

African American Girls Using Individual
Values, Experiences, and Text to Discuss Social Issues

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Abstract

This study investigates readers' use of text and discussion to understand unjust topics. In this study, four African American girls who have experienced the effects of Hurricane Katrina, read and discuss *The Watson's go to Birmingham, 1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis. The participants engage in independent reading and journal writing, followed by a group discussion to share their responses. Topics such as discrimination, racism, economic status, and violence are included in the text, prompting several types of responses. A shared response among the girls is text to life connections; other individual responses include their use of morals, values, and background knowledge.

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Introduction

The interest and development of my research topic was inspired by my experiences with, and reflections on three distinct situations. The first was inspired from my work with elementary students in New Orleans public schools pre-Katrina. While observing, tutoring, and student-teaching in New Orleans, I noticed that a disturbing number of elementary students I interacted with were unable to read. In addition, there were a large number of students who conveyed to me their distaste for reading, describing it as “boring”, “hard”, and “stupid”. Despite some students’ obvious lack of reading proficiency, it seemed as if educators, administrators, and parents were allowing these students to progress to higher grades. I could not understand why the students I interacted with were unable to read; I searched for and suggested books reflecting the interests of many of these students. However, to the majority of these students, the act of reading was just not appealing; this immediately piqued my interest. I knew I wanted to study reading, but was unsure of what aspect of reading I wanted to focus on. As I began to reflect on my time spent in New Orleans, and on my subsequent conversations with texts, professors, and classmates in graduate school, my research interests evolved.

The second inspiration was an experience working in a youth summer camp, nine months after Hurricane Katrina. The purpose of this camp was for upper elementary and middle school youth to participate in activities focusing on relevant issues, like bullying, violence, gangs, teen pregnancy, poverty, and any others the youth wanted to discuss. My purpose was to develop and facilitate activities that would foster a discussion about these issues. However, the youths’ need to express their feelings and emotions about the effects of Katrina dominated the camp. They felt the adults in their lives were concerned with

Federal Emergency Assistance, insurance policies, and finding loved ones instead of talking with them about their feelings. Many discussed their struggle with understanding the current state of their city, and trying to cope with the media's portrayal of the relationships between blacks and whites. For many, this was the first time they were able to unleash their emotions, frustrations, and struggles concerning this disaster and feel that their thoughts and expressions were valid and important. Through this, I realized the need for youth to have opportunities to express their thoughts and opinions about injustices they see around them.

At this point I decided my research question needed to address how youth who witness various injustices could use reading to change these injustices. Several concerns arose with this question. First, there was a need for a longitudinal study to describe attempts to transform injustices. This would result in having the participants live in oppressive situations, and attempt to change them, or include participants viewing oppression and seeking change. Another concern was those living in situations which seemed oppressive to me, but could be viewed as home, invincible to change by others.

After witnessing the oppression, injustice, and grief many children faced before and after Hurricane Katrina, I wondered how reading and social justice could be partnered. If these students who have witnessed and experienced trauma and injustice read books depicting similar injustices, would they use these texts to make sense of their worlds? As I wondered, I was unaware that my third inspiration would be a simulation of this present study. During one of the first courses in my graduate career, I engaged in reading adolescent texts. I completed journal responses to the texts before, during, and

after my readings. When we completed the texts, the entire class discussed the books together. To my surprise, this was what I wanted my participants to do!

These three experiences combined with my subsequent review of relevant literature, led to the development of my theoretical framework, and research agenda. I wanted to describe how students can see themselves as avenues for transforming their environments rather than becoming a passive participant in them. This inspires two questions: Do readers view reading as a way to understand, relate to, or transform societal ills? Do readers use books to help them understand social issues such as racism, poverty, and violence?

We know that readers can view reading as an ongoing, engaging act. In addition to reading for academic purposes, readers can perceive and adopt reading as a social action, a way of understanding difficult and new concepts infused into the structure of our society. Readers are able to communicate with themselves, the text, and others about social justice topics, and can move towards eradicating oppressive systems. This study explores how young readers might use reading as a form of discourse, eventually leading to praxis.

Theoretical Perspective

Reader response theories began establishing precedence in literary theory near the beginning of the twentieth century, as a reaction to the text-oriented theories dominating reading research. One established by a group called the New Critics who believed text held a standard meaning to be obtained by the reader. This group of men led with a belief that reading meant a careful and critical analysis of the text's structure, without

recognition of the author's intent, purpose, or background (Sloan, 2002). Syntax, codes, and conventions were a part of the formalities attributed to text oriented theories, without regards to meaning. In contrast to this text- oriented belief, researchers began to discover that readers were an active part of the reading experience. Socio-cultural, linguistic, and anthropological beliefs influenced researchers' recognition of how readers' culture, background, environment, race, and class impacted the reading experience (Smith & Stock, 2003). Transactional theory, one of the most prevalent theories in reader response, has shed light on the fact that reader's influence text during the reading experience.

Transactional Theory

Rosenblatt's (1938, 1978) transactional theory was one of the pioneering perspectives that viewed reading as an engaging act. Rosenblatt's (2005) transactional theory views reading as a selective activity where the reader's past experiences, interests, and reading purposes guide the selection, synthesis, and organization of a text. This theory contrasts with text- oriented theories, which attribute meaning to the information presented in the text by its author. Text-oriented theory posits that readers gain information the author intends for them, without acknowledging the readers' interpretations, experiences, and purposes for reading. Transactional theory disputes these claims, formulating a new perspective in which text and reader combine to make meaning. The author does write for readers, and must have knowledge about readers, and the author's own experiences, contexts, position, and interests help shape how they write the text. However, this does not predict the meaning each individual reader will construct with the text. Past assumptions of reading as a passive act, is opposed by transactional theory's continual, recursive engagement where the reader and the text condition each

other (Rosenblatt, 2003). In this instance meaning is formed because of the existence and influence of both reader and text.

Readers' interpretation of text is dependent upon their experiences, interest and reading purposes; a reader can read the same text on more than one occasion and possibly construct different meanings (Rosenblatt, 2003). For example, a reader reading a novel about Thomas Jefferson for a book club discussion will create a different experience than a reader who reads the same novel for a book report. All readers read for their own purposes, which influence their attention to certain portions of the text. Consequently, different purposes for reading generate distinctive meanings and are usually reflective of the two types of stances highlighted in transactional theory: efferent and aesthetic stance. A reader does not necessarily assume one stance while reading, but is likely to read and respond on a continuum between the two stances.

The efferent stance focuses on information that is to be retained and recalled after the reading event. This includes deriving meaning through structuring ideas, detailing main events, directions, and conclusions to be retained, used, or acted upon. The common strategies used with efferent reading are abstracting out, analyzing, and structuring what is to be retained after reading. The aesthetic stance examines the qualities of feelings, ideas, situations, personalities, and emotions as they relate to tensions, conflicts, images, and events in a text as they unfold. Aesthetic reading is perceived through senses, emotions and intuitions; and is subjective to the reader's interpretation during and after the reading event. Aesthetic reading focuses on what is being lived during the act of reading, the ideas and feelings being evoked and organized with text. Both stances are

reflected in response studies with researchers explicitly or implicitly including them in research questions, data collection methodology, or analysis.

Review of Relevant Studies

Recent studies have shown teachers' attempts to put transactional theory, and other reader response theories into action. Whether the focus is efferent or aesthetic stance, it is clear that readers apply their own insights as they work to understand text. In reader response studies, the participants' response is the primary data, which can be problematic. The problem with this type of data is that a reader's response is never directly accessible, but instead is mediated by the reader talking, writing, or drawing about the responses. A reader has to interpret his or her own responses, reactions and understanding of the text, and translate them into verbal or written form, which is then interpreted and analyzed by researchers and educators. The majority of research has focused on what connections readers make with text and how they arrive at meaning. Although it is difficult to understand how readers construct their responses, important similarities have been found in their characteristics (Jewett, 2007; Odel & Cooper, 1976).

When analyzing the responses gathered from readers, researchers have created categories to assist with grouping the commonalities found between participants' responses. Purves' (1968) categories of responses were reader centered including engagement-involvement, perception, interpretation, and evaluation. These categories were combined with Odel & Cooper's (1976) categories which formulated a balance between the reader and text centered categories. These categories entailed a personal

statement about the reader and the work, a descriptive statement about the main ideas and structure of the literature, the reader's interpretive statement, and an evaluative statement regarding the meaningfulness of the text. The reader and text centered categories are similar to Eeds & Wells' (1989) categories derived from fifth and sixth graders' student literature discussions. Their categories contain involvement: a text inspired association; literal comprehension: retelling and reciting facts, inferences and predictions; conversation maintenance; comments continuing the conversation; and evaluation. Newer studies have borrowed, expanded, or created categories similar to these seminal, earlier studies.

Across several response studies, a common goal was to capture readers' processes and types of meaning making (Brooks, Browne, & Hampton, 2008; Broughton, 2002; Celani & McIntyre, 2006; Duenas, 2004). These studies show that when reading individually, readers create meaning for themselves that they can share with others. This sharing and reading with others allows communal understandings of oneself, others, and the world around them (Galda, 1998). The types of responses vary according to what was investigated in each study. This review of literature is divided into two sections reflecting the types of responses investigated: literal response and personal response, and social/political response. These categories were suggested by McGinley and Kamberelis' (1996) categories of response functions. Literal and personal response focuses on facts, story line, plot, and retelling, and how readers understand their present selves, their problems, and their future; social/political response involves readers understanding, affirming, or negotiating social relationships in their immediate worlds, understanding

social issues, and reflecting upon ways to transform social problems in their communities, and society.

This review includes a discussion of the studies focusing on literal and personal responses, followed with a discussion of social/political response studies. The studies explored below may emphasize one type of response, but this does not mean the reader was limited to this one response during the reading.

Different disciplines provide various connotations of the terms text and literature, for the purposes of this review and the studies included, “text” and “literature” will be used synonymously with “books” unless noted otherwise.

Literal and Personal Response

Many studies attempted to gauge if and how students comprehended difficult and nonconventional texts, referring to vocabulary, concepts, length and story structure. Researchers used response journals, written activities, interviews, and discussions to determine the type and depth of the participants’ comprehension. The studies investigated how students understood challenging texts by conveying participants’ use of traditional reading strategies, including contextualization, intertextual, and intratextual analysis for comprehension.

In a study of first graders listening to their teacher read aloud a difficult chapter book, Martinez and Roser (2008) describe readers taking a stance of either living inside of the story world, or being outside of the story world. When these readers’ responses were inside of the story world, they were able to recreate or retell the story vividly. In contrast, the responses outside of the story world determined the emotional response to

the reading experience; the students expressed their feelings about the story and provided examples from the book that supported their opinions. Pantaleo's (2006; 2007) participants also used the inside and outside of the story world stances, although Pantaleo does not use these phrases. Two of Pantaleo's studies included nonconventional books, Scieszka's *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Stupid Fairy Tales* (1992), and Macaulay's *Black and White* (1990). Both texts exhibit nonlinear story structures as well as multiple stories combined into one. When transacting with the texts, participants commented on their likes and dislikes of characters and the text. In an effort to make sense of these texts, the participants found themselves co-authoring the story.

The use of difficult texts often causes students to rely on their previous experiences with texts, concepts introduced to them through text, and previous background knowledge to assist with comprehension. In a case study with two critical readers engaging with difficult speeches given by Abraham Lincoln, Wooden (2008) found that readers lacked background knowledge about the relationships between blacks and whites. This finding explains his participants' inability to contextualize the text, and their lack of personal connections to the speeches. Responses depicting readers' ability to place issues and problems in a historical or present context show how readers express a deep understanding and exhibiting text-to-life connections to the story (Brooks, Browne, & Hampton, 2008). Text-to-life connections were prominent in Celani & McIntyre's (2006) study, in which participants used textual evidence to support their comments, connecting their personal and real worlds while questioning, challenging, and interpreting the text. This suggests the participants in the study took on both the efferent and aesthetic stances during their reading.

Heller's (2006) participants read and responded along a continuum between efferent and aesthetic responses, but Heller's findings differed from Celani & McIntyre's findings about the use of aesthetic responses. The first graders in Heller's book club offered literal retellings of their books, which were termed efferent response. Aesthetic responses were expressions of the participants' feelings about factual information, excitement about the beauty of pictures and their pleasure in learning new things. These studies demonstrate the diversity of response. This diversity is further revealed in personal connections, as each individual reader's background and experiences influence their responses.

Stories are culturally situated texts, written by culturally situated authors with beliefs about the world; texts which transact with readers' own culturally situated experiences (Galda, 1998). Together, both the reader and the text make meaning; the reader brings personal background experiences, culture, and knowledge to engage with a text. The text is a reflection of the author's experiences, cultures, and intentions. Both affect the possible lived-through experience of an aesthetic reading. The reader and the text come together to form meaning; the processes and types of meaning vary among readers and texts.

Three phases of analysis were used to construct the response categories in Hancock's (1993) case study investigation with four participants. In the first phase, Hancock created categories of responses between all the readers. In the next phase, she constructed categories of individual responses, and then compared the responses of the four readers with respect to meaning making in the last phase. This thorough system of analysis helped Hancock devise three major categories of response: Immersion,

self involvement, and detachment. Immersion includes the readers' involvement in the text as he or she makes sense of the emerging plot and characters; Self involvement entails the readers' personal involvement with characters or plot as he or she took the place of the character or action; and lastly, detachment describes when readers stepped outside the story world in order to make evaluative statements about the literature, or to contemplate his or her perspective on the process of reading or writing. During a description of the four readers, Hancock attributes each reader to one of the three categories, presuming these readers respond in either the immersion, self involvement, or detachment categories. This aligns with Martinez & Rosen's (2003) characteristics of response, describing each reader's response as rich and varied, exhibiting distinct response profiles.

The response categories detailed in Hancock's study constitute the readers' connections with the characters and events in the text, and an evaluation of their experiences and thoughts about the text. The readers connected with characters and story events in McGinley and Kamberelis' (1993) study, and explored the way reading and writing functioned in their lives. These connections enabled participants to explore new roles, identities, and responsibilities as school children, family, community members, and citizens of society. This emphasis resulted in a development of responses focusing on a simultaneous connection between the reader and text, and the reader and their environment. McGinley and Kamberelis' study focused on five African American students and their outcomes while participating in reading, writing, and discussing their neighborhoods, families, and culture. The authors' analysis detailed response themes around student's engagement with texts which included: remembering or savoring

personal experiences, reconciling problematic emotions, understanding or negotiating social relationships in their world, consciously celebrating literate values and practices, awareness of social problems and injustices, transforming people's opinions and values, and participating in imaginary worlds (pp.19).

Identifying with characters was one of the ways Broughton's (2002) readers related their lives to the story world. Broughton's participants connected with characters to help formulate the construction of their attitudes, beliefs, values, and other subjectivities, while comprehending the text. When contributing to written responses, Broughton's participants concentrated on one particular character whose personality or living situation emulated that of their own. Instead of discussing connections with characters, Galda's (1982) participants assessed or evaluated the characters' actions and beliefs. Interestingly, some of these evaluations reflected the reader's inability to separate her own view of reality from the author's created reality in the text. This does not deny that the participant's connection between the text and her life is valid, but raises possibility that it may be the result of the participant's development of a personal style from which to approach both life and literature (Galda, 1982 p. 17).

Based on their social, cultural, and linguistic background knowledge, and shared personal experiences with characters in the text, Duenas (2004) revealed her participants use of the characters to assist in a discussion about social issues relevant in their daily lives. The participants found the characters dealt with similar issues they faced in their homes, such as drug use, relocating, and economic hardships. Duenas' participants shared similar ethnic, social, cultural, and linguistic knowledge with the characters, which assisted with the meaning making detailed in their written responses. When reading *The*

Skin I'm In by Sharon Flake (1998) Brooks, Browne and Hampton's (2008) participants were introduced to discrimination within the black community based on skin complexion. Although Brooks, Browne, and Hampton's (2008) participants shared similar ethnic, social, cultural, and linguistic knowledge with the novel's characters, some of their personal identities, regarding esteem and self worth did not reflect the main characters. This caused the readers to detach themselves from the main characters.

The former studies exhibit examples of readers' personal responses, allowing them to offer suggestions to characters from their own experiences, try on characters' experiences, and provide a safe way for explorations of ethnicity, identity, and home culture (Brooks, Browne, and Hampton, 2008; Broughton, 2002; Galda, 1982; Hancock, 1993). These studies reflect reading practices that lead to what Lewis (2000) calls the oversimplification of the aesthetic stance, reducing it to personal response. Lewis argues for a broadening of reader response to include social and political factors influencing readers, the text, and its author; since all are positioned and subject to dominant discourses, culture, and structures (Lewis, 2000). Brooks, Browne and Hampton (2008) end their study with a question, as if responding and reflecting on Lewis' argument for a broader definition of reader response. They ask was it enough for participants to recognize issues with teasing and self esteem embedded in narrative, and not deeply grapple with a redefined beauty aesthetic for African American girls-to view character and themselves as gendered and racialized members of society?

Social/Political Response

The readers' and authors' social racial, and cultural position affect their possible readings and outcomes of the reading experience. Authors' social, racial, and cultural status influence their perception of the world, therefore affecting their texts. Similarly, readers' interpretations of text are filtered through their social, racial, and cultural positions. Reading can be viewed as an example of discourse or dialogue, an ongoing process, relating to other dialogues preceding them (Bakhtin, 1986). Bakhtin similarly places importance on dialogue and language but uses utterances, which symbolizes dialogue, "The speaker is not the first speaker, and he is actively understanding and responding to the utterances before him. Any utterance is a link in a complex organized chain of utterances," (p.69). The participants in the following studies have participated in this type of dialogue as described by Lewis' (2000), where literature discussion invites readers to question the discourse that shapes their experiences, and resist textual ideology that promotes dominant cultural assumption (pp. 261). From this perspective, reading and response are ways of participating in this dialogue.

The social/political section illustrates Galda's (1998) definition of reading, describing reading as an act of transformation, where the reader looks at mirrors into themselves, or through windows into the lives of others, by transforming words into meaning, and possibly reconstructing the self.

"Students At the Center" is a writing program housed at McDonough 35 and Frederick Douglass high schools in New Orleans, Louisiana, which enables students to publish work as writers, journalists, and creative artists surrounding teen concerns and issues. The following excerpt was written by an African American student in New Orleans capturing her city. (August 28, 2005):

I'm writing this essay, so I guess I survived. He sure didn't though. His second line [a traditional celebration for the deceased] will probably be next week. It's amazing how many fall in a week like mosquitoes in a bug lamp. People should really take a stand, but they are tired and weary of working hard all day and ends still don't meet. Our daily suffering is not shown in those commercials where everyone is smiling and drinking. If I was the mayor or another high-ranking official, I wouldn't show it either. Why would I, if I'm making a stack from tourists? Besides they're only trashing one little city. My Louisiana is a great place to visit and have fun, but take my advice don't stay here!!
(**website:** <http://www.strom.clemson.edu/teams/literacy/sac/program.html>)

This essay highlights the student's opinions, and reflections of her environment in New Orleans. This response shows the student's awareness and questions about oppression in various forms as a result of societal norms, expectations, and standards. These subjects often cause conflict among youth, due to the unsettling, inequitable distribution of privilege and power in society, that need to be addressed and discussed (Snyder & Peeler, 2008).

Duenas (2004), and Brooks, Browne, and Hampton's (2008) studies reveal young readers understanding and forming opinions about the events, concepts, issues, and emotions presented in literature. Young readers can engage in this type of meaning making with the narratives in text, just as they can create text in response to their lives, environments, and society. In an effort to investigate these responses to real life issues and injustices presented in our society, researchers and educators interested in reader response have investigated this phenomenon for evidence of social action or awareness. Using literature depicting social issues, or using reading strategies and activities to promote critical reading, readers reflected, critiqued, and inquired about their own lives, and the social and political issues introduced to them. As students are confronted with problems relating to themselves in, and with the world, they feel compelled to respond to

that challenge. Their response evokes new challenges and new understandings (Freire, 2000).

In Jewett's (2007) study with students in a graduate children's literature course, she used books that included social issues like racism, gender discrimination, and/or classism. During their reading, Jewett asked students which groups' voices were not heard in each book, to take on the lives of those characters. Since the majority of Jewett's participants were from white, middle class families, she found it was difficult for them to move beyond their worlds and think of others' realities, without prompting. Like Jewett's participants, Brooks and Hampton's (2005) readers positioned themselves based on race in an effort to try to understand and cope with the vivid account of racism in Taylor's novel *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976). Their participants identified with the characters' racial identity; however, they struggled with the historical accounts of racism, since they did not see this explicit racism in their present realities. Through these cultural affiliations, Brooks and Hampton identified four strategies students used to understand the text: gaining historical knowledge; seeking or giving rationale; venting anger; and, appreciating revenge. Both studies demonstrate readers' awareness and reliance on their race, social status, and culture in an attempt to understand the issues presented in the texts.

Reliance on race was less evident in Johnson, Bowen, and Johnson's collaboration with a teacher. They described participants' effort to understand racial dynamics, as they listened to read aloud of a Rosales version of a common Christmas story '*Twas The Night B'fore Christmas* (1996), which includes a black Santa Claus. Instead of accounting for the students' racial background, the researchers discussed the

students' experiences as their lens for inquiry. The teacher's previous readings of Santa stories with a white Santa confused the students as they tried to determine which Santa was "real." By using their previous experiences with Santa at department stores, some determined the white Santa was real, and the black Santa was the helper. As students discussed their insights, their perceptions developed into beliefs such as: "The black and white Santa take turns and are friends"; "Santa is mixed with black and white like Indians"; and "the black Santa goes to black people's houses and the white Santa goes to white people's houses." Students' inquiry with the texts revealed their inquiries of life, revealing their knowledge of power relationships and distinctions between black and white.

A few studies evidence some societal ills and injustices as sensitive topics for young people. Depriving children of reading about confusing or painful matters they may be experiencing can make literature irrelevant to them or leave them feeling alone in their thoughts and experiences (Moller & Allen, 2000, p. 161). Experiencing these types of books often calls for specific moments or encounters when a word, concept or event in a story surprises, or frightens readers to a degree that they seek to inquire further about the vocabulary, event or concept (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006). For example, DeNicolo and Franquiz's (2006) participants struggled with racial slurs used to describe characters belonging to their African American and Hispanic races. After talking with the researcher, the participants asked if they could refrain from using the racial slurs while reading.

A discussion of the Ku Klux Klan was not only a struggle for Moller and Allen's (2000) participants, but also caused fear. While interpreting and discussing racism in their

novel, readers began to relate racism to their present lives. A discussion evolved about the Ku Klux Klan, which caused discomfort among the participants because of their inability to separate historical race relations with the present. A discussion of the Ku Klux Klan prompted fear, and they looked to adults and the researcher to provide assurance and protection from this group. Due to the hatred and violence attributed to the Ku Klux Klan, the four girls in this study did not feel comfortable discussing them. This caused the participants and researchers to feel troubled, invoking a resistance to, and disengagement from the story and topic.

Summary of Literature Review

The themes highlighted in the literal/personal, and social/political sections of this review may differ; but they all attribute to the readers' process of understanding. When reading for literal meaning or gathering facts, readers use individual strategies to help them understand the text during their efferent reading. In personal responses, readers use various forms of connections between text and self, text and world, and text to text for comprehension. Likewise, in social responses, readers use their understanding of the world, as tactics to help understand new, ambiguous and controversial topics presented in texts. All three responses verify individual ways readers ascertain meaning during their reading experience.

Unanswered questions

There are a number of ways to describe the kinds of responses readers make however, research on the process in which readers formulate their responses and how participants answer questions or respond in a certain way is scarce (Jewett, 2007; Odel &

Cooper, 1976). Since researcher data is mediated by readers, the challenge is for readers to express how they are formulating their responses, as opposed to an easier conveyance of their response. Few studies indicate how participants' social, cultural, economic, and racial positions are subject to the text and other participants.

Reader response studies also lack the inclusion of a researcher's reflexivity. There is a discussion of the participant's social positioning based on their ideologies, perceptions of self and others, environments, relationships, societal norms, and expectations, but, researchers lack a discussion of their own positions in relation to these topics. MacGillivray & Curwen (2007) express concern with participants' view of them and their methods. How researchers' cultural and social position may have affected data, interpretation, and analysis, is often not included. This aspect is needed because how researchers define self and subjects is important to the data collection, analysis, and publishing (Brayboy, 2000).

Power structures and dynamics between adults and young people, teachers and students, and researchers and participants indicate positions of authority and submission. Decisions regarding when to speak and what to speak about are often controlled by the expectations of certain roles. In classrooms, student /teacher roles and student-student relationships reflect power dynamics which may cause the silencing of voices (Moje, 1999). Alvermann et al. (1999) presented friction between how researchers wanted to be perceived (as researchers) and how participants perceived them. A discussion of how these power dynamics affect research findings is often neglected.

Students who have experienced trauma possess various experiences and lenses that they can deconstruct, inquire about, critique or understand. Furthermore, research including participants having witnessed or experienced trauma, engaging with a text including social issues is encouraged. Using other methods to formulate research will allow researchers to investigate a variety of populations, and determine if students actually use texts to understand their world, without the demand of others.

Methodology

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions: Do readers presented with literature, including social issues such as racism, discrimination, poverty, and violence respond to these injustices? How do readers apply their response to the text, to their lives and the lives of others? Do readers use books to help them understand social issues such as racism, discrimination poverty, and violence? Do readers view reading as a way to understand, relate to, and transform societal ills?

In regards to the questions investigated in this study, the term student refers to young people in upper elementary level grades. Also the text is limited to one fictional, narrative book.

Case Study

Yin (2003) suggests choosing case study as a methodology when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context. This results in an inclusion of

the participants' context into the study. Dyson (1995) makes the following remarks that are in conjunction with Yin's suggestion:

What can be done with thousands of children but count them? In mass, children-and the challenges they present-are faceless, nameless, and overwhelming. But these massive numbers of children are not isolated individuals; they're social participants included, or so we hope, in particular classrooms and schools, in particular institutions and communities.

This quotation includes the context of the participants in the data, allowing for multiple complex interactions between the phenomenon, participants, and their contexts. The significance of using case studies is to provide information about the dimensions and dynamics of a population, phenomenon, situation, or place. Since case studies ensue multiple dimensions of data, multiple sources of evidence are needed, tailored to the type of case study chosen.

Case study research can be single or multiple studies, and can be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive (Yin, 2003). Exploratory studies define the questions and hypotheses of a study, after the investigation and data collection. Explanatory case studies explain cause and effect relationships. The type of case study chosen to answer my research questions is descriptive, providing a complete description of a phenomenon within its context.

Birnaum, Emig & Fisher (2003) outline the process for conducting descriptive case study investigations. The first step involves constructing research questions and purposeful sampling to determine the unit of analyses (case or cases). The type of questions asked, and cases being studied assist with determining the type of evidence or data to be collected. As Yin (2003) suggests, multiple data sources are needed to arrive at answering the research questions, and to reflect on the phenomenon being studied.

Merriam (1988) gives an overview of case study methodology by attributing four characteristics to case studies: particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. Case studies are particularistic because they focus on a particular situation, program, event, phenomenon, or person. Once their focus has been determined, the researcher gathers descriptions on the chosen object of study. The heuristic quality depicts enhancing a reader's understanding. Case studies are inductive; the data drives the understandings that evolve from the study. Reliance on theoretical concepts to help guide the design, define unit of analyses and data collection methods, is one of the most important strategies for conducting successful case studies (Yin, 2003). Reliance on the fundamentals of transactional theory aided my ability to follow the steps outlined by Birnaum, Emig, & Fisher (2003). As previously discussed in the introduction section, the steps to my research includes pin pointing a research topic, formulating research questions, and determining the population to study.

Method

Since power relations seem to influence response (Brayboy, 2000; Fecho, 2004), in this study I felt it was important to be an active participant rather than in a position of authority. Instead of encouraging my participants to regard me as a researcher looking to give answers, I wanted to embody the role of a researcher actively involved in making sense of our world, through reading, writing, and speaking. Freire (2000) best describes the type of dialogic interaction and the role I wanted to assume as a researcher/participant with my participants. Freire describes the positions of student and teacher as not based on authority but with people teaching and learning from one another. In this instance, I was a teacher and participant.

Setting. The four participants frequently visit Bethune Public Library (a pseudonym), a relatively small library. The library was filled with book shelves, computers, and tables arranged along the walls. This library is very popular among students and families from neighboring schools and households. As a result of its size and traffic, many library visitors were constantly moving and talking throughout the library. To avoid distraction and noise levels the participants and I met in an enclosed study room. We could see visitors in the library, but were unable to hear them. The only furniture in our room was a wide circular table with six chairs surrounding it. The girls and I sat close to each other around the table with two tape recorders in the middle.

Participants. As a result of my experiences discussed in the introduction, my chosen population of interest was African American youth, who experienced the trauma of Hurricane Katrina. The reason for selecting this population is a result of the historical and present connections to oppression, isolation, and exclusion from mainstream society. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina exposed extreme injustices attributed to race and class. In that, the participants experienced and witnessed these injustices, I was interested in their thoughts with respect to their presence in literature.

Selection of participants. I opted against using a school for soliciting participants, in hopes of separating my study's purpose with the affiliation of school expectations; such as reading to complete assignments for grades. Instead, I chose to post flyers at a community dance school, where I was familiar with the owner, staff and students. The flyers solicited youth in upper elementary grades willing to participate in a University research project. In response to my flyers, four girls met the requirements by expressing

an interest in the study; being in upper elementary grades, and self identifying as African American or black.

Data collection procedures. Since I was unable to be present throughout the duration of the study, I mailed the materials in separate increments, and communicated the instructions through written forms and telephone conversations. I instructed the participants to keep all materials sent until our group discussion. In the first package was a pre-reading questionnaire (See Appendix C), with four questions about their perceptions of themselves as readers, their reading interests and reading purposes. The second package included a copy of *The Watsons go to Birmingham, 1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis, a composition notebook, and the following instructions: “Here is the book you will read on your own for the next week. While reading, write in the composition notebook at any time before, during, or after your reading. You can write about any reflections, reactions, thoughts, or anything else you would like to say about the book.” After sending the materials I contacted each girl by phone, reiterated the instructions and answered questions. I also informed them I would read the novel that week and write in a journal as well.

At the end of the week the girls and I met face to face at Bethune Public Library to discuss the book. All of us brought a copy of the novel and the journal responses to the discussion. Before beginning the discussion, I reminded the girls that I would be taping the session, and allowed them to create their pseudonyms. After the girls wrote their names on name tags, we began the session with their introductions. Following the introductions, I briefly explained the directions for the discussion: “Okay girls we are going to discuss the book today and you don’t have to raise your hand or anything, you

can say whatever you want. If anyone wants to start first with their reactions to any part of the book you can.” Immediately, one of the girls began the discussion that lasted for an hour and forty-five minutes.

I informed the girls prior to our meeting that I would participate in the activities with them, including the reading and journal writing activities for the week. During the discussion I tried to make sure the girls viewed me as another reader, rather than an adult questioning them for correct answers. This was difficult near the beginning of the discussion as I noticed the girls looking at me whenever they spoke. I informed them that we were all talking to each other. As the girls began responding to one another’s comments they seemed to exclude me from the conversation, as if they forgot I was there. As a result, the only time I spoke was to ask for details from the girls or clarification. In one instance, one of the girls asked what I thought about one of the chapters. This surprised and annoyed the other three participants.

Next, I distributed a post-reading questionnaire (See Appendix C). The questions asked details about whether the discussion or the book signaled certain ideas or thoughts about reading books that include social issues, as well as how to use books to make life decisions. The girls completed the questionnaires individually, and returned the questionnaires and journals to me. I allowed the girls to keep the books.

Text Summary. “*The Watson’s Go To Birmingham, 1963*. Enter the hilarious world of a ten-year old Kenny and his family, the Weird Watsons of Flint, Michigan. There’s Momma, Dad, little sister Joetta, and brother Byron, who’s thirteen and an “official juvenile delinquent.” When Momma and Dad decide it’s time for a visit to

Grandma, Dad comes home with the amazing Ultra-Glide, and the Watson's set out on a trip like no other. They're heading South. They're going to Birmingham, Alabama, toward one of the darkest moments in America's history (Curtis, 1995)."

The Watson's go to Birmingham, 1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis is widely read in elementary schools across the nation. It has received several awards including the Newberry Honor and the Coretta Scott King awards. In addition to its accolades, the text was chosen because of the topics it caused me to think about while reading. The issues presented in the text prompted reflection on many social issues including racism, poverty, and classism, during and after my reading. In chapter fourteen the church bombing added a historical fact to the novel many young readers are unaware of. This book brought up feelings of sadness, joy, and laughter while reading about the issues it presented. I felt *The Watson's go to Birmingham, 1963* would present an avenue for my participants to engage in reflection and critical thinking.

Coding Process. When beginning my analysis I decided to borrow one of Hancock's (1993) techniques, which uses several phases to analyze the data. In each phase I use a specific lens to identify patterns for coding purposes. In the first phase, I use a holistic approach, viewing the conversation as a whole without emphasis on individual contributions, to determine the topics being discussed. I read the transcription and took notes on the topics evident in the conversation. I created a table of topics to include: racism and racial discrimination, segregation, violence and hate crime, physical discrimination, characters' personalities, the church bombing, faith, morals and values, socioeconomic status, teasing, relationships, relatable experiences, and disability. As I

identified examples I inserted page numbers into the table (See Table D1). Using the same holistic approach, I searched for the types of statements made, and questions asked. I compiled a list of the types of statements and questions which included: questioning, morals/values, relationships, clarification, inferences, identifying with story or participants, judging, and evaluating. (See Table D2)

After further review, I noticed the list of conversation topics were sub categories and needed to be merged into larger conceptual categories. For example, acts of discrimination include topics of race, disability, social economic status, violence, and the church bombing. Another category, originally titled relationships, included relationships between participants and text, participants' feelings and textual events, participants' personal relationships and characters' relationships, participants' morals/values and textual events, and participants' individual morals and values. After formulating these broad and smaller conceptual categories, I revisited my data with the same holistic lens. Using the conceptual categories, I recoded my data, and highlighted instances where each type of conversation topic was indicated, then noted which type of comment or statement was made in relation to these topics. Instead of including the page number, I noted the lines where the type of comment or statement was evident.

Unfortunately, I was unable to use the girls' journal due to the lack of relevant data. Instead of reflecting and writing their personal reactions to the novel, each girl summarized each chapter. Three girls described what happened in each chapter without including personal feelings or reflections. One participant wrote a summary of chapter fourteen because it was her favorite. She provided a summary of the chapter's events and described why it was her favorite.

During the second phase of analysis, I revisited my data with an individualistic approach, determining each girl's experience with the discussion and reading. For this phase I used the discussion transcript and the pre and post questionnaires. I used the previous categories for topics and statements to code each girl's contribution to the discussion. For example, I focused on one participant at a time, highlighting the occasions they spoke, and then noted the topics and type of comments made by this participant. This information was inserted into a profile I created for the participants, outlining the number of times she spoke, topics she discussed, types of comments made, and a brief synopsis of her contribution to the discussion (See Table D3). I repeated these steps for all four participants.

Next I constructed one table for each questionnaire. Tables D4 and D5 depict each girl's answers to each question, a summary of the girls' individual responses to the questions, and a summary of the responses across questions. The table for post questionnaire reflected the same format. Using the tables, I formulated a brief description of each girl's perception of themselves as readers, and their use of reading and discussing before and after the group discussion. This information was used in conjunction with the girls' individual profiles; aiding my analysis of each girls experience with the reading and discussion.

Table D4: Analysis of Pre Questionnaire

| | Do you think you are a good reader? Why? | What kinds of books do you read? | What kind of topics or ideas do you like to read about? | Does reading make you think about your own life? How? |
|---------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| Shantell | Depends on kind of book, not good at reading books not on reading level. | Lots of fiction | Mystery books | No because I don't have mysteries in my life. |
| Sasha | Yes because I feel like I'm there in the book and I comprehend well. | Diary books | About experiencing wars | Sometimes but not all of the time |
| Jaslene | Yes, I understand really well and know plot, setting, and events | Mystery, romance, and suspense | Topics with family or friend problems | Yes makes me think if that was my family |
| Jasmine | Yes because I like to act like characters' in the book | Big and some small, interest level is middle grade, I read good books again. | Drama, gossip, romance, and love, sad stories | Yes because some lessons in books I have been taught and will learn. |
| Analysis across questions | Most think about reading level and how well they understand story, one thinking about how she can be in characters' shoes | Mostly fiction stories, one stating books above her reading level | | The two with family, friends, drama (topics dealt with in real life) do think about their lives while reading |

Table D5: Analysis of Post Questionnaire

| | Did discussion make you think of ideas you hadn't noticed before? | Do you think it's good to read books about social issues? | What are some of the social issues in book that you thought about after reading and discussing? | How could you use books like the Watsons to help you make decisions in your own life? | Individual Analysis |
|----------|---|---|---|--|---|
| Shantell | Yes never noticed how mean and evil people can be. | Yes so you can learn that there are issues you have to deal with and you can learn how to deal with them. | Having a brother that disobeys his mom, my mom would have to beat my brother. | To never put bombs in people's church. Not to do anything to hurt myself or anyone else because I wouldn't them to hurt me or my family. | Thought about her and her family in relation to the Watsons. Also reflected mostly on the bombing. |
| Sasha | Yes that there were four children that died and I thought it was three. | Yes because I could relate to the situation and also learn from them as the problems come | Racism, violence and verbally bullying. | Use them in my own life when people talk about the color of my skin. | Can learn from the family's problems. Thought about racism, violence, and bullying, and can use this book racism. |
| Jaslene | Thought it was three girls that die but it was | Yes to know how things work and if | The bombing of the church was a big social issue | Not to get the conk (perm) and curse like | Can use books with social issues to learn |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|--|---|
| | four. | anything happens in your life you'll know how to deal with it. | that wasn't necessary | Byron does | about them and know what to do. Still evaluative in these answers and uses her moral and values. |
| Jasmine | Yes seeing how the characters changed | Yes because it makes you think about what could happen that relates to your life. | Thought about the racism going on between white people and black people. | Make me think about enjoying family, although they have ups and downs we are still family. Love the way they author expressed himself in the book. | Think about racism and the importance of family. Used the book to think about her how to deal with issues the Watson's faced. |
| Analysis across questions | How many died in church bombing, character development, and violence | See how reading can help introduce social issues and teach ways to cope and deal with them. | Thought about race relations, disobedience, church bombing, but not social economic status. | The girls put themselves in the Watson's position. Also can use the book to learn how to deal with discrimination. | |

These various analyses allowed for an overarching depiction of each girl’s contribution to the discussion, and their individual experiences. Therefore, the findings represent the overall nature of the discussion in regards to topics and statements made. Finally, I drafted an account of the experiences and contributions to these topics and statements made by each girl. Using the previous tables, transcript, and individual profiles I constructed a turn taking table numbering the types of statements each girl made, also totaling the number of lines each participant contributed to the transcript, as shown in Table D6.

Table D6: Turn Taking Table

| Name | Judge | Evaluate | Text to Life | Text to World | Inference | Question/ Wondering | Question/ Clarification | Total of lines |
|----------|-------|----------|--------------|---------------|-----------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Sasha | 6 | 11 | 10 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 134/ 639 |
| Shantell | 6 | 10 | 14 | 1 | 9 | 7 | 4 | 170/ 639 |
| Jaslene | 5 | 20 | 9 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 164/ 639 |
| Jasmine | 4 | 11 | 10 | 5 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 175/ 639 |

The last step of my analyses allowed for revisiting the data across the four participants. Based on their individual profiles I compared each girl’s contributions to the

discussion. I also compared the first phase of analysis to the last phase. The individual contributions affected my view of the entire discussion. The findings from this analysis are explored in the next section.

Findings

Conceptualizing their talk

As mentioned in the previous section, my first analysis provides an overall description of the discussion. The findings highlight the nature of the discussion in regards to topic and types of statements made. The term “talk” refers to the four participants’ conversation or discussion with each other, me, and the text during our group discussion.

Many of the previously discussed research articles discuss their participants’ use of personal experiences to understand and connect to text. Although my participants inserted their experiences into the discussion, their talk of morals and values occurred most frequently, as shown in Table D1. The girls attempted to understand the characters’ values by deconstructing characters’ behaviors; specifically detailing events discussing characters’ relationships and personalities through the perception of their own values. They concluded whether a character was sweet or mean based on their intentions and actions towards other characters. One of the character’s bullying tactics confirmed a mean personality to the girls. Contrastingly, a character’s quietness and obedience defined a sweet spirit.

Table D1: Data Analysis Phase 1- List of Topics Girls Discussed

| Topic | Abbreviations | Page Number | Details or Comments |
|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|--|
| Racism or Racial Discrimination | R or RD | 2,3,16 | Action vs. beliefs or thoughts based on race |
| Segregation | S | 2, | Historical Context |
| Violence Hate Crime | V | 2,5 | Relating past to their present |
| Discrimination | D | 3,13,14 | |
| Character's Personality | CP | 1,5,9,10,11,14,17,19 | |
| Church Bombing | CB | 6,9 | |
| Faith | F | 7,8 | |
| Morals/Values | M/V | 1,10,11,12,13,15 | The character's and the |

| | | | |
|------------------------|-----|-------------------------|--|
| | | | participants' |
| Social/Economic Status | SES | 12,16 | |
| Teasing | T | 13,14,15 | |
| Relatable Experiences | RE | 5,7,13 | |
| Disability | Dis | 13,14 | |
| Relationships | R | 1,5,9,11,13,15,16,18,19 | Characters' and Participants', and Role Models?? |

The girls also used their own morals and values to understand the events in the text, by judging the morality and immorality of certain actions. For example, the cursing exhibited by some characters disturbed the girls because they felt it was wrong. They also felt passionately about the racism and racial violence presented in the text, proclaiming their disbelief of innocent people dying as a result of God's creations, as in the following transcript, "I just wanna get rid of all the hatred; everyone was created equally." (Line 68-69). They solemnly expressed their sadness and confusion of the church bombing in Birmingham, AL depicted near the end of the novel. They were frustrated about the bombing of innocent people over something as trivial as skin color. But what most concerned them was the location of the bombing being in a church, during Sunday school. The girls could not imagine someone bombing a church, and killing little girls in attendance to worship.

Line 174-175: “And it just upsets me so bad because four innocent little girls, just going to Sunday school and the next thing you know they’re dead; It’s horrible.”

The types of predominant statements the girls made were either evaluations, or text to life connections. When discussing the epilogue, the girls described their reactions to the novel’s depiction of the church bombing:

Line 37: “I think it’s sad because they’re hating people over something that’s really not that big of a deal”; Line 39 “It’s just the color of your skin”.

The girls expressed strong emotions and opinions about the various types of discrimination and the characters’ personalities and actions. Their use of evaluative responses caused the conversation to move from the story events, to girls’ feelings about such events, then connecting the events to their own lives and feelings. In the following conversation the girls begin with their judgments about Kenny, the main character, being teased because of his physical appearance, this leads into a similar example of discrimination one participant views in her classroom.

Line 396 “I think that every person who made fun of Kenny for his lazy eye, I think they should be ashamed, ashamed of themselves...it’s just something that happens” Line 405 “I really don’t like when people do that at school” Line 407 “They make, students make fun of students that have a disability...” Line 411 “Exactly, I have some special ed friends at school.

The girls seemed to easily transition between their discussions of discrimination and relationship, while using text to life connections. These transitions usually began with an evaluative statement such as, Line 8 “Uh, I liked the part whenever Joetta kept blowing the matches out...”, then followed by either another evaluative statement or a judgment like the following, Line 10 “I think she should’ a burned his fingers, me”, using their own opinions, thoughts, and feelings of morality to understand and react to the textual events. There was some retelling evident, and when present the retelling was used

to share their opinions, evaluations, and judgments only, or in one person's case to clear up confusion. However, the majority of the responses were making evaluations about the morality of the characters through the lens of their own values (See Table D2).

Table D2

Data Analysis Phase 1: Types of Statements and Questions the Girls made

| Kinds of Statements or Questions | High Lighter Color | Page Numbers | Details or Comments |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|---|---|
| Questioning | Dark Blue | 5,6,7,8,9,11,12,13,15,18 | Seeking Justification Topic Change Wondering Asking Diff Perspective |
| Morals/Values | Pink | 1,2,3,5,7,8,10,11,12,13,15,17,18,19 | Authority Beliefs: Behavior, Justice: Being good citizens Consequences |
| Relationships | Light Blue | 15,16,17 | Between Characters Parent and Child Adult and Child |
| Clarification | Green | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16, | In response to previous statement: more info, relate to story or |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------|---|---|
| | | | participants exp, understanding participant or text |
| Inferences | Yellow | 1,3,4,5,9,10,11,12,1 3,14,15,16,18,19,20 | Characters' intentions Society's Members |
| Identifying w/Story | Grey | 2,5,6,17,18,19 | Life to text Identifying w/events |
| Identifying w/Participants | Purple | 5,16,19 | Shared Experience Agreeing |
| Judging | Orange | 1,2,4,5,6,9,10,11,12, 13,17,19 | |
| Evaluating | Red | 1,2,3,5,6,9,10,11,12, 14,15,16,17,18,19,2 0 | |

This first phase of my analysis attributes the most prevalent topic of their conversation to morals and values. The participants used their morals and values during and after their reading to interpret, understand, and reflect on the text. The girls also tried to infer the characters' morals and values based on their behaviors and personalities. The dominant statements made were evaluations and text to life connections. Whether

discussing discrimination, characters' personalities, relationships, or violence, the girls used their morals and values to evaluate and connect their experiences to the text.

Individual Experiences

When creating a description of their talk for each participant, I paid more attention to the talk surrounding injustices than retelling comments. After introducing each participant, I describe their talk in relation to social ills they introduced or responded to. I was able to gain insight on how each girl interacted with the injustices presented in the text and introduced in the discussion. Rightfully so, each girl provided a different way of responding to the injustices. Because this section concentrates on individual response, the girls' individual statements and topic choice may not reflect those that were dominant in the first phase.

Sasha. Sasha is a twelve- year- old girl in the sixth grade. She attends a private middle school in a suburb of New Orleans, LA. In addition to being enrolled in the honors program at her school, she also participates in various community organizations such as cheerleading, a Christian dance academy, and gymnastics. Although Sasha is the eldest of the four girls, she is the smallest in physical stature, appearing to be significantly younger than her true age. Sasha's quiet and high pitched voice was heard less frequently than the others, speaking 134/639 lines in the transcript, but she confidently expressed herself when she deemed it necessary.

Sasha began the conversation with a comment on the incident in the text involving the mother's attempt at burning her son's fingers as a consequence for constantly playing with matches. Later, Sasha explained the character should have been

punished since his mother warned him about lighting matches in the house. The majority of her talk flowed in this manner when retelling events in the novel; changing a topic and finally adding a statement explaining her feelings or providing an interpretation of the comment she previously made. However, Sasha never initiated any discussion about types of discrimination, racial violence, or poverty. Instead she added to the other girls' thoughts about these topics. For instance, the topic of whites' unfair treatment arose and Sasha added, Lines 72-73 "Some Caucasians (using quotation marks with her fingers) are racist against blacks. I think it kinda runs in the family or something".

Sasha added her own factual information to corroborate the statements the other girls made. The girls made reference to instances where white people were "hatin" (displaying some form of jealousy) on Obama, Sasha's remark rebuts the white's reactions, Line 85-86 "Well whenever they had Bush or someone, well we, the blacks weren't hatin (using quotation marks and rolling her eyes). Line 88, "We had to deal with it and they're just gonna have to deal with it too." Sasha presented her comments as evidence she gathered from personal experiences, others' experiences, conversations, books, and television. Interestingly, none of the girls ever disagreed or rebutted any of her talk during the discussion. However, Sasha respectfully disagreed with other comments, always giving supporting details explaining why.

Sasha spoke the least out of the girls, and spent a large amount of her talk attempting to understand the events in the story. She did not spend as much time discussing social issues as retelling. At times she seemed a bit agitated with extended conversation, especially on the church bombing, by rolling her eyes and sighing as more comments surfaced.

Table D3: Data Phase Analysis 2- Individual Profiles

| Sasha's Profile | | |
|--|------------|----|
| How much did she talk: 134 lines out of 639 21% | | |
| Types of topics she discussed: | | |
| Morals and values of characters, and her own lines 135-136 1234567891011 | | |
| characters' relationships | 12345 | |
| discrimination based on race | 12345 | |
| her experiences in relation to text (lines 72-73) in regards to people at her school 123456789 | | |
| characters' personalities line 303 | 12345 | |
| violence | 12 | |
| discrimination based on disability | 12 | |
| Social economic status | 12 | |
| Her own relationships with family lines 585-586 | 12 | |
| Sasha spoke the most about her own morals and values and the morals and values of the characters. This appeared eleven times, she also discusses her experiences that were similar or related to the text, or used her experiences to understand the text nine times. Three other topics that appeared three times in her talk were characters' relationships, characters' personalities, and racial discrimination. | | |
| What types of comments did she make: | | |
| Evaluations | IIIIIIIIII | 11 |
| T/L | IIIIIIIIII | 10 |
| Judgments | IIIIII | 6 |
| T/W | III | 3 |
| Inferences | IIIIII | 6 |

| | | |
|---|----|---|
| Q/W | II | 2 |
| The types of comments Sasha made were evaluations, text to life, and judgments. Her evaluations and judgments were concerning things in the texts, like the events (church bombing), mostly character's personalities. When using text to world she mostly commented on discriminations based on race and disability. | | |
| Her talk: | | |
| Reads between the lines | | |
| Changes the subject a lot-was tired of the conversation about chapter. 14 | | |
| Then gives her factual input on certain topics | | |
| Wants to know more about certain events in the story | | |

Shantell. Shantell is a ten year old girl, in the fifth grade. She attends a public elementary school in New Orleans, LA. Shantell is fluent in dance, participating in ballet, hip hop, jazz, and liturgical. She also began her first year as a cheerleader this year. Shantell is often described as “loud and common” by her peers since she tends to forget to use her “inside voice”. She is very energetic and likes to tell jokes. Shantell is heavier than the other girls, but seems confident and comfortable in her skin. She takes pride in defending herself and others when being made fun of.

Shantell's talk conveyed her ability to read the story through her own eyes, associating with the characters and the events. Shantell placed herself in the story line, experiencing the discrimination and other events with them. This type of reading was evidenced in her descriptions of the emotions she felt while reading about the racial violence in the novel. As Jasmine and Jaslene recalled their visit of Birmingham, AL and the museum housing the church, Shantell was taken aback by the notion.

Line 194, “Me, I would be so afraid to go to that church after what happened, so afraid.”
Lines 196-200, “Because who would ever know if you were sitting in a church and something wound up happening to you or someone sitting next to you. Like for instance, if you’re sitting in a church and all of a sudden half of it blow up and something was blocking the door, how are you gonna get out? That is so scary”

Shantell was also afraid of living in and witnessing blatant racism that was presented historically. She began many comments with phrases like “If that was me” or “If I was there back then” then describing how she would have felt or the actions she would have taken. Lines 41-43, “If I was living back in that time, I would be so sad. I’d stay at home and lock the doors and stay inside because I wouldn’t want anything like that to happen to me or my family”.

Since Shantell easily inserted herself into the story while reading, naturally she connected the events to personal encounters. Shantell articulated sympathy towards Kenny, the main character, who possessed a disability, because one of her classmates had a similar disability. She talked about this student having few friends and being called weird because of his lazy eye. Shantell recalled Kenny being made fun of because of his lazy eye; Shantell did not understand how people could talk about others with disabilities when they did not know what it was like to “be in their shoes”.

Near the beginning discussion of racism, Shantell responds to Sasha’s earlier comment about racism running in white people’s families by retelling her experience with racism. Her classmate expressed his hate for Obama because he was black. Shantell concluded her conversation with, line 94, “Well you don’t have to be racist because your parents are.” She did not disclose any information confirming her classmate’s parents’ racist beliefs. This comment reflects Shantell’s use of the discussion, the other girls’

opinions and experience as a means of understanding and reflecting on her lived and reading experiences; a tactic she used to assist her with reading between the lines.

The discussion indicated some inferences the other girls made while reading, did not occur with Shantell, instead she tried to infer aloud during the discussion. She often responded to the other girls' comments, thinking her confusion through while talking, and also questioning and wondering to make sense of the story or topics evolving from it. For example, the other girls inferred two brothers lacking food and clothes were less fortunate, economically, than the Watsons. Shantell did not assume this opinion asking, line 505, "I wonder why did they have to share clothes and they never had lunch to eat?" Sasha began explaining some blacks did not have as much money as whites did. Shantell nodded saying, "So I guess Kenny was the only friend they [two brothers] had". Shantell interpreted Kenny's act to share his food as being a good friend, without acknowledging the Watson's economic advantage in comparison to the two brothers' low wealth.

| Shantell's Profile | | |
|--|-------------------|----|
| How often did she talk: 170 out of 639 lines 27% | | |
| Topics she discussed: | | |
| Characters' relationships | 123456789 | |
| Morals/Values | 12345678910111213 | |
| Her own relationships | 123 | |
| Racial Discrimination | 12345 | |
| Experiences and text | 123456 | |
| Characters' personality | 12345678 | |
| Violence/church bombing | 12345 | |
| Feelings about text | 12 | |
| Disability | 12 | |
| SES | 1 | |
| Shantell topics were using her morals and values to discuss the morals and values of the characters' thirteen times. She also discussed the character's relationships commenting on their interactions between each other, Line 18. She also discussed the characters personalities eight times commenting on if they were sweet, nice, a better person (lines 262, 327-328) | | |
| Types of comments she made: | | |
| Evaluations | IIIIIIIIII | 10 |
| T/L | IIIIIIIIIIIIIIII | 14 |
| Text/World | I | 1 |
| Inference | IIIIIIIIII | 9 |
| Judging | IIIIII | 6 |

| | | |
|--|---------|---|
| Q/W | IIIIIII | 7 |
| Q/C | IIII | 4 |
| <p>Shantell used text to life the most as she introduced various experiences she has had with discrimination based on race and disability. She also put herself in the character’s shoes on many occasions saying if that were me... (lines41-43; 582-584. She also used many evaluations when referring to character’s relationships, character’s personalities, and character’s morals and values. Shantell also asked the most questions out of all four girls, she used mostly questioning and wondering in relation to the church bombing, and discrimination, she also asked questions for clarification on the story events. Shantell’s inferences were regarding race, characters’ personalities, and literal comprehension.</p> | | |
| Her talk: | | |
| Puts concepts and events into perspective, relates to it through her life: “if that was me” lines 41, 45, 176, 196 | | |
| Book and Real world connections: lines 89, 92, 424 | | |
| Conversation aids her in reading between lines: lines 103, 119, 505, 511 | | |
| Emotional about violence: lines 194, 196 | | |

Jaslene. Jaslene is a ten- year- old girl in the fifth grade. She lives in a gated community consisting of upper class families. She attends a predominately white private school where she is enrolled in the honors program. She is involved in several dance teams including that of her church, dance school, and the Louisiana state All American Dance Team. Jaslene already has plans for her future consisting of the college she would like to attend and aspirations for two professions. In her circle of friends she is the one making sure they make the right decisions. She delights in listening to her parents, elders, and church leaders; in their absence she is sure her actions make them proud.

Jaslene's personality was evidenced through her talk, as her profile shows she made judgments about topics discussed from the text. Since Jaslene lives her life governed by rules and standards given by her parents and various social institutions, she feels everyone abides by these same rules. Many of her comments dealt with concepts and events she felt were immoral, therefore, should be perceived as such by society. Whether discussing injustices, or characters' actions, Jaslene's responses included her opinions about the morality or immorality of the subject matter. She seemed passionate in her responses, expressing her emotions and feelings of disgust, anger, and sadness during her talk.

It is common for readers to use their personal experiences as a lens for reading, interpreting, and responding to text. However, Jaslene did not use this common approach, instead she read using her religious beliefs as a guide to base her interpretations of the text. Jaslene did not set aside her moral teachings and ethical viewpoints while reading; she used them as a guide for comprehension and response. The majority of her comments reflected what she has learned to be morally correct and/or unethical. In her eyes, those participating in society and in a fictional novel are aware of these same principles. Instead of retelling the novel, explaining her experiences, or seeking to understand the issues and events presented in the novel, Jaslene used her talk to express her many feelings towards societal ills.

Jaslene did not understand the nature of discrimination, specifically pertaining to race. It seemed illogical to her for people to mistreat, dislike, and harm others when all should be treated as equals. When discussing the effects of segregation, Jaslene gives her thoughts, Line 51, "I think it's ridiculous because every man was created equally and

should be respected equally.” She makes a similar comment on the church bombing, expressing both anger and frustration with the violence.

Lines 131-134, “I think it’s sad because the four little girls who did die in the church from whoever put the bomb in there. And I think that whoever did that, they should be ashamed of themselves for putting little girls in danger and hurting everyone else and making them sad. I just think it was horrible.”

Her comments illustrate the disgust she feels towards hatred, violence, and unfair treatment. To Jaslene it seems simple to treat everyone fairly and as equals. Jaslene initiated the conversation about one of the characters stealing from another. Lines 376-378, “I think it was weird because one of his friends kept stealing all of his toys and things. I think that was really dumb, why don’t you just ask your mom to buy you some toys instead of stealing someone else’s.” When she was asked what if their parents were unable to afford toys, Jaslene answered, line 380, “they would just have to wait.”

about her experience with Birmingham Alabama, racism, she also used text to world given a historical account of racism in relation to the text (lines 34-36; 50-52). Also made judgments about characters' personalities and relationships.

Jasmine. Jasmine is a twelve year- old sixth grader in advanced placement classes at a New Orleans public school. She lives within a gated suburb community with her family. Jasmine is involved in extracurricular activities including cheerleading, hip hop and liturgical dance for her church and school. Jasmine is outspoken and tends to be a loner at times. When she does not approve of her friends' actions, Jasmine removes herself from them, often causing her to be an outcast. During the discussion Jasmine talked the most contributing 175/639 lines in the transcript, providing lengthy comments during her talk. When some of the girls sucked their teeth or rolled their eyes at how often and long her comments were, Jasmine ignored them and continued until finished.

Jasmine noticed the girl's gestures during her turn, but continued to offer her input. During the discussion of chapter fourteen (including the church bombing), all of the girls discussed their feelings and interpretations of the chapter. Jasmine surprised us by asking what I thought of the chapter. The girls' gave her mean looks, shaking their heads as if she stepped out of line. Jasmine shrugged her shoulders and asked again "So how do you feel about the chapter?" Jasmine did not seem bothered by the girls' reactions to her; instead she used them as leverage for building her interpretation of the book and discussion. Jasmines talk elaborated on the other girl's comments, providing more details or her opinion.

Jasmine paid much attention to the behaviors and personalities of the characters'. In response to some of the girl's retelling of text events, Jasmine evaluated the characters' personalities based on their actions. For example, Jasmine introduced the event in the text where Kenny went to the church to find his younger sister, Joetta, after he heard of the church bombing. Jasmine's response to this was, Line 148 "That was really sweet, he saved her, he didn't want her to die." Similarly, she discussed Byron's character progression after experiencing the bombing, reflecting on his personality before and after this event.

Lines 271-272 "He was becoming a better person way at the end. He started to change because I think the mistakes that happened-Byron started to just stop lying."

Jasmine's talk concentrated on interpreting the type of people these characters were. She described Joetta as "having a good attitude" because she was quiet, and Byron and his friend Buphead as "mean" because they misbehaved. She seemed to be the only one who noticed and was concerned about how their personalities evolved as a result of their experience with the church bombing.

Jasmine's responses also included text to life examples. During the discussion of discrimination based on physical disabilities, Jasmine expressed her dislike for "making fun" of people because of their physical appearances. Line 407, "I really don't like when students make fun of students that have a disability or that are not capable of doing something." Then she provides an example from her life in which she and others interact and befriend her peers with disabilities; Lines 411-412, "Exactly, I have some special ed. friends at school, and they say good morning to every student in class and nobody tries to

make fun of them.” She used her personal experiences as supporting evidence for her comments during the discussion.

| Jasmine’s Profile | | |
|---|---------------|----|
| 175 out 639 27% | | |
| Topics she discussed: | | |
| Morals/Values | 1234567891011 | |
| Characters’ relationships | 123456 | |
| Characters’ personalities | 12345678 | |
| Feelings | 1234 | |
| Race | 1234 | |
| Church bombing | 1234 | |
| Violence | 12 | |
| Disability | 1234 | |
| SES | 1 | |
| <p>Jasmine talked about her morals and values more than the characters’, she thought people should learn their lessons lines 13-14; making promises to God lines 16-17; church bombing lines 165-168. She also discussed character’s personalities saying they were sweet, mean, kind, becoming a better person, or telling lies (lines 24; 591-593). She evenly discussed her feelings, racial discrimination, church bombing, and disc. Based on disability four times. Many of Jasmine’s remarks were building upon, or in relation to the other girl’s responses (line 47; 70 255; 405). She also gave many literal retellings.</p> | | |
| Types of Comments: | | |
| Judgments | IIII | 4 |
| Evaluations | IIIIIIIIII | 11 |
| T/W | IIII | 5 |
| T/L | IIIIIIIIII | 10 |

| | | |
|---|---------|---|
| Inference | IIIIIII | 7 |
| Q/W | II | 2 |
| QTC | II | 2 |
| <p>Most of Jasmine’s evaluations were of the textual events saying I liked the part when, or I didn’t like the part when (lines 148; 278-281) also characters’ relationships (lines 337-339). Jasmine also used much text to- life comments like the other girls but she used much text to world when discussing topics of discrimination based on race and disability. Her inferences were an effort to “read between the lines” to gather extra information for literal meaning lines364-365, 512-514).</p> | | |

The types of statements made and topics each girl discussed lend insight into how they were making meaning and comprehending the text. All four participants inserted their personal, lived experiences into the discussion, but in different ways, and their experiences served different purposes to help them arrive at their responses. Sasha included the experiences that helped her gain background knowledge about the topics she discussed. These experiences served as supporting information for her comments and aided in her ability to infer more details from the text. Shantell put herself in the characters’ shoes and lived the experiences with the characters. Shantell included real world experiences she lived that were similar to the text world events she lived with the characters. Jaslene included her experiences evidencing her religious beliefs and moral teachings. Jasmine used her experiences to understand character relations and development, providing details about her opinions on the morality and immorality of these character actions.

Revisiting the talk

The overall nature of the discussion flowed between retelling textual events, introducing social issues in the text and describing the relationship to their lives, expressing feelings and evaluations of injustices represented in the text and their lives. The girls skillfully moved in and out of the text and the real world when discussing issues like racial and physical discrimination, racial hatred, and classism. The conversation exhibited a pattern of one girl explaining her like or dislike for an incident in the text. After that, the girls provided responses and reactions to these events by expressing their feelings and opinions. Next, the girls supported their comments by providing experiences from their lives relating to the discussion topic. Through this discussion pattern the participants displayed their efforts to interpret text, and think through societal ills presented in text and discussion, while reflecting on their lived experiences.

Discussion

This study investigated if and how readers use text to respond to social injustices such as racism, violence, discrimination, and poverty, and also how they apply their responses to their lives and others'. All four readers responded to the racism presented in the text by sharing their direct experiences with racism, expressing their feelings about the incidents of racism in the text, and describing possible reactions as if they were in the story. Although the participants responded in the same manner to the depictions of violence and discrimination presented in the text, they did not give much attention to the poverty illustrated by one family in the story. This could be the result of a less blatant depiction of poverty than the former topics.

This study also examined whether readers view reading as a way to understand, relate to, and transform societal ills. Prior to the study, Jasmine and Jaslene felt they used reading to think about their lives. Sasha and Shantell's perceptions differed because the types of books they read did not relate to their lives. After the study, each girl felt reading and discussing enabled them to think about discrimination, race relations, and violence. They also noted that they could use reading to learn about and cope with social issues. Since the participants were not asked directly, none discussed their thoughts about using texts to transform injustices.

It is important to note the importance of the type of book selected, and its influence on the girls' responses. Each girl proclaimed their "love" for the book, wishing there was a sequel to read. Although, the girls were presented with traumatic, troubling and saddening topics they were presented in a non threatening way to the readers. This allowed room for the girls to respond emotionally and think about the topics, without detaching from the book out of fear. Since the girls were between the ages of ten and twelve it was necessary for the book to present controversial information including troubling details while being sensitive to the readers interpretations. For example, *The Watson's Go To Birmingham, 1963*, included the bombing and deaths as a result, but without gory details of how the bomb injured and killed the victims. Although the main character was a male and my participants were female, the language used was relatable to the participants' age group. The events that took place were similar to those the girls encounter in their schools and homes.

As with McGinley and Kamberelis' (1996) participants, these girls not only used reading and discussion to construct a textual understanding of the literature, but also

constructed their identities, moralities, and vision for social and community life. The findings in the previous section indicated these readers responded to racism, discrimination, violence, and poverty within the text, and simultaneously responded to their presence in their worlds. As a result, they included examples of their own and others' experiences with these injustices. If they did not have any encounters with some of the injustices others have experienced, the participants articulated how they would react in those situations, demonstrating what Galda (1982) titles a "virtual experience" or "trying on another's experience."

As previously mentioned, I attempted to structure the study's activities in a way that did not reflect literacy activities in schools. In the beginning of the discussion the girls expected the questions and answer session commonly displayed in classrooms. Although I began the discussion with a prompt, and asked several questions during the discussion to turn attention to certain topics or events, the girls' talk included their own interpretations. The prompts and questions I asked were open ended, causing them to think about certain topics, thus constructing their responses and not mine. As the discussion developed, the girls shared a conversation as if I was not in the room, only noticing my presence when I inserted a prompt then continuing the discussion with one another.

Although I asked the participants if they used books to help understand injustices in the pre -and post- questionnaires, I did not ask this during the discussion. Nevertheless, their reading and discussion provide an example of readers using text to think about, reflect on, and learn from one another's thoughts about racism, discrimination, violence, and poverty- a verbal representation of reading life through texts and text through life

(McGinley and Kamberelis, 1996). The participants in this study read text featuring African American characters, which encouraged their response and reflection to reflect their affiliation with the same racial background. This behavior is consistent with previous studies whose participants also related to a characters racial background (Brooks & Hampton, 2005; Brooks, Browne & Hampton, 2008; Moller & Allen, 2000). Using their previous social and cultural background knowledge, accompanied by their shared experiences with each other and the characters, enabled them to attempt to understand and evaluate various social issues. These findings suggest several ways readers make meaning about social inequalities through texts and discussions.

Conclusion

The previous section illustrates the participants' individual techniques used to make meaning after the reading event and during the discussion. In addition to their construction of meaning making during the independent reading, the participants used various techniques to understand and interpret the text through their responses in the discussion. Whether using their personal experiences, previous knowledge (as Sasha and Shantell demonstrated), or personal beliefs and characters' values (as Jaslene and Jasmine exhibited), the participants displayed their personal style to approach text and life (Galda, 1982). During this study, the girls looked into the lives of the characters, each other, people in their worlds, and themselves as they developed responses to the text and discussion.

Any reader and persons facilitating learning through reading, can use these findings to understand how texts can be used to think about challenges in society. This

understanding can shape classroom instruction to include using texts for critical thinking in all subjects. However, it is important to note that readers can engage in reading for social purposes without the facilitation of an adult. They can begin to choose texts including injustices and social structures they want to learn more about or seek to challenge and change. It is my hope that the participants in this study will become self engaged in similar reading, discussing, and other practices that allow them to think about their worlds.

Researcher Reflections

This was a small study with four participants, targeting a specific population; therefore, it cannot be generalized to a mass population. Concerns with the method presented challenges with data collection and analysis. Since I was unable to conduct the entire study in person, communicating by mail and telephone caused misinterpretations of the instructions. Consequently, the journals could not serve as an additional data source.

The participants' responses and my analysis of these responses are formed through my racial and social background. As an African American woman I have experiences similar to those shared by the participants and the text's characters. The experiences I have not encountered directly, I indirectly relate to through my knowledge of historical accounts. Consequently, I tried to set aside my own assumptions and biases of race and class while conducting this study, while also being cognizant of my participants' use of their identities during this study. Sharing the same race does not mean sharing the same culture, as most of the participants possess a different lifestyle because of their economic statuses. This was difficult because my analysis is inevitably filtered

through my culture, lifestyle, values, and morals. By using transcriptions, tables, and profiles for my data, I tried to make sure I interpreted what was actually said instead of what I thought should be said based on each girl's racial, physical, social, and moral identities.

Since the girls, main characters, and I are of the same race, the conversation seemed to lack discomfort but provided a safe place to converse about difficult topics. The girls openly shared thoughts and experiences about their encounters with racism and discrimination, allowing all of us to glimpse into each other's values. Although we identified with the same race, we did not share the same positions of authority. Since this was my research, and I controlled the activities they participated in, the participants viewed me as an authoritative figure. During many of the girls' turns, I noticed they would only make eye contact with me, seeking assurance for the response. When Jasmine asked how I felt about the chapter, the response from the girls was that of dismay. It seemed everyone thought it was wrong and unacceptable to question me- the adult, the researcher, and person with power. As I continued to remain quiet, the girls began to ignore my presence and talk with each other as if they were having a natural conversation.

Many elements of this study resembled their school assignments. For example their journal responses were written as summaries rather than their reactions and reflections. Their pre- and -post questionnaires included responses mirroring elements of school such as reading levels and their understanding of the elements of a story. The beginning of the discussion also began as a classroom discussion where they expected a

question- and -answer session. These concerns and limitations provide helpful insights for practitioners and researchers.

Practitioner Implications

Revisiting two of the previously described experiences that birthed this study will offer insight for classroom educators. The disinterest in reading prevalent with the New Orleans students I encountered reflects the need for culturally relevant literature. Readers are more likely to become disengaged with the act of reading if the texts they are expected to transact with do not reflect their lives. Teachers often use texts that are relatable to mainstream students rather than diverse backgrounds. Using literature in classrooms that students can make connections to will afford them a better chance of reaching high levels of literacy (Au, 2006). Teachers should select culturally relevant texts that can assist students in making connections with their own lives.

Educators are aware of the need to discuss social issues prevalent in our society. The assignments given in classrooms promoting dialogue of this nature may not always provide a safe space for young people to talk honestly about difficult topics. Many assignments require a grade, attaching another element that may impede what students share. As shown in this study, there are certain perceptions students have towards reading, discussing, writing, and the relationships between adults and students (Hynds, 1989). Those elements have to be considered, but should not intimidate the implementation of this dialogue. Teachers need to encourage academic success and cultural competence, but also assist students with recognizing, understanding, and critiquing social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2008).

My experience with the youth at the summer camp months after Katrina showed me the need for students to discuss their reactions, feelings, questions, and critiques of injustices confronting them. While these types of discussions were the core of the summer camp, this format is not prevalent in many classrooms. Fecho's (2004) classroom instructional design helps demonstrate how teachers can facilitate students' use of literacy to engage in personal and critical critique. Fecho used texts that were relevant to his students' culture, interests, and daily interactions and coupled them with activities that allowed for critique, inquiry, and transformation. His instructional methods enabled students to use reading and writing as a means to further define themselves in relation to the many social institutions they encountered. Similar to my participants, when readers' primary purpose for reading is to fulfill teacher assignments, or to excel to a higher reading level, they may not notice other purposes for reading. Teachers need to provide the opportunity for students to use reading as an avenue for exploring their worlds, critiquing mainstream society, and making meaning. When given this opportunity, readers can begin to use and perceive reading as more than just a classroom or homework assignment, but as an opportunity to look into their own lives and the lives of others.

Research Implications

This study invites research with a larger population and long-term tracking of the participants. Since readers are laden with experiences and use them during and after reading to engage in discussion, researchers should examine if these experiences promote future practices with reading and discussing. What happens as students continue to read and converse about injustices? Longitudinal studies investigating readers' long term use

of reading to understand societal ills is necessary. Then we will be able to see if activities such as reading and discussion can lead to acts of transformation.

A study targeting populations other than African Americans, girls, upper elementary age range, and New Orleans resident may provide varying results. Finding out how all types of readers respond to text with injustices will assist educators, librarians, parents, counselors and others working with youth, to present opportunities and activities for dialogue and action. Conducting these studies in a variety of social contexts like classrooms, libraries, parks, recreation centers, and homes will diversify the kinds of responses as contexts influence a reader's behavior (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Hynds, 1989).

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Appendix A

Assent Form

Using Literacy Activities to Understand Social Injustices

You have been invited to be in a research study of responses to reading. I ask that you read this letter and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by me, Sherise Ross. I am a current graduate student in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota.

This study will help me understand if and how you respond to a book that includes issues like racism, poverty, and violence. If you agree to participate in this study, you will complete a pre- reading questionnaire and a post- reading questionnaire about your thoughts on reading and discussing books. After you complete the first questionnaire, you will receive *The Watsons Go To Birmingham* by Christopher Paul Curtis, to read on your own over a week's time. While reading, you will respond and reflect in a journal. After reading, you will meet with me and three other participants at a public library to share and discuss your journal writings or any other responses to the book.

This discussion will be recorded, written out word for word by me, and saved on my password protected computer. All research data will only be seen by me and my academic advisor/teacher, and will be destroyed after this study is complete.

If you choose not to participate in this study no one will be mad at you. If you decide to participate now and later decide you don't want to, that's fine.

Signing this form means that you have read this paper or had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to participate, don't sign.

Sincerely,

Sherise Ross

Signature_____ Date _____

Signature of Person Explaining Study_____ Date _____

Appendix B

Consent Form

Using Literacy Activities to Understand Social Injustices

Your child is invited to be in a research study of responses to reading. I ask that you read this document and ask any questions you may have before allowing your child's participation in the study. This study is being conducted by Sherise Ross, who is currently a graduate student in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota.

The purpose of this research is to investigate if and how your child uses literacy activities to understand social injustices presented in literature. Your child will be asked to respond through writing and discussing a book depicting social injustices by reflecting and making connections to their own experiences.

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, he/she would complete a pre- reading questionnaire and a post- reading questionnaire inquiring about their perceptions of reading and discussion in general. Upon completion of the pre-questionnaire I will give your child the award winning book *The Watsons Go To Birmingham* by Christopher Paul Curtis, to read independently for a week. While reading they will also respond and reflect in a journal. After reading, your child will meet with me and three other participants at a public library to share and discuss their journal writings and other responses. This discussion will be audio recorded and transcribed by me and saved on my password protected computer. All research data will be confidential, viewed and stored by me and my academic advisor, and will be destroyed after completion of this study. Also pseudonyms will be used instead of your child's name.

Your child could express sensitivity or offense to the depiction of racism, poverty, and violence in *The Watsons Go To Birmingham*. The benefits of your child's participation in this study are the opportunity to read and discuss an award -winning novel, and to reflect on how reading, and discussion such as this one can be applied to life.

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. The decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the researcher or the University of Minnesota. If you allow your child to participate, he/she is free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

If you have any questions you may contact Sherise Ross by phone at (206) 251-6405 or via email at rossx375@umn.edu. You may also contact her academic advisor Lee Galda by phone at (612)625-3310 or via email at galda001@umn.edu. If you would like to talk

to someone other than the researcher contact the Research Subjects Advocate Line at (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of Parent or Guardian _____ Date _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Questionnaires

Pre Questionnaire

Name_____ Age_____ Grade_____

1. Do you think you are a good reader? Please explain why.

2. What kinds of books do you read?

3. What kind of topics or ideas do you like to read about?

4. Does reading make you think about your own life? Please explain how.

Post Questionnaire

Name_Age_____ Grade_____

1. Did the discussion make you about ideas you hadn't noticed before? Please explain these ideas?

2. Do you think it's good to read books about social issues?

3. What are some of the social issues in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* that you thought about after reading and discussing?

4. How could you use books like *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* to help you make decisions in your own life?