Five Ways of Teaching:

*The Last Days* by Scott Westerfeld

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For my “Five Ways” project I initially had another book in mind; however, fate and book publishers have an interesting way of intervening. While waiting for my first choice book to become available I read *The Last Days* by Scott Westerfeld, a book I had just purchased in a one hundred dollar shopping spree at Penguin books online courtesy of the National Evaluation Series (NES) pilot exam. *The Last Days* is a companion novel to Westerfeld’s *Peeps*, an interesting take on the young adult vampire novel that I thoroughly enjoyed. *Peeps* includes intercalary sections on parasitology, explaining the scourge of vampirism as a parasite that causes cannibalism and other popularly misconstrued side effects. While *The Last Days* takes place in the same apocalyptic New York, the characters are entirely new and add on to the story approximately where *Peeps* left off. The larger story arc centers on a group of teenager with dreams of “rock-stardom” trying to make it big as the world crumbles around them. The band has its own unique issues; namely, their lead singer is one of the infected, a vampire who sings in a primordial language and tries to resist her “yummy” urges. But instead of being the band’s demise, the vampire lead singer (Minerva) turns out to be the world’s salvation.

There are many reasons why I believe *The Last Days* is relevant to my secondary English Language Arts students, but the largest connection is definitely music. My students might as well have their iPod earbuds surgically attached, because that is how often they wear them. Many of my students are in their own bands, or dream of creating one. Music is important to them, and so this book—with its main theme of music as world savior—would be of great interest to them. In addition to the topic, the pacing is quick, the chapters are short, and each one has a built-in “pay-off” (exciting plot point). *The Last Days* is specifically written for an older teenage audience, as it deals with some adult themes like sexual attraction and annihilation. The book does not “baby” its audience, which my high school students would appreciate. In order to make the text and activities accessible to all levels, I have built in a good amount of teacher modeling and group work. Small modifications can also be made to specific assignments—such as providing cloze notes—which I have notated in my individual lesson plans. For Spanish-speaking English Language Learners (ELLs), the book is available in their home language.

The “Five Ways” project I designed would work best as a whole class literature study unit; however, it could be adapted to meet many needs. There is a significant amount of peer work, so it would not work well as an individual reading. The unit begins with a vocabulary study. *The Last Days* does not present much in the way of challenging vocabulary for eleventh graders, but it does use some technical, domain-specific music vocabulary. Students will use the online search tool instaGrok in a Jigsaw-type learning environment to research, define, and explain relationships between various technical vocabulary words. In addition to a class list of words, students will also be responsible for Vocabulary Self-Selection (VSS) throughout the study. The VSS strategy links the vocabulary lesson to other instructional parts of this unit, such as the Reader Response component. While reading, students will keep an interactive notebook. For each reading assignment, students will be responsible for completing a FIVE-Q entry in their journals. The FIVE-Q strategy focuses on getting to students to write the following: facts (a summary of the reading section), inferences, vocabulary (self-selected), experiences (in the form of dialectical journaling), and questions using Bloom’s taxonomy question stems. Through Reader Response, emphasis and value are placed on students’ individual reactions to the text. Students will also be using Psychoanalytic (or Freudian) criticism to examine *The Last Days*. After a lesson on Psychoanalytic critique, students will complete a Pinterest-inspired multi-modal composition to demonstrate their knowledge and application of the critical lens. As students progress further into the novel, they will also work on a practical grammar lesson about effective sentence writing by imitating some of Scott Westerfeld’s beautiful, descriptive prose—specifically passages that describe the sound of the band’s music. Students will effectively apply all of this learning into a final authentic writing assessment: they will be writing and digitally publishing a music review on an album of their choice. After reading some exemplar texts, students will create a list of genre conceits to follow while crafting their review. Students will also do some vocabulary self-selection specific to the genre of music they choose to write about and will be required to use class vocabulary words and self-selected vocabulary words in their final products. Another requirement will be that students must include an imitation sentence in their album review, adapted to fit the subject. Underlying themes from *The Last Days* must also be evident in their writing.

Last, but not least, I must give credit to a few individuals who helped this all come together fairly seamlessly. Since APA format does not include personal communications in the reference list, here is my list of many thanks: to Dr. Laura Turchi for showing me that sentence imitation is not *completely* evil; to Sara Ramirez for her Reader Response journal idea that got “mushed” into an amalgamation of Amy Welch’s “FIVE-Q Lit Logs” and other, more obscure sources; to Jen Bozek at Desert Vista High School, whose students did such beautiful work on their Pinterest collages that I could not help but want to adapt it for my own purposes; to Richard Pino at Desert Meadows for showing me instaGrok; and to Dr. B for turning me on to adolescent literature and Scott Westerfeld in the first place.

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