Where Is the Love? Using the Black Eyed Peas to Reach Expository Writing Students

Heidi Blackburn

Jennifer Molidor

Where Is the Love? Using the Black Eyed Peas to Reach Expository Writing Students

Abstract

Over the last year, the K-State at Salina Library has created and renovated a project utilizing contemporary music as a way to connect with students and provide research topics in an Expository Writing course. In 2003, the song "Where Is the Love?" by international music sensation The Black-Eyed Peas, swept the tops of billboard charts. With a hip-hop vibe and boundary-crossing critique of war, terrorism, discrimination, and hate crimes, the song's themes moved fans of all ages, races, and backgrounds. Using this connection, our project emphasizes cross-departmental collaboration, and is grounded in the belief that in Freshman Composition courses the writing professor and the research librarian must work together for successful writing and research based projects. In "Writing Information Literacy: Contributions to a Concept" Rolf Norgaard (2003) urges librarians and writing instructors to have "informed conversation between writing and information literacy as disciplines and fields of endeavor." Following this approach, the results of our activity initiated a coordinated restructuring of the library-writing course curriculum. This paper will focus on student learning outcomes, challenges of the activity, student feedback, and post-assessment adjustments.

Volume 1, 2011

Originate, Create, Renovate, and Innovate: Leading Revolution in the Academic Library

Where Is the Love? Using the *Black Eyed Peas* to Reach Expository Writing Students

Heidi Blackburn
Kansas State University-Salina Library
Salina, Kansas

Jennifer Molidor
Kansas State University-Salina
Salina, Kansas

Abstract

Over the last year, the K-State at Salina Library has created and renovated a project utilizing contemporary music as a way to connect with students and provide research topics in an Expository Writing course. In 2003, the song "Where Is the Love?" by international music sensation *The Black-Eyed Peas,* swept the tops of billboard charts. With a hip-hop vibe and boundary-crossing critique of war, terrorism, discrimination, and hate crimes, the song's themes moved fans of all ages, races, and backgrounds. Using this connection, our project emphasizes cross-departmental collaboration, and is grounded in the belief that in Freshman Composition courses the writing professor and the research librarian must work together for successful writing and research based projects. In "Writing Information Literacy: Contributions to a Concept" Rolf Norgaard (2003) urges librarians and writing instructors to have "informed conversation between writing and information literacy as disciplines and fields of endeavor." Following this approach, the results of our activity initiated a coordinated restructuring of the library-writing course curriculum. This paper will focus on student learning outcomes, challenges of the activity, student feedback, and post-assessment adjustments.

Pedagogical Approach

Billy Joel's song "We Didn't Start the Fire" (1989) originally inspired this activity; the previous K-State at Salina Instruction Librarian used it to generate keywords for students doing a research search string activity. Students chose a theme from the song to serve as a practice topic from lyrics printed on the back of a worksheet. For the new project, a contemporary song was needed to hold the attention of a younger generation. In 2004, the song "Where Is the Love?" by the *Black-Eyed Peas* (BEP), swept the tops of billboard charts. Its themes and issues moved fans of all ages, races, and backgrounds with a hip-hop vibe and boundary-crossing critique of war, terrorism, discrimination, and hate crimes. Familiar to most college students and containing references to current events, the song was a natural choice.

Research projects were open-ended and topics not distributed before the activity with the goal of allowing the collaboration between professor and librarian to foster a shared, group sense of wonder, excitement, and curiosity about the possibilities of research. Yohannes and Johnson have noted similar success with a similar approach in that "allowing students to explore freely what the library has to offer infuses an element of excitement into the research writing process and engages students in ways that other models just do not" (2004). In addition to the use of pop culture to inspire research themes, using open-ended research projects, emphasizing collaboration between professor and librarian through all phases of design, implementation, and assessment, our pedagogical approach was structured around kinesthetic, tangible experiences in learning and allowing a hands-on approach that simulated the challenges of the research experience.

Student Learning Outcomes

The student learning outcomes for the activity were 1) to address the problem of varying levels of familiarity and preparation in the student population without leaving unprepared students behind or losing student interest by repeating overly familiar research activities. 2) to demonstrate for students the important of time management 3) to accentuate the social skills necessary in writing courses structured around peer review. 4) to introduce students to the idea of theme-based socio-political "issues" research. 5) to develop a working relationship between the librarian and the writing course. Furthermore, the following goals were outlined to students to keep in mind during the activity.
- Effectively search the online catalog and retrieve a book
- Effectively search a specific issues database to retrieve an article
- Effectively search LexisNexis to find a relevant current event
- Demonstrate how the team conducted the searches at the end of the class

Because familiarization with the library's online resources was an important goal for this project, the activity was designed to test students: to make them feel the pressure of doing last-minute research under a deadline with no formal library instruction, but in a safe environment without consequences such as grade deductions. Positive research strategies were reinforced including: starting early, devising a plan, asking for help, and preparing to face frustration if needed materials were not immediately available. This approach complemented the lesson plan by correcting the instant gratification attitude present in a class of freshmen who rely primarily on "Google" type search engines. Students also explored under-utilized library resources such as print newspapers, fiction books, and the online citation link tool with the hope they may remember such materials.

At the beginning of class, the librarian demonstrated where to access the library's website, online card catalog, and the links to databases. Second, she announced research topics would be taken from the BEP video "Where is the Love?" and encouraged students to pay close attention to themes from the song lyrics as well as the visuals. After the video, the class was informed their activity would be a nontraditional competition between teams. Instructions describing the types of activities to be completed (as well as the "evidence" required for each task) were distributed and each team wrote their topic at the top of the page. Tasks included using the card catalog to locate a non-fiction book, finding a print newspaper article, and locating a relevant DVD, among others. A time limit and the location of where the class would meet up for discussion at the end of the class were announced before students were dismissed to find their materials. At the conclusion of the activity, students wrote their team name and topic on the board in the order they

arrived. Teams were asked to stand in front of the class, share their topic, and defend the materials they found to their peers to earn points for each task. Those materials called into question were voted Pass/Fail by a show of thumbs from the class. The first team to complete their tasks won. (See Appendix for a complete Task List).

Early Results

The Expository Writing 1 course first tried this activity in the spring of 2010. All three sections of the course participated, so it was taught consecutively at 9:30, 11:30, and 2:30 on a Friday. The classes consisted of traditional and non-traditional college students with varying levels of academic preparation. Because of the nature of the classes, the project was designed to meet the particular challenges of varying student skills, ages, and backgrounds, as well as to relieve fears associated with conducting research for those new to the college experience.

In the morning section, the activity went fairly well, with about 15 students participating. With quite a bit of guidance, they seemed to understand the expectations but were slow to gather their materials. This lack of enthusiasm may correlate to the early meeting time. They calmly completed the required tasks but none went above and beyond to complete any of the bonus tasks and so the class finished before expected. The student feedback was minimal and limited to comments such as "Good job" and "Fun activity."

The librarian was forewarned the 11:30 section was overly rowdy and they lived up to their reputation, talking loudly and joking around until the video started. The largest of the sections (22 students) was therefore the hardest to corral back into the classroom. As a whole, they quickly disagreed with peers' attempts to defend their selections and participants with low scores complained certain classmates were not being objective. Energy was high but the usefulness of the tools students tried was lost in heated debates over such minute details as whether the movie *Wall-E* should count as a film about the environment. Unfortunately, such dissent spilled over into student comments, which were dashed off because of time constraints (due to the large class) and thus offered little constructive criticism.

The 2:30 section was relatively calm compared to the earlier section, and the dynamic of the class reflected in the quality of work produced. Students eagerly worked in groups, scoured the library for materials and defended another group's choice to select *Gran Torino* as a film about gang violence. The quiet nature of the library (due to the meeting time of the class) added to the calm manner in which students collected their materials and went about finishing their tasks. Feedback from the final section was also minimal as students rushed to leave the campus for more pressing weekend activities.

Analysis

On the anonymous feedback forms, students were asked to highlight confusing points and suggestions for improvements. General responses included "*Good video choice!*" "*Helped me find what resources were available to me.*" "*Awesome!*" and "*Good idea for activity.*" From observations of the class during the activity, the choice of BEP was clearly met with enthusiasm and the overall idea of a timed group scavenger hunt was appealing. Therefore, the librarian decided to keep the song for the next round of students.

Areas of anxiety for students were readily apparent in such comments as "*Reiterate the importance of printing only the first page verbally,*" "*Not everything we had to use was explained*" and "*I don't understand how to find things online.*" The importance of printing only the first page of the database article was reiterated verbally numerous times to the class and highlighted on the handout. (Students were allowed to print the first page of the article for free, but those failing to change the printer settings were charged 10 cents a page for the entire document, causing some students to pay for their evidence as a consequence.) Several non-traditional students were frustrated at not being shown step by step how to search the online card catalog and the database before being asked to use it. While a legitimate concern, demonstrating the tools before the task would have negated the concept of creating a rushed, confusing environment for the simulation.

Suggestions for improvements varied widely and reflected the different learning styles of students, as well as differing attention spans. *"Give more time, make it easier"* was given in the same group as *"More structure"* and "*Be more specific on what the task we had to do was. Until we got out to do it, I was confused!"* Clearly, some students wanted further instructions, while others just wanted an easier task. Other comments reflected an inability for a few students to focus on written directions and verbal cues from the teacher at the same time, or to focus on their own tasks if their partners were busy doing a different one. However, comments about the activity's difficulty and stress were fully expected as part of the feedback.

Second Verse, Same as the First: Applying Analysis to the Activity

In the summer of 2010, this activity was repeated in the Expository Writing 1 course. This class was unique in that about 25 percent of the students were "Upward Bound" high-school students, as well as traditional, and non-traditional college students with varying levels of academic preparation. The section had 18 students and met for two hours (due to the summer schedule) instead of the customary 50 minutes, giving the librarian more time for the activity. The class was given extra time to go over any initial questions students had about the tasks but no additional directions or demonstrations. The overall mood for the activity was positive and the competition seemed to be light-hearted compared to the previous sections. One interesting twist was the skill at using the Dewey Decimal system the high school students displayed to find books quickly, which could be due to more recent use for homework than the traditional and non-traditional students in the class.

After the initial activity and announcing of the winners, a discussion was held with students to receive their feedback, finding quality sources for their assignment and what they thought about the library's resources. Students admitted they had waited until the last minute for an assignment at one point, and the stress and frustration they felt in the activity was not something they wanted to go through when a real grade was on the line. Connections between the ease of using library resources to find scholarly resources, meeting instructor specifications and saving time were also made. After the discussion, two student volunteers demonstrated searches on the databases preferred by the instructor for the assignment, and information was provided on how to access the databases off-campus and reaching the librarian for further help. Finally, students worked individually on preliminary searches for their upcoming assignment for the remaining class time.

Because of the lower number of patrons in the library during the summer term, computer stations were readily available and students used online evaluation forms after the activity was completed. This increased not only the quality but also the quantity of the feedback for the librarian and instructor. Student responses addressed picking their own topics, the discussion about finding high-quality information, ease of using the databases (*"Very handy for both my classes this summer"*), and using Inter-Library Loan *("That you can find the rest of the article through the librarian if it isn't given").* The stress of finding all the required information in a limited amount of time was surprisingly listed as a highlight, rather than a problem, proving students will remember the frustration and (hopefully) avoid putting off their research in the future.

Surprisingly, finding books (both in the catalog and in the stacks) was the most frequently cited fear in the feedback. The librarian and instructor assumed students would have had adequate exposure to online catalogs compared to searching databases but it was the weakest skill for a good number of students. "*Rather difficult still to find books in the fiction section," "Where to go on the K-State site to find books in the library, never done it before,"* and *"How to find books, like using the Dui [sic] Decimal System"* echoed students' desires to understand how to find print books, a skill a large amount upper of classmen are still unfamiliar with due to the campus favoritism towards electronic resources.

Overall, suggestions from the class on how to improve the activity were more constructive from the summer class. For example, one such comment stated: *"When people have sources that don't follow the directions, automatically disqualify the source. I think this would save some time and confusion. I think the Black Eyed Pease[sic] video was excellent, got us really thinking about topics, but in an interesting way. All together[sic] it was a good learning experience."* This comment shows a balanced assessment of the

activity and concern for not only how the activity benefitted the student, but ways the whole class could run smoother in the future.

Further Improving the Approach

After the class, the librarian and instructor discussed ways to modify the activity for the fall semester, based on themes from the student feedback and observations. First, despite student suggestions to disqualify materials not meeting the guidelines, partial points would be granted for student efforts. Instead of voting Pass/Fail, the class would vote on Full/Partial points to alleviate student feelings of disappointment in not being granted recognition for effort. Second, because of constant flux of DVD titles on the shelf, films easily matched to student topics may be checked out at the time of the activity. Therefore, extra leniency would be shown towards films gathered as bonus items in future classes. Finally, a stronger connection between the activity and learning research strategies such as starting early, making a plan, and asking for help would be addressed in the debriefing discussion after the class. Giving students additional time to reflect on how the activity went, to share what worked and what did not with their peers, and emphasizing the library's numerous resources would help students understand the point of the exercise as something beyond busywork. In addition, if the class is 50 minutes long, an additional session may need to be booked with the librarian so database demonstrations can be thorough.

Overall Insights

While student feedback helped gauge student reactions to the activity, some aspects were retained for the sake of the integrity of the lesson. First, the librarian and instructor both agreed students were resilient enough to stand the stress of the activity, even with a few complaints in the feedback. Demanding students rise to the challenge was part of the lesson so incomplete instruction, a short time frame for completing the task and difficult bonus tasks were left in place. Second, requests for training on using call numbers and finding books in the stacks were deemed secondary skills which could be learned via the library's short online video tutorial. Time could not be sacrificed from the database demonstration (the top priority) so it was not added to the lecture. Finally, because there were complaints on both sides that the lesson moved too fast and too slow, the timing of the presentation was kept at the same level to meet the majority of the students' needs.

Two is Better than One: The Importance of Collaboration

Team-teaching this activity, with both the librarian and instructor present and hands-on, proved the best approach to this activity, and reinforced the benefits of collaboration across departments. First, feedback from both sides is critical because the librarian and instructor are looking for the development of different skill sets. Having two sets of eyes and ears can help gauge the understanding of the class before, during, and after the assignment. Second, the collaboration can provide a richer experience for students. Instead of the librarian trying to guess the instructor's most important points, and the instructor trying to stay current on the library's newest resources, departments can combine their expertise to create an in-depth activity. Research by Stein and Lamb for example has established that such collaboration results in improved student projects. Finally, collaboration has led to stronger partnerships in other courses. A willingness to let the librarian try a new activity in the Expository Writing 1 course led to innovations and improvements in Expository Writing 2 classes as well. As word has gotten around about the success of the activity, previously uninterested faculty contacted the librarian about instruction sessions for their classes and faculty already utilizing librarians have been more open to trying new activities.

References

Barclay, D. A. (1992). "Understanding the freshman writer: the pedagogy of composition and its relevance to bibliographic instruction." In Thomas Kirk (Author), Donna Lakes (Ed.)., *Academic Libraries Achieving Excellence in Higher Education: Proceeding of the Sixth National Conference of the Association of College & Research Libraries.* American Library Association, Salt Lake City, UT.

Black Eyed Peas. (2004). Where is the love? In *Elephunk* [CD]. New York, NY: A&M Records, Inc.

Gerrard, A. & Knoch, J. (Winter, 2004). "Trial by fire: New librarians as team teachers." *Academic Exchange Quarterly, 8*(4), 12-15.

Isbell, D. & Broaddus, D. (1995). "Teaching writing and research as inseparable: a faculty-librarian teaching team*." Reference Services Review, 23*(4), 51-62.

Marcus, S. & Beck, S. (2003). "A Library adventure: Comparing a treasure hunt with a traditional freshman orientation tour." *College and Research Libraries, 64*, 23-33.

Joel, B. (1989). We didn't start the fire. On *Storm Front* [CD]. New York, NY: Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

Norgaard, R. (2003). "Writing information literacy: Contributions to a concept." *Reference & User Services Quarterly, 43(2),* 124-130.

Stein, Linda L. and Jane M. Lamb. (1998). "Not Just Another BI: Faculty-Librarian Collaboration to Guide Students Through the Research Process." *Research Strategies* 16, 29-39.

Yohannes, T. & Johnson, A. M. (Winter, 2004). "A Writing course faculty-librarian collaboration." *Academic Exchange Quarterly, 8(4),* 120-125.

Heidi Blackburn is the Reference/Instruction Librarian at Kansas State University-Salina Library, Salina, Kansas.

Jennifer Molidor is an Assistant Professor at Kansas State University-Salina, Kansas.

APPENDIX

Where is the Library's love?

Purpose:
Student will learn library skills by using themes found in the popular song "Where is the love?" by the Black Eyed Peas to conduct research. This song/video will provide topics because the activity is not connected to any specific research assignment.

Student Learning Outcomes:
Students will become proficient at using the library's website in order to:

-Effectively search the online catalog and retrieve a book
-Effectively search a specific issues database to retrieve an article
-Effectively search LexisNexis to find a relevant current event
-Demonstrate how he/she/the team conducted the searches for the activity at the end of the class

Requirements:
-"Where is the love?" video by Black Eyed Peas
-Instruction handouts for each student, which include directions and lyrics
-One computer/projector for demonstration to class
-Computer workstations for each student/student team
-Access to the library's collection

Activity:
1. Show the class where to find the library's website, online card catalog and links to the databases.
2. Tell students that today's research topics will be taken from the video and encourage them to pay close attention to pick out themes from the lyrics as well as the visuals.
3. Explain to the class that today's lesson will not be an in-depth demonstration, but rather a competition between teams and ask students to pair up.
4. Pass out the instructions and make sure each team writes down their topic at the top of the page. Be sure to set a time limit and location of where the class will meet up for discussion at the end of the class.
5. Briefly give a tour of the library to show students where items are located and which direction the call numbers run, then turn students loose to begin.
6. At the end of the lesson, have students write their team name and topic on the board in the order they arrive to use as a tie-breaker. The team who completed all of their tasks and any bonus tasks first wins.
7. Have the teams show their resources for their points to the entire class and discuss any questions or concerns students might have faced while searching.
8. If any materials come in to dispute, the entire class will vote by a show of thumbs "yay" or "nay." If the material is voted down, half credit will be given.
9. Ask students to bring all of the materials (including paper to be recycled) to the Questions desk so they may be properly re-shelved at the end of class.

WHERE IS THE LIBRARY'S LOVE?

TEAM NAME:_____

TEAM TOPIC:_____

In this scenario, you are time-crunched to find all the materials you need for an "assignment" that is due tomorrow. While it *is* a race, be sure you follow *all* the directions. **All resources must be relevant to your above topic.** Be ready to defend your materials' relevance in front of the class if disputed.

REQUIRED TASKS:
   1.   Book (10 points)
Use the **online card catalog** to find a book related to your topic (make sure it's newer so the information is current!). Find the book on the shelf using the call number and bring it as your documentation.

   2.   Current event (10 points)
Using the **LexisNexis** database, find a current event within the last 30 days that is related to your topic. Print the FIRST page to the Library's 4014 printer and collect it at the Questions Desk for your documentation. (If you print the entire document, you will be charged.)

   3.   Database article (10 points)
Using **CQ Researcher, Issues and Controversies** OR **Opposing Viewpoints**, find a full-text database article relating to your topic. Print the FIRST page to the Library's 4014 printer and collect it at the Questions Desk for your documentation. (If you print the entire document, you will be charged.)

BONUS TASKS:
   4.   Popular DVD (5 points)
Find a movie relating to your theme and bring the case.
   5.   Fiction book (5 points)
Find a book in the Library Lounge fiction section relating to your topic and bring it.
   6.   Print newspaper article (10 points)
Find a newspaper article in the newspapers (Located near the Community Room) and bring the entire paper.
   7.   Find the full-text article (50 points)
Use the following incomplete citation to find the full-text article using any of the library's databases. Write down the full citation in MLA format. (Stylebooks are available at the Questions Desk)

Homer, C. and Simpson, L.   ??????????? Health Affairs. Mar/Apr 2007. v. 26, Issue 2.
Correct citation:

Where is the love?/Black Eyed Peas
What's wrong with the world mama?
People living like ain't got no mamas
I think the whole world's addicted to the drama
Only attracted to the things that bring you trauma

Overseas yeah we tryin' to stop terrorism
But we still got terrorists here livin'
In the USA, the big CIA, the Bloods and the Crips and the KKK
But if you only have love for your own race
Then you only leave space to discriminate
And to discriminate only generates hate
And if you hatin' you're bound to get irate
Yeah madness is what you demonstrate
And that's exactly how anger works and operates
You gotta have love just to set it straight
Take control of your mind and meditate
Let your soul gravitate to the love y'all

(Chorus)
People killing, people dying
Children hurtin' you hear them crying
Can you practice what you preach?
Would you turn the other cheek?
Father, Father, Father, help us
Send some guidance from above
'Cause people got me, got me questioning
Where is the love?

It just ain't the same, all ways have changed
New days are strange, is the world the insane?
If love and peace so strong
Why are there pieces of love that don't belong
Nations dropping bombs
Chemical gases filling lungs of little ones
With ongoing suffering

As the youth die young
So ask yourself, is the loving really strong?
So I can ask myself, really what is going wrong With this world that we living in
People keep on giving in
Makin wrong decisions
Only visions of them livin' and
Not respecting each other
Deny thy brother
The wars' going on but the reasons' undercover
The truth is kept secret
Swept under the rug
If you never know truth
Then you never know love
Where's the love y'all?(I don't know)
Where's the truth y'all?(I don't know)
Where's the love y'all?

(CHORUS)

I feel the weight of the world on my shoulder
As I'm getting older y'all people get colder
Most of us only care about money makin'
Selfishness got us followin' the wrong direction
Wrong information always shown by the media
Negative images is the main criteria
Infecting their young minds faster than bacteria
Kids wanna act like what the see in the cinema
Whatever happened to the values of humanity?
Whatever happened to the fairness and equality?
Instead of spreading love, we're spreading animosity
Lack of understanding, leading us away from unity
That's the reason why sometimes I'm feeling under
That's the reason why sometimes I'm feeling down
It's no wonder why sometimes I'm feeling under
I gotta keep my faith alive, until love is found

(CHORUS)

Suggested research topics:

- Big Brother government
- Terrorism in America
- War in Iraq/Afghanistan
- CIA cover-ups
- CIA intelligence tactics
- Gang violence
- Discrimination
- Hate crimes

- Police brutality
- Effects of news/media on public opinions
- Effects of television on children
- Racism/White power in America
- Homelessness
- Freedom of religion
- Freedom of speech
- Pollution
- Violence in video games