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Robert B. Rhodes Jr.

*Cedarville University*, [rbrhodes@cedarville.edu](mailto:rbrhodes@cedarville.edu)

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# The Problem with Creative Writing

*Robert Rhodes*

*Robert Rhodes just graduated in May of 2016 with a double major in Music and Worship. He is currently working as a Worship Pastor in Dayton and enjoys tennis and wrestling alligators in his spare time.*

A mood of excitement was in the air as people stood in line at the movie theatre. The final movie of *The Hunger Games* series was finally showing this evening or should I say morning since it would be 12AM of the next day. I noticed that the first six showings were completely sold out as I made my way up to the ticket counter. The large cardboard display in the theatre lobby depicted the movie's main characters in fighting positions. At the very bottom of the display under the title, I noticed smaller lettering, "Based on the series by Suzanne Collins." I remembered the first time I saw a *Hunger Games* series book. While it intrigued me, I ignored it off because I assumed that it was like every other fiction series out there. Not till a few months later, when I started reading the first book in the series did I realize that these were different. They were compelling pieces of literature. These books told the story of the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, and her struggle to fight against the governmental ruling and caste system that looms over her and the rest of her nation, Panem. While the majority of people have given in to the fact that this is the way things are going to be, Katniss chooses not to back down and becomes an icon that Panem eventually emulates in order to claim their freedom as a nation against their oppressive government. While this series was not only interesting to read, these books expressed an amount of real-world opinions on governmental control and hierarchy. As I sat in the theatre and waited for the lights to go down, I thought about the fact that all of the excitement from this franchise began at the writing desk

of one author, Suzanne Collins, and it was her creative energy that flowed onto those pages.

Suzanne Collins and her work are just a small portion of the greater genre known as creative writing. Creative writing is a form of writing that usually goes outside the normal realms of writing, whether that is professional, journalistic, academic, or technical. It can come in many different forms including poetry, plays, movie scripts, songs, speeches, and fiction. The purpose of creative writing is both to entertain and share human experience. Much like what Collins did in the *Hunger Games* series when she thought up Katniss and the world of Panem, creative writers are able to share their own views through the power of their creative expression. Creative writing also brings along with it a variety of literary devices including character developments, theme, conflict, plot formation, dialogue, metaphors, anecdotes, and emotional appeal (Tate 181-183). Clearly, creative writing is a much bigger genre than many people consider it.

Unfortunately, just as the people of Panem at the beginning of *The Hunger Games* were settled with the idea that there was no value in their own freedom, many people see creative writing as not valuable and are choosing to not show their creativity in this manner. A survey of Cedarville University students scored a five or under when polled if they liked creative writing or enjoyed writing for pleasure (Composition Course Survey). In addition, William Dell makes the poignant observation in his article “Creative Writing in the English Classroom” that the reason more and more is being written on promoting creative writing in the classroom is because of student’s lackluster attitudes toward it. Dell points out that this is due to the fact that people fear negative criticism from both their teachers and their peers (500). Even when creative writing does occur, there is a great deal of discussion about its lack of quality, the underwhelming attitudes of the audience for it, and how the two are tired together (Dell 28). Ron McFarland makes this claim specifically about the creative writing genre of poetry in his article, “An Apologia for Creative Writing” that even teachers are hesitant to encourage the practice of creative writing in their classrooms (45). Douglas Hesse writes in his article “The Place of Creative Writing in Compositional Studies,” that creative writing in academia is considered an “elephant-making machine” because it makes students fall in love with something that the majority of them will not be excelled enough in to make a living (32). With such

dire reasoning as this it is no wonder that people are choosing to stay clear of creative writing.

So what if the interest in creative writing is slowly dwindling? People need to be aware of how much of a problem this really is. The first and most important reason is the fact that people need to learn that they should not only be consumers of things as people so often are, but they also need to be creators as well. Douglas Hesse also writes, “We are at the crucial professional juncture, needing to find a good mix between being ‘about’ writing/composing (that is, as focusing on interpretation, on analyzing texts of literature practices) and being ‘for’ writing/composing (that is, focusing on production, on making texts)” (34). Another important reason to teach creative writing is that it can teach students not only how to show creative expression but it can also help them express their own opinion in a unique way. This is invaluable and is something that is very difficult to teach someone (Bailey 154). One final thing worth mentioning is the fact that creative thinking is extremely helpful to our brains and how they grow and develop. This creative thinking always helps them take in more information and data (Zeki 51). There are some important things at stake when it comes to the love of creative writing fading from view.

Unfortunately not all of the attempts to help people enjoy the practice of creative writing have been successful. One of these failures was the idea to force the love for it on people. This does not mean to tie them to a chair and yell at them to love creative writing, it means that many people are not thinking creatively themselves and are not giving those under them purposefully good experiences with creative writing. Creative writing is easily integrated into many different subjects in many different ways. Creative writing is also easily disguised in different forms. Why should it be disguised? Some practices are best learned inadvertently. In other words, it may be better to disguise creative writing because of the ever-increasing negative attitudes that arise from today’s students. This way, if done correctly, it allows for students to have a chance to learn creative writing, practice it, and maybe learn to admire it without the added pressure to write it off because it seemed to be just another assignment given to them by their teacher.

Another failed attempt at fixing this problem is the idea the creative writing can only come from what writers know and have experienced. While this is true for many creative writers, it heavily limits the abilities of those who desire to write. Creative writing

involves so much more than just what one has seen or experienced. It leaves room to transcribe whatever may come to the writer's mind just as an artist may paint a scene that they have never seen in real life before or a composer will write a piece based on a tune that simply came to them. It is also important to understand that many people who are using creative writing as an outlet may have experienced very little in their lifetimes and therefore would have equally very little to write about. This creativity does not make them a liar as long as they acknowledge that this writing was something that did not come from their own experience, but from something they took the time to develop and write out. Since neither of the previous solutions have been successful, it is important that we try other options. The solution to this problem of lack of interest in creative writing is the teaching and instilling of it as an interest at a young age.

And who are the Katniss Everdeen's of this problem who can fix this problem and use this solution to overcome the oppressive power that apathy has when it comes to creative writing as Katniss did when she led her people to overcome Panem's government? Since there is a great deal of importance on the young age of when this influence occurs, it is important to assess who has this sort of power in young people's lives.

That would be none other than the providers and nurturers known as parents and teachers. Parents have an opportunity to instill this interest in the countless hours they take care of their children as they grow and mature. They have an opportunity to instill a positive attitude towards creativity in their homes. This creativity may not even start out in any form of literacy, but may eventually lead there. Likewise, teachers have an incredible responsibility to encourage their students to think creatively in the assignments that they are given. This means that assignments are presented in a way that students have significant enough room to show their creativity. Teachers and parents have the ability and responsibility to change young people's outlook on creative writing.

Responsibility is a big part of why the fate of creative writing should matter to teachers and parents. If they are serious about their jobs, then they will understand how important it is to share the importance of things such as creative writing. Another reason, teachers and parents should care is that creative writing uses a different part of their children and student's brains allowing their children and students to think in ways that they would not normally. This could not only help them solve problems in everyday life

currently, but also down the road when they are looking for a job. If parents and teachers feel responsible enough for their children and student's futures, then they will promote the use of creative writing. What is even better is that this solution to the creative writing problem is relatively easy to implement and does not have to be a hindrance. For the majority of young people, creativity is something that teachers and parents do not have to sit down and teach them. It is also something a parent or teacher does not have to be highly trained in beforehand. They only have to give the freedom they need to do it. In the home, creative writing can be a fun activity that can replace endless hours in front of the television or computer and both the parent and child will have something permanent that will come out of it. In school, creative writing does not have to be a burdensome thing taught as a subject all by itself, but it can be easily integrated into the learning processes of other subjects such as writing a poem about a historical event or writing down a made-up story in Spanish. The possibilities are endless and the use of creative writing in daily practice is not as difficult as it once was.

There are countless success stories for how this practice of creative writing has been integrated into both the school and home. For example, a group of four junior high schools launched a creative writing project among them that challenged their students to write several different paragraphs that would appeal to each of the senses that they had been talking about recently in their classes. This assignment also gave their teachers a chance to stress other important things that they were recently trying to convey such as increased use of vocabulary. The students took to the assignment well: spending time on carefully developing their word usage along with asking for good examples of writers who were able to appeal to the senses well such as Edgar Allen Poe. Many of the teachers from the participating schools went as far as to say that this turned out to be one of the most valuable assignments that they have ever given their students (Kinnick 86-87). Studies such as this show the importance of creative writing's integration.

Despite the aforementioned evidence, those that represent that oppressive government of Panem and believe that the teaching of creative writing is a waste and will not be of use later in life exist. They will say that there are so many other things that need to be focused on in teaching children as either a parent or teacher. They will say that creative writing will do nothing for them twenty years down the

road. What they are not thinking about is that creative writing will actually help foster a lifelong love of learning for kids. If kids fall in love with creative writing at a young age and then find different ways to integrate it into different subjects as they learn in elementary up through college levels, then there will be so many more people who all have a more positive attitude towards education as a whole. Clearly the counterargument has a very strong voice in the world but does not overcome the evidence in favor of creative writing.

The movie theatre lights come up as the audience claps its approval. They may change a lot of things between what the book says and what the movie shows, but they were smart enough to know that Katniss has and will continue to overcome the oppressive government of Panem. In the same way, parents and educators should continue the fight to push a love for creative writing for young children despite the sometimes-negative attitudes toward it. Though it may seem bleak, things are beginning to change; so find creative ways to use creative writing and “May the Odds Be Ever in Your Favor.”

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