love interest of Edward–a human sympathizing vampire–and Jacob–a Native American werewolf. Over the course of four books, Bella is the target of various supernatural dangers, the subject of traditional parental tensions with her protective father, and at the whim of her own *nearly* uncontrollable sexual desire. Throughout, protagonist Bella is caught in a love triangle between feuding *species* of non-human creatures. As a desirable and white-skinned girl, her beauty is a temptation that, at any moment, can lead to all out war not simply between vampires and werewolves but within the highly regulated society of vampire government. In this reading of the text, Bella is a powerful woman who can wield her wanted sexuality (and human blood) as leverage for an otherwise weak, human species. Such a reading, goes only so far as Bella eventually becomes a vampire in the final book and–married–engages in lots of undying carnality. Further, Bella's helplessness also points to ways the book is squarely placing power in the hands of men: "Bella, once smitten by Edward, lives only for him" (Miller, 2012b).

Popular critiques of the book point to how the characters adhere to life-choices that are acceptable from a Mormon viewpoint–Meyer's religious affiliation. The book's seeming push away from pre-marital sex (despite protagonist Bella's strong desires), for example, are seen as lessons for adolescent readers to follow. However, when looking at the development of characters and narrative arc within the *Twilight* series, the story can be read as one about power, control, and possession. There is a complex hierarchy of power within the book that intertwines, race, gender, supernatural-species, and experience. Further, when Bella becomes impregnated, days after her marriage, the paranormal baby growing rapidly inside her is a physical threat to her well-being. That she perseveres to carry the child at her own detriment

is read by some feminist analysis as a pro-life message within the book (Wilson, 2011).

If the heart of critical pedagogy is focused on exploring power and guiding freedom for an oppressed class, Bella's suppressed agency within the books is a space to highlight with youth. Encouraging alternative possibilities of how she can respond to and speak back to male characters and non-human adversaries is an important step in incorporating these texts meaningfully within classrooms. Further, the ways non-human characters create a classed system of privilege within the book is also important to emphasize. As feuding paranormal factions, the werewolves and vampires in the book take on symbolic positions of power for youth to explore. Though they may be equally matched, how Native Americans are positioned as the individuals that turn into werewolves can be read problematically. Essentially going to schools on the "rez"–like Junior in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*–the characters that turn into werewolves are an oppressed class in *actual* society. Bella ultimately *chooses* the white vampire, Edward, as the man she marries. The paranormal backdrop of the book helps reify American societal power dynamics.

The depictions of race and gender within the book help illuminate how these forms of representation play into power for students today. A critical pedagogy is one that engages youth in dialogue around a text like *Twilight* as a source for developing and acting upon critical consciousness–what Freire (1970) calls "conscientization." Through developing an understanding of the societal forces that suppress individual agency, a critical consciousness is one that allows youth to take action against these forces. As such, I would argue that a text like *Twilight* that is largely seen as inferior to other YA texts in literary quality (Cart, 2010), can be an important tool for students to explore their own interpretations of the world. *Twilight* is neither a *good* or a *bad* text for youth. The fact that it and the many paranormal books that it helped spawn are so widely read make it a useful text for developing strategies for a critical pedagogy made accessible for today's youth.

LITERATURE AS A PATHWAY FOR YOUTH TO CRITIQUE AND PRODUCE

The wave of fantasy and science fiction YA film adaptations–such as *Twilight*–continues to build financial success of YA franchises as discussed in Chapter One. As *Twilight* was a defining YA-adapted film in the first decade of the twenty-first century and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is proving to be one in the second decade, a note about these two texts as films is necessary.

As I write this chapter, a 2012 film adaptation of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* has sparked a renewed and continuing interest in a book that's now more than ten years old. The continuing appreciation of the book is akin to youthful interest in the foibles of Holden Caulfield. Both Charlie of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and Caulfield are lone teens in search of stronger understanding of the process of growing up. As they speak to their audience, these two protagonists offer important

opportunities for empathy from readers. If film continues to persevere as a dominant form for depicting cultural shifts, translating Charlie's adventures into a 2012 film only further the messaging of the popular YA text.

One way to consider the possibilities of a text like *The Perks of Being A Wallflower* for developing critical consciousness is through also seeing it as an opportunity for developing critical literacies. Closely tied to critical pedagogy is a body of literature around critical literacy. As Allan Luke (2012) notes, the central question at work within critical literacy is, "What is 'truth'?" (p. 4). Luke goes on to explain, "The term critical literacy refers to use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life" (p. 5). As directly impacting the reading, producing, and interpretation of texts from standpoints of power, critical literacies empower youth to treat texts as sites for cultural understanding and critique. A book like *Gossip Girl* is not simply a book for young people to read and interpret the powerful gender messages described in the previous chapter. Instead it functions as a site for personal articulation beyond. As Luke notes, critical literacy "is about the possibility of using new literacies to change relations of power, both peoples' everyday social relations and larger geopolitical and economic relations" (p. 9).

The Perks of Being a Wallflower can allow this intersection of societal forces and youth ideologies to help guide powerful writing and production practices. It is a book that–despite problematic politics of representation (I left the movie theater telling my partner that the adaptation was *the whitest movie I've seen*)–can offer clear ways to explore critical literacy practices within classrooms. And while the book is layered with content to unpack, the most important lesson here begins with its form.

DEAR FRIEND

As an epistolary novel, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* belongs to a sub-genre of YA that can foment a stronger relationship between reader and protagonist. I argue here that these texts can offer a clear portal into tenets of critical pedagogy for classrooms. YA texts that are crafted as a series of letters *(The Perks of Being a Wallflower*), as a diary (*Go Ask Alice*), or as some sort of school report (*Rat Saw God*)–though there are significant differences between these forms–offer significant opportunities for learning, growth, and engagement. They, too, frame the reader (and thus assumptions of whom she or he is) in specific ways.

Epistolary texts are not at all unique to YA. With notable poems, books, and exchanges published in the epistolary form, a text like *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a welcome addition to a genre that already focuses on amplifying interior feelings and emotions to a direct, reading audience. J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in The Rye*, for instance, is perhaps one of the most widely read (and likely most frequently assigned as *required* reading) YA novels. In it, Holden Caulfield recounts to the reader his own experiences and perspective leaving his school and slumming across New York for a few days. The perspective is one that allows

readers an intimate look at the foibles of a teenage boy and gives literature teachers across the country an opportunity to engrain in young people the concept of the unreliable narrator. Salinger's approach of addressing the reader directly is largely carried over in his other works detailing the relationship of the Glass siblings. *Raise High the Roof Beams, Carpenters* is an extended letter written by Seymour Glass to his younger brother, Buddy. Its bound neighbor, *Seymour: An Introduction* is an incomplete narrative description by Buddy about his late brother, Seymour–it too is written directly to readers.

Though there is less framing in *Catcher* than in a text like *Perks of Being a Wallflower*, both are constructed around being written *to* an audience. While the same could be said for all books, there is an intention in the books to note that they are present as an audience. There is a "you" implied in these books as being the person holding the physical book and looking at it (just as "you" are reading this very paragraph right now). It should be noted that it is more than the fact that these are first person accounts. Instead, it is the fact that these novels find the protagonist, explaining, recounting and reflecting on things in their lives. Though these are not a large genre of texts, the prominent texts within this sub-genre (including previously discussed *Go Ask Alice* and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*) are so widely recognized as hallmark novels in YA that a look at the structural form of these books is necessary. In particular, we will focus on *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* as a widely-read example of this form.

The epistolary form of these texts allows the protagonist space to question and ponder varying incidents instead of merely offering a play-by-play of life as an adolescent. It is a dialogic space that invites reflection and a sense of participation for readers.

Comprised of a series of letters written to an anonymous receiver, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* frames the book's narrative so that it offers a voyeuristic view of Charlie's struggles growing up. Though Charlie explains that he is taking efforts to anonymize the names and identities of the individuals he writes about, he is very specific about who he intends these letters to be received by. In his first letter, he offers a rationale why "you" are getting this story:

> Dear friend,
>
> I am writing to you because she said you listen and understand and didn't try to sleep with that person at that party even though you could have. Please don't try to figure out who she is because then you might figure out who I am, and I really don't want you to do that. I will call people by different names or generic names because I don't want you to find me. I didn't enclose a return address for the same reason. I mean nothing bad by this. Honest.
>
> I just need to know that someone out there listens and understands and doesn't try to sleep with people even if they could have. I need to know that these people exist. (Chbosky, 1999, p. 2)

Based on this opening, it is clear that the "friend" that Charlie writes to is not the reader: you and I and the millions of other readers of *Perks of Being a Wallflower* were not at "that party" and yet are still, somehow, privy to the letters and extended monologues left by Charlie. Because of this specificity, the actual readers of *Perks of Being a Wallflower* are like Charlie themselves: somewhat out of place, often left feeling uncomfortable with the way the world within the text unfolds, and silently watching what happens next. During a party early on in the book, Charlie's friend Patrick offers a toast about Charlie: "He's a wallflower … You see things. You keep quiet about them. And you understand" (Chbosky, p. 37). Just like Charlie, the reader, too, is a wallflower. However, whereas Charlie is able to come to terms with the world around him and mentally block the trauma of childhood abuse, the reader is left to simply follow along. It is our haphazard circumstances that have somehow brought Charlie's letters into our hands, as readers–they were neither intended for us (within the conceit of the story) nor were they ever offered in a way that gives us, as readers, any agency.

The idea of the reader having any power of *voice* when reading a text like Chbosky's or a novel at all may seem strange. However, in looking at how different authors position their protagonist in relation to a reader, it is apparent that novels can be read in terms of how they position the reader to gain any sense of empowerment or control over a text.

Chbosky's narrative frame is not something unique to *Perks;* this concept of voyeurdom is echoed directly in the conceit of *Gossip Girl*, for instance. In between chapters about the constant bickering and feuds of Blair, Serena, and Nate, updates and Q&As from the anonymous Gossip Girl provide contextual clues for how gossip functions within the novel. The conceit is drastically different from that of *Perks* in most ways except for one major similarity: Gossip Girl's insider information allows readers to feel like the fly-on-the-wall that is privy to the rumors and sightings of the text's main characters. The distancing feature of writing and responding to fan letters during the recurring columns allows readers to peak into a world that is often shaded away from public view and even feel like they could contribute or comment on an online post. Unlike *Perks*, the epistles of *Gossip Girl* offer more agency on the part of the reader. Though the reader does not participate other than reading what occurs within the text, *Gossip Girl* is clearly a space that encourages dialogue. Readers see that Gossip Girl publishes and responds to readers questions. The result is a YA text that creates the sense that, if this were a *real* website, readers could write letters to Gossip Girl and possibly receive a response. This dialogic entry of can be seen as an opportunity for readers to engage with and push beyond the framework.

What would happen if readers wrote back critical responses to Gossip Girl asking about race, class, or gender representations on her site? Can a fictitious gossip column function as a lens for critical analysis of the book and the "real" world of readers? In contrast with *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, there is a heightened sense of agency for readers of *Gossip Girl.*

Though readers will not likely try to write letters to the anonymous gossip writer of the novel, the sense that this is a possibility, that she is even soliciting invitations to contribute, reframe the stance between reader and text. At the same time, readers can *write back* to Charlie in Chbosky's novel. Though the letters are unidirectional–they are only written to a "Dear friend," the space for inclusive voice can be found in responding through classroom writing. Likewise, the epistle as a form of genre writing can offer powerful opportunities for critical pedagogy: it is written *to* someone. The assumption of an audience (even a very broad one) can allow youth to convey pointed narratives for specific individuals and purposes. In doing so, young people must consider necessary negotiations within their letters and ways to communicate effectively. As Charlie notes in the introductory letter "listening" and "understand[ing]" are crucial components to the dialogic strategies of authors of letters. Though it is not the only pathway forward, I would argue that *Perks* demonstrates clear guidelines for articulating narrative points for critical consciousness.

Related to the position of author and audience it is striking how this book reverses the stance between author and reader. In *Perks*, Charlie becomes a character that readers can understand by the end of the book but the reader learning little about what "you" – as the intended recipient of Charlie's letters–is/are like. Can we infer that this "you" is the you reading the book?

FROM DEAR FRIEND TO DEAR ME

Differing from the epistolary novel in significant ways, books like the previously discussed *Go Ask Alice* and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* imagine the novel as an extended diary. The diary form as a novel is a particularly salient format for YA because of how inherently insular it is. By its own structural features, a diary is autobiographical. It is a chronological account of events, feelings, and rumination about the world as one experiences it. It is a daily soliloquy about what happened and what one worries about, yearns for, dreams of. For teenagers trying to understand their place in the world that may be changing around them, a diary acts as both an anchor into someone else's experiences and–perhaps–a place to seek empathy.

However, a diary is also an object that could be considered highly private: it is usually intended to be read only by its original author. For us to pry open the diaries that are marketed as YA is to choose to breach a social contract. We are instructed to peer into the innermost thoughts of others. And while the approach is one that allows readers the kind of unfettered access into the thoughts of people that are represented as their age, the process of accessing this content is one that is ethically deleterious. Though this may seem minor–after all we're talking about fictitious books marketed with the intended use to be read and enjoyed–the act of reading someone else's diary is a transgressive one. The power with which we gain our insights as readers is one that must be examined and acknowledged. This sense of voyerdom, one could argue, is something that is perceived in any novel not written in the second person.

Unless a book directly addresses "you," then theoretically you have no place to be looking at and reading the pages. I think the role of voyerdom is particularly relevant to diaries, letters, and transcripts in YA because these books position the reader as someone that has somehow come across a text that was not necessarily intended for him or her. As a result, our reading of these texts is a peek into a world we were not necessarily invited into.

In *On the Brink: Negotiating Literature and Life with Adolescents*, Susan Hynds (1997) details several years of literacy instruction in the classroom of Meg (a pseudonym used throughout the book). At one point, Meg describes the relational aspect of reading circles and spaces within the classroom:

> I noticed a lot of kids in the library talking about their books. So I thought if I given them a forum to do that in class, they might encourage each other. And so sometimes we'd have whole-class book talks where I would just pick a name out of a hat and the kid would just talk about the book he was reading in any way. And that was one thing I learned from doing the response journals. I didn't say, "Well, there are five ways to do this." I said, "You could talk about your book in a way you wanted." (Hynds, p. 240)

What I appreciate about Meg's reflection is how youth voice dictates and guides classroom space. Though Meg, as the classroom facilitator, helps ensure alignment with course goals, the class is largely driven (at least for this activity) by student voice. In terms of literature, I see a parallel between the taking up of classroom space and the taking up of a blank page of possibilities. In seeing diaries and letters as valid forms of fiction within classrooms, youth too can utilize these tools for their own powerful critical literacy practices.

Later in *On the Brink*, Hynds argues that Meg (and literacy instructors at large) need to "*step in* and point out the racial, ethnic, and gender issues" that arise in their classrooms (p. 254). While I've argued throughout this book about the problematic issues that come out of texts like *Go Ask Alice*, I would also caution adults to move beyond focusing solely on these issues. While a critical pedagogy–like Critical Race Theory–must address these issues within the classroom discussions and texts, it is also a pedagogy that is driven by leveraging a text for movement and action. *Perks*, for instance, can function as a powerful exemplar of participatory and action-driven classroom discourse and personal reflection. And with the tools for authoring texts becoming easier to utilize in classrooms due to advances in technology, it is time educators look at literary texts like Chbosky's less as tools for analysis than as templates for social change.

A WIRELESS CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

In a previous research project (Garcia, 2012a), I looked at the kinds of work fostered within my high school classroom and used my own experiences, frustrations, and

limitations to consider how a critical pedagogy in the 21st century deviates from what came in the past. In these efforts, I noted that critical pedagogy is not a static notion or a cemented concept. Instead, critical pedagogy must be in a constant process of reinvention, looking at and acknowledging the ways the world around it shift power, oppression, and individual agency. With this in mind, I playfully call an updated form of critical pedagogy a "wireless critical pedagogy." This is to acknowledge the shifts in technology and participatory culture that affect the kinds of experiences of young people in classrooms and schools today.

The context and era in which Freire developed his own practice varies significantly from that of any classroom today, decades later. In this sense, young adult literature is primed to help better illuminate the changes we face socially when building a critical literacy that responds to the needs of today's adolescent youth.

In my previous study, this critical pedagogy expanded the notions of what students could produce and how they drove the discussions of critical consciousness within their classrooms and their lives. This pedagogy is one–like Critical Race Theory–of production. Instead of simply viewing and consuming textual products of mainstream media and authors in positions of power, these texts are gateways into actualizing student voice.

One major component of wireless critical pedagogy is the recognition that young people are included as individuals that research and not as simply subjects in someone else's research. As such, instead of looking at research as something that is done to better understand a text or in order to support a thesis, I utilize a burgeoning tradition of Youth Participatory Action Research (Fine & Cammarota, 2008). In my own experience collaborating with students on a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project, finding ways to mutually explore research topics salient to and responsive to community needs is a delicate balance. Further, grounding student research in age-appropriate literature can help provide context; in one project students and I read *Little Brother* while we explored technology use as a tool for data collection. In another project my students and I became detectives much like the protagonist of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*, which we read at the same time. While the power struggles of a purely equitable YPAR within classrooms are substantial, I've argued that teacher power is something that needs to be transparent in classrooms (Garcia, 2012b).

Though not tied specifically to the teaching and use of literature, the table below highlights six key tenets my students and I developed for adapting critical pedagogy for the 21st century.

Why do I think the tenets outlined here are part of a modern day critical pedagogy? When looking beyond the theoretical arguments that fill contemporary discussion of critical pedagogy, I see a clear relationship between how young people are positioned as subjects in schools, the socioeconomic and other potentially dehumanizing ways young people are cast, and the opportunity to expand, challenge and reassert power through revolutionary means. Wireless critical pedagogy takes these understandings and pushes them into the 21st century: utilizing the cultural norms and resources that

Table 1. Key Tenets of Wireless Critical Pedagogy

Student Centered	• Student interest, knowledge, and perspective drive content and production. • YPAR acts as a component of wireless critical pedagogy, not as a separate pedagogical approach.
Empowered Identities	• As mobile devices can allow students to document, share, and amplify their expertise, they can act as tools for Freire's (1970) concept of "conscientization." • Likewise, adjusting the activities within classrooms to situate student learning within various roles shifts how students perceive and interpret class work and its relevance in the "real world."
Community Driven and Responsive	• In conjunction with youth-driven research practices, work within classroom contexts speaks to and focuses on community needs and concerns. • Critical educators can help bridge in-class learning with the expertise, opportunities, and challenges that are faced beyond the school boundaries; through digital tools, visits, and role-play, alternate voices help bolster student interaction within their communities.
Culturally Relevant	• Though popular YA series can be seen as embraced as part of youth culture, bringing these books into classrooms changes the context of how they are perceived. Simply "using" popular books–like the latest technological fad–in a classroom is not culturally relevant. • Applying youth cultural practices, including YA within classrooms, responds to and builds upon how socially transformative learning unfolds.
Critical Technical and Academic Literacies	• Classroom learning still places focus on academic literacies and technical skills. However, these are applied within purposeful contexts. Students produce academic texts and develop technically complex media in order to advocate, inform, persuade, and ignite discussion amongst an audience. • While students still write and produce research reports, persuasive essays and other content expected within traditional, standards-aligned classrooms, this work can look different: a student's essay may be a persuasive memo written to (and actually given to) the city council; a research report may be turned into an edited segment of a Wikipedia entry; a response to a literary text may become a blog post to engage in public- driven discourse.
Not Reliant on Technologies	• Though this pedagogy is responsive to cultural shifts as a result of participatory media tools like mobile devices, it does not require expensive technology. • A wireless critical pedagogy is a revitalization of critical pedagogy for the twenty-first century, not simply utilizing digital tools within a classroom. As such, educators need to look beyond specific tools and apps, focusing on incorporating the cultural practices of participatory culture for critical education (this is discussed in detail in the next chapter).

students are familiar with, the walls of the classroom become fluid for revolutionary dialogue and discourse.

So, where does YA literature fit into all of this? While several projects noted in the next chapter, such as the Harry Potter Alliance, rely on some of these principles for engagement, I believe that these are generally powerful ways to elevate words on pages to tools for critical consciousness. This pedagogy can be about fomenting passion and literature as a lens for critical and revolutionary social change.

CHALLENGING THE GENRE

Much like the title of this book, a framework rooted in critical pedagogy offers teachers and students the opportunity to challenge the books they engage with. More than simply pointing to the problematic instantiations of race, class, gender, sexuality and power depicted in a text, a critical pedagogy framework for readers allows students to respond to and manipulate text in ways that are amplified for other readers and classmates.

I want to emphasize that critical pedagogy is more than something one does. More specifically, a teacher doesn't *do* critical pedagogy as one component of a lesson and then switch to another aspect of the daily teaching responsibilities. Likewise, when discussing and exploring critical pedagogy, it is not a practice that students turn on for an assignment and then switch off. Critical pedagogy is pervasive. And while scholarship in critical pedagogy is mired in theoretical abstraction, the root of the theory is based on *action* and *reflection*. The cyclical nature of renewal and discourse here are key to working productively with youth. And–as emphasized by the examples in this chapter–critical pedagogy should not rely merely on canonical or "good" literature. Whether a student is reading a *Twilight* clone or a curriculum-approved YA novel like *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* a critical pedagogy is one that engages readers in dialogue around power structures that exist: both in the book and in one's own society.

As a wireless critical pedagogy is one that builds on youth's own empowered identities, I want to emphasize that culturally relevant and high-interest books for youth are necessary tools to validate how individuals learn within our classrooms. And while I emphasize that critical pedagogy in the 21st century does not depend on digital tools, I also believe that they can greatly enhance how we communicate and enact transformative literacy practices. As we'll see in the next chapter, digital technology is not just changing learning in classrooms, it is redefining the YA genre as a whole.

NOTES

[1] Portions of this chapter are adapted from my previous research: Garcia, A. (2012). *Good reception: Utilizing mobile media and games to develop critical inner-city agents of social change.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.