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## How I Teach: Shenanigans are allowed

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# How I Teach: Shenanigans are allowed

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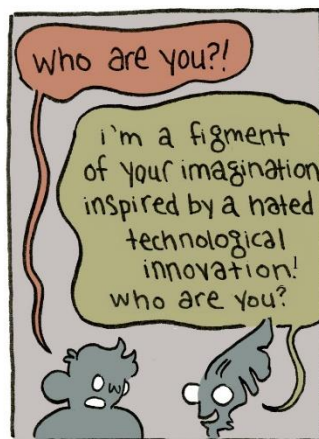
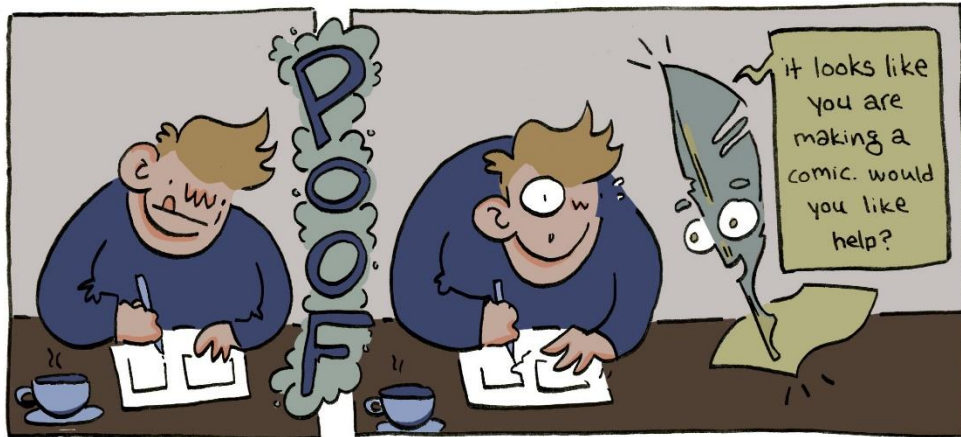
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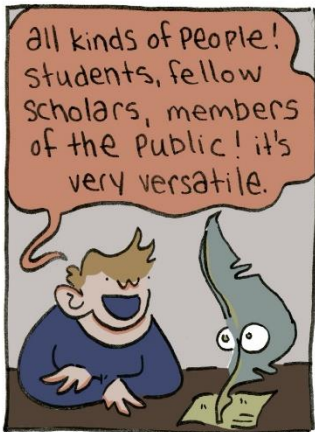
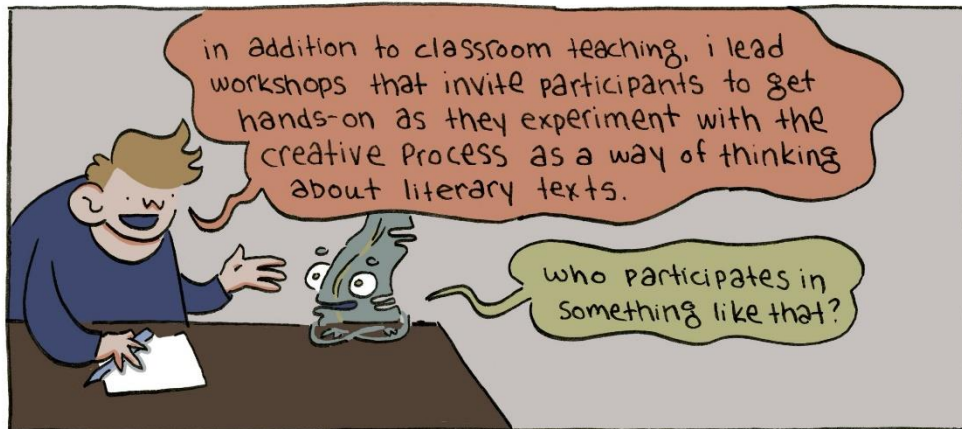
## Abstract

Incorporating thinking pulled from creativity research and comics theory, this essay explores the value of play and creativity in learning environments. The essay is constructed in two parts: the main body is presented in comic form and then followed by a second section containing instructions and relevant worksheets for an adaptation exercise designed for classroom use.

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<sup>1</sup> Microsoft Office Assistant "Clippit" or, more commonly, "Clippy."



<sup>2</sup> "Chaucer Here and Now" exhibition, Weston Library, 8 December 2023 – 28 April 2024.



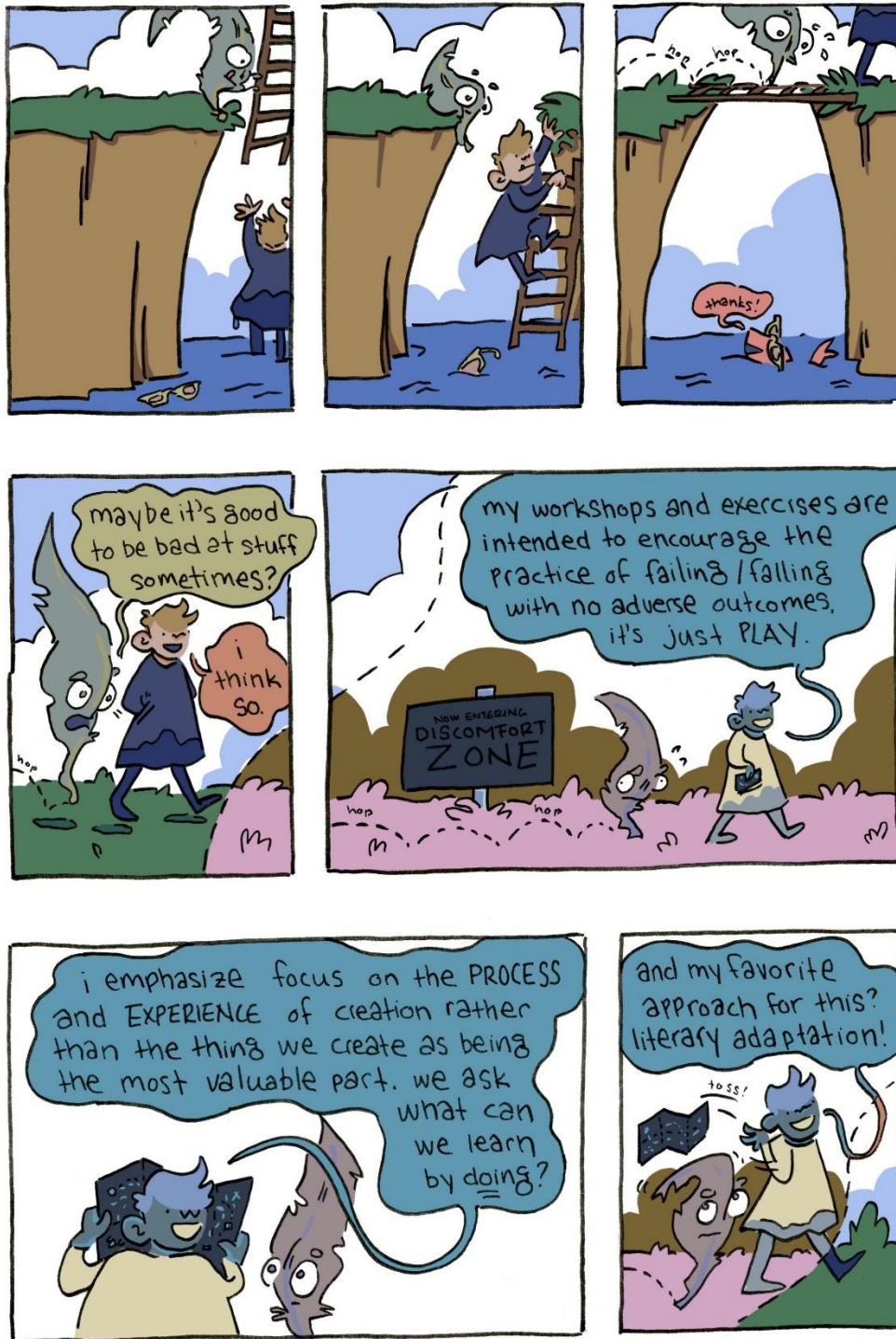
<sup>3</sup> Ackerman 6.

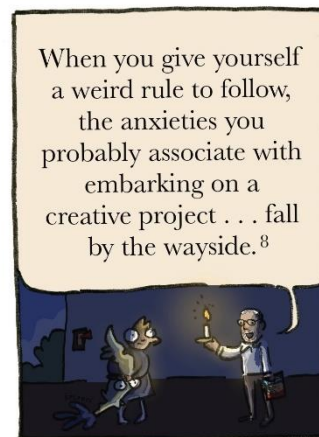
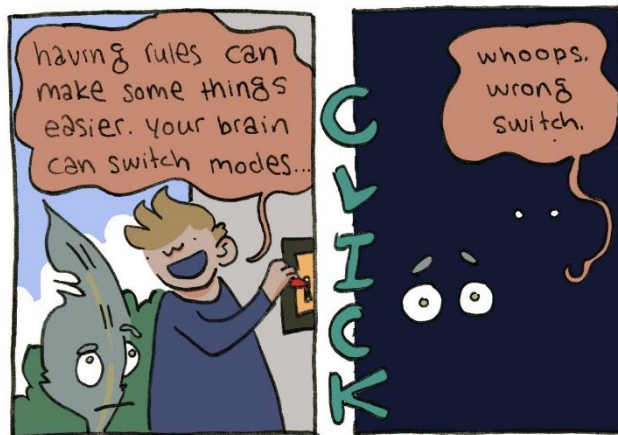
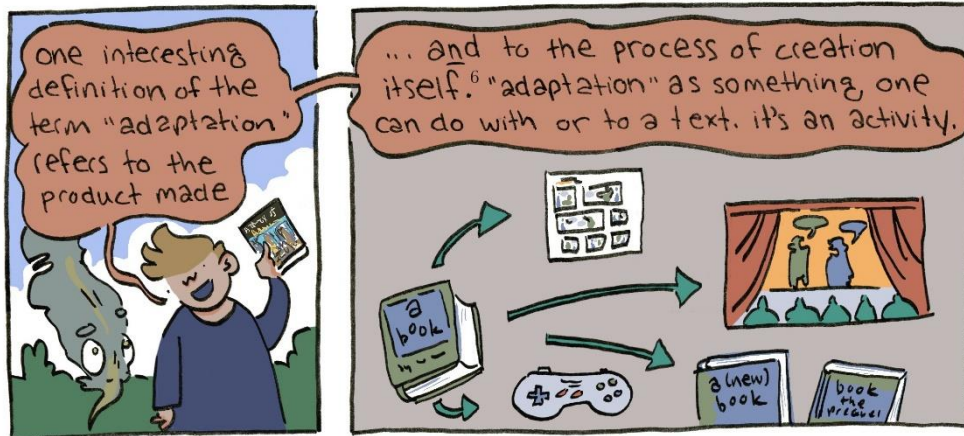


<sup>4</sup> OED, s.v. "re-."



<sup>5</sup> Lees and Overing 31.





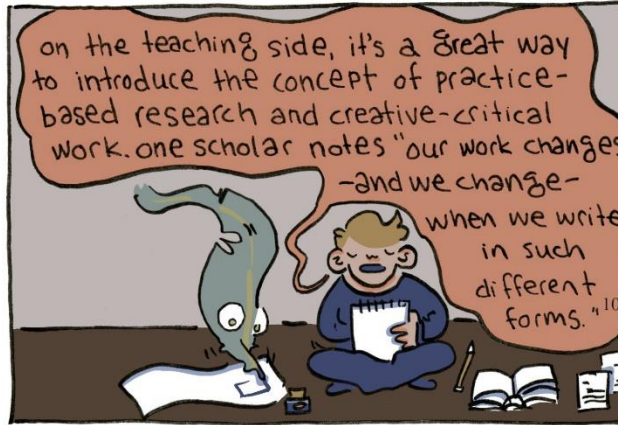
<sup>6</sup> Hutcheon 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Madden 206.

<sup>8</sup> Madden 203.

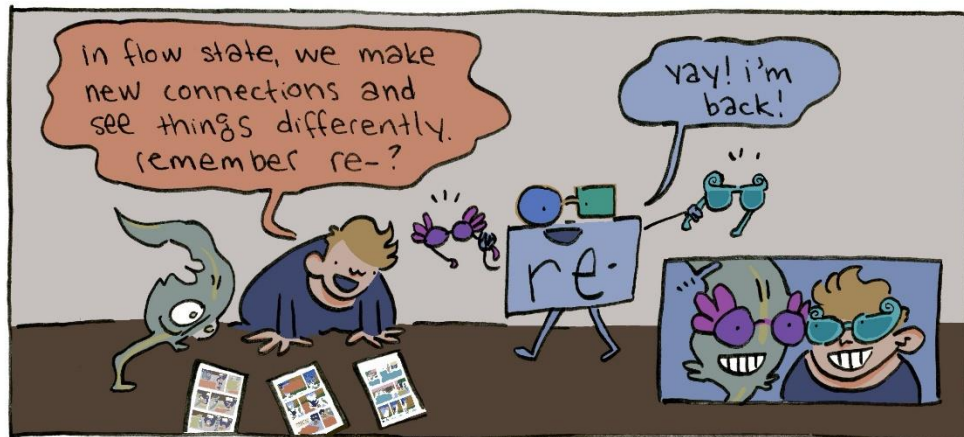


<sup>9</sup> Hutcheon 7.



<sup>10</sup> Zarins 188.

<sup>11</sup> Csikszentmihalyi 4.



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## A Numbers Game

An exercise in randomized idea generation intended to encourage a playful approach to a text which can then pave the way for more nuanced discussion in a classroom setting.

### Material:

- Attached worksheet or blank white paper
- Pens
- Access to Google “roll three (six-sided) dice” *or* actual six-sided dice (one per pair of students)

**Estimated time:** 45 minutes

### Exercise instructions:

Distribute either blank paper or printed worksheets to the class, one sheet per student. This exercise begins as an individual task and becomes a paired or small group activity as the exercise progresses.

This exercise is an exploration of the process of literary adaptation. Students should either select a text they will think about adapting and write it on the top line of the worksheet or the instructor should choose and communicate the text to be adapted. This exercise allows the instructor to determine whether each group will consider a different text or if all groups will be working with the same text.

### Part one: individual work (approx. 10 minutes)

**Step one:** Each student writes the title of the text to be adapted on the top line of the worksheet or their blank sheet of paper.

**Step two:** Each student rolls three six-sided dice (This can be done digitally, by Googling “roll six dice,” or with actual dice). Students record the first result (of 3 numbers) on their worksheets and then roll again and record this second result. The purpose of this step is to give students two different randomized options from which to choose later in the exercise.

The three numbers correspond with a creative constraint that will shape the randomized adaptation to be created. The first die indicates the form the adaptation will take. The second will determine the character or characters that adaptation will focus on. The third die determines an additional adaptational decision or strategy that will move the adapted text further from the source text.

**Step three:** Once the results are recorded, students should use the randomization key included on the worksheet to determine which constraints will apply to their randomized text (see completed example of worksheet for a sample).

**Step four:** On the back of their sheet or on a piece of scrap paper, students should take three minutes to jot down their first impressions of their two randomized combinations: what does each make possible? What does each complicate? What target audiences might be interested in each possible approach?

### Part two: working in pairs or small groups (approx. 30 minutes)

**Step one:** With this initial brainstorming complete, students should break into pairs to discuss. Each person should share their randomized combinations and a thought or two from their “first impression” notes. Take five minutes to discuss and brainstorm together about all four (or more in the case of small groups) randomized adaptational approaches. After discussion time is up, each pair or small group should choose ONE of the possible approaches they will develop further

**Step two:** Each pair or small group will take ten minutes to prepare a pitch for this randomized adaptation as if they were a) hoping to talk a publisher into accepting it OR b) talking a publisher out of it if the idea seems impossible. Groups can use the sample pitch on the worksheet if they need help organizing and drafting their pitch.

If there is additional available time, students can be given more plain paper and encouraged to mockup a cover for their text to use as a visual aid in their pitch.

**Step three:** The class should be arranged in a circle if possible. Each group will take 2-4 minutes to pitch the rest of the class (who will be playing the part of the publication board) on their newly imagined texts. Board members may pose follow-up questions as desired to more fully flesh out each pitched adaptation. Each group should take a turn to pitch their adaptation.

**Part three: Closing discussion** (varies according to time available)

The instructor might use the remaining moments in class to return to a more general discussion of the text (if all students work on the same text) or of the process of adaptation and the question of canonicity if groups work with different texts. Discussions might consider what qualities appear repeatedly in the different pitches or the different ways the (randomly selected) form affects the adaptational strategies and is reflected in considerations of audience when pitching. Participants might be encouraged to analyze their own decisions about what was included and what was omitted in their adaptations and respond critically to the ways these changes reflect their own understanding of the text and, subsequently, how this is transmitted to the reader of their adaptations. Another interesting conversation might be to consider how far a text can be pushed before it ceases to be a retelling and why this might matter.

## A Numbers Game Worksheet

I am adapting \_\_\_\_\_.

My first roll: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_

My second roll: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_

Form	Characters	Adaptational Shift
1. verse	1. single character ONLY	1. change the time/era
2. prose	2. two characters	2. change the location/setting
3. visual/illustrated	3. main character as focus	3. change the point of view/focalizer
4. performance, oral recitation/ podcast	4. minor character as focus	4. change character gender or age
5. life writing	5. invent and insert a new character	5. change the tone or genre of the work
6. non-traditional (Game? Puzzle? Cookbook? Etc.)	6. author as a character	6. invent a new ending

**Crafting your pitch:** Our text will be [RANDOMIZED CONSTRAINTS] based on [TEXT TITLE]. The intended audience for this text will be [TARGET DEMOGRAPHICS]. Our approach will appeal to readers for the following reasons:

- i. Opportunities and/or challenges
- ii. What would your illustration strategy for your book cover be? what do you want your book to look like?
- iii. Why would this illustration style appeal to your chosen audience?
- iv. What changes would need to be made?
- v. What doors does it open up?

## A Numbers Game Worksheet (*completed example*)

I am adapting the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue” from the *Canterbury Tales*.

**My first roll: 5, 5, 4**

An adaptation borrowing from the form of life writing (5) where we invent and insert a new character (5) and change one character’s gender or age (4).

**My second roll: 3, 6, 1**

An illustrated adaptation (3) with the author as a character (6) in which we change the time/era of our adapter text (1).

Form	Characters	Adaptational Shift
1. verse	1. single character ONLY	1. change the time/era
2. prose	2. two characters	2. change the location/setting
3. visual/illustrated	3. main character as focus	3. change the point of view/focalizer
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5. life writing	5. invent and insert a new character	5. change the tone or genre of the work
6. non-traditional (Game? Puzzle? Cookbook? Etc.)	6. author as a character	6. invent a new ending

**Sample pitch based on first roll:** Our text will be a retelling of Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath’s Prologue” in the form of a **series of letters** written but never sent to the Wife of Bath by a suitor hoping to be Husband Sixte (**invented character**) who met the Wife on a pilgrimage celebrating her sixtieth birthday and has not been able to stop thinking about her gap-toothed smile (**changed age**). Our text will be a popular read for suburban women’s book clubs who are likely to be unfamiliar with Chaucer’s text but will recognize and enjoy the antics of a feisty and lascivious older woman dipping back into the dating pool yet again. Academics and former English majors will also be interested in our text as it builds on the already extensive literary afterlife of this vivacious character.