

Beyond the Alphabetic: Using William Blake’s “The Tyger” as a Way to Teach Modal Affordances

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Several authors claim that we, as a field, typically concentrate on alphabetic text as the main mode of communication (Palmeri; Alexander and Rhodes; Jewitt; Selfe; Shipka). Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes assert that even “when we as compositionists have adopted new and multi-media, we have often done so with print- and text-driven rhetorics in mind” (6). For instance, Erik Ellis, in “Back to the Future?: The Pedagogical Promise of the (Multimodal) Essay,” argues for the pedagogical practice of having students create multimodal video *essays*. While he is encouraging multimodality, he pushes students to analyze and compose videos in terms of the print essay. Notice that even his title suggests that multimodality can be removed from his classroom, as “multimodal” is in parentheses. Even though alphabetic text itself is multimodal (Jewitt; Ball, Bowen, and Fenn), we do our students a disservice if we do not prepare them to compose with and understand the rhetorical consequences of using a variety of modes. Cynthia Selfe argues that this disservice is twofold:

As faculty, when we limit our understanding of composing and our teaching of

composition to a single modality, when we focus on print alone as a communicative venue for our assignments and for students' responses to those assignments, we ensure that instruction is less accessible to a wide range of learners, and we constrain students' ability to succeed by offering them an unnecessarily narrow choice of semiotic and rhetorical resources. (644)

Selfe indicates that we are not only limiting *how* our students learn (in terms of learning styles); we are also limiting *what* our students learn. Jennifer Saunders and Peggy Albers explicate the complexity of being literate in the twenty-first century: "In today's world, a literate person must be able to read and create a range of paper-based and online texts (newspapers, pamphlets, websites, books, Kindle, and so on), participate in and create virtual settings...that use interactive and dynamic Web 2.0 tools, and critically analyze multimodal texts that integrate visual, musical, dramatic, digital, and new literacies" (2). Given this complexity, our classrooms should be a space where students can explore, work with, and compose in a variety of modes.

Obviously, we cannot teach students to write in every genre of every medium of every mode; instead, we can help students develop strategies for approaching new composing situations by teaching them to analyze modal affordances – what each mode allows the reader and/or composer to do – and make rhetorical decisions based on those affordances. The concept of students making intentional decisions based on their understanding of modal affordances is echoed in scholarship that defines multimodal composing. For instance, in the introduction to their edited collection, *Multimodal Literacies and Emerging Genres*, Tracey Bowen and Carl Whithaus define multimodal composing as "the *conscious manipulation* of the interaction among

various sensory experiences – the visual, textual, verbal, tactile, and aural – used in the processes of producing and reading texts” (7 emphasis added). Likewise, in *On Multimodality: New Media in Composition Studies*, Alexander and Rhodes (borrowing from Claire Lutewitte) define multimodal composition as “communication using multiple modes that *work purposely* to create meaning” (3 emphasis added).

A note about definitions: Scholars often differ in where they draw the boundary between mode and medium. For instance, some scholars label images as modes (e.g. Jewitt) while others label images as media (e.g. Ball, Bowen, and Fenn). I will be using the definitions provided by Jeff Bezemer and Gunther Kress: “A *mode* is a socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, speech, moving image are examples of modes” (171 emphasis in original). Meanwhile, a medium is “the means for the distribution of messages,” such as poems, newspapers, and films (169). Media are made of up modes; for instance, a film is composed of voice, gesture, lighting, moving images, and so on. Each of these modes will enable composers and readers to understand the text in particular ways – these are the affordances – and potentially hinder this understanding in other ways – these are the constraints. Below, though I point to specific texts, I will focus on the modes within each medium and the affordances of those modes.

In this article, I offer an example introductory assignment using the poetry of William Blake to help students analyze modal affordances. Though there are a variety of texts that could be used, I have chosen to use Blake for the several reasons. First, using Blake can help facilitate discussions about multimodality prior to the advent of the computer. As Jody Shipka stresses, if

we want our “students to leave our courses exhibiting *a more nuanced* awareness of the various choices they make throughout the process of [producing a specific kind of text] and the effect those choices might have on others...we need to resist equating multimodality with digitally based or screen-mediated texts” (76). Second, Blake is popular enough that many people have adapted his poetry into new media and modes. Third and finally, students often come into our classrooms expecting to work with alphabetic text; beginning with the affordances of alphabetic text can help students more easily transition into thinking about the affordances of other modes. As this article progresses, I will analyze different remediations of “The Tyger,” including three versions of the etching that accompanied the original work, a choral version of the poem, and a YouTube video of a dramatic reading of the poem. With each remediation, I will analyze the ways in which meaning making is affected by changes in and juxtaposition of different modes. This same kind of analysis could be conducted with students, helping them discover how different multimodal texts lead to different meanings. With this analysis, students could also discuss how the meaning could have been made clearer or made different.

The Alphabetic Text Only

The Tyger

- 1 Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
- 2 In the forests of the night,
- 3 What immortal hand or eye
- 4 Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

- 5 In what distant deeps or skies
- 6 Burnt the fire of thine eyes?

- 7 On what wings dare he aspire?
- 8 What the hand dare seize the fire?

- 9 And what shoulder, & what art,
10 Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
11 And when thy heart began to beat,
12 What dread hand? & what dread feet?

- 13 What the hammer? what the chain,
14 In what furnace was thy brain?
15 What the anvil? what dread grasp?
16 Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

- 17 When the stars threw down their spears
18 And water'd heaven with their tears,
19 Did he smile his work to see?
20 Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

- 21 Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
22 In the forests of the night,
23 What immortal hand or eye
24 Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

One of the affordances of alphabetic text printed on a page is the ability to read it multiple times and at any speed. Also, the reader can choose to concentrate on particular chunks of the text, even if those chunks are located on different parts of the page, with only the movement of the eye (rather than, for example, alphabetic text scrolling on a YouTube video or being read aloud). This means that the reader can perform a close reading of the poem and easily identify strategies such as repetition of lines and words. In addition, punctuation, structure, font, and emphasis provide hints for how the text should be read. For instance, the exclamation points

after “Tyger” indicate a particular emphasis – possibly fear or excitement – on the word (lines 1, 21). On the other hand, the series of question marks in the poem suggest the poet is constantly asking questions and, given that the poem ends with a question mark, he does not receive answers to his questions. Readers can also use “syntactic, grammatical, and lexical resources” to determine the meaning and context of the alphabetic text (Bezemer and Kress 171). Similarly, because alphabetic text printed on a page is often organized in a linear fashion, writers can indicate the importance of different parts of the text through their organization. For example, because “Tyger” is the first word of the poem, the reader is likely to see the tiger as the most important figure in the poem (line 1).

However, alphabetic text can lead to abstractions and confusions and, because there are no additional modes, the reader is given no extra indication of which reading might be the reading intended by the author. There are three confusions in “The Tyger”: (1) whether the tiger is an object of fear or of protection; (2) whether the maker of the tiger should be feared; and (3) whether “the maker” is God or the poet. The poet creates the first confusion with punctuation, such as the exclamation and question marks (as suggested above), and with ambiguous language. For example, the tiger is “burning bright/ In the forests of the night” (lines 1-2). Is the tiger supposed to be feared because he is paired with fire – an element that is harmful if it is approached too closely – or is the tiger lighting a path in an otherwise dark and scary forest? The poet creates confusion in similar ways as the reader decides whether the maker or the tiger is the object of fear. In lines 3-4, the poet writes, “What immortal hand or eye/ Could frame thy fearful symmetry?” This could suggest that the tiger is to be feared because “fearful” is an

adjective attached to the tiger's symmetry. At the same time, the narrator questions who could have made this fearful tiger, suggesting that the maker may be even more fearful than the tiger. This sense is heightened in the last lines of the poem: "What immortal hand or eye/ Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?" (lines 23-34). The change from "could" to "dare" implies that the maker is doing something wrong.

Because the alphabetic text enables the reader to read the text multiple times, he/she can perform this kind of close reading. Also, because the text is available all at once, the reader can easily recognize the repetition in of the first verse as well as the change from "could" to "dare." Combining the poem with other modes can help clarify these confusions (or, depending on the constraints of the mode, add to them). This is because, as the reader is presented with a variety of modes with and around the poem, different aspects of the poem are highlighted, while others are pushed to the background or completely ignored.

Adding the Visual Mode

Gunter Kress explains that the logic of visuals is the "simultaneous presence of a number of elements and their (spatial) relation. This logic can, of course, be turned into sequences of images following another; but its inherent characteristics are those of display: showing what salient elements in the world are and...the spatial relations between them" (79). This means that, with images, the viewer is given a visual of the objects present in the image. The size, positioning, coloring, and framing of objects lets the viewer know how both the objects and the viewer should be positioned in terms of power and authority as well as how the viewer

should feel about the objects. At the same time, the stillness of an image does not indicate how objects in the image might talk, move, and act. The personality of the objects is left for the viewer to imagine. When a visual is paired with alphabetic text, the viewer attempts to understand the two modes in relation to each other. As David S. Birdsell and Leo Groarke argue, “Words can establish a context of meaning into which images can enter with a high degree of specificity while achieving a meaning different from the words alone” (6). As I will show below, this means that the visual can clarify the ambiguities in the alphabetic text while the alphabetic texts can give the viewer a better understanding of the occurrences and characters in the visual.

The William Blake Archive has 13 different versions of the etching belonging to “The Tyger.” While they all have the same typography and overall shape of the image, the coloring of the images differs widely in the background, the lettering, the tiger, and the tiger’s eye. Furthermore, the expression on the tiger’s face fluctuates from image to image. Looking at a variety of etchings makes clear how simple changes in an image can affect the meaning the reader gains. I will analyze these three examples:



Figure 1: The Tyger

Given the large size of the image and the small lettering of the poem, the viewer is likely to take in the image before reading the poem. Because of this, I will start by analyzing the picture and explain how that analysis might affect one's reading of the poem. In all of these images, the focus is on the tiger; he is the only object that is fully framed and detailed within the edges of the image. Both the tree and the grass-like plant on either side of the poem go off the edges of the image. Furthermore, though the bird is fully framed within the edges, the viewer is given only the outline of the bird and, as will be discussed below, the outline is barely

discernable as a bird in some of the images. Because the tiger is the focus of the image, the maker of the tiger is pushed to the background. The viewer is more likely to question the actions of the tiger, rather than ask who created him. Additionally, the concept of poet as maker does not seem present in the images as the lettering of the poem is separated from the nature. The tree branches, for instance, grow between the stanzas rather than growing through them or connecting with the letters. Even when nature and words connect – the vine becomes the first word of the title – this connection happens as far from the content of the poem as possible. The connection point is also the only point at which nature twists over itself, suggesting that the vine attempted to turn around before finally connecting with the word; this implies that nature is uncomfortable with being so close to the words. Thereby, the poet and his words are distanced from the natural background, which is often associated with creation. Given the foreground of the tiger and the distancing of the maker (either God or poet), the viewer is likely to read the poem with a focus on the tiger. The coloring of the image, then, will lead the viewer to decide whether the tiger should reflect fear or comfort.

Starting with the image on the left, the tiger's widened eye suggests that he is alert, while his mouth looks relaxed. This suggests that the tiger is comfortable with keeping his guard. There are hints of claws on the tiger, but, given the small size and the fact that they are the same color and thickness as the outline of the tiger, they do not seem menacing. The lighting behind the tiger suggests either a sunrise or a sunset. The scene is one of stability: The tiger is in a stable stance, neither crouching to pounce nor poised to fall over. Furthermore, the tree's green coloring and tall stature suggests strength, livelihood and constancy. Combining this image with the poem, the

stability of the scene and the easiness of the tiger suggest that he is not a creature to be feared, at least by the viewer/reader. The lighting behind the tiger suggests that he is either prepared to begin his protective guard (if the sun is setting) or has effectively protected the viewer/reader throughout the night (if the sun is rising). The image, then, leads the viewer/reader toward the more positive reading of the poem. Additionally, it encourages the reader to think about the beginning and the end of the night with the protective tiger. The poem alone focuses the reader only on the middle of the night; it does not suggest that the night either begins or ends. In the poem, the tiger seems to exist only at night. The visual, then, offers another perspective to the content of the poem.

The middle image is much darker. The darkness suggests that, rather than night just beginning or ending, the scene is set in the middle of the night. This suggests that the person in the forest has already experienced fear for some amount of hours and will continue to experience it for several hours more; this gives the feeling that the fear will never end. The tiger's body is barely discernible from the depiction of the ground, implying that the tiger is sneaking around in the dark. Additionally, there is a bit of red coloring on the tiger's body. Red is often associated with blood, suggesting the tiger has already killed something. Also, because the tiger's body is so dark, the red particularly stands out. The darkness of the tiger, the fact that the viewer can barely make out the tiger's body from the background, and the red on the tiger's body suggest that he is one of the scary creatures in the forest. Finally, the viewer can make out the outline of a bird by the title. (This bird is not obvious in the image on the left as it looks similar to the wavy line that connects to the Y of "tyger.") The bird appears to be flying away, suggesting that the

creatures in the forest run away from the tiger. The viewer, then, gets the impression that he/she should run away from the tiger as well. Combining the image with the poem, the viewer/reader is lead to consider only the fearful aspects of the tiger. As neither the poem nor the image suggest the possibility of night beginning or ending, the eternity of night and fear is emphasized.

Finally, the image on the right has three immediately noticeable differences from the other two: the sky in the background, the color of the tree, and the facial expression of the tiger. The sky in the background could be another sunrise/set; however, the colors of the sky – red and yellow – are reminiscent of fire. The tiger’s eyelid is half closed and his mouth is positioned in an almost non-expression. Together, these seem to indicate that the tiger is tired and is about to fall asleep. If the viewer assumes this image is only of tiredness, one might argue that the black and white of the tree indicates that it’s too tired to have color. On the other hand, a black and white tree could suggest that the tree is dying, as the colors make the tree look unhealthy. Combining all of this, the viewer is left confused. The fire may be warming the tiger, which is making him sleepy, or the fire could be killing the tree. Also, the sleepiness of the tiger suggests that he is indifferent to the viewer and his potential role as protector or predator. Meanwhile, the poem seems to rule out the possibility of the tiger as indifferent. The image and the poem, then, seem to have opposing messages. Additionally, the poem states that the tiger is (on) fire, while the image suggests that the sky is on fire. In this case, it seems, the juxtaposition of modes creates confusion rather than clarity. It is out of this confusion the viewer/reader must make meaning.

Adding Musical and Vocal Modes

The choral rendition I am using was found on YouTube. This YouTube “video” is an audio recording of the Friendswood Junior Varsity Treble Choir singing “The Tiger” as composed by Trevor Jones. (Find the video [here](#).) There is no video recording of the choir. Instead, the viewer is simply presented with a picture of several girls, who are posing in front of a tree (shown below).

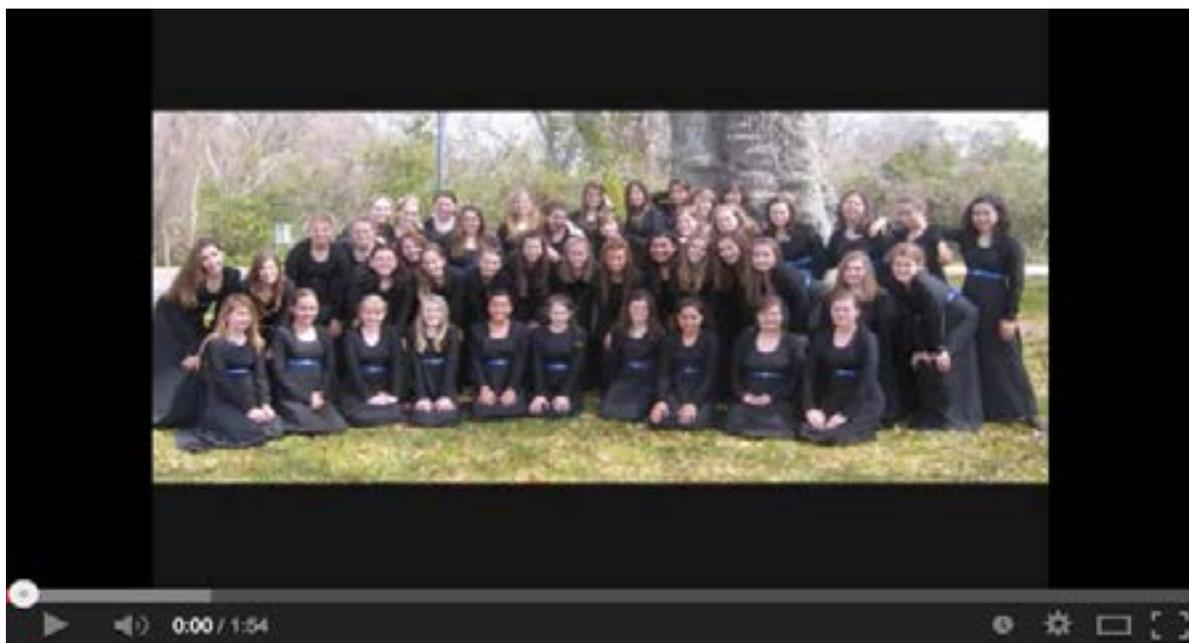


Figure 2: Friendswood Junior Varsity Treble Choir

The viewer of the picture will likely assume that these are people singing in the choir. As this picture does not change and likely has nothing to do with the tiger about whom they are singing, the viewer essentially ignores the picture. The central focus, then, is on the song. A song includes three main modes: the lyrics (alphabetic text), the vocals (the way the lyrics are sung), and the music played behind the vocals. These modes cue the listener to understand the original poem in particular ways. The movement of the music, the manipulation of chords and harmonies, and the key in which the song is written help the listener assess the mood he/she is supposed to feel. Also, the movement of the vocals present the listener with more cues for the mood as well as indicating which parts of the song are most important. For instance, if a line is sung more loudly or at a faster pace than other lines around it, the listener is likely supposed to understand that that line is important. Music also tends to make the listener feel (physically and emotionally) the mood of the song. While reading an alphabetic text, the reader can remove him/herself from the mood, stating that the feelings in the poem are felt by the poet or the narrator rather than by the reader; this is more difficult to do with music. While the modal affordances of the lyrics themselves (i.e. the original poem) are the same as those described above with the alphabetic text, the song's musical harmonies, chords and speed at which the lyrics are sung allow the listener to gain a greater understanding of the original poem.

Because this recording was put into the medium of a YouTube video, the listener has the ability to listen to the song multiple times. This means that the listener can review the song in order to gain a greater understanding of its meaning. On the other hand, one of the drawbacks of using a recorded song can be that the vocals and/or the music is unclear; when one cannot hear

the lyrics and/or music clearly, the meaning is more difficult – if not impossible – to determine. Fortunately, the choir in this recording sings each word of the song clearly and the music is easily discernible. Because this was posted as an audio recording rather than a video recording, the listener does not have access to the facial expressions of the vocalists, which would have provided more evidence of the mood of the song.

The majority of the song is played in the key of C minor. Minor keys are darker than major keys. This gives the listener a feeling of discomfort. As the music begins, the pianist plays a minor ninth. Rather than the pure sound of a harmonic triad (playing, for instance, a C, E and G in the same octave), the addition of the ninth (playing the D above the original octave) creates dissonance in the music. This dissonance occurs because two juxtaposed notes (C and D) are played together, which the ear does not like to hear. The dissonance in the music causes an uneasy, unsettled feeling in the listener. It is over this dissonant music that the choir begins singing about the tiger.

These uneasy feelings continue as the choir sings “night.” The song is in a 3/4 time signature, which means there are three beats in each measure. However, there is an extra beat added into the phrase as the choir sings “night.” To add to this feeling, there is a suspended note at the end of the phrase on “night.” During a suspended note, the listener expects to hear the purity of the triad, but the pianist plays a different note than expected with this third finger. As the name suggests, a suspended note creates a sense of suspense in the listener as he/she waits for the music to resolve. However, at this point, the music does not resolve. Instead, there is a musical hole where the resolving note would have been played. The combination of the extra

beat, the suspended note, and the lack of resolution adds tension to the music. This throws the listener off (similar to the feeling caused by the change in rhyme scheme at the end of the first stanza). The vocals and music finally resolve at the end of verse (the first stanza); however, in the lyrics, the rhyme scheme is unexpected. The feeling of tension is increased as the music, which is resolving, is contrasted with the lyrics, which do not give a feeling of resolution.

The song continues in the key of C minor, with no unexpected notes or beats, until the line “What the hand dare seize the fire?” The vocals punctuate each word, which sounds almost as if the singer is attempting to walk on tip-toe. On this line, the piano plays a diminished chord, the darkest and scariest possible chord. The combination of the diminished chord and the tip-toe sensation causes the listener to feel a sense of cautiousness, as if the tiger is close by.

The song begins to change when the choir sings, “Did he who make the lamb make thee?” The vocals start quietly; “Did” is barely audible. By the end of the line, though, the vocals are strong and loud. The gradual increase in volume makes the line sound like the listener is experiencing a realization. This is immediately followed by the pianist playing in a manner that suggests a slow falling sensation. It sounds as if the listener’s world has been turned upside down.

As the choir moves into the final verse (stanza), the music changes to the key of D, which is a higher – and, thereby, more hopeful sounding – key. The vocalists add to the poem, repeating lines one and two. The choir then ends the song by speaking the word “tiger.” The vocals end on the tonic – meaning the music ends on the first note of the key’s scale (D) – on the first beat of the measure. Ending this way creates tonal resolution, so the listener’s ear is comforted. More,

because there are no bright or dark harmonies, the tonic sounds genuine. Given the resolution in and genuineness of the last two lines as well as the more hopeful sounding final verse, the listener feels different about the tiger than he/she felt in the first half of the song. The tiger has now shifted into a comforting – as opposed to dark and scary – role.

The song gives a slight different meaning to “The Tyger” than does the poem alone. While the poem suggests that the tiger is either a fearful or a protective force (or is *both* a fearful *and* a protective force) through the entire poem, the song suggests that the tiger begins as a fearful creature that becomes a gentle creature after the listener’s revelation. As the climax of the song is on the line “Did he who make the lamb make thee?,” the central emphasis of the song is the listener’s revelation. Interestingly, the song puts the focus on the listener – who is experiencing both the song and the revelation – rather than on the tiger or the tiger’s maker. Previously, all of the renditions of “The Tyger” have focused inward to the tiger, the maker, and/or the poet. The song, though, focuses outward to the listener.

Adding Gesture, Lighting, and Other Film Related Modes

Unlike other media, video allows the viewer to see the gestural mode, the movement of those who are being filmed. This means that the viewer can take cues from gesture, speed of movement, and other forms of body language. Like images, video gives the viewer resources for making meaning with the modes of positioning, coloring, and framing of the filmed items. Video also allows the viewer/listener to hear the sounds of the objects being filmed, whether the sound is, for instance, a human voice, the sound of an animal, or even the screech of a chair moving

across a floor. The sound itself as well as the intensity, length, and repetition of the sound enable the listener to make meaning. More, video “follows patterns of continuity, editing, lighting, and soundtrack conventions that all give specific information to the audience to understand how the narrative structure is progressing” (Romberger 213). Given the linear movement of video (linear in the sense that the video medium itself moves from beginning to end, not linear in the chronology of the story line), most viewers will read the video content as a kind of a narrative, attempting to understand how one piece connects with another and how all of the pieces fit together to make a whole. The organization of the video, then, affects the viewer’s meaning making. The modes in the video – tone and speed of voice, soundtrack, gesture, and organization – interact with the original poem to shape what the viewer/reader understands from the poem.

In the dramatic reading posted by Joshua Navarro, a single man is filmed. (Find the video [here](#).) He is sitting in a chair, reading “The Tyger” aloud. A soundtrack plays in the background. In this video, the viewer is given four modes with which to make meaning: written alphabetic text, music, vocals, and visuals. I will analyze each individually and then combine them.

Written Alphabetic Text

The video opens with “THE TIGER” in white letters against a black background. The choice of colors recalls the first two lines of the poem as the letters shine brightly in the darkness of the background. The fact that the title is in all capital letters suggests that the tiger has a commanding presence or, at minimum, a commanding physical stature.

Music

The music behind the reading of the poem begins simply and becomes more complex as the poem progresses. Prior to the reading, the only music is a single-note piano melody. The drums come in as the reader begins reading the poem, but the drums are essentially only keeping time. As the second stanza begins, a chord structure is introduced on the piano, which replaces the melody. In addition, the drums become more rhythmic, doing more than just keeping time. Beginning in the fourth stanza, the drums speed up, with a cymbal being hit every eighth note. (The normal beat is 1, 2, 3, 4. Playing every eighth note means hitting on each number and half way between each number.) Finally, at the start of the last stanza, the drums double in speed, the chord structure continues, and the single-note melody from the beginning comes back in. Each time the music changes, the listener is given the sense that pieces are coming together as the poem progresses and, by the end, these pieces create a single unified work. This could mimic the idea that the maker put his work together piece by piece to create the whole - either God put the tiger together or the poet put the poem together.

Vocals

The reader of this poem has very few dynamics in his voice as he reads. As the listener cannot take cues from tone or volume, the speed at which he reads becomes the listener's method for gaining meaning. Particularly, the reader reads most of the poem rather quickly; thereby, the moments he slows down and punctuates words are the moments that seem most important. The listener, then, can analyze these slower moments to understand what he/she should value in "The

Tyger.” The following parts of the poem are read more slowly than the rest: “Tyger! Tyger!” (line 1); “What the hand dare seize the fire?” (line 8); “What dread hand forged thy dread feet?” (line 12; line modified from original poem); and “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” (line 20). Also, the entire last stanza is read at a slower pace than the first. When taken together, the slower lines seem to emphasize creation. In addition to emphasizing moments of making the tiger (the seizing of the fire from which the tiger was made and the framing of the tiger), the reader replaced “and” with “forged” in line 12. This is significant because the original line – “What dread hand, & what dread feet” is ambiguous. The reader does not know if the hands and feet belong to the tiger or to the maker. With the word replacement, the line becomes about the maker creating the tiger, specifically his feet. Also, the word “hand” appears in three of the five parts that are read more slowly. If the listener takes into account that the poem being read was written with a hand, the implication is that the hand of the poet has value in the meaning of the poem (and of the video as a whole).

Visuals

The video is in black and white, which is often considered an “artsy” method of filming. To add to this “artsy” feel, the reader’s face is half hidden in shadow. The entire video shows either the reader reading or the book from which he is reading. Besides a zoom that focuses more closely on the reader’s face and a zoom back out to show his head and chest, the only time the camera changes is to focus on the book (still images of the video are shown below). Also, the reader moves very little. His only movement is the slight movement of his head to occasionally

look to the camera or to look up from the book. The simple camera shots combined with the minimal movement from the reader puts the emphasis on the poem itself, both from its being read and from the poem itself inscribed on the page.

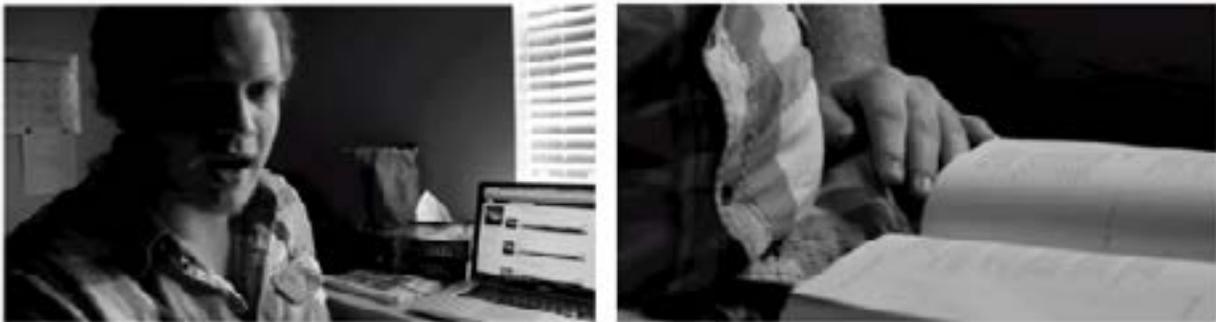


Figure 3: YouTube video

The combination of the musical, verbal, and visual modes works to underscore the creation of art: the creation of poem, the creation of the video, and the creation of the music. In this video, the emphasis is drawn away from the tiger with the visual, musical, and vocal modes; the tiger becomes a medium to creation. This creates some tension when the listener/viewer brings in the mode of the textual. The title screen of the video, as shown above, suggests that the tiger has a commanding presence and is the only object that is seen in the dark. The listener/viewer, then, must struggle with these opposing ideas.

Other Options

Modes

There are several texts that could be used in addition to or instead of the above examples. For instance, a quick Google image search brings up images from people who have copied the poem and drawn (by hand or on the computer) their own pictures behind it. On YouTube, there are videos of people singing “The Tyger” with varying tempos and orchestration as well as numerous dramatic readings. There are also memes and comics (see [Appendix A](#) for examples) that make use of “The Tyger,” which can be used to discuss how texts are remediated into other cultural forms. Students could also make their own “The Tyger” texts, utilizing multiple modes and media of their choice; during and/or after composing, they could articulate their rhetorical decisions, referring specifically to the modal affordances of the modes they have chosen.

Discussion Questions

The analysis of “The Tyger” and its remediations can also lead to discussions of:

- Circulation: How do texts move from one place to another? How does widening the audience affect the composition and meaning making of the text? How does the location and publisher of a text affect how it is received and by what audiences it is seen?
- Authorship: To what extent can those who copy the poem and add their own

pictures claim authorship?

- Expertise: What kinds/how much expertise is needed to compose an effective multimodal text? How is our integration of a text shaped by the composer's level of expertise?
- Self-publishing: How has publishing changed over the last few centuries? How does the credibility and popularity of the self-publishing author affect how a text is received and by what audiences it is seen? How does the space in which a person publishes affect how a text is received and by what audiences it is seen?

Authors

Lastly, other authors could be used in this assignment. An instructor could use Kathleen Blake Yancey's "Made Not Only in Words," cartoonist and comic theorist Scott McCloud's work, "Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek" by John Branch, and so on. The importance lies not in the specific authors we use in our classrooms, but rather the critical awareness our students can gain from working with and creating multimodal texts.

Concluding Thoughts

Scholars who write about utilizing multimodal texts in their classrooms emphasize that they require their students to write "a reflective text to encourage articulation of their own rhetorical choices and to be able to transfer and adapt such knowledge in new rhetorical situations" (Reiss and Young 171). For these reasons, reflection is important. However, many

teachers require students to write this reflective piece like the traditional essay. The problem is that, by ending with a required alphabetic text, we may send the message to our students that the alphabetic traditional essay ultimately has a higher value than other modes and media. It seems contradictory to not at least allow the option of composing this reflection in another medium or in multiple media. The same is true for our daily pedagogical practices. As Penny Kinnear asserts, “It was and remains my responsibility to develop and use multimodalities in my teaching, in the way I present and develop ideas in the classroom. [This includes the] deliberate inclusion of visual [and other modal] elements in both the way material is presented as well as in assigned “readings” and eventually the assignments students must complete” (201).

Finally, we need to make sure we use multimodal vocabulary. “Without the [multimodal] vocabulary – I include both the words to talk about the [multimodal] elements and the elements themselves – [alphabetic] text remain[s]...privileged” (Kinnear 198). I am not advocating a removal of alphabetic text from our classrooms. Students need to know the affordance of alphabetic text in addition to the affordances of other modes. Instead, I, like other scholars, am calling for an equalizing of *all* modes in our classrooms. If we truly want to shape our classes around the literacies our students bring with them and prepare them for writing beyond our Composition courses, we need to recognize the importance and prevalence of multimodality and take the times to help students gain a critical awareness of modal affordances.

Appendix A: Examples of Memes and Comics

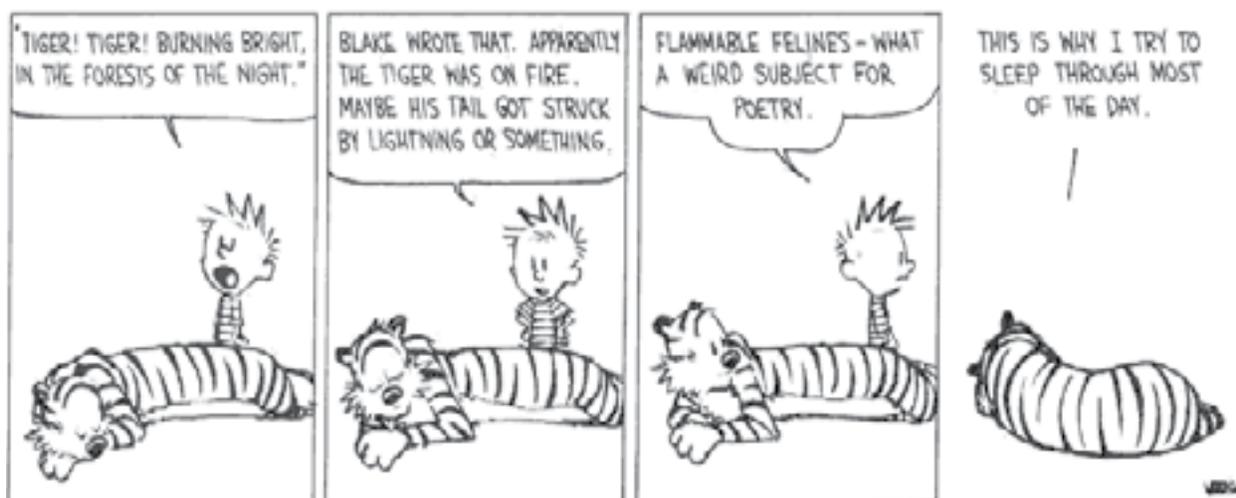


Figure 4: Calvin and Hobbes



Figure 5: Tiger Meme

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