

Weaponised information:

The role of information and metaphor in Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Abstract: Joss Whedon's hit television show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, presents a world of everyday teenage angst masked by a veil of horror. This paper explores how information and librarianship function in the world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. To do this, the paper breaks down the prevailing metaphors present in the show's setting, such as how high school is portrayed as Hell and monsters are teenage anxieties given life. The paper then explores the role of the librarian in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Finally, witchcraft is analysed as an information management system and a force of weaponised information. The end conclusion is that in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, information is a crucial weapon to not only defeating evil but also contending with the day-to-day struggles of life.

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Introduction

In Joss Whedon's cult classic television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which aired from March 1997 to May 2003, analogy is used heavily to add a deeper meaning to the world. High school is Hell, the slayer represents a teen's struggle to determine her identity, and monsters are physical embodiments of the day-to-day struggles of adolescence. Throughout the show, though she possesses supernatural powers, Buffy always relies on the librarian Giles and the information he provides to defeat evil and win the day. It is information, and not supernatural might, that makes the difference and enables the show's heroine to be successful. Therefore, just as information is Buffy's crucial weapon to defeat monsters, information is shown as a key factor in navigating the real-life problems the monsters represent.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a complex work of information management, as it incorporates many metaphors to communicate complicated themes in entertaining ways. Vampires are not only vampires but representations of sexual desire and hunger, and magic is not simply the ability to turn people into rats, but a way in which others seek to understand their world. Not only does *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* provide many examples of multimedia approaches to information reception, it also presents a very positive view of information seeking practices on modern television.

The role of the slayer in the world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is that of a solitary hunter of the undead and demonic entities. The slayer is gifted with the powers of super strength and agility to defeat her foes. These powers, along with the information provided by her watcher, a librarian-like figure whose field of expertise is vampires and demons, are the tools used by the slayer to fulfill her calling. Buffy is continually singled out compared to others who came before her because she has friends and a life outside of her calling. These friends are what set Buffy apart from previous slayers, as they provide her with the training and information she needs to be successful. The information and support her friends – particularly Giles and Willow – provide allow Buffy to overcome challenges which would have been impossible alone.

While the information Buffy utilises to defeat evil often comes to her in the traditional forms of books, newspapers, and other searchable texts, she comes to rely more and more on witchcraft and magic to defeat her foes. The following analysis begins by exploring the world in which *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* takes place and the metaphors that drive it. Then, information's role as a weapon will be examined. The role of witchcraft as weaponised information in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has never been thoroughly assessed. The analysis will endeavor to show information's value as a

weapon against evil in a metaphor-rich world through the vehicle of witchcraft and magic.

Methodology

In order to explore the role of information in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a post-structuralist textual analysis of the show and related literature has been performed. According to McKee (2003), a textual analysis is “making an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text” (p. 1). While textual analysis is subjective, iterative, and non-repeatable, the humanities often make use of literary analysis because more objective measures are not always possible when looking at literature or history.

The post-structuralist approach to performing a textual analysis involves a close reading of the text. In this context a text is “something we make meaning from”, including books, journal articles, and television shows (McKee, 2003, p. 4). For the purposes of this analysis, the researcher carefully analysed a broad variety of scholarly articles written about *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and compared those authors’ interpretations to close, personal observation of the television show.

Humanity encompasses a broad expanse of emotion, perspective, and ideals. Therefore, just as two people may not react the same in a given situation, those same people may perceive a piece of literary fiction differently. However, this lack of objectivity and repeatability does not invalidate the importance of the information gathered through textual analysis (McKee, 2003). McKee (2003) quotes Coulson and Rogers (1968) as saying “personal value judgements and informed beliefs are the basis on which one decides what is a sound or unsound direction in science; what evidence appears valid and what doesn't” (p. 120). Therefore, part of the value of a textual analysis, which is based on subjective intuitive reflection, is the degree to which the researcher is familiar with their subject matter. The researcher has watched the entire *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* series multiple times, grew up with it, experienced it while in school, and personally felt many of the feelings portrayed in the analysis. This personal experience with the subject matter provides a strong foundation for synthesising the research of others in the field of information management and film studies to draw meaning and significance from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and contribute to the field as a whole.

The Role of Metaphor in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

A crucial aspect of the argument presented in this paper is the idea that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* uses fantasy metaphors to represent controversial themes related to adolescence, drugs, and sex. This paper will explore the two primary examples of how metaphor functions in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: the role of high school being Hell, and social anxieties and insecurities being monsters. These metaphors and representations in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* shape how everything in the show functions and create the landscape in which the characters and information operate.

High School is Hell

The idea of portraying high school as a hellish space is very reflective of the mindset of the teenagers experiencing it. Every experience is heightened in high school as teenagers navigate the transition from adolescence into budding adulthood. Magee (2014) states:

The idea of making high school represent a kind of hell is reflected in numerous cultural fears that tend to manifest in situations, challenges and sometimes, life-changing events through trials by fire—from drug use, to having sex, to the all too common fear of not being accepted for who you are or being marked as different. (p. 885)

Television writers, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Joss Whedon, understand this concept and utilise it to great effect. Joss Whedon himself is quoted by Longworth (2002) as saying that “what makes the show popular is the central myth of high school as horrific. The humiliation, the alienation, the confusion of high school is taken to such great proportions that it becomes demonic” (p. 213). The show's success indicates that many teenagers do identify with the message of high school being portrayed as hellish.

The best example of how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* portrays high school as Hell is the Hellmouth itself. The fictional town of Sunnydale, in which the show takes place, is significant because it is the location of one of the mouths of Hell. These “hellmouths” are like magnets that draw all evil to them. Buffy's job, therefore, is to stand guard over the Hellmouth and wait for the evil to arrive so she can defeat it. In the season one episode “Prophecy Girl”, it is revealed that the Hellmouth is actually located directly under the high school library (Whedon & Whedon, 1997). Therefore in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, high school is not only a metaphor for Hell, but actually physically located directly on top of it. Since the Hellmouth is a locus for evil, many of the evil monsters and forces encountered throughout the show end up at the high school.

Monsters are Social Anxieties

What would Hell be without the monsters that inhabit it? *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is filled with monsters and evil for its heroine to combat, but these villains are more complicated than simple obstacles to overcome. The show uses its demons and vampires to illustrate problems with relationships, peers, and sex without explicitly discussing these topics (Magee, 2014). The monsters in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be divided into two broad categories: the Big Bad and the monsters of the week. The Big Bad is Buffy's overarching nemesis for any given season (Gerrits, 2012). The Big Bad is typically a relatable enemy with motivations that the viewers can empathise with. The monster of the week, on the other hand, usually only shows up for a single episode and is used as a physical representation of the social issue being addressed. Both of these categories function as metaphors for teen-related issues, but they operate in different ways.

As previously stated, the Big Bad is a humanised enemy in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Seeing the human in these enemies is crucial to understanding them, because it is through their human qualities that the viewers can draw meaning from them (Gerrits, 2012). These enemies are relatable because their motivations and identities have correlations in the viewer's day-to-day lives. The Big Bad of season five, Glory, is a strong example of this.

Glory, also known as Glorificus, is a displaced goddess of a Hell dimension who wants to return home and represents the quintessential "mean girl". She is portrayed as a very superficial young woman who loves being pampered and obeyed. She can be nice when it will get her something she wants, but she can also be incredibly cruel. In popular culture, the mean girl is often portrayed as beautiful, popular, and seemingly invulnerable. To have her favour is to be blessed, and to be on her bad side is to be continually on edge waiting for the hammer to fall. Throughout season five, Buffy, representing the underdog, is continually unable to do anything to stop Glory because she is powerful and invulnerable. Viewers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* likely attached their hatred of their version of the high school mean girl to Glory and commiserated with Buffy as she was continually unable to stop her.

It is easy to believe that an all-powerful Hell goddess would have been a foe too large for the show's heroine to defeat. However, Glory never truly lives up to her Hell goddess reputation. Many episodes such as "Spiral", where the Knights of Byzantium refer to Glory as "the Beast" and list many of her crimes, talk about how bad Glory was (Contner & DeKnight, 2001). When she is actually portrayed, however, she is often spending her time manipulating Buffy and others into doing her dirty work for her. Her

general lack of overwhelming terror and the emphasis on her petty manipulations supports her over-arching characterisation as a stereotypical mean socialite.

In the season finale Glory is defeated, showing that despite her seeming invulnerability, the high school mean girl is not all-powerful. Buffy and her friends discover that Glory shares her body with a mortal man and that when he is in control she is vulnerable. Utilising this weakness, Buffy and her friends are able to ultimately slay Glory (Solomon & Petrie, 2001). While the show is not telling its viewers to beat their high school's popular kids to death with a hammer, it is communicating the idea that no individual or problem is as invincible as it may seem. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the offenders are in fact inhuman. Therefore, where in daily life people are forced to navigate around the difficult people in one's life, Buffy can slay these monsters therefore gaining closure" (Gerrits, 2012, p. 1064). By portraying real life issues as a villain, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* gives its viewers the closure of being able to physically conceptualise and defeat an obstacle in their lives.

Where the Big Bad typically represents a complex difficulty and humanises it, the monsters of the week are social anxieties given physical form. The horror genre creates a narrative that allows adolescents to engage with their anxieties regarding their place in society, sexual relationships, and growing up in a setting where these issues are given monstrous form and are therefore able to be fought and defeated. Anxiety is an interesting idea here because it alone can often be a physical barrier to functioning in the real world. Individuals who suffer from intense anxiety often feel like there is a physical force weighing on them, preventing them from being successful (American Psychology Association, 2015). In the real world, this pressure is enhanced by the idea that anxiety is all in the individual's mind and that it is only hindering them because of some failure on their part to cope with it. Horror narratives, such as those present in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, give anxiety physical form. It takes the monster within and externalises it, giving the show's heroine the ability to defeat it. Buffy's successes at defeating her foes – these representations of anxiety – gives people suffering from anxiety hope that they too can defeat their demons.

Two example monsters of the week are vampires and Billy. Vampires are the most obvious example of a monster of the week in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. They are representations of the worst of humanity: a person without a soul or conscience. The show utilises vampires as metaphors for a variety of human sins such as lust, gluttony, and greed. They take what they want and do not particularly care who they hurt in the process. The fact that what they typically take from people is their blood just adds to the sense of horror they create. When Buffy slays a vampire, she is not only

defeating the monster but the sin it represents. When defeated, a vampire turns into dust, essentially cleaning itself up and showing that even the worst problems have the potential to be swept away. In season one of the show, teenage anxieties and fears literally come to life in the episode "Nightmares" (Green, Whedon, & Greenwalt, 1997). Young Billy Palmer, in a coma after suffering abuse from his baseball coach, becomes an unwitting conduit, causing characters' nightmares to become reality. The monster of the week in this case is not Billy, but rather his fears and how they are bleeding over into the real world. In this episode, the greatest fears of Buffy and her friends become reality due to comatose Billy's tormented sleep. It is revealed that Buffy's greatest fear at that time is dying and becoming a vampire herself. This fear is essentially the fear of becoming what one hates, and is a common fear suffered by adolescents. By slaying vampires and overcoming her fears, Buffy provides viewers with a resolution of fears and anxieties that remain unresolvable in reality (Jarvis, 2001).

Surviving High School

If you take the allusions of high school being Hell and monsters being adolescent social anxieties together, another prevalent theme in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reveals itself: that of surviving high school. Many teenagers view high school as a gauntlet to be endured, and a lot of popular literature and television shows portray it as such (Magee, 2014). However, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* takes this idea a step further, by making survival a real concern rather than a dramatization.

A majority of the episodes in seasons one through three portray at least one student dying or becoming a monster. Episode twenty of season two ("Go Fish"), for instance, is about the high school swim team becoming sea monsters (Semel, Fury, & Hampton, 1998). Similarly, in episode three of season one ("Witch"), students are set on fire and maimed in a variety of ways (Cragg & Reston, 1997). Navigating these monsters is such a way of life that many of the students of Sunnydale High do not consider it abnormal. High school is seen as such a horrible place that death and mayhem simply come with the package. In fact, it is Buffy's presence at Sunnydale High that causes the most disruption to the normal lives of her fellow students. In "The Prom", Buffy is given the award of class protector in recognition of her services to the school. Her fellow students remark that, thanks to Buffy, the school has seen its lowest mortality rates ever (Solomon & Noxon, 1999). While it may seem pretty straight forward as to why the students decided to thank Buffy for saving their lives, one has to consider that the high school has always been over the Hellmouth. Therefore, the death and chaos that beset Sunnydale High in the show had always been present. It was not until Buffy came and saved them that they realised they had needed saving. In a similar way,

many high school students cannot imagine high school existing without all of the anxieties and troubles that are associated with it (Jarvis, 2001).

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, high school is situated above the mouth of Hell and surviving to graduation is a death race. The "horror school" is the realization of the teenager's fear taking control. High school is often considered the gateway between adolescence and the adult world. It is in high school that teenagers learn the rules and social structures that will enable them to be productive and contributing members of society. In the horror genre, chaos invades the school and evil is manifest, demonstrating the inability of the adult world and its rules to protect young people (Jarvis, 2001). While Buffy is equipped with super powers to set her apart from her peers and empower her to fight evil, she also needs the help of her friends. In order to fight evil, Buffy needs to understand it and its weaknesses. This is where information comes in.

Information as a Weapon

The main purpose of this paper is to explore how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* portrays information as a crucial weapon in the fight against evil and the social anxieties it represents. Television is a powerful source of influence on today's society. It is a lens which allows viewers insight into the values and relationships underlying society. These insights represent and ultimately influence the audience's experiences (Hicks, 2012). Therefore by examining how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* portrays information, one can see how the show intended for its audience to view information as well. This section will explore the role of information in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* by examining how libraries and librarians function in the show, as well as how the information seeking process itself is represented.

Giles, Warrior Librarian:

A discussion of how the library and librarians function in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* necessitates consideration of the character Giles. Throughout the show he is many things: librarian, watcher, father figure, friend, and, most importantly, Buffy's metaphorical "arms dealer". Giles is an overdramatised example of the struggle all librarians face. Librarians hold in their hands the power to determine the success or failure of the continued access to information of their users. They can either be the hand that provides the crucial reference to the creation of a great work, or, in failing, assist in the academic demise of their patrons. This responsibility is represented well in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but this struggle is made more intense because it is not academic success that is at stake, but instead actual life or death (DeCandido, 1999).

Though he wears many hats, Giles' role as a librarian and Buffy's arms dealer go hand in hand. This is best illustrated through the system of slaying.

The system of slaying is the process through which Buffy and her friends discover, study, and ultimately defeat the current threat. The process begins with Buffy being alerted to the presence of trouble, either through encountering it herself or through a warning. At this point, Buffy either attempts to face the threat immediately or resorts to information gathering. Regardless of whether or not Buffy tries to face the threat on her own, she always ends up in the high school library to gather information. It is here that Giles enters as a crucial character in the series. Utilising his books – and fellow characters Willow and Xander as research assistants – Giles uncovers the information that is necessary to enable Buffy to defeat her foe (Sheffield, 2009).

For example, in the episode "Teacher's Pet", Buffy discovers that her new teacher is a large praying mantis in disguise that is preying on the boys in her school. With the research provided by Giles and her friends, Buffy learns about the strengths and weaknesses of praying mantises. She then takes this knowledge and tracks the mantis to its lair and uses bat sonar, something she learned incapacitates mantises in fear, to weaken the creature so she can slay it. Though in the end it is Buffy's supernatural strength and fighting skill that saves the day, the knowledge Giles provided her was integral to her ability to successfully defeat her foe (Green & Greenwalt, 1997).

The Library is a Sanctuary

Hand-in-hand with the theme of information gathering in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is the role of the library as a safe haven and place of learning. Estill (2006) argues that "the library...enables negotiations around the acquisition of knowledge, the relationship between research and power, [and] the drive to create community" (p. 236). While Giles' role as librarian is initially the driving force behind why Buffy and her friends spend time there, it comes to be their primary place of gathering. The library acts as Buffy's base of operations, as it is the source of her power and she feels safe there. This portrayal of a library is an incredibly positive one because it emphasises the role of the library being as more than just a place of learning, but as a community space as well. Today, libraries are seen not only as providing information, but also as a safe space to interact with this information.

Portraying heroic librarians and libraries as a base of power are wonderful contributions from television to the field of information studies, but the best offering *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* provides is in its portrayal of the information gathering process itself. Information and knowledge are powerful weapons in Buffy's hands, but like all

powerful weapons they do not come without hard work and determination. Indeed, despite its fantastical themes, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* never underrepresents the arduous reality of methodical research (Sheffield, 2009).

As previously mentioned, research often plays a pivotal role in the resolution of each episode's difficulty and is therefore a central narrative in the show. Each episode in season one contains instances of information seeking practices. According to Hicks (2009), "there were thirty-five different instances of information seeking throughout the twelve episodes of the season, for an average of 2.9 instances of information seeking per episode" (p. 3). Giles, as the purveyor of information, is often seen as all-knowing by Buffy and her friends, but he is the first to admit that this is only because he was at the library "from midnight to six researching" (Brazil & Greenwalt, 1997). Though Giles highlights the work involved with research, he always approaches his next problem with a sense of joy (DeCandido, 1999). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* shows that though gathering information can be a lot of work, it is worth the effort. This is a particularly important message in the media today because true research often is not as simple as just using Google. Research can be time-consuming and is not finished when you find an answer, but when you find the right answer.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer shows that information is a powerful tool, and in the right hands can be a potent weapon against evil. In light of all of the other metaphors throughout the show, this communicates a compelling message. If high school is Hell, and the monsters are representations of teenage anxieties, then the weapon that slays them can also be used to resolve what they represent. Therefore, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* teaches its audience that information is a powerful weapon against the difficulties of everyday life.

Witchcraft, Weaponised Information

Knowledge is power. This theme is used regularly in fiction and non-fiction alike. It is the belief that understanding trumps all else; that if one understands something, one can conquer it. This belief holds true in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, where witchcraft acts as a visceral representation of the power of knowledge made manifest as weaponised information. Witchcraft and magic in the show are represented as a form of power derived from books, study, and careful application of materials. Willow is not born a witch; rather, she studies the craft for years and often finds spells to deal with very specific problems in the show. Early in the show magic plays a fairly minor role, being used infrequently to solve a problem or defeat a monster of the week. In later seasons, however, witchcraft (and its fundamental user Willow) come to play a much

more pivotal role. Spells, like information, are primarily used as problem solving devices. They are powerful if used correctly but also dangerous if not perfectly understood. Witchcraft in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has never been explored as an information management system. This paper attempts to fill that gap.

Magic is Data

In the field of information studies, the hierarchy of information is typically described using three terms: data, information, and knowledge. Data is raw facts and concepts, collected but not interpreted in any way. The collection of data has become a large area of interest in recent years as businesses and individuals go out of their way to collect data on everything in the hope that some gain can be achieved. The idea of magic in the world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* functions very similarly to data. Magic just *is*; it exists in the world, but does not accomplish anything without direction or focus. But if magic is data, it follows that spells are information.

Information is an organised collection of data used to inform. A spell is the raw substance of magic given form and purpose by the will of the practitioner invoking it. By taking the innate power of magic and shaping it into a spell, the witch is able to affect or inform the world in the way they desire. The concept of knowledge is a nebulous one. One definition is that knowledge is "structured information held inside a cognitive system" (Zins, 2007, p. 496). When information contributes to an individual's overall understanding of a concept it becomes knowledge. Therefore, if a spell is information manifested, then witchcraft is knowledge manifested. Witchcraft is not simply an act, but an entire way of perceiving and understanding the world. A witch understands that there are forces in the world that, if understood, enable them to shape reality.

Examples of Magic in Action

There are many examples from the show where the connection between spells and information is very clear. As Wilson (2005) points out: "There is magic and spell craft in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but it is not the witchcraft found in historical accounts or practiced by contemporary Wiccan, pagans, and witches" (p. 158). Joss Whedon could have made the portrayal of witchcraft historically accurate if he wanted to do so. One does not become as successful a writer as he has without being able to collect information on one's subject. Therefore, it is possible to suppose he structured and created the system of magic in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to hide deeper meanings on the nature of the world he was exploring (Wilson, 2005). In the final showdown with the Big Bad of season four, Willow, Xander, and Giles cast a spell to

infuse Buffy with all their skills and experiences. Later it is revealed that the spell not only granted Buffy their knowledge, but also the combined power and understanding of the original slayer. This is an example of magic being used directly to inform. Through this spell, Buffy was equipped with the tools and knowledge necessary to defeat her enemy.

Another prime example of the information process at work in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is Willow's ongoing mission to transform the rat Amy back into a girl. In the episode "Gingerbread" in season three, Amy transforms herself into a rat to avoid being burned at the stake (Whitmore, John, & Espenson, 1999). Throughout the next few seasons, Willow is assumed to be researching off screen ways by which to transform Amy back. Willow's skills are not sufficient for the task in season three, but her power has grown so vastly by season six that she is able to accomplish the task without any difficulty. In the episode "Smashed", Willow ponders the problem of Amy's transformation, declares "reveal it", and the answer to her problem literally appears written on a piece of paper (Meyer & Greenburg, 2001). She then casts the revealed spell and Amy is returned to being a girl again. The contrast between the information gathering process shown in this episode and those shown in season one are similar to the differences between browsing a shelf of books for information on a topic or utilising Google. Willow is able to use her magic to quickly and instantaneously gain the information she needs.

However, just as magic and witchcraft can be a powerful tool for Buffy and Willow, they also come with their own set of responsibilities. As previously stated, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* portrays the information seeking process as an arduous one requiring patience and effort. However, by using magic, Willow is able to quickly and instantly gather information and approach a problem head-on. Similar to using Google to search for the answer to a problem and only considering the first result, many of the problems associated with magic in the show result from a lack of foresight. Quality searching involves multiple queries and a careful analysis of the results to eliminate outliers and determine their authenticity. In the case of Amy the rat, Willow did not consider whether or not she was ready to have a rat-turned-witch on her hands to rehabilitate. She did not consider the effects of her actions, she just acted. Similarly, information is a powerful tool, but only if used correctly. Just because an initial search produces a result does not mean that the result is an effective one suitable to answer the given information need.

If spells in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are information and Buffy utilises spells to defeat her foes, then witchcraft itself acts as a metaphor for the power of knowledge to affect

and change the world. Early in the show the information Giles provides to Buffy allows her to find her enemies' weaknesses and create efficient strategies for fighting them. In later seasons, however, Buffy turns to Willow for her information as the level of difficulty escalates into requiring magical aid to achieve victory. In episode 21 of season five, "The Weight of the World", Buffy goes so far as to tell Willow that she is her gun, a powerful weapon that she can use to defeat the Big Bad (Solomon & Petrie, 2001). At this point of the show it is Willow's magic, the physical expression of information in the world, which Buffy uses as a weapon rather than the tactical knowledge Giles provided her earlier on. However, though witchcraft is a powerful tool, it still requires careful consideration for effective use. Information in general is not the only thing required to solve a problem; one must make sure that the information or spell being used is the right one for the situation at hand.

Conclusion

The world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is one of intense metaphorical significance. Nothing in Joss Whedon's horrific portrayal of the modern world is exactly as it appears at first glance. It is this complexity that drew millions of fans to the show and continues to keep the legacy of Buffy alive in fan fiction and graphic novels today.

Sunnydale High School is portrayed as a hellish space, its every hall and classroom influenced by the fact that the school is located over the mouth of Hell itself. Teenage anxieties such as budding sexual feelings, feelings of inconsequentiality, and the fear of failure manifest themselves as real life monsters to terrorise the citizens of Sunnydale. It is Buffy's job as the slayer to be the heroine of the people and defeat these monsters. Buffy is a supernatural entity herself, possessing the super strength, speed, and toughness necessary to put her on equal footing with her adversaries. However, even with all of this power it is not her identity as the slayer that makes the difference in these confrontations, but the training and information she receives from her allies. No episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is complete without some mention of the information gathering process. As previously stated, the 12 episodes of season one of the show alone possess over 30 references to information gathering. Therefore, it is this information that is the true weapon for defeating evil in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

The many layers of metaphor active in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* create a deeper significance in the role of information as a weapon. If the evils in Sunnydale are manifestations of adolescent anxieties and problems, then the weapons used to defeat the monsters are also the weapons useful for defeating what they represent. Therefore, an underlying theme of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is that information is a tool

that can be used to solve the mundane struggles of everyday life. Buffy is a supernatural heroine of the people, and in the end it is her knowledge that wins the day, not her superpowers. Information is a powerful tool which, in the right hands, can be used to accomplish amazing things.

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