

Praise for *Beyond Literary Analysis*

English teachers have been waiting for this book since . . . well . . . forever. Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O'Dell breathe new life into that semicomatose assignment—the analytic essay. They ask us to totally reimagine it, to examine how analysis works “in the wild”—on blogs, websites, internet reviews, and to expand the range of “texts” students can analyze (music, video games, sports teams, movies). Then drawing on their own classroom work, they show how students can use the lessons from mentor texts in their own writing. A groundbreaking and absolutely essential book.

—Thomas Newkirk, author of *Embarrassment* and *Minds Made for Stories*

Are you ready for a mind-bending journey into analytical writing? This book holds a new vision for student engagement grounded in current, authentic, and relevant texts. I guarantee it will upend your understanding of analysis. Full of sentence and passage studies that ignite student voice, minilessons that clarify the intent of organizational structures, and a deep understanding of how best to learn from a mentor text, this book will make you a better writing teacher. It's simply brilliant.

—Penny Kittle, author of *Book Love* and coauthor of *180 Days*

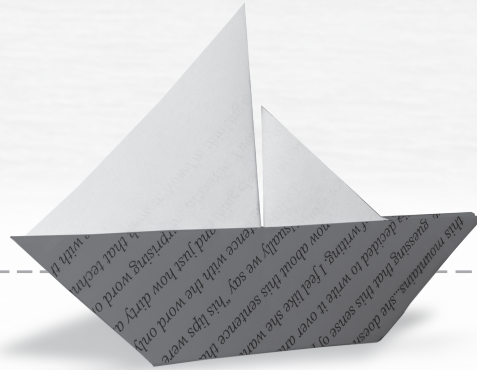
Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O'Dell take the dusty skeleton of literary analysis and transform it into a responsive, sophisticated, magical genre of writing that we can teach our students to develop and adore. Using this book will produce the writing that you and your students will cherish most. These are the writings they will keep—the pieces they will publish. Marchetti and O'Dell's work brings relevance, voice, and life to a form that feels crusty and brittle with directions, templates, and redundancy. This book will not only make your students better writers but it will also help them to enter into the world they encounter with greater passion and insight than ever before.

—Kate Roberts, author of *A Novel Approach* and coauthor
of *Falling in Love with Close Reading*

As tour guides to a brave new world, Rebekah O'Dell and Allison Marchetti reject the well-worn path of literary analysis and guide teachers to a vibrant new analytical landscape. By reframing the idea of text as anything that has a beginning, middle, and end, O'Dell and Marchetti entertain a “bigger vision for analysis” that helps students find their passion, explore their ideas, assert authority, and build solid structures for writing. Divided into three sections, the book offers an inquiry into traditional analysis, a compendium of practical lessons, and an exploration of subgenres, such as writing about movies, music, sports, and video games. In addition, this book is chock-full of dynamic mentor texts and classroom-ready techniques that will free your students to explore the vistas vital to their lives.

—Liz Prather, author of *Project-Based Writing*

For more information about this Heinemann resource,
visit <http://www.heinemann.com/products/e09249.aspx>



beyond literary analysis

Teaching Students to Write
with Passion and Authority
About Any Text

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—**Heinemann Publishers**

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For Andrew,
the most passionate person I know.

—AHM

For Grandmama,
the author of *The Magic Rock Garden*
and Other Stories and
Over Adventurous Trails.

—REO

For one another,
without whom this book, this dream,
this new world of teaching and
writing and thinking together,
wouldn't exist.

—AHM & REO

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A downloadable Study Guide for *Beyond Literary Analysis*
is available at hein.pub/BeyondLitAnalysis.

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The teachers we meet who inspire us with enthusiasm, questions, queries, and a never-say-die spirit.

The real writers whose names fill our bibliography, whose Twitter feeds we stalk daily for new mentor text inspiration—for reminding us that the world is ripe with amazing texts (that don't always fit on bookshelves) waiting to be broken down and studied and understood; for showing us there's so much more than a five-paragraph essay and a thesis statement in your last paragraph; for inspiring us to bring real-world analysis to our students who deserve so, so much more.

Allison Thanks . . .

Joe, my partner, my rock. For rising with me at the crack of dawn (and only falling back to sleep a few times) so I could write. For keeping me level-headed and helping me make a plan. For steering my ship back on course when I lost my way.

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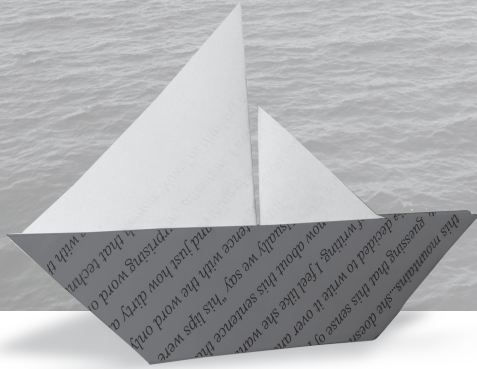
My mom, who has been gluing all my writing into a homemade chapbook since I was little.

Rebekah Thanks . . .

Allison—"and now whatever way our stories end, I know you have rewritten mine by being my friend."

Evan, for endless, saint-like patience and sacrifice as I gave up innumerable evenings and weekends of "us time" to write . . . and vent about writing. Thank you for holding all four of us together, for cheering me on, for insisting I take breaks, and for encouraging me to press forward.

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CHAPTER THREE

the essential tools of analysis

O

K, by now you have a million thoughts running through your head. Maybe you like this idea of expanding your analytical writing world, raising the level of student writing by connecting to their passions, and elevating their writing to the level of professional analysis. Or maybe this scares you. No matter where you stand, we're sure you're wondering this: If you are no longer teaching students to write eerily similar pieces of analysis on the same piece of literature, what *are* you teaching? You will shift your focus from teaching content to teaching the tools that will enable writers to explore any text.

Sharpen the Focus of Teaching

Whether a close reading of how the music in a video game impacts the player experience, a character analysis of Holden Caulfield, or a commentary about how Lady Gaga has revolutionized the pop music world, all analytical writing has a few essential elements in common.

Naming the essential tools of analysis sharpens the focus of our teaching and brings clarity to our curriculum. Students need consistent practice using these tools so they can explore texts in any content area:

- *Passion*. The writer's compass. Passion is the writer's wholehearted investment in the text she is exploring. Deeper than just admiration, the writer takes her subject seriously, full of conviction that it matters.
- *Ideas*. The places the writer explores. Ideas encompass everything the writer considers and discusses—claims, reasons, evidence.
- *Structure*. The maps a writer uses to chart her course. Structure includes the writer's focus, paragraphing, how she leads and concludes, and visual structure tools.
- *Authority*. The writer's know-how that enables her to explore a text. Authority speaks to a writer's content knowledge, tone, word choice, and use of grammar and conventions.

We've shown you literary analysis in the wild with Anna North, and we've shown you what student analysis can look like when a student gets to explore his passion. Now let's focus on the four essential tools of analysis and see what they look like in another piece of professional writing.

What follows is an analysis (originally for air on NPR's *Fresh Air*) about the way music functions in the Netflix series *The Get Down*. The music embedded in the piece transforms it, of course, so you'll want to listen to it on your computer or your phone as you follow along with the text. A simple Google search for "Hip-Hop Meets Disco on the Electrifying Soundtrack to *The Get Down*" will get you there.

This example of authentic analysis is a great one for us to dive into together. It analyzes the kinds of texts that students love (television, music). It's relatively short, especially compared to a lot of analysis, so it's great for younger students or students with short attention spans. It includes an audio component to support struggling readers. And we just love Ken Tucker. He's one of our all-time favorite mentor writers because his writing is clear and concise but also beautifully crafted.

This is a good time to point out to you that this article (and all of the articles we share throughout the book) will no longer be hot-off-the-presses by the time you read this, so you may decide not to use it as a mentor text. Still, even if you

decide the texts are not relevant enough to hand to your current students, they will help you frame your understanding of what different kinds of authentic analysis look like. Part 3 of this book is chock-full of examples of real-world analysis just like this on the topics student writers frequent most!

Hip-Hop Meets Disco on the Electrifying Soundtrack to *The Get Down*

By Ken Tucker, *Fresh Air*, NPR

[Sound bite of song “Hum Along and Dance” as performed by Janelle Monae]

It would’ve been easy to slap together a soundtrack album for *The Get Down*. Just take some of the period hits that punctuate many scenes from the Netflix series such as The Trammps’ “Disco Inferno” and Garland Jeffreys’ “Wild in the Streets” and shove it out there for nostalgists and newbies alike.

But like the TV show itself, there are multiple layers to this *Get Down* soundtrack, intentionally disorienting fusions of past and present and a dreamlike mood that hovers over the music like a fog . . .

[Sound bite of song “You Can’t Hide” as performed by Zayn Malik]

One of the things I like about *The Get Down* TV show set in the late 1970s is that it doesn’t sneer at disco in favor of what would become hip-hop, unlike much of the rock music establishment of this era, which despised dance music. Rap music pioneers recognized that these pulsating rhythms could be thrilling.

The Get Down understands just how glorious the greatest disco was to the point of creating a credible would-be hit of the era. Herizen Guardiola plays the romantic lead, Mylene, who wants nothing more than to be a disco queen on the order of Donna Summer or Gloria Gaynor. To do it, she records “Set Me Free,” which sounds like a lost classic, but it’s actually a new song composed for *The Get Down* . . .

[Sound bite of song “Set Me Free” as performed by Herizen Guardiola]

The Get Down’s most prominent producer-director is Baz Luhrmann who specializes in going over the top in movies such as

Moulin Rouge and his adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. He's working with technical advisers such as the music scholar Nelson George and the pioneering hip-hop DJ Grandmaster Flash—so important, he's portrayed by an actor as a key character. Luhrmann mixes true facts with heightened invention.

When *The Get Down* needs an example of inspirational rapping, the production comes up with nothing less than something called “Black Man in a White World (Ghetto Gettysburg Address),” an invented manifesto that's a collaboration between Michael Kiwanuka and the rapper Nas . . .

[Sound bite of the song “Black Man in a White World” as performed by Nas and Michael Kiwanuka]

A prime example of the way *The Get Down* plucks older music for its new purposes and thus operates precisely the way original rap music did. Appropriating beats from earlier R&B is the song “Cadillac.” It takes the 1976 track “Love Is in the Backseat of My Cadillac” by the great British group Hot Chocolate and turns it into a different sort of hip-hop via the contemporary singer Miguel. Oh, and Cadillac is also the name of one of *The Get Down's* characters, so it all becomes doubly witty . . .

[Sound bite of song “Cadillac” as performed by Miguel]

The Get Down as a TV series is uneven, often electrifying and moving, sometimes florid and corny. The soundtrack to *The Get Down*, however, is an almost pure delight, a rapper's delight as the title of a Sugarhill Gang song once termed it. It captures moments from forty years ago and brings them decisively into the present.

You might have read Tucker's piece and wondered if it is analysis. Remember that we defined analysis as a piece of writing that explores a text. Does he do this? Tucker explores music as it is used throughout a television series in his review. The series has a finite number of episodes and musical numbers (a beginning, middle, and end), and it can be broken down into smaller pieces for closer study—the music that populates the background of the action, originals created specifically for the show, and “older music used for new purposes.” Tucker further explores the impact of the music as it elevates the overall quality of the television show, making it more “delightful” than “florid and corny.”

This is a piece of writing that explores a text—it’s analysis! In it, Tucker uses all the essential tools of analysis.

Understand the Tools of Analysis

PASSION

Ken Tucker is a professional (and very well-regarded) film and music critic. His passion is written all over his business card. But with this particular topic, Tucker is thoroughly and dynamically engaged throughout the review.

Even when he’s writing about the soundtrack of a Netflix series, Tucker takes his subject seriously. He demonstrates his passion for smart music-and-television mashups as he acknowledges the “multiple layers” of the soundtrack. Rather than writing like a soulless analysis robot, Tucker acknowledges his experience and bias by directly telling his reader “things I like” about the soundtrack and that it leaves him with “almost pure delight.” His emphatic language throughout the review—“pulsating rhythms could be thrilling,” “just how glorious the greatest disco was,” “often electrifying and moving, sometimes florid and corny”—communicates his excitement for the subject at hand.

IDEAS

This piece of analysis is replete with textual evidence—song lyrics. But this isn’t the only kind of evidence Tucker employs. He also uses comparisons and allusions to flesh out what this album is and isn’t.

Tucker has a strong claim, but it doesn’t appear until the end of his review—he writes his way into it. Setting us up early on for the soundtrack’s depth (“... There are multiple layers . . . disorienting fusions of past and present . . .”), Tucker actually presents his reasons for liking the soundtrack and evidence of the soundtrack’s credibility before presenting his ultimate conclusion on the album:

The Get Down as a TV series is uneven, often electrifying and moving, sometimes florid and corny. The soundtrack to The Get Down, however, is an almost pure delight, a rapper’s delight as the title of a Sugarhill Gang song once termed it. It captures moments from forty years ago and brings them decisively into the present.

Notice that it takes Tucker three sentences—an entire paragraph of his review—to fully express his perspective on how the soundtrack informs the

television show. This is another vast departure from the one-sentence, three-part thesis statement so many students are taught to write.

STRUCTURE

In his lead, Tucker engages the audience's expectations by saying that while it would have been easy to slap together a clichéd disco soundtrack, the producers of *The Get Down* do more.

Tucker spends multiple (short) paragraphs unpacking and deepening ideas throughout his piece. Take the introduction, for example, broken into two short paragraphs. The first sets up the expectations for the soundtrack (a simple recounting of iconic disco tunes). The second paragraph contradicts that, explaining what the listener gets instead (a soundtrack of “multiple layers” and “disorienting fusions”).

Tucker delights in *The Get Down* soundtrack for two main reasons: It values both disco and rap as genres, and it uses older music for new, innovative purposes. These reasons are not neatly contained in two, equally long body paragraphs, though. Rather, Tucker's focus is on the way the show values the musical styles it represents. It takes him nearly four paragraphs to move through this idea. He begins by showing the representation of disco in the show, then discusses the pedigree of the music production, and follows with a discussion of the original rap music. His discussion of the show's sampling of older music is shorter—one paragraph.

Tucker also uses multiple paragraphs to explore every angle of his first reason—that both disco and rap are given equal respect and credibility on this soundtrack. Each paragraph deepens that reason, giving a sense of “Not only this, but also . . . !” that propels the reader through the review. That it can take multiple paragraphs to develop an idea may come as a surprise to students in whom the “one idea per paragraph” mantra has been ingrained. While Tucker's piece is logical and organized, it is far from formulaic. He spends as long as he needs to spend on each idea until it is completely realized.

AUTHORITY

A lot of writing with authority comes down to knowledge—how thoroughly you know your subject and how you share that knowledge with the reader. Tucker shows his vast musical knowledge by connecting *The Get Down* soundtrack with music history. He mentions that the show takes disco seriously “unlike much of

the rock music establishment of this era, which despised dance music,” and he acknowledges that rap pioneers of the day also saw the value of disco’s rhythms as they crafted their own genre. He again nods to the show’s historical accuracy when he writes that the way the show appropriates older music for new purposes “operates precisely the way original rap music did.” Tucker further connects the fiction of the show to the fact of history as he alludes to Donna Summer and Gloria Gaynor as real-life mirrors for the show’s lead, Mylene. He clearly knows the big hits of the disco era as he mentions “Disco Inferno” and “Wild in the Streets” in his first paragraph.

As a music expert, Tucker speaks to the integrity of the original songs on the soundtrack, calling “Set Me Free” an original disco tune, “credible,” and sounding “like a lost classic.” He describes an original rap number, “Black Man in a White World (Ghetto Gettysburg Address),” as “inspiring.”

Tucker’s understanding of the modern film and music scene is displayed in his explanation of the producers’ impact on the music—a combination of Baz Luhrmann’s over-the-top direction, Nelson George’s technical help, and DJ Grandmaster Flash’s hip-hop credentials.

We get the sense that Tucker knows his time is brief in a radio review, so he wades into this topic without diving too deep; while he gives examples from the soundtrack and insights into its significance, he moves quickly between ideas.

He also shows an obvious awareness of the audience of his forum for publication—*Fresh Air*. Tucker seems to understand that *The Get Down* might not be an obvious choice for his audience. Knowing that NPR listeners tend to be older, he focuses on the heavy significance given to disco music on the soundtrack and the influence of disco on the hip-hop featured on the album. For this same predominantly well-educated and culturally engaged audience, Tucker elevates his subject to make it worthy of their time. Connections to musical history and insight into the show’s “multiple layers” appeal to this audience. At the end of his review, he does nod to the crowd who might discount this show by acknowledging that it is occasionally “florid and corny,” but he validates the soundtrack as “almost pure delight.”

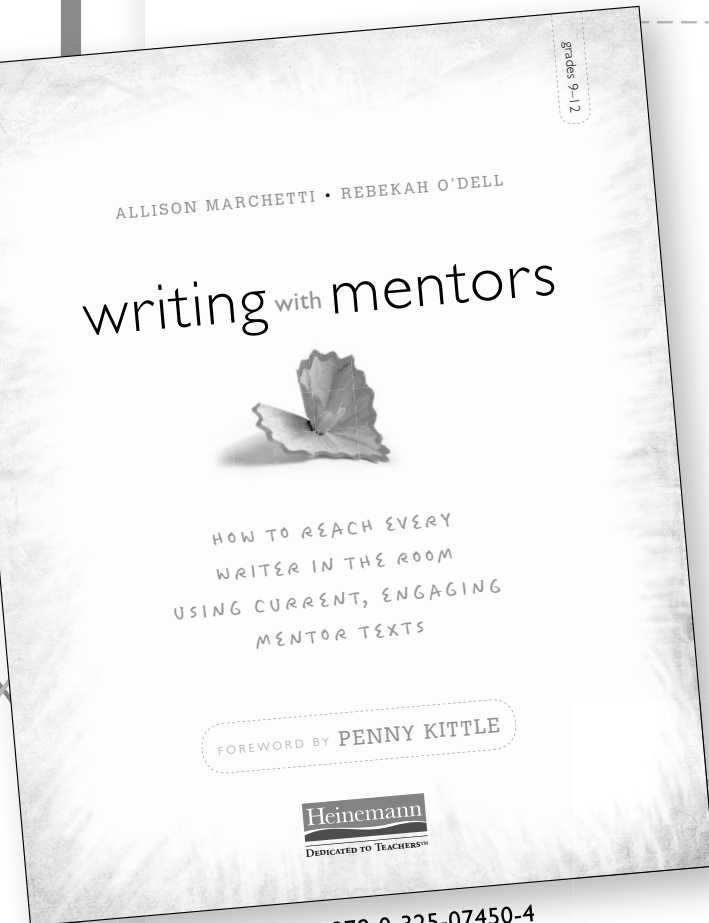
Jargon throughout like “track” and “beats” subtly shows that Tucker speaks the language of music, and, thus, the reader knows his opinion can be trusted.

Analysis Is Everywhere, and Your Students Can Write It

Broadening the definition of analysis gives students opportunities to write about the topics on which they are experts, topics that interest them, topics on which they have something to say. When we engage them with multiple opportunities to share what they know and allow them to explore a wide range of texts, they can learn and eventually master the essential tools of analysis. These skills will serve them whether they are writing about literature or history or video games or the NBA finals.

And this is key. Because when we look at the world of writing, the writing that pours through our Twitter feeds, the articles we dog-ear in *The New Yorker*, most of it is analysis. Writers closely read literature and films and music and dance and politics and video games and current events and sports. Writers analyze everything. When we teach our students these skills in contexts that allow them to be successful, we give our students access to the wide world of analysis and prepare them to engage in those conversations as writers for the rest of their lives.

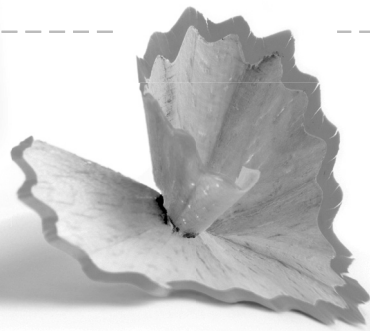
ALSO AVAILABLE from Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O'Dell



In *Writing with Mentors*, Allison and Rebekah prove that the key to cultivating writers who can see value and purpose for writing beyond school is using dynamic, hot-off-the-press mentor texts. In this practical guide, they provide strategies for:

- finding and storing fresh mentor texts from trusted traditional sources to the social mediums of the day
- grouping mentor texts in clusters that show a diverse range of topics, styles, and approaches
- teaching with lessons that demonstrate the enormous potential of mentor texts at every stage of the writing process.

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