Candidate:  
Krystal Howard  
For the degree of:  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department:  
English  
Title:  
The Collage Effect: Form and Participatory Reading in Contemporary Children’s and Young Adult Literature  
Committee:  
Dr. Gwen Tarbox, Chair  
Dr. Meghann Meeusen  
Dr. Elizabeth Bradburn  
Dr. Mike Cadden  
Time/Place:  
Friday, March 17, 2017  
10 a.m. to noon  
4028 Brown Hall  

This project focuses on the ways in which recent formal innovations in children's and young adult literature suggest a specific attention to how a narrative is constructed in more experimental ways that privilege voice and foreground the creative act. The formal and structural choices utilized by multiple authors for young people address both personal and cultural traumas, invite reader interaction and involvement, and suggest a metaphor for the increasingly fragmented experience of childhood in twenty-first-century North American culture. This study examines the ways that contemporary authors and illustrators for young people use innovations in visual and textual form as tools to incite activism and creativity in young
readers and to represent marginalized groups who have experienced trauma or had their voices silenced.

My research is unique in that it builds upon scholarship that explores participatory culture and connects to experiments in literary form. I have developed the term “the collage effect” to describe this compiling, layering, and piecing together of visual and textual fragments and its subsequent impact upon young readers. In children's and young adult literature, collage aesthetics in a variety of media—including picture books, verse novels, diary narratives, and polyvocal and companion novels—work in distinct ways in order to destabilize traditional narrative modes and to invite active reader participation. The collage aesthetic is present in multiple works published since the late 1990s within children's and young adult literature that interrogate themes of identity construction, creative voice, and cultural trauma.

Authors such as Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean, Jacqueline Woodson, Walter Dean Myers, Isabel Quintero, and John Green and David Levithan utilize not just traditional collage techniques, but also metaphorical representations of collage aesthetics, in order to suggest creativity as an avenue for character growth. The texts featured in this study each focus their attention on characters who are themselves writers, creators, and storytellers and whose fragmented revelations about personal crises and cultural traumas emphasize the way in which growth and identify formation are facilitated by these critical situations. Through their emphasis on formal collage techniques, these authors disrupt narrative, encourage an active readership and intimacy between young readers and the focalizing characters, while simultaneously urging readers to question their own ideologies, as well as the ideologies put forth by their culture about race, sex, gender, and class. These authors posit creative work (namely writing, drawing, and creating) as a way in which their young characters (and young readers by extension) might understand, cope with, and move beyond the individual and cultural traumas they experience. Not only do these writers model collage aesthetics, but they also encourage readers to take up the role of the collagist as well. By demonstrating the way in which innovative formal structures contribute to young people's understanding of cultural politics, history, and identity construction, this study adds to the critical conversations within the field of children's literature and childhood studies about adolescent and preadolescent subjectivity, the representation of creative voice, and the role of participatory culture.