M any gifted students are experiencing heightened stress and anxiety related to academic pressures from the Covid-19 pandemic, as many families are facing concerns over health, employment, and the uncertainty of K-12 schooling. Across the country, districts are experimenting with hybrid schedules, as children alternate between online and in-person learning. While many educators have also experienced feelings of concern to some degree, new research from the CDC and others has shown increased rates of depression and anxiety in youth during the pandemic. In this unprecedented time, the social-emotional well-being of our talented students should be a top priority, as the emotional challenges faced by some (underachievement, perfectionism and engagement) may be exacerbated by the pandemic.

The Benefits of Videotherapy

Videotherapy is a strategy that uses film to help foster developmental and counseling needs enabling students to identify with the characters. This can be empowering for gifted students who may be struggling in some manner (Dole & Mcmahon 2005, Milne & Reis 2000, Hebert & Sergent 2005). While all adolescents face challenging periods of growth and transition, students with gifts and talents may feel these same challenges more intensely, experiencing asynchronous development, heightened sensitivities, or issues of multipotentiality (Hebert & Sergent 2005). In film, students can engage in meaningful discourse with their peers and teachers, problem-solve during major developmental moments, and be empowered to consider important decisions in their own lives.

While videotherapy is a useful strategy at any point throughout development, it is particularly important in this new age of online learning. There is less time for students to meet with teachers individually, less group and partner work, and less access to support staff. While society often views gifted students as being self-sufficient, the reality is that many academically talented students also have learning disabilities, are learning English as their second language, do not have access to rigorous texts at home, or may be underachieving for varying reasons. Additionally, at a time where students are completing their work on electronic devices, secondary students may receive a flood of reading assignments from their teachers. These assignments can be monotonous for students, and some teachers have reported that this shift to online learning has made them feel less competent, as they cannot assign as many creative tasks. Using film during this uncertain time can help provide students with learning experiences that are engaging, exploratory, and unique.

Recommendations for Videotherapy for Secondary Teachers

Videotherapy has many benefits but must be structured in a thoughtful manner. Educators interested in teaching through film need to guide their students carefully, as many students can get carried away by the entertainment value of the film and lose sight of the objectives. First, teachers must consider the rating of the film, view it in its entirety, and follow district protocols for teaching with videos in class. As with any well-structured lesson, teachers must have clear objectives for their students, and practitioners suggest three stages in videotherapy: identification, catharsis, and insight.

The identification stage enables students to connect with the characters and their problems, followed by the catharsis stage that occurs when students feel emotionally connected to the character, and then insight, when students problem solve and identify real-life solutions.

Depending on certain factors, such as the age of students in class, the length of the film, and the film content, videos can be shown in their entirety or in clips (Milne & Reis, 2000). When students view films at home during remote learning, the movie or movie clips must be free and easily accessible. Additionally, if the film is not intended to be viewed in its entirety, time stamps must be clearly communicated. In order to help scaffold students through their viewing, it is useful to have pre-viewing, viewing, and post-viewing activities that are different depending one’s objectives. Pre-viewing activities include reflection foreshadowing the themes of the film and a synopsis of the plot and characters. If viewing occurs during class, a time for reflection should be provided for identification, catharsis, and insight. Teachers can also consider providing specific stopping points for students to reflect and draw conclusions. After viewing, opportunities should be given for students to engage in the insight stage, where they can problem-solve and make meaningful connections to their own life.

Teachers can assign a follow-up project or assignment to enable students to create divergent questions that could be discussed in a virtual class discussion or complete a brief writing entry that challenges students to draw on themes from the film to make personal connections. This stage can be differentiated and should keep in mind students’ needs and interests. The following films (or parts thereof) could be discussed in a virtual class discussion or complete a brief writing entry that challenges students to draw on themes from the film to make personal connections.

- The Sound of Music
- The Sandlot
- Stand by Me
- Ferris Bueller’s Day Off
- The Sixth Sense
- Schindler’s List
- The Mummy
- The Lion King

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Adding references

Creative supplies that may be useful include glue sticks, colored pencils, permanent and non-permanent markers, scissors, old magazines and newspapers, colored paper, double-sided tape, washi tape, rubber stamps, inkpads, internet and a printer.

While this column focuses on one example of how to create an altered book with expository text, there are unlimited possibilities for how to use a similar approach to creating altered books with fiction where students illustrate a theme on the pages of the book, or create characters that pop up and speak central themes, illustrate a scene in the pages, and more. Note that this artistic approach is not meant to destroy books that are in good shape but to repurpose them.

Sources for books include library discard piles, library book sales, paperbacks that are losing their pages, extra copies of older books that may not have the same appeal that they had when they were published, and books that are being weeded from personal, public or school libraries.

If you and your students create altered books and want to share them on social media, please share them with the NAGC audience-tag @NAGC and use the hashtags #alteredbooks #ELA #Comprehension #Creativity.

References


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social and emotional learning

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of films) are excellent for use with gifted secondary students: Good Will Hunting, Hidden Figures, Finding Forrester, Spellbound, Akeelah and the Bee, and Mean Girls. This diverse list offers opportunities for students to connect with main characters of color, talented boys and girls, and interests ranging from math to spelling. THP

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