JOURNAL OF LITERACY INNOVATION

RETHINKING LITERACY INSTRUCTION

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CO-EDITORS' INTRODUCTION
DR. BRITTANY ADAMS & DR. SEAN RUDAY
ISSUE CO-EDITORS

One of the most important aspects of education is its ability to transform and shape society and its citizens. It is not just schooling itself that helps achieve this goal—it is the experiences and practices offered to students in educational contexts that will achieve the aims of equity and justice. We, the editors, designed this themed special issue of the *Journal of Literacy Innovation* to bring together a collection of critical literacy perspectives and practices that prepare young people to effectively respond to evolving literacy needs and evolving social challenges. Specifically, we were and remain interested in how children's and adolescent texts can be utilized to teach critical literacy across educational contexts, including in teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning. Broadly, we define critical literacies as a disposition and set of skills that enable one to interpret the complex social powers at play in texts, think critically, and take action to change unjust situations. This issue offers a diverse representation of critical literacy pedagogies in theory and practice that take up youth literature, youth media, and youth-generated texts to support learning in K-12 spaces. The authors herein share content analysis of popular children's literature, text sets for building empathy, curricular projects that celebrate diverse student identities, a reframing of our conceptions of disciplinary literacies, and reflections on a social justice focused professional development experience.

In *A Content Analysis of 21st Century Caldecott Picture Books Featuring Portrayals of Poverty and Financial Difficulty*, Dr. Sherron Killingsworth Roberts, Dr. Patricia Crawford, and Nancy Brasel examine portrayals of poverty in children's books awarded the Randolph Caldecott Medal or given honorable mention since the turn of the century.

Portrayal in Their Pages: An Intersectional Analysis of Florida's 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Grades 3-5 Sunshine State Award Book List, by Via Lipman, investigates representation of social identities in children's chapter books featured on the Florida Sunshine State book list in the midst of state legislature that seeks to deny diverse representation in K-12 schools.

Dr. Nora Lester Murad's *An Antiracist, Anticolonial Approach to Evaluating Palestinian Children's Books* identifies nine criteria that can help educators and librarians use an antiracist and anticolonial approach to identify and critically use children's books involving Palestine.

In *Kahani Literacy Project*: *Indic-centric Language Arts Instruction as a Shield against Asian Hate*, Dr. Kalpana Mukunda Iyengar and Dr. Howard Smith discuss the findings from an analysis of 224 inventive, culturally validating writing samples (*Kahanis*) from diasporic Asian-Indian children aged four to fourteen.

Beyond "Think Like an Expert": A Call for Critical Disciplinary Literacy explores how current ways of thinking about disciplinary literacy reify the anti-democratic banking model of education. Dr. Jeanne Dyches presents an alternative power-confronting, democratically oriented model that values students' funds of knowledge and expands conceptions of expertise.

Reading with our Students in Mind: Empathy, Criticality, and Community Engagement Through Young Adult Literature, by Dr. Annmarie Garcia Sheahan, Dr. Ashley Dallacqua, Dr. Alexandra Davis, and Clara Maeder, features a multimodal text set for secondary students that encourages them to embrace lenses of empathy, criticality, and community as they read the word and the world.

Finally, in *Reflections and Insights from Running a Professional Development Institute for Young Adult and Children's Literature Social Justice Teaching Practices*, Dr. Henry "Cody" Miller, Dr. Natalie Sue Svrcek, and Dr. Kathleen Colantonio-Yurko reflect on their experiences designing a social justice professional development institute for K-12 English language arts and literacy teachers. The authors provide an outline with action steps that can inform the work of others seeking to develop professional learning for socially just classrooms.

Special Theme Issue Editor Biographies:

Dr. Brittany Adams is an assistant professor of literacy education at the University of Alabama. Her research interests include critical literacy, children's and young adult literature, and the preparation of culturally sustaining teachers. Her work has been published in *Journal of Literacy Research*; *The Reading Teacher*; *Literacy Research and Instruction*; and *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*.

Dr. Sean Ruday is a professor and program coordinator of English education at Longwood University. He is particularly interested in inclusive and equitable teaching in the English classroom. He has written 17 books for educators, all published by Routledge Eye on Education.

READING WITH OUR STUDENTS IN MIND: EMPATHY, CRITICALITY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

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Abstract

Young adult literature is a powerful tool that can invite readers to connect, question, and act. This article focuses on a multimodal text set that was created for students, encouraging them to embrace lenses of empathy, criticality, and community as they read and think within their English Language Arts classrooms. As educators, we challenge ourselves to center our students, rather than archaic texts and practices that often rule classrooms. We briefly review literature that supports adolescents engaging empathically and critically with multimodal text sets. Then, we detail our new text set with the goal of highlighting voices that connect with our students and help us to displace the literary canon in our regular classroom practices. Ultimately, the goal of this text set is to support young people in reading with empathy, engaging critically with texts, and being mindful of what happens in their communities.

Reading with our Students in Mind: Empathy, Criticality, and Community Engagement Through Young Adult Literature

Young adult literature (YA lit) has power. It has the power to create, change, evoke, and fundamentally, to destabilize and displace canonical texts that narrowly focus on white, middle class, monolingual, heteronormative ideologies (Sheahan & Dallacqua, 2023). We agree with Cart (2016) that YA lit has the "capacity for fostering, in its readers, understanding, empathy, and compassion by offering vividly realized portraits of the lives – exterior and interior – of individuals who are unlike the reader" (p. 11). Because of this, YA lit invites students to embrace humanity through connecting to themselves and others (empathy), through asking questions and challenging power systems (criticality), and through learning ways to make change within their own communities (community engagement).

In this manuscript, we come together as teachers and researchers of different experiences, privileges, and identities to offer a YA text set created with our students in mind. Annmarie is a Hispana/Chicana-Irish educator and researcher who currently teaches Language Arts and Film Criticism in a secondary public school in the southwest. Ashley is a white, cis female who operates as both classroom volunteer/co-teacher and researcher. Alexandra is a white, cis female

who contributed her knowledge of adolescent moral development to this paper. Clara is a white, cis female, bilingual educator and graduate student. This text set stems from our understanding of the ways in which YA lit should operate as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Sims Bishop, 1990), and the ways in which it can highlight voices of individuals from historically marginalized communities. Because our work is situated in a diverse secondary school whose population primarily identifies as Mexican, Mexican American, Chicane, or Hispanic, we recognize the importance of selecting texts that honor the identities and varied experiences of our students. We also know that authentic YA lit can be controversial and challenging as evidenced by current, ongoing backlashes and book challenges (Mazariegos & Sullivan, 2022). In creating this multimodal text set, we have embraced these controversies and challenges in our selection of five texts that utilize a range of voice *and* form as a means of authentically reflecting readers' worlds.

Our Previous Work: Using Multimodal YA to Destabilize Canonical Texts

In creating a YA text set that could authentically connect with our students, we drew heavily from our past work using YA lit to destabilize a canonical curriculum. This previous work was conducted in Annmarie's 10th grade English Language Arts (ELA) classroom during a unit of study in which *Hamlet* (Shakespeare, 1994) was paired with *Yummy: The last days of a Southside shorty* (Neri, 2010). Our decision to highlight *Yummy* in this unit was part of a larger year-long goal to give our highly diverse sophomores more opportunities to engage with BIPOC and multimodal YA literature. *Yummy* is a nonfiction comic that documents the final days in the life of Robert "Yummy" Sandifer, an 11-year-old member of the Black Disciples gang in Chicago. *Yummy* presented students with a layered, nuanced perspective using material that many students might find relatable to their own community experiences as they engaged with the text alongside *Hamlet*. Students connected the story of Yummy to their own lives while also thinking outside themselves in ways that helped foster deeper reflection about the complicated role that social systems play in shaping outcomes of people. We found the themes empathy, criticality, and community engagement (Dallacqua et. al., 2021) were central to our teaching and learning.

Our experience with *Yummy* impacted the way we thought about using texts as a means of promoting *empathy*, *criticality*, and *community engagement* in our students. Here we use these three themes as lenses for selecting texts *outside* of the literary canon. Our work with *Yummy* was rooted in a unit that still included a work of the literary canon (*Hamlet*), but here we intentionally displaced all canonical works as we cultivated this set of YA texts. For us, YA lit is multimodal, critical, and diverse, and by its very nature disrupts the singular narratives of more traditional works taught in ELA classrooms.

In this article, we briefly review literature that supports adolescents engaging empathically and critically with multimodal text sets. Then, we detail our new text set with the goal of highlighting voices that connect with our students and help us to go beyond disruption to ultimately displace the literary canon from our regular classroom practices. Ultimately, the goal of this text set is to support our students and other young people in reading with empathy, thinking critically, and engaging with their communities.

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Scholarship

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Adolescent Moral Development

Adolescence is a key time for teachers to promote moral development (including empathy and social consciousness) since adolescents are able to think in more abstract ways than younger youth and experience increases in their hypothetical reasoning skills. Furthermore, adolescents' social relationships grow increasingly more complex in ways that can support the development of empathy and engagement with others (Bukowski et al., 2011; Choudhury, et al., 2006).

Empathy is one aspect of moral development that has been linked to a host of positive outcomes for adolescents, including helping behaviors and community engagement (Hoffman, 2000). Empathy encompasses two components: perspective taking (the cognitive component that reflects understanding the condition of another) and empathic concern (feeling negative emotions consistent with the experience of another person; Hoffman, 2000). Classrooms that encourage empathy ask young people to examine themselves as emotional beings, as well as look outward into their communities.

Researchers have highlighted the role of social contexts in predicting community engagement and helping behaviors among adolescents (Davis et al., 2018; Hart & Matsuba, 2009; Raffaelli et al., 2005). Specifically, when young people have access to opportunities and environments where they can positively engage with others who might be different from them, they are more likely to develop a strong moral identity and become committed to community activism and engagement (Hart & Fegley, 1995). Based on this evidence, teachers can support the development of empathy in their students through meaningful educational experiences that resonate with and stretch youths' own worldviews.

Reading Within Critical Frameworks

A critical literacy framework can help teachers foster empathy and critical consciousness in adolescents. Critical approaches to ELA instruction seek to help students build skills to deconstruct texts and to understand the role of language in conveying meaning and either promoting or disrupting power relations (Morrell, 2005). Because adolescents do not always enter classroom spaces with a conscious knowledge of how systems of power operate in historical and current contexts (Dyches, 2022), choosing and approaching texts with a critical lens is essential in aiding students to think deeply about how their own lived experiences reflect larger political and power struggles (Vasquez et al., 2019).

Critical literacy scholars advocate for careful text selection that gives students opportunities to investigate how a narrative is positioned and how it positions them as readers (Janks, 2019). Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) argue that critical reading of texts enables students to ask and answer questions about power and exclusion in society. More importantly, working within a critical literacy framework takes students beyond analysis, inviting them to consider ways in which they can use language to disrupt inequity in their own lives and communities. Empowering adolescents to use the texts they read in class as a catalyst for creating and designing their own texts and for larger community activism and change is the driving force behind critical approaches to literacy instruction (Morrell, 2015).

Though we agree that dominant narratives can be taught through a critical literacy framework, our goal is to destabilize a singular emphasis on the literary canon, instead focusing on the breadth of literature written for and about young people (Sheahan, 2020; Dallacqua & Sheahan, 2020), thereby centering their voices.

Multimodality

Multimodal texts offer many opportunities for meaning-making and engagement (Jewitt & Kress, 2003) through image, color, sound, and more. When we talk about reading here, we think about it broadly to include engagement with many modes. Modes, "…are broadly understood to be the effect of the work of culture in shaping material into resources for representation" (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 1). Because of the social and cultural implications of multimodality, creators, readers, consumers, and *people* are at the center of multimodal reading and composing.

Text Sets. Multimodal text sets that amplify a diversity of voices, modes, and genres support a diversity of student identities and creative literacy practices that can change worlds (Marlatt, 2021). The texts in our set share different voices, perspectives, and community settings in a variety of media forms, across a range of time periods. Offering this kind of range supports students as critically literate readers (Bersh, 2013).

As we conceptualized this text set, we mindfully chose texts that could evoke empathy, criticality, and community engagement while celebrating voices of characters, authors, and artists that are not regularly part of the white, canonical mainstream. While this set does not have a designated focus text, our sequencing of texts considers how each works to support the others, therefore operating as a full set (Lupo et al. 2018). We were thoughtful about the range of media reflecting students' own interests (Marlatt, 2021) while motivating readers (Bersh, 2013) and offering ideas that matter to them.

A Text Set for Empathy, Criticality, and Community Engagement

In this section we document our text set: texts curated to displace canonical texts and connect to our students, working together to support students' empathy, criticality, and community engagement. Here, we work with a tenth-grade curriculum in mind for our current students, although the set could fit into many curricular spaces. We considered our students' varied backgrounds and interests as we chose texts that could both reflect and challenge their experiences. In our work together as educators and scholars, the conventional white, homogenous canon does not always speak to or reflect our students' lives as working class, immigrant, multilingual, culturally diverse young people. This text set does.

While all of our chosen texts support empathy, criticality, and community engagement, we are interested in the ways empathy can lead to criticality, which then leads to community engagement. By focusing on empathy in a classroom space, we create potential to nurture students' critical consciousness as they are able to think about others' complex experiences and contexts in new ways. The combination of empathy and criticality can promote a broader understanding of the role of community in our students' lives, and a desire to engage with and in their communities.

The first text in our set is Elizabeth Acevedo's (2019) YA novel, *With the Fire on High*. Through the first-person perspective of aspiring chef Emoni, readers are invited to fully immerse themselves in her mind and life as she navigates her senior year of high school. Not only is she working her way through the year balancing work, school, family, and friends, but Emoni is the mother to two-year-old Emma, lovingly called Babygirl.

Our second text, George Takei's graphic memoir *They Called Us Enemy* (2020) seamlessly interweaves his experiences as a child in Japanese internment camps during World War II with

his future social and political activism. The visual nature of the text and the nonlinear timeline invite readers into multiple perspectives of Takei's life and experiences.

Centering many voices of young Indigenous women, the multimodal nonfiction collection *#NotYourPrincess* (Charleyboy & Leatherdale, 2017) makes use of numerous modes to cover subjects such as intergenerational trauma, sexual assault, intersectional Indigenous identity, and collective activism as a means of guaranteeing more hopeful futures for Indigenous women. The many forms of media reflect the diversity of voices of the pieces.

Next, *Ain't Burned all the Bright* (Reynolds, 2022) focuses on current and deeply rooted issues connected to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement. This visual/verse narrative, first-person poetry positions readers as quarantined at home during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic through a narrating voice who identifies as a Black son and brother. Each page is a piece of art with a single poem running throughout the text.

Finally, *On My Block* (Lungerich et al., 2019) is a YA Netflix show that centers around a group of friends (Monse, Cesar, Ruby, Jamal, and Olivia) as they navigate high school as Youth of Color living in South Central, Los Angeles. These episodes highlight realities for Youth of Color while honoring a range of multicultural identities and economic contexts.

We believe these texts' power comes from putting them in conversation with each other. Disrupting and displacing the given curriculum in a way that encourages empathy, criticality, and community engagement happens through considering a variety of voices, genres, timeframes, and modes. It does not and cannot happen looking at singular experiences.

We recommend starting *With the Fire on High* with a focus on identity and empathy. Then, thinking about historical misuse of power and privilege as highlighted in *They Called Us Enemy* positions readers to critically consider inequalities faced by the individuals and communities they meet in *#NotYourPrincess*, then in *Ain't Burned All the Bright*, and finally in *On My Block*. In each of these texts, there are multiple ways young people highlight their intersecting and fluid identities, offering opportunities for connection, care, and empathy.

Empathy

Part of engaging empathically is taking on others' perspectives. Many students will be able to take on Emoni's perspective while reading *With the Fire on High*, as she strives to balance being a student with caring for family members, applying for college, being a good friend, experiencing economic hardships, and figuring out romantic relationships. Because perspective taking is a critical precursor to the development of empathic responding (Hoffman, 2000), this type of text provides an important starting point for students in regards to promoting moral development. As Emoni attempts to balance all of the things that are important and necessary to her, she also experiences exhaustion, being overwhelmed, and anxiety. She expresses, "There are some nights I want to cry myself to sleep from how much I'm carrying, but even my eyes are too tired to make tears work properly." (Acevedo, 2019, p. 217). Students' practice taking on Emoni's perspectives can support them in building empathy for her during these heavy moments.

Another important part of reading with empathy is building understanding and showing concern for others (Hoffman, 2000). Many students will not share Emoni's identity as a mother since fewer than 5% of mothers fall into the teen category (although many students may still identify with her caregiver role). Yet, since students share other experiences with her and have built

empathy and understanding for her in other ways, students can also understand and empathize with this aspect of her life. For example, when Emoni's phone is taken away at school and she needs a signed permission slip to get it back, she reflects, "I can sign permission slips for my daughter but can't sign one for myself" (Acevedo, 2019, p. 251). Students likely can relate to this lack of agency at school, and through this connection can build empathy for Emoni's experience as a parent.

As students develop empathy for Emoni, they can engage in empathy-building activities with one another in order to build classroom community. For example, students could engage in recipe creative writing, adding narrative and context to a favorite recipe in order to share parts of their identities with one another, just as Emoni does. This practice within the classroom community supports students in empathizing with individuals in other texts.

In *#NotYourPrincess* the authors and artists showcase and evoke empathy. The Cree poet Tasha Spillet, in her entry in *#NotYourPrincess* writes "Little sister, I see you," (Charleyboy & Leatherdale, 2017, p. 102). She highlights the strength and safety that comes from being seen and understood. This poem is accompanied by Julie Flett's artwork, showing two women standing side by side looking out at the water. There is a sense of solidarity in both poetry and art. This work shows students what it means to show empathy with simple acts and invites them to engage in it.

Students will identify connections between Emoni and the narrator poet in *Ain't Burned all the Bright* as he is reflecting on the fear of COVID-19 and his father being sick. He notes, "...it feels like I'm the only person who can tell we're all suffocating" (Reynolds & Griffin, 2022). Both Emoni and the poet carry fears and weights. Students can also relate to the poet as he is constantly thinking about the world outside of his space while at home and indoors during the pandemic, something all students lived. The lack of power, connection, and feelings of safety are feelings our students can understand. In addition, this text can push students with differing intersectional identities to feel empathic emotions consistent with characters who are different from them, which is part of moral development (Hoffman, 2000). This text is purposely positioned fourth in the set to allow students to build classroom community before engaging with this heavy text.

In the television show *On My Block*, characters experience hardships of their own that readers may understand, such as loss of parental figures, gun violence exposure, and discrimination. *On My Block* also highlights other characters acting with empathy, trying to understand and show concern. For example, there is continuous tension for Cesar as he navigates gang affiliation pressures and his family's history of gang involvement. In Season One, Episode Two, Monse expresses concern for his safety, and Cesar shares "I don't want to think about dying, so I'm going to live." The friend group continually worries and tries to find understanding for Cesar, inviting viewers to develop empathy alongside them.

Finally, in *They Called Us Enemy*, Takei writes, "Justice grows out of recognition of ourselves in each other" (p. 203). As students read with empathy–greeting characters with understanding and concern, and taking on their perspectives–they see themselves in this and other texts, creating opportunities for critical engagement.

Criticality

As noted above, there are many opportunities for readers to relate to Emoni in *The Fire on High* as she explores and shares her intersectional identities. With our students, this identity work is a connection point, but also an opportunity to critically consider identities, privileges, and lived experiences (their own and others') (Duncan-Andrade, 2008). Emoni, who identifies as Afro-Puerto Rican and bilingual, is constantly placed in the position of "having to give people geography and history lessons" as her racial and cultural identities are questioned (Acevedo, 2019, p. 69). The characters in *On My Block* also discuss their identities. These conversations bring topics of privilege and oppression, especially as related to race, to the forefront for students to consider. As students engage with these conversations related to *On My Block,* they can also be asked to think about how TV can be used to represent communities, tell important stories, and entertain. In class, we recommend investigating aspects of young adult popular media such as casting choices, cultural representations, and the voices that are amplified and silenced.

Acknowledging the relationship between identity, privilege, and oppression connects to the critical work in *They Called Us Enemy*.Reading and discussing Takei's graphic memoir within a critical framework provides students with opportunities to reflect on the ways power, privilege, and wartime fear resulted in the oppression of Japanese Americans. Takei and illustrator Harmony Becker do not shy away from depicting the many moments of dehumanization Takei and his family were subjected to after Pearl Harbor, using close up visuals of the identification tags Japanese Americans were forced to wear and the horse stalls in which they were forced to sleep to illustrate how the United States government's decisions positioned people as less than human (Takei, 2020, p. 31-36). It is all the more powerful as a graphic memoir, forcing readers to confront the actions of the US government and the experiences of Japanese Americans.

Takei's memoirs offer a moving account of a young person's path toward critical awareness. One powerful example is a visually arresting page illustrating young Takei saying the pledge of allegiance along with his classmates as he is haunted by memories of watchtowers at the internment camps where he spent much of his childhood (Takei, 2020, p. 172). As a teenager, Takei acknowledges this juxtaposition explicitly, stating, "I couldn't reconcile what I read in these books about the shining ideals of democracy with what I knew to be my childhood imprisonment" (Takei, 2020, p. 173).

Like Takei's graphic memoir, Charleyboy and Leatherdale's multimodal collection, *#NotYourPrincess* offers opportunities for students to critically consider historical injustices the enacted by the United States government, in the case of this text, toward Indigenous peoples. For example, a vignette entitled "Blankets of Shame" by Métis member Maria Campbell illustrates the ways in which Indigenous people have had to protect themselves against prejudice. Campbell states, "When the government gives you something, they take all that you have in return–your pride, your dignity, all the things that make you a living soul" (Charleyboy & Leatherdale, 2017, p. 16). Campbell's vignette, along with other poems, paintings, and short memoir pieces in the collection, demonstrates the lasting effects of unjust government policies on Indigenous young women. The collection can also serve as an invitation for young people to learn more about Indigenous nations as each piece contains information about the creator's tribal membership. Like *They Called Us Enemy*, *#NotYourPrincess* invites students to critically examine how power and privilege operate to deprive minoritized peoples of basic human rights.

Ain't Burned All the Bright also highlights power, privilege, and oppression, particularly within the context of 2020, during the early days of COVID-19, Black Lives Matter protests, and the

continuation of systemic oppression of Black and Brown people in the United States. As he overhears his sister's plans to join a protest, the narrator poet writes, "...this fight for freedom aint' nothing but a fist with a face that looks like mine swinging at the wind or swinging on a swing pulling back and pushing forward and back and back…," describing the immense frustration of the way progress is made, lost, made, and lost again (Reynolds & Griffin, 2022).

This cycle of oppression in the face of white supremacy, colonizers, and others with power is explored in each of the texts in this set. It is our hope that by offering a wide range of narratives with a critical lens, students will be empowered to acknowledge and challenge the instances of oppression in this text set. Prompting students with questions such as: *whose story is this? Who benefits from this story? Whose voices are louder or quieter, amplified or silenced?* can help students to develop their critical lens as they dive into each of the texts (Reese, 2018). Importantly, promoting criticality is also tied to moral development for youth, as the ability to think critically about social constructs and oppression is often what leads to moral actions including activism (Lardier et al., 2021).

Community Engagement

Fostering criticality in readers requires that teachers support students in moving beyond analysis and towards action (Janks, 2019). While engaging with these texts, students can be invited to consider: who are the communities of the individuals we meet in the texts? How do the narrators of these texts show up for their communities? How do their communities show up for them? Emoni reflects on this type of community support as she describes the ways her community shows up for a school fundraising project. "Around the whole room I spot neighbors, block homies, 'Buela's church friends, directors from the cultural center, shop owners, all here to support a dream (Acevedo, 2019, p. 223-224). Moving from the personal to the community, this text set offers many perspectives on what it means to show up and take action.

An example of a shift from empathy towards community action comes from *On My Block's* focus on communities and neighborhoods. The show intentionally represents the ways broader systems like neighborhoods and cultural contexts shape decision-making and promote a deeper engagement with community. In Episode Three, Cesar, Olivia, and Ruby decide to trick-or-treat on Halloween in Brentwood, a high-income, predominantly white neighborhood. One of the young men from Brentwood is dressed in attire mocking East LA culture, including a fake tattoo on his face and a flat bill hat. He approaches the main characters and speaks to them in a derogatory way, setting an uncomfortable and tense climate. Cesar and Ruby are offended, and the show invites viewers to feel this alongside them, encouraging an empathic response. As the episode continues, the show builds from this empathy and characters are forced to speak out, taking critical action. When students engage in learning about the role of culture and oppression in the lives of others, they can begin to think more critically and become motivated to engage in community outreach (Lardier et al., 2021), all of which contributes to moral identity development.

As the Halloween party continues, a group of white teenagers confront Cesar, Olivia, and Ruby because Olivia took a juice out of the fridge as a party refreshment saying, "What is wrong with you people. Have a little respect." Olivia pushes back, "You people? Respect? Says the white boy dressed like a cholo." This scene illustrates cultural appropriation and ethno-racial bias. It has the potential to push students to think about culture, white privilege, and the ways bias and discrimination might be a reality for youth from minoritized communities. It offers an

opportunity for critical awareness as well as an example of speaking back to racism and protecting one's community.

The poet in *Ain't Burned All the Bright* acknowledges an important moment of community in action as part of the Black Lives Matter movement. The poet shares, "and they are talking about a protest" (Reynolds & Griffin, 2022); these words appear next to a sketch of George Floyd. The poem continues across four more full-page spreads, "and how they heard this and that, this being people from everywhere, are taking to the streets, to call out and cry out for freedom to live and freedom to laugh." There is a small painting of a bridge, visually alluding, perhaps, to protests across history, including the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The narrator continues, "at funny jokes and not-so-funny jokes like why did the chicken cross the road, to prove he wasn't no chicken, and freedom to run and be out of breath and catch it again…" These are additional references to Ahmaud Arbery, who was gunned down while out for a run and to Eric Garner's last words to officers, "I can't breathe." The visual allusions and references continue to pull readers' attention in and out of this text, challenging them to consider larger social factors outside of the book and outside of their own needs, creating community awareness (Reinders & Youniss, 2006). Students can work to model their own thinking from what Reynolds and Griffin do in their work, shifting from a personal experience towards a wider perspective. For example, while the Black Lives Matter movement may very well connect to our students' own experiences, it is a collective, community movement. We suggest digging into the origins of this movement with students alongside your reading.

#NotYourPrincess calls on students to consider how agency and community activism can be used to celebrate identity and to ensure more equitable futures for Indigenous peoples. Charleyboy and Leatherdale's collection offers multiple examples of young Indigenous women embracing their identities and social and political activism within their respective communities. Reliance on community to create platforms of agency and social activism is at work in the photo collage by various authors entitled "Digital Smoke Signals." Within this piece, snapshots of Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter feeds illustrate how Indigenous women utilize social media as a tool to reach and unite global communities to "take action, take notice, or take a stand" (Charleyboy & Leatherdale, 2017, p. 85). *#NotYourPrincess*'s focus on cultural revitalization and community activism provides opportunities for students to think critically about how to come together and take action within their own communities, and by doing so, to envision their communities' needs and work towards achieving them. A first step in this work could be creating a class collection of short, multimodal memoir pieces, using *#NotYourPrincess* as a model text.

Finally, Takei's entire text models the trajectory of empathy to critical reflection to community engagement. He narrates much of the text through the perspective of his younger self, helping students to see themselves in him. He uses visual and textual memories to illustrate his own path towards critical consciousness and his growing awareness of the ways in which power, race, and fear resulted in the imprisonment of 120,000 individuals of Japanese ancestry while seamlessly interweaving his experiences as a child with his future social and political activism.

Reading and seeing Takei's growing understanding of the ways power and privilege worked to disadvantage and harm his family has the potential to invite students to critically reflect on how this has or has not happened in their own communities. *They Called Us Enemy* highlights injustices beyond the internment of Japanese Americans, illustrating the plight faced by Trump's ban on immigration from Muslim countries as well as ongoing conditions faced by immigrant

children in detention centers. While reading, students and teachers can pose questions about other internment camp experiences (See Sakoi & Sung, 2019). There are also opportunities to follow Takei's activism for the LGBTQ community. Reading Takei's memoir can help students disrupt the misconception that injustice is a thing of the past, a realization that is a key component to a critical understanding of how power, privilege, and oppression continue to operate in their communities. As students engage with these themes, they can consider their own neighborhoods, schools, and the changes they hope to see and be a part of. Investigating and connecting with local activists' movements, neighborhood businesses, or leaders comes next.

In Practice

As noted above, we have a recommended reading order if one is considering using all of these texts across a school year. However, each text does important work, as part of a set and on its own. This set could also be organized as part of literature circles, where one or two of these texts could serve as anchor texts (we would recommend *With the Fire on High* and *On My Block*), while the rest can be choices for literature circles. We also hope that this set might serve as inspiration for educators building their own sets, drawing from a range of voice, genre, media, and narrative techniques.

We recommend creating guiding or essential questions around these central themes alongside students. In the past, our students have created questions like: *How are voice and agency impacted by community and identity?* See Table 1 for examples of questions that could guide your classroom space into one that focuses on empathy, criticality, and community.

Additionally, reading across this set or others like it can encourage students to consider the modes and methods in which texts come to readers. As educators, we can encourage young people to read and ask questions like: *How does the medium support this narrative? What impact does image or sound have to the overall message*? *What do you think the author/artist does effectively to present this message? What works and what doesn't for me, as a reader? Why? How does this text serve the community it represents?*

Table One: Essential Questions for Our Text Set

Empathy	What is something you wish other people knew or understood about you?
	How might you share or explain important parts of yourself to someone else?
	Do you see instances of shared understandings with characters as you read?
Criticality	When do you get to make decisions for yourself ? When don't you?

	Who makes decisions for you and how does that impact you?
	How do you see this happening in other spaces?
Community	How might you describe your community to an outsider?
	How do your experiences in your community connect/disconnect to one of the communities you are reading about?

As we think about student response, we also encourage educators to emphasize multimodal composing and collaborative group projects, especially for summative work. Our students have collaged, made visual maps, annotated pages with words and images, written poetry, or selected a medium, using a multimodal text as a mentor text. When working individually, students can draw on their own powerful and personal narratives. But we also make space to work collaboratively, so that students can continue to listen to multiple perspectives and work through questions and larger themes as a collective.

Conclusions

In creating this YA text set, we hope to offer practicing educators and their students the opportunity to engage with a variety of voices, mediums, and experiences, holding closely to our belief that YA lit can speak to our students, honoring their lived experiences authentically. We feel that this set encourages young adults to develop the skills needed to empathize with characters who have similar experiences to their own, but also with those whose lives are starkly different (Sims Bishop, 1990). Our hope is that this set invites students to critically consider inequalities faced by individuals with diverse identities while also providing examples of how to envision more hopeful futures for communities through agency and social activism.

This set is only a beginning. We must continue to hold ourselves accountable for the texts our students have access to, the texts that get time and energy in our classrooms, and what texts we recommend and celebrate. Teaching and reading with the goal to prioritize empathy, criticality and community acknowledges the *power* in the voices of educators and youth–a power that makes engaging with YA lit deeply transformative.

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PORTRAYAL IN THEIR PAGES: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF FLORIDA'S 2021-2022 AND 2022-2023 GRADES 3-5 SUNSHINE STATE AWARD BOOK LIST

VIA LIPMAN

Abstract

The importance of diverse and inclusive representations in children's literature is a common theme amongst preexisting studies in the field of youth literature. This study sought to answer the following question: How do SSYRA texts integrate diverse perspectives into its texts, and has this representation been impacted by systematic censorship? Thematic analysis was employed to understand representation in four categories: racial representation, family structure, gender conformity, and socioeconomic diversity. Numerical and qualitative data were synthesized to get a fuller and more comprehensive view of the diversity in the novels. Analysis showed that the novels after the passage of "Don't Say Gay" and "Stop W.O.K.E." did not change their levels of inclusivity and even improved upon the previous year's. This study highlights the importance of diligently screening books for positive representations before being promoted to children and paves the way for progress to be made in working to further diversify characters and plots in youth novels. It also suggests the purely performative nature of recent discriminatory legislation and shows the little impact it has on inclusive education.

Portrayal in Their Pages: An Intersectional Analysis of Florida's 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Grades 3-5 Sunshine State Award Book List

Introduction

Almost every K-8 student in Florida is exposed to the Sunshine State Young Readers Awards (SSYRA) book lists, a decades-long and highly successful reading program co-sponsored by the Florida Association for Media in Education (FAME) and the Florida Department of Education. While some schools require reading selections from the list and others use it as a way to encourage students to pursue reading for fun, the SSYRA titles are a key part of many students' English Language Arts education. The SSYRA novels, colloquially known as "the Sunshine States," consist of 30 well-chosen middle grade novels divided into two equal lists: the Grades 3-5 and the Grades 6-8. Elementary students are encouraged and/or expected to individually read selections from their respective lists and participate in in-school activities relating to the novels,

reading a higher quantity from the year's list as they move through the grades. This program functions to encourage and inspire a love of reading for young children in the Florida public school systems. Although the SSYRA program began 1983, the impact of the book list remains just as relevant almost 40 years later.

There are 6 requirements that readers and committee members take into consideration (Page, 2021). The books must

  • be fiction;
  • be originally copyrighted within the three years preceding selection;
  • be age-appropriate for either grades 3-5 or grades 6-8;
  • be the first in a series (if it is part of a series);
  • have literary merit and appeal to young readers; and,
  • have received a favorable review in at least one of the professional
    reviewing publications.

Because the SSYRA books are a statewide program to encourage reading and are presented to the approximately 750,000 grades 3-5 students in the Florida public school system, they must be selected with the utmost diligence (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021).

Studies (e.g., Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003; Yokota, 2009) regarding the encouragement of tolerance through an inclusive curriculum in schools have demonstrated that a more diverse reading list can further a sense of acceptance among peers and allow all students to see themselves represented within their materials—fostering a sense of self-confidence and self-validity in all respects. These tremendously positive effects from reading diverse literature puts it at the utmost importance for schools to include.

Thus, analysis of these pieces of literature is crucial. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the diversity of representation of characters and themes in the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Florida Sunshine State Award reading lists for elementary school grades 3-5. Inspiration was taken from Lester's (2013) analysis of queer-themed picture books through the lenses of (1) race relations and representations; (2) socioeconomic class diversity; (3) character gender conformity; and (4) various family structures.

The study is also rooted in the concept of intersectionality, the interconnectedness between social categorizations (e.g., race, gender). Further, it touches on themes of critical race theory—a way of challenging white[1] privilege and exposing the systematic racism that is present in our society—as well as queer and feminist theory—a means of examining the inherent correlation between gender, sexuality, and oppression (George, 2021; Marinucci, 2016). This study also touched on tenets of Marxist theory—a lens to explore the struggle between economic classes— to assess the categories under analysis (Wolff & Leopald, 2021). These themes are significant as they contribute to the creation of a more inclusive list of suggested reading material from the state.

Although large amounts of information on inclusivity of young adult books is readily available (e.g., Davis, et al., 2005; Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003; Yokota, 2009), there have been no previous studies on the SSYRA book lists, and even more specifically, the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 lists. This specific research is important to the field as Florida's children are an especially

vulnerable group to grow up around hate and intolerance toward minority groups (e.g., NAACP, 2023). Recent legislation in Florida has aimed to eliminate conversations around race and gender. Florida House Bill 7 (2022), colloquially known as the "Stop W.O.K.E. Act," characterizing discussion of and materials about systemic racism as anti-white discrimination, went into effect in the summer of 2022. Simultaneously, Florida House Bill 1557 (2022), or the "Don't Say Gay" bill, eliminating class discussion about sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade, was adopted. This new censorship of curricula and books in schools contributes to the exigency of research surrounding Florida's curriculum (Solochek, 2022). Through providing inclusive literature, children can un-learn the hateful ideologies present around them (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016). Because the new legislation aimed at erasing diversity education in classrooms went into effect between the time of the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 book lists, this research seeks to understand whether the new Florida laws influenced book selection titles and the way underrepresented identities are presented to children through their school literature.

Literature Review

Lester's (2013) research on queer-themed picture books concluded that misrepresentations and stereotypes are present in even the most intentionally inclusive titles. Characters represented in the 68 picture books studied were predominantly white, largely in the upper middle class, conformed to gender norms, and in the typical nuclear family structure (Lester, 2013). Multiple studies have supported Lester's findings of a lack of diversity in areas including race, class, gender conformity, and family structure (Crisp et al, 2016; Koss, 2015; Lo, 2019; Qarini, 2022). The following sections are organized around these ideas.

Race

Multiracial representation in children's literature has been studied extensively in the past (e.g., Davis, et al., 2005; Lester, 2013; Rodriguez, 2018). Consistently, white characters are overrepresented in children's texts and characters of color make up the slim minority, if present at all. Additionally, characters of color are more often of ambiguous race than a clear representation of any racial minority group (Lester, 2013). There continues to be a vast underrepresentation of Asian and Latinx characters, culture, and stories in children's literature (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Rodriguez & Kim, 2018). When they are represented, they often end up either having only superficial associations to their culture or are portrayed with racist stereotypes and harmful misrepresentations (Rodriguez & Kim, 2018). Novels with diverse racial representation have been known to regularly "whitewash" characters of color by relying on typical Eurocentric gender roles and perspectives. They privilege the English language, even in bilingual text, and assume the presence of a utopian society, where systematic racism and oppression do not impact the characters in any way (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016). A recent study also shows that not only are non-white characters rarely the central character, but it is almost four times as likely to see an animal main character than a Black human main character (Center for Literacy in Primary Education, 2021). This startling statistic highlights the true extremity of the issue of racial representation in some of the reading material of today's youth.

According to the 2020 US Census Bureau evaluation, Black people make up 14.5% of Florida's population, Hispanic and Latino people amount to 26.6%, and people of other races add up to 3.1% of Floridians (United States Census Bureau, 2020). These statistics shed light on the importance of representation in Florida schools. Because such a significant portion of Florida's population is people of color, schools need to encourage diversity of thought and provide uniquely inclusive education in order to recognize the nearly half of Florida's residents who are non-white.

Class

There is not as much scholarship on the topic of socioeconomic class diversity in children's literature as compared to other concepts. This is likely because, as a few researchers have lamented (e.g., Jones, 2008; Niro, 2020), the representation of socioeconomic and class diversity remains regrettably limited even though diversity in children's books has become increasingly widespread in the past decade. To this day, this particular subsection of social diversity is the most overlooked aspect of inclusive literature (Niro, 2020). Furthermore, when characters of poor backgrounds are present in the storylines, there continues to be themes of white saviorism, victimization, or inauthentic representations of poverty present in the books (Niro, 2020).

The clear void of children's literature that prominently features working-class and poor families, classism, and structural understandings about money and power, adds to the "invisibility" that families in poverty already feel. Including representations of working-class and poor families in literature can, if correctly executed, work against the marginalization of lower socioeconomic classes. Books have the capacity to produce discourse through societal lenses, however, when discussions about social classes are limited and/or nonexistent in children's literature, they restrict discussion, conceptualization, and societal normalization of class diversity (Jones, 2008).

As of 2021, 13.4% of Americans live below the poverty line, and even more specifically, 14.0% in Florida (DePietro, 2021). Scholars weighing in on the subject all suggest the essential requirement that every American, despite their social class, should be able to find their existence within books, in order to properly validate their lives and their unique perspectives (Jones, 2008; Niro, 2020).

Gender Conformity

Research on the reinforcement of gender conformity and upholding of gender roles in youth literature has shown that although large advances have been made on the acceptability of girls eschewing traditionally feminine gender roles (e.g., being assertive, not wearing dresses, taking an interest in hard sciences), boys in novels remain hyper-masculinized and are ostracized for any presented differences in gender expression that are deemed as 'girly' (Lester, 2013).

This connects clearly to books' representations of LGBTQ youth. Historically, there has been little to no positive representation of queer youth in young adult literature where their queerness and associated negative experiences are not central to the novel (Nam et al., 2023). Additionally, even in specifically LGBTQ literature, almost no representations of gender-nonconforming or bisexual+ (including other non-straight, non-gay identities) are included (DePalma, 2016). The

strong desire to put all characters into clear fitting boxes of conformity versus nonconformity and gay versus straight in a type of 'either/or' dichotomy is offensive and ultimately exclusive to large populations of today's students, especially those who are still discovering the nuances of their own sexualities and identities. The societal impulse to put all characters into rigid identity categories increases the pressure for students to self-label.

Bickmore (1999), through her multiple studies of LGBTQ children's literature, argues that children's understandings and attitudes about the world around them are formed by the stories to which they are exposed. For young children, educators must start with non-judgmental literature and curricula that teach children about homosexuality and gender identity at a young age, because misinformation is rampant and can plague kids at an early age. By doing this, children can become "unaccustomed" to excluding certain members of their classrooms, and, as a sort of "mini society" kids can make their classroom (and by doing so, themselves) tolerant and accepting spaces to children who are previously defined by their "otherness" in terms of gender performance (p. 22).

Family Structure

Almost all children's books favor nuclear family types with an emphasis on heteronormativity, the idea of one mother and one father running a household, and repronarrativity (Lester, 2013). Repronarrativity, referring to the idea people must produce and raise children to find fulfillment in their lives, can be invalidating to those either raised in a non-heteronormative household, non-typical household (with community parenting, grandparents as guardians, etc.), or children who may grow up to not want children at all (Warner, 1991). A 2013 study by Randolph examined the 2007-2012 Children's Choice Award Books, a supposed beacon of inclusivity and quality representation in the youth literature world, for their portrayal of family structures. Her research found that, as predicted, the vast majority of families were a heterosexual two parent family, followed by a limited showing of single-parent families, and only a single title representing a grandparent-as-parent family (Randolph, 2013). However, there was a complete absence of any other types of families, including blended families, same-sex parent families, extended families, and cooperative families. The lack of diversity present in the Children's Choice Award Books is indicative of a larger problem in the education systems where family structure diversity does not receive the attention it deserves and needs.

In a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, findings confirmed that fewer than half (46%) of US children are living in a "traditional" family with two married heterosexual parents in their first marriage (Livingston, 2014). This statistic, consistent in the state of Florida, directly contrasts with the negligible representations of diverse families in past textual analyses of children's books and illuminates the unfair societal stigmatization of non-traditional family structures.

Methods

As with any qualitative research, my findings are not free from bias. This research is deeply informed by my own experiences as a student who grew up in Florida and who cares intensely about the state of diversity in school curricula. I strongly believe that children should all have

access to authentic representative and intersectional reading materials and that literary censorship has no place in classrooms. Children should have exposure to different perspectives and marginalized identities in order to promote ideologies of inclusion and combat racism, classism, homophobia, ableism, and sexism, in addition to all other forms of oppression. I was brought to this topic as someone who attributes a lifelong love of reading to my childhood participation in the SSYRA program. This study sought to answer the following question: How do SSYRA texts integrate diverse perspectives into its texts, and has this representation been impacted by systematic censorship? I approach this question as a white, cisgender, able-bodied student with a background in anti-censorship and LGBTQ+ rights advocacy and strive to remain attuned to that positionality by questioning the assumptions I am making about what I see in the data to ensure that my perspective isn't the only one amplified by this research. To address this research question, I engage in thematic analysis (Beach et al., 2009) of representation in four categories: racial representation, family structure, gender conformity, and socioeconomic diversity. Thematic analysis is a flexible research method for analyzing texts that interprets material through a process of coding text with a pre-determined set of themes, which act as questions that guide the course of the data collection (Beach et al., 2009). Thematic analysis is used when researchers want to examine the repetitive nature of certain subjects in works. This method is frequently used in studies centered on children's literature (e.g., Roberts et al., 2023), allowing this study to easily fit in with the community of practice. This section provides an overview of the texts selected for analysis, the data analysis process, and a consideration of the limitations of this study.

Data Sources

Data was collected from the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 SSYRA grades 3-5 lists. The SSYRA list is the most widespread reading list in the state of Florida and therefore reaches the largest number of students. Additionally, the Florida House Bill 1557 (2022) legislation specifically impacts classroom curricula in grades Kindergarten through third grade, mandating "Classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not age appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students" (p. 4). Analyzing the Grades 3-5 list from the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 captured texts immediately before and immediately after both Florida House Bills were adopted.

Tables 1 and 2 below present brief plot summaries of all titles analyzed. The summaries come from the SSYRA book list for Grades 3-5 for the years of 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 published by the Florida Association of Media in Education (2021).

Table 1. Summaries of the 2021-2022 SSYRA Books

Title	Plot Summary
Amelia Six by Kristen L Gray	Eleven-year-old Amelia (Millie) doesn't realize just how much adventure awaits her when she's given the opportunity of a lifetime: to spend the night in Amelia Earhart's childhood home with five other girls. Once at Amelia's house in Atchison, Kansas, Millie stumbles upon a display of Amelia's famous flight goggles. But her luck changes quickly when the

	goggles disappear, and Millie was the last to see them. It's up to the Amelia Six to find the culprit and return the goggles to their rightful place.
Black Brother, Black Brother by Jewell Parker Rhodes	As one of the few Black boys at Middlefield Prep, most of the students don't look like Donte. They don't like him either. When an incident leads to his arrest and suspension, he knows the only way to get even is to beat the king of the school at his own game: fencing. Donte embarks on a journey to carve out a spot on Middlefield Prep's fencing team and maybe learn something about himself along the way.
Charlie & Frog by Karen Kane	Charlie heads into the village where an old woman gives him a desperate message in sign language, then suddenly disappears. All Francine (aka Frog) wants is to be the world's greatest detective. Frog, who is Deaf, would jumps at the chance to tackle a real-life case. Together, Charlie and Frog set out to decipher a series of clues and uncover the truth behind the missing woman's mysterious message.
The Disaster Days by Rebecca Behrens	Hannah loves living on a tiny island. It's a little disconnected from the outside world, but she's always felt completely safe there. Which is why when she's asked one day to babysit after school, she thinks it's no big deal. Then the shaking begins. The terrifying earthquake only lasts four minutes but it changes everything, damaging the house, knocking out the power, and making cell service nonexistent. Hannah and the youngsters are stranded and alone with Hannah in charge, as things go from bad to dangerous.
A Field Gide to Getting Lost by Joy McCullough	Sutton is having robot problems. She must have gotten something wrong in the coding. Luis spends his days writing thrilling stories about brave kids, but there's only so much inspiration you can find when you're stuck inside all day—allergic and afraid. Sutton and Luis couldn't be more different from each other. Except now that their parents are dating, these two have to find some common ground. Will they be able to navigate their way through life?
Following Baxter by Barbara Kerley	Jordie has been waiting forever for someone to move in next door, so she is thrilled when Professor Reece arrives: she has a laboratory in her basement and an extraordinary dog named Baxter—who seems to understand everything Jordie says. She begins walking Baxter and helping Professor Reese in the lab. But being lab assistant ends up being more than Jordie bargained for and leads her to an unexpected secret. When Professor Reece goes missing, it is up to Jordie to use her smarts and Baxter's magical powers to find her. Will they be able to save Professor Reece before it's too late?
From the Desk of Zoe Washington by Janae Marks	What does a girl say to the father she's never met and who's been in prison for a terrible crime? A crime he says he never committed. Zoe is determined to uncover the truth. Even if it means hiding his letters and her investigation from the rest of her family. With bakery confections on one part of her mind, and her father on the other, this is one recipe Zoe doesn't know how to balance. The only thing she knows to be true: Everyone lies.

The Great Pet Heist by Emily Ecton	Butterbean knew she wasn't always a good dog. Then her owner, Mrs. Food, fell in the hallway. Now Butterbean and her fellow pets (Oscar the mynah bird, Walt the cat, and rats Marco and Polo), have to come up with a plan to support themselves. When they discover a mysterious man in their building who seems to have lots of loot, they plan a heist. Can these animal friends pull off the heist of the century?
How to Test a Friendship by Theanne Griffith	Violet and Pablo are best friends who love science! So when they discover a riddle that opens a magic portal in the Science Space at school, they can't wait to check it out! Along with their new classmate, Deepak, the friends discover a magical makerspace called the Maker Maze. It's a laboratory full of robots, 3D printers, an antigravity chamber, and more. Doors line the walls of the makerspace, with a new science adventure waiting behind each one.
The Incredibly Dead Pets of Rex Dexter by Aaron Reynolds	Rex Dexter is itching to have a dog but ends up with a pet chicken. One hour and fourteen minutes later, the chicken is dead, Rex is cursed, and wild animal ghosts are haunting Rex's room. Rex's uninvited ghostly guests are a chatty, messy bunch. And they need Rex to solve their mysterious deadly departures from the Middling Falls Zoo before it happens again. But how?
Midnight at the Barclay Hotel by Fleur Bradley	When JJ's mom accepts an invitation to a weekend getaway at the Barclay Hotel, he never imagined that he'd find himself in the midst of a murder mystery. When he arrives at the Barclay Hotel and his mother is blamed for the hotel owner's death, he realizes his weekend is going to be anything but ordinary. Now he must track down a killer, clear his mother's name, and maybe even meet a ghost or two along the way.
The Newspaper Club by Beth Vrabel	There are rumors of vandalism and attacks at the only park in town. Something is happening at the park, but what? All of the fake online news and rumors are clouding the truth. Nellie wants to break the story— and break free from the front yard — but she can't do it alone. She needs a whole club if she's going to start the Cub Report, the town's first independent newspaper. Creating a newspaper from scratch is going to be tough; but for Nellie, making friends is even harder.
Roll With It by Jamie Sumner	Ellie's a girl who tells it like it is. That surprises some people, who see a kid in a wheelchair and think she's going to be all sunshine and cuddles. The thing is, Ellie has big dreams: one day she's going to be a professional baker. But when Ellie and her mom move so they can help take care of her grandpa, Ellie has to start all over again in a new town at a new school. Except she's not just the new kid—she's the new kid in the wheelchair who lives in the trailer park on the wrong side of town.
The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez by Adrianna Cuevas	Nestor doesn't want anyone find out his deepest secret: that he can talk to animals. But when the animals in his new town start disappearing, Nestor's grandmother becomes the prime suspect. Nestor learns that they are being seized by a tule vieja—a witch who can absorb an animal's powers by biting it during a solar eclipse. And the next eclipse is just around the corner…Now it's up to Nestor's extraordinary ability and his

	new friends to catch the tule vieja—and save a place he might just call home.
Wish Upon a Sleepover by Suzanne Selfors	Leilani is planning to host the best sleepover in the history of the world. But her grandmother accidentally sends the invitations to the "do NOT invite" list and now Leilani is stuck hosting a group of kids she can't stand. This is sure to be the worst sleepover in the history of the world. Or...maybe the unexpected will happen.

Table 2. Summaries of the 2022-2023 SSYRA Books

Title	Plot Summary
Amari and the Night Brothers by B.B. Alston	Amari Peters has never stopped believing that her missing brother is still alive, no matter what others say. That's why, when she finds an invitation for a tryout at the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs, she goes, even though now she has to deal with magicians, fairies, aliens, and other supernatural creatures. It would be easy to give up, especially with everyone thinking she's the enemy and there's an evil magician on the loose, but Amari will do anything to find her missing brother.
The Beast and the Bethany by Jack Meggitt-Phillips	Ebenezer Tweezer is beautiful– and 511 years old. His secret is the monster in his house. He feeds the monster rare items and in exchange gets magical potions. But now the monster wants to eat a child. The child, Bethany, is very rude and obnoxious, but Ebenezer is starting to have second thoughts about feeding her to the monster. What if Ebenezer wants to be her friends instead?
Ben Yokoyama and the Cookie of Doom by Matthew Swanson	Live each day as if it were your last. Ben's fortune cookie changes his life. He creates a bucket list of what he wants to do with his life. But with his new tasks and dreams come new fears, risks, and plenty of trouble— all which may interfere with things like building a 1000 piece model and eating an entire cake. Ben's new way of living life may just lead to new friendships and new apple pies to be baked.
Carry Me Home by Janet Fox	Twelve-year-old Lulu and her little sister Serena have a secret. They are homeless. And their dad has disappeared. Lulu will try her best to be responsible for her family—and try to keep their situation a secret. One mistake and Lulu and Serena will be separated. One mistake and Lulu's life that she has been creating in her town and in her school will be over. Who can Lulu trust? Can anyone be trusted to save her and Serena? Can anyone be trusted to find their father?
Distress Signal by Mary E. Lambert	Lavender's class trip to a national park is not going well. First, she is stuck in a group with her ex-best friend, a mean girl, and an odd boy. Then, disaster strikes. There is a flash flood. The four students are separated from their school and lost in the desert. They will need to put aside their differences if they want to survive.
J.D. and the Great Barber Battle by J. Dillard	J.D. learns that he has a natural talent for cutting hair after his mom gives him the worst haircut of his life. Soon he is making money running a barbershop from his bedroom. But when Henry Jr. (the owner of the only official barbershop in town) tries to shut him down, there is only one thing

	left to do. How do you solve who is the best barber in town? With the Great Barber Battle!
Julieta and the Diamond Enigma by Luisana Duarte Armendariz	Julieta is so excited to finally visit Paris. She arrives with her art-handler dad and immediately takes in the sights, but when they get to the Louvre, they walk in on a thief stealing a priceless cursed diamond. The thief gets away and—worse yet—Julieta's dad is the main suspect! Can Julieta catch the real diamond thief before it's too late?
Katie the Catsitter by Colleen AF Venable	Everyone is off at summer camp, except for Katie. She and her mom don't have enough money to send her. Unless she earns the money herself! Katie gets a job catsitting for her mysterious neighbor Madeline. Madeline's 217 cats are not what you would call normal. And why is Madeline out the exact time the city's famous supervillain is committing crimes? Can Katie save her friendships, solve a mystery, AND take care of 217 cats???
Leonard (My Life as a Cat) by Carlie Sorosiak	When Olive rescues a cat from a flood, she learns that Leonard the cat is really Leonard the alien. Leonard was attempting to come to Earth as a human and learn human things (bowling, hosting a dinner party, how to hold an umbrella). But now, not only will he not get those experiences, if he doesn't make it from South Carolina to Yellowstone National Park soon, he will miss his ride home.
The Lion of Mars by Jennifer L Holm	Bell has spent all 11 years of her life on Mars. She often wonders why she is not allowed to contact any of the other colonies on the planet. Then, when all of the adults on her colony are sick with a virus, it is up to Bell to save her colony, and maybe even unite the entire planet of Mars.
Measuring Up by Lily LaMotte	Cici has just moved from Taiwan to Seattle. The only thing she wants more than new friends is to fly her A-ma to Seattle for her 70th birthday. But a plane ticket is very expensive. Cici's plan is to win the prize money in a kids cooking contest. Unfortunately Cici only knows how to cook Taiwanese food. Can Cici make friends, win the cooking contest, and celebrate with her A-ma?
The Million Dollar Race by Matthew Ross Smith	Grant is fast. Real fast. So he is very excited when a sneaker company announces a world-wide competition to find the fastest kid. But it won't be easy. His strange parents never got him a birth certificate, so he may not be allowed to compete. Grant wants to win, but at what cost? He may have to invent his own country. He may have to knock his best friend out of the competition. What is Grant willing to sacrifice to be the fastest kid in the world?
Mystery on Magnolia Circle by Kate Klise	Best friends Ivy and Teddy are having the WORST summer. Ivy broke her leg and Teddy's dog died. But when Ivy witnessed what might be a burglary, things get a lot more interesting. Who are the criminals? Could a classmate be involved? More mysteries await as Ivy and Teddy save their summer.
Shirley & Jamila Save Their Summer by Gillian Goetz	Jamila is bored and in a new city. Then she meets Shirley. Sure, Shirley is a bit odd, but it is a long summer. They might as well be friends. When a boy named Oliver begs Shirley to help him find his missing gecko, Jamila discovers that Shirley is the neighborhood's best detective. Even better,

	Jamila finds that she too has crime-solving skills. Can they solve some mysteries? And save their crumbling friendship in the process?
Stella by McCall Hoyle	Stella had a great job as a bomb-sniffing dog. But when she made a mistake and there was an explosion, Stella's anxiety forced her to retire. When a girl named Chloe adopts Stella, it is an opportunity for the dog to prove her worth. Stella discovers she can smell when Chloe is about to have a seizure. Can Stella become a new kind of service dog and save Chloe's life?

Data Analysis

The texts were read and analyzed twice: first to familiarize myself with the plot and a second time through the lenses of *race, class, gender conformity, and family structure* described earlier. Results from the textual analysis are presented in an organizational chart further in this paper, as well as being detailed later in the narrative, underneath the headings of Race, Class, Gender Conformity, and Family Structure.

I reread and highlighted lines from the selected texts that relate to the respective themes from my predetermined coding scheme. The next step was to compile highlighted lines for a complete data set of quotes and descriptions of plot lines. Unimportant and/or extraneous quotes that didn't fully answer the questions or were repetitive were weeded out. Lastly, I analyzed patterns in my data in order to draw conclusions detailed later in my research.

I read each piece of literature and took note primarily of plotlines or dialogue that centered on diversity in the form of racial issues, socioeconomic class struggles, breaches of gender conformity, and presence of "nontraditional" family structures, specifically looking for representation in the central characters and their family. Although I took note of inclusive peripheral characters, my results do not focus on them and will only briefly summarize peripheral character situations. I itemized the data collected in this way and found patterns in the inclusion of these themes in the examined texts. All notes can be found in Appendix A.

The questions, inspired by Lester's (2013) research, that guided my research and form my coding scheme are outlined in Figure 1.

Race:

➢ Are the characters of color represented as central or peripheral characters?

➢ What is the ratio of white characters to POC?

➢ How is racism discussed?

➢ Are the children characters aware of racism in their society?

Socioeconomic Class:

➢ Is money ever discussed?

➢ How are lower-class families represented?

➢ Are the characters aware of financial divides?

Gender Conformity:

➢ How are the female and male characters presented?

➢ Do the characters' behaviors align with stereotypical gender norms?

➢ Do their interests break gender norms?

Family Structure:

➢ Nuclear family type vs. others present? (Single parent/ same-sex parent/ grandparent inclusion/etc.)

Fig. 1. Guiding Questions

Results and Discussion

This study sought to understand how recent SSYRA books represent diversity and inclusivity through a holistic intersectionality approach. Findings regarding the four themes and corresponding intersectionality are presented by year and then summarized.

2021-2022 Book List

Race

In order to analyze racial diversity, characters were categorized by their race using the same categories as those seen on the U.S. Census (United States Census Bureau, 2020): Black, White, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Native American/Indigenous, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Non-white characters were examined to find examples of more powerful cultural integration into the plot of the novel as well as character self-awareness. Five of the 15 novels (*Black Brother, Black Brother; From the Desk of Zoe Washington; How to Test a Friendship; The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez;* and *Wish Upon a Sleepover)* featured non-white central characters along with

two additional titles portraying non-white peripheral characters: *The Newspaper Club* and *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. However, an awareness of racism from the central characters, a key distinction of a positive depiction of racial diversity (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016), only appeared in two of the novels: *Black Brother, Black Brother* and *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*. These two texts offered the highest level of race representation through direct communication with the reader about race-related issues. Both address racism through current events. *Black Brother, Black Brother*, for example, discusses a recent history of racial discrimination in America:

> This is how it starts. Bias. Racism. Plain and simple. Philadelphia, cops called on black men meeting in Starbucks. Portland, cops called on a hotel guest talking on his cell phone with his mother. That's not the worst of it. Cleveland, Tamir Rice playing with his toy gun, killed. Twelve and he's dead. Boys. Men. It's everywhere. Everywhere (Rhodes, 2021, p. 24).

This presentation of heavy topics indicates that the novel, despite being targeted for elementary schoolers, aimed to raise awareness about real-life racial issues as well as properly represent the weight of the real-world topics. Furthermore, *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* gives readers a more specific view of the racism involved in America's criminal justice system:

> I stared at another chart that showed the different races of the people the Innocence Project helped. Most of them were Black. Of course. I knew about the Black Lives Matter movement, how Black people all over the country were getting shot by the police for no reason (Marks, 2020, p. 102).

This sheds light on the fact that today's youth are aware of racism's prevalence and severity across America—a reality that is fortunately reflected in the reading material given to children of color, to validate their lives, and to white kids, in order to educate them about the harsh truths of the non-white experience.

Class

Categorizing central characters by socioeconomic class proved to be difficult as the distinctions between the typical Upper Class, Upper Middle Class, Lower Middle Class, Working Class, and Poor categories are extremely nuanced and require more information than can be attained from context clues in elementary school novels (Niro, 2020). In order to determine a level of economic privilege, I grouped the character families into three divisions: those who do not worry about money, those who consider money when making decisions, and those who clearly worry about money. Roughly a half of the novels featured families that either considered or worried about money on a frequent basis (see Table 5).

For example, in *The Amelia Six*, readers learn from the very beginning of the story that Amelia's father recently made a "six-hundred-buck" (p. 7) purchase that he has been fretting over for multiple months (Gray, 2020). Because of this, she was cautious to ever ask him for money for activities she wanted to do.

Roll With It portrays the most extreme example of financial insecurity. Ellie, a teenage girl who needs a wheelchair, struggles to pay for medicine and other medical care. She and her single mother are forced to go live with her grandparents in their trailer for the duration of the novel. This text illustrates the insights and awareness the other kids from the trailer park have about their economic situations and the intersection between that and their societal social standing.

> There's us…and then there's them…the trailer park kids and the townies…Doesn't matter what it is. But there's always some place that separates the weird from the normal, the poor from the rich, the white trash from the middle class (Sumner, 2019, p. 134).

This text depicts children's perceptivity to the subtleties of class relations. With a more widespread approach to representing impoverished individuals, this technique can work to break down the stigmatization of poorer families in society (Jones, 2008).

Gender Conformity

Determining characters' adherence to gender stereotypes was based on whether the character's interests and behaviors were uncommon for their gender (e.g., emotional boys, science-oriented girls) (Hentschel et al., 2019). Three of the novels featured nonconformist central characters: *The Amelia Six*, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, and *The Newspaper Club*.

For instance, Amelia, the central character in *The Amelia Six*, admits to her Rubik's Cube hobby: "Not many girls cube. Even fewer compete" (Gray, 2020, p. 9). This immediately sets her apart from typical gender norms as she acknowledges from the beginning of her story that she sees differences between herself and the typical girl. Similarly, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* presents the story of Sutton, a girl whose passion is coding robots. She often dreams of attaining the same coding fame that teenage boys could in her favorite science magazine: "The magazine article only featured boys, though, and Sutton had pinned it to wall above her bed for motivation. She was going to be featured in an article like that one day. Maybe one day soon" (McCullough, 2020, p. 33). Her drive to exceed gender-based expectations already pushes her outside the box of gender conformity.

Although these examples highlight positive differences, other novels portray characters who clearly conform to gender stereotypes. Leilani, the central character of *Wish Upon a Sleepover*, longs for popularity, is often called a "drama queen" (p. 68) by her mother and is obsessed with hiding any difference that will make her stand out (Selfors, 2018). Another example of gender conformity is Donte from *Black Brother, Black Brother* who informs readers that he gets really angry sometimes and has urges to take this anger out by physically fighting other students (Rhodes, 2020). This shows a lack of emotional sensitivity and toxic masculinity that reinforces stereotypes for men. These counterexamples to an overall gender nonconformity of characters in the book list imply that more work needs to be done in the representation of gender stereotypes in youth literature, especially considering a complete lack of nonbinary and trans characters present within the novels.

Family Structure

Categories taken directly from the U.S. Census Bureau were used to categorize family structures. A diverse family structure, for the purposes of this research, includes any family that differs from the nuclear family structure, such as single parent families, grandparent families, second marriage families, blended families, same-sex parent families, extended families, co-custody families (divorced families), and nuclear families. Nine of the 15 novels feature a non-nuclear family structure—a surprising display of diversity. The results are listed below in Table 3.

Table 3. Family Structures Represented in the SSYRA 2021-2022 List

Title	Family Structure
The Amelia Six	Single parent
Black Brother, Black Brother	Nuclear
Charlie & Frog	Grandparent
The Disaster Days	Nuclear
A Field Guide to Getting Lost	Co-custody
Following Baxter	Co-custody
From the Desk of Zoe Washington	Second marriage
The Great Pet Heist*	-
How to Test a Friendship	Nuclear
The Incredibly Dead Pets of Rex Dexter	Nuclear
Midnight at the Barclay Hotel	Nuclear
The Newspaper Club	Single parent
Roll With It	Single parent
The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez	Extended
Wish Upon a Sleepover	Extended

* Does not fit into the distinctly human family structure categories because all of the characters are animals

A supermajority of books are non-nuclear, making the family structure category of this research by far the most inclusive, with the minor exception of a complete absence of same-sex and cooperative family representation (consistent with Randolph, 2013). However, this is still an outstanding finding considering that unique family structures are typically a forgotten aspect of children's literature (Lester, 2013; Warner, 1991).

2022-2023 Book List

Race

Six of the 15 novels on the 2022-2023 SSYRA list (*Amari and the Night Brothers*, *Ben Yokoyama and the Cookie of Doom*, *J.D. and the Great Barber Battle*, *Julieta and the Diamond Enigma*, *Measuring Up*, *Stella)* feature central characters of color. Three of these novels (*Julieta and the Diamond Enigma*, *Measuring Up*, and *Stella*) also include bilingual text: Spanish and Mandarin Chinese. Of the six novels with diverse racial representation, only two (*Amari and the Night Brothers* and *Measuring Up*) show an elevated awareness of the racism around them, a key distinction for effectively representative literature. Both texts address the stereotypes that

children of color have to break to be successful in their predominantly white worlds. *Amari Peters and the Night Brothers* directly discusses the assumptions people make when they see a Black girl:

> It's kind of like how being a Black girl from the projects makes Mr. Jensen feel the need to watch me extra close every time I come into his store. Or how surprised my scholarship interviewers were that I could speak so well. People assume stuff about you based on things you can't change about yourself. So I just do my best to prove them wrong, to be the person they're not expecting (Alston, 2021, p. 101).

Amari alludes to the unfair burdens that people of color carry in order to constantly disprove others' assumptions about them. This is a notion that is echoed in *Measuring Up*, a novel that tackles the challenges of being Taiwanese in America. The father of the main character gives his daughter this warning in reference to how to act in America:

> Cici, they are American. They don't have to try as hard. When people see us, no matter how American we become, they always see someone who's not like them. We always have to prove ourselves first (LaMotte, 2020, p. 168).

The directness of the comment that non-white immigrants will never be able to completely fit in American society displays an elevated understanding of the struggles and brutalities of racism.

Class

Like the year before, roughly half of the novels featured characters that either considered or actively worried about money throughout the novels (see Table 6). In *Amari and the Night Brothers*, Amari, the central character, reflects on the mistreatment she notices around her because of her low-income status and her peers' outward classism: "'They call me Charity Case and Free Lunch and remind me every chance they get that kids like me don't belong here'" (Alston, 2021, p. 3). Additionally, Amari discusses the double standards of acceptable actions between socioeconomic groups: "People like Emily and Ms. Grant will never understand what it's like to not have money. They can do whatever they want with no consequences while the rest of us have to watch our every step" (Alston, 2021, p. 3). The candid conversation of inherent inequalities and difficulties of being underprivileged allows for positive and direct representation of class issues in America.

J.D. and the Great Barber Battle confronts the social repercussions of having less financial freedom than others: "My clothes and shoes were hand-me-downs from my aunt and uncle in North Carolina… so I was always out of style" (Dillard, 2021, p. 23). The humiliation that the titular character expresses about being "out of style" reflects a simple understanding of some struggles of income inequality, especially in the context of school age children.

The Million Dollar Race follows the story of Grant and his journey as a runner to make an international tournament in order to win a million dollars. His family cannot afford much, and even has a deal with the local grocery store to "get all their just-expired yogurt for half off" (Smith, 2021). He often feels self-conscious about the fact that his friends have a significantly

more luxurious quality of life. He constantly dreams about changing his family's financial status: "'Because we need money,' I said. 'We all do… wouldn't it be nice to have a bigger house… Come on. You don't fantasize about it? Being rich'" (Smith, 2021, p. 119). The theme of rising up to a higher economic class continues throughout the entire novel and sheds light upon the continuation of the depiction of the American Dream in modern American literature.

Carry Me Home displays the most extreme case of financial hardship by depicting the life of a homeless teenager. The protagonist, Lulu, is keenly aware of her destitute situation and constantly feels the need to hide her condition from her schoolmates, teachers, and everyone else in her life. By living in her car with her younger sister and desperately trying to find money to food and other essentials, *Carry Me Home* highlights the struggles of and provides honest representation of severe poverty.

Gender Conformity

Ten of the 15 novels (*Amari and the Night Brothers*, *The Beast and Bethany*, *Carry Me Home*, *Distress Signal*, *J.D. and the Great Barber Battle*, *Julieta and the Diamond Enigma*, *Leonard (My Life as a Cat)*, *The Lion of Mars*, *Mystery on Magnolia Circle*, and *Shirley and Jamila Save Their Summer*) portrayed nonconformist central characters (featuring characteristics consistent with Hentschel, et al., 2019), a large increase in representation from previous year's three.

The archetype of the 'troublemaker' girl is seen in *The Beast and the Bethany*. The central character is described as a girl who shows little remorse and great pride in her misdeeds. The head of the orphanage she lives in even exclaims "I've never met ay girl so determined to be unladylike" (Meggitt-Philips, 2020, p. 46). The more masculine "sporty" girl can be found in *Shirley and Jamila Save Their Summer* with a central character who insists in her desire to spend her summer only playing basketball.

The next most common type of nonconformity to gender stereotypes was the trope of the 'nerdy' or 'smart' girls. *Mystery on Magnolia Circle* and *Distress Signal* both depict characters perceived as stunningly smart. *Mystery on Magnolia Circle* discusses the many accomplishments of Ivy: "I'd worked hard all year. I'd won the fourth-grade spelling bee and the fourth-grade multiplication bowl. I'd earned a perfect score of my Trojan War project, which was pretty impressive…" (Klise, 2021, p. 4). *Distress Signal* uses a similar character introduction:

> Lavender had never been more impressed with herself… not when she'd won the spelling bee in fourth grade… not when she'd gotten to be the Queen of Hearts in the school play… not when she'd gotten first place at the science fair for the third year in a row… not even when she'd passed the test to become an amateur radio operator (Lambert, 2020, p. 6).

The depiction of girls who are smart and are not afraid to brag about their accomplishments suggests a shift in the representation of girls in children's literature.

J.D. and the Great Barber Battle shows some characteristics of a nonconforming male lead. He loves to draw and never has any problems with understanding his emotions and expressing his

insecurities: "Well, Mom, I'm a little scared" (Dillard, 2021, p. 94). *The Lion of Mars* also features a nonconforming male character, Bell, who is in touch with his emotions. Bell also appreciates some of the 'girlier' or more sentimental parts of life: "'It's a special kind of blanket,' she said. 'It takes a lot of work to make one. Usually, a group of people get together to sew it. My grandmother used to make them with her friends.' That seemed sweet. 'I'll take this,' I said, and picked up the quilt" (Holm, 2021, p. 98). Although there is less representation for nonconforming males, the two novels that do attempt to display nonconforming male leads show boyhood without a high level of toxic masculinity.

Family Structure

Table 4 displays the breakdown of family structure types for the 2022-2023 novels. The most recent SSYRA novel list features about the same level of family structure diversity as the year before with 8 of the 15 novels describing a non-nuclear family type.

Table 4. Family Structures Represented in the SSYRA 2022-2023 List

Title	Family Structure
Amari and the Night Brothers	Single parent
The Beast and the Bethany	Single parent
Ben Yokoyama and the Cookie of Doom	Nuclear
Carry Me Home	Single parent
Distress Signal	Nuclear
J.D. and the Great Barber Battle	Single parent
Julieta and the Diamond Enigma	Nuclear
Katie the Catsitter	Single parent
Leonard (My Life as a Cat)	Grandparent
The Lion of Mars	Cooperative
Measuring Up	Nuclear
The Million Dollar Race	Nuclear
Mystery on Magnolia Circle	Nuclear
Shirley and Jamila Save Their Summer	Nuclear
Stella	Single parent

Summary of Findings

This study sought to assess whether intersectional representations of diverse social identities related to race, class, gender, and family structure in SSYRA books were negatively impacted by state legislation. Looking for diverse representations across the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 book lists for the four identified categories was crucial for understanding the intersectionality of each book. In other words, the more representations present across the lines of race, class, gender conformity, and family structure, the better it fits the criteria for a progressive and intersectional read (Davis, et al., 2005; Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003; Yokota, 2009). The presence of a theme is marked by a dot symbol as seen below in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Intersectionality of SSYRA 2021-2022 Books

	Race	Class	Gender	Family
The Amelia Six		●	●	●
Black Brother, Black Brother	●			
Charlie & Frog				●
The Disaster Days				
A Field Guide to Getting Lost			●	●
Following Baxter				●
From the Desk of Zoe Washington	●			
The Great Pet Heist		●		●
How To Test a Friendship	●			
The Incredibly Dead Pets of Rex Dexter				
Midnight at the Barclay Hotel		●		
The Newspaper Club			●	●
Roll With It		●		●
The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez	●			●
Wish Upon a Sleepover	●			●

Table 6. Intersectionality of SSYRA 2022-2023 Books

	Race	Class	Gender	Family
Amari and the Night Brothers	●	●	●	●
The Beast and the Bethany			●	●
Ben Yokoyama and the Cookie of Doom	●			
Carry Me Home		●	●	●
Distress Signal			●	
J.D. and the Great Barber Battle	●	●	●	●
Julieta and the Diamond Enigma	●		●	
Katie the Catsitter		●		●
Leonard (My Life as a Cat)			●	●
The Lion of Mars			●	●
Measuring Up	●	●		
The Million Dollar Race		●		
Mystery on Magnolia Circle			●	
Shirley and Jamila Save Their Summer		●	●	
Stella	●			●

For the 2021-2022 list, an average of 1.40 themes appear in each book, meaning that most have only one of the key themes of *race, class, gender conformity,* and *family structure*. The distribution of themes can be seen below in Table 7.

Table 7. Theme Distribution in SSYRA 2021-2022 Books

Titles	Themes Present
The Amelia Six	3
Black Brother, Black Brother	1
Charlie & Frog	1
The Disaster Days	0
A Field Guide to Getting Lost	2
Following Baxter	1
From the Desk of Zoe Washington	1
The Great Pet Heist	2
How to Test a Friendship	1
The Incredibly Dead Pets of Rex Dexter	0
Midnight at the Barclay Hotel	1
The Newspaper Club	2
Roll With It	2
The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez	2
Wish Upon a Sleepover	2

The 2022-2023 list had an average of 2.07 themes discussed per book, showing more inclusivity than the previous year by 55.64%. The distribution can be seen below in Table 8.

Table 8. Theme Distribution SSYRA 2022-2023 Books

Titles	Themes Present
Amari and the Night Brothers	4
The Beast and the Bethany	2
Ben Yokoyama and the Cookie of Doom	1
Carry Me Home	3
Distress Signal	1
J.D. and the Great Barber Battle	4
Julieta and the Diamond Enigma	2
Katie the Catsitter	2
Leonard (My Life as a Cat)	2
The Lion of Mars	2
Measuring Up	2
The Million Dollar Race	1
Mystery on Magnolia Circle	1
Shirley and Jamila Save Their Summer	2
Stella	2

In the 2021-2022 list, although each of the four core themes were touched on in at least three of the novels, only a few books included multiple simultaneous themes—the goal for any properly intersectional reading material (Lester, 2014). The most intersectional read was computationally *The Amelia Six*, with the three themes of socioeconomic class, gender conformity, and family structure all touched upon. However, some novels included zero of the themes including *The Disaster Days* and *The Incredibly Dead Pets of Rex Dexter*.

For the 2022-2023 SSYRA novels, there was a significantly higher level of intersectional diversity in the books. *Amari and the Night Brothers* and *J.D. and the Great Barber Battle* featured all four of the themes of *race, class, gender conformity,* and *family structure*—an achievement not found in the 2021-2022 list of books. Additionally, none of the novels on the 2022-2023 list received zero codes related to the diversity themes, a stark improvement from the previous year.

Implications

Surprisingly, after the laws went into effect, analysis of the 2022-2023 SSYRA list suggests that the list's inclusivity did not regress at all, and, more, it actually became more representative of underrepresented identities. These findings could either indicate that these new harmful laws centering on disregarding marginalized identities have not yet affected much of the upper-elementary literature promoted to Florida students, but possibly could in future years, or that the legislation is simply performative for modern-day politicians and does not affect the material presented to children as significantly as suggested. Although there is always more work to be done in the field of providing authentic and representative youth literature to elementary school students, this research reaffirms that Florida's teachers do not have to spend significant amounts of time, money, and resources on finding positive and diverse literature beyond the SSYRA recommendations, co-sponsored by the Florida Association for Media in Education and the Florida Department of Education, as this list does commendable work in seeking to depict the authentic lives of many groups of marginalized people. It is absolutely essential that every child, despite their race, social class, gender, or family structure is able to find their existence within books, and that invalidation or ignorance of their lives is removed from all reading materials, a goal that, with proper focus, is absolutely attainable.

The best of multicultural literature does not solely focus on race or class; rather, it acknowledges that characters are modelled after real people who have complex identities that surpass just one label. Jagoo (2023) asserts the vitality of intersectionality even in presumably "diverse" reading materials: "…even if books depict Black characters—if they only show Black boys that play sports or fight for civil rights—they don't represent the Black folx who are disabled, gender non-conforming, or some other identity" (para. 12). In selecting and teaching inclusive literature, teachers should pay attention to several points. One of the most significant tasks in picking representative literature is avoiding tokenism by seeking out novels that portray marginalized character experiences in a meaningful and authentic way (Pinto, 2021). Further, finding specifically intersectional representation in literature will attempt to mitigate the common pitfall of diverse literature that only features characters that become an overgeneralization for one identity category like race or religion (Pinto, 2021).

A 2022 NCTE position statement emphasizes that "educators have both the right and responsibility to engage in antiracist teaching" (National Council of Teachers of English, 2022, para. 5). Yet across the collection of texts analyzed, the least coded theme in the novels was race. Educators can use these findings to supplement class reading material with alternative literature to fill this gap in reading material available to their students. By choosing and teaching representative and authentic titles about marginalized races, teachers show solidarity with people of all backgrounds and identities and work to teach antiracist values that work to eradicate prejudices in and out of the classroom. Alternatively, if text curation options are limited, teachers should consider intentionally engaging with the limitations of texts lacking intersectional representation.

Although characters with disabilities win several novels, teachers should consider seeking out additional literature to provide students with more comprehensive representation of ability. One resource for such literature is the American Library Association's annual Schneider Family Book Award, an award that honors youth literature that artistically and authentically presents experiences of people with disabilities. Additionally, representation for queer characters was almost nonexistent with just two novels (*The Newspaper Club* and *Shirley & Jamila Save Their Summer*) alluding to a peripheral same-sex family in one sentence of each book. As supported in numerous studies (e.g., Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011; Hammack, 2005; Ochman, 1996), LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to develop negative self-concepts without exposure to proper role models, which can lead to higher rates of mental health struggles within the queer community Teachers should consult the Stonewall Book Awards or the Lambda Literary Awards as resources for queer youth literature.

In addition to purposeful selection of multicultural and intersectional literature, teachers must put intention into the way they teach the titles in classrooms. The use of tropes in novels, be it about characters of a certain race or gender, could operate as a starting point for class discussion. Within classroom conversations, teachers can express pedagogical commitments to inclusivity by presenting the selections through one of several lenses, such as critical literacy, wherein students are asked to be "active, critical consumers and producers of knowledge" (Macaluso et al., 2023, p. 6) and teachers, in turn, are expected to "model equity and justice in elevating student voices, ideas and questions" (p. 6). Such critical conversation should focus on topics such as culture and society, human experiences, and the roles of the students as citizens. Lewison and colleagues (2022) identify four dimensions for critical analysis of literature (see Figure 2). Teachers could use these dimensions to consider texts from multiple viewpoints and encourage discussion that illuminates the systems of power at play in texts.

Fig. 2. Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy (Lewison et al., 2002)

1. Disrupting the Commonplace

Questions and Prompts:

- How is this text trying to position me?
- What stereotypes or cultural norms are perpetuated or broken?
- How is my experience different from what is presented in this text?
- What does this text assume is normal or correct?

2. Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints

Questions and Prompts:

- Whose voices are heard and whose are missing?
- Whose view of the world is the text presenting?
- Who is allowed to speak? Who is quoted?
- Who is being silenced or marginalized?
- What are alternate perspectives?

3. Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues

Questions and Prompts:

- How do sociopolitical systems shape the text?
- What issues of power are presented in the piece?
- What kinds of social realities does the text portray?
- What cultural values does the author assume the reader holds?
- How would the text be different if it were set in another time, place or culture?

4. Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice

Questions and Prompts:

- What action can we take to achieve social justice?
- What does this text inspire me to do?
- How can we solve real problems in the world?
- How can we make a difference in our community?

This study highlights the importance of diligently screening books for positive representations before they are presented to children. It also explores an unstudied book list and therefore adds to the preexisting body of knowledge in the field of children's literature and paves the way for progress to be made in working to further diversify characters and plots in youth novels. In addition, with new Florida legislation censoring conversation about LGBTQ+ and systemic racism, representation of these issues in the SSYRA book lists is now more important than ever as a means to reach marginalized children.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the SSYRA program, future research should analyze forthcoming SSYRA lists to continue to monitor patterns of representation, especially considering changes in Florida's legislation about elementary reading requirements. Analysis of the SSYRA book lists for middle and high school would also offer a more comprehensive view of the books recommended for older readers. Additionally, the categories for diverse representation could be expanded on in future research to include themes such as disability and sexual orientation.

Notes

1. I purposely use lowercase letters for "white" when referring to race in an attempt to decentralize whiteness within my piece.
2. In the current political climate, teachers who are actively seeking information and recommendations in light of the rampant LGBTQ+ literary censorship should turn to the NCTE Intellectual Freedom Center for more resources on how to promote inclusivity in reading materials.

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Author Bio

Via Lipman (she/her), a first-year student at Stanford University, currently lives in Naples, Florida. Via served on the 2022-2023 cohort of the GLSEN National Student Council and currently works on the Youth Engagement team as the GLSEN NSC Alumni Ambassador to promote the safer schools mission and advance LGBTQ+ student rights. At GLSEN, she founded and enthusiastically heads the organization's project, *Rainbow Writes*, a national queer writing contest that encourages LGBTQ+ youth to share their stories and celebrate authentic representation through writing, bringing together her loves of LGBTQ+ activism, queer joy, and representation in literature. She has spoken in webinars and conferences hosted by the U.S. Department of Education ("Inclusive and Nondiscriminatory School Environments for LGBTQI+ Students"), the National Council of Teachers of English ("High School Matters: "We Can't Be Sheltered: Why Banned Books Matter"), the Anti-Defamation League ("A Resurgence of Censorship: Understanding Book Banning in the South"), and GLSEN ("Forbidden Queer Lit: A History of LGBTQ+ Fiction"; "Why Allies are So Important for Queer Youth"; "Lessons from a Gay Student in Florida"), among others. She is also recently a recipient of the Stanford University Moos Fellowship for Intersectional Identities. Via intends to contribute work towards a more just society through her activism and bring more positivity and inclusivity into communities nationwide.

REFLECTIONS AND INSIGHTS FROM RUNNING A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE FOR YOUNG ADULT AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE SOCIAL JUSTICE TEACHING PRACTICES

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Abstract

This manuscript shares the experiences of three American teacher educators and their development of a social justice professional development institute for K-12 English language arts and literacy teachers. The article serves as an outline with action steps and theoretical underpinnings that can inform the work of other school leaders and English language arts department chairs in developing professional learning for socially just classrooms. The article shares the frameworks that informed the construction of this professional development institute, how the PD was implemented, and key takeaways from participating teachers.

Keywords: social justice, professional development, professional learning, K-12 teachers, young adult literature, children's literature

Reflections and Insights from Running a Professional Development Institute for Young Adult and Children's Literature Social Justice Teaching Practices

Introduction

The need for professional development that centers social justice education and criticality is simultaneously well-documented and urgent. For instance, Forde and Torrance (2020) noted that, "knowledge and understanding of the issues around the professional growth and development to support and sustain such practices" relating to social justice professional development are "far less extensive" than understanding of other types of professional development opportunities (p. 3). Unfortunately, professional development opportunities typically replicate rather than challenge dominant, deficit-based instructional practices (Dover et al., 2020; Kohli et al., 2015; Parkhouse et al., 2023; Picower, 2015). To support teachers in developing social justice practices, we created and ran a semester-long professional development institute focused on social justice literature instruction. Stemming from this reality, we detail how three American teacher educators developed a social justice professional development institute for K-12 English language arts teachers over the course of a semester. In doing so, this article serves as an outline

with action steps and theoretical underpinnings that can inform the work of other school leaders and English language arts department chairs in developing professional learning for socially just classrooms. We note what frameworks informed the construction of this professional development institute, how we implemented the institute across a semester, and the takeaways from participating teachers.

Theorizing Social Justice Education and Teaching

Put directly, social justice education requires teachers and students to recognize how "institutions, such as government offices, perpetuate societal inequity through the disproportionate distribution of material and symbolic resources among social groups" (Dyches & Boyd, 2017, p. 3). Moving specifically into English education, Boyd succinctly defines social justice English teaching as "pedagogies that cultivate students' abilities to dissect power relations and helping students locate themselves within these structures of power so that they can act for change" (p. 12). Social justice English teaching is about more than text selection and instructional material. English teachers who enact social justice pedagogy must understand themselves as socio-cultural beings who understand their positionality in society and use their power as educators to create social change (Boyd, 2017). Finally, a growing number of scholars see young adult literature as a potential avenue for professional learning relating to social justice education (martin, 2021; Miller et al., 2019). The triad of social justice education definition, clear connections to English language arts teaching, and power of young adult literature helped position the institute to teachers and provided us with guiding literature as we built the institute.

Of particular importance to this institute was the work of Dyches and Boyd (2017), who critique Shulman's (1987) Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework for its silence on social justice teaching. In doing so, Dyches and Boyd offer a new framework for social justice teaching entitled "Social Justice Pedagogical and Content Knowledge," which includes three knowledge domains: Social justice knowledge, social justice pedagogical knowledge, and social justice content knowledge. Social justice knowledge includes understanding how discourse, theory, history, and agency shape the understanding of knowledge construction. Social justice pedagogical knowledge includes understanding the practices of culturally assessing pedagogies, critical pedagogies, and agency-inciting pedagogies. Finally, social justice content knowledge includes traditional content knowledge and critical content knowledge.

The "Social Justice Pedagogical and Content Knowledge" framework guided our selection of the major readings, activities, and learning goals of the institute. Dyches et al. (2021) identified knowledge of disciplinary critique, knowledge of marginalized identities, and knowledge of supplementary content as core to English teachers' social justice content knowledge. We addressed disciplinary critique by preparing readings that outlined the role systems of oppression such as racism, homophobia, and xenophobia played in shaping the discipline of English language arts. We also incorporated readings that addressed how curriculum and school policies enforce inequitable social hierarchies that further marginalize students whose identities are already marginalized. For instance, we planned to discuss how LGBTQ characters were neglected in traditional English curriculum and how canonical texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) rely on white savior tropes at the expense of Black characters' full humanity and agency. We positioned young adult and children's literature alongside other types of texts,

including multimodal ones, as content that can supplement English curriculum in order to challenge curricular harm.

We constantly returned to a pedagogy of texts that centered questions of power and access as we know deterring from such analysis could result in dominant teaching practices and avoid engagement with systemic inequities, which erode the transformative power of equity work (Grinage, 2020). We sought to support participating teachers in developing an understanding of how power, privilege, and oppression pulse throughout all pedagogical decisions as Dyches and Boyd (2017) remind that "all pedagogy— from classroom discussion to read alouds to worksheets— are political in nature, and fueled by a teacher's relationship to Social Justice Knowledge" (pp. 480-483). English language arts teachers are always oscillating between upholding or disrupting through text selection and instructional choices, whether intentional or not. Illuminating the political dimensions and cultural history of text selection and teaching is vital for developing social justice content and pedagogical knowledge. For instance, English language arts teachers need to understand how colonialism and the ensuing logics of settler colonialism underpin the common course sequencing of American and British literature in high school coursework. Developing historical and political knowledge about English language arts curriculum is equally important as cultivating pedagogical knowledge about teaching books. The Social Justice Pedagogical and Content Knowledge gave us language to elucidate the work of the institute.

Professional Development, Learning, and Social Justice Teaching

Professional development is often imagined as mandated by administrative forces while professional learning is conceptualized as teachers working collaboratively to address their own pedagogical needs (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Skerrett et al. (2017) argue against binary positioning of professional development and professional learning as they believe both can be spaces for teachers' social justice learning. Looking at professional development and professional learning is important in order to capture the breadth of teacher learning. Ultimately, we decided to call the institute a "professional development" because teacher participation resulted in receiving credit for professional development hours in participating teachers' districts thanks to our campus' teacher education certification officer. The work we outline in this article falls somewhere along the continuum of professional development and professional learning as conceptualized by scholarship (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Skerrett et al.,2017), and speaks to the importance of equivocating the binary.

We acknowledged the reality of many school-provided (or mandated) professional development opportunities for practicing K-12 teachers in regards to social justice education. The dearth of professional developmental opportunities within schools that focus on social justice, especially in schools that serve some of the most marginalized students (Skerrett, 2010, 2011; Skerrett & Williamson, 2015), has resulted in teachers turning to colleagues and other teachers who root their work in social justice to create their own professional learning opportunities (Picower, 2007; Ritchie, 2012; Simon, 2015). These collegial communities are invaluable and embody the type of teaching we see as aspirational. We want to stress that teachers are engaging in professional learning opportunities to develop social justice practices, especially in online spaces. For instance, Collins' (2019) outlines how social media communities for social justice

teachers can disrupt notions of professional development, isolation, and expertise. English teachers Tricia Ebarvia, Lorena Germán, Kim Parker, and Julia Torres (2018) formed an online grassroots movement called #DisruptTexts, which seeks to "challenge the traditional canon in order to create a more inclusive, representative, and equitable language arts curriculum that our students deserve" while supporting teachers in developing social justice teaching practices. Indeed, these examples show how teachers turning to grassroots professional learning opportunities are outpacing the work in K-12 schools and academia.

Our Positionalities as White Educators Talking about Justice

All three of us are white, able-bodied cisgender educators who previously taught in K-12 public schools. Two of us are heterosexual females and one of us is a queer male. We all currently teach in a regional northeastern public university, a region that none of us have youthful attachments to. We address our positionalities for two reasons. First, as a form of accountability. We want to note our commitments to equity work within schools and habitually gauge our stated values and our actual practice in order to close the gap between the two. Second, as a piece of contextualization. We are white teacher educators working with white K-12 educators. The racial makeup of the work we discuss in this article is shaped by the racial dynamic between the facilitators and the teachers. Our hope is that by modeling our own work to challenge white supremacy in our own white lives, we invited teachers into that constant process.

We are committed to critical reflection to revise our approach and actions, which is important given the way shallow diversity initiatives and neoliberalism can easily co-op attempts to make equitable and just change within schools and classrooms (Grinage, 2020; Tanner, 2018). "How do we move from rhetoric and slogans into action?" was a constant question we posed to ourselves before and after each session. Additionally, we committed to enacting changes within our own department over the course of this professional development institute. Throughout the process, we were each other's critical colleagues in the work, meaning we were willing and able to have conversations and push each other as a form of accountability (Dyches, 2016). For instance, part of the constant reflective process meant regularly interrogating how whiteness has and continues to shape English language arts teaching (Tanner, 2015, 2019), which can implicate how the teaching of young adult and children's literature is enacted in schools by white teachers (Sarigianides & Borsheim-Black, 2022). We frequently shared these personal reflections with the teachers throughout the institute.

Finally, we stress the importance of learning from practicing teachers. As former K-12 teachers who are no longer required to directly navigate the standards-based landscape of K-12 classrooms, we constantly reminded ourselves and participating teachers that K-12 teachers are the experts of their own classrooms. Our goal was to co-construct and co-develop ideas, practices, and curriculum with teachers rather than replicating hierarchies that place teachers beneath those who are leading professional development.

Young Adult and Kids Literature Social Justice Institute Overview

Our goal to plan and implement a social justice professional development institute focusing on young adult and children's literature arose from three factors. First, we noticed a desire from

practicing teachers in our graduate programs for more professional development opportunities aimed specifically at cultivating social justice teaching practices. Second, as K-12 teachers we often felt there were not many professional development opportunities to cultivate practices related to instruction around literary texts. Anecdotally, we heard that our experiences were still common for many K-12 English language arts teachers. Finally, we received a grant from Learning for Justice that provided financial resources for purchasing young adult and children's literature for practicing teachers. Learning for Justice (formerly called Teaching Tolerance) is the K-12 wing of the Southern Poverty Law Center. The organization creates teaching materials for K-12 teachers who wish to enact social justice education. The grant stipulated recipients work with K-12 teachers, which aligned with our intended goals. These three factors helped us conceptualize the institute on paper; practice came next. In the remainder of this section, we outline the theoretical underpinnings of our institute, how we developed and curated materials for participating teachers, and how we recruited local teachers to take part in the process.

We sought to have clear guidelines to help frame our work in the institution. Subsequently, we wanted teachers to exit our institute with similar guidelines that allow participants to revise and rethink their own curriculum and teaching. Learning for Justice has developed Social Justice Standards and provides grant money for K-12 teachers and teacher educators to develop social justice teaching and learning. Receiving the grant plus our belief in the value of the standards meant our work was guided by the Social Justice Standards. Learning for Justice (2022) defines the purpose and construction of the Social Justice Standards as follows:

> The Social Justice Standards are a set of anchor standards and age-appropriate learning outcomes divided into four domains—Identity, Diversity, Justice and Action (IDJA). The standards provide a common language and organizational structure: Teachers can use them to guide curriculum development, and administrators can use them to make schools more just, equitable and safe. The standards are leveled for every stage of K–12 education and include school-based scenarios to show what anti-bias attitudes and behavior may look like in the classroom.

> Teaching about IDJA allows educators to engage with a range of anti-bias, multicultural and social justice issues. This continuum of engagement is unique among social justice teaching materials, which tend to focus on one of two areas: either reducing prejudice or advocating collective action. Prejudice reduction seeks to minimize conflict and generally focuses on changing the attitudes and behaviors of a dominant group. Collective action challenges inequality directly by raising consciousness and focusing on improving conditions for underrepresented groups. The standards recognize that, in today's diverse classrooms, students need knowledge and skills related to both prejudice reduction and collective action. (p. 2)

The standards provide language to frame curriculum, teaching, and assessment. However, the standards are not meant to be assessed in the vein of traditional academic standards. Instead, the standards offer a guide and shaping mechanism for teachers to wrap their curriculum around. The standards are not tied to traditional academic content or disciplinary knowledge.

For instance, the Justice 13 standard reads: "Students will analyze the harmful impact of bias and injustice on the world, historically and today." *How* a teacher opts to teach about the impact of

injustice is up to the teacher and their respective content. These standards became valuable for us in thinking about how we approach young adult and children's literature instruction. We could use a young adult title like Abdi Nazemian's (2019) *Like a Love Story*, which documents the rise of AIDS and ensuing neglect of queer populations' health and wellbeing in the late 1980s to teach how homophobia resulted in millions of people losing their lives in the United States to address this standard. Using content, in this example a young adult title, to teach about injustice would require both social justice knowledge (how homophobia has shaped public institutions, including schools) and social justice pedagogical knowledge (how to address and critically examine homophobia in a classroom). One major purpose of our institution was for K-12 teachers to revise their curriculum to address the demands of the Social Justice Standards. We emphasized that while we would be using young adult and children's literature to fulfill the standards' requirements, any text could be positioned to touch on the topics outlined in the Social Justice Standards.

We wanted to pair the Social Justice Standards with additional resources, including additional ideas from Learning for Justice. For instance, we believed that Learning for Justice's *Let's Talk! Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students* (2019) would be a valuable supplemental resource for the teachers as the guide details how to talk about racism, inequities, and systemic oppression with students. The guide offers practical, implementable ideas tailored to different grade bands. Facilitating critical conversations in classrooms, especially with books, is an important component of a justice-minded English language arts practice (Sarigianides & Borsheim-Black, 2022; Schieble et al., 2020; Svrcek & Miller, 2021). We also turned to shorter pieces published by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), including blog posts and videos. Our goal was to curate pieces that were written with practicing K-12 teachers as the primary audience and included clear, actionable takeaways that the teachers could implement in their own classrooms the next day.

The institute was intended to span across the 2021-2022 academic calendar. However, due to ongoing COVID complications and other professional obligations, the bulk of the institute occurred throughout the Fall 2021 semester. The institute took place on our university's campus with bimonthly meetings from September to December with expectations carved around holiday breaks. In total, we met on six evenings during two-hour long sessions. Throughout this section we detail the six sessions that happened across the fall 2021 semester. Table 1 provides an overview of the major practices we sought to model and develop with participating teachers. Wilson (2008) illustrated how to frame teaching practices developed from professional development with the pedagogical content knowledge model. We align the teaching practices with their respective area of social justice pedagogical content knowledge and provide scholarly rationales that informed the teaching practice.

Recruiting Participating Teachers

Our campus is a smaller public university with regional reach and is located in the northeastern part of the United States. Many of our graduates work in local school districts and local school districts are typically eager to hire our graduates. Initially, we intended to serve 12 practicing teachers: three each across elementary, middle, and high school. We individually reached out to English and literacy teachers (P-12) who worked at the local school district where our university

is located. Additionally, we communicated with our former undergraduate and graduate students who expressed a commitment to social justice during coursework. We decided on 12 participants due to funding measures as participating teachers were guaranteed a variety of young adult and children's literature they selected for their classroom libraries. Initially, we accepted 12 applicants, and 9 remained throughout the entire institute. Our nine teachers spanned P-12 education, including two early childhood, two elementary, two middle grades, and three high school teachers. As previously noted, all teachers were cisgender white educators.

Table 1
Overview of the Professional Development Institute

Session	Topics and Practices	Area of SJPACK Addressed
1 Unpacking Identity and Building Community	**Topics** ● Introduction to institute ● Establishing norms (Smith, 2014) ● Community building (Identity Webs; Ahmed, 2018) ● Learning for Justice (LfJ) materials distribution and review	● Social justice knowledge
2 Analyzing Windows, Mirrors, Sliding Glass Doors, Curtains, and Telescopes	**Topics** ● Analysis of LfJ Identity and Diversity Social Justice Standards ● Mapping of Identity and Diversity Social Justice Standards to self-selected texts ● Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors (Bishop, 1991), Telescopes (Toliver, 2021), and Curtains (Reese, 2021)	● Social justice knowledge ● Social justice pedagogical knowledge
3 Digging into the Social Justice Standards	**Topics** ● Cross-analysis of LfJ Identity and Diversity Social Justice Standards ● Critical analysis of teacher provided texts ● Book flood with children's literature and YA **Practices** ● Facilitating critical conversations (Schieble et al., 2020; Svrcek & Miller, 2021) ● Navigating state mandates and curricular standards (Dyches & Sams, 2018)	● Social justice knowledge ● Social justice pedagogical knowledge
4 Debriefing Our Learning So Far	**Topics** ● Debriefing conversation focused on institute topics and application of concepts in classrooms thus far **Practices**	● Social justice knowledge ● Social justice pedagogical knowledge

Session	Topics and Practices	Area of SJPACK Addressed
	• Facilitating critical conversations (Schieble et al., 2020; Svrcek & Miller, 2021) • Navigating state mandates and curricular standards (Dyches & Sams, 2018) • Critical teaching of the British canon (Dyches & Sams, 2018)	• Social justice content knowledge
5 Contextualizing the Social Justice Standards	**Topics** • Analysis of LfJ Justice Social Justice Standards • Mapping of Justice Social Justice Standards to self-selected texts • Introduction to shared text *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (Sáenz, 2014) • Facilitating critical conversations (Schieble et al., 2020; Svrcek & Miller, 2021) **Practices** • Navigating state mandates and curricular standards (Dyches & Sams, 2018) • Constructing literature circles to support critical analysis (martin, 2022; Miller et al., 2020; Thein et al., 2011) • Intersectionality as a form of literary analysis (Durand, 2015; martin, 2022) • Teaching LGBTQ texts with care and criticality (Durand, 2015; martin, 2022)	• Social justice knowledge • Social justice pedagogical knowledge • Social justice content knowledge
6 Applying the Social Justice Standards to *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (Sáenz, 2014)	**Topics** • Critical setting analysis (Miller, 2018) • Multimedia character mapping (Miller & Colantonio-Yurko, 2018) • Social justice concept analysis and application (Appleman, 2015) **Practices**	• Social justice knowledge • Social justice pedagogical knowledge • Social justice content knowledge

Session	Topics and Practices	Area of SJPACK Addressed
	● Facilitating critical conversations (Schieble et al., 2020; Svrcek & Miller, 2021) ● Navigating state mandates and curricular standards (Dyches & Sams, 2018) ● Constructing literature circles to support critical analysis (martin, 2022; Miller et al., 2020; Thein et al., 2011) ● Intersectionality as a form of literary analysis (Durand, 2015; martin, 2022) ● Teaching LGBTQ texts with care and criticality (Durand, 2015; martin, 2022)	

It was important we honor the time and efforts the teachers put into the institute; therefore, we compensated teachers in a variety of ways for their participation. One goal of the institute was to support teachers as they created curricular materials for their classrooms, we supported planning, and our grant funded the teachers with adequate titles and quantities for their work. When we ordered books, we encouraged participating teachers to select titles that their colleagues could also use. Working with our certification officer, we ensured that the teachers would receive continuing education credit for the time they spent in the institute. We also paid for participating teachers' parking and provided refreshments based on their dietary requests and restrictions.

Overview of Young Adult and Kids Literature Social Justice Institute

Next, we provide a detailed description of the institute. For each session we provide the activities we engaged in, the practices we aimed to support and develop with the teachers, and related literature that supports our work together.

Session One: Unpacking Identity and Building Community

We began our first day together by introducing the purpose of the institute, examining our identities, establishing goals and norms, spending time with professional materials from Learning for Justice, and contemplating together how children's, middle grades, and young adult literature can be tools to teach for social justice alongside literacy and ELA curriculum standards. Before we began the curricular work of the institute, we knew it was important to first name and examine our identities, histories, and beliefs and subsequently address privileges or oppressions that aligned with those identities (Svrcek & Miller, 2021). In accordance with Dyches and Boyd's (2017) work, we asked teachers to examine their own identities in relation to their teaching contexts so that they could implement equity-minded and socially just curricula. Individually, teachers created their own identity webs, a visual tool for naming and then examining the different identities we each carry from Ahmed's (2019) *Being the Change: Lessons and Strategies to Teach Social Comprehension*. Next, as a whole group we discussed identities that we felt most defined us in our roles as educators. Then, as a community we centered conversations about inequity and privilege and noted that it takes practice (Learning for Justice, 2016). Further, we wanted to establish norms for critical conversations we knew would take place (Svrcek & Miller, 2021).

Our second institute activity included a community listen to Clint Smith (TED, 2014) speak about the four core principles of his classroom: "read critically, write consciously, speak clearly, and tell your truth" to situate the environment we hoped to create (1:08-1:13). The teachers worked to define each of these core principles and envisioned how these would look and feel in the community we were building; their work was public and on display for examination and discussion (see Figure 1).

Lastly, on the first day of the institute we moved to content. The remainder of our first session discussed social justice work in schools and in our personal lives. We also shared that this learning was "not static" and that teachers would be expanding their own learning and knowledge of social justice in education (Dyches & Boyd, 2017, p. 482). Learning for Justice provided a variety of print materials (e.g., *Let's talk: Facilitation critical conversations with*

students [2019a], *Speak up at school: How to respond to everyday prejudice, bias and stereotypes* [2019b]) for the teachers to support their work enacting social justice education in schools--teachers spent time browsing, and were asked to share what was new, what felt familiar, and potential connections to their current pedagogy and curriculum.

Figure 1

Teachers' Analysis of Clint Smith's Four Core Principles
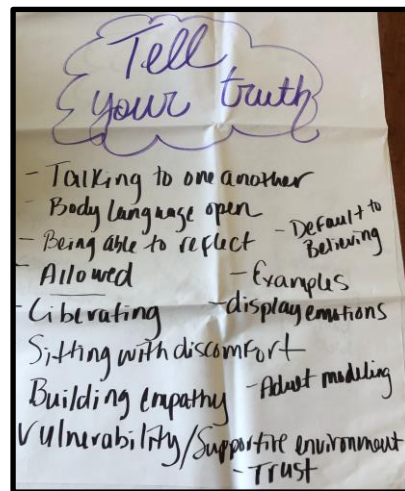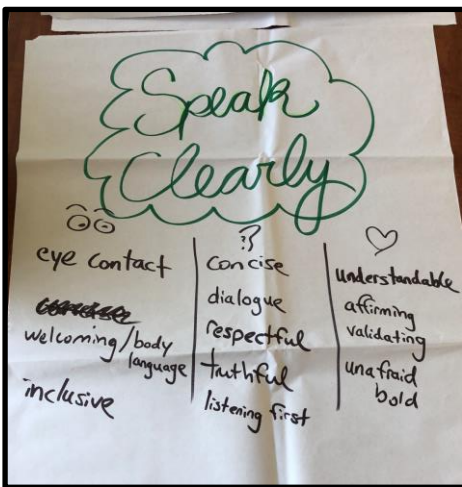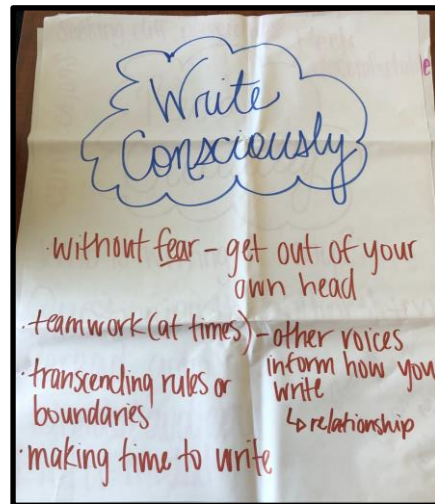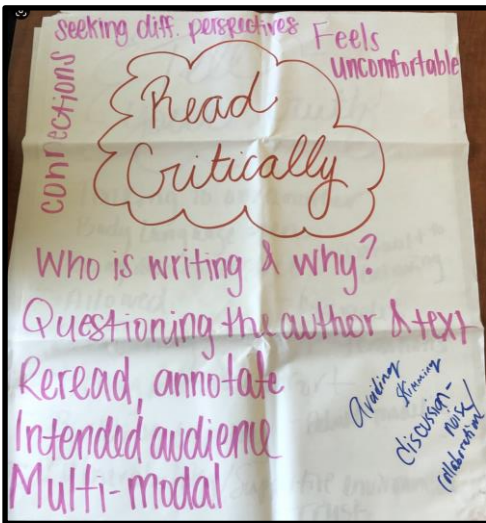
It was at this time we introduced our framework for the institute which was the foundation for our work together (Figure 2), which explicitly bridged together teaching for social justice and young adult and children's literature into one. This framing for the institute became a conversation we had each session, explicitly working to illustrate the integration of these ideas for K-12 classroom spaces.

Figure 2

Framework for Social Justice Institute

Session Two: Analyzing Windows, Mirrors, Sliding Glass Doors, Curtains, and Telescopes

We began our second session by reflecting on the previous session thinking about what stood out, what was still ruminating, and questions that might have emerged. After this session, we decided to open each session with reflection. It was important to us that the teachers felt like their work and thinking were at the forefront of our work together; additionally, we wanted teachers to connect prior and emerging learning between sessions.

The curriculum of our professional development depended on participants' needs and interests, and we wanted to create space for their inclusion. In session two, we decided it was important to build on our institute framework. As a result, the first task we engaged in was asking teachers to read and discuss scholars' such as Bishop (1990), Reese (Santa Fe Public Library, 2021), and Toliver (2021) who helped us think about representation in texts, minimal representation of certain groups in specific genres and the resulting continued marginalization (e.g., Black women and girls in science fiction, Toliver, 2021), and misinterpretations of texts from outsiders looking into window texts (Reese, 2021). These readings were selected so participating teachers could deepen their social justice content knowledge.

Our institute relied on the Social Justice Standards (SJS, Learning for Justice, 2022) as a supportive framework for the teachers to integrate teaching for social justice in their literacy and ELA classrooms. Thus, we routinely discussed how the SJS were used to frame curriculum, to be in conversation with the content standards, and not formally assessed like a content standard. Before these standards could be applied to work in K-12 classrooms, we needed to spend time with the standards so the teachers could assess their own knowledge and identify areas of their continued growth (Svrcek & Miller, 2021). Additionally, spending time with the standards and thinking through practices associated with them would allow for teachers to grow their social justice pedagogical knowledge (Dyches & Boyd, 2017). Our second session task resulted in

spending most of our time during this session analyzing the identity and diversity standards from the Social Justice Standards. First, we split the teachers into two groups. Each group took one set of standards (identity or diversity) and identified words/concepts that need to be clarified and explicitly taught, then rewrote each standard in student-friendly language, and finally noted questions and wonderings about the standard (see Figure 3). We concluded the session task by discussing our learning as it related to the standards thus far, with the intention of continuing this work during session three.

Session Three: Digging into the Social Justice Standards

The third session included revisiting the SJS of identity and diversity and applying those standards to texts the teachers used in their classroom. We began our work for this session by engaging in our reflective discussion. Next, we participated in our first task which included dividing teachers into two groups for standards analysis. For this session, the groups switched

Figure 3

Example Teacher Analysis of Identity and Diversity Social Justice Standards
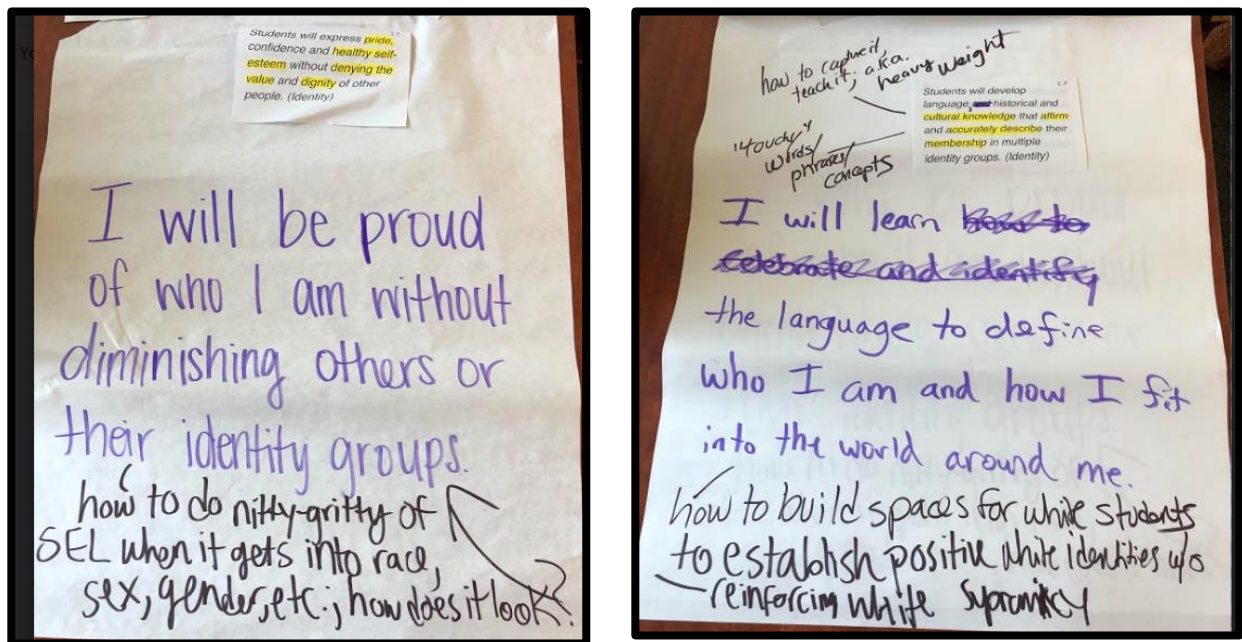
standards, for example the teachers who analyzed the diversity standards last time now examined the identity standards, and vice versa. To build community knowledge, teachers worked to immerse themselves in the new standards, noting what they noticed; relevant additions and suggestions to the other group's work; and similarities and differences between standard strands (see Figure 3).

The last half of the session, we engaged in our second task which included spending time thinking about integrating the SJS into the work teachers currently did in their classroom. To

prepare for this work, we asked the teachers to bring a text they used or planned to use in their classroom. They also watched a Learning for Justice Webinar, which are free webinars led by "innovative educators in the Learning for Justice community" that illustrate how the SJS can be integrated in work we do in the K-12 classroom (Learning for Justice, 2022). As part of task two, teachers split into pairs and shared about the text they brought including, the nature of the text, how it was used, its purpose, and how and why it was taught. After grounding their partner in the purpose of the text, we asked that each teacher critically examine their text by answering the following questions (Svrcek & Miller, 2021).

- Whose voices/perspectives are heard? Whose are missing?
- Whose reality is presented? Who is ignored?
- What questions/topics are raised? Which questions/topics are ignored or not addressed?
- How can this text contribute to a larger set of texts? Media? Current news and events?
- How does this text present attitudes and beliefs in relation to the theme and author's purpose? How does the author's voice play a role?
- How does this text situate itself in the cultural context of the time period it is set in? What is there to unpack?

By using a text that teachers already used, we wanted to illustrate how any text could be a social justice text and that the SJS were meant to be embedded with the content standards, the work they already do (Dyches & Boyd, 2017).

To close task two, we called the teachers back to the whole group to think about the Learning for Justice webinar we viewed. The webinars served as a springboard for conversation. As an institute community, we discussed how the webinars informed how the teachers thought about the SJS and their own teaching and curriculum, a blend of critical content knowledge and social justice work (Dyches & Boyd, 2017). By sharing this thinking in a whole group, teachers were able to hear about a variety of webinars even though they had only watched one prior to coming to our session. Then, to tie SJS to the text they brought, teachers continued used the following questions to consider the new possibilities for their text.

- Which social justice standards can be addressed with this text?
- How can you (re)position the text to address the SJS in a curricular unit?
- What critical questions can you pose to students with this text?
- What activities can you ask students to engage in to meet the standards?
- What types of assessments can you use to meet state academic standards as well as the SJS?

Finally, we concluded our session with task three, a book flood, a term we use to explain spending time and immersing oneself in books. We brought a selection of approximately 100 grant-funded and personally owned books (picture books, middle grades, young adult, and graphic novels) for the teachers to browse, as we wanted them to have choice in the texts they received. We intentionally curated an inclusive array of texts for our book flood which included books about and by LGBTQ people, BIPOC people, disabled people, and people whose identities intersect among those categories. The books were selected using resources such as NCTE blogs, ALA resources, book awards, scholarly articles, and more. After spending time browsing, the

teachers put in an order for five books that we purchased with grant funds and delivered to them during a subsequent session.

Session Four: Debriefing Our Learning So Far

Session four was a session that unexpectedly resulted in rich conversation and fewer planned tasks. Most teachers were absent due to illness, so our smaller group discussed learnings from previous sessions.

## Session Five: Contextualizing the Social Justice Standards

In session five we chose to focus our work on one of our central ideas for professional development, which was that social justice and young adult literature/children's literature should be braided together in practice. Our first task placed teachers in four facilitator-assigned groups, organized by grade level so that teachers could gain the most practical knowledge from their peers. The teachers spent five minutes with each standard in a carousel activity. Figure 4 demonstrates an example of what teachers authored during this part of the session.

Like other sessions, teachers were asked to engage in the following tasks with each standard:

- Identify words/concepts that need to be clarified and explicitly taught.
- Rewrite each standard in student-friendly language.
- What questions/wonderings do you have about the standard?
- Make a connection to a webinar or teaching strategy from Learning for Justice

Figure 4

Example Teacher Analysis of Justice Social Justice Standards
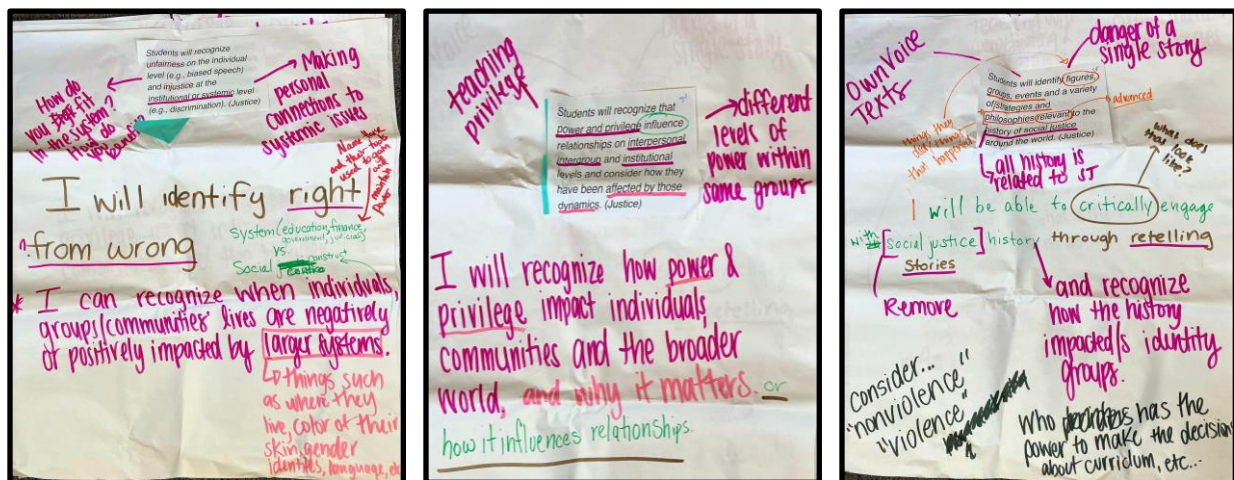
For the second task, teachers brought a book that they used in their own practice with students. The teachers were given individual times to work on marrying the SJS with content area and literacy standards in their lesson plans. Examples of tasks were provided to teachers via

PowerPoint and included suggestions such as: locating passages that aligned with specific standards, guiding questions for the text, assessment, and how the text might be situated in the existing curriculum. The teachers were invited to share their ongoing work with those around them and we discussed ideas as a whole group. These activities and active discussion and reflection times promoted teachers to become change agents in their own classrooms (Dyches & Boyd, 2017).

Finally, our session ended in a culminating discussion and introduction to our new shared text *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Universe* (Sáenz, 2014). Prior to this session, teachers were very excited about engaging in a shared reading of the novel and the opportunity to practice the skills developed during the PD on a shared text. Working with the same text provided opportunities for analysis and social justice pedagogical content ideation. We closed the session with a written reflection on the experiences of the evening and gave each teacher a copy of *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Universe* to read by the next session.

Session Six: Applying the Social Justice Standards to Literature

The final session focused on the shared reading of *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Universe*. First, we began with a general discussion of the text including the teachers' thoughts and wonderings on the text; ideas, concepts, or topics the book raised; and their favorite characters. By using a shared text, all teachers were able to come to the session with the same prior experiences with characters and story. We then leveraged this text as a tool to illustrate how English language arts and literacy content could be used for teaching for social justice (Dyches & Boyd, 2017).

Next, we created activities and assignments for reading and teaching young adult and children's literature that aligned with the Social Justice Standards and state English language arts curricular standards. These activities and assignments were partially based on activities we enacted in our own K-12 classrooms prior to becoming teacher educators. We created these activities so participating teachers would leave the institute with practical, implementable curricular tools for their own classrooms (see Figure 5). Sarigianides and Borsheim-Black (2022) note that having strategies that can be implemented with literature instruction increased pre-service English teachers' confidence with anti-racist teaching. We wanted to stress that the types of teaching with young adult and children's literature we were advocating for could be done in our current standards-based policy landscape. Additionally, we sought to illustrate how traditional English content, such as the teaching of setting and characterization, could be

Figure 5

Example of Classroom Activity

Please note: We use "activity/assignment" to recognize *how* you use this work depends on your classroom context and curricular purpose. For instance, you could use the Multimedia Character Mapping as a summative assessment where you assess students' learning using a relevant standard-aligned rubric. However, you could structure this approach as an activity students do before writing a more formal paper about characterization or some other prompt. Additionally, you could use the work as a formative assessment before having students use the map for a summative assignment. The point is *how* you use these ideas to engage student learning is up to you. We are simply providing broader ideas for incorporating these practices into your own classrooms.		

Critical Setting Analysis		
Overview	**Standards (ELA and SJS)**	**Further Reading**
This activity/assignment is an updated version of a setting analysis that considers how power operates within and across settings. Students either select or are assigned a setting. Then, students consider how characters operate within the setting and why based on the power dynamics within the setting. Students can select specific quotes to illustrate their points. Students can then consider how the changing of a setting impacts how a character acts and views themself and why. Additionally, students can make literal maps using digital tools such as Google Maps, Google Drawings or another digital tool.	*ELA Anchor Standard* ● Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly/implicitly and make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. ● Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. ● Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. *Social Justice Standard* ● Identity 5 ● Diversity 10 ● Justice 12 ● Justice 14	"Beyond Picture Walks: Revaluing Picturebooks as Written and Pictorial Texts" (using illustration) "Teaching the Intersections of Religion, Nationality, and Sexuality: LGBTQ Muslim Voices in Sara Farizan's Novels" "Using Pressure Maps to Help Middle Grades Readers Develop Nuanced Understandings of LGBTQ+ Characters"

reimagined with the aims of social justice education. In other words, we demonstrated how English content knowledge could become English social justice content knowledge (Dyches & Boyd, 2017). An example of one activity, the "Critical Setting Analysis," is available in Figure 6.

Finally, we focused on three specific areas of literary analysis: setting (Miller, 2018), characterization (Miller & Colantonio-Yurko, 2018), and social justice concepts (Appleman, 2015). We introduced each strategy/activity and then asked the teachers to engage in this work as if they were students working through the activity. Alongside the activities we tried out, we considered the affordances and constraints of this work within each of the teachers' classrooms using a SWOT Analysis (Mind Tools Content Team, 2022). We used "activity" to recognize how this work depended on the specific classroom context and curricular purpose. Any of the activities we shared could be used as summative or formative assessments, or in progress thinking tools for students.

Multimedia Characterization Mapping

This activity/assignment is an updated version of a character map/mind map that incorporates multimedia and digital literacies (Miller & Colantonio-Yurko, 2018). The teachers selected a character from *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Universe*. Then, they selected digital images to represent the characters' journey (Identities, Relationships, Changes, and Experiences). They then selected one quote that aligned with each of the images they've selected. Finally, the teachers wrote a short analysis that connected their images to the quote. This activity could be completed on Google tools (ex. Docs, Slides) or using other digital apps such as Piktochart, Prezi or another image curating tool.

Social Justice Concepts

As a learning community, teachers in the professional development conducted a version of literary analysis and devices that required teachers to understand and apply concepts from social justice education to the novel, *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Universe*. We explained that the activity can be modified in practice; for example, students can be assigned into groups based on a concept (for example, "oppression"). Then, students can be given the definition and asked to rewrite it in their own words. For the PD, we asked the teachers to brainstorm examples of the concept of either gender or class and then consider these concepts in relation to texts in their lives. We asked teachers to explain how either gender or class as a concept operated in the novel, *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Universe*. For this activity we used the following guiding questions based on (Appleman, 2015) to examine their selected concept:

- Observe how sexual and gendered stereotypes might be reinforced or undermined.
- How are gender rules enforced in the text?
- Think about how gender affects and informs relationships between the characters?
- In what ways are economic classes represented in the text?
- Does the narrative side with working people or those with economic power?
- How are social hierarchies maintained or disrupted in the text?

Teachers included quotes to illustrate their arguments. We also shared with teachers that this assignment can be completed using digital tools such as Google Slides or, Prezi, Piktochart or another digital tool.

Critical Setting Analysis

With teachers, we engaged in a critical setting activity. For this work, we updated a version of a setting analysis that considers how power operates within and across settings (see Miller, 2018). The teachers we all assigned groups and then selected one of the settings from the novel, *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. Teachers considered how

Figure 6

Example Critical Setting Analysis using Dante and Aristotle Discover the Secrets of the Universe
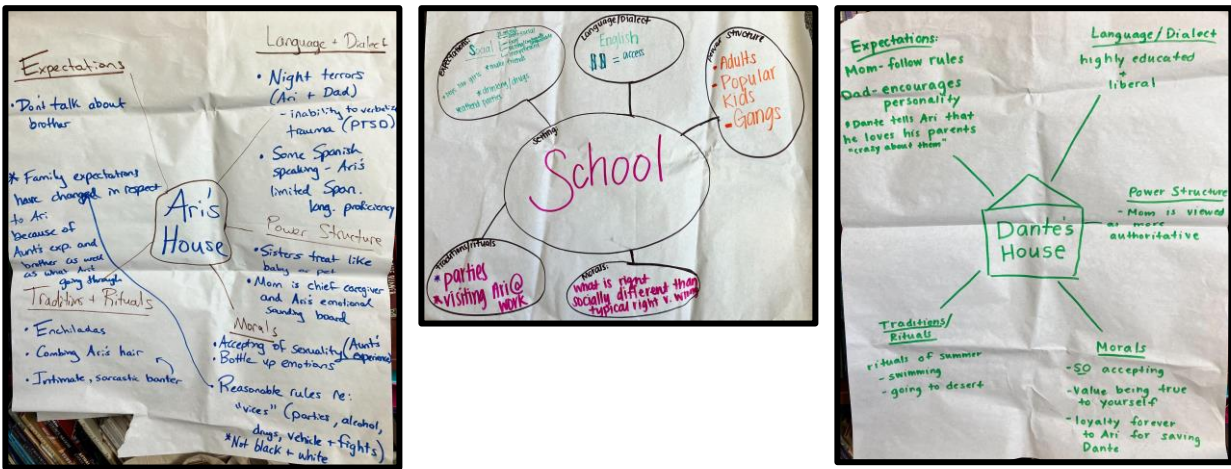
characters operate within the setting and why based on the power dynamics within their selected setting from the novel. We encouraged teachers to select specific quotes or examples from the novel to illustrate and support their points and analysis (see examples in Figure 6). Teachers in the professional development then examined how the changing of a setting impacts how a character acts and views themself and why. We explained to teachers that in their own practice, their students can make literal maps using digital tools such as Google Maps, Google Drawings, or another digital tool.

Reflections from Teachers

We do not position this article as an empirical study. Rather, we wanted to outline how and why we positioned a professional development centered on social justice education with young adult and children's literature. As outlined above, teachers transitioned from unpacking the SJS to application with texts from their own curriculum and a shared text in *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe.* Our goal was for teachers to begin applying critical approaches to literary analysis in their own classrooms. The purpose for writing this article is to provide ideas and insights for other teachers, teacher leaders, administrators, and teacher educators who wish to construct a similar professional development opportunity. Still, we would be remiss to not include feedback and anecdotes from the participating teachers from the institute. The feedback we received from participating teachers throughout and towards the conclusion of the institute provided insight into revisions that were enacted or should be enacted in future iterations of the institute.

One key take-away expressed by many teachers was around text selection and text inclusion. One teacher shared that the PD, "really helps me to critically examine the texts, and then have students do the same so they can apply these to the situations they encounter in their life." Additionally, teachers considered the ways that texts can work using a social justice framework. Another teacher shared, "Any text can be a social justice text- it's helping me rethink how to teach the books I already use." Teachers noted that this PD informed the way that the select texts

for students and how students work around those texts can indeed be married with social justice teaching. As one teacher stated, the SJS allows them to: "think critically about what texts I use and how those texts are presented to my students."

A second key take-away from teachers showed that teachers grew their understandings of social justice teaching and wanted to implement these ideas in their own lives. One teacher noted that their learning from the PD, "allows us to teach students how to be more critical about the world around them, which is the first step before they can become change-makers and advocates." A second teacher wrote, " I find it to be helpful in knowing what to talk about in respect to social justice (as a discipline) and how to frame conversations/assignments with students using that language." Thus, teachers in the institute brought their honed awareness of social justice teaching with them to their own classrooms and practices. They were growing into the change agents they wanted their students to be.

Suggestions and Takeaways for Implementing a Similar Institute

Based on our work, we offer three takeaways for teacher leaders, department chairs, and other administrators who wish to implement similar professional development opportunities as we've outlined in this article. As with any teaching, contextual realities are going to shape how an educator constructs and leads professional development. We are not advocating for a direct translation from our work to other school settings. Instead, we provide these three guiding principles that emerged from our reflections during and after our professional development institute ended with the hope that educators take these ideas, expand upon them, refute, and revise them, and add to the conversation about social justice professional development.

Establishing Community and Norms

First, professional development leaders need to establish a community of norms that surface power dynamics and explicitly outline working norms of engagement. This point was especially important for our work as our group consisted of teachers from various schools and districts. Many teachers knew each other from graduate courses, but some did not. We began with Clint Smith's four classroom principles: "read critically, write consciously, speak clearly, and tell your truth." Participating teachers worked to visualize what those norms looked like in practice. We returned to those norms throughout the session to ground our conversations. In doing so, we modeled one way of engaging in critical conversations using texts (Schieble et al., 2020; Svrcek & Miller, 2021), which is a type of social justice pedagogical knowledge. Participating teachers noted that they implemented what we modeled with Smith's ideas into their own classrooms.

These norms reflected our collective agreement that we would engage in conversations about our own teaching and curriculum in critical, sometimes uncomfortable, ways. Our community norms also meant that we would root our conversations and reflection in action. In other words, by establishing norms and community agreements professional development leaders and participating educators are demonstrating that they are "willing to be disturbed" (Wheatley, 2002) about current practices and ways of thinking about English language arts teaching. We stress that norms are also shaped by power dynamics, which must be surfaced. We worked with an all white, all cisgender group of teachers. That racial and gender composition shaped how we

engaged in conversations. Professional development leaders must be aware of how cultural norms and power dynamics work in tandem in learning spaces. For instance, a focus on "niceness" thwarts critical conversations that are needed to challenge inequities because dominant social norms stemming from whiteness dictate that discussing racism is considered outside the bounds of "normal" and "nice" behavior (Dyches, 2016). An understanding of how power dynamics shape interactions is itself a type of social justice knowledge that is important for leading professional development opportunities.

Starting "Where Teachers Are"

Next, professional development leaders should ground the work in participating teachers' current understanding of social justice knowledge, social justice content knowledge, and social justice pedagogical knowledge. Professional development such as the one we outline should begin with "where teachers are" with the goal of moving them towards criticality (Milner, 2021). Frontloading and previewing major ideas before moving into readings and conversations is one way to establish where participating teachers are in their understanding. One way we approached this point was by having participating teachers unpack the Social Justice Standards for clarity. Professional development leaders could also preview terms and concepts with participating teachers to establish working understandings, clarify assumptions, and answer questions before moving into the heart of the work. For instance, professional development leaders could offer a concept like "critical literacy" for participating teachers to unpack before moving into how to enact critical literacies in classrooms.

Working Within, Around, and Through Predefined Boundaries

Finally, professional development leaders need to root the work in participating teachers' current approach to their content and craft in their professional contexts. Our institute focused on children's and young adult literature. Yet, we had high school teachers who were required to teach certain texts relating to the canon. This requirement was a contextual feature of their work and had to be addressed with criticality and care. We worked to support these teachers in revising their approach to teaching a text like *Beowulf* with the Social Justice Standards in mind. This work moved their pedagogical knowledge into social justice pedagogical knowledge because the teachers repositioned *Beowulf* as a vehicle to unpack social norms, gendered power dynamics, and dominant voices within a text. We philosophically disagreed with a rule that required teaching canonical texts, yet we had to be "pedagogical realists" (Dyches & Sams, 2018) and meet teachers in the contexts they operated within. We also considered how we could use young adult literature book clubs to supplement the teaching of *Beowulf*, which was a type of social justice content knowledge. This example illustrates the importance of recognizing and working within teachers' current contextual restraints, especially when those restraints are antithetical to our own beliefs about social justice English language arts education. Professional development leaders need to work with teachers to find ways to push against boundaries and imagine new ways of teaching within defined boundaries.

Declaration of Interest

We have no relevant interests to disclose.

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KAHANI LITERACY PROJECT: INDIC-CENTRIC LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION AS A SHIELD AGAINST ASIAN HATE

DR. KALPANA MUKUNDA IYENGAR
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Abstract

As society grapples with the realities of inequity, marginalization, microaggressions, and senseless acts of hatred, schools must assume a greater role as a change agent. This article reviews the results of the *Kahani* Literacy Project - an Indic-centric Language Arts pedagogical approach. Diasporic Asian Indian children provided the writing samples (*Kahanis*) for the present study. We collected 224 *Kahanis* in which diasporic Asian Indian children explored multiple experiences (e.g., food, travel, values) from an Indian perspective. The *Kahani* writers demonstrated an appreciation and respect (or veneration) for their heritage. Discourse analysis (visual and script) of the dataset identified socially mediated elements that would contribute to the formation of a healthy ethnic identity. Results from the present study suggest that, when situated in a space free of cultural disparagement, diasporic Asian-Indian learners will create inventive, culturally validating narratives. The texts written by the students revealed psychological and cultural negotiation, common to most bicultural individuals. These writings, in turn, contribute to the construction of positive ethnic identity, which acts as a buffer to Asian hate.

Kahani Literacy Project: Indic-centric Language Arts Instruction as a Shield against Asian Hate

> **Child's Perspective on the Nature of the Problem -** *Indians that live in the United States are not an exception to bullying. Indians could be bullied because of their eating habits, lifestyle and social behaviors. In most cases kids won't even take-home cooked food for the fear of made* [sic] *fun of. I feel very lucky to go to a school that will not tolerate any type of bullying* (AP 012)

Introduction

Students who have been marginalized or ignored by the mainstream curriculum blossom through culturally sustaining approaches to instruction (Paris, 2012). While there is some research addressing the needs and experiences of the African American and Latinx community, all culturally marginalized communities prosper from experiences that celebrate or privilege their cultural capital (Boudreau, 1977). Despite their academic achievement in school, students from

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) cultures are often subjected to symbolic and physical violence in school and the community. Adding to the estrangement, most schools offer a white, Ameri/Euro-centric curriculum despite cultural diversity in the school community. Students from AAPI communities (e.g., Asian Indians) are often situated in academic spaces that are culturally distal or disrespectful of their heritage. Might there be benefits for diasporic Asian Indian American (AIA) children who participated in an Indic-centric writing experience?

One promising iteration is the *Kahani Literacy Project* (KLP). This Indic-centric approach to Language Arts instruction incorporates purposely selected texts and culturally efficacious literacy activities. The KLP contributes to the construction of a culturally affirming *habitus* for cultural insiders. At the same time, it decenters the curriculum, disrupting white-privilege while broadening the worldview of cultural outsiders. In this paper, we explore the origins of this social malady and a possible solution to Asian hate, i.e., *Kahani Literacy Project* (KLP). We present student-generated *Kahanis* (e.g., Indic-centric texts & visuals) and then discuss possible findings through critical discourse analysis. *Kahani*, the Hindi word for "story," represents the language and the culture of the participants.

There is a dearth of research on the AIA population. Some readers may be incredulous to learn that a community labeled "model minority" (Wright & Li, 2019) confronts challenges both in and out of school spaces. In their research, Galindo and Pong (2011) note that diasporic Indian children suffer affronts to their identity construction and "sense of belonging" within school settings.

Concomitantly, with their exclusion from the curriculum, there has been an alarming increase in the violence, i.e., physical and symbolic, experienced by AAPI communities (Dmello, 2021; Mello, 2022). Distortions, Hindu-phobia (Batra, 2021), racism, and other forms of ignorance germinate Asian hate. Culturally efficacious Language Arts instruction contributes to the development of ethnic pride and healthy identity, (Iyengar & Smith, 2016). While cultural insiders benefit, those outside of the cultural community have the opportunity to increase in their knowledge, respect, and appreciation of cultural expressions not their own.

Cultural Distortions, Ignorance, and Displacement

Formal schooling, commonly extols the victories and milestones of its " majority" citizenry. Unfortunately, in multicultural societies, the myopic curricular lens (focused on a sole cultural group) marginalizes, demonizes, and pathologizes communities who do not belong to the mainstream culture (Austin, 2022; Johnson, 2021; Morrow, 2020). Without meaningful engagement beyond their culture, individuals are doomed to misunderstanding, disinformation, miscommunication, baseless suspicion, and irrational hate. To combat ignorance, intolerance, and other manifestations of aggressions against AAPI communities, the co-authors propose, *KLP*, culturally mediated Language Arts experience.

The Kahani Literacy Project is a culturally informed approach to writing instruction. Though informed by the Writing Workshop model (NCTE, 2022), the *habitus* (i.e., the reading materials, writing prompts, languages of instruction) reveals an Indic-centric space in which to develop culturally scaffolded written expression. The National Writing Project model (*Writing Workshop*

[*WW*]) organizes writing experiences for learners at different stages in their writing development. Augmenting the social-constructivist framework of *WW*, the *KLP* emphasizes daily, systematized, and sustained *culturally* mediated writing experiences within a nurturing and supportive *habitus* (i.e., Indic-centric).

In addition to their roles as arbiter, cheerleader, coach, editor, facilitator, listener, observer within the culturally mediated space, through the *KLP*, teachers and students assume the role of cultural docents, who perpetuate the *Cultural Rhetorical Knowledge* (CRK) (Iyengar, 2023) of the community, i.e., diasporic Asian Indians. CRK is naturalistic instruction designed to increase the youth's understanding of the shades of meaning (i.e., the formal, lexical, and conceptual forms of semantics), subtle characteristics (e.g., values), and nuanced world-view of a given culture. According to Iyengar (2023) "CRK may be experienced by both cultural insiders and interested, knowledgeable outsiders. It is the process of becoming better informed, i.e., more knowledgeable about any cultural group. … CRK has the potential to promote inter-group tolerance, appreciation, and empathy" (p. 87). Through CRK, learners diminish their cultural ignorance and ignominy.

Kahani Literacy Project (**KLP)**

Iyengar and Henkin (2015) created an iteration of the NCTE Writing Workshop and *Cuentos* Project, which was called *Kahani Literacy Project* (*KLP*). The *KLP* was later researched in public schools (Iyengar & Smith, 2022). This writing experience was designed to provide diasporic AIA school-aged (Pre -K-12) children with opportunities to explore their heritage through literacy practices in an environment free of disrespect or disparagement. Through the *KLP*, a sociocultural- constructivist approach, it was envisioned that there would emerge a pedagogy that would acknowledge the minoritized cultural capital as they advanced their skills of literacy.

When transformative educators integrate the customs, traditions, values, and worldviews of students beyond the mainstream, they must be vigilant against the microaggressions that their learners may face in school and society (e.g., cultural/curricular erasure, exoticization, trivialization). The *KLP* was conducted in a metaphoric space that was welcoming to Indic cultures. When schools structure their curricula, they have the opportunity to infuse greater cultural sensitivity and to decenter whiteness as the "gold standard." Culturally affirming pedagogies, like the *KLP*, reinforce the positive values and social contributions originating in the Indian community, thereby fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect. In this way, students from any cultural background, experience a heightened sense of *CG*. In addition, cultural insiders have the opportunity to make a fortuitous contribution to their *EI* construction. As cultural insiders, (i.e., diasporic AIA learners), cultural outsiders (i.e., Euromericans) engage in classroom explorations and activities informed by the Indian cultural community. There is reduction among the "three conceptual I's, that is, Ignominy, Ignorance, and Intolerance. Through such affirming pedagogies, learners are fortified, i.e., shielded against Asian hate.

The Rationale for The Kahani Literacy Project

Given the importance of literacy proficiency to academic achievement (cf. Rintaningrum, 2019), the *Kahani* project serves a critical role in the intellectual development of diasporic Asian Indian children. Because of their important contributions to literacy development, parental engagement and involvement must be potentialized, especially from minoritized groups. Through interventions like the *KLP*, literacy experiences can integrate family members and thereby become more culturally inclusive. By embracing the heritage of Asian Indian communities through offering culturally reaffirming tasks (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Hollins, 2015), a nurturing learning environment is created that scaffolds literacy development and disrupts Asian hate. Because it scaffolds literacy development and healthy ethnic identity, the *Kahani* literacy project is a fortifying educational experience for children from the AIA community.

Most educators, though dedicated and well intentioned, would not profess deep knowledge or a cultural connection to AAPI groups, none the least, Asian Indians. A perusal of the customary U.S. school curriculum reveals a glaring absence of Asian Indian themes or perspectives in assignments. Activities within the *KLP,* proffers a robust curriculum that foregrounds a particular Asian community, e.g., Asian Indians. By designing an Indic-centric Language Arts curriculum (i.e., *KLP*), the racism, stereotyping, misrepresentation, and other forms of ignorance that malign AAPI communities will be contested (Lee, 2021).

Current research demonstrates the efficacy of learning experiences that integrate school practices with culturally based practices (Flores, et al., 2022). The *KLP* presents many possibilities for authentic, culturally efficacious elements (e.g., literature, writing, multimedia) that contribute to school success in literacy and other content areas. As instruction is thoughtfully designed with inclusivity and delivered with cultural sensitivity, students are less likely to fall prey to misinterpretations and spurious ideas about cultural groups.

The bibliographic component of any literacy experience is crucial. Illustrated, Indic-centric children's books that highlight the heritage and contributions of Indians to society address two distinct audiences. Through such books and materials, diasporic Indians celebrate their heritage, which contributes to their construction of positive ethnic identity. For cultural outsiders, such books and materials demystify unknown aspects of an ancient culture and prompt respect, which minimizes the ignorance and misunderstandings that lead to Asian hate. As a component of *KLP*, Indic-centric, illustrated children's literature (e.g., *Dancing Deepa*) is a tool that helps to contest the marginalization and misrepresentation towards Asian Indians. The *KLP* approach helps to develop an appreciation for equity, social justice, and the diversity beyond the mainstream (e.g., AAPI community).

Theoretical Framework

Though subtle, education has been identified as one of the most potent instruments of hegemony, e.g., Asian hate. Curriculum designers with and without intentionality, maintain a Eurocentric or Ameri-centric focus on instruction which omits the contributions and lived experiences of other communities. Just as debilitating are educational spaces in which learners feel compelled to mask their identities (e.g., *I am not from that ethnic group*), are obliged to reify fictions or myths (*British colonialism was good for India*), or ignore meaningful events in their lives (e.g., *Kalpana Chawla was the first Indian woman to go into space*.) These marginalizations and

omissions, if left unattended, lead to *cultural erasur*e or *cultural cringe* (Phillips, 1999). One pedagogical approach to impede potential cultural atrophy or mortality is the creation of instructional opportunities that privilege marginalized, disparaged, and oppressed groups.

Narrative Writing to Disrupt Euro/Ameri-centric Curriculum

Literacy researchers (c.f., Koenig Kellas, 2013) find three purposes for storytelling practices. Focused at a more cognitive level, Koenig Kellas advances that narrative writing facilitates - (a) the construction of individual and relational identity, (b) socialization, and (c) functions as a coping mechanism. Koenig Kellas (2013) continues, "stories and storytelling are one of the primary ways that families and family members make sense of both everyday and difficult events, create a sense of individual and group identity, remember, connect generations, and establish guidelines for family behaviour" (p.1).

Healthy Ethnic Identity

The eradication of Asian hate may be an insurmountable challenge. Bhalla (2008) suggests that a tenable approach would be to fortify the emotional and psychological security of the learner. Educators can bolster learners (i.e., particularly from marginalized communities) against microaggressions (e.g., Asian hate) by supporting their construction of healthy *ethnic identity* (EI). This socio-psychological state refers to pride in one's culture, the opposite of *cultural cringe* (Phillips, 1950). For the construction of a healthy EI, an awareness of the group's historical positionality (e.g., emic historical perspective, victories and achievements of the community). Semiotically, cultural images (e.g., flag, statuary, icons) evoke positive feelings (e.g., familiarity, happiness, pride).

Those lacking a healthy EI may wince upon hearing their heritage language among the mainstream. Lacking healthy EI, the individual may not question misleading or erroneous "facts." According to theorists (cf. Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991; Hardy, 2013), robust EI functions as a psychological defense against symbolic violence and microaggressions experienced by members of marginalized groups as they interact with the broader (i.e., mainstream) society. In order to construct a healthy EI, it is beneficial to engage in activities that make the culture the cynosure of the experience.

Cultural Groundedness

Cultural Groundedness (CG) (Gosin, et al., 2003) is epistemological. As a construct, CG refers to various skills, semiotics, and schema embedded in a particular culture. The presence of the construct is evidenced through germane, observable attributes and behaviors. The presence of these attributes contribute to the construction of a sense of self-worth that is rooted and validated by one's culture. Observable attributes, as they relate to CG, include expressed knowledge or veneration to culturally historic personae (e.g., Shakuntala Devi, Indira Gandhi), events (e.g., The Expulsion of the British), or artistic expressions (e.g., *Bharatanatyam*, Carnatic music, *Rangoli*). The reader should be mindful that this is not an exhaustive list.

When they possess CG, learners are cognizant of the contributions from their cultural community to society. Notable examples include Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi [world peace], Anandibai Gopal Rao Joshi [First Indian woman physician]. A contemporary example in U.S. politics is Vice-President Kamala Devi Harris. In agreement with prior cultural theorists, we advance that individuals with well-developed CG and are less likely to succumb to sociocultural victimization (Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Branch, 2020). As knowledge increases, it mitigates symbolic violence and refutes disparagements against AAPI communities.

An important contributor to healthy ethnic identity (positive view of one's culture) is an appreciation for the members of one's ethnic community and a recognition for the positionality of the community (e.g., historicity, contributions to society).While the *Kahani* data yielded cultural groundedness to varying degrees (*It has …helped me expand my knowledge of dance,* [and] *also helped me to stay connected to my roots*), we have selected exemplar *Kahanis* that have evidence of pronounced cultural groundedness. While less pronounced, all *Kahanis* writers acknowledged Indian culture (*Despite the fact that my family lives in America, we still try to keep our Indian culture alive*). Healthy EI is psychological.

Because KLP is Indic-centric, it privileges the epistemologies and worldviews of India. Through this language arts approach (e.g., culturally mediated texts, visuals, writing assignments), the curriculum refocuses on the lived experiences of diasporic Asian Indian children and their heritage. Through culturally efficacious instruction of the KLP, students acquire an appreciation or awareness of their heritage which contributes to CG. In this way, they engage in the Language Arts within an Indic-centric *habitus* (Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Branch 2020). As we reported earlier:

> Children who are culturally grounded are more likely to perform well in schools (Urrieta, 2005). Similarly, Valenzuela (1999, p. 163) speaks of a "dual frame of reference" that bicultural students develop as they negotiate their identities and the meanings of their bicultural lives. As a tool of psychological mediation, the dual frame of reference allows individuals to consider multiple perspectives (social, cultural, linguistic), as well as their own situatedness within a given context (Iyengar & Smith, 2016, p. 18).

Because it is situated within a psychological space that recognizes the perspectives of India, the KLP and its curriculum afford students the opportunity to utilize the experience of literacy development as a tool of psychological mediation.

Reconstructing the Language Arts Curriculum for CG

Despite its many benefits, the Euro/Ameri-centric curriculum is often silent regarding the contributions of marginalized groups, e.g., Asian Indians. The failure to recognize the contributions of all communities leads to normalization of social inequity, which, in turn, contributes to rising Asian hate. The KLP addresses three critical elements of the curriculum, including 1. the intent of instruction, 2. the content of instruction, and 3. the learning experiences. For clarification, the intent of the KLP is to decenter the Anglophile curriculum in favor of Indic-centeredness. The intent is to expand the learner's perspectives in their academic experiences, to foster a sense of equity, and develop critical consciousness.

Having established the intent of the KLP approach, the content, i.e., the materials and activities, is concomitant. As a multimodal approach, the KLP embraces written and oral texts (e.g., *Ramayana & Mahabharata; Panchantantra Katha*) as well as multimedia (e.g., YouTube). Along with archival materials, the *KLP* incorporates live exhibitions of the Indic-centric performing arts (e.g., *Bharatanatyam* dance & *Carnatic* Music). Attendance and discussions of these experiences, as well as purposeful instructional design, construct a nurturing space (*habitus*) in which the Asia Indian learner fortifies their EI and in so doing, grows in their CG. While not eliminating animosity, transformative interventions (e.g., *KLP*) strengthen the CG of Asian Indian learners so that they can withstand microaggressions like Asian (Indian) hate.

Positionality Statement

The co-authors are multilingual specialists of (bi)literacy. They have more than 50 years' combined experience guiding and scaffolding teachers in transformative literacy pedagogies, including the writing process, Multicultural Children's Literature (MCCL), and ESOL. Embedded in their teaching are approaches for educational equity and social justice, especially for marginalized communities. The first author, born and raised in India, is a cultural insider who conducts Indic-centric research. She instituted the *Kahani* Literacy Project to leverage the *Cultural Rhetorical Knowledge* to encourage written expression. The second author is a respectful cultural outsider to the Indian community. He is an African American born and raised in the United States and has a research agenda focused on the Latinx community. Despite their individual academic achievements, they have experienced cultural exclusion through the Americentric/Eurocentric curricula found in most US educational institutions. Because of prior personal experiences, the co-authors intuitively understood the benefits of creating a culturally mediated writing space or *habitus* for learners. The fortuitous teaming of insider/outsider yielded an emic/etic perspective that guarded against bias and erroneous interpretations. Admonitions of "put on your researcher's hat" kept interpretations within the limits of theoretical constraints. Through this synergistic (emic/etic) process, the researchers engendered fidelity to the meanings expressed in the data (i.e., *Kahani)*.

Methodology

Kahani Narratives: Examining the Data

In this article, we report on data gathered through the *Kahani Literacy Project,* which took place over nine consecutive years (2009-2018). The project was curtailed due to the pandemic for 2019. For analysis, the data included written texts, accompanied by illustrations. AIA students, ranging in age four to fourteen, met during the summer in cohorts numbering between nineteen and twenty-four. As part of the recruitment, a survey was distributed at classical Indian dance and music schools in a major, U.S. southwest city. In addition to SES questions (e.g., parental income and education level), we gathered information on other demographics. Results from 224 diasporic Asian Indian children revealed:

1. Representation from the four principal regions of India
2. Knowledge of multiple Indigenous languages and dialects

3. Attendance at *Balavikas* (Hindu Religious School) at temple
4. Participation in various Indic-centric performing arts activities were enrolled in *Bharatanatyam* dance and *Carnatic* Music

The co-researchers sought evidence that a culturally infused Language Arts activity like the *KLP* would contribute to the construction of healthy ethnic identity as revealed through elements have the potential to develop cultural groundedness, offering a defense against dispersions? To answer this question, we selected samples from the data set (*N*=224) that was collected over 9 years. To better appreciate the characteristics, we conducted a two-tiered analysis of the data: (1) Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA - *imagery*) and (2) Discourse Analysis (DA - *script*).

Discourse Analysis (DA) requires units beyond the individual word and the script (i.e., words). DA relied upon open coding. The researchers highlighted and reached consensus on significant phrases. The phrases indicated activities (e.g., travel). The initial unit of analysis was the "episode" (e.g., *Train Trip*, *Flag Hoisting, Temples of the Kakatiyas*), which we subsequently parsed into plot points. We provide exemplars to clarify the processes below. The codes were refined as needed, i.e., individual names were grouped into categories. As the categories were analyzed, themes emerged. For purposes of this paper, we present those themes that had the strongest presence among the *Kahanis.* The co-researchers, as they discussed the codified phrases, endeavored to frame the elements within an Indic-centric perspective. One example of contextualization: A *Kahani* writer described the lesson from her grandmother on how to milk a buffalo. While milking a cow is commonplace for many westerners, the notion of milking a *buffalo* is just as commonplace in India, while not customary in the west. The exemplars we discuss in this paper were selected because they demonstrably evidenced elements of CG.

In order to engage in the process of Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA), we perused, then listed the elements within the illustrations that the *Kahani* writers had incorporated into their narratives. We listed nature/natural objects (i.e., flora and fauna), structures (e.g., architecture), synthetic products (e.g., colors), and manufactured objects (e.g., conveyances). Albers (2007) theorizes that VDA permits an analysis of "studying the structures and conventions with visual texts, and identifying how certain social activities and social identities get played out in their production" (p.83). For a better understanding of the possible interpretations of the illustration, the researchers had to determine text-picture congruence within the culturally/socially mediated stories. While not all, several *Kahani* writers engaged in transmediation (Siegel, 1995) by incorporating hand drawn illustrations and images to convey their messages. To better appreciate the characteristics, we conducted a two-tiered analysis of the data: (1) Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA - *imagery*) and (2) Discourse Analysis (DA - *script*).

Defense Against Microaggressions and Other Forms of Hate

Contained within the *Kahanis* were descriptions of everyday behaviors, beliefs, and objects that were customary in India. What is noteworthy is that, in all cases, the diasporic AIA writers described a sense of cultural pride, pleasure, respect/veneration, and/or socio-cultural discernments). If the *Kahani* writers described a negative (e.g., *the roads to the house were bumpy*), it would be counterbalanced by positive expression (e.g., *when we got to* [place]*, it was*

worth it). As students wrote about their in-country experiences, they revealed their joy with those things (e.g., behaviors, beliefs, holidays) that might provoke disparagement from Ameri-centric individuals. Those who are culturally grounded are less likely to concur with naysayers or deprecators of the Indian community. The love and respect of self, and one's cultural roots, provide a defense against outside attacks, exoticization, and other forms of disparagement.

VDA 1: "Republic Day"

 Even in the narratives in which some Ameri-centric object would be mentioned (e.g., bottled milk purchased in stores) the *Kahani* narratives. At the first level of visual analysis, we find the flag of India, the second focal point is the family unit.

In her *Kahani* (see *image* 1 below), a child writes about her discussion with her mother about the flag of India. In the same *Kahani,* the child expresses excitement and positive feelings toward the tri-colour banner, the symbol of her heritage country (*It was the best day of my life* [AJ 080]). As we continue on with the review of the drawing, we notice that the child has drawn her entire family (evidence of Indian collectivism) (Mittapalli, 2009) with smiles on their faces. The facial expression customarily connotes pleasure or positive affect.

Concordant with the happy dispositions of the people, the young author drew a bright yellow sun with a clear, blue sky, and fluffy white clouds. The *triranga* (tri-color) flag of India, was the center of the image. For the *Kahani* writer, in summary, the flag of India with the smiling family was contextualized within a positive experience (i.e., episode).

Discourse Analysis 1 (*script*)

The following analysis refers to *Kahani* (AJ 080). Through the *Kahani*, we view the ways the mother inculcates civic behavior in the daughter. In one Kahani we read "*it's* [sic] *Indian Republic Day, let's go to see flag hoisting*…." The word choice (*beautiful*) in the third sentence is ambiguous. It could apply to the experience, her feelings, as well as the flag itself. The student further wrote, *it was so beautiful to see the Indian flag for the first time*. Whatever the referent (i.e., flag, feeling, or experience), the student wrote of a positive association with a patriotic symbol of India. We read about another instance in which the mother offers additional instruction about the symbols of India, *My mom told [sic] Indian flag is called triranga, because it has three colors.* This is a tacit lesson in morphology - the mother links "triranga" from *Kannada* (a language from India) to the English description of the flag.

> *My mom said it's Indian Republic Day, let's go to see flag hoisting. My dad drove us. It was so beautiful to see the Indian flag for the first time. I was four years old then. My mom told [sic] Indian flag is called triranga, because it has three colors. It was the best day of my life* (AJ 008)

Figure 1: Republic Day Celebration

Young children often communicate fuller expression through imagery than through the written word alone. Through this *Kahai* (AJ 080) we review how a young writer identifies elements of her culture that she regards with pride (*It was so beautiful to see the Indian flag for the first time*). Both through her words and the illustration, echo positive sentiment toward Indian culture. Moreover, the child recounts the mother's spontaneous teachings of *cultural rhetorical knowledge* (Iyengar, 2023), *My mom said it's Indian Republic Day, let's go to see flag hoisting*. This *Kahani* is an example of Indic-centric Language Arts instruction to foster an appreciation of heritage culture.

VDA 2: "First Train Journey"

Unlike the first image, the following *Kahani* (see figure 2) communicates completely through visual text. The emphasis in the visual obligates the viewer to make interpretations of meaning and intentionality. Without words, the child loudly articulates a sense of peace or tranquility through the drawing (i.e., graphic text) of the Indian countryside. The child-artist skillfully paints the native palm tree as well as the soothing color of the morning sky reflected on the water. We should note that, despite the enumerable travelers on the train and the countless animals living on the land, the artist focused on inanimate objects in the environment (e.g., flora, land, water, air, sky). This choice of "visual subjects" also contributed to the feelings of quiet and solitude. For the reasons mentioned, the co-authors argue that objects or concepts drawn by the *Kahani* writer,

that relate to India, engendered consideration as the source of calm or a soothing, languorous experience.

Figure 2: A Travel Image from the Train

Discourse Analysis 2 (*script*)

As the *Kahani* writer announced from the beginning, this was a story about his first train ride that took place in India. He was keenly aware of differences and shortcomings that were associated with the mode of transportation, "*unlike any air-conditioned car.*" Notwithstanding the inconveniences, he proclaimed the experience in India as, "*one memorable trip.*" Continuing his description of his train travel, he reveals that he "*could not sleep as much,*" but he said to himself, *"that was awesome.*"

The writer identified multiple inconveniences: (1) no air conditioning, (2) lack [of] sleep, (3) long (8-hour) journey, (4) cafeteria made food (5) sleeping in bunk beds (top bunk), (6) strong [i.e. unpleasant] taste of *chai,* (7) second-class travel. What is immediately apparent is the manner in which the *Kahani* writer rationalized and ameliorated each of the vexations he mentions

The young writer, in the first sentence, dubbed his trip in the train car without air conditioning as "one memorable" experience. Clarifying his appreciation for the trip, the Asian Indian child commented that he "*enjoyed that new experience of talking to new people and seeing new*

places." It is through interaction with members of a community that an individual obtains information, i.e., acquires knowledge about the experiences and perspectives of community members. As they were described, the encounters were positive and informative. All of the negative experiences listed were mitigated through some positive or enriching event.

While people commonly find mass-produced meals disagreeable, this child wrote glowingly about his meal prepared in the train cafeteria (which, arguably, contributed to his pleasant reminisce). His inaugural second-class train ride in India would also contribute to his healthy ethnic identity construction. As research documents (Chan, 2022; D'warte & Woodrow, 2023; Niu, 2022;), members of marginalized communities are more likely to withstand microaggressions and other forms of hate when they are fortified with cultural groundedness.

> *The First Train Journey*
>
> *I think I made the right decision, because it was one memorable trip unlike any air-conditioned car. I could* not sleep as much*, but enjoyed that new experience of talking to new people and seeing new places…*[I] *said to myself that was awesome!!!!!!!!The first time I traveled on [sic] train was in India… The trip was eight hours long… I picked to sleep on the top bunk of the train, because getting on and off the bunk using* [sic] *l*adder *was amusing… In the early afternoon my dad let me sip chai* [tea that] *tasted so bad - wonder* [sic] *why grownups drink it!!!I had to drink a whole bottle of water to get the taste out of my mouth.* [We] *ate lunch on the go. The food was prepared in cafeteria* [sic] *and it was tasty…It was my choice to travel second class so I could see everything!*

Throughout this *Kahani*, the child reveals socially mediated experiences through which he acquires cultural rhetorical knowledge and an Indic-centric worldview. Despite any inconveniences, the child's mood remained positive and culturally affirming.

DA 3: "Stone Temple"

The *Kahini* under discussion in this section was based on a photograph of the temples in South India built by the rulers called *Kakatiyas*. DA of the script (which linked to the image) revealed evidence (e.g., imagery, syntactic structures, vocabulary) of the learner's acquisition of (cultural) knowledge and veneration for their Indic heritage:

> *…I couldn't stop talking about how amazing the temple was. It took 72 years to build it! Imagine that, waking up every day and working hard by chiseling and chipping for 72 years!* (JG 003)

To the co-authors, there are phrases in the excerpt above (e.g., *72 years!*) that reveal respect and pride in ancestry.

During his visit to the temples of *Kakatiyas*, the *Kahani* writer, a diasporic Asian Indian child, expressed wonder, "*I was amazed at the majesty and elegance of the temple.*" With surprising metacognition, the child writes: "*I was expecting it to be a boring old temple, but it was very interesting. It showed me a lot about my heritage, and made me proud of it*" (JG 003).

We advance the theory that the formation of healthy EI acts as a shield for students against (i.e., Asian) hate found in western societies. The sense of cultural pride (versus *cultural cringe*) will fortify young minds in the formative years of their ethnic identity construction. Though imperceptible, the aggressive neglect of themes and topics in the curriculum that honor AAPI cultures, render children from these communities vulnerable to microaggressions, *cultural cringe*, and self- (ethnic) hate.

As a demonstration of his acquired cultural knowledge, the *Kahani* writer offered a pedagogical exposition, *The Kakatiyas who ruled some parts of South India from 1083 AD to 1323 AD…but you cannot see all of them now as most of them were destroyed* (JG 003). The following paragraph is excerpted from the *Kahani.* We note the detail (e.g., geographical, historical, distal), the accuracy (e.g., nomenclature), and the meticulous choice of words (e.g., *presiding deity*, *half of a human life*) in his description.

> *The Ramappa temple is built* [sic] *in 1213 A.D. by Racherla Rudra who was a general of King Ganapathi Deva. It is located in Palampet, which is about 77 km from Warangal, the capital of the Kakatiyas. The presiding deity at Ramappa temple is Lord Ramalingeshwara, another form of Shiva. It took 40 years to build it, which is half of a human life and it is also the only temple in India that's named after its chief sculptor Ramappa* (JG 003).

Figure 3: Stone Temple

The writers presented in the foregoing analysis experiences during their travels. It is important to understand that culturally informed instruction is contingent upon travel to the heritage country. A culturally framed *habitus* can be created by incorporating multiple media and activities.

Creating an Indic-centric *Habitus*: Multiple Contributors to Identity Development

The development of healthy ethnic identity (EI) is the result of limitless experiences, objects, items, and artifacts. In short, there are multiple avenues to acquire *Cultural Rhetorical Knowledge* (Iyengar, 2023) to deepen one's understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage. Those who are ignorant of the victories, achievements, and social contributions of their cultural community are vulnerable to pernicious myths about their culture and other forms of hate or microaggression.

The images selected by the children harkened back to their travels in India. However, sources of cultural knowledge are not limited to trips to one's heritage country. There are countless opportunities, experiences, and cultural artifacts that can enhance a child's understanding of their heritage. Among the possibilities, culture can be experienced through dance, music, *samskaras* (ceremonies) and celebrations. We selected and analyzed a set of *Kahanis* based on the writers' experiences outside of the heritage country.

Dance Performance as a Conduit of Culture

The contributions of the performing arts, particularly the dance, cannot be dismissed. The colorful costumes, exotic make-up, and intricate jewelry are admired by audience members, usually without iconicity. Those who are cultural insiders often recognize the referents and symbolism encompassed by the dress (e.g., costume, jewelry, make-up), expression, and movements (e.g., *hasta mudras*) of the skillful dancers. The performance, as well as the preparations for a performance (e.g., costuming, memorization of stories etc.), necessitate the exchanging of ideas (i.e., communication) with members of their cultural communities. It is such cultural knowledge that permits audience members to transcend aesthetics or the superficial to an authentic level.

In the following example, a child discusses her experiences as a performer of the sacred *Bharatanatyam* dance. She is aware of the linguistic, religious, literary, mythological, and historical contributions of membership in this dance troupe.

> *I fell in love with and continued to learn the dance form. It has not only helped me expand my knowledge of dance, but has also helped me to stay connected to my roots because of the mythology, language, and socialization through Bharatanatyam.*
> (MV 025D).

The child explains the important contributions of *Bharatanatyam* on her construction of her EI. The *Kahani* writer reflects on multiple areas (e.g., "*mythology, language, and socialization*") in which her dance experience expands her understanding of her heritage. Later, the child discusses the contributions that *Bharatanatyam* makes to heritage language development. Study

of the sacred dance of India also deepens the performer's grasp of the semantics and symbolism of an ancient culture.

Music: Tonal Semiotics

Music is also a conduit of culture. It is through music that children come to appreciate a worldview in a particular situation (e.g., appropriate, socially acceptable behavior). Emotions are mediated through sounds and songs. As a medium of communication, tonal semiotics (i.e., music) embodies emotions, history, values, morays, and aspirations. In this *Kahani*, a writer explains the ways in which music scaffolds CG.

> *I learn Carnatic music which is classical Indian music. This helps me keep an idea on where I came from and not lose my roots… But when I am away I feel like I am losing my roots. So I asked my parents to put me into a Carnatic Music class that way* [sic] *I would be able to say that I know something from my culture… Music affects our everyday lives by connecting us to our emotions and our roots.*

As with all forms of artistic expression, there is an immediate appreciation for the visible, superficial or aesthetic level. However, the cultural gravamen (e.g., abstractions, metaphors, symbols) contributes to healthy EI leading to CG. The child affirms and reiterates the importance of music for cultural preservation (Iyengar & Smith, 2016), leading to CG.

> *There are many different reasons for why people use music. Most of the reasons are for pleasure but I believe that music should be used to help you attach to your family roots. Your family roots are what keep you attached to reality* (AR0017).

Festivals and Celebrations

Festivals, celebrations, commemorations, and other social gatherings offer a microcosm of the complex construct called "culture." Such events may be linked to religious belief (e.g., Christmas, Hannakhua, "*Navarathri*"). There may be a historic connection (e.g., Indian Independence Day). Gratitude for things of nature (e.g., *Sankranti*) is celebrated. Social customs (e.g., birthdays, marriage, *Namakarana* [naming ceremony/blessing]) are also celebrated. There are memorial ceremonies for the deceased. All societies have culturally bound systems to memorialize events. People who wish to (or need to) function appropriately within any culture must learn the corresponding pragmatics acquired through participation in culturally-based events. It is important to remember many components of culture (e.g., beliefs, traditions, behaviors) must be experienced. Reading, alone, is insufficient.

Through the following excerpt, a *Kahani* writer reveals an understanding of the deeper connotation (i.e., spirituality, morality) of a popular festival, *Holi*.

> *Most Americans of Indian descent living in the United States today have some memory of dancing around the fire while throwing various colored powders and possibly water around at their friends at a community event…The idea behind the colored water or*

powder that is thrown around during this holiday is to make everyone look the same as to make discrimination impossible, with everyone covered in color (GI 005).

In a different *kahani*, a writer discusses how a celebration acts as a catalyst to learn social/cultural norms.

> *Our family celebrates all the Indian festivals with great religious fervor, particularly Deepavali is specially celebrated in our home in a grand form. We fill the house with lot* [sic] *of lights and decorations. Clay lamps are lit at the front entrance…We do Bommala Kolluvu – arranging different deities, toys and dolls on a staircase; should* [sic] *be odd numbers 3, 5, 7, 9 etc. Our relatives, friends and neighbors come over to be a part of the celebration and for tambulam. Traditionally, the guests are offered turmeric, kunkum and fruits. A goody bag with sweets and a gift is also given to the guests. All women and girls get ready in their traditional Indian attires. I get to be the host on that day and tell everyone about the display and the related stories…Celebrating Deepavali is a great fun event, and we end the day by fire crackers.*

The visits by friends and family, decorative accouterments, as well as traditional gifts, are part and parcel of this joyful cultural experience. Through such social gatherings, the values of a culture (e.g., collectivism, conviviality, generosity) are instilled during formative years and perpetuated.

EI and CG: Shields Against Hate

As arrogant, unenlightened members of the greater society attempt to demoralize and engage in microaggressions against minoritized communities (e.g., AAPI, Asian Indian) the psychological defense of a healthy ethnic identity is critical. Curricular experiences that expatiate on the contributions and achievements of this Asian community, decenters whiteness, and fosters a critically conscious educational experience.

> *I have* [gone] *to different Indian festivals.* [I connect] *to the Indian* [sic] *culture through social gatherings and acquaintances…I am able to meet and make friends with people who are part of my culture. With these people, I can learn new things about Indian culture and I can share different aspects of my culture to people who understand and appreciate it…We are not completely exposed to the culture but we try our best to hold on to it...*

When classroom time integrates culturally efficacious instruction (Flores, et al., 2018), learners are engaged and develop resilience to withstand the psychological assault of microaggressions. The following quote, from one of the *Kahanis*, describes the situations and the benefit of a culturally mediated literacy like the *KLP*.

> *I felt different and there were times where I didn't want to be Indian. Now, because of all the Indian friends I have made, I feel proud and honored to call myself an Indian.*

The implicit goals of microaggressions and other forms of hate is to disparage, demoralize, and stigmatize members from minoritized communities.

While it may be impossible to eradicate all Asian-hate, it is possible to construct curricula that dispels ignorance, uplifts voices, and embraces multiple perspectives. When communities learn to coexist, they respect the epistemologies of groups other than their own, conceivably provoking a disruption of animosity and hatred. As learners read and write about diverse communities, they acquire new knowledge and support their peers as they venerate their heritage.

Implications

When afforded opportunities to write with free topic choice, learners often construct culturally grounded narratives that reveal their understanding and appreciation for their heritage. While the students may perform or excel within the "official (i.e., Anglo-centric) school curriculum," elements of the learners' cultural community may be omitted perfunctorily. As the data collected (i.e., *Kahani* narratives) revealed, diasporic AIA children are able to articulate positive aspects from their culture (e.g., travel, festivals), important cultural artifacts (e.g., the flag of India, festivals), and natural wonders (e.g., the *Ganga* River).

In order to equitably serve children from marginalized communities, topic choice would appear to have critical significance, in that themes and ideas from the child's culture may have been excluded. As evidenced in the *Kahanis*, Indic-centric things (i.e., concepts, ideas, objects) may hold a special interest for the children. Lacking any adjustment to the curriculum, there is high probability that the writing topics, of interest to the diasporic AIA learners, would fall outside of the curricula, or become fodder for taunts and disparagement.

To become more culturally generative, schools can broaden the curriculum to encourage written cultural community exploration. These transformative literacy practices fortify students' self-concept and CG. When there are learners from the AIA community, along with extended writing activities (e.g., KLP) the classroom LA program can include culturally infused stories and other Indic-centric experiences to better achieve student engagement and enjoyment. Such a curricular paradigm shift would "decenter whiteness" (Finnegan, 2022) and equip students to be understanding and supportive of diverse perspectives. Culturally framed interventions like the KLP, that incorporate critical engagement, enable learners to develop critical consciousness, thereby fostering inter-group solidarity.

Conclusion

As we read in the *Kahanis*, diasporic Asian Indian children leveraged their travels to India and other cultural experiences (e.g., festivals, celebrations)to deepen their appreciation for the achievements of "their people." As the data revealed, the acquisition of new knowledge was conspicuous through their writing. Their words of admiration honoured their cultural group. Through their *Kahanis*, the young writers elevate the epistemologies, experiences, languages, and worldview of Asian Indian communities. As the student engages in culturally affirming activities, they learn about what is honourable about their culture. Just as important as free topic choice, the learner must be received into a welcoming, safe, and judgment-free environment.

Learners who are taunted or teased for their preferences, may shy away from authentic expression, and ultimately, experience cultural cringe. In extreme cases, a hostile or culturally antagonistic schooling experience will lead to cultural atrophy or mortality. Schooling in America typically centers around "whiteness," which marginalizes and dispirits students of disparate communities. While working in a culturally empathic space, the *Kahani* writers were free from disparagement and other microaggressions for their cultural practices. As learners come to honor their culture, they strengthen their shield against hatred and other forms of microaggressions. In this way, the *Kahani Literacy Project* provided a shield against Asian hate.

Recommendations

Concerned educators can study and implement a more learner-driven approach to composition and writing, free of prescribed or teacher-led topics. Within the classroom, teachers can encourage learners to explore realities and experiences that fortify their cultural CRK (e.g., community leaders, natural/geographic wonders, cultural icons). Students can be given time to construct and share their writings with their classmates to share their understandings. Along with original essays, published works feature aspects of Indic culture may be incorporated to augment the literacy experience.

Multicultural Children's Literature (MCCL)

Perhaps the biggest and most accessible resource that will function as an antidote or shield from (Asian) hate is a broad selection of MCCL. Illustrated stories with affirming messages contribute to the learners CG and support the process of "ideation" - at the personal and collective levels. Children can read a story from different cultures and make an Indic-centric transformation. Children can also analyze an Indic-centric story, and write a discussion around specific cultural differences or norms of the Indian community (e.g., open air markets, animals wandering freely through town). They can write lists of novel items from the story (e.g., unique fruits, flora, animals) in column "A" and write the English equivalent (or description) in column "B." Using their word lists, they can work in pairs/teams to create a unified poem.

Text Sets in Multiple Modal Pedagogies
One activity involves the distribution of several copies (i.e., at least one per student) of texts (e.g., book, magazine, newspaper) that focus on a central idea (e.g., modes of transportation in India, *Rangoli* art). We offer the example of a set of books with a common theme (i.e., *Rangoli*). Each team member should read available materials. To thoughtfully engage in reflection around an Indic-centric experience, students could be tasked with the suggested activities. To illustrate, we selected *Rangoli*, an artform from the Indian traditions. (1) Write a description of your chosen figure including its color, shape, and materials, (2) Select and name at least two dominant shapes in the Rangoli (3) Write a list of colorful materials that could be used in an original rangoli. Select the materials and generate your own design. Leaves, colorful pebbles, seeds, lentils, beads, flowers/flower petals, cotton balls, buttons, etc. are possible art supplies.

As another example, learners could explore *Vallam Kali* (i.e., boat game), also known as Snake Boat Race. Answer the following questions in essay form: (1) Write a description of your chosen boat including its color, shape, and materials (2) Select one passenger (other than yourself) and

describe that character, (3) Describe the setting (e.g., "…*Sea coast lined with palm trees,* (4) Describe your actions (i.e., what were you doing during the race?).

Biographies

After gathering books and other materials on significant people of Indian origin e.g., Kamala Devi Harris, *Jhansi Rani Laxmibai,* children in pairs or small groups can write an original biography script based on their multiple readings. The educator should model note taking. This may include - direct instruction on grammatical verb tense (i.e., spelling, grammatical conjugation, accurate chronology, transitional expressions), and summarization strategies. If desired, the scripted biography can be read and recorded to a smartphone (or another device) or publicly spoken.

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AN ANTIRACIST, ANTICOLONIAL APPROACH TO EVALUATING PALESTINIAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

DR. NORA LESTER MURAD[1]

Abstract

What do children learn—and not learn—about Palestine and Palestinians from the books they find in bookstores, libraries, and classrooms, and what are the implications of these messages? How can educators and librarians leverage antiracist and anticolonial values and methods to identify and critically use children's books involving Palestine? An analysis of 56 children's books resulted in two articles. The first article, previously published, revealed four categories of erasure of Palestinians from children's books: omission, dehumanization, distortion, and disinformation. The current article surfaces nine criteria to help educators and librarians use an antiracist and anticolonial approach to identify and critically use children's books involving Palestine. Exposing the dynamics, content, and impact of the erasure of Palestinians from children's books can help Palestinian and non-Palestinian readers and parents more actively and intentionally highlight Palestinian representation that builds identity, pride, and agency. Similarly, the criteria grounded in an antiracist, anticolonial approach identified in this article can help libraries and schools—sites where early knowledge about Palestinians is formed— choose better books and use books more critically.

Keywords: Representation, misrepresentation, Palestine, Palestinian, erasure, children's literature, diverse books, antiracism, anticolonial, libraries, educators, critical multicultural analysis

An Antiracist, Anticolonial Approach to Evaluating Palestinian Children's Books

Introduction: Ending the Invisibility of Palestinians in Children's Books

Like other racialized (Aziz, in press) and marginalized communities, Palestinians are regularly erased and misrepresented in the United States (Media Education Foundation, 2006). Anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab, and anti-Muslim racism reinforce one another, leading to consequences that vary from a lack of sense of belonging to criminalization. In addition, the 2023 Israeli war

on Gaza has made clear that dehumanization of Palestinians in the U.S. and Europe enables support for foreign policy choices that result in massive death and destruction in Palestine (Bennett, 2023).

Many Palestinian and solidarity organizations in the United States focus on correcting common distortions in public narratives. See, for example, Visualizing Palestine ("dedicated to using data and research to visually communicate Palestinian experiences to provoke narrative change"), Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network ("produc[ing] critical policy analysis and collectively imagin[ing] a new policymaking paradigm"), and the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights ("advanc[ing] a rights-based, accountability and justice-oriented framework"). But as most adults must first unlearn destructive, inaccurate information that has already been assimilated throughout childhood, this work is necessarily remedial. Despite the importance of accurate representation, efforts to expand and improve teaching about Palestine and Palestinians to children are not given sufficient attention by Palestinian rights advocates nor have Palestinian books—even those committed to antiracist and anticolonial approaches—been given sufficient attention in studies about children's literature.

Pervasive misrepresentation of Palestinians in K–12 education harms both Palestinian and non-Palestinian students and undermines healthy relationships between them. Writing about the misrepresentation of Indigenous nations, Betsy McEntarffer (Reese and McEntarffer, 2021) pointed out that white students may feel guilty of complicity when they later realize their relationship to others' oppression. She said the misinformation she learned "made it possible to enjoy a life of white privilege that was harmful to Indigenous and all children" (p. 54).

In educators' circles, representation is most frequently discussed as a matter of inclusion. People who do not see themselves represented feel they do not belong and are seen by others as not belonging (Najib Ibrahim, 2021). Being seen as outsiders can be devastating to young people's self-esteem and capacity to learn. It can also lead to physical insecurity. In a 2017 study by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, nearly two in five Muslim families in the United States said their children had been bullied due to their faith, and one quarter of those incidents involved a teacher or administrator (Möller et al., 2021, p. 148).

Accurate representation in children's books is also tied to academic outcomes, including improving literacy among students of color (Drucker, 2003, and Myers, 2014, as cited in Aronson et al., 2018). In their study of gender and race, Dee et al. (2004, as cited in Adukia et al., 2021, p. 6) found: "While not a panacea, 'subject–object identity match' (e.g., teacher–student identity match, or content–reader identity match) can help reduce academic performance gaps among multiple marginalized groups via a wide range of potential channels." Adukia et al. (2021) further suggested that children's books may be an important factor in the transmission of societal values over generations.

Aronson et al. (2018) note the institutional and systemic implications of a lack of diverse representation in children's books: "The absence of people of color in children's books positions whiteness as normative and dominant, communicating through numerical force that these stories are more worthy of focus, perpetuating and promoting biases" (p. 165). Misrepresentation is as harmful as invisibility. The messages about communities embedded in children's books have

been shown to shape readers' beliefs later in life, including how they see their possible futures (Fuchs-Schündeln and Masella, 2016; Cantoni et al., 2017; Arold et al., 2022; and Arold, 2022, as cited in Adukia et al., 2021).

The rich field of scholarship and practice exploring the related concepts of culturally responsive teaching, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrates that asset-based approaches that center and affirm students' diverse experiences (including with oppression) empowers all students, and especially students of color, to become lifelong learners and critical thinkers (Will and Najarro, 2022).

These ideas have gained support among educators who hold antiracist and anticolonial values, whose activities have increased in response to attacks by so-called anti-CRT interests. Yet even though Palestinians are frequently attacked, they do not have a similar infrastructure of organizations defending them. Even self-identified antiracist, anticolonial educators often relate to Palestinians as outsiders and behave as if they are not worthy of study—even though Israel/Palestine play a key role in U.S. foreign and domestic policy and even though U.S. voters play a significant role in events in the Middle East, including through tax-funded aid (Haines, 2023).

It was especially disturbing, then, to see the results of the current study, which is based on research I conducted with a team of Palestinian teachers to examine the amount and quality of representation of Palestinians in English-language children's books. Our first observation was that there are not enough children's books that uplift Palestinians, confirming the role that censorship plays in keeping Palestinians invisible (Murad, 2022b). Our second observation was that nuanced erasure, which is easily overlooked by the untrained eye, was common, even more so than blatant racism or misrepresentation in books we considered problematic (Murad, 2022a). As erasure was covered in those previous publications, this article, based on the same research study, focuses on exemplary books and the antiracist and anticolonial approach that led to their identification. Our proposed criteria for identifying books that counter the erasure and misrepresentation of Palestinians are that they

- prioritize self-representation (i.e., Palestinians speaking for themselves)
- say the word "Palestine"
- show both suffering and strength
- inspire engagement
- model positionally aware introspection.
- emphasize diversity among Palestinians, Jews, and others
- contextualize with truthful history
- include quality nonfiction
- incorporate translations

Context: The Challenge of Teaching Literature When Identities Are Contested

In the United States, threats to K–12 education, and especially to queer and BIPOC people, are increasing as politically motivated forces try to ban books and curriculum aimed at promoting equity and understanding hard history. Attacks against what is erroneously called Critical Race

Theory (CRT) share some characteristics with attacks against Palestinians and their allies. For example, in 2021, in my city, Newton, Massachusetts, a teacher was disciplined, and their contract not extended, because they wrote a pro-Palestinian statement on a board in a classroom (alongside a pro-Cuba statement that was apparently not considered problematic). The teacher did not come forward to defend themselves, and reports of how the statements were discussed in the class are not clear. Yet the principal reassured community members with an email saying that students who were exposed to the statement ("I stand with Palestine") were provided with emotional support (Murad, 2023).

When Palestinian humanity is framed as traumatizing for others, it communicates to Palestinian students (like my daughter) and non-Palestinians that Palestinians are not equal and valued members of the school community. This incident came just a few years after the Newton school district was sued for antisemitism by a pro-Israel interest group called Americans for Peace and Tolerance, a tactic that uses fear to shut down learning and prevent students from developing skills in analysis and civic discourse that are requisite for responsible citizenship. The suit was withdrawn, but the chilling effect on educators remains intact in Newton and around the country where teaching about Palestine is too often considered dangerously controversial.

As Glenn and Ginsberg (2020) pointed out, addressing historic inequities in representation is impossible when teachers aren't prepared, confident and supported. They said:

> If teachers choose not to select diverse titles for instruction, a normalization of the dominant narrative may be perpetuated, and the diverse voices that have been historically silenced remain quiet. If teachers engage in this work in harmful ways, a normalization of deficit-oriented perceptions of minoritized groups is likely (Ginsberg, Glenn, & Moye, 2017; Glenn, 2015, 2014, 2012). However, if we can better understand the tensions that emerge when teachers use texts that feature cultures and communities with which they (and sometimes their students) are less familiar, we might identify approaches that increase not only the inclusion of diverse texts in our curricula but also the implementation of culturally affirming pedagogies that achieve equity- and justice-related aims (p. 2).

Writing about Islamophobia in the classroom, Sensoy and Ali-Khan (2016) emphasized the important role teachers play in creating classrooms where contested ideas can be explored and discussed while maintaining safety for all students. They credit Pitt and Britzman (2003) for suggesting that educators transparently acknowledge that classrooms can be challenging emotionally and socially, not just intellectually, and that difficult knowledge needs to be "worked through" (p. 8). Since educators working within an anti-oppression framework note that students must be guided to gain comfort with ambiguity, dissonance, and contradiction, it is imperative that teachers also become comfortable with ambiguity, dissonance, and contradiction (Apple, 2004; Boler, 1999; Kumashiro, 2002, 2004, as cited in Sensoy and Ali-Khan, 2016).

However, a focus on the teacher or librarian as the source of the problem or the locus for remediation is reductive. Queer people and other BIPOC communities are not being threatened because they are misunderstood by teachers or students, but because politically motivated

societal forces understand all too well that centering previously marginalized voices will, by definition, decenter whiteness and heteronormativity.

In the case of Palestinians, uplifting Palestinian humanity and worldviews challenges Zionist efforts to maintain exclusive Jewish control over Israel/ Palestine. This is clear in the activism of Marjorie Gann, a retired teacher and children's author who is affiliated with the right-wing, Jewish supremacist group called Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA). Gann is an active commenter about bias against Jews in children's literature when books about Palestinians are reviewed or discussed (Gann, 2019). Because erasure of Palestinians is itself political, it requires political, not merely pedagogical, efforts to reverse it.

Those who claim that seeking to counter erasure involves the inappropriate politicization of children's books fail to acknowledge that all books are products of dynamics that reflect political choices that center certain viewpoints at the expense of others (Gardner et al., 2021). Pretending that some books are "objective" or "apolitical" does not change this reality. The attempt to depoliticize children's books is an effort to maintain the political status quo and leads to distortions that do not serve the education of children. One often-mentioned example from outside the Palestinian sphere is the way the story of Thanksgiving has generally been taught in the United States. Even when victimization of Indigenous people is acknowledged, there is little or no attention given to the perpetrators, leaving readers to infer that relationships between Indigenous nations and white colonists were just a big misunderstanding and no reparations are warranted.

Desai's study (2015) found that insistence on balance (equally showing both sides of a conflict) is a strong recurring theme in reviews of children's books set in Israel/Palestine. She noted, however, that "the principle is applied selectively and seldom invoked when the perspective is deemed apolitical or sufficiently pro-Israeli" (p. 55). Desai criticized "balance" as an evaluation criterion because it should not apply when there are extreme power disparities, and because it contradicts the value of literature to delve deeply into particular characters' experiences. She said:

> The argument is that fairness requires that both sides be given a hearing: both sides have good arguments, and both suffer. Yet the extreme disparity in the political power of the two sides in this case is a reality that cannot be ignored in any discussion of balance. Furthermore, authors create characters based on their own political perspective, to which they are entitled, and on the imperatives of their narratives, rather than invent characters to serve as emblematic representations of all points of view. In literature, as in reality, the social, economic, and political milieu impacts on people's lives and so cannot be edited out. These factors make balance an unreasonable criterion for judging a literary work in which the characters live on one or the other side of a great political divide (p. 55).

Further, Desai noted:

> Reviewers approve, for example, of picture books about Israeli children whose lives (in the books at least) are unaffected by the political conflict and expect books about Palestinian children to be equally unaware of it. Some find political conflict inappropriate

for young readers and object to its intrusion, for example, in books about cross-cultural friendships or about Palestinian life under Israeli occupation. They object to exposing young U.S. children to the harsh realities of violent conflict; some even object to exposing them to very different (Palestinian) cultures. While it may be argued that protectionism has always been a strong element in western children's literature, in fact, violence and danger have always been integral to its plots, and in recent decades few taboos remain. Books on the Holocaust, Hiroshima and slavery, for example, abound. It is rather reviewers, parents or teachers (never children) who object to strong doses of reality in their literature (p. 56).

Methodology: Seeing Through Erasure

To assess the visibility and representation of Palestinians in English-language children's books, I worked with four Muslim, Palestinian teachers: Muna Mustafa, high school teacher of Arabic and Arabic culture, New Jersey; Dr. Sawsan Jaber, teacher–educator, high school English teacher, Illinois; Abeer Ramadan-Shinnawi, consulting teacher–educator, former middle school social studies teacher, Maryland; and Kefah Ayesh, English Department leader, Al-Ghazaly High School, New Jersey. To identify my own positionality: I am a Jewish American activist and writer of young adult fiction who married into a Palestinian family 40 years ago and raised my Palestinian children in the West Bank. I also have 20 years of experience teaching undergraduates and graduates in international and intercultural topics.

First, the team collectively developed a spreadsheet of English-language children's books involving Palestine and Israel. Books were identified through searches of Nielsen Bookscan, Amazon.com, library databases, diverse-books databases, awards lists, and book recommendation articles. From the population of 189 books, we analyzed 56 fiction and nonfiction children's books (excluding textbooks) across age groups. A large majority were originally written in English and published in the United States, including traditionally and self-published titles. We had originally planned to read all 189 books, but it proved too time consuming and unnecessary. Our sample was somewhat ad hoc. Each reader chose books she was interested in reading. Overall, we sought to read a diverse sample, with a preference for newer titles and titles we know are used in schools. Since it is faster to read and analyze picture books, we made a point of including middle grade and young adult books. Most team members preferred to read books by Palestinian authors, so I concentrated on books featuring Palestinians that were written by non-Palestinians, including Israeli and other Jews.

I read virtually all the books in the sample of 56 while other research team members read as many as their time allowed. We did not cross analyze; each book was analyzed by one reader, though in discussions it was clear that some books were familiar to more than one reader. Using a collectively developed Google form, each reader captured her observations about the accuracy and respectfulness of the representation of Palestinian characters, occurrences of common stereotypes and tropes, and authenticity and credibility of the author. We also looked for intersectionality and connections with U.S. social justice issues and groups that might facilitate integration of the book in classrooms.

Knowing the relevance of structural factors and power dynamics, we did take note of the identity of the authors, but since identity (e.g., Israeli, Jewish, Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, Christian) does not determine the author's political position, we tried to consider, when possible, whether the author tended to promote or challenge the dominant pro-Israel narrative.

Since our research team was primarily community-based K–12 teachers and the topic is new, we used a dynamic and emergent research methodology and did not endeavor to restrict ourselves to existing academic traditions. Our overall approach was consistent with critical multicultural analysis, especially in terms of our attention to power dynamics and historical context (Botelho and Rudman, 2009). We also drew on antiracist and anticolonial frames (Barakat, 2018, and Salaita, 2017) because messages in children's books derive meaning from context—including the context of past and current conflict and struggles for liberation.

Notably, we all found it easier to name and discuss the problematic aspects of books. The Palestinian members of the research team drew on their own experiences growing up in the United States, rarely seeing themselves in children's books and feeling either invisible or dehumanized at school. As educators, they were aware of the most widely used books that distort students' understanding of the rich, diverse, and beautiful aspects of Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim experience. I brought my experience as an author of a young adult novel about Palestine and awareness of challenges teachers face trying to bring Palestine into the classroom. Drawing on our life experiences and deep analyses of the problematic books, we first developed a long list of examples of erasure that were subsequently categorized into four categories of erasure: (a) omission, (b) dehumanization, (c) distortion, and (d) disinformation. This analysis is published in Murad (2022a).

There were also children's books that the Palestinian members of the research team felt proud of. My research colleagues explained why these exemplar books countered common stereotypes and tropes of Palestinians, and how the books could be used in teaching. The final criteria were derived both by articulating the positive features of constructive books and by "translating" the destructive features of nonrecommended books into constructive criteria. In follow-up group and one-on-one analysis meetings among research team members, these criteria were developed and modified and, in reference to the scholarly literature, iterated into the antiracist, anticolonial approach presented in this paper. I took the lead on writing this and previously published articles.

Learnings: Countering Erasure Using an Antiracist, Anticolonial Approach

Our research study not only identified erasure and misrepresentation (Murad, 2022a), it also identified nine criteria that teachers, librarians, parents, and young readers can use to find children's books about Palestine and Palestinians that counter erasure. Our list identifies an exemplar book for each of the nine criteria.

1. Prioritize self-representation

Self-representation is especially important in the Palestinian context because Palestinians are often not allowed to speak for themselves and are discredited when they do (Said, 1984). Self-representation is tied to self-determination, which is an internationally recognized human right

and a core demand of the Palestinian movement for liberation. Palestinian writers represent themselves from their own positionality and should not be assumed to be speaking for all Palestinians.

Exemplar book: *They Called Me a Lioness: A Palestinian Girl's Fight for Freedom* by Ahed Tamimi and Dena Takruri (One World, 2022). Ages: Adult/young adult.

This comprehensively researched memoir by then 16-year-old Palestinian activist Ahed Tamimi exemplifies many best practices, but here we highlight the importance of books written by Palestinians that let Palestinians represent themselves to readers. Research team members selected this book because it was written by a Palestinian teen about her own experience growing up and becoming an activist in the West Bank. It provides rare insight for teen readers into the lives of their agemates in Palestine.

2. Say the word "Palestine."

In general, referring to people as Palestinian is considered less controversial than using the place name Palestine, which some feel connotes support for Palestinian rather than Jewish control over the land. For Palestinians, historic Palestine (including what is now the state of Israel and the West Bank, including Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip) is a very real place with a history, culture, economy, institutions, and people with agency and rights. For Palestinians, using the term Palestine acknowledges the reality of the place that Palestinians come from and belong to, which is a precursor to actual decolonization (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

Exemplar book: *Homeland: My Father Dreams of Palestine* by Hannah Moushabeck; illustrated by Reem Madooh (Chronicle Books, 2023). Ages: 5–8 years.

This picture book with culturally rich illustrations offers an age-appropriate window into Palestinian history through the recollections of one family. Research team members selected this book because having the word Palestine in the title of a traditionally published children's book is a milestone in the struggle for credibility of Palestinian narratives, and it conveys awareness of colonial history.

3. Show both suffering and strength.

Not unlike the Black American experience with slavery (Johnson, 2018), Palestinian reality is contextualized by dispossession by Israel, but should not be defined by it. It is important for readers to learn about the impact of colonization, occupation, and dispossession on Palestinians but not to think of Palestinians as mere victims. Young readers should see Palestinian steadfastness and resilience, and all the facets of Palestinian humanity that have nothing to do with oppression—like all other people.

Exemplar book: *Salim's Soccer Ball* by Tala Fahmawi; illustrated by Neveen Abu Saleem (Tablo, 2022). Ages: 4–8 years.

This self-published rhyming picture book makes the challenges of Israeli military occupation visible in an age-appropriate way. It features a boy who loses his soccer ball on the other side of Israel's apartheid wall. While he is not able to retrieve his ball, the community teaches Salim's about its deep cultural resources, securing a new ball for the boy. The research team selected this book because it acknowledges hardships while still foregrounding Palestinian joy, culture, and survival.

4. Inspire constructive engagement.

Engagement is important because one goal of education is to support young people's development into constructive social actors, what the National Council for Social Studies (2012) calls "taking informed action." Books can inspire constructive engagement by highlighting the stories of others, real or fictional, who become involved in issues, and by directly suggesting ways that young people can act to influence the issues that concern them.

Exemplar book: *We're in This Together: A Young Readers Edition of* We Are Not Here to Be Bystanders by Linda Sarsour. (Salaam Reads / Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2022). Ages: 10 years and up.

This deeply personal and enlightening memoir shares with readers both Sarsour's development as a Palestinian-American in an immigrant family in Brooklyn and how her community's experiences of racism and hope propelled her into progressive leadership roles until she reached the national spotlight. Grounded in U.S. progressive movements beyond Palestine, Sarsour speaks honestly about the hardships and challenges as well as what she has gained by working in solidarity with others. The research team selected this book because the tone is respectful of young people as agents of change and the ideas are creative and meaningful for a diversity of young people.

5. Model positionally aware introspection.

Introspection is the key to learning. Ideally, characters practice positionally aware introspection—that is, demonstrating awareness about how their own racial cultural, gendered, national, linguistic, socioeconomic, and other positionality influences the way they experience and see the world (Adisa-Farrar, 2019). When readers see characters they care about modeling introspection, it helps them consider what the messages of the book mean for them, and it teaches them that people who are differently positioned may derive different meanings.

Exemplar book: *Beni's War* by Tammar Stein (Kar-Ben Publishing, 2020). Ages: 9–13 years.

Beni's War is an unlikely candidate as an exemplar in best practices in Palestinian children's books as it is about an Israeli boy during the 1973 war and does not feature Palestinians at all. However, by using introspection, *Beni's War* manages to tell a completely Israeli story in a way that models the kind of critical thinking that is needed for justice for Palestinians. The research team selected this book because Beni not only wonders about Arabs in a substantive and not tokenistic way, but his wondering also affects his actions and relationships and is part of his character arc.

6. Emphasize diversity among Palestinians, Jews, and others.

It is not uncommon these days for books to uplift groups and celebrate their diversity, but it is equally important to illustrate the diversity *within* groups. Stereotypes or "single stories" that present groups as unidimensional are inherently dehumanizing and inaccurate (Christensen, 2012). When it comes to Palestine, it is critical for young readers to appreciate political, religious, social, and other diversity within groups and learn to deconstruct reductive representations. This includes the fact that there are Israeli and non-Israeli Jews who support Palestinian humanity, rights, and equality and who do not experience Palestinian liberation as threatening.

Exemplar book: *Where the Streets Had a Name* by Randa Abdel-Fattah (Scholastic Press, 2010). Ages: 8–12 years.

While each and every book can represent all kinds of people or aspects of intersectionality, the research team selected this book because it does an excellent job of telling a Palestinian story that normalizes religious diversity among Palestinians as well as political diversity among Israelis and Jews. It also foregrounds intersections with mental health and physical disability, and highlights youth agency.

7. Contextualize with truthful history.

Truthful history about all marginalized people is under attack because it pushes back against intentional distortions that benefit groups in power (Siu, 2023). Without truthful history about Palestine, it is impossible to understand how Palestinians came to be in the situations they face today. Moreover, truthful history helps young readers grasp the role history plays in Palestinian identity and culture.

Exemplar book: *Salt Houses* by Hala Alyan (Harper, 2017). Ages: Adult/young adult.

Salt Houses is a deeply moving novel that explores Palestinian history through the multigenerational experiences of one relatable family. The research team selected this book because the historical accuracy and literary quality make it a book that readers will continue to think about for a long time.

8. Include quality nonfiction.

Nonfiction is important because the kind of emotional connection readers get through fiction is not enough to counter the misinformation about Palestinians that prevails in books, schools, and popular media. Young readers also need factual information about history, culture, economics, and politics.

Exemplar book: *We Are Palestinian: A Celebration of Culture and Tradition* by Reem Kassis; illustrated by Noha Eilouti (Crocodile Books, 2023). Ages: 9 years and up.

Nonfiction by Palestinians (self-representation) is important because without it, non-Palestinians predominate social studies and history lessons about Palestinians, undermining their right to define themselves and contributing to erasure. The research team selected this book because it is the only traditionally published nonfiction children's book by a Palestinian author that we could find.

9.   Incorporate translations.

The dearth of adult books translated into English is mirrored in children's literature, and translation offers critical opportunities for learning, including decolonial learning (Fishman, 2021). When English-language readers have access to stories that were written in Arabic for Palestinian readers, they get an additional perspective into Palestine. Reading books that Palestinian children read in Arabic can also build bridges between Arabic-language and English-language readers.

Exemplar book: *Thunderbird: Book One* by Sonia Nimr (Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin, 2021). Ages: 9 years and up.

The Thunderbird trilogy is a face-paced historical fantasy adventure about an orphaned Palestinian girl from Ramallah who must time travel and solve mysteries in order to save the world. Laden with historical and cultural information, the books offer an adventure featuring a girl who is finding her purpose. The research team selected this book because it offers English readers access to a story that was not curated especially for them.

Application: A Tool for Educators and Librarians

Fortunately, critical reading can help ease the harm caused by the dearth of good Palestinian children's books. Exposing the dynamics, content, and impact of the erasure of Palestinians from children's books can help Palestinian readers and parents more actively and intentionally highlight Palestinian representation that builds identity, pride, and agency in sources other than books. It also helps libraries and schools—locations where early knowledge about Palestinians is formed—to choose better books and use all books more critically. Gardner et al. (2021) consider the critical analysis of diverse books as an "integral core literacy practice," enabling educators to counter constricted curricula" (p. xvi). As a "key site of power," messages conveyed in children's books reflect societal power imbalances (Adukia et al., 2021, p. 7) and offer strategic opportunities to challenge those imbalances.

Botelho and Rudman (2009) point out that by respecting readers' agency, critical reading is like an act of resistance against censorship and the indoctrination it serves:

> The circuit of culture demonstrates that meaning is a dynamic process: writers encode particular meanings in books and readers often receive them inadvertently, but it is through reading/consuming that meanings are actively made. If they are conscious of this process, readers can detect how these messages or ideologies try to regulate their lives, and their society. They can interrupt ideologies that privilege particular groups over others. Critical multicultural analysis calls attention to how identities are constructed,

how texts are constructed, how society is constructed, and how language/discourse creates us as much as we create it (p. 3).

Nuance is important in criticality, so educators and librarians are encouraged to use an antiracist, anticolonial approach as a tool for interrogation not as a checklist for including or excluding certain books. Readers should also be taught how to use the criteria to evaluate books themselves, helping them develop the skills needed to unpack messages rather than protecting them from certain perspectives. To facilitate this, I worked with one research team member, Abeer Ramadan-Shinnawi, to develop a tool to help teachers and librarians choose good books about Palestine and Palestinians.

We began by referencing existing book evaluation tools (see Crisp, et al., 2021) and decided to propose a tool (Table 1) that enables users to think about each criterion on a spectrum. The tool can be used not only to evaluate individual books, but to build libraries with a diversity of books representing different strengths.

Table 1

Criteria for Evaluating Children's Books about Palestine and Palestinians

Criterion	Unacceptable	Better	Good practice
Prioritize self-representation	Non-Palestinian writing about Palestine without relevant life experience nor awareness of the limitations of their positionality	Non-Palestinian writing from their own experience with awareness of the limitations of their positionality	Palestinian self-representation, writing from their own experience with awareness of their own positionality
Say the word Palestine	Avoiding the word Palestine, including with asymmetrical statements like "Israel and the Palestinians"	Explaining the different usages and meanings of the word Palestine	Normalizing and making common the word Palestine and its reference to the land to which Palestinians belong
Show both suffering and strength	Palestinians shown only as oppressed (or oppressors)	Both the oppression of Palestinians and their strength is show	Palestinians shown as both suffering and resilient, and their human complexity is shown in ways that have nothing to do with their dispossession
Inspire engagement	Readers learn that there is nothing they	Readers are encouraged to learn	Readers learn that they have a role to play given their

	can do to influence peace with justice (often because it is claimed that fighting has been going on forever or the parties are somehow destined to hate one another)	more and get involved, even though, it is implied, their lives have nothing to do with peace and justice in the Middle East	relationship to Palestinians as fellow human beings and as taxpayers, voters, citizens, and members of the global community
Model positionally-aware introspection	Readers are shown a perspective as if it is truth without context about the positionality of the view holder	Readers understand that others' views are affected by their positionality	Readers are inspired to think about their own positionality and how it affects their lives and views
Emphasize diversity among Palestinians, Jews, and others	Palestinians are shown as monolithic and diametrically opposed to Jews, who are also shown as monolithic	Palestinians and Jews both shown as groups that are internally diverse	Palestinians and Jews are not presented as two sides, but rather one of many ways to describe groups, all of whom share similarities and differences
Contextualize with truthful history	History is presented selectively so that Palestinian experience is distorted	History is presented truthfully but without information about why or what the consequences were	History is presented as dynamic and nuanced
Include quality nonfiction	Palestinians are presented like romantic, mythical people or demonized as fanatics or terrorists rather than real, living people	Accurate information is presented, but students are not inspired to engage or learn more	Information is used to deepen readers' understanding about and interest in Palestinians in all their complexity
Incorporate translation	No awareness that translations of Palestinian literature exist or that they are important	Awareness of the importance of translations but inability to use good translations consistently	Consistent use of high-quality translations for a variety of purposes

Conclusion: Consistency in Antiracist, Anticolonial Education

Librarians and teachers are increasingly uplifting antiracist and anticolonial values and methods in order to counter underrepresentation and misrepresentation of BIPOC and queer communities. They are eschewing the kind of "objectivity" that serves as a fig leaf for normalized whiteness and admitting that books should be chosen and taught with intentional criticality.

Educators say that both white children and children of color benefit from the diversity awareness, self-awareness, and identity development that is promoted through books about culture. They specifically mention books that feature oppression and the ways in which many have thrived despite oppression (Drucker, 2003, and Myers, 2014, as cited in Aronson et al., 2018).

Countering the distortion of Palestinian representation in children's books is simultaneously a pedagogical and a social justice imperative. Neither Palestinian nor non-Palestinian children can grow into their best selves, become responsible global citizens, or form healthy relationships across lines of difference without accurate and constructive information and critical thinking skills. Employing an antiracist, anticolonial approach can help educators include Palestinians in a constructive way.

Selecting good books is only part of the solution, however. Empowering readers with the skills to evaluate books critically helps counter falsehoods by pointing out the methods used to deceive (Yasmin, 2022). Critical reading also helps elevate criteria grounded in an antiracist, anticolonial approach for selecting books that teach honest history and nuanced perspectives so that readers can constructively engage with the important issues of our time.

There have always been educators who embrace this mission, and the movement has grown exponentially since the so-called anti-CRT attacks against Black, brown, and queer communities. Free speech advocates and critical educators have grown a veritable ecosystem of support organizations including PEN America, the American Library Association, We Need Diverse Books, and many others. Unfortunately, most of the organizations that stand up for BIPOC inclusion fail to include Palestinians.

The nine criteria and the tool for educators and librarians are intended to support them to apply the same antiracist, anticolonial values they embrace to their teaching about Palestine and Palestinians.

Children's literature, like everything else, reflects and promotes social, cultural, and political values. We believe that intentionally uplifting antiracist and anticolonial values and methods in our understanding of how to choose and use children's literature is the best way to advance the kind of constructive and deconstructive learning that makes the world a better place.

Since the choices available are limited and the goal is to promote critical literacy, educators can also empower readers to shift from being passive recipients of others' messages to active "authors" of constructive, antiracist narratives—even when texts are flawed. For example, Reese

and McEntarffer (2021) found *The Pueblo*, by Kevin Cunningham and Peter Benoit (Scholastic, 2011), problematic in its representations of Indigenous people. They decided to involve readers and educators not only in critical thinking, but in critical action:

> We determined that we would use the book with students and call attention to the inappropriate predominance of past tense verbs. If the book is part of educators' personal libraries, we would encourage them to modify the past tense verbs. They could use permanent markers to change "Every Pueblo people had its own beliefs about kachinas" to "Every Pueblo has its own beliefs about kachinas." Educators who write in personal copies of books communicate that some information in books is inaccurate. The act of writing in a book demonstrates that texts are not hallowed artifacts. They are created by people who can—and do—make errors. We also suggest students do writing activities like submitting reviews (through their educator's account) of that book to online sites such as Amazon and Goodreads and write to the publisher requesting the change (p. 52–53).

Literature certainly influences attitudes about social and political issues, but attitudes about social and political issues can also influence readers' relationship to literature. A commitment to antiracist and anticolonial practice by educators requires consistent application of those values to the use of children's books, including those that feature Palestinians.

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A Content Analysis of 21st Century Caldecott Picturebooks Featuring Portrayals of Poverty and Financial Difficulty

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Abstract

Portrayals of poverty in children's books seem especially salient knowing that in the United States, children living in poverty more than doubled between 2021 and 2022. According to the Child Welfare League, child poverty rates in 2022 increased to include 3.7 million more children in poverty in America since 2021, with children of color most impacted. Given the vicarious power of literature to inform, help readers to navigate stress, and engender empathy, we conducted a critical content analysis to explore the portrayal of poverty in 21st century picturebooks. We focused on representations in Caldecott winning books, due to their quality, durability in library collections, and ready availability for classroom teaching. Findings revealed: 1) maintaining of the status quo of middle-class representations in most books; 2) books that acknowledge the reality of financial stressors; 3) intersections of poverty and race across time; 4) intersections of poverty with genocidal racism, refugees, and immigration; 5) portrayals of internal solutions for poverty; 6) few models of helping hands; and 7) the persistent themes of hope in all books. Future research should analyze pedagogical ways to leverage literature for children who are facing seemingly impossible contexts to invite empathy and advocacy for action.

A Critical Content Analysis of 21st Century Caldecott Picturebooks: Exploring Portrayals of Poverty and Financial Difficulty

Introduction and Rationale

In the United States, the shadow of poverty looms over so many of our children. "The monthly child poverty rate increased from 12.1% in December 2021 to 17% in January 2022…This increase in poverty represents 3.7 million more children in poverty.... Latino and Black children experienced the largest percentage-point increases …" in the U.S. (CWLA, 2022). Even more recent census reports in the United States unfortunately show that children living in poverty more than doubled between the years of 2021 and 2022, largely due to Congress not renewing child

tax credits (Luscombe, 2023). In this challenging context, knowing that nine million children live in poverty (Luscombe, 2023), it is especially salient to examine the ways in which messages about poverty are conveyed to children. Children's literature is a key form of media that conveys both clear and nuanced messages about social class, and which for the most part, is readily available to children, families, and schools. Given that children's literature offers a vicarious means for children to navigate the world around them, this critical content analysis explored the portrayals of poverty and financial difficulties in 21st century Caldecott books, awarded 2000-2022, to explore the unique, important insights they offer. Children's books, often considered both windows and mirrors of our lives (Sims-Bishop, 1990), wield a unique power to guide individuals, particularly children, through the complexities of life's financial trials, offering children and families insights, empathy, and perhaps a sense of agency (Crawford & Roberts, 2016; Deliman, 2021; Roberts & Crawford, 2019b; Vaughn, et al., 2022). In this article, we provide a review of the related professional literature, the detailing of this critical content analysis, and a discussion of the findings with implications for practice.

Review of the Literature

Financial difficulties experienced by families have unique as well as universal aspects that educators must consider. Prior to COVID, one billion children experienced multidimensional poverty, lacking basic sanitation, water, and food; since then, an additional 100 million children were thrust into extreme poverty (UNICEF, 2022). Portrayals of poverty and financial status in books for children grows in significance when one considers how books may shape both our self-perceptions of others and society, as well as the way that books can be used to help children comprehend social issues and interactions (Crawford & Roberts, 2018a; Roberts & Crawford, 2019a), enhance empathy, and develop motivations to read (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; Kidd and Castano, 2013).

Children's award-winning books certainly provide readers with windows into the lives of diverse characters, offering insights on dealing with adversity, and often promoting resilience. While a great deal of children's literature includes storylines reflective of a middle-class perspective, it is essential to ensure readers have access to high quality literature that provides access and insight into the experience of financial stressors, as this has the potential to engender both empathy and coping skills among readers (Crawford & Roberts, 2016). Access to books that depict characters who are working-class or suffering poverty can combat common stereotypes and deficit discourse, while thoughtful exploration and discussion of these texts has the potential to help readers note, affirm, and hopefully disrupt experiences and biases related to poverty (Hartsfield, 2022; Hunt & Siever, 2018).

Few content analyses have been undertaken that specifically examine picturebooks for children and the ways that poverty is addressed within them. Over a decade ago, Kelley and Darraugh (2010) noted that many picturebooks for children were set in historical time periods and in other geographic locations. These settings may send a message to children that poverty is a concept that happens in another place and time, not in the here and now. While not explicitly focused on the topic of poverty, some content analyses on books featuring other difficult and challenging topics have highlighted the intersectionality of poverty with issues related to housing types (Terrile, 2022), eating habits (Acevedo-Aquino, 2019), and immigration and refugee status

(Arizpe, 2021; Crawford & Roberts, 2018b; Roberts & Crawford, 2018; Roberts & Crawford, 2019a; Strekalova-Hughes, 2019). These types of studies have provided evidence of the intersectionality among issues of poverty with displacement, race, and hunger, alongside the sense of being different and alone. Thus, the portrayal of poverty in books, as in life, can be understood as a complex and wicked problem (Jacquet, 2020).

Perry (2021) in his book, co-authored with Oprah Winfrey, entitled, *What Happened to You?*, explains the neuroscientific perspective that traumatic experiences, including hunger, homelessness, and living in poverty shapes the way we perceive and learn about our world, ourselves, and others. Likewise, children living in poverty, by definition, are experiencing scarcity (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013); accordingly, scarcity impacts our physical and mental health. Further systematic reviews of research show that scarcity and the lack of resources to meet basic needs impact children's academic performance, socioemotional development, self-regulation, and executive function (Allee-Herndon & Roberts, 2019).

Offering children developmentally appropriate venues for deconstructing, understanding, and probing poverty and financial status is a well-founded means of helping children to develop empathy and resilience (Crawford & Roberts, 2018b; Lacina, Baumi, & Taylor, 2016; Massey, et al., 2022; Quast & Bazemore-Bertrand, 2019; Ward & Warren, 2020). Quality books for young children also provide models of characters who respond to crises and cope in varied ways (Crawford & Roberts, 2009; Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2013; Roberts & Crawford, 2009; Roberts & Crawford, 2019b). Related research notes that reading builds empathy (Kidd & Costano, 2013; Williams-Sanchez & Cook, 2023), and that empathy is produced where there was none by reading fiction about individuals belonging to stigmatized or outgroups (Deliman, 2021; Ku, et al., 2005; Kucirkova, 2019). Similarly, Johnson (2012) found that stories increase affective empathy, almost doubling readers' prosocial behavior. However, portrayals of socioeconomic status in books for young children remain a relatively unexplored area (Terrile, 2022; Vaughn, et al., 2022).

We aimed to fill the research gap by focusing on 21st century Caldecott Award and Honor books to explore depictions of poverty and financial status. Through this critical content analysis, we harvested and synthesized themes, many highlighting the potential of these books as tools to assist children and families in understanding financial difficulties, to engender empathy for others, and advocate for subsequent action.

Theoretical Framework

We drew from two broad theories for this study: Social Learning Theory and Critical Literacies. Bandura's (1976) Social Learning Theory is a flexible theory that places great emphasis on modelling; that is, that learning takes place by observing others and then following that model. Bandura's work noted that the vicarious experiences found in media and literature provide avenues for symbolic modeling from which viewers and readers can learn (Cherry, 2022). Meanwhile, critical literacies offer a means for understanding texts as cultural artifacts; ones that stem from, as well as inform, sociocultural, historical, and political contexts (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Leland, Lewison & Harste, 2013; Souto-Manning, 2009). A critical literacy lens is well-suited for the exploration of literary representations of socially situated phenomena such

as poverty and financial status. This perspective supports the use of critical content analysis, which assumes that texts are cultural artifacts that convey messages related to social class and power (Johnson, Mathis, & Short, 2016; Yenika-Agbaw, 2021).

Methods

The corpus of books was high quality, American picturebooks receiving the Caldecott Medal or Honor between 2000 and 2022 (publication dates from 1999 to 2021). Named in honor of Randolph Caldecott, the Caldecott Award, begun in 1938, is given each year by the American Library Association, specifically the Association for Library Services for Children Committee, to the artist for the most distinguished picturebook (ALA, 2023). Even in times of severe budget cuts, libraries and school districts' purchasing power may be limited, but these award winners persist as exactly the books they buy. Similarly, parents and educators often look for the Caldecott seal as a recognition of quality when purchasing books. Therefore, this population of books was chosen because of their widespread accessibility and persistent availability to young children.

Each book (n=103) was read and coded by the research team (consisting of the three authors of this article) for indicators of poverty or financial status, gender, age, and race. Through this process, we sought to answer the following questions:

    a) How is poverty portrayed within 21st century Caldecott books?
    b) Are there patterns and/or themes surrounding who helps those living in poverty?
    c) How are those portrayed who hold wealth, power, and/or materialism?

The researchers created a coding protocol, which also included year of publication, summary, genre, and markers of financial status, to aid in finding these patterns. The critical content analysis (Johnson, Mathis, & Short, 2017) was conducted to find possible exemplars in Caldecott books (2000-2022) for indicators of financial status in general, and poverty in particular.

During the first round of coding, any coding discrepancies across researchers were discussed and reconciled until complete agreement across the three coders was reached. Soon after, a second round of coding commenced, during which time we met in person to discuss and highlight our findings. The common, highlighted coding patterns were noted and then grouped and regrouped to identify patterns and common themes found across books, including portrayals of poverty or of financial status.

Findings

Out of the 103 books read and coded, 79 books did not have any reference to poverty or financial status, and 24 were agreed upon to contain portrayals of poverty or financial status (see Appendix A). These 24 books were identified as clearly revealing characters or families whose lives were at either end of a common idea of the American middle class, so either situations of financial difficulties or of privileged status. The critical content analysis of these Caldecott books from 2000 to 2022 unveiled several prominent themes in the portrayal of poverty and financial

status. Findings revealed picturebooks fell into these themes: 1) maintaining the status quo in most books; 2) books that acknowledge the reality of financial stressors; 3) intersections of poverty and race across time; 4) intersections of poverty with genocidal racism, refugees, and immigration; 5) portrayals of internal solutions for poverty; 6) few models of helping hands; and 7) the persistent themes of hope in all books. Themes were not discrete, with several titles exemplifying more than one theme and therefore included across multiple themes. Table 1 provides an overview of the seven themes and touchstone texts. An expanded discussion of the findings continues below.

Table 1: Themes identified and 21st century Caldecott picturebook touchstone texts

Theme	Caldecott picturebooks/Touchstone texts that exemplify theme
Maintaining the status quo in terms of middle-class portrayals	• *Olivia* (Falconer, 2000) • *One Cool Friend* (Buzzeo, 2012) • *The Noisy Paint Box: The Colors and Sounds of Kandinsky's Abstract Art* (Rosenstock, 2014) • *This One Summer* (Tamaki, 2014) • *Zen Shorts* (Muth, 2005) • *A Couple of Boys Have the Best Week Ever*(Frazee, 2008) (wealth) • *A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams* (Bryant, 2008) (wealth)
Acknowledgement of financial stressors	• *A Different Pond* (Phi, 2017) • *Last Stop on Market Street* (De La Pina, 2015) • *Watercress* (Wang, 2021)
Intersectionality of poverty and race	• *The Undefeated* (Alexander & Nelson, 2019) • *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* (Weatherford, 2021)
Intersections of poverty with racism, refugees, and immigration	A Different Pond (Phi, 2017) • *Coming on Home Soon* (Woodson, 2004) • *Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad* (Levine, 2007) • *How I Learned Geography* (Shulevitz, 2008) • *The Cat Man of Aleppo* (Latham & Shamsi-Basha, 2020) • *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* (Sis, 2007) • *Voice of Freedom Fannie Lou Hamer: Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement* (Weatherford, 2015) • *Watercress* (Wang, 2021)

Internal solutions for living in poverty and financial difficulty.	• *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type* (Cronin, 2000) • *Extra Yarn* (Barnett, 2012) • *Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad* (Levine, 2007) • *How I Learned Geography* (Shulevitz, 2008) • *Joseph Had a Little Overcoat* (Taback, 1999) • *The Cat Man of Aleppo* (Latham & Shamsi-Basha, 2020) • *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (Selznick, 2007) • *The Undefeated* (Alexander & Nelson, 2019) • *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* (Sis, 2007)
Models for helping hands	• *A Different Pond* (Phi, 2017) • *Last Stop on Market Street* (De La Pina, 2015) • *Nana in the City* (Castillo, 2014) • *Thank You, Omu!* (Mora, 2018) • *The Cat Man of Aleppo* (Latham & Shamsi-Basha, 2020)
Persistent hopefulness	• All books ended on a note of hopefulness for the future.

Maintaining At Least the Status Quo in Terms of Middle-Class Portrayals

As indicated above, only about a quarter of the books in this content analysis showed financial situations out of the ordinary. Despite the growing number of books addressing poverty, the status quo of financial disparities is maintained, implying that this middle-class status is the norm. Few books delve into the extremes of poverty or of wealth. Although the current reality of many schoolchildren living in poverty is growing, Caldecott books in the 21st century overwhelmingly maintain the status quo in terms of middle-class portrayals.

While in most cases, middle-class perspectives seem to be assumed and portrayals of financial status were seemingly invisible, several books held representations of wealth or privilege that could be detected through a closer, more nuanced examination. For example, the book, *Olivia* (Falconer, 2000), shows an adorable piglet enjoying a busy day with her mother and brother, taking fancy day trips to the beach, and fun times at the museum. Olivia enjoys a broad range of books, toys, and activities, and regularly sports a dizzying array of different outfits; characteristics that could be associated with wealth. A few other recent books revealed privilege, such as spending carefree summers at the beach without parents working in *This One Summer* (Tamaki & Tamaki, 2014). Privilege is also shown in the images of being born into wealth in *The Noisy Paintbox: The Colors and Sounds of Kandinsky's Abstract Art* (Rosenstock, 2014) and by living in a mansion in *One Cool Friend* (Buzzeo, 2012).

Books Acknowledging Financial Stressors

The early years of the 21st century did not provide any books highlighting poverty. However, recent years have witnessed an increased focus on themes related to financial stressors in Caldecott books. For example, in *Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Pena, 2015), a grandmother and her grandson take a bus through the impoverished area. En route, the grandson makes observations and raises questions about the poverty he sees along the way. The grandmother responds by unobtrusively pointing out the beauty of the neighborhood, leading to the ultimate beauty of helping those in need. Similarly, *A Different Pond* (Phi, 2017) uses a quiet early morning fishing trip to bring the characters closer and to demonstrate the need to advocate for a refugee family experiencing food insecurity. In *Watercress* (Wang, 2021), a young daughter of immigrants, initially embarrassed, learns that her parents laud the lowly watercress as free and fresh. Then, she comes to realize the value of watercress that saved her family during a famine, shedding much light on the importance of hard work and resourcefulness during difficult financial times. Now, the daughter eats with new understanding.

Intersectionality of Poverty and Race

Many recent books highlight the intersections of race and poverty across time. One of the most notable examples includes *The Undefeated* (Alexander, 2019) which shares multiple, meaningful triumphs over injustice, poverty, and tribulations experienced by Black Americans. Another powerful, recent Caldecott is found in *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* (Weatherford, 2021), a grand book with expansive illustrations. No doubt, this book encapsulates the issues of wealth, race, and poverty centered on the Greenwood community in Tulsa, often called The Black Wall Street, which was targeted and annihilated by lawless white mobs in 1921. By identifying these books, this critical content analysis revealed complicated and important outlets for engendering empathy, enacting justice, and advocating for action to aid children and families of color to navigate through injustices toward brighter futures and wealth.

Intersections of Poverty with Racism, Refugees, and Immigration

Beyond race, even more picturebooks showed the intersections of systemic racism, genocidal racism, enslavement, refugees, and immigration. Both *How I Learned About Geography* (Shulevitz, 2008) and *The Wall: Growing up from Behind the Iron Curtain* (Sis, 2007) feature refugees of war; escapees of injustice, and immigrants trying to find safety, shelter, and sustenance. Alongside *The Undefeated* (Alexander, 2019) and *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* (Weatherford, 2021), historical fiction, and somewhat autobiographical picturebooks also address issues of poverty and its violent impact on lives in conjunction with other forms of oppression. A strong example of this triumphant response to oppression and poverty can be found in *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer, Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement* (Weatherford, 2015), a picturebook collection of poems which captures the life and spirit of this powerful civil rights activist. The text conveys the depth of poverty ("doggone dirt poor doing without" and "rags patched with rags") (n.p.) alongside sharp references to the violent racism of early 20th century Mississippi.

In a more subtle manner, Jacqueline Woodson's eloquent (2004) *Coming on Home Soon* depicts a Black family in deep financial need during World War II. Systemic issues of race, gender, and class intersect, so that the mother needs to move to gain viable employment. There are long

periods with "no letter or money coming" (n.p.) which brings loss and longing to the young protagonist. Likewise, *How I Learned Geography* (Shulevitz, 2008), also set in World War II, depicts a young boy and his family who have fled for their lives. Based on the author's own experiences, poverty intersects with racism, genocide, and repeated forced migration.

Meanwhile, books such as *Watercress* (Wang, 2021), *A Different Pond* (Phi, 2017), and *The Cat Man of Aleppo* (Latham & Shamsi-Batha, 2020) all poignantly show the human impact that occurs when poverty, violence, and oppression collide. Powerful, but impactful small acts within these narratives shed light on the multifaceted challenges faced by marginalized communities both past and present.

Internal Solutions for Living in Poverty and Financial Difficulty

The vast majority of financially themed Caldecott books portray protagonists finding their own solutions for living in poverty from within themselves. For instance, many of the books model solutions that involve tenacious hard work, patience, and clever solutions, such as *Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad* (Levine, 2007) where Henry, an enslaved person in the south, builds a box to mail himself to freedom. In *Extra Yarn* (Barnett, 2012), *Joseph had a Little Overcoat* (Taback, 1999), and *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (Selznick, 2007), internal creativity and optimism in response to the problems of poverty play a role.

In contrast to the next theme regarding helping hands in 21st century picturebooks, a 2000 award winner, *Click, Clack, Moo, Cows that Type* (Cronin) showed the internal empowerment of farm animals to boycott for better working solutions; highlighting the importance of in-group collective action. Both *The Wall: Growing up behind the Iron Curtain* (Sis, 2007) and *How I Learned Geography* (Shulevitz, 2008) give readers strong models of children and families being brave, resourceful, and persistent. Other picturebooks show solutions that involved grit and resilience alongside compassion, such as in *The Cat Man of Aleppo* (Latham & Shamsi-Basha, 2020) about Mohammad Alaa Aljaleel who struggled to save cats abandoned during a war of injustice in Syria. Certainly, Alexander's *The Undefeated* (2019) is a beautiful book illustrated by Kadir Nelson, that also highlights the sheer strength and perseverance of persons of color across many decades of injustice to remain undefeated.

Few Models for Helping Hands

Surprisingly, only a few 21st century Caldecott books included actual acts of individuals helping those in need. For example, *Nana in the City* (Castillo, 2014) shows Nana personally giving food to a man living on the street, while *Thank You, Omu!* (Mora, 2018) shows neighbors generously contributing to a neighbor's soup pot and then enjoying a communal meal afterwards. Similarly, *A Different Pond* (Phi, 2017), previously mentioned, tells the heartwarming story of a father in America continuing a tradition of father-son going fishing in the early morning to provide food, in addition to companionship. In *The Cat Man of Aleppo* (Latham & Shamsi-Basha, 2020), a man spends his money and time saving cats abandoned during the war in Syria. The final example of a model for helping hands is seen in *Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Peña, 2015),

which particularly stands out as the singular instance of societal charity, the soup kitchen, located in a church.

Persistent Hopefulness

Across all books analyzed for this critical content analysis, a prevailing theme is the presence of hope in the portrayals of poverty and financial difficulty. We believe hopefulness must be a distinctive feature of all literature aimed at children (Roberts & Crawford, 2019a; Roberts, 2021). For example, recent books like *The Undefeated* (Alexander, 2019) bring the many harsh settings and situations of the past into today to give hope for the future. Even quiet books, such as *Zen Shorts* (Muth, 2005), *Coming on Home Soon* (Woodson, 2004), and *Watercress* (Wang, 2021), soften the harsh reality of financial difficulties by shining a light through the ever-present and most important characteristic of hope. These books offer hope and nurture socioemotional connections and empathy, equipping both parents and teachers to better address the needs of children living in poverty.

Discussion

The findings of this content analysis of 21st century books underscore the potential of children's literature, particularly Caldecott award winning books, in shaping children's awareness and understandings of poverty and financial difficulty. As in Hade and Bush's (2014) work, these Caldecott picturebooks align identity within the constraints of poverty. In the vein of Sims-Bishop (1990), these books offer windows into the lives of families facing economic stressors, as well as mirrors to empathetically offer comfort to readers facing the same difficulties. The content and beauty of these engaging pages allow young readers to vicariously experience various aspects of poverty (Mathis, 2016).

Even though the 24 books analyzed in this study contained quite diverse characters; in general, Caldecotts continue to need more diverse characters, according to the Cooperative Children's Book Center (2018). Yet, by awarding diverse narratives that touch upon various aspects of poverty, the Caldecott Medal's notoriety gives teachers, parents, and librarians a positive venue for opening important conversations to cultivate empathy and perhaps even subsequent action. Most importantly, the current study found many Caldecott books that serve as strong literary models of determined and hopeful children and families who possess grit, show resilience, utilize collaborative and community skills, work hard, and tenaciously value resourcefulness.

However, the current study also highlighted certain gaps and challenges that were startling. The limited representation of acts of helping those facing economic challenges was surprising. The limited representation of advocating for those living in poverty or acting to help those in financial straits calls for a reevaluation of how stories might inspire young readers. Additionally, the persistence of the status quo in most books suggests the need to continue the positive trend of recent decades to include and address diverse portrayals of financial situations.

Implications for Practice

No doubt, children's books have the potential to inform, comfort, and vicariously model and scaffold coping strategies (Crawford & Roberts, 2009; Crawford & Roberts, 2016; Roberts & Crawford, 2009; Roberts & Crawford, 2019b). In a world where child poverty rates are on the rise, economically-themed children's literature can play a vital role in educating and empowering young minds. In addition to illuminating varied representations of poverty and socioeconomic status in this set of Caldecott picture books, the findings also have several implications for practice, including the following:

- ***The presence and availability of varied economic portraits matters.*** Teachers can help readers to access these literary texts as both windows and mirrors, by ensuring that books such as the ones here are available and highlighted through meaningful learning activities. The inclusion of books related to poverty and working-class life shows respect for a full range of economic levels and can stimulate insights, understanding, and empathy among readers.

- ***Picturebooks related to poverty and class or socioeconomic status can serve as invitations for critical thinking.*** While some of the Caldecott books here contained straightforward content about socioeconomic status, others were quite nuanced. Readers can be supported in critical thinking through engagement with close readings that call attention to both words and images. Teachers might assist these close readings by offering think aloud statements or related questions during interactive read alouds. These could include general prompts (e.g., "What did you notice?" "I wonder why this happened?") or questions specific to the plot of the book (e.g., *Olivia* (Falconer, 2000): "Oh my, Olivia is a lucky little pig. Look at how many different outfits she has. I wonder how she got so many…."; *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007)*:* "Wow! Can you imagine mailing yourself somewhere? What was Henry's thinking or situation that made him do something like that? Can you think of any other way Henry could have solved this problem? What do you think you would you have done?"). These types of engagements can help raise awareness that picturebooks convey perspectives, content, and layers of meaning that can boost children's critical thinking such as analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating.

- ***Books may be best navigated with deep, authentic discussion.*** Tough topics in Caldecott picture books may be best navigated with children through opportunities for reader responses, authentic discussions, and engaging literature circles (Crawford & Roberts, 2018b). Topics raised with respect to equity and poverty are complex, warranting opportunities for talk and rehearsal within a supportive community to advance understanding and action. As Deliman (2021) notes, "Literature can be used to create communities of conscience around topics of social justice, hope, and activism" (p. 46).

- ***Varied responses to provocative literature are appropriate.*** Allowing time and space for children's natural responses to literature are fascinating and often needed. Depending on the children and the texts used, responding to the content of these books may be best addressed through graphic representations, artistic avenues, poetic endeavors, and multimodal presentations. For example, teachers might consider asking each child to find a five-syllable and a seven-syllable phrase within the pages of these books that resonated

with them. Then, silently children move around the room to find two other friends and create a collaborative haiku. Illustrating, videotaping, or spoken word events to share their collaborative haikus open up multimodal opportunities for expression. Foremost, authentic responses and meaningful goals for classrooms might be to find real opportunities to contribute positively to help others, even if on the smallest scale (Roberts & Crawford, 2008).

Concluding Remarks and Future Research

The findings of this critical content analysis provide insights about content and point to the potential of Caldecott Award and Honor books to serve as tools for understanding, empathy, advocacy, and action. As we continue analyzing future Caldecott books for portrayals of victims, profiteers, and for helpers, we believe children's books can serve as important and available collective impacts that can be scaled for great good. Future research should delve deeper into the intersectionality of identifying attributes within the pages of picture books. Further, teachers must explore reader response as a means of shifting literacy conversations with preservice teachers to enhance awareness and understandings of the impacts of poverty and privilege. Future studies could be richer by expanding our dataset to include even older titles or to examine other bodies of literature, such as the Coretta Scott King Awards. An exploration of authors' notes which, per Kaczmarczyk and Adams's study (2021), may provide important information about how authors' personal identities often intersect with race, ethnicity, and racism.

As educators, caregivers, and researchers, we must recognize the transformative power of literature in the lives of children. By harnessing the power of picturebooks about economic hardships, teachers can better equip future generations with empathy and understanding for themselves and others. Integrating Caldecott picture books with related classroom practices provide needed spaces to address the real challenges of poverty and financial difficulty and to foster a more compassionate and just world.

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BEYOND "THINK LIKE AN EXPERT": A CALL FOR CRITICAL DISCIPLINARY LITERACY

DR. JEANNE DYCHES

Abstract

Pervasive thinking around disciplinary literacy overwhelmingly demands teachers apprentice students to "think like," even "be like" an expert to meet mainstream markers of success. In this essay, Jeanne Dyches explains how current disciplinary literacy thinking may reify a banking model of education dependent on maintaining exclusionary "regimes of truth." Dyches explains that cultural conflict between disciplines and students can inflict a form of curricular trauma that devalues students' funds of knowledge through limiting conceptions and demonstrations of *expertise*. Further, Dyches argues that conventional notions of *expertise* subtly delegitimize teachers' unique pedagogical content knowledge. Buttressed by germinal critical literacy and disciplinary literacy scholarship, Dyches suggests a move toward *critical disciplinary literacy*, a power-confronting model that (a) centers disciplinary inquiry that honors students' experiential knowledge and vulnerability; (b) sees reciprocal expertise as a vehicle to renegotiate traditional disciplinary power structures; and (c) espouses the value of critically-oriented professional learning communities. Dyches concludes with suggestions for applying these three CDL dimensions in secondary ELA classrooms.

Keywords: disciplinary literacy, critical literacy, literacy education, pedagogical content knowledge, critical disciplinary literacy

Beyond "Think Like an Expert": A Call for Critical Disciplinary Literacy

"Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information." -Paulo Freire

For several years now, I have taught a course called *Teaching Disciplinary Literacy* to undergraduate students, all of whom aspire to teach in secondary (grades 6-12) U.S. classrooms. The course fills an important need in the students' teacher preparation coursework given that, since the advent of the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), teachers of virtually all secondary subjects have been tasked with sharpening students' disciplinary literacy skills. Per the expectations of disciplinary literacy standards and research-driven best practices, year after year, I have faithfully prompted my students to metacognitively consider how they expertly think to, in turn, teach *their* future students to "think like an expert."

Like most educators, my syllabus is under perpetual construction. Both foundational and emerging scholarship, practitioner insights, and ever-changing sociopolitical contexts influence my course paradigm, readings, and assignments. But given the increasingly hostile treatment of

educators across the country—reflected in the introduction and passing of legislation requiring educators to publish their curriculum for approval months before teaching it; banning/censoring books, discussions around gender identity, sexuality, and "critical race theory"[1]; and eliminating diversity, equity, and inclusion specialists—a heightened urgency compels me to locate readings and experiences that speak to current issues in the field. I want my students to consider their roles within the educational system, and come to understand that seemingly "neutral" entities like curriculum, standards, and pedagogies are, in fact, always value-laden (Apple, 2004; Dyches, 2018a, 2018b, 2022; Giroux, 1978).

Shifting from "Thinking Like" to "Being Like"

While updating my syllabus for the forthcoming semester, and with a mind to designing experiences that both challenge disciplinary literacy thinking and equip my pre-service teachers with the skills to meet its demands, I recently came across this epiphanous line in a second-edition textbook: "to engage students in authentic disciplinary practices, teachers plan instruction that goes beyond 'like an expert' to 'being an expert' so that students learn in the same ways that experts learn" (Berry & Aldrich, 2022, p. 37). I paused. I re-read the sentence. Something seemed *off,* though I could not quite pinpoint the tension even after several re-reads. The sentence resounded in my head for days after encountering it.

I came to realize that the cause of my unease was the move from "thinking like" to "being like"—a semantic shift suggesting to me the disciplinary expectation that students *essence* rather than *code* switch. Thinking like an expert was no longer sufficient. Instead, students should assume the identity of an expert in order *to learn in the same way experts learn,* suggesting that even students' learning processes require alteration. Simply put, I wondered if new directions in disciplinary literacy were perpetuating, rather than disrupting, disciplinary hierarchies. And if expecting students to "be like" and "learn like" an expert was perplexing, was espousing "thinking like" an expert as an ideal problematic, too?

"Expert" Examination

Much disciplinary literacy scholarship tends to its sociocultural, ideological nature (e.g., Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2016; Dyches, 2022; Dyches & Gunderson, 2021; Gee, 2010, 2015; Moje, 2007, 2015). Popular resources continue to esteem the role of "expert." Given that expert-systems invariably establish a power hierarchy that positions students as teacher-dependent, (Gee, 2004; Giddens, 1991) the term "expert" could benefit from a nuanced re-consideration. Before we task students with "thinking like an expert," perhaps disciplinary literacy stakeholders should first problematize: Who is an *expert* and what constitutes *expert knowledge*? In what ways do the credentials vary across disciplines? Who is included—and who is left out—of conventional understandings of *expertise*? And what entities determine the answers to these questions?

What began as a routine syllabus update inspired this essay: a critique of disciplinary thinking and some of its pervasive surrounding discourses. Scholarly contributions from critical literacy

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[1] I use quotations around "critical race theory" because its critics often use the phrase to describe instructional practices and concepts that are not, in fact, reflective of the tenets of CRT.

and disciplinary literacy theorists (e.g., Freire, 1970, 2007; Gee, 2004, 2015; Moje, 2007, 2008, 2015) help contextualize the issues, and inform suggestions for moving toward a disciplinary literacy model that confronts and reshapes established systems of power.

Purpose

This essay is both a scholarly contribution and a personal rendering of internal conflicts—what Kumashiro (2001) called "moments of disequilibrium." Such moments are humbling—and often uncomfortable. But educators must lean into vulnerability if they are to share these private moments of disequilibrium with a larger audience. And this sharing is essential: research shows that de-mystifying critical reflection processes—ones that reveal our own socialized ways of thinking and doing—can empower other educators to engage the process (Dyches, 2022; Howard, 2002; Sams & Dyches, 2017). Educators committed to anti-oppressive teaching and learning must be willing to iteratively evaluate and evolve their positionalities, especially in fields wherein they contribute pedagogically and academically. The disciplinary discourses I analyze and critique in this essay are ones I have used in my own writings and teachings. To that end, though I offer here a critique, it is also a path forward that is as much professional as it is personal.

Using D/discourse theory (Gee, 2015), I describe how disciplinary literacy discourse often instantiates a banking model of education (Freire, 1970, 2007) that prioritizes cognitive apprenticeship over students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). Then, I outline how upholding disciplines as "regimes of truth" (Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2016) can create an exclusionary classroom environment. Cultural conflicts between disciplines and secondary students may inflict a particular form of curricular violence (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2010; Jones, 2020). Next, I posit how disciplinary literacy discourse often delegitimizes the skill sets unique to teachers—what Shulman (1987) named "pedagogical content knowledge"—which are vastly different skills than those belonging to an essayist, novelist, archivist, poet, or other craft expert. The sum of these conversations reveals the need for an ideological and pragmatic shift to *critical disciplinary literacy* (CDL)*:* a model that nuances the power systems unique to each disciplinary body. I finish with three suggestions for educators looking to incorporate CDL into their own thinking and instruction: disciplinary inquiry that centers experiential knowledge and honors vulnerability; power-sharing through expert reciprocity; and forging critical colleagueship in professional learning communities.

Disciplines and Damage

Gee's (2015) D/discourse theory explains identity-bound, value-laden storylines (Discourse) and language-in-use (discourse) as inextricably tethered. For example, the sum of my White, female, cisgender, heterosexual, and middle-class lived experiences (my Discourses) permeates words I say—and don't (my discourses). Conversely, my language-in-use, or my discourse, manifests and reflects my Discourses, which include the socializations, values, and belief systems that make me who I am. Gee's ideas on D/discourses suggest that the ways in which literacy educators treat terms, advance dialogue, and implement practices provides insights into how we view ourselves, our profession, and our students. Working as a critically oriented scholar and practitioner means iteratively acknowledging and critically reflecting on my own positionality;

"the way I'm in the world," as Gee might say, influences all aspects of my teaching and writing in ways visible and not.

Examining the D/discourse around disciplinary literacy reveals a great deal about its imbued ideologies. Consider the storylines highlighted in the D/discourse of requiring students to "think like," even "be like[22]" an "expert" (which assumes students' *in*expertise) to meet disciplinary measures of success. The practice depends on the expert's ability, and willingness, to transfer, or share, knowledge with a learner—an act that inherently prompts a re-distribution of power in the relationship. Hierarchy, and assimilation, undergirds the expert/apprenticeship model.

The Expert-Apprentice Model: Then and Now

Cognitive apprenticeship makes a transmission of expert learning possible. Dennen and Burner (2008) share:

> The concept of a cognitive apprenticeship—defined as "learning through cognitive and metacognitive, rather than physical, skills, and processes" by Collins et al. (1989, p. 456)—has its roots in social learning theories. One cannot engage in a cognitive apprenticeship alone, but rather it is dependent on expert demonstration (modeling) and guidance (coaching) in the initial phases of learning. Learners… must rely on assistance from and collaborations with others to achieve these tasks (p. 457).

"Alone," "dependent," "modeling," "demonstration," "rely," and "assistance" all connote the apprentice's need—and the expert's powerful station.

Historically contextualizing the expert-apprenticeship model illuminates its present-day dynamics. In the medieval ages, trade experts—notably called "masters" (Mirza-Davies, 2015)—selectively chose apprentices. Access to a trade expert indubitably shaped a person's quality of life. Though the relationship was mutually advantageous, a chasmic power imbalance existed between the two parties. The apprentice held no illusions of equality, and labored for years to gain the master's approval, an acceptance vital to gaining insider access to the trade community and, consequently, an autonomous future.

Centuries later, expert-apprentice discourse is almost always associated with disciplinary literacy. Many disciplinary literacy stakeholders and policy-makers (myself included) have unwittingly endorsed a type of thinking grounded in the transmission model of learning. As Mthethwa-Sommers (2014) writes:

> Maintenance and replication of the socio-economic and political structure or the status quo can be attained through transmission of the dominant group's desirable cultural traditions, beliefs, and values from one generation to the next. In other words, social transmission theories support and uphold current socio-economic and political arrangements (pp. 7-8).

Perhaps what we consider *normal* disciplinary literacy expectations—for example, requiring students to use Standard American English due to socialized notions of professionalism and

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success—are perceived as such because they reflect the cultures of mainstream, dominant groups (Baker-Bell, 2013).

Cultural Conflict

Disciplines, which are socially constructed, advance their own cultural traditions and beliefs. As Moje (2015) explains, "Disciplines are highly specialized—and fairly exclusive—cultural groups, and just as one has to learn the conventions and practices of a new culture, so does one have to learn the conventions and practices of a discipline" (p. 258). The degree to which students can re-negotiate and compartmentalize their cultural mores to conform to these disciplinary conventions and practices—what Delpit (2006) calls "codes of power"— directly impacts their academic success. But what linguistic, narrative, spiritual, cognitive prices do students pay—particularly those from marginalized groups—given that disciplines have *always* been tailored to reflect dominant voices and experiences (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016)?

If disciplines are "regimes of truth" (Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2016), we must acknowledge that regimes cannot exist without social stratifications, power structures, and rulers. Even justice-driven teachers risk complicit participation in an autocratic classroom that reifies what Freire (1970/2007 metaphorically described as a "banking model" in which "education…becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (p. 53). Banking depends on transmission learning. Mthethwa-Sommers (2014) writes, "[because] schools serve as transmission tools of the dominant culture, they also serve to perpetuate inequities and social injustices that exist in society" (p. 9). A transmission-based disciplinary model that installs teachers as acting-experts and students as receiving-apprentices runs the risk of establishing teachers as arbiters of disciplinary assimilation.

Cultural conflict between students and disciplinary expectations can inflict damage. Students enter our classrooms with vibrant, varied, and extensive knowledges (Moll et al., 1992; Yosso, 2005). But these knowledges are not always validated or valued in school settings, particularly when they diverge with traditional disciplinary expectations (Love, 2019). Consider the earlier example of requiring students to use Standard American English in academic spaces. Knowing that language and identity are inextricably connected (Baker-Bell, 2013; Gee, 2015), dismissing a student's dialect as incompatible with disciplinary expectations implicitly tells that student their *person* is incompatible with the disciplinary culture. Similarly, curricula, the bedrock of disciplines, wields immense power. Requiring students to read disciplinary texts that are mostly or entirely written by White, Anglo, male authors can isolate, even damage, students who do not identify with the curriculum or its authors (see, e.g., Carter 2007; Dyches, 2017).

Ighodaro and Wiggan first offered the term "curriculum violence" in 2010; drawing on their work, in 2020, Jones wrote that, "curriculum violence occurs when educators and curriculum writers have constructed a set of lessons that damage or otherwise adversely affect students intellectually and emotionally" (p. 48). Curricular violence assumes many forms, and often triggers and/or perpetuates racial, sexual, and other types of trauma. We may not intend to diminish students' funds of knowledge when we limit *expertise* to the knowledges and skills of canonical, mainstream, privileged traditions—but that does not mitigate the trauma, or absolve our roles in its perpetuation. As Jones warns, "intentionality is not a prerequisite for harmful

teaching" (p. 48). The field of disciplinary literacy must confront that the ways we have historically understood, presented, and implemented disciplinary literacy often deviates from the goals of a democratic, justice-oriented education. For many students—particularly those holding marginalized identities—"thinking like" or "being like" an "expert" is only possible through cultural assimilation.

Teachers as Experts: Yes, But…

Disciplinary discourse has also forged a narrative, and established expectations, for teachers. Since the implementation of Common Core State Standards in 2010, classroom teachers across the United States have been tasked with coaching students to emulate the cognitive processes of craft experts. A sea of resources, from textbooks to journal articles, offer strategies for helping students learn to "think like" a craft expert (see, e.g., Dyches & Gunderson, 2021; Fedewa et al., 2014; Gillis, 2014; Juel et al., 2010; Phillips et al., 2020). But, as a former high school English language arts (ELA) teacher, I can attest (both honestly, and a little sadly) that I am not equipped to teach the inner workings of the minds of James Baldwin, Emily Dickinson, or Jhumpa Lahiri. Said differently: if I distilled my expertise for students, I would be sharing the thought processes I engaged as I analyzed a text, designed a strategy, or organized my lesson *to account for teaching my secondary students*, not creating content for a mainstream reading audience. My approach is, of course, vastly different than a poet's as they sit down to write a sonnet, or a screenwriter to type dialogue and stage directions. I am an expert *teacher* of ELA, not an expert novelist, essayist, or short story writer. Shulman (1987) would call this my "pedagogical content knowledge"—the "special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers" (p. 8). Certainly, and necessarily, craft experts and teachers of said craft have overlapping skills; however, these skills are not interchangeable, as both groups enjoy specialized ways of thinking and creating.

But if pedagogical content knowledge is the domain of teachers, why are teachers expected to assume these adjacent, but ultimately very different, craft identities of poet, short story writer, or essayist, and facilitate students' assimilation into these communities? Are we unintentionally delegitimizing the specialized work of teachers when we uncritically subscribe to *expert* disciplinary literacy discourses? And what are the gendered implications of this delegitimization given the overwhelming feminization of the teaching profession? In many ways, *expert* rhetoric misunderstands and diminishes teachers as well as students.

Toward Critical Disciplinary Literacy

Analysis of disciplinary literacy discourse suggests the need to broadly and more critically evaluate how we view disciplines and stakeholders' roles with them. Nevertheless, learning how to navigate disciplinary spaces for academic success is valuable and necessary. Teachers must designate a content specialty during teacher education coursework; moreover, refusing to support students' acquisition of the mainstream skills needed to succeed in academic spaces and beyond—that is, disciplinary codes of power (Delpit, 2006; Moje, 2015)—is tantamount to curricular violence. Developing students' critical literacy, and creating positive experiences with disciplinary literacy, are not mutually exclusive instructional approaches.

A more nuanced approach to disciplinary literacy involves teaching students how to both excel in *and* question the disciplines. Drawing from sociocultural models of disciplinary literacy learning (Gee, 2006, 2015; Moje, 2007, 2008, 2015), critical disciplinary literacy (CDL) positions students and teachers to consider disciplines—their histories, skills, and expectations—from a critical literacy perspective (Dyches, 2018a, 2018b; Dyches et al., 2023). A way of "doing" critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987), CDL explicitly acknowledges disciplines as codes of power, and recognizes the cultural conflict that often arises between disciplines and students' funds of knowledge (Delpit, 2006; Moje, 2015; Moll et al., 1992). For example, a student who struggles to write the standard, formulaic five-paragraph essay in an ELA class might have a deft touch of language when writing song lyrics. A student who has difficulty conceptualizing the relationship between numbers and space in geometry might confidently calculate distance ~~and~~ when creating complex worlds in Minecraft. In both examples, however, the mastery of the disciplinary convention, rather than the culturally reflective and relevant task, is valued in the academic space. An educator committed to CDL finds a way to acknowledge, value, and *incorporate* students' funds of knowledge, while also showing students how to access the mainstream disciplinary skill. One commitment cannot eclipse the other.

CDL de-neutralizes procedural disciplinary thinking and instead requires stakeholders to unpack the unique, specialized power structures and attendant strategies of a discipline. Working from a CDL perspective, a government teacher might, for example, modify the Know-Want to Know-Learned (KWL) strategy to show students the distinct disciplinary skills they use to analyze trans*phobic legalese; a math teacher could amend the stop-and-jot strategy to help students apply trigonometric principles to determine wheelchair accessibility at their high school. An earth science teacher, while analyzing a graph from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, might use a think-aloud to make explicit how global warming disproportionally impacts people of Color. Ultimately, CDL values and creates space for developing the skills needed to name, nuance, and speak back to power structures that characterize the disciplines. In sum, a CDL model empowers students to question the very disciplinary communities they are trying to enter; to simultaneously identify and subvert codes of power (Dyches et al., 2024).

"Doing" Critical Disciplinary Literacy in ELA Classrooms

CDL discourse reflects a movement toward more critical, justice-oriented literacy instruction. My goal in sharing this "worked example" (Gee, 2010) is threefold: to critique disciplinary norms, offer alternative ways of thinking, and provide pedagogical suggestions for moving toward a power-sharing, democratic approach to disciplinary literacy. Below, I expand on three ways ELA teachers can "do" CDL: centering disciplinary inquiry that honors experiential knowledge and vulnerability; power-sharing by normalizing reciprocating expertise; and utilizing their professional learning communities to establish a collective commitment to questioning tradition. Table One provides several possible applications for enacting these three approaches. While the application suggestions center ELA practices, these ideas have transdisciplinary possibilities.

Disciplinary Inquiry: Honoring Experiential Knowledge and Vulnerability

Freire (1970) famously avowed dialogue as the mechanism of liberation. Dialogue provides a conduit through which to challenge disciplinary norms. Teachers who champion CDL openly talk with their students about the ways in which disciplines are, by nature, hierarchical, power-bound, and designed to honor and dismiss specific types of intelligence. In short: they normalize and personalize disciplinary interrogation (Moje, 2015). CDL-oriented teachers might ask students which disciplines they think they are "good" at, "bad" at, and why. Above all, CDL-driven teachers create space for students to share their disciplinary narratives, understanding that for many students, these experiences are marked by curricular trauma, even curricular violence.

Importantly, the teacher must do more than facilitate these conversations: they must actively participate in them. This sharing is an act of vulnerability, to be sure. But willingness to be vulnerable is sometimes necessary in order to prompt students' thinking, particularly around complex, sometimes painful topics (Shelton & Brooks, 2024). For example, when talking with my own students, I share my struggles in math courses, noting that the perceived "right and wrong" nature of the discipline (which left little space for my strengths, writing and reading), made me feel like an anxious outsider. Math felt like an isolated endeavor to me—and, as someone with an extroverted personality, I often felt like my very essence was incompatible with math culture. Because my academic experiences in math were largely independent, I had little opportunity to learn from and with my peers. I often felt sick with worry that my math teacher would call on me to "show my work" on the board, a terrifying, shame-inducing request that only my math teachers made. In initiating these conversations and modeling vulnerability, educators can douse disciplinary gaslighting and begin to redraw disciplinary boundaries that create space for students' lived experiences.

Power-Sharing: Expanding "Expertise"

In secondary classrooms, who gets to be an expert—and who doesn't? Are teachers always the expert; students, always the novice? By limiting notions of expertise to only those aligned with academic success, we may inadvertently limit students' confidence and agency. Engaging reciprocal expertise means that students and teachers take turns being experts, an approach that disrupts the conventional transmission-model of disciplinary literacy instruction. While teachers support students' acquisition of disciplinary conventions, so too can students show teachers how to expand disciplinary boundaries in ways affirming of their funds of knowledge. For example, in ELA, teachers often model the various disciplinary skills needed to conduct a literary analysis. But teachers could power-share by encouraging students to propose the format of their own literary analysis—a spoken word poem, YouTube short, multi-media art, interpretive dance—even a traditional five paragraph essay. Teachers must be willing to let students show their understanding of disciplinary conventions through non-traditional means; to provide choice and support autonomy. Per students' interests, the assessment formats may be different; however, the teaching objective and disciplinary skill remains constant. Though this expert reciprocity is dependent on context, task, and outcome, it first requires a commitment from teachers and students to listen, value, and learn from each other's expertise.

Professional Learning Community Collaborations

Professional learning communities, or PLCs, are common in schools across the country. In these spaces, teachers of the same discipline create community, and have a chance to discuss discipline-specific successes and issues. Utilized thoughtfully, PLCs can play a powerful role in unsettling conventional approaches to disciplinary literacy instruction. Research shows that having a critical colleague—that is, a colleague a teacher can turn to in order to discuss issues of power related to self and teaching—can influence and promote justice-driven teaching (Boyd et al., 2021; Lord, 1994). Critical colleagueship involves "[c]reating and sustaining productive disequilibrium through self-reflection, collegial dialogue, and on-going critique" (Lord, 1994, p. 192). To that end, ELA PLCs could discuss the idea of critical colleagueship, and how they might use such a framework to guide their PLC. Critical colleagueship requires vulnerability; as such, PLCs must address and establish norms and expectations for these professional relationships. Together, ELA teachers might explore what a reciprocal, collaborative approach to disciplinary literacy instruction entails—one that celebrates joy and creativity, renegotiates authority, and advances justice. They might collaboratively reconcile implications in being a craft versus pedagogical content knowledge expert, thinking through the explicit and implicit messaging of these labels. They may consider, too, what happens when a teacher experiences cultural conflict with a discipline (see, e.g., Dyches, 2018c). Importantly, these conversations can and should be tailored to the PLC's particular teaching context, including its unique sociopolitical climate, curricular mandates, and students.

In addition to creating a critical community, disciplinary-defined PLCs are essential because they provide a vehicle for promoting justice-driven literacy practices, like CDL, across all courses. A student might first encounter dialogic interactions that include questioning the discipline and reciprocal expertise in ninth grade; if all ELA PLC members share the same commitments to equity, then students will have an abundance of opportunities to develop and refine these skills across their high school careers. When ELA teachers collectively subscribe to CDL, students will not experience these skills in isolation, but will instead have the chance to develop and hone these skills throughout their secondary school experience. Moreover, a transdisciplinary commitment (Puig & Froelich, 2021) to CDL—that is, a school- or even district-wide effort—could potentially reshape students' entire concept of, and relationship with, formal education and academic success.

Table 1. Critical Disciplinary Literacy Approaches and Applications.

Strategy	Applications
Disciplinary Inquiry	Together, the ELA teacher and students write a reflection about their feelings of belonging in disciplinary spaces (ELA, math, etc.) providing examples from recent and past experiences. The ELA teacher and students find/create GIFs/memes that represent their feelings toward a particular discipline and share.
Power-Sharing: Reciprocal Expertise	The ELA teacher shares the standard/disciplinary skill students will work on developing. In consultation with their teacher, students suggest how they might bring their own expertise (e.g., multimodal writing, digital media production, performance) into their chosen assessment. Students write a brief proposal explaining how their proposed format

| | will show their understanding of the disciplinary skill. The teacher responds with feedback; students adjust as needed.

Students investigate recent book banning legislation, such as Iowa's House File 496, to understand "Who is centered? Who is missing? Who is marginalized? And what does this mean and why does this matter?" (Ebarvia et al., 2020, p. 101). The ELA teacher and students brainstorm ideas for sharing their opinions with community members, including legislators, thinking through what avenues are available to them uniquely as students and teacher. |
|---|---|
| Professional Learning Communities | ELA teachers participate in a book study to understand their discipline's history (e.g., Applebee's (1974) *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: A History*). They discuss how their subjects' historical beginnings influence and inform its current status. They note the traditions of ELA they most rely on in their own practice.

In pairs, ELA teachers read "Navigating the text selection gauntlet: Exploring factors that influence English teachers' choices" (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015) and discuss the factors that influence their own text selection relative to the article's findings. They brainstorm how they might modify their instruction to allow students more autonomy and control.

Teachers select one CDL strategy to implement in their classroom (see, e.g., *Power Tools: 30 Critical Disciplinary Literacy Strategies for 6-12 Classrooms*). They report their successes and challenges to the PLC. |

Conclusion

Historic and current disciplinary discourse makes necessary a new way of thinking about the field that forges explicit connections between power, canonical bodies, expertise, and language. And, though recent scholarship has explored promising critical disciplinary literacy-oriented strategies, such as read-alouds in social studies (Wrenn & Gallagher, 2021) and think-alouds in ELA (Dyches, 2022), broadly, the field holds tightly to ideas of "expert," "apprentice," and other disciplinary conventions. Pontificating or diminishing the good and important work many disciplinary colleagues and forebears have contributed to the field is not my goal, and I acknowledge my own culpability in upholding ideas that may ignore or otherwise limit students' funds of knowledge. Theorizing this paper has challenged my thinking as a teacher, scholar, learner, community member, and advocate for justice. I hope we can join in community to create new directions for our field and the students we champion, learn from, and serve.

This essay must contextualize itself within the current sociopolitical milieu, characterized by the devastating impacts of global warming; censoring and banning of diverse texts; legislative attacks on the queer community and women; weaponizing of critical race theory; rejection of science-based research around public health; and fear of another January 6th-like insurrection. But amid this uncertainty, literacy stakeholders have agency (Dyches, 2023). We can,

collaboratively, reconstitute the governing disciplinary discourses that often dismiss students' funds of knowledge. Such a shift could transform the disciplinary learning experience for teachers and students alike, and better position students to engage the world around them as a critical citizenry.

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