It is not surprising that students invoke the literacy-as-success cultural narrative: the (upward mobility literacy myth) has been enmeshed in our culture since its founding and is propagated through literary and autobiographical texts, film, and the media. Janet C. Eldred and Peter Mortensen find, for instance, that for nineteenth-century women writers such as Hannah Webster Foster, acquiring written fluency in mainstream English indicated achievement and accomplishment (*Imagining* 7, 143). The success narrative is also appealing because it promotes the idea that anyone—no matter their social background—can move up in "status, income, reputation, and self-esteem" (Bloom 667). In short, buying into the trope that literacy leads to enlightenment and liberation carries "tremendous cultural cachet" and "is an irresistible plot for students to plug into" (Paterson 99).

> It is not surprising that students invoke the literacy-as-success cultural narrative: the upward mobility literacy myth has been enmeshed in our culture since its founding and is propagated through literary and autobiographical texts, film, and the media.

It does seem, however, that students rarely explore the possibility that the literacy-equals-success narrative is a faulty or, at the least, an overly generalized myth, even though many scholars have noted this point. Historian Harvey J. Graff, for instance, maintains that connections between schooling and social mobility are not natural ones, and he argues convincingly that actual realities challenge and contradict our assumptions about the inherent connections between literacy and success (264, 340–42, 350). Likewise, in *Literacy Matters: Writing and Reading the Social Self*, Robert Yagelski shows that although literacy can lead to possibility, hope, and power, it can also marginalize and disempower people (14). In similar ways, Vershawn Ashanti Young highlights the conflicts and tensions that arise for African Americans when literacy-as-success is viewed as "the trope for black class ascension" (8). Some costs of aligning oneself to the success narrative include homelessness, unhappiness, and loss. Other costs include social, cultural, and personal permanent displacement, which lead people to "alienation, despair, and impulses to suicide" (Christopher 80).[3]

Because the cultural narrative that literacy necessarily leads to success is simplistic and even inaccurate, it can be characterized as a "master" narrative, which, according to Jean-François Lyotard, is an overarching story people tell themselves about their experiences in relation to the culture, literature, or history of a society (31). Also known as "grand" or "metanarratives," master narratives both have the unfortunate result of gross overgeneralization and act invisibly to structure and define our lives (Daniell; Levine; Lyotard; Scott).

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Handwritten annotations:

That's not a bad thing, have a heart

The internal conflict that Gee talked about → relates here, but I don't know if literacy as a concept marginalizes as opposed to literacy can be used and put in a nonsensical hierarchy

Master Narrative — overgeneralized average story about an experience within a culture

Psych corner — representative heuristics are useful tools for quick thinking and are just one of the human faults of perception — no need to blame ppl for it.