

We All Have Jobs Here: Teaching and Learning with Multiple Intelligences in *The Walking Dead*

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ABSTRACT

A model can be useful when engaging secondary students in team-building by appreciating differing skills and identifying their own strengths. In this example, a model was provided that students indulged in the transgression of popular culture and zombie media. Middle and high school students participated in a critical thinking and team-building unit which capitalized on student interest in zombie popular culture, particularly the AMC series *The Walking Dead*. Students engaged in cooperative activities with a “zombie apocalypse” theme. Activities included identifying roles for team members based on individual skill sets in order to strengthen to group as a whole. This approach allowed students to approach this unit as assembling a “zombie apocalypse team,” an idea borrowed from popular culture. The popular culture “zombie apocalypse team” shows that survival depends on building a cooperative team of individuals with disparate but complementary skills and approaches to problem solving. Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences can provide theoretical framework to examine how the group of survivors in *The Walking Dead* combine multiple intelligences, as represented by individual characters, to survive. This model can provide a more detailed context to allow students to their own strengths within a team.

Keywords: educational psychology, Howard Gardner, intelligence, Multiple Intelligences, psychology, The Walking Dead, pedagogy, team building, secondary education

INTRODUCTION

“Who would be on your zombie apocalypse team?” has become a popular thought experiment entertained by horror fans, online memes, and quizzes. In fact, typing “Who would be on your” often autocompletes in a Google search with “zombie apocalypse team.” The question itself seems to suggest a popular understanding that no one skillset or strength is adequate to survive extraordinary conditions. Rather, success relies on assembling a cooperative team of individuals with disparate but complementary skills. This premise is played out in the popular ongoing series, *The Walking Dead*. The AMC series, developed by Frank Darabont based on the comic series by Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, and Charlie Adlard, follows a close-knit group of survivors as they navigate a post-apocalyptic world after a zombie outbreak led to the collapse of society. Most members of the group came together as strangers, each bringing a unique background and different approaches to problem solving. The notion that communities benefit from diverse representation of individual strengths is not limited to the popular imagination. Developmental psychologist Howard Gardner observed that across cultures and community contexts, the breadth and complexity of human problem solving could not be adequately assessed using traditional measures of intelligence. In 1983, Gardner published his seminal work, *Frames of Mind*, in which he described his theory of multiple intelligences (MI theory), which sought to develop a better understanding of human intelligence than accounted for in traditional IQ tests and similar measures. This article will explore a practical application of the question, “Who would be on your zombie apocalypse team?” and the use of zombie popular culture as a conduit to teaching team building in middle and high school. Then, this premise will be further applied to Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences as a theoretical framework to examine how the group of survivors in *The Walking Dead* combine multiple intelligences, as represented by individual characters, to survive.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Howard Gardner became critical of traditional views on intelligence prevalent in psychology, which led to his research and development of his theory of multiple intelligences, introduced in the 1983 book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. (“Reflections”). Gardner described an intelligence in terms of the ability to solve problems or fashion products of significance to a particular cultural context or community (*New Horizons* 15). In addition, Gardner identified several criteria an intelligence must fulfill: the potential for isolation by brain damage, a place in evolutionary history, the presence of core operations, the potential to symbolic expression, a developmental progression, the existence of prodigies or exceptional individuals, and support from experimental psychology and psychometric findings (*Frames of Mind* 66-71). To identify intelligences, Gardner reviewed volumes of existing research and identified seven intelligences: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. In 1995, Gardner wrote that if he were to rewrite *Frames of Mind*, he would include an eighth intelligence, that of the naturalist (“Reflections” 206).

Educators enthusiastically embraced MI theory. Volumes have been written about the application of MI theory in classrooms, and entire schools have even designed their curricula to support multiple intelligences (“Reflections” 202). However, rather than placing a greater value on a more diverse range of intelligence, some educators have confused multiple intelligences with “learning styles” (“Reflections” 202-203). Gardner wrote that he was “jarred” by attempts to teach all content areas using all the intelligences or using multiple intelligences simply as mnemonic devices (“Reflections” 206). Musical intelligence in particular has been subject to being used as merely a vessel for teaching the more traditionally valued linguistic and mathematical intelligences (Kassell 32). While Gardner’s theory has been embraced by many in the field of education, others have harshly criticized MI theory, even arguing that the theory is pseudoscience (Gleak 126-127). This paper takes no position on the scientific basis of the theory of multiple intelligences, but rather aims to use the

theory as a framework for analysis.

Gardner sought to develop a theory of intelligence which better explained the diverse skills and approaches to problem-solving that individuals possess. The intelligences Gardner identified do not function in isolation, but within a cultural setting, community or social context, which suggests communities benefit from a diverse representation of intelligences. Although few outside the fields of education or psychology might be familiar with Gardner's theory, the idea that individuals of differing strengths working cooperatively are greater than the sum of their parts, is not a radical one and is represented in popular culture. *The Walking Dead* and the notion of the zombie apocalypse team presents a model in the popular imagination of how different intelligences or strengths function in context. Maudlin and Sandlin invite educators engaging in teaching popular culture to reflect upon the impact and cumulative imagery in popular culture (376-377). Although these common images often reinforce negative stereotypes, zombie apocalypse narratives, including *The Walking Dead*, have contributed to the common image of the "zombie apocalypse team."

The Walking Dead, in particular, offers an interesting model of the zombie apocalypse team, in which multiple intelligences can be represented by an individual member of the recurring cast of survivors. In practice, popular culture can serve as a conduit for students to learn and apply new ideas (Creadick 17). Teaching through popular culture, such as *The Walking Dead* and other zombie media, provides a model of teamwork and differing strengths which allows students to confidently envision themselves as part of their own team. Below is an application of the zombie apocalypse scenario for team building with middle and high school students, followed by an analysis of multiple intelligences as represented by individual characters in *The Walking Dead*.

As a certified school librarian, my position within my school allows me to collaborate closely with my educator colleagues and to engage with students in informal conversation, often about popular culture. During the course of the project described below, I had frequent discussions with students as they worked on their "zombie project" in the library and around the school. My role as librarian also led me to conversations with this group of students about their shared interest in *The Walking Dead* television series and comic book and the young adult book series *Rot and Ruin* by Jonathan Maberry. With this article, I hope to open educational possibilities for secondary students, especially who may struggle with traditional academics, by engaging students with the transgression of popular culture in the classroom and empowering students to recognize their strengths with a framework such as multiple intelligences.

IN PRACTICE

In spring 2016, I was invited to observe and participate in a team-building unit which would post students with the question: "Who would be on your zombie apocalypse team?" My colleague, who works with me at a suburban middle school in the northeastern United States, is an instructor with an educational nonprofit that partners with public schools. He and another instructor in the same program at a nearby rural high school created a zombie-themed critical thinking and team building activity for students enrolled in the program. The intent was to create a dropout prevention program, and has evolved to work with students to develop skills such as leadership, critical thinking, communication, self-awareness, character development, and team-building. Many students enrolled in the program at the two schools were avid fans of *The Walking Dead* and other zombie media such as *Z-Nation*, *Shaun of the Dead*, and Jonathan Maberry's young adult book series *Rot and Ruin*.

Many students enrolled in this program, which fits into students' schedule like an elective course, may struggle with traditional classroom assignments and academic success. Instructors design learning activities to capitalize upon and develop students' strengths. Many projects are founded in career readiness or community service with authentic, real-life goals. Activities also often have students collaborating with peers to work

toward a common goal. Teaching through popular culture in this context provides students with a learning activity which is unique and resembles play. For middle and high school students -- especially those who may not easily fit the ideal of traditional school success -- subverting typical school expectations by creating a zombie apocalypse plan, talking about favorite *Walking Dead* characters, even playing a shooting video game in class, creates a sense of *jouissance*, a blissful pleasure that comes from disrupting the social order (Duncum 234). Further, teaching through popular culture can decenter and redistribute authority within the classroom (Creadick 16). Not only does the instructor give up being the expert, but students may also be forced to reassess and redefine their roles within the classroom.

The unit harnessed students' interest in zombie popular culture to help them work toward team building and leadership learning targets. Competencies students were working toward included: demonstrating team membership and leadership, the ability to analyze strengths and weaknesses in self and others, understand and apply knowledge of social roles, and identifying and understanding personal aptitudes and abilities. The activity drew from the "Zombie Preparedness" lesson published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and a zombie-themed critical thinking lesson by Breanne Harris. Since students were also working toward competencies in teamwork, communication, and social skills, students were given team-building tasks, such as identifying a team leader and individual roles for team members.

Interestingly, although this unit was not designed with MI theory in mind, the learning activities integrate a number of intelligences throughout the project. Students capitalized on the personal intelligences through self-reflection of strengths and weaknesses and then working together as a group. Group leaders, in particular, had to show strong interpersonal intelligence. One middle school activity had students engaged in "shooting practice" using a Nintendo Wii video game and gun controller. Each team could then choose their best shooter to compete against other teams to earn a preferential starting point within the larger activity. In an opportunity to demonstrate linguistic intelligence, students gave presentations or oral arguments about their plans. Teams also created maps as part of their plan, which would require spatial intelligence.

The unit took place during class time over the course of two weeks. The high school unit was more theory-based, with students mainly working in the classroom, while the middle school unit was more practical, with students creating a zombie survival strategy within the school building. High school students began the unit with class discussions about infectivity and emergency preparedness. Students also worked on individual tasks such as identifying individual needs and choices for zombie preparedness. Students then each created ideal or imagined zombie apocalypse teams, which could include real or fictional people, and presented their plans to their classmates. In the second week of the unit, students were broken into teams. First, each team was tasked with identifying a leader, including determining how that leader would be chosen -- through a quick election? Drawing straws? Students were cautioned to be aware that for "the rest of the game you will take orders from that person until there is a revolt or they get eaten by zombies." Teams were then instructed to establish group norms, including division of labor and wealth, responsibility toward other groups, laws within the group, and how to handle infected members. Students were instructed to negotiate and debate points until the team could reach consensus.

Middle school students were engaged in more practical, hands-on activities. In one introductory activity, students had to find their way to the sitting area of the classroom while blindfolded and navigating a rope maze. The first two students to the sitting area could take their blindfolds off and provide vocal commands to the remaining students. Those first two students also became the team leaders and had the privilege of choosing the other members of their team.

Once teams were formed, each team worked as a group to identify individual strengths and assign each team member a specific role. In addition to the team leader, group roles included the medic, weapons specialist, strategist, and most resilient. Each role had defining characteristics. For example, the medic should

demonstrate empathy, kindness, and character; the weapons specialist should be the most resourceful and show originality and creativity; the strategist should be smart, sensible, and judicious. During these discussions, students readily made connections to the roles of favorite fictional characters -- identifying themselves as the Rick or Daryl of the group, for example. As a group, students discussed the roles and how they functioned within the team. Students identified their individual skills and strengths and which role they felt they were best suited for. For instance, an athletic student might see himself as well-suited to be weapons specialist, while a shy student known for being caring could serve the role of medic. However, these self-assessments also had to align with their peers' assessments, as well as the skills students had identified on resumes created earlier in the school year.

A custodian gave students an all-access tour of the school building, and each team was tasked with identifying their top three choices for best rooms to use as a base, along with inventories and strategies for surviving for two days. The role of each team member informed their priorities when identifying potential hideouts. The medic had to ensure they had access to first aid supplies. The weapons specialist had to find potential weapons and other supplies such as gear and food. The strategist was in charge of identifying the group's final location and strategy for survival. The group leader would listen to all perspectives and make the final decision. Portions of the unit were stylized like a game, with students rolling dice to determine if the way was clear or if zombies roamed the school hallways. Once their survival plans were complete, each group presented their strategy to the other teams.

When students had debriefing sessions on the unit, they had the opportunity to reflect on working with their team and their individual roles within the team. Students identified their own strengths within their team, and some students said that they wished they had spoken up more during the activities. One group even said that if they were to do the activity again, they would overthrow their leader and choose another member of the group to lead the team. One of the learning targets students were working towards, "Working Toward Team Goals" was described as "A synergetic team is a complementary team: capitalizing on the strengths of team members making weakness irrelevant." Even the group that wished to overthrow their leader recognized the strengths of individual members and of the group as a whole and the leadership qualities of the individual they wanted as the team leader. Both teams reflected positively that their team was stronger for having individual members with different strengths and roles within the group.

The learning goals of this unit were unique in that although each student was working toward the same competencies in teamwork and collaboration, they demonstrated these competencies through their differences. The unit included both conscientious teaching of collaboration through capitalizing on the strengths of individual members and a fanciful, yet practical, application of working with team members with complementary skill sets. The use of the zombie apocalypse scenario and references to popular culture allowed students an engaging and imaginative way to apply their individual skills and practice working with a team. Even when middle school students earned a free day and the option for a trip to a local doughnut shop, students unanimously opted to stay at school and continue working on their zombie apocalypse plans.

I had the opportunity to listen in on middle school students' conversations as they discussed the different roles within their team. Students considered not just their own personalities and strengths, but those of their teammates as well. This process, and a future iteration of this unit as a whole, could further develop students' insight into the role of differing skills to strengthen the group as a whole by explicitly teaching multiple intelligences through familiar popular culture, in this case, *The Walking Dead*. Below is an overview of how individual characters could be used as models for Gardner's multiple intelligences.

INTERPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE: RICK GRIMES

Rick Grimes, a former sheriff's deputy, is the leader of the band of survivors in *The Walking Dead*. Rick demonstrates exceptional skill in reading people and their motivations, as well as the ability to bring people together to work cooperatively. Gardner explained that in an advanced form, interpersonal intelligence can allow a skilled individual to read the intentions and desires of others and potentially to use this knowledge to influence a group of disparate individuals to work cooperatively (*Frames of Mind* 253).

Early in the series, Rick says to an antagonist character, "We survive this by pulling together, not apart." Rick shows his commitment to this sentiment in his efforts to help the group escape Atlanta. He leads the group out of the city by using the knowledge and expertise of the other members of the group, including background knowledge about city planning, observations about walkers, and the spatial intelligence of Glenn Rhee ("Guts").

By the end of the fifth season, the other characters who have followed Rick have come to recognize his insight and abilities. When the group arrives at Alexandria, Rick has a violent outburst, frightening the residents of Alexandria ("Try"). As a result, the leader of Alexandria, Deanna Monroe, schedules a community meeting to discuss the events and potential consequences ("Conquer"). Michonne, Carol, Abraham, and Maggie all speak in Rick's defense. One of the common themes in all of their comments is that Rick's strength is his understanding of the world. Rick met each of these characters at different points and in different contexts, but each of them expresses loyalty for him. Either explicitly or implicitly, each character also expresses an understanding that they are stronger as a group, as a family. Gardner's definition of an intelligence is the ability to solve problems within a particular context or community (*New Horizons*). The problem Rick is tasked with solving is to survive in a dangerous world. To achieve this end, he has employed advanced interpersonal intelligence to bring people from disparate backgrounds and experiences together to work cooperatively.

INTRAPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE: CAROL PELETIER

Gardner described intrapersonal intelligence as a depth of understanding of one's internal feelings or range of affects and emotions and the ability to "draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one's behavior" (*Frames of Mind*, 253). In her first introduction, Carol is meek, polite, and under the thumb of an abusive husband. Carol has grown and changed over the course of the series, and reflects on her changes. By the third season, Carol has transformed into a confident and contributing member of the group. When another character remarks to Carol that she does not seem scared of anything anymore, Carol responds simply, "I'm not" ("This Sorrowful Life").

By the fourth season, Carol is more contemplative about her change. In talking to Rick about her previous life with her abusive husband, she says, "I didn't think I could be strong. I didn't know I could, that I already was." When Rick asks about her daughter Sophia, Carol says she's dead. "Somebody's else's slideshow," suggesting that Carol views herself as so changed as to be a new person entirely ("Indifference"). In season five, she goes into greater detail to Daryl:

I went home, I got beat up, life went on, and I just kept praying for something to happen.
But I didn't do anything. Not a damn thing. Who I was with him she got burned away.
And I was happy about that. I mean, not happy, but at the prison I got to be who I
always thought I should be, thought I should've been. And then she got burned away.
Everything now just consumes you. ("Consumed")

Carol's self-knowledge functions as much more than idle reflection, but rather helps guide her behavior and actions. As the series continues, Carol is driven to do whatever is necessary to protect the lives of the community members and is viewed by those around her as an integral and valued member of the group.

SPATIAL INTELLIGENCE: GLENN RHEE

Gardner described spatial intelligence as the ability to perceive the visual world in three dimensions, to adapt or adjust initial perceptions as necessary, and to be able to re-create aspects of one's visual experience (*Frames of Mind*, 182). In the second episode of the first season, Glenn, as yet unseen, helps Rick escape from a military tank in Atlanta, describing an exit strategy and route via the radio. Glenn then meets Rick in the alley, and leads him up a fire escape. As Rick follows, Glenn shows familiarity with the area, and has, at any given moment, several exit strategies in mind. Glenn can strategize and plan on his feet as circumstances change and areas are blocked ("Guts").

Gardner related spatial intelligence to the strategy and visual memory of chess players and the "ability to anticipate moves and their consequences" (*Frames of Mind* 202). But Gardner argued that strong spatial intelligence was more than just exceptional visual memory, using the example of the battlefield: A commander who enters into battle with a detailed image of his battle plan, but is unable to quickly change course or adapt his plans as circumstance change would make a poor commander (*Frames of Mind* 204).

When Rick, Glenn, and others return to Atlanta to rescue a group member and retrieve Rick's dropped bag of weapons, the group discusses which task to tackle first. Rick says to Glenn, "You know the geography, it's your call" ("Vatos"). In creating a strategy to retrieve the bag of guns and ammunition, Glenn creates a model of the surrounding area drawn on the floor, using different objects as models for the bag and people: "That's the tank, five blocks from where we are now, that's the bag of guns. Here's the alley I dragged you into when we first met. That's where Daryl and I will go." Glenn's plan accounts for the fact that he may not be able to come back the same way, so he positions group members two blocks in the other direction. Not only does Glenn demonstrate a strong visual memory of the area, obstacles, streets and alleyways, but he is able to effectively strategize and anticipate potential changes and adapt accordingly.

BODILY-KINESTHETIC INTELLIGENCE: MORGAN JONES

Gardner describes bodily-kinesthetic intelligence as the ability to solve problems or fashion products using one's body (*New Horizons* 10). While many of the characters in *The Walking Dead* demonstrate some level of advanced bodily-kinesthetic intelligence to survive, Morgan Jones is noteworthy not only because of his advanced skills in martial arts, but also due to his apparent fast learning speed and fashioning of tools and products. In the first episode, Morgan declines to travel with Rick to Atlanta, saying he needs to practice shooting. Yet, when he takes target practice from the upper floor of a house, he is able to accurately make headshots with ease ("Days Gone Bye"). Later in the series, Morgan shows exceptional bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. When Rick encounters Morgan again in the third season, Morgan has not only survived solely on his own, but has fashioned a complex series of traps with bait, arrays of spikes, walls, snares, and guards against walkers, as well as booby-traps against intruders ("Clear"). Although Morgan is mentally unstable, he has used bodily-kinesthetic intelligence to create and use tools in order to protect himself from walkers and intruders.

Morgan appears again in the fifth season, eating alone next to a campfire when he is attacked by two men, one of whom is armed with a gun ("Conquer"). Morgan has no trouble dodging their attacks armed only with a bo staff. Neither of the two successfully land a single blow to Morgan. At this point in the series, Morgan's dedication to non-killing requires a much higher level of physical skill than accuracy with a firearm. Morgan's unique ability is later recognized by King Ezekiel, leader of the community The Kingdom, who asks Morgan to train his people ("The Well").

LOGICAL-MATHEMATICAL INTELLIGENCE: MICHONNE

Gardner characterized individuals exhibiting strong logical-mathematical intelligence as questioning and showing a persistence in carrying through, appreciation of connections, and flouting conventional wisdom (*Frames of Mind* 158). The stoic, katana-wielding Michonne is introduced after Rick's group flees the Greene family farm. Michonne becomes a companion of Andrea when she is accidentally left behind. Early in season three, Andrea and Michonne are taken to the community of Woodbury led by the Governor. Michonne shows skepticism towards both the Governor and Woodbury ("Walk With Me"). Early on, Michonne tells Andrea she does not trust the Governor and alludes to something sinister being hidden in the community of Woodbury ("Walk With Me"). Later, Michonne examines the military vehicles and equipment the Governor brought back to Woodbury, she finds bullet holes and blood. The Governor told the community that the servicemen had been overrun by the dead before the Governor and his people arrived ("Killer Within"). When the Governor finds her, Michonne takes the opportunity to question him directly, with the confident, probing manner of an attorney or detective:

Michonne: "You'd think one soldier would drive away, especially against something so slow."

The Governor: "Those men were heroes. Not the kind to leave anyone behind. If only we got there sooner. And you were with us."

Michonne: "Lots of bullet holes. You think biters figured out how to use weapons?"

The Governor: "They must have encountered bandits weeks ago." ("Killer Within")

The Governor's responses do not provide satisfactory answers for Michonne, as his statements do not fit in with the connections she has already made. Gardner noted that those who possess exceptional logical-mathematical intelligence value their intuition, and yet cannot accept any fact until it has been rigorously proved. Michonne continues to persist in finding answers by breaking into the Governor's home ("Say The Word").

Michonne becomes a valued member of the main group of survivors, often playing the role of the level-headed voice of reason. After the group is at the mercy of the Savivors, Michonne is once again compelled to seek her own answers. When Carl asks why Michonne did not go scavenging with his father, she explains, "I have to figure some things out." She explains to Carl that while she may think Rick is wrong in his approach in dealing with the Savivors, "Even if I think he is, I don't know" ("Go Getters"). Although her intuition may guide her, Michonne cannot accept any fact as given until she has rigorously sought her own answers.

LINGUISTIC INTELLIGENCE: HERSEL GREENE AND MAGGIE GREENE RHEE

According to Gardner, linguistic intelligence includes a sensitivity to the pragmatic functions of language, or the uses to which language can be put (*Frames of Mind* 80-83). Hershel Greene is introduced early in season two as the head of the Greene family farm where he lives with his daughters, Maggie and Beth, and several family friends. Gardner described linguistic intelligence as a sensitivity to the different functions of language, including the potential to excite, convince, convey information, or to please (*Frames of Mind* 82). This sensitivity to the functions of language can be seen in Hershel's interactions with and lasting impact on the other characters. Hershel uses language to defuse tense situations and to counsel other characters. After Hershel's death, Maggie similarly uses language to inspire and influence others.

When a deadly illness infects the group after they have sought shelter in the prison, Hershel puts language to use to move and inspire others. When Glenn becomes ill, Hershel tells him, "We got this far somehow, you can believe somehow. Now we all have jobs here. That one's yours" ("Isolation"). These words

have such a lasting impact, that Glenn, Maggie, and Beth all repeat some variation of the phrase “We all have jobs here” in subsequent episodes. Similarly, Hershel’s words stay with Rick even after Hershel’s death. In a particularly dark moment, after the fall of the prison and after Rick has killed several members of another threatening group, through a series of flashbacks, Rick thinks back to his conversations with Hershel and the counsel he offered (“A”).

After Hershel’s death, Maggie eventually takes on a similar role, offering words of support and inspiration. Maggie’s skill and sensitivity to the functions of language are recognized by other members of the group. Glenn tells Maggie to continue talking to Deanna at Alexandria, “Keep going over the plans you talked about” (“First Time Again”). Later, Rick tells Maggie she should be the one to talk to Gregory, the leader of the Hilltop community. Rick recognizes both Maggie’s skill in language and the application to leadership: “You gotta start doing these things” (“Knots Untie”). In the final episode of the seventh season, Maggie is shown alongside Rick and King Ezekiel, leader of the Kingdom community. Maggie gives an inspiring speech to members of the three communities, Alexandria, the Kingdom, and the Hilltop, using language to bring people together behind a common cause (“The First Day”).

MUSICAL INTELLIGENCE: BETH GREENE

Gardner described the components of musical intelligence as melody, rhythm, and timbre, but also explained that music is intimately associated with emotions and feelings. Gardner wrote that music “can serve as a way of capturing feeling, communicating them from the performer or the creator to the attentive listener” (*Frames of Mind* 131). While musical performance may not contribute directly to survival, the characters of *The Walking Dead* have nevertheless shown an interest and connection with music.

Although most of the group’s energy is spent on survival, music is shown to be of value within the context of the community of survivors. Beth Greene uses musical intelligence to improve the quality of life of herself and those around her. Early in season three, after the group has struggled to survive over the winter, Hershel asks Beth to sing. At first, she responds that no one wants to hear, but Glenn asks, “Why not?” During their time at the prison, Beth becomes known for singing and uses music to convey emotions. At a moment in the series when the group is scared and vulnerable to attack, Beth sings an uplifting song with the chorus, “You gotta hold on” (“I Ain’t A Judas”).

After the group has fled the prison, and Beth and Daryl have found shelter in a funeral home, Beth finds a piano and begins playing and singing. When Daryl enters the room she stops, but he asks her to continue.

Daryl: “Why don’t you go ahead and play some more? Keep singing.”

Beth: “I thought my singing annoyed you.”

Daryl: “There ain’t no jukebox, so...” (“Alone”)

Here again, after they have been forced from their home and separated from their group, Beth and Daryl find meaning in music. Later, when Beth is held at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, in speaking to Dr. Edwards, she further shows musical intelligence in reflecting on the place of music in the context of the survival:

Dr. Edwards: “[Art] doesn’t have a place anymore. Art isn’t about survival. It’s about transcendence. Being more than animals. Rising above.”

Beth: “We can’t do that anymore?”

Dr. Edwards: “I don’t know.”

Beth: “I sing. I still sing.” (“Slabtown”)

NATURALIST: DARYL DIXON

In 1995, Gardner wrote about adding an eighth intelligence, the intelligence of the naturalist, to his original list of seven. He explained that naturalist intelligence is demonstrated by the ability to recognize flora and fauna and make other distinctions in the natural world, and to use this ability in a useful way, such as hunting, farming, or biological science (“Reflections” 206). Educator Bruce Campbell further described naturalist intelligence as having “to do with observing, understanding and organizing patterns in the natural environment” (“The Naturalist Intelligence”).

The other members of the Atlanta camp express reservations about Daryl’s place in the group, but early on his hunting and tracking skills prove to be of value to the camp. In the second season, Daryl’s tracking skills are put to further use when Carol’s daughter Sophia becomes lost in the woods. Daryl leads the search, and when Rick can no longer make out tracks in the ground, Daryl can. Rick recognizes Daryl’s skill by asking him to lead the search: “Daryl knows the woods better than anybody. I’ve asked him to oversee this” (“What Lies Ahead”). Later, Daryl and Andrea, another member of the group, continue the search. Daryl tells Andrea he was younger than Sophia when he got lost in the woods for nine days, surviving on berries before he finally made his way home no worse for the wear, except for poison oak (“Save The Last One”). Daryl’s naturalist abilities have been present from an early age and have adapted to new contexts and needs.

Gardner argued that there is an evolutionary history of survival often depending on avoiding predators and on recognizing and categorizing species (*New Horizons* 19). The naturalist intelligence may also adapt to more modern environments, not only the “natural world” (Gardner, *New Horizons*). Consequently, Daryl’s ability to make consequential distinctions in the natural world has adapted to the new demands of survival and avoiding predators, both walkers and people. Daryl can distinguish between live human blood and walker blood, as well as human tracks from walker tracks (“Inmates”). Later, after the group has joined with Alexandria, Daryl comes across Aaron, a resident of Alexandria, in the forest. Aaron comments to Daryl, “You can tell the difference between walkers and humans by sound?” (“Forget”). Aaron recognizes Daryl’s exceptional skill and asks him to assist in recruiting new residents to Alexandria.

DISCUSSION

Gardner explained that complexes of intelligences function together (*Frames of Mind* 295). Of course, all these characters show skill in more than just the one intelligence highlighted here. Aaron asks Daryl to assist in recruiting for Alexandria in part because he is impressed with Daryl’s naturalist intelligence, but also because Daryl shows interpersonal intelligence in being able to read people and their motives. Morgan shows intrapersonal intelligence in his reflection on his personal journey after losing his son and discovering the philosophy of aikido. Michonne taught herself how to use her katana indicating exceptional bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. However, Gardner also argued that no one individual can possess exceptional strength in all intelligences, which further suggests the necessity of a cohesive team representing diverse intelligences (*New Horizons* 222).

Hershel recognized that every member of the group had a job to do, and Rick saw that the group’s strength came from their unity, “As long as it’s all of us, we can do anything” (“Last Day”). The group’s strength stems from the diverse intelligences of individual group members. Each intelligence, and each group member who represents that intelligence, brings value in their own right. As a result, the group’s strength is greater than the sum of its parts. The group would be weaker if certain intelligences had not been developed in

individual members, but had only been used as pathways to traditionally valued academic skills.

While many educators have embraced MI theory, traditional educational settings provide students with limited practical opportunities to identify and use their personal strengths. Interpersonal skills and musical ability, for example, are rarely (if ever) measured by traditional assessments and standardized tests, providing students few opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. Even in group work, students are often working together on similar tasks and using similar skills, rather than collaboratively combining a variety of skill sets toward a common goal. Or, as Gardner and others have noted, different intelligences are used simply as a conduit to developing the more traditionally valued linguistic or logical-mathematical intelligences (“Reflections” 206; Kassell 32).

When young people are under ongoing pressure to conform to adult ideals (such as traditional academic success), youth culture becomes one of resistance and transgression (Duncum 234). Using popular culture to illustrate a concept such as multiple intelligences allows students to not only engage in the play and transgression of pop culture, but also provides students with an opportunity to resist that pressure to conform to academic success, and explore and redefine their own strengths.

In order to effectively and meaningfully use popular culture in the classroom, educators must acknowledge and embrace the role of play that is inherent with students’ relationships with popular culture (Duncum 234). Zombie narratives in popular culture are a good example of the play of transgression in popular culture, particularly for younger viewers. Zombie media, such as *The Walking Dead*, is often violent and gory and clearly at odds with school-approved, “family friendly” media.

Embracing the play and transgression of the zombie apocalypse provides a fertile ground for learning, particularly for an emphasis on under taught skills and with students who may not be as easily successful in traditional academic areas. Maudlin and Sandlin discuss the impact of representation and cumulative imagery in popular culture, particularly within the context of teaching and learning (376-377). Although these common images often reinforce negative stereotypes, particularly harmful racial and gender stereotypes, other images may be more benign, such as the “zombie apocalypse team” created by *The Walking Dead* and other popular media. The cumulative imagery of the zombie apocalypse team has allowed many young viewers to imagine themselves on a zombie apocalypse team with their actual (or idealized) strengths. The next portion of this article will explore a unique example of how the popular notion of the zombie apocalypse team informed the development and application of a critical thinking and team building unit with middle school and high school students.

CONCLUSION

As Rick Grimes said, “As long as it’s all of us, we can do anything” (“Last Day”). Zombie apocalypse narratives in popular culture, and in particular, *The Walking Dead*, have captured the popular imagination. The notion of the zombie apocalypse team can provide insights into common understandings of teamwork and the benefits of a group or community comprised of individuals with disparate strengths. Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences offers a useful framework to analyze the characters of *The Walking Dead* in that each character can be seen as an archetype representing a distinct intelligence. Together, these intelligences combine into a cohesive group, nicknamed “Team Family” by fans, which is together stronger for their differences as individuals. The popular imagery of the zombie apocalypse team creates a model in the minds of young viewers illustrating how different intelligences or strengths function together. By using popular culture as a conduit and embracing the fun of transgression of *The Walking Dead* and other zombie media, instructors can create a meaningful learning opportunity for students to reflect upon and explore their personal strengths and collaborate effectively with a team of peers.

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