Crash Course: What is Remix Culture?
(Article by Chantal de Medeiros and Danielle Hubbard)

Here at the beginning of the twenty-first century, new sources of media are pouring into young adult culture a mile a minute; books, movies, music, TV shows, video games, comics, and blogs are all being produced, consumed, and shared at a voracious pace. Canadian teens are no longer (if indeed they ever were!) passive consumers. What creative sixteen-year-old hasn't read *The Lord of the Rings* and then filmed their friends acting out a scene or two? Or scribbled out a comic strip based on *Final Fantasy*?

Well, there's a name for these activities: *remix culture*. If Canadian libraries want to stay current, and keep teen services new, exciting, and relevant, we librarians had best familiarize ourselves with the ins and outs of this edgy (and yet surprisingly common) trend in teen culture.

Remix culture isn't strictly for teens, of course. Any undertaking that combines or edits existing materials together to produce something new is a part of remix culture, be the material geared towards adults, teens, or even toddlers. Music, videos, books, or any other form of expression imaginable are all fair game. According to Brian Lamb (2007), "remix" is simply the adaptation of an existing work. The adaptation may be subtle, or it may completely change the original meaning or intent of the initial work. In *Android Karenina*, for example, author Ben Winters takes Leo Tolstoy's timeless classic, *Anna Karenina*, and combines it with his own zany steampunk ideas. The result? A remix.

A "mashup," more specifically, is the combining of two or more existing works (eg. Taylor Swift's "Love Story" with Rammstein's "Du Hast" to create a new song. In the purest sense of the term, the mashup artist herself contributes no new material to the mix. Her art is the imaginative combining of elements, often from very disparate sources. In common parlance, however, *mashup* and *remix* are used pretty interchangeably.

Whatever you want to call these art forms, remixes and mashups are becoming more and more popular (Center for Social Media, 2013). They are still, however, part of an old tradition. People have been creating new things out of old things since time immemorial. As the Center for Social Media (2013) puts it, "...the entire history of cultural production, from Aeschylus, through Shakespeare, to *Clueless,* has shown that all creators stand, as Isaac Newton (and so many others) put it, 'on the shoulders of giants.'"

Remixes and mashups are becoming more and more popular.

Ideally speaking, those choosing to remix works will get permission from the artists or copyright holders. However, in the real world this is usually not the case. With today's technology and easy access to digital content, remixing has become tantalizingly easy and ever more popular (2020 Media Futures, n.d.). Creators of new material can easily take or borrow music, text, images, etc., and transfer it from one digital device to another. Many believe that remixing is a way to improve an existing idea or work. Many remix artists make their new creations available to the public so that other artists can in turn remix what *they* have made. This cycle creates more and more creative opportunities (2020 Media Futures).

CCImage courtesy of Sergio Mancilla on Fli...
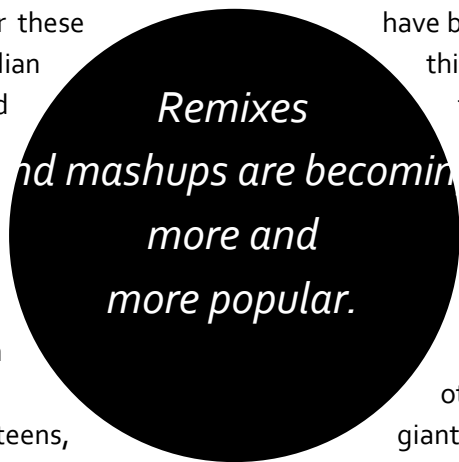
Although many artists see no harm in using others' material to create their own, some powerful industries (most notably the music industry) disagree. The music industry is striving to "tighten intellectual property frameworks and aggressively pursue alleged copyright violators to slow loss of revenues and maintain control of content" (2020 Media Futures).

What I mean is: remix culture can be a complicated business! It's packed with artistic, creative, and relationship-building potential for teens, but there are also some sticky legal issues to keep in mind. All of these issues, including copyright infringement and fair use, will be discussed in greater detail in other articles in this issue.

References

2020 Media Futures. (n.d.). Remix Culture. Retrieved from http://2020mediafutures.ca /Remix+Culture.

Center for Social Media. (2013). Remix Culture. Retrieved from http://centerforsocialmedia.org/fair-use/videos/podcasts/remix-culture

Lamb, B. (2007). Dr. Mashup; or, why educators should learn to stop worrying and love the Remix. *EDUCAUSE Review*, 13-24. Retrieved from http://www.educause.edu/ero/article /dr-mashup-or-why-educators-should-learn-stop-worrying-and-love-remix