

November 2017

Literary Digest: Cannibal Poetry and Biology

Alicia Anzaldo
Wilbur Wright College

Claire Boeck
Wilbur Wright College

Sara Schupack
Wilbur Wright College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/steam>

 Part of the [Biology Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Anzaldo, Alicia; Boeck, Claire; and Schupack, Sara (2017) "Literary Digest: Cannibal Poetry and Biology," *The STEAM Journal*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 20. DOI: 10.5642/steam.20170301.20
Available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/steam/vol3/iss1/20>

© November 2017 by the author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License.

STEAM is a bi-annual journal published by the Claremont Colleges Library | ISSN 2327-2074 | <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/steam>

Literary Digest: Cannibal Poetry and Biology

Abstract

A humanities professor and a biology professor at Wilbur Wright College collaborated to create a lesson on human digestion and poetry, enriching the humanities course theme on cannibalism. This article describes the lesson plan, examples of student work, and faculty reflections.

Author/Artist Bio

Alicia Anzaldo has taught biology for the past 22 years at Wilbur Wright College and currently serves as the department's chairperson. She founded the college's Center for Teaching & Learning. Claire Boeck has been teaching Humanities at Wright College for over eight years. She will begin a doctoral program in Higher Education Fall 2017, although cannibalism will always be something she is interested in. Sara Schupack, Director of Developmental Education, has worked at Wilbur Wright College for more than four years, and prior to that, taught English at several different community colleges in California and Massachusetts. Her teaching and research interest focuses on integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum. All three authors are active members of the college's STEAM Think Tank.

Keywords

cannibalism, digestion, poetry, biology, higher education

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Literary Digest: Cannibal Poetry and Biology

Alicia Anzaldo, Claire Boeck, & Sara Schupack

Planning

Faculty at Wilbur Wright College, an open-enrollment community college in Chicago, are developing STEAM projects and programming with the support of the STEAM Think Tank. The Think Tank is a group of faculty and administrators who learn together about the potential for STEAM in higher education, and facilitate interactive sessions in the college's Center for Teaching and Learning to explore the topic and possible applications. Members also experiment with STEAM in their own classrooms.

Professor Claire Boeck wanted to incorporate a lesson on the human digestive process into her humanities World Literature course. Her approach invited students to write poems that could tie the digestion process to cannibalism, as the theme of her course is cannibalism. The readings and course content examine how cannibalism has functioned as a metaphor for political and economic oppression as well as how it has been used by conquering powers to demonize “the Other”. Boeck asked a biology professor, Alicia Anzaldo, to provide the lesson about digestion because it celebrates and demonstrates respect for the expertise of someone in another discipline. Having a guest speaker highlights how collaboration between trained academics is beneficial to all parties involved. Anzaldo welcomed the opportunity to merge the two disciplines in the spirit of STEAM.

Delivery

The lesson plan was designed to have Anzaldo from the biology department be a guest speaker and provide her expertise in a humanities World Literature course, taught by Boeck. This lesson was designed by both faculty members, stitching together their disciplinary expertise

The goal was for students to use biological facts to produce a creative work of literature. Boeck asked Anzaldo to prepare a roughly 30-minute presentation on the basic functions and processes of the human digestive system. Boeck shared the assignment instructions and grading rubric with Anzaldo so she could know how students were going to apply this knowledge. Anzaldo shared the Power Point presentation and handout with Boeck in advance to make sure the material would enable students to compose their poems.

In order to obtain a grade ‘A’ for their poem students were provided with this criteria: relates cannibalism to the digestive process; demonstrates clear understanding of the concepts/process in the digestion lecture; is at least ten lines long; includes a clearly developed pattern of number syllables per line; includes a metaphor or simile. Handouts and presentations were posted to the course website so students could use them as reference materials as they wrote their poems. This was Anzaldo’s first opportunity to teach to a class of students that had not been exposed to at least basic cellular biology prior to learning about human digestion. The challenge was to present the material at a level that students could comprehend and enjoy, while at the same time providing enough information that they could achieve insight into the process of digestion. Of all the human systems, digestion, is arguably the system most people can relate to on a daily basis. The hope was that students could use their previous knowledge, along with the new content presented and apply both to the creative process of writing their poems.

Outcomes

Boeck observed that the students were extremely engaged with biology. They asked Anzaldo several questions, displaying genuine interest in digestion and connected it to the theme of the course. For example, they asked if human meat would be processed any differently from other foods. Some students chose to use the various parts of the digestive route to organize the stanzas of their poems, thus linking the anatomical structure to the poetic one. Out of a class of twelve, eleven students participated and completed the poem. There were seven female students and four male students, ages ranging from 20-32. The mean age was 22 and the mode was 20. Their poems indicate comprehension of the digestive process as well as innovative connections between cannibalism and human anatomy. These students gave permission to include their poems:

Digesting a Modest Proposal – Matthew Barge

Mouth

Since you are lesser than me
I will taste you on my tongue
Teeth as sharp as knives
Ready to break down

Stomach

You'll churn inside my belly
Just like some flesh on a spit
Wanting to move on
Waiting to escape

Intestine

I'll grind you up like the work
That takes the last of your worth
Taking what I need
Ejecting what's left

Rectum

When all that's human is gone
I'll rid myself of remains
Pushing out the waste
But I, no better

Digestion Poem – Katherine Schick

Pink, empty, and warm,
Dead, still delectable,
The white ground iced,
Splattered red with life's blood,
Which slithers down,
That hollow tube of flesh,
Esophagus,
Coating the pitted walls,
Of my stomach,
Oven of my body,
Dissolved and churned,
Sent through the coiled snake,
Lined with villi,
Soft as supple velvet,
To drain the life,
From your flesh to mine,
Become a part,
Of this lone cannibal

Digestion Poem – Kristian Dus

It's been hours since my last meal.
My lower intestine, I'm beginning to feel,
The absence of that delicious and fresh,
That tasty and rich, human flesh.

Your neck is probably where we'd begin.
My canines surely would pierce the skin.
To ensure your death is not in question,
To promote a safe and smooth digestion.

You'd sit in my stomach for further inspection,
To rid you of waste for unneeded infection.
You'll need a map when you're in my mid-section,
Traveling through the long roads of my intestines.

Eating humans is my new obsession,
Perhaps I might make it my new obsession.
Victims might say, these acts are selfish and heinous,
I'll make sure to ask them, when they come out of my anus.
=]

Reflections

Boeck and Anzaldo experienced a new aspect of their professional relationship. The collaboration was a wonderful opportunity to bridge disciplines that attract different groups of students as well as help faculty learn from one another. The students verbally commented they enjoyed the guest lecture and the assignment. Furthermore, the collaboration helped Boeck connect with the learning and the students as Boeck was also a student during the digestion lecture. Anzaldo added another layer to her teaching skills by working with the new set of students. Boeck and Anzaldo repeated the activity for the Spring 2017 semester.