

Mundane Creativity: Analyzing the Colors and Footnotes of a K-pop Song List

Danielle Eldredge

Using a definition of creativity that includes everyday activities, genres, and content offers us a broader perspective when it comes to appreciating different literary texts. As such, we can look at mundane pieces of text—like that of a song recommendation list—as creative. In this analysis of her K-pop song recommendation list, Danielle Eldredge examines how color-coding and footnotes can both be appreciated as aspects of creativity.

Introduction

Back when I was a junior in high school, I started listening to Korean pop music, commonly known as K-pop. After months of delving into this genre, I began to really love it. One day, I was informed by my friend that our mutual friend was interested in giving K-pop a listen. Excitement immediately filled my body! There was so much to show this friend about the different types of sounds, feelings, and emotions of K-pop that it was quite overwhelming. How could I possibly introduce all of this to her without sending an obnoxious amount of information that might repel her before she even begins listening to it? My solution was simple: to create a list of songs that I would recommend for her. And so, the “Superior Songs” list was born! That said, *how* I generated this list is what makes the entire text *creative*, according to Tusting and Papen’s definition (more on that soon). In this analysis, I will examine my categorization of the songs using color and footnotes, and how my creation of these aspects of the text helped my viewer interact with the text.

What Is “Creativity?”

Before I answer this, allow me to explain Karen Tusting and Uta Papen’s definition of creativity. In their analysis, “Creativity in Everyday Literacy Practices: The Contribution of an Ethnographic Approach,” Tusting and Papen explicitly define creativity as, “Not necessarily [having] to refer to making something startingly original . . . [but] rather . . . [combining] the means and modes available to them [the creator] to make meanings” (7). To explain this more clearly, Tusting and Papen are arguing that for something to be creative, it doesn’t exactly have to be something that has never been made by anyone else. Rather, it is how someone combines their resources in order to produce something that makes it creative. Given this, it is inherent that anyone can be a creative maker of text, not just the well educated or elite. In fact, Tusting and Papen also define creativity in accordance with how people, “produce, use, and generally interact with texts” (5). Everyone produces texts every day—from notes, to reminders, to essays, to lists—and are constantly interacting with their texts. Because people create and use things in ways that are unique to them, everyone is a creative maker of text according to Tusting and Papen.

Lastly, Tusting and Papen contribute another key aspect to their argument by stating, “We identify the creativity inherent in seemingly mundane forms of written communication, even where the texts themselves might show little evidence of . . . ‘artfulness’” (7). Essentially, this quotation reiterates what was said previously about texts not having to be “startingly original.” For any form of written communication, even something as simple as a bulleted list—which does not fit into the traditional standard of “creativity” nor does it portray any particular artistic talent—can be seen as creative. In brief, Tusting and Papen’s definition argues three central points:

- **Creativity can be mundane:** That means even everyday tasks can be understood to include creative activity.
- **All humans engage in creativity:** Instead of creativity being an activity that only particular kinds of people engage in, creativity can be found in many everyday human activities.
- **Creativity is not just content:** It’s not just the subject matter or genre that can involve creativity. When people remake and reuse texts, or combine them or repurpose them in different ways, this is also a creative activity.

It is important to keep in mind how this contrasts drastically from the traditional definition of creativity as being a quality of the artistically elite, which includes only certain kinds of genres with original content.

Nevertheless, if we use Tusting and Papen’s definition, it is fair to argue that an ordinary song list, that was made by a seventeen-year-old girl, can be seen as a “creative” text.

Color-Coding as an Aspect of Creativity

As readers who have read my previous *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* article, “The Colors of Literacy” (issue 12.2, Spring 2022), may already know, color plays a significant role in my life. It is how I commonly picture the intangible things in life such as moods and feelings. As a result, I tend to picture colors in my mind whenever I hear a song, which segues into my first point. Each song in the “Superior Songs” list is categorized by the overall mood of the song. I made this explicitly clear by providing a key (Figure 1) on the very first page of the Google Doc before listing any songs.

Not only did this small section indicate what the colors translate to, but it also explains more clearly why the songs are colored the way they are. Since there usually isn’t a clear-cut reason for why I see a song as a particular color, I had to put an extra effort into making sure that this whole section is comprehensible to my viewer. In other words, I had to sit down and figure out a succinct translation from colors to words. Because this is such an odd translation to explain, I had to make sure that I chose my words carefully when writing this key. Plus, I tried to make each color category as distinct as possible in order to avoid confusion because, oftentimes, colors may overlap (as they do in my mind when I hear a song). Nonetheless, using color in my creation of this text makes it unique to me because it is my personal means

- Brief Color Code Description**

 - hype/intense songs **[red]**
 - some are really intense and get your blood flowing
 - others are just super hype and make you wanna get up and dance
 - good/catchy bops **[orange]**
 - classic songs that get stuck in your head all the time bc they’re just all-around good
 - really hot/ groovy songs **[green]**
 - a few of these are just sexy idk how else to describe it lol
 - a lot are really smooth, like you can groove to it
 - soft/chill songs **[blue]**
 - some are just soft
 - others are sad
 - quite a few are good songs to vibe to
 - songs that give me chills **[purple]**
 - a lot of these are sad oops
 - the lyrics or the way the songs are sung is just so powerful to me
 - bubblegum pop **[pink]**
 - cutesy bops

Figure 1: The color-coding key I created.

of organization. It isn't an entirely new concept, but how I use color-coding to achieve a goal is one of the reasons why this text is a creative text.

Furthermore, the colors are also creative in terms of how I intended my viewer to use them. In other words, I wanted my viewer to be able to pick and choose songs to listen to depending on her current mood. Since I gave her a pretty big list, I didn't want her to go into it not knowing what to expect. Therefore, the other reason I chose to use colors was to help give her an idea of what she is about to listen to. For example, if she isn't too familiar with how "bubblegum pop" sounds, I didn't want her to have a song like that thrown at her if she's not in the mood to get into it just yet. Likewise, if she knows she wants to listen to more chill songs while doing homework, rather than exciting and upbeat songs, she can just glance at the list and choose accordingly. This use of color to guide my viewer in interacting with my text can also be seen as creative.

Footnotes as an Aspect of Creativity

Following color, another important aspect of the creativity of my "Superior Songs" list are the footnotes I decided to include. As seen in Figure 2, everything is organized using headings and bullet points. Acknowledging this, I concluded that adding notes in between the bullets would disrupt the flow of organization that I had going on. Consequently, I decided that adding footnotes would not only be the most practical means of inserting miscellaneous text, but it would also be the neatest. This decision points to two things being creative: how I carefully crafted my footnotes and how I intended for my viewer to interact with them.

A Note About "Editor's Notes"

This sample (Figure 3) was extracted from the very first page of the entire nine-page document and is the very first text that appears, even before any songs. The primary purpose was to establish a brief introduction to the new music my viewer was about to listen to since it's something that is quite different from what she is used to. I even clarified some of the same things that are mentioned in this analysis.

From this sample, one can observe how much time, energy, and passion was put into crafting such a seemingly mundane document.

As I mentioned earlier, there was so much to introduce to my friend within this new genre of music that it was overwhelming. Not only in terms of the different songs, but the background of each song and/or artist was also a key component that I wanted to introduce her to. In fact, I even made a brief section for "Editor's Notes" (Figure 3) on the very first page of the document, which highlights some key things I wanted her to know before listening to the songs.

SOLO ARTISTS/ ARTISTS WITH SOLO ALBUMS

Chunga

- Roller Coaster
- Why Don't You Know

Taemin¹⁰ (SHINee)

- Thirsty
- Move
- Pretty Boy (ft. Kai from EXO)
- Press Your Number
- Danger
- Goodbye
- Flame of Love

Sunmi

- Gashina
- Heroine

Lay (EXO)

- Goodbye Christmas¹¹
- Lose Control
- What U Need?

Ten¹² (NCT)

- Dream in a Dream
- New Heroes

HyunA

- Lip and Hip

Yezi

- Anck Su Namum

¹⁰ this man right here is a legend! stan him!
¹¹ there's a chinese and english version of this song, but i have the english one in my playlist and it makes me cry omg it's so sad
¹² also a legend oMg

Figure 2: Footnotes made about specific artists.

INTRODUCTION

Editor's Notes

- hi i love kpop so much and i tried to condense this list as much as i could but oops
- i left a lot of footnotes for extra info and my opinions you wanna check them out
- i tried to categorize these songs with umbrella categories; there's sO many different moods but i didn't wanna have 3409850394 colors either :/
- * **keep in mind** * that the typical korean girl group concept is different from that of the typical american girl group concept - they're supposed to be cutesy so a lot of their music is like bubblegum pop
 - i color coded them in terms of this concept ^
 - (so like hype/intense for girls is not the same as hype/intense for boys)
 - if you don't like them as much it's ok
- even if you don't like the song(s), i highly recommend at least watching the MV/ dance practice bc the choreo is SO GOOD OMG
- im trying really hard to be balanced here bc i love hype songs and boy groups skdfjsldkj

Figure 3: My "Editor's Notes" from the "Superior Songs" list.

Nonetheless, due to the large amount of information that was at hand, what I chose to include and how I chose to organize all of it, all while maintaining neatness, can be seen as creative because it shows how my style of organization is unique to me. To illustrate this more clearly, imagine having enough information to fill a textbook about any given topic. Now take all of that information, summarize it, offer some brief commentary, and make sure it stays under fifteen sentences. It's a lot of work, right? Is it, in the traditional sense, a shockingly new and never-before-seen task? Not exactly. However, I can guarantee how everyone chooses to summarize and comment on said information will be completely different. This is precisely the case with my footnotes. I decided to use footnotes rather than text boxes, parentheses, arrows, and so on because it was the neatest means available that would relay the necessary information without drawing too much attention away from the main goal of the list.

Much like how the color-coding section of the text required specific and succinct explanations, the footnotes required the same. I had to find that perfect balance for a decent footnote, which segues into my second point. How I constructed the footnotes so that my viewer can interact with them is, in itself, creative. Every text has its limitations; in this case, mine was how much information I can relay through footnotes. By far, the hardest part of the footnotes was choosing what to include and what to omit because the primary purpose of a footnote is to provide a *brief* background or description of a concept. In turn, it is crucial that each inscription is relevant. For someone as passionate as me about this music, I wanted to throw all kinds of information at her, so it was difficult to choose what was “irrelevant” enough to omit. However, making these decisions was crucial to how I intended my reader to interact with the text, for if I had too many, they could possibly be ignored or bore the reader. In terms of my previous analogy, I not only had to sort through that textbook of information to find what I wanted to include, but I also had to write summaries that were informative without being too lengthy and succinct without being incoherent.

The language that was used within each footnote further contributed to how I intended my reader to use the text. Since this was made for one particular viewer, I chose to make the language very informal and relatively silly. I also used a particular diction that my viewer would understand that would most likely not make sense to an outsider. This not only shows my creative ability to create text of a certain diction that is specific to one person, but also shows how the interaction with the text is important to the creation of the text.

Starting with the colloquial diction, examine Figure 2. In footnote 10 it says, “This man is a legend!” To many people this would make absolutely no sense. Since it’s footnoting a name that is most likely unrecognizable, the “legend” aspect probably wouldn’t make any sense since most people would immediately imagine legends such as Hercules or Iron Man, or maybe even inspirational leaders such as Nelson Mandela. But who is Taemin? It wasn’t my intention to be ironic, but rather hyperbolic in the sense that this particular artist is incredibly talented. Thus, it’s clear to see how choice of language is significant to the creativity of the text. Not only does it show how I manipulated words to mean something different from how they are traditionally viewed, but it also shows how it is directly related to the person that is interacting with the text. In fact, this was another point in Tusting and Papen’s definition of creativity. They argue that “the creativity inherent in people’s everyday literacy practices is socially shaped: how it involves adaptation to social and institutional constraints, [and] how it is drawn out and bounded by the potential and limitations of different contexts” (Tusting and Papen 9). What this means is that creativity can also be recognized through a creator’s adaptation of text with regard to its social context. As aforementioned, I deliberately used colloquial diction that was specific to my viewer. Thus, I “creatively” produced my text by specifically crafting it to fit the social context of how I intended my song list to be used. That is, I intended for my list to feel like it is a friend-to-friend text interaction, rather than a textbook-to-friend interaction.

To expand more on my last point, allow me to explain how choice of diction is dependent on who is viewing the text. Examine again Figure 2, footnote 10. You can see the phrase, “Stan him!” Again, to an outsider, this would probably have no meaning whatsoever, but my viewer understands exactly what I mean by this. As a result, who interacts with the text is an aspect of creativity, especially in this case, where my viewer can interact with that text much differently than most other people. Additionally, how the text within the footnotes was crafted to include our uncommon diction is yet another example of Tusting and Papen’s definition of creativity, particularly how the text is socially shaped.

Conclusion

The use of creativity in a text, according to Tusting and Papen’s definition, can also be seen in Lucas Weber’s “Literacy in Aviation: Aeronautical Inscriptions Take Flight.” When describing how he uses his inscriptions centered around preflight, Weber states, “I keep these inscriptions in my

knee-board, which I attach to my leg to use in the cockpit” (27). Typically, inscriptions like that are quite mundane and seem anything but creative. However, the way he uses his inscriptions, by attaching them to his knee, is what makes his text unique to him and creative. Similarly, the way I created my text to revolve around my viewer, and how I intended for her to use my text, is unique in my own way and, likewise, creative.

It’s clear to see how my “Superior Songs” list is creative. It is not the text itself that is startlingly original, but rather my production and intended interaction with the text that makes it creative. This shift in what is deemed “creative” raises an important question: What do we gain in thinking about writing and texts and writers using Tusting and Papen’s preferred definition of creativity? As my analysis suggests, we gain an appreciation of a wider array of texts, including a song recommendation list, and we can appreciate the author as being a creative maker of text. Essentially, we are not limited to a specific definition of creativity that only includes a small portion of the number of different texts that are produced daily. Tusting and Papen’s definition also expands our appreciation toward the functions and processes behind said texts. An example would be things like color-coding and footnotes, which would often be overlooked and seen as typical or ordinary. However, looking at those things with a broadened definition of creativity in mind really opens up a new perspective toward the unique processes that are involved in people’s everyday literacies.

Works Cited

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Danielle Eldredge is a free spirit who loves to travel, learn, meet new people, and experience life. She embraces all forms of beauty and creativity, and she aims to keep an open mind toward everything.



Notes

More Music Recs

- The Mechanisms ♡ 🧠
- Philip Glass 🎵 ⭐
- The Superconducting Supercolliders ♡
- MALLRAT ♡ 😊
- Angel Olsen ⭐ 🌳
- Frank Ocean ♡ 🌳 🎵
- Chet Baker 🎵 🌳

Key

- gay/gay vibes = ♡
- jazzy = 🎵
- inspirational = ⭐
- mood = 😊
- space pirates = 🧠
- listen w/ weed = 🌳
- and/or mood lighting

ulysses bonfire