

GWRJ Short: This Blanket Is a Text

Piper Coe

The *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* presents a new genre: the GWRJ Short. Here, describing how crocheted or knit blankets are texts, Piper Coe discusses multimodality, remediation, and how makers use temperature blankets to make visual meaning.

We Can Make Meaning in the World Without Words

I began my fiber arts journey in 2020 with crochet and soon after learned about the art of temperature blankets. Temperature blankets, usually constructed through either crochet or knitting, are colorful blankets where each row represents one day's temperature for a full year (Figure 1). Typically, crafters create a temperature gauge that corresponds to a specific color (>100°F=Bright Red; 21–32°F=Dark Blue, etc.) and fits the weather of the maker's region (Figure 2). Some artists use these blankets to capture a day's highest temperature through color. Temperature blankets make it possible to visualize temperature changes over the course of a year or more, and track how humans are affecting our planet, as well as climate change. Makers can compare their blankets with ones they made in previous years and see how the colors changed and what month this change occurred. Temperature blankets are physical archives of how our world is changing.



Figure 1: A swatch made by the author showing the first two weeks of October’s weather for Normal, IL (data gathered from AccuWeather).



Figure 2: An example of a temperature gauge for Normal, IL based on temperature highs (data gathered from US Climate Data; “Climate Normal – Illinois”).

Medium, or media, refers to the systems we use to deliver and receive communication. We consider how the tools we use to communicate across modes mediate or influence others’ uptake (“Multimodality Terms”).

Tapestries (what we might consider “vertical blankets”) are another **medium** for displaying temperature changes. For example, The Tempestry Project (Figure 3), a collective of artists, activists, and scientists, create “tempestries” (temperature tapestries) depicting climate change. They make two kinds of tempestries: one catalogues “daily high temperatures for a given year and

location,” and another shows “annual deviation-from-average-temperature going back to the late 1800s and up through the present” (The Tempestry Project). They collect tempestries and put them on display for viewers to see the timeline on a larger scale and show how the earth has changed over time.

Most crafters’ blankets are made with the colors of the rainbow, so they tend to come out super colorful. When we look at temperature blankets, we don’t just see the colors of the rainbow, however; we can see the blankets as remediating alphanumerical characters through the use of color as a **visual modality**. **Remediation** “is the practice of transforming a text in one genre into a different genre. It is an activity that requires writers to mediate (change, transform) something again (re-), including altering its conventions to work toward different goals and/or in different writing situations” (“Genre Research Terms”). For example, dark red represents a high temperature, and as readers of this text, we gather this meaning from the color used. By using colorful crochet or knit as the medium to track temperature, crafters are influencing others’ uptake of temperature blankets as texts. If this data were visualized in a table, it would be harder to comprehend with just a glance. But when data is visualized in this colorful way, the simplicity of the remediation allows a more thorough and complex transfer of meaning with the temperature encoded in the colorful fibers.

Temperature blankets and tapestries aren’t the only way that fiber enthusiasts remediate alphanumerical characters through colorful yarn. Crafters also make temperature scarves, sky scarves, mood blankets (Figure 4), blankets that track how much sleep the maker (or someone else) got (Figure 5), health change blankets, and more!



Figure 3: This QR code leads to The Tempestry Project website.

Visual (modality) is a mode that makes meaning through images and characters that we see. When we use the visual mode in writing and literate activity, we might use drawings, still or moving images, data visualizations, words, and visual design elements (“Multimodality Terms”).



Figure 4: This QR code leads to a blog with instructions on how to crochet a mood blanket (“How to Crochet”)!



Figure 5: This QR code leads to a Tweet containing images of a sleep blanket (@Lagomorpha).

Works Cited

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Notes

