

“Here’s All My Stuff, The Rest Is on You”:

Remix, Reader Authority, and Kate Messner’s *Breakout* (Abstract)

Naomi Baron writes, “If reading habits change, so do the ways authors tend to write” (*Words Onscreen*, p. xiii). It is not just reading habits, however, but our entire conception of reading and literacy, that has changed. Since the 1990s, there have been calls for acceptance of new kinds of literacies that transcend traditional boundaries, such as video game narratives and digital storytelling. “Traditional” print literature published for young people today often reflects these “new literacies” through innovative design and content that encourages reader participation.

A case in point is Kate Messner’s 2018 novel, *Breakout*, a story about a prison break that leads three pre-teen protagonists to ponder issues of race, power, privilege, and identity. In *Breakout*, Messner reflects and incorporates the popular practice of remix, which can take various forms, but is always transparently intertextual and typically comprised of decontextualized and recontextualized multimodal digital content. Messner finds innovative ways to suggest multimodality within the constraints of print: she includes, for example, photographs, text messages, web links, and transcriptions of recordings. Transparent literary intertextuality is interwoven throughout the text, as when one of the girls writes poetry modeled after the work of African-American poets. Messner’s clever use and juxtaposition of artifacts (real and invented) empowers readers to become partners in the process of making meaning--not just inside, but outside, the confines of the text. Messner explicitly and implicitly calls for readers to take up where her characters leave off and critically examine the cultural assumptions that inform their own lives.