

Possible Symphonies: Creating Artistic Spaces in the ELA Classroom

Nina Schoonover
North Carolina State University

Book Review of Macro, K. J., & Zoss, M. (Eds.). (2019). *A symphony of possibilities: A handbook for arts integration in secondary English language arts*. NCTE.

In their edited book, *A Symphony of Possibilities*, Katherine J. Macro and Michelle Zoss (2019) challenge English education's focus on assessment by offering the possibility of arts integration for the secondary English language arts (ELA) classroom. They argue that “the arts allow the learning experience to truly become part of the individual in ways that solely reading and writing a text cannot do” (p. xvii). In calling for arts integration, the book presents research and theory, as well as strategies and resources, for educators of all levels to take a “defiant” stance on integrating art in ELA.

Each chapter of the book begins with justification for integrating different art media as well as strategies and examples shared by scholars and educators dedicated to this work. It begins with music and Timothy J. Duggan’s chapter on musical adaptations and his M.A.S.T.E.R. framework, followed by Christian Z. Goering and Amy Matthews’s integration of protest songwriting with students in Arkansas. Readers then find the art of language in Wendy R. Williams's work with spoken word projects, and in Laura B. Turchi and Pauline Skowron Schmidt’s classroom play with Shakespeare. The book moves across the “symphony of possibilities” of artistic work, ranging across music, poetry, drama, and visual art. Macro’s chapter discusses the creative entanglements of drama in the ELA classroom as the arts reveal themselves across the discipline. Toby Emert explores Dadaism and found poetry, translating

theory into practice, and Alisha M. White presents specific steps and strategies for implementing visual responses to literature.

The culminating chapters of the book from Michelle Zoss and Stephen Goss reflect ways of bringing the public into the classroom. Zoss shares work with large-scale visual projects, exploring murals and wall-length images, and Goss discusses the power of audiences for students' creations. In its conclusion, the book thoughtfully provides an extensive list of resources organized by these different artistic forms (drama, music, poetry, and visual art), and concludes with a glossary of terms to help illuminate the argument that ELA classes should embrace "what students create" (p. 177) as a core part of the curriculum. Chapter 8's authorial team of educators consisting of Pamela M. Hartman, Jessica Berg, Brandon Schuler, and Erin Knauer lays out aesthetic strategies that they found meaningful in integrating artistic responses as a way to share their pedagogical practice with readers. As a former secondary ELA teacher, I appreciate how this book highlights helpful resources and serves as a guide for arts integration without feeling scripted.

In my current work with preservice teachers, I can draw from this book to set the stage for why I too believe ELA teachers need to integrate the arts. The frameworks and strategies the book provides in each chapter are both specific enough to be implemented, but broad enough to reach a wide audience of educators. As a teacher, I often seek more concrete or explicit steps to teaching strategies, so the amount of text in this book may feel overwhelming to others who want clearly structured lesson plans. However, the authors offer a research-based and thoughtfully explained overview of arts integration with examples from actual classrooms. Instead of a step-by-step process, this book leaves room for classroom teachers to *play* with the arts in the new and innovative ways that will work for them. I found that how this book showcases the different

forms and shapes the arts may take in the classroom helps to highlight how we can each distinguish ourselves as unique ELA teachers. For educators wanting to defy the testing culture, this book is a vital resource for creating the space necessary to offer artistic possibilities for our teachers and students.

Nina Schoonover is a doctoral candidate studying literacy and English language arts education at North Carolina State University. Her research focuses on arts integration, arts-based pedagogy, and visual literacy. She has been a member of NCTE for 3 years.