

Create, Collaborate...Connect

How students' interest-driven activities can inform their classroom learning.

Educators make necessary distinctions between “formal” and “informal” learning. Lying outside these boundaries are the spontaneous, interest-driven activities young people pursue during their free time. These activities are fueled by a passion and an excitement that any teacher would love to see in the classroom. Young people learn negotiation skills as they move between communities with differing social norms, for instance; they learn to think of themselves as authors when they write and critique fan fiction. Students' interest-driven practices can illuminate and inform what is taught in both formal and informal classrooms, and classroom content can help learners apply new knowledge to their own interest-driven experiences.

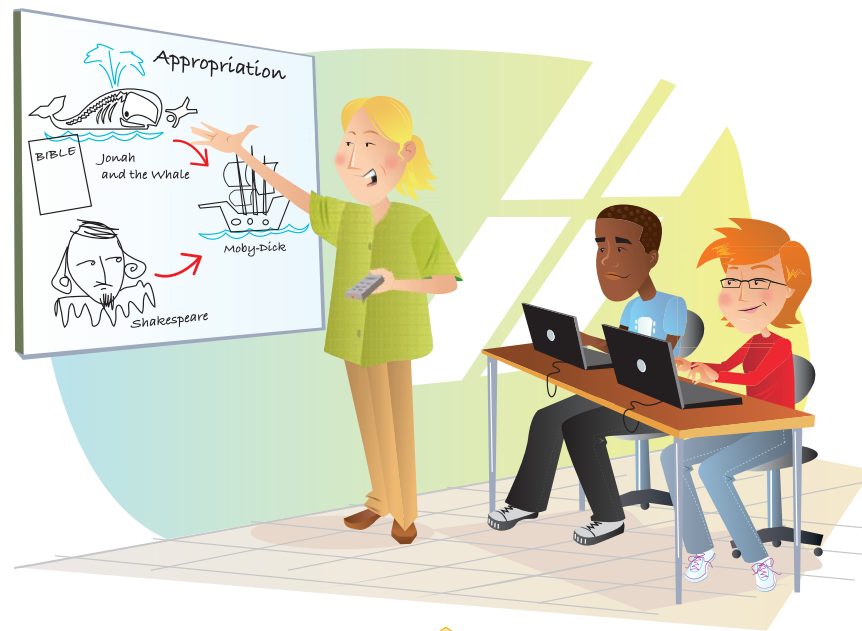
In the panels here, we follow Jesse, a typical online 15-year-old, as she navigates between school, an after-school program, and connecting with friends. In each setting, Jesse is exploring the new media literacies of appropriation, networking, and negotiation. (For the complete list of skills, see page 9.)

In English class, she learns how Herman Melville appropriated and remixed material from many different sources in writing *Moby-Dick*, then at home she uses similar techniques while searching media databases and remixing elements from TV shows, movies, and pop music to create short videos called fanvids

to share with an online creative community. In between, Jesse and her after-school program classmates explore issues of copyright protection and content ownership and then videotape skits about the topic to post on the program's blog.

Back in English class the next day, the teacher asks Jesse to describe fanvidding to the class, seeking to relate the ethics of Melville's artful borrowing to his students' own activities in manipulating and sharing media today.

—Anna van Someren



ENGLISH CLASS: Herman Melville, Master Remixer

Jesse's teacher draws comparisons between Herman Melville's quilt-like writing style in *Moby-Dick* and current appropriation practices. Today's activity centers on the history of annotating and ornamenting texts, and Jesse and her classmates collaborate on suggestions of words, images, audio clips, and movie scenes to post on the interactive whiteboard to create a multimedia remake of Melville's text.

NML Skill: Appropriation—the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content.

Participatory Culture Characteristic: Shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement.



AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM: How Creative Commons Licensing Works

Jesse and the other participants work in small groups to learn about Creative Commons' alternatives to copyright licenses. They use what they've learned to write and perform skits illustrating how the licenses work. Jesse is nominated to videotape the skits, and later she uploads them to the after-school program's blog.

NML Skill: Appropriation

Illustration by Tim Read



AT HOME: Hanging Out with Interest-Driven Learning

Jesse uses her laptop and the editing application iMovie to create a video to share with a fanvid online community. She and a friend pick a song performed on *American Idol* and TV scenes from several *Gossip Girl* episodes. Jesse's friend is searching a media database, looking for a specific scene, while Jesse is working on a rough cut, trying clips in different orders to match the beat of the music.

NML Skill: Networking—the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information.

Participatory Culture Characteristic: Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement.

OUT AND ABOUT: Texting About a Fanvid Contest

Jesse is never without her phone, and on the way to school the next day she remembers to text her friend about a contest she learned about online to mash up *Moby-Dick* and the popular TV series *Lost*. Her message says “contest online 2 make lost/mobydick vid wanna try it?”

Participatory Culture Characteristic: Members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another.



ENGLISH CLASS: When Is It Okay to Appropriate?

Jesse shows her first fanvid in class and explains how her creative process is similar to the way Melville used appropriation in his novel. She explains that fanvidders remix TV scenes, music, and other media in the creations they share online.

NML Skill: Negotiation—the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.

Participatory Culture Characteristics: Strong support for creating and sharing one's creations; some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices.