# FAN FICTION IN THE CLASSROOM: FIELD NOTES FROM A FANFIC WRITER TURNED EDUCATOR

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editorial



**I am still not used to the idea of fan fiction being mainstream.**

It gets lists on Buzzfeed, there are entire retrospectives about fandom in the early 00s; and I hear about students swapping fan fiction as easily as they do their lunches. As a teen, I learned to cover my tracks online so Mom wouldn't find out about the fics I liked to read, yet here we are.

People talk about it and it's sometimes taught in the classroom, much to my horror—err, amusement. I wrote fan fiction in my teens and I now work as a junior high English teacher with ongoing post-graduate studies in Language and Literacy Education.

**I write this as I know of actual lesson plan modules on the genre by well-meaning teachers.**

This is not key action research, but may undergo further study and testing. Fan fiction can be a powerful classroom tool. It's widely accessible and most kids love it. But when you introduce the concept of fan fiction in the classroom, you're introducing more than the medium. You're introducing them to an internet subculture, and they will need more than study and application of the genre.

**Here are some points to consider when planning a discussion on fan fiction:**

***It's not the medium, it's how it's utilized.***

A more responsible approach as an educator is to acknowledge what they read in and outside of school. Disparaging a genre does not further a genuine love for reading. Celebrate the fact they are reading. It's more worrying when they read only when required to.

***Teach internet security basics.***

As said, the term "fanfiction" involves more than just the medium. It's also opening up channels of interaction between writer and reader. Students have to be prepared for this. Even before introducing fan fiction, students have to know the risks of looking up and sharing information online. Activities to introduce alongside or even before you broach the topic of fanfiction can be internet security or assessing internet sources. They have to understand that going online is the equivalent of leaving a place they know and trust; even if they access it from school or home.

Some things that should be clear to students: when one can use their real full name; and not giving away their own or other people's addresses or phone numbers to a stranger. There are a lot of case studies to work with in this regard.

Also accept that there will be students really need to be moderated before they're allowed to play online. There's nothing wrong with that.

***Have strong foundations in the elements of fiction, and students should understand the idea of canon, non-canon, and nuance.***

Literature is subject to the study of its nuances, but there are non-negotiable plot elements. Ruroni Kenshin will always be about a samurai who wants to redeem himself from a bloody past; Luke Skywalker will always be Vader's son, that will never change.

Themes can be challenged and debated, and that may never be resolved, not even when the author themselves intervene! Be mindful that young students can take dogma to heart, and that's very easy to do with fan fiction. Stress that fan fiction is escapism, and that the nuances are explored and made more concrete though the creator has absolutely no say in it. For me, showing this difference might even make students a better fan and an overall better person.

**There are no standards in regards to fan fiction and there's nothing anyone can do about it.**

There is canon and there is taking liberties with the canon so that it "improves" the series. It's why fanon couples such as Eriol x Tomoyo for *Card Captor Sakura* or pretty much a LOT of slash and yaoi fanfic have devout followers. Fan fiction also has the freedom to explore beyond the scope of the series and form – as alternate universes, "crack" or humor fanfic, and even adult themes.

There is no real governing body to fan fiction, and it will always be that way. Some authors have attempted to quash fan fiction of their works; but it's likely that such fan works just found ways to stay even further off the radar. The worst that can happen is that you get picked up and reviewed by "fanfic review sites" or your story gets bad feedback from readers. But even that doesn't stamp out "bad" fanfic. It will always be there, and yes it will find its audience.

**Your class should understand the concept of ownership.**



Sketch by Lee Flores

We are in an area where it has be clarified if something is "owned" or "shared". Fans don't necessarily have ownership of a series, but they can make sure that it's kept on air or on print. Just because someone wills it so, does not make it canon until it actually is written or shot. Case in point: I would love for Eriol and Tomoyo to get together, but that is not in the canon (Ugh, Kaho). If CLAMP finally gets them together, that will be great, but I wouldn't push it.

**Stress that it's ok not to look or read something they're uncomfortable with.**

A lot of fan fiction tends to explore sexuality and not all teenagers will be ready for it. In my own learning context, the general public attitude towards sex is largely conservative. Even outside of fan fiction, if there is a required reading that makes them uncomfortable, I have to help them process or I refer them to a counselor, coach, or shrink who can help them do so. I'm lucky that I teach in a progressive school where students are mentored AND taught. This is a bigger challenge in more traditional classrooms, so you will be challenged to make use of even more resources.

**But it really goes back to objectives — what is your aim in teaching fan fiction?**

Fan fiction isn't the only genre that can unlock creativity or effectively teach the elements of fiction. If anything, the nature is more confining as it is situated within a very set world. The term doesn't even have to be used if you're designing a lesson plan to understand a character or POV better. "Write about a *Rose for Emily* from the perspective of the village person" would suffice. This zeroes in on the element of POV better.

And since fan fiction is largely community bred, it makes impossible to be taught solely as a text and nothing else. Fan fiction is hip, but its openness bears very serious risks inside and outside of the classroom.
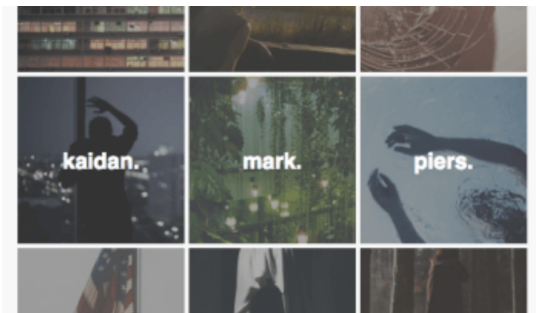
So, I ask, are you sure you want to teach fan fiction?

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*Do you have thoughts about fan fiction and education? We'd love to here them, so feel free to leave us your take in the comments!*

**Read more:**


Geek Word Wednesdays: A Definition of Meta in Fandom


Geek Word Wednesdays: The Definition of Fandom


Remembering Old Friends: Neverwinter

**MIA**

A co-founder of GGG, Mia is still coming to terms with her shadow. For now she adults but is a fangirl at heart. Favorite games: Persona 3 and the Phoenix Wright DS series. Unapologetic filthy casual.