



LAYERED LITERACIES

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Booktubing:

Reader Response Meets 21st Century Literacies

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The theme of this issue of *The ALAN Review* is focused globally on the world of young adult literature. As with previous Layered Literacies columns, our aim is to share emerging and exciting ways that youth are meaningfully engaging with digital tools and young adult novels. In this column, two of us from Medellín, Colombia (Raúl and Tatiana) and one of us from Texas in the United States (Peggy, the Layered Literacies column editor) share our mutual interest in booktubing. We provide an overview of booktubing, describe the characteristics of this medium of video-based expression, illustrate several cases of booktubing in global contexts, and offer concrete ways in which educators, librarians, and youth themselves can get started with and engage in this practice.

Background: Youth Engagement, 21st Century Literacies, and Literary Engagement

Twenty-first century literacies have become increasingly participatory spaces where youth can engage with and produce multimodal texts (Burnett & Merchant, 2015; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Lammers & Marsh, 2015; Morrell, 2012). In this new form of digital and multimedia-based production, engagement

with canonical and alternative literary genres seems to be morphing into new dialogic spaces where the selection of texts and conversations about the texts are kaleidoscopic (Heath & Street, 2008) in nature. For those of us in the fields of literacy and reading studies, the potential for these new forms of expression provides both moments of awe and possibilities for us to expand our practice and research.

One of these new forms of literary engagement is *booktubing*. This is when a book reviewer creates a specific channel on YouTube® or other video platform to provide opinions and commentary about literary works. In doing so, the booktuber actively seeks to build a following of viewers (who are typically subscribers to the channel). Booktubing, which is practiced by both youth and adults, has become an increasingly popular outlet for young adults to engage with today's literature in more open and critical ways. Whether it can be considered a twist on traditional literary reviews or an entirely new style of its own, booktubing has great potential in the new age of online text production. In this column, we describe booktubing in detail and show its global possibilities. We also share insight into how language teachers (both language arts-focused and second language-focused) and librarians can tap into booktubing's potential to highlight YA literature.

A Booktubing Primer

Intersecting Our Interests in Booktubing

The three authors who engaged in this written conversation about booktubing come to this topic

from very different conceptual, experiential, and geo-located vantage points. Raúl's interest stemmed from his current research on 21st century literacies (Mora, 2015) and previous experiences using reader response and multimodal essay creation (Mora, 2016) with his preservice teachers. Peggy's interest in global

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booktubing stemmed from watching four youth booktubers, ages 16–18, at a North Texas Teen Book Festival panel facilitated by library science professor Karin Perry (<https://goo.gl/2pX2HY>). During this panel, Karin facilitated a discussion with the booktubers about the ways in which youth engage with multimodal literacies and the rituals of a video-based community of readers in cyberspace. Tatiana's interest stemmed from her blogging experiences and from watching videos

on YouTube while looking for new releases. She is interested in booktubing as a different way of promoting literature.

Defining Booktubing

Since its initial appearance in 2005, YouTube has become one of the key players in the Web 2.0 era, as it has evolved from a repository of videos to a space where individuals and organizations often create their own videos and broadcast on their own user channels. A strong example of the participatory nature of YouTube lies in the presence of *YouTubers*, or people who produce video content and then broadcast their commentaries and other materials (which range from carefully, professionally crafted videos to gonzo-style productions) on their channels. A recent spin-off of the YouTube culture is the *booktuber* phenomenon.

Booktubing refers to channels produced by users (Machado Balverdú, 2014; Sorensen & Mara, 2014), usually between the ages of 15 and 25 (Torrego, Acebes-de-Pablo, & Dornaletche, 2016), who talk about and review literary works, most typically young adult novels. The tone and style of the videos is usu-

ally casual (Machado Balverdú, 2014), and videos often include book reviews, Q&A sessions with others, or read alouds.

Booktubing Features

Most booktubers include three shared elements in their videos: *background, editing, and content*. When we looked at representative videos, we discovered that most usually last between three and nine minutes in length, although some are even longer. Booktubers tend to choose specific *backgrounds* and locations for their videos, such as shelves with bookish items, posters related to books and maps, or blank backgrounds for video effects (e.g., words or images featured in the video). Ultimately, it is the content of the video itself that seems to determine the chosen background. Some booktubers combine *background, editing, and content* to make meta-videos or “how-to” videos about how to be a good booktuber. Booktubers usually record themselves using smart phones, professional cameras, or webcams. During the *editing* process, they often use different kinds of effects to improve their videos. For instance, the video might turn grey to represent doubts or questions about what is being said. They might cut sections of the video to avoid repetition or mistakes, make themselves sound more fluent, or provide emphasis on key ideas. They might also include links to prior videos or comment on different gadgets and relevant ideas highlighted in the video. With regard to *content*, several booktubers include animated avatars to represent the channel. These avatars serve the dual purpose of greeting viewers and helping other booktubers and users recognize the channel.

There are three salient video formats. The most common are *book reviews*, where booktubers record videos about new releases or books requested by followers. During their reviews, booktubers typically begin by holding the book in one hand, showing the cover and remarking about its design. Then, they often introduce the book and the author, describing their own literary preferences or their opinions of the authors. During the first few minutes of the video, booktubers usually explain whether they loved or hated the book and why. Reasons for liking or disliking a book have to do with an affinity (or lack thereof) with the author's writing style or with some of the characters in the book. Booktubers usually provide a caveat stating that they are just expressing their own

opinions, as opposed to producing sponsored reviews. This clears doubts about potential conflicts of interest. They often talk about the plot, characters, and genre, and they usually do not provide much plot detail in order to avoid spoilers. Instead, the review typically mentions whether the book is well written and the characters realistic. Booktubers tend to introduce characters meticulously and in detail. In the event that booktubers have read other books by the same author, they often compare books or characters.

The second kind of video is *unboxing*, which features booktubers opening boxes from sites such as Owlcrate (www.owlcrate.com), Illumicrate (www.illumirate.com), Bookcase (www.bookcase.club), or The Bookworm Box (www.thebookwormbox.com). These websites feature boxes with monthly subscriptions for one or more YA hardcover books (often signed by the author) and three to five bookish “keepsakes.” Each month highlights a theme related to the book(s). Booktubers record themselves opening the boxes to advertise the chosen website.

The third kind of video relates to *the booktuber's life*. Booktubers organize their books on visible shelves—either by colors, authors (bookshelf tours), best-of-the-month lists (wrap-ups), or new books to read (book hauls). They may even pose questions to other booktubers about their reading preferences (book tags). For all types of videos, many booktubing vloggers (video bloggers) do funny things in front of the camera like acting out sections or changing the inflection of their voices. This personality-driven engagement with viewers enables them to garner more followers.

Why Booktubing Matters

As a 21st century literacy, booktubing is relevant to English teachers (both English language arts and English as a second language), literacy researchers, and librarians. Booktubing represents a networked attempt to learn and discover literature in today's digital and multimodal spaces. Booktubing invites us to rethink how we respond to what we read, and it is a form of reader response (Rosenblatt, 1994). What used to be an individual transaction with the text has now become a participatory moment that has the potential to develop agency in readers regarding text selection, content, and layout. Booktubers also represent growing online communities of readers where feedback and comments become just as important as talking

about the text. Interactions between booktubers and their followers make the videos all the more powerful in the ways they open new avenues of engagement with print text.

As a global phenomenon (see Machado Balverdú, 2014, and Torrego, et al., 2016), the cross-cultural implications of booktubing are multidimensional. One tangible example became evident when looking at videos from the two regions the authors come from (Colombia and Texas, USA). One common feature across videos from both countries is the presence of book hauls as a genre feature. The choices of authors are also noteworthy: it is typical that booktubers in both regions choose similar authors (whether in English or the translated Spanish version of these books).

However, they are also mindful of highlighting local and regional authors in their reviews.

In the case of Colombia, booktubing is a rather recent phenomenon. About three booktubers appeared at Filbo (Festival Internacional del Libro de Bogotá / Bogotá International Book Fair) to speak and to interview the authors they read. There are almost 100 booktubers in the country, seven of whom are the most influential, based on the number of visits to their channels and their emerging presence in social media. They share the same elements as other booktubers around the world (background, editing, and content), but they also record how-to videos. Topics for these videos, other than the traditional topics we previously noted, include discussions about how to start reading in English and the difficulties of learning the language. Interestingly, these booktubers often explain that their English was poor when they attended school but later improved. They also provide tips for buying books abroad (e.g., Amazon, Book Depository, Linio), which connects with the issue of finding books in Colombia. Books can sometimes be very expensive, difficult to find, or pirated. Some translations are not accurate to the original text or not written in Latin-American

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Spanish. (Iberian Spanish remains the most prevalent variant in most translations.)

Overall, booktubing affords a great deal of potential for book and language exchange and is a space for second language acquisition. One potential option for booktubing is a comparison of multi-language versions of popular texts across channels.

Steps for Getting Started with Booktubing

Teachers and librarians can adapt booktubing to highlight YA literature and give students a platform

Educators can dialogue with students and focus on ways students can engage fully in any combination of viewing, commenting, or producing booktubing videos.

to share ideas about texts. In this section, we provide an overview of ways to implement booktubing across educational settings, including libraries and schools. Beyond formal school settings, students can also be made aware of booktubing as an engaging and interactive literary practice. Educators can dialogue with students and focus on ways students can engage fully in any

combination of viewing, commenting, or producing booktubing videos. Students can be provided with opportunities to critically reflect on the booktubing genre and the production process.

1. **Modeling booktubing:** Educators might provide students with opportunities to locate examples of good booktubers whose videos can serve as mentor texts with regard to content and format. Teachers and librarians might also consider becoming booktubers themselves to serve as models for students. For instance, they could do a Monday weekly booktubing video to highlight YA novels they are reading or intend to read. They might also consider doing an unboxing of books.
2. **Exploring booktubers and booktubing as a genre, platform, and digital community:** Educators might provide students with time to explore booktubing as a medium and a genre of multimedia. A good starting point is the Booktubers app (available in English, Spanish, and French for both iPhone and

Android smart phones), which provides a list of booktubers in alphabetical order with links to social media, blogs, and YouTube channels. In addition to this app, teachers can create a simple handout that provides some of the basics about booktubing, drawing on ideas from this column and their own observations of booktubers on various video channels. They can encourage students to find booktubers they enjoy following and emphasize that a booktuber's focus is to gain a following of the video channel and share their love of books and authors. Booktubing goes beyond traditional book reporting because booktubers share their personalities, idiosyncrasies, and literary preferences; they respond to texts in ways that traditional book reports simply cannot capture.

3. **Evaluating booktubing videos:** Educators might invite students to add their ideas about the booktubing genre. They can discuss the value of considering audience in order to gain a following. Students might examine booktubers who have larger followings and consider what they have in common and how they appeal to their audiences.
4. **Creating and producing videos:** Teachers and librarians should encourage students to become booktubers themselves, either inside of school, if school policy permits it, or outside of school, if students are interested. Capturing videos is simple with cell phones and apps. Students can consider whether they want to script videos or use bullet points on index cards to guide their thinking. If students wish to fully script their booktubing videos, they can use a simple app such as Teleprompter (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/teleprompter-pro-lite/id578104295?mt=8>) in conjunction with a tablet device. Scripting and reading off a teleprompter are ideal if students are nervous about what to say or if they fear forgetting what they want to say.

For planning purposes, storyboarding can be used to plan the sequence and content of booktube videos. Students can use a series of sequential boxes in a simple graphic organizer to sketch key events in their narrative. We include an example of a template that could be used to plan a booktubing video (see Fig. 1). The features included in this storyboarding format

General Features of the Booktubing Video		
1. Focus of the video (e.g., bookhaul, overview of latest favorites, booktalk, unboxing, solo, dialogue)	2. Estimated length of video (under 10 minutes is ideal)	3. Background and set design
Storyboard Sequence		
1. Introduction (big ideas)	2. Main ideas and reaction to book one	3. Main ideas and reaction to book two (optional)
4. Main ideas and reaction to book three (optional)	5. Other ideas (continue storyboarding, as needed)	6. Wrap up and thank viewers. Request viewers subscribe to the booktubing video channel.

Figure 1. Example of storyboarding template

Booktuber Screen Name and Country	URL Link to Booktubing Channel
Andreo Rowling (Spain)	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCF8T4cUCdpMp3t3IeuXqV4w
Las palabras de fa (Mexico)	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHJnpw2ZR-7hlfCgdDHPWYw
Macarena (Argentina)	https://www.youtube.com/user/graciasalolibros
The Grey Lady (Colombia)	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMehl1qNroCOco9evTVbapw
The Booktube Network	https://www.youtube.com/user/TheBookTubeNetwork
Abookutopia (UK)	https://www.youtube.com/user/abookutopia
Katytastic (US)	https://www.youtube.com/user/Katytastic
Epic Reads (US)	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSRwwQb-oMNAWWAnw0bh27w
Lucythereader (UK)	https://www.youtube.com/lucythereader
Little Book Owl (Australia)	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYOhq5F-joK8qQPekd-jU1g
Rincey Reads (India)	https://www.youtube.com/user/rinceyreads

Figure 2. List of exemplar booktubers (both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking)

are important for students to consider, regardless of whether they complete the storyboard. The best way to start thinking about booktube videos is to view a variety of booktubers, so we have also included a list of booktubers who might serve as models (see Fig. 2).

5. **Reflect on the videos:** As students design videos within the booktubing genre, teachers can provide opportunities for them to share their videos. Students in the class might reflect on the videos and provide constructive feedback to one another. Teachers might create a physical bulletin board space, highlighting booktubers in the school and/or classroom by displaying screenshots of student and faculty booktubers. Within the classroom or library, educators might share videos on a password-pro-

tected platform such as Edmodo or on a website or blog.

6. **Consider connecting booktubing to a book club:** If schools and libraries have an existing book club, booktubing would be a great synthesizing experience for readers. In contrast to book trailers, where students provide an overview about a book, booktubing is more reader-specific and focuses on the reader's reaction to the text.

Conclusion

Booktubing provides a creative way to engage young readers with books and allow them to connect with others who share a love of a particular author or genre. Booktubers share ideas and a passion for read-

ing in a medium that transcends distance, place, and time, and they can build very large followings. Because these video channels tend to be open platforms, discussions of media literacy, digital citizenship, video production, and design should all be included in conversations with students if educators wish to include booktubing in their curricula or library instruction.

We hope that you will consider the value of booktubing and the ways it evokes response about YA texts. If you choose to create your own booktubing video channel, consider tagging *The ALAN Review* (@ALANReview) and ALAN (@ALANorg) on Twitter with a link to your channel so that we can view it. Also consider using the #NCTEChat hashtag, so the broader NCTE community can view your videos!

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