NAVIGATING LIFE'S "FUN AND GAMES": PAIRING *DOWNRIVER* WITH *LORD OF THE FLIES*

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Abstract
Since pairing the classics with young adult literature can increase reading comprehension and spark interest amongst our students, this essay explores a unit plan for connecting Will Hobbs's *Downriver* (1991) with William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954). Both works espouse significant and timely themes: the importance of working together; the harms of mob rule; the importance of law and order for maintaining civilization; the value of controlling one's emotions such as fears and desires; and the causes for individuals and groups waging war against each other. Additionally, the essay provides a brief summary of the novels and outlines activities for before, during, and after reading them.

Keywords
young adult literature, YAL, YA literature, classic literature, canon, canonical literature, reading engagement, reading interest, William Golding, Will Hobbs

Introduction

When I was an early-career teacher in East-Central Kansas, I learned a hard lesson about the importance of building prior knowledge when teaching Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum." I erroneously assumed that my tenth graders would be able to tackle the story's style, diction, historical context, and plot. Initially, students read the text out loud, but because they had problems with pronunciation and comprehension, I stepped in and read for them, stopping to explain words and concepts. Unfortunately, the farther we got into the text, the more their eyes glazed over; it was unclear who was suffering more: Poe's protagonist or my students.

Stover (2003) argued that in order to avoid such teaching disasters, we need to mind the numerous "gaps" occurring "between students' interests, reading abilities, levels of life experience, and the worlds of the texts they are asked to read" (p. 79). Bushman and Haas (2006) explained that these gaps occur for a variety of reasons: classics were not written for teenagers; they were not written for today's audiences; teens have not experienced the same situations as the stories' characters; and the style, syntax, and delivery are alien to young readers (pp. 175-176). Subsequently,

while some students sufficiently master literary techniques to "leap gracefully," other students "trip *hard*, and fall into that gap" (Stover, 2003, p. 77, emphasis in original).

To rectify this problem, scholars such as Kaywell (1993) promoted pairing young adult (YA) novels with classics because the more accessible YA novels can bridge gaps. Likewise, Bushman and Haas (2006) asserted that YA novels can help students "hone their thinking skills" since students enjoy and have an easier time comprehending YA books, thus providing "a common core of knowledge" for more complex reading (p. 177).

When selecting texts for pairing, teachers might opt for William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (*LOTF*), the "uber-canonical" novel that has been frequently taught in classrooms for decades (Applebee, 1990, 1992; Stotsky, Goering, & Jolliffe, 2010). Published in 1954, this classic "robinsonade" or castaway narrative depicts schoolboys, ages six to twelve, stranded on an uninhabited tropical island after their plane is shot down. *LOTF* is widely used to teach text structure, character development, and symbolism (Samuels, 1993, p.195).

Perhaps the reason that this "staple of most high school curricula" (Porteus, 2009, p.16) meshes so well with other texts is that it was conceived as a direct (and in Golding's mind, more believable) response to another text: R.M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1857). In this tale, the boys encounter numerous enemies from sharks to cannibals and stay united against their opponents while "having a jolly good adventure" (Presley, 2017, para. 2).

Golding, in contrast, portrayed a group of children who are their own enemy and are constantly undermined by their own physical deficiencies and moral flaws. At first, life is peaceful for the boys: they elect Ralph, a conscientious leader, to create a constructive, stable social order; they start building shelters, and they light a bonfire to alert potential rescuers. Resentful of not being elected "chief," Jack shatters the tranquility; he systematically foils Ralph's authority and entices the children to play and hunt rather than perform daily chores like maintaining the signal fire. Jack's actions push the cooperative civilization into savage anarchy: the fire rages out of control, burning one of the "litteluns" to death and destroying some of the huts; Simon and Piggy are viciously murdered; and Ralph becomes hunted by Jack's newly formed tribe. At the end of the novel, Ralph stumbles upon a naval officer who has come ashore to determine the cause of the fire. Shocked and embarrassed by the uncivilized, disheveled, and sobbing "pack of British boys," the officer turns his back on them until they can "pull themselves together" (Golding, 2001, p. 182).

Over the years, a number of scholars have demonstrated *LOTF*'s suitability for pairing with YA texts. For instance, Herz and Gallo (1996) made thematic connections to Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974), Duncan's *Killing Mr. Griffin* (1978), Peck's *Princess Ashley* (1987), Myers' *Scorpions* (1989), and Hobbs' *Downriver* (1991). Additionally, Samuels (1993) paired *LOTF* with *The Chocolate War* in order to focus on the novel's messages about control, power, order, evil, identity, and mob rule. She observed, "A unit of this kind offers a variety of different ways to look at how power is abused and leadership grabbed by unscrupulous power-hungry individuals, while offering some examples of people who dared to fight back" (p. 213). In addition to pre, during, and after-reading activities for the unit plan, Samuels noted potential *LOTF* connections with poetry, short stories, and YA novels such as Swarthout's *Bless the Beasts* & *Children* (1970) and *Downriver*.

> Both novels espouse timely themes of working together; the harms of mob rule; the importance of law and order for maintaining civilization; the value of controlling one's emotions such as fears and desires; and the causes for individuals and groups waging war against each other.

In this essay, I take up Herz, Gallo, and Samuels' suggestion to pair *LOTF* with *Downriver*. Both novels espouse timely themes of working together; the harms of mob rule; the importance of law and order for maintaining civilization; the value of controlling one's emotions such as fears and desires; and the causes for individuals and groups waging war against each other. While many of the more "universal" themes might be better suited for adults, the novels' examination of a character's struggles against self and society, are highly relevant to teenagers navigating life's "fun and games" (Golding, 2001, p. 181) and discovering themselves and their place in the world.

Downriver depicts seven teenagers attending Discovery Unlimited, an outdoor school for troubled adolescents. Feeling constrained by the program's rules, these "Hoods in the Woods" (p. 1) ditch Al, their counselor, and attempt to navigate the Colorado River without adult supervision, a permit, adequate supplies, or even a river map. Much like *LOTF*, conflict between rivaling factions emerges over group leadership. The charismatic but flawed Troy is eventually usurped by the narrator, Jessie, a young teen who is at war with herself and her parents. Early in the novel, she reflects, "I could see nothing but the frightening dark tunnel that was my future" (p. 2). Initially smitten by Troy's natural leadership and handsome eyes, Jessie gradually gains confidence in herself and her crew to navigate her fears, perilous rapids, newfound enemies, and the authorities pursuing them.

One of the reasons why I selected *Downriver* is because of my fondness for its author, who I have had the opportunity to meet: first, at the Writing Conference's literature festival in Lawrence; then, later at one of the KATE Fall Conferences in Wichita. Hobbs is an engaging speaker and uses numerous photographs he took on his many rafting trips to illustrate how he devised plot, character, and key passages. Hobbs once remarked that *Downriver* was:

> set in a place I very much wanted to share with my readers. I've rowed my own whitewater raft down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon 10 times so far, and enjoyed enormously the chance to bring it all to life on the pages of these books—the feel of moving water, the song of the canyon wren, the quiet beauty as well as the roaring, heart-pounding excitement of being there. It's a joy to write about the places you love. (as cited in Lesesne, Buckman, & Beers, 1997, p. 237)

Hobbs has profoundly affected the way I approach young adult literature in the classroom. When I read *Downriver*, scenes of climbing Storm King Peak, relaxing at the River Blue, and navigating Lava Falls come to life as a multimodal experience, a blending of the author's voice, photos, and text. Consequently, when designing lesson plans, I like to appeal to the senses the way Hobbs does. To guide teachers in implementing a unit plan pairing these two novels, the next sections will provide speaking, listening, writing, and thinking activities for before, during, and after reading.

Before Reading

Using Media to Build Background

Media can activate or create prior knowledge in addition to sparking interest; this strategy can be especially effective for our students who may not have a background in mountain climbing, river rafting, or being stranded on a deserted island. Although I generally use shorter clips to maintain students' attention spans and keep the lesson "flowing," there are three fascinating longer videos about the Colorado River that I highly recommend. The first video, "John Wesley Powell" (2013), is a thirty-minute National Geographic documentary about the first person to float the Colorado River. Another National Geographic video, "Chasing Rivers" (2014), describes the river's beauty and emerging environmental problems. Finally, television station Denver 7 (2017) produced a twenty-one-minute documentary illustrating the river's numerous benefits: generating electricity, providing water for people, crops, and livestock, and supporting a range of recreational activities.

In terms of movies, *Cast Away* would be incredibly effective for inciting interest and generating schema. In particular, teachers might show the terrifying scene where protagonist Chuck Noland (played by Tom Hanks) survives a violent plane crash and washes onto an uninhabited island. In order to illustrate the difficulty of survival, teachers might play scenes where Noland learns how to make fire and how to fish.

Role-Playing Activities

There are a range of role-playing activities that can be employed to spark interest, exercise critical thinking skills, practice group problem-solving, and set up reading of the novels. To introduce *LOTF*, teachers might employ "Stranded at Sea" games. These are an excellent means for learning survival strategies and facilitating discussion of leadership qualities necessary for surviving, a critical theme connecting the two novels. A U.S. Coast Guard version of this activity is readily available on the internet. The game asks students to rank in order of utility 15 items that would be beneficial for survival such as a case of rations and a can of shark repellent. Then, students share their rankings in small groups to generate a consensus score. Finally, students compare their scores with the official Coast Guard answers. In order to make computation simpler, Mind Tools (2015) offers a free chart that automatically tabulates results; one column indicates individual scores while another displays team scores.

Other role-playing activities could be done as writing assignments or class discussions. For instance, students could compose a journal about what they would need or want to have with them if they were a castaway. Also, the class could deliberate on what makes a good leader and then generate a list of those qualities on poster board or butcher paper to display in the classroom. Throughout the unit, the class can revisit the list to consider how characters represent or violate good leadership principles. This will be especially helpful after both books are read because students can compare and contrast how rivaling factions emerge and how subsequent conflicts are resolved.

During Reading

Literature Circles

To carry group interaction into the reading phase of the unit, teachers might divide the class into literature circles (Daniels, 1994), groups of 4-6 students who read and discuss the text with each other. Each member is assigned a particular role such as the "discussion director," who develops questions for group conversation; the "literary luminary," who selects important or intriguing passages and reads them aloud to the group; the "illustrator," who renders key moments in the passage and then shares it with the group; the "summarizer," who provides a brief overview of the assigned reading; the "vocabulary enricher," who picks, defines, and shares new or difficult words.

Ironically, I have experienced "Lord of the Flies" moments when using lit circles because students did not want to participate or had not done the required reading. My daughter has even complained about lit circles: she felt like the teacher always placed her with students who would not do the work. To overcome such problems and provide a means for evaluation, teachers should have students submit their work in writing either on paper or electronically via shared Google or Word documents, blogs, or wikis. Furthermore, students could be rotated into different groups as they read the novel so they are not "stuck" working with the same people for the duration of the unit.

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are one of my favorite strategies for scaffolding reading skills because they help identify, organize, and display students' learning as we read. Additionally, they may be employed to foster discourse by having students share their findings and chronicle their conversations. Miller and Buffen (2015) stated that graphic organizers are beneficial since they

provide opportunities for finding evidence to support ideas, reflect on learning, and raise new questions; make inferences based upon dialogue or themes generated in the text; pose questions to the class based upon puzzling, startling, or intriguing evidence; form dialogue by selecting passages that incite reactions; make personal connections; and analyze across texts by contrasting or comparing evidence from previous reading activities or earlier chapters (para. 7-12). In addition to connecting new information with prior knowledge, graphic organizers reduce students' cognitive load (Wei et al., 2019, p. 628).

One of my favorite types of graphic organizers are multi-column entry journals. These are simply tables easily created on one's favorite word processing application; two or more columns and rows provide space for students to log and reflect on their learning (Herman & Wardrip, 2012, p. 50). For this unit, let us explore two graphic organizers for vocabulary development and reading response journaling.

Vocabulary Development

While *Downriver* may not be as linguistically complex as *LOTF*, there are numerous words like *cascade*, *eddy*, *writhing*, *deluge*, *mystique*, and *rogue* that may impede comprehension. *LOTF* can be especially challenging to American readers due to the many British colloquialisms expressed in the novel such as *pills*, *batty*, *nuts*, *queer*, *precentor*, *sucks to your auntie*, *wizard* or *wacco*, and *sod you*. Consequently, a four-column graphic organizer could be employed to record newly encountered words or assigned literary terms; list brief definitions; cite relevant passages and page numbers from the text; and apply the term in a complete sentence (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Four-Column Vocabulary Graphic Organizer

Term	Definition	Passage/Page #	Use in Sentence
precentor	person who helps facilitate worship; music director	"He's always throwing a faint," said Merridew. "He did in Gib; and Addis; and at matins over the precentor." p. 13	The precentor told the choir to sing "Amazing Grace."

Reading Response Journaling

Reading response journals promote active reading because they have students summarize chapters, record personal reactions, make predictions, and raise questions. Since *Downriver* contains numerous settings, graphic organizers track plot development as it flows from point to point. Students could create character-focused organizers to record internal and external conflicts as they arise; predict how they will be resolved; indicate what the conflicts say about the characters; and then note when those resolutions happen (See Figure 2). Conflict organizers may be used to chart and display the rise and fall of social order in *LOTF*. Also, organizers could manage theme analysis and assess characters' leadership qualities. Finally, another benefit of graphic organizers is that they can help students retrieve information quickly, which will be very especially helpful later in the unit when students compare and contrast the two novels.

Figure 2. Four-Column Character Organizer

Character	Internal Conflict	Prediction	Resolution
Star	Struggles with feelings of abandonment.	Will fall in love with Adam.	Lives with Jesse and her family.

After Reading

After-reading activities stimulate a deeper understanding of each novel as well as guide students through a comparison and contrast of both books. The post-reading activities outlined below are designed to foster critical inquiry with a range of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Stations

Stations (also called "Gallery Walks") are discussion-based activities that are set up around the classroom as posters on walls or handouts on desks. Students move from place to place, read the information, and discuss their observations. Later, small groups share their answers to the entire class (Francek, 2006, p. 27). I first implemented stations in my university courses because they promote active learning and give students an opportunity to get to know one another while they process their learning. Still, I wished that I had used them back when I taught high school English because they can be very effective in fostering class discussion and they provide desk-bound students an opportunity to move around.

When devising the activities for each station, I favor open-ended, critical thinking questions: why does Troy dislike Al; why does Star believe in Tarot cards and crystals; what does Crystal Rapids symbolize; what are some important foreshadows; and why does Adam not take things seriously? For *LOTF*, students could reflect on the symbolism of the officer turning his back on the kids; discuss the significance of chapter titles; consider what the novel would be like if the characters were teenagers, adults, or females; and ponder how particular emotions such as fear, desire, jealousy, hunger, and sorrow pervade the text while happy emotions—even at the end of the novel—do not. Other stations could focus on key quotations, asking students to identify the character who stated them and explain their meaning. Finally, students could address specific events in the novels, explain what went wrong, and proffer solutions for preventing or resolving conflicts. To synthesize learning, I have students write a group journal containing a list of their names to provide a record of group membership and a team reaction to what other groups wrote on the stations; reviewing other teams' responses encourages students to consider alternate perspectives.

Mock Trials

At the end of *Downriver*, Al tells the kids that they will have to face a judge who will determine what will happen to them, and this sets up an opportunity to use mock trials as a post-reading activity to highlight the importance of law and order for maintaining civilization as well as exercise persuasion, character analysis, and listening and speaking skills. At ReadWriteThink, Podolski (2010) provides a great starting point for conducting trials of literary characters, offering step-by-step instructions, terminology, and evaluation rubrics for a unit consisting of eight class sessions per fifty-minute period.

Teachers might also draw upon the many resources available at The Classroom Law Project (2019) for "how-to" instructions to teachers and students; handouts for preparing eyewitness affidavits; summons, forms for witness and exhibit analysis; and guides for preparing and cross-examining witnesses. The site also models literary applications of mock trials with a unit on Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron."

There are numerous options for mock trials for *Downriver* and *LOTF*. For instance, student district attorneys could prosecute Troy and Pug for the attempted murder of Freddy; or they could try the whole group for stealing Al's equipment and rafting without a permit. Furthermore, student defense attorneys could represent Jack and Roger who face charges for murdering Piggy; or they could try Jack and his hunters for the attempted murder of Ralph.

As the public speaking component might scare some of the shyer students, teachers might have reluctant students play jury members so while they are still role-playing, they do not have to worry about giving speeches. Mock trials also exercise critical reading and writing skills. For instance, the prosecution and defense teams gather, create, and present evidence from the novels and other resources to support their case. Also, the judge and jury have to deliberate on the evidence; they could also provide a spoken or written justification for their decisions.

Writing Activities

Instead of the traditional literary analysis essay, there are a number of fantastic post-reading writing activities that may be employed as summative assessments for *Downriver* and *LOTF*. One such activity is creating annotated maps of the river or the island. When my students do this assignment, I have groups of three or four students draw on large sheets of butcher paper with crayons and markers. The sketching process allows students an opportunity to discuss events in the novels and then compare their notes with the other groups' projects. One of the things that amazes me when doing this assignment is how the class climate shifts: some of my very boisterous classes have fallen into a kind of trance—they are so caught up in sketching and coloring their maps, they are eerily silent. Even when they discuss the maps, they tend to do so calmly and softly.

"RAFT," an acronym which stands for "Role, Audience, Format, and Topic," (DiBenedetto & Willis, 2017, p. 358) is also a perfectly suited writing assignment for both novels. In this strategy, students role-play a particular author who crafts a message to a specific audience. This strategy was introduced to me during a professional development workshop in Topeka conducted by a physical education/health teacher, and one of her examples came from a student who explained how the digestive system worked by chronicling the journey of an M&M. Overall, my students enjoy this project, but they sometimes need assistance getting started. Consequently, we will brainstorm types of writing formats such as interviews, police reports, songs, poems, letters, editorials, cartoons, and instruction manuals. I also provide examples of RAFTs from other topics. Once completed, RAFTs are shared with the rest of the class.

RAFTs in *Downriver* might include selecting Al who is writing a brochure intended for parents looking for educational opportunities for their troubled teens. In *LOTF*, students could pretend to be one of the "littluns" and write a letter home to his "mum and dad." One of the creative aspects of this activity is that it does not necessarily have to be print-based. The assignment could be achieved through a PowerPoint, Sway, Prezi, vlog, podcast, or other new media format.

Another engaging writing activity involves composing alternate endings that ask students to consider character arcs and plot development and then speculate as to what might happen next. For instance, what if the teens in *Downriver* continued on to Lake Mead? What would have happened if one of the characters died? Furthermore, what would happen if the schoolboys in *LOTF* were not rescued; would the hunters have killed Ralph? What happens to the boys once they leave the island? Students could also hypothesize more about the war—who is fighting, is it over, how bad was the planet damaged by nuclear war? Furthermore, where will the boys go? Has Britain survived? Students might also flesh out the character of the naval officer by role-playing him and writing a letter to the survivors' parents. What would the officer say occurred? On a related note, how should the boys be cared for after their experiences?

In addition to alternate endings, writing assignments could explore alternate points of view. As *Downriver* is written from Jessie's perspective, students could write a travelogue chronicling the events from another character's perspective. For instance, how does Troy feel about what transpires in the story? Is he a purely bad character, or can students find ways to make his character and struggles more complicated? Since *LOTF* is conveyed in an omniscient perspective, recontextualizing the novel from the vantage of a single character compels readers to consider more

deeply an individual character's feelings, biases, and development. For instance, what would students learn about bullying, the need for working together, and how civilization can descend into chaos if they were to tell the story (or selected scenes) from Ralph's, Jack's, or one of the littluns' point of view? Furthermore, as students compare their writings with one another, they may discover that these answers will differ due to each character's perspective.

Multimedia Projects

In addition to writing activities, there are a number of multimedia projects for encouraging a deeper analysis of the novels. For instance, students could stage a live or recorded television interview with one student playing the host and other students playing characters from the novels. Much like a *Jerry Springer*-like tabloid talk show, the program could have protagonists and antagonists face each other; in such a format, both novels' characters could interact with one another. The talk show activity also develops reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills since the host (perhaps assisted by classmates) creates thought- and emotion-provoking questions while the characters consider responses which would be true to their nature; characters could also wear costumes to make the scenario more authentic.

In the pre-reading section, we discussed using videos for introducing novels; however, rather than merely consuming media, students could make their own. Using the commercial videos as templates, students could adapt during-reading graphic organizers to make scripts. These videos also have students consider the rhetorical effect of visuals, dialogue, and soundtracks. Examples of such projects are readily available on YouTube, and one of my favorites is GCubes' (2015) stop-motion depiction of Piggy's death using LEGO sets and figures.

In addition to summary and analysis types of videos, students could create "teasers" which spark interest in the novels much like Hobbs did with his *Downriver* presentation. Finally, students could make video responses to other videos using applications like Flipgrid. For instance, they could answer Dash's video about why *LOTF* should (or should not) be read. Also, they could react to Golding's (2019) contention that the novel is actually optimistic rather than pessimistic by analyzing his argument and then providing evidence to support or disprove his assertion.

Along with video projects, I have had tremendous success with "soundtracks" which permit students to connect a reading to their favorite music. As an example, students could compile a playlist of songs that they would want to take with them while running the rapids; then, they would explain why they chose the songs and how the songs are suitable for the journey. Students could also make an ideal playlist for being "stranded on a deserted island" and explain how the songs might relate or help them cope while marooned. Finally, they could generate and explicate a playlist that sums up particular characters or themes in the novels.

Having used these soundtracks as summative activities for a number of years now for a range of reading assignments, I have discovered that students place a great deal of care and consideration in the production of their playlists because they are very passionate about music. When my first groups of students did the assignment, they actually ripped compact discs, created album covers, and wrote their analyses in the form of liner notes. Today, that work is submitted digitally, but their creations are still inventive and fun to share with the rest of the class.

Students could also complete the trading card assignment to emphasize artwork. Based on the idea of baseball cards, this activity focuses on each novels' characters by having students illustrate details such as character descriptions and mannerisms, provide memorable quotes, determine whether or not the character is static or dynamic, and explain the character's relationship with others. The trading card assignment helps them synthesize the information they collect from the novel and re-present it into their own words and images. Students have a range of options to

complete this activity such as with index cards or blank paper or with the interactive trading card creator at ReadWriteThink.

Extended Readings

While *Downriver* is a wonderful addition to the English language arts classroom, we may also take note of several other YA novels could be used as additional readings to extend learning. First, teachers might select Hobbs' *River Thunder* (1999); this sequel to *Downriver* takes Jessie and the gang back to the Colorado River where they encounter former nemesis Troy who is eager to prove that he has reformed. One intriguing way to connect the sequel to *LOTF* is by having students speculate what Jack might be like if he changed his ways.

Among the many contemporary YA novels inspired by *LOTF,* Prasad's *Damselfly* (2018) serves as a wonderful option for classroom use. Prasad modernizes Golding's tale by marooning a fencing team from an elite American boarding school on a Pacific island in order to explore how teens grapple with difficult issues such as race and class. In this pairing, students could trace changes between each text or they could examine how social issues affect themselves and their peers. Another intriguing work, Power's *Wilder Girls* (2019), proved highly prescient, having been published just prior to the COVID pandemic. Located on an idyllic island, Raxter School has devolved into a prison for its students when a mysterious disease kills their teachers and cuts them off from the rest of the world. Now after eighteen months of struggle, the survivors face food shortages plus the possibility that the disease is spreading to the remaining students.

Conclusion

Hobbs (2004) once commented, "I've always thought that novels are a great way for kids to learn content. Novels engage the emotions, and the brain remembers what the heart cares about" (2004, p. 63). Likewise, young adult novels can stimulate our students' interests and enrich their backgrounds thus providing an essential bridge to the classics. For teenagers navigating life's "fun and games" and discovering themselves and their place within society, a unit pairing Hobbs' *Downriver* with Golding's *LOTF* is a wonderful opportunity to learn the value of working together while running the perilous rapids of mob rule, lawlessness, and unbridled emotions.

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