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## Powerful Print: Identifying the Influence of Narrative Reading over Student's Opinion Formation

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**POWERFUL PRINT:  
IDENTIFYING THE INFLUENCE OF NARRATIVE READING OVER STUDENT'S OPINION  
FORMATION**

by

SARAH A. LORD

(Under the direction of John Weaver)

**ABSTRACT**

This study examined the ways in which reading works of fiction affects the formation of student's opinions and attitudes by using literature circles discussions and journal writing. It uses Louise Rosenblatt's (1938) Reader Response Theory supported by Lev Vygotsky's (1962) writings about the social dynamics of language development. Methodologically I followed the example of literature circles set forth by Janice Almasi and Linda Gambrell (1994, 1995).

Participants were fifth grade students in a rural South Georgia elementary school who participated during the 2010-2011 school year. The students participated in small peer-led discussion groups. The students chose the books they would read and held weekly literature circles to discuss those books. Before reading began, the students' knowledge and opinions of certain key words, "Nazi", "German" and "Jew" were assessed. After completion of the first novel their thoughts on those same texts were assessed again. Then the groups switched books and the process was repeated until all participants had read all books. In the second phase of the study, the students were given free reign to choose books on any subject and the process was repeated.

Each time the children met, their conversations were recorded. Those comments showed a consistent shift in attitude from their initial reactions. The students' attitudes which began as largely neutral toward all three key terms had shifted toward the negative for the terms "Nazi" and "German", and toward the positive for the term "Jew" by the end of the study. Other findings showed that, while the students may have been hesitant to accept the characterization of people groups based on the information in the novels, they blindly accepted other information presented within.

**INDEX WORDS:** Almasi, Attitude, Fiction, German, Jew, Literature Circles, Nazi, Opinion, Reader Response, Reading, Rosenblatt, Vygotsky

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## DEDICATION

To my husband - This work has been arduous and long. At times I have wanted to quit. Without your support (and impressive parenting skills) I never would have reached the end of this stage of the journey. I look forward to continuing our journey together.

To my mother – Thank you for always being my biggest cheerleader. You have always stood beside me and pushed me to better myself. And thank you for your editing skills, without which this dissertation would just be a mess. I love you.

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I would like to acknowledge all of my teachers, from preschool, Sunday school, elementary, middle and high school, college(s). It is the cumulative effect of your hard work and role models that helped propel me to become the teacher and student I am today, and hope to continue to be for many years to come.

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## CHAPTER 1

## Why should we read?

## An introduction and setting of purpose

*Mark Twain said he often moved cities, counties, and even entire states when necessary to help a story along. Nothing gets in my way either. If I can't find a building, then I'll construct one on the spot. If a street does not fit on my map, then I won't hesitate to either move it or draw a new map. I would guess that about half the places in this book are described somewhat correctly. The other half either don't exist or have been modified or relocated to such an extent that no one would recognize them. Anyone looking for accuracy is wasting time.*

*– John Grisham*

**Introduction:**

Why do people read? That is an important question that needs to be answered before any true understanding of reading can occur. I love to read. I read constantly when I have the time and freedom to do so. And I want to share this love of reading with others. I believe that children are born with an innate curiosity and wonderment that, when cultivated, leads to a love of reading. “The pleasures that drew us first to literature were not those of the literary scholar” (Probst, 1988, p. 3). People read because it is fun.

When an avid reader is reading, the world fades away. The reader becomes one with the text. As a young reader, Alberto Manguel's (1996) mother used to urge him to put down the books and join the "read world" (p. 11). Manguel's mother, however, could not understand that "each book was a world unto itself, and in it [he] took refuge" (Manguel, 1996, p. 11). Manguel *was* in a world that was very real to him; as real as the children playing soccer in the street outside of his window. He felt a drive, a compulsion to continue his journey into the text. I do not believe he intended to ignore the "real world" or to disobey the wishes of his mother. He simply was unable to free himself from the power of the written word. And I am sure it was not simply one book that grabbed his attention. Lovers of reading read continually.

Logophiles move rapidly from one book to the next. We feel compelled to keep reading, and must, therefore, proceed. And often, once is not enough. A true lover of reading can read a book over and over again without losing the sense of excitement found the first time if there is a connection between the reader and the text. Morris (2008) speaks of this when she says, "When I was a child, my favorite book was Ray Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man*. I can very clearly remember reading and re-reading this novel about a man covered in tattoos. These tattoos told stories, these tattoos came to life . . . ." (p.94). Morris felt a need to read this book over and over because she felt a connection with it.

It can be quite disconcerting to find oneself with time to read and no book in hand. There is usually a short time of mourning between texts that allows for complete closure from the first book and readiness for the next, but that time is

usually brief. Robert Scholes (1989) does a beautiful job of explaining the push that we feel to continue reading.

*Though a narrative may urge us onward toward its conclusion with considerable force, there is something in us that resists. We may dearly wish to finish a particular story, to know how it comes out, to experience the joy, the catharsis, or whatever lies in wait for us at the end, but at the same time—and the more pleasure the book is giving us the more strongly we feel this – we don't want it to end. We want it to go on forever (p. 19).*

I often feel a sense of sadness when I finish a book I have really enjoyed. There is that glorious moment when the book is complete, I hear the crack as the book slams shut, take a deep breath and refocus my eyes. I must leave the world that the print has created and reenter reality, and for just a moment as my bedroom slides back into focus and I see the laundry I have neglected on the floor, or the papers I was supposed to grade but haven't, depression sets in. While I am engaged with a book, I think about the characters as though they are my friends. I worry about the places and situations in which I left them. I have even been known to make a comment out of the blue about a concern I have for some character or event in a book, and my poor husband is left believing that I am speaking about friends or work. This consumption of the reader by the text is pleasurable, and that is why most people read.

Pleasure, however, is not the only reason for reading. People also read for utility. We read because we have to. As a people of a culture of print, those who cannot read are at a considerable disadvantage. Consider for a moment how many times a day the average American is called upon to read something. Whether it is the

directions on the box of oatmeal or the flavor of the creamer for your morning coffee; the shampoo bottle in the shower and the label on your pants; the morning newspaper or blog, or even the bottom line of ESPN, print is everywhere. And this is all before leaving the house to start the day! Street signs, clocks, e-mail, memos, notes, homework, school work, menus, notes from the teacher, bible study, video games, movie menus on the DVD . . . the list is endless! This utility reading, while perhaps not the most glamorous of reason for reading, is very real and very necessary in American daily life.

Additionally, people read to learn- to gain new knowledge and insights. Teachers love to assign reading for their students so that they may learn new and wondrous things. Many hours of my life have been spent bent over textbooks as I forced new knowledge into my head - knowledge that I was told I needed to have to be a good citizen or a good student or a good teacher. Many (perhaps most) of those hours were not fun because the choice to read those things was not mine. I had no ownership. I was told to read them so that I could learn, but how much learning really took place? Socrates says that reading cannot teach anyone anything that he does not already know (Manguel, 1996). Written words, according to Socrates, only have the power to help you recall or clarify information you already possess. He believed that writing and, by association reading as well, would “create forgetfulness in the learners’ souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember themselves” (Jowett, 2000, 189). There may be some truth to Socrates’ claims. If I pick up a textbook about proper methods used in chemical engineering, I fear that no amount of time spent in that

book will help me. I do not know anything about the subject, so therefore methodological instruction will not teach me much. I do not already know it, and therefore it cannot be recalled by the text.

But Socrates is not completely correct. For a knowledgeable chemical engineer, that book may contain very useful information of which she was previously unaware. “For Socrates, the text read was nothing but its words, in which sign and meaning overlapped with bewildering precision” (Manguel, 1996, p. 59). Meaning belonged to the reader, not the text. The reader, according to her prior knowledge, assigned the meaning to the text. This view changed as reading progressed through history. Toward the year 1250, Richard de Fournival disagreed with Socrates’ contention and suggested, “since all humankind desires knowledge and has but a short time to live, [humankind] must rely on the knowledge gathered by others to increase the wealth of its own” (Manguel, 1996, p. 59). We must rely on the research, knowledge and wisdom of those who came before us if we intend to continue down the path of knowledge without constantly retracing the already very well worn paths.

The key to how much a text can help you learn is the desire to learn the knowledge it contains. When reading my assignments in college, I may have been able to retain the information long enough to use it for a class, but then it was quickly forgotten if it held no life significance for me. I had no desire to retain that information, so I did not actually learn it. However, when I was interested in a subject, the readings were often far less arduous, and at times even enjoyable. That desire, enjoyment, and pleasure is necessary in all reading for the reading to be successful.

**Research Question:**

When I finished reading *The King of Torts* (Grisham, 2003), I thought that I had a sense of what tort law was all about. I had learned some new vocabulary (the term tort, for example), and I thought I could follow in a conversation with fellow law scholars on the subject without sounding completely ignorant. However, when I read Grisham's disclaimer at the end of his book "anyone looking for accuracy is wasting time" (2003, np), I was flabbergasted, flummoxed, and confused. How could it all, or largely, be simply made up? I had trusted this author. I had believed what he had to say. I had bought into it completely. And I was deceived. Yes, I knew it was fiction. I never thought that the characters or actions were legitimate, but I had simply assumed that the background was true. How DARE he simply make it up! He was the one with some law experience in his past, and I had none. Therefore he was the expert and I was the pupil, and he let me down.

It was then that the power of the written word really came to light for me. I realized that when someone writes down a thought, it becomes true for someone else who reads it – even if it is a complete and total fabrication. People believe a little of what they hear and some of what they see, but they tend to believe most of what they read. It seems the simple act of putting a thought into print, (especially if someone can find a publisher willing to mass-produce it) offers that thought validity. By taking the time to write it down, the thought is granted importance. I now realize that I know precious little about the practice of law in Mississippi (or any other state for that matter) despite the many John Grisham books lining my bookshelf. And this

realization makes me wonder how many other things I have read and taken for granted. How much have the books that I have read, both fictitious and scholarly, formed my thinking? How many of my ideas are actually mine, and how many were put there by various authors without my knowledge or consent? How many of those thoughts were simply made up, or worse yet, are just plain wrong?

These questions made me decide to do more research on this topic. How does reading something – specifically a narrative, change the way in which one thinks? I set out to find the answer by working with elementary age students in literature circles to try to expose their thought processes before reading a given novel and then again after reading that novel. I decided to begin with novels written about The Holocaust because I knew it was a subject about which the students would have little preconceived biases, and therefore the biases they developed after reading would be easily distinguishable. Once we were through with the Holocaust books, we moved on to books on other topics.

Before we began, the participants were asked to write down what they “knew” to be true about the Holocaust by doing some free association with given terms. Then they were given novels which centered on The Holocaust, but which are written from widely different points of view. For example, one group was given *Friedrich* by Hans Peter Richter (1987). *Friedrich* portrays German citizens as normal people living in a difficult time; people who show an array of attitudes towards the Nazis and the war. This book makes little or no mention of the camps at all.

Another group was given *The Devil’s Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen (1990). In this book, a young child is transported back through time and space and put into a

concentration camp. The only reference to non- Jewish Germans in this book is to the SS soldiers, and it is quite negative. A third group read *Jacob's Rescue* by Malka Drucker and Michael Halperin (1993). In this novel, a Polish family puts their lives at risk to save a young Jewish boy named Jacob and his brother. Drucker and Halperin use the terms “German” and “Nazi” interchangeably. Any Germans in this story are bad and intentionally inflict harm on all Polish people, not just to the Jews.

The students were encouraged to keep a journal of their thoughts and discoveries as they read. They also met weekly to discuss the books. After reading these books, the participants again wrote about their thoughts concerning Holocaust related issues. The driving research question was “Will the students show a shift in their “knowledge” base and in their opinions that is in line with the book they are given?” This schematic shift should be expressed in their conversations and journal writings. After completing one round, the groups switched books and the procedure was repeated. Following the example set by Louise Rosenblatt’s Reader Response theory, the students were allowed to construct their own meaning of the text through their reading, journaling, and discussing. Those literature circles lead themselves with as little interference as possible from the researcher. According to Almasi (1995), the instructional goals of peer-led literature groups are to “interact with others in a manner that foster[s] meaningful interpretation of literature” (p. 319) and to “become a support structure for one another as they attempt to interpret literature and construct meaning” (p. 319) as well as to “set agendas for discussing literature and for interacting with one another in a conversational manner” (p. 320). These were the guidelines that we followed.

Once the novels about the Holocaust were completed, the students were given free rein to choose books from my class room collection purely for pleasure. The same format was followed for the groups, and I observed their discussions and writings for evidence of schematic shifts. At the close of the groups, we discussed together if their opinions changed, and how much their minds were changed by the fiction they were reading, as well as whether or not they were aware of the text's influence over their thoughts. Whether or not their thoughts changed and the extent to which they changed can only be truly decided by the participants themselves. Finally, I asked them to write about the experience and what they did or did not discover about the power exerted over them by the printed material they were reading.

As you read through this dissertation, you will encounter in chapter 2 a review of the scholarly literature. It opens with a review of the ethics of reading, goes into the history of literature and then moves on to different approaches to reading theory. We will then look at how literature is handled in modern classrooms as well as using literature to represent the past, a specific overview of using literature to represent The Holocaust, and finally how reading is tied in with curriculum studies. Chapter 3 addresses theoretical reasoning as well as methodology. Chapter 4 will introduce you to my students and what they learned from their reading. In chapter 5, we will synthesize the information from chapter 4 into appropriate conclusions about the effect that print can have over the reader. So let's dive right in.

## CHAPTER 2

### What to Read -

#### A review of Literature

*There are two distinct classes of what are called thoughts: those that we produce in ourselves by reflection and the act of thinking, and those that bolt into the mind of their own accord.*

*-Thomas Paine*

As Thomas Paine says in the above quote, human thought is not autonomous. Our thoughts are the products of our environment. They may be born of our observations intermingled with our remembrances of our personal experiences, or they may be placed there by the influences of a trusted Other. In this case, the Other is print. For the purposes of this dissertation, we will be investigating the literature surrounding the ethics of reading, literature history, reading theory, contemporary literature, representing the past, and finally Holocaust history.

### **Ethics of Reading**

When discussing ethics of reading, the first question that must be asked is what should be read and by whom. How will that reading be done? J. Hillis Miller (2001) discusses these and other questions with regard to the ethics of reading Joseph Conrad's (2011) controversial *Heart of Darkness*. "Should we read *Heart of Darkness*? May we read it? Must we read it? Or, on the contrary, ought we not to

read it or allow our students and the public in general to read it? Should every copy be taken from all the shelves and burned? What or who gives us the authority to make a decision about that? Who is this “we” in whose name I speak? What community forms that “we”? (Miller, 2010, 104). These are the question of ethical reading.

Miller is calling for all readers to take responsibility for their reading choices. It is not enough to take another’s judgments of a work as one’s own without investing a little of oneself into the reading of said work. Conrad’s work is controversial because of its portrayal of imperialism and slavery. Does that make it unworthy of being read? Does that make it dangerous? To be ethical, each reader must evaluate the worth of the piece for herself. After all, as Miller (2010) later asks, how can one decide if she should read something without first reading it to determine its worth? The act of reading Miller’s work does not make one racist. On the contrary, if one elects to avoid literature because of the fervor created around it without actually experiencing it for oneself, that is like racism, but rather “textism,” to coin a term. The two isms are the same at heart. They are allowing another person to do your thinking for you. In this context, we are not using the term reading as “just run[ing] the words passively through the mind’s ear, but perform[ing] a reading in the strong sense, an active response that renders justice to a book by generating more language in its turn, the language of attestation, even though that language may remain silent or implicit” (Miller, 2001, 104). Everyone responds to his reading in some fashion. The question is how to respond ethically.

“Reading deeply and widely in one’s discipline – reading deeply and widely in interdisciplinary ways – is reading ethically” (Morris, 2006, 12). In order to converse within a discipline, it is necessary to be well versed. One cannot learn to swim by simply wading in the water, just as one cannot begin to understand a discipline by simply skimming over some articles. In order to be ethical in one’s response, one must necessarily be knowledgeable. This is especially true when dealing with stories from survivors of traumatic events. “Without seeking an ethical relationship with the text and continually questioning our reading methodologies, we risk becoming the passive readers that Louise Rosenblatt warns about in her research on Reader Response Theory” (Houlihan, 2010, 80). Passive readers do not engage with the text in a way that allows meaning to develop from “the transaction that occurs between the reader and the text wherein the reader constructs a personal envisionment of meaning” (Barson, 2000, 565). Instead, passive readers are focused exclusively on how they are affected by the text, “not on what their textual interpretations can do to enhance the agency of characters within the text” (Houlihan, 2010, 80).

This type of self-indulgent reading denies the characters and the text the agency to critique social injustices and oppressive stereotypes. “In this case, the reader not only does a disservice to the characters within the text, s/he also risks denying the text its full potential as a possible vehicle for ethical contact between the suffering human and the humanitarian. In other words, ethical reading is not simply necessary for the humanitarian who wishes to engage ethically with the suffering characters in the text. An ethical relationship between the reader and the text is also

vital for understanding a text's cultural work and how it promotes social change” (Houlihan, 2010, 80-81).

When reading ethically, one must acknowledge the power and the right of a text to promote its agenda. Ethical readings should also evaluate “the judgments we make as readers” and “the more difficult representational and political problems of literature” (Chen, 2005, 161). According to Will Wright (2005), cultures exist in the midst of stories and are a way to explain the unknown such as religion, destiny, and progress. We do not read in isolation, nor do we write there. Some claim that personal writing “allows for the perpetuation of the fallacy that a writer can be free of social influences, independent of a society and of its politics, and owners of his/her own perspective and experiences – of those the writer expresses on the page specifically” (Allen, 2008, 890). No writer can exist in a separate realm away from the influences of the world. It is silly, therefore, to think that any work of writing in any genre would be free from those same influences. Jane Thompkins (1985) asserts that readers of prose should not seek the uniqueness of textual works; rather, readers should examine how texts engage with a “storehouse of commonly held assumptions, reproducing what is already there in a typical and familiar form” (xvi).

When reading or writing anything, our preexisting condition will be an influence. If you have a certain political viewpoint, be it conservative or liberal, that will show through in your writing. A Christian and Muslim who read the same historical writing will likely see very different things, because they approach from very different conditions. These preexisting conditions create in us certain expectations. If you believe a certain group of people to be malicious, then you will

read writing about that group of people in a malicious way. And if you ascribe a benevolence, or powerlessness, or malevolence to a certain people group, those conditions will show up in what you read about those people, thereby making it difficult for you to see what else may be imbedded in the writing. “While these presumptions and expectations are present in all our acts of reading, they can be more pernicious in the context of reading the testimonies of extreme suffering and atrocity because of the ways they make us deaf or blind to what survivors are trying to communicate to us” (Geddes, 2008, 9). While it is impossible to disentangle oneself from her situatedness, it is important to recognize the slant from which we read, so as to be aware of our own biases.

Biases naturally influence the way in which we interpret and respond to literature. And, just as there are many different ways of approaching testimonies, there are equally many different ways to respond. “[T]here is no single approach to listening to the many different traumatic experiences and histories we encounter . . . the irreducible specificity of traumatic stories requires in its turn varied responses – responses of knowing and of acting – of literature, film, psychiatry, neurobiology, sociology, and political and social activism” (Caruth, 1995, ix). Slaughter (2006) asserts that readers should view themselves as “the humanitarian, the subject position of one who already recognizes the human dignity of the wounded and attempts to relieve the suffering” (6). But there is a danger in attempting to follow Slaughter’s admonition. “There is a danger of universalizing, of assuming survivors of different atrocities, for example, experience the same thing just because we use the same words to describe what has occurred (Geddes, 2008, 2).

Each survivor's story is individual and unique. That survivor is sharing his secrets, and thereby making himself vulnerable to the judgment of every person who picks up his work of print. In particularly well written works of survivor history, the author has a way of "making the reader feel as if he or she has been, so to speak, inside the narrator's skin and has experienced all his subject's feelings as well as seen what he saw" (Miller, 2001, 137). It causes the reader to take on, if only minimally and momentarily, the mantle of those characters. Accepting those emotions is not only imperative, it is a "methodological necessity" (Arendt, 1994, 403). To deny the indignation caused by the Nazis, for example, is "not to be objective, but to condone them and such condoning cannot be changed by a condemnation which the author may feel duty bound to add but which remains unrelated to the description itself" (Arendt, 1994, 404).

One must be careful, however, when registering emotions in texts, not to become narcissistic in such a way that the "attention is focused away from the survivor and towards our own emotional responses, such that the survivor's experience is eclipsed in our writing" (Geddes, 2008, 5). We are called to be touched and changed by the reading, but not to lose touch with the reality that this is not our story, and it would be unethical to attempt to appropriate their stories as our own.

"Literature, particularly story-telling in literature, as well as teaching and writing about literature, seems to have something essentially to do with the sharing of secrets" (Miller, 2001, 139). So what do we do once the stories have been shared with us? According to Miller, (2001) "such sharing is more than the imparting of knowledge. It also lays on the one who receives the secret an obligation, a

responsibility to judge, to decide, to act” (Miller, 2001, 138). And so we write. We write in personal journals. We write critiques in scholarly journals. We write to flesh out our thoughts and reactions to the reading. Developing an ethical relationship with other humans “is a task not for theory, but for genres such as ethnography, the journalist’s repost, the comic book, the docudrama, and especially the novel (Mejia, 1999, xvi).

Determining the worth of a work of print is just what readers are asked to do. There is a judgment that takes place every time something is read. The reader must decide for herself what use she has for the work and what to do about it once she is finished. “What should we do? Or, rather, what should *I* do, since the act of reading is personal, individual, and secret even. Others can see that I hold the book in my hands and am running my eyes from line to line, but what is going on inside my mind and feelings is hidden, unless I choose to make it public, to bring it out into the open” (Miller, 2001, 138). Those who choose to write about what they have read bring the reading out into the open. They share their secrets: secrets that came from within the text itself. Reading deeply and honestly, judging respectfully, and responding honestly is ethical handling of literature.

## **Literature History**

When one endeavors to delve into the depths of the history of literature, one must first answer the question of where to start. We could go all the way back to the very beginning of reading itself, with cave men and their painting on walls as the

beginning of print and storytelling. We could begin with the beginning of the alphabet in 1000 BC when there were no letters, or with the Greek alphabet of 800 BC where vowels were first introduced. (Rodgers, 2004). We could choose to look at the 2000 years it took our species to “make the cognitive breakthroughs necessary to learn to read with an alphabet” and that today “our children have to reach those same insights about print in roughly 2000 days” (Wolf, 2007, p. 19). We could approach it from trying to understand “what reading demands of our brain and knowing how it contributes to our capacity to think, to feel, to infer, and to understand other human beings[as it] is especially important today as we make the transaction from a reading brain to an increasingly digital one” (Wolf, 2007, p. 4).

One could begin to study literature with the printing press and Gutenberg, and its effect on written history. We could spend time discussing the works of Febure and Martin (1958) in which they discuss the first three centuries of printing. Or we could begin with Rudolf Hirsch (1967) who writes about printing, selling and reading in the first century after the printing press came into use. There are wonderful writing by Elizabeth Eisenstine (1979) about how print was used as an agent of change and by Robert Darnton (1982), who discusses the underground print movement in France before the revolution.

While this history of writing and reading is truly fascinating, to give that much history its proper respect would take quite a while. And the focus of this dissertation is not on the history of alphabetic principals or that of writing and print. Therefore, I answered the question of where to begin by narrowing my focus to the theories of

reading instruction used in schools here in America since that was the most relevant to my work.

When literature was budding as a field of study in the New World of America, there were “[a]t least three traditions . . . already fully intertwined in the English curriculum of 1890: an ethical tradition which placed its emphasis on moral and cultural development, a classical tradition of intellectual discipline and close textual study, and a nonacademic tradition more concerned with ‘enjoyment’ and ‘appreciation’ ” (Applebee, 1974, p. 1). Enjoyment was not considered important in the world of academe. Literature was used to inform and educate, anything else was frivolous and not deemed worthy of the energies of the institutions of higher learning.

Literature was seen as the vehicle through which learning was to occur. This learning was accomplished in most cases by using primers. *The New England Primer* was the first primer used in the New World. It was first published around 1686. This primer and its predecessor *The Protestant Tutor for Youth* [published in Europe] contained the same main components: alphabet work, syllabarium, the Lord’s Prayer, catechism and other religious teachings. Among these is the famous child’s prayer *Now I lay me down to sleep*. Religious instruction was of utmost importance in the new world. The N. E. Primer was modeled after those used regularly in Europe and was very heavy on mature and religiously moralistic content (Applebee, 1974).

In 1783 Noah Webster compiled a spelling book “designed explicitly to foster the unity and common culture which he sensed that the nation lacked” (Applebee, 1974, p. 3). This also provided a much-needed American source for books, as most teaching books were printed in England. Webster’s book had sections for the

alphabet, primer, speller, and reader. Its spelling lists brought about the popularity of this particular book. This speller became the universal speller of choice, and was still in use in some places in the 1900's. (Applebee, 1974; Martin, 1999; Venezky, 1987). While its predecessors had religious indoctrination as one of the main reason for reading, Webster's purpose was more secular. It focuses on nationalism, along with the more obvious purpose of teaching reading and spelling. "Rather than the Catholicism or Protestantism of early books, selections were chosen for patriotic content, ethical emphasis, and usefulness in the development of the speaking voice" (Applebee, 1974, p. 3-4).

Following Webster's speller, more attention was given to the literary quality of the selections. Texts began to include poetry and prose by the likes of Shakespeare, Longfellow, and Wordsworth. (Pierpont, 1829). Some new books that followed Webster's were Lindley Murray's three books (1799-1801), which were devoted half to poetry, and Pierpont's series (1820-30), which included excerpts from Shakespeare (Applebee, 1974). Even while these literary pieces were finding their focus, there was another current pushing against them. A movement was at work to steer educators away from these readers and into more contextually based literature. The belief here was that students didn't need to waste time reading something just because it was well written when they could be "learning" something. The century produced, among others, *The Christian Reader* (made up entirely of tracts from the Bible and hymns) and *The Farmer's School-Book*, with offerings on "making and preserving cheese, raising calves, and the nature of manure" (Applebee, 1974, p. 4). This touched off a debate that, ironically, is still going on today. Educators still cannot

agree on the proper emphasis and placement of reading instruction. Should it be reading for reading instruction, or should the students' readings be guided by the content of other subject areas? One method that tried to answer was the basal reader.

Basal readers made their first appearance on the reading scene with McGuffey Readers in the mid 1800's. These readers combined excerpts from many American and European authors that had a moral slant without being directly religious in its instruction. They also increased in difficulty from one reader to the next. (Applebee, 1974). They were divided into six levels, starting with basic one or two syllable words forming the sentences. They then moved on incrementally, with increasing difficulty at each step, until reaching level six, which contained passages from the likes of Shakespeare and Longfellow (Payne, nd). This method of delivery is still used in many classrooms today.

## **Reading Theory**

From the beginning of reading history, there have been many different approaches to the theories behind it. The history of reading theory is the history of pendulum swings. Consistently the next new thing in reading theory is a reaction to the prevailing theory before it, and most often the reaction is one of opposition. One example of reading theory which dominated the landscape in American education starting in the 1920's was the Maturational perspective. There was a strongly held belief that "young children needed time to mature and to develop knowledge of the self before beginning formal reading instruction" (Crawford, 1995, p. 72). After that

came the Developmental Era, in which supporters shared a belief that children must be ready before they could learn to read, but that family environment and literacy experiences could influence that readiness. (Crawford, 1995). Developmentalist had four key assumptions at the core of their beliefs: “All children are capable of learning to read and write, basic skills are essential, all disadvantaged children lack skills and experience, and finally steps must be taken to help disadvantaged children develop” (Young, 2004, p. 2). Another theory was that of the Psycholinguistic perspective which came to popularity in the late 1950s. In this theory, it was proposed that readers were active constructors of meaning and high importance was placed on using meaningful texts rather than repetitive high frequency texts. This belief gave rise to the Whole Language philosophy of teaching. (Goodman, 1986). While these theories were rifling for top billing, there were two others that were gaining ground and attention. We will focus on those two notable theories: the Formalist Criticism and Reader Response theories.

The prevailing theory from the 1930’s – 1960’s was that of Formalist Criticism or New Criticism. A formalist approach to reading was formed by the New Critics – a group influenced by the likes of William Empson, I. A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, Alan Tate, R. P. Blackmur, Keneth Burke, Yvor Winters, Robert Penn Warren, and William K. Wimsatt, Jr. While this group was never a cohesive school of thought, far from it, and the individuals each had very different ideas on a wide range of topics, they were held together by “their reaction against the preceding or contemporary critical schools and views” (Wellek, 1978, 613) that came before them. They all rejected “the kind of metaphorical, evocative criticism practiced by the

impressionists” (Wellek, 1978, 614). Tate, Blackmur, Burke, and Winters were highly critical of the neo-Humanists, and none of them were in favor of Marxism. This group encouraged the reader to “focus on a [literary work’s] verbal detail, not its historical context or political/psychological/ philosophical ideas, but its metaphors, ironies, and ambiguities” (Bauerlein, 2007, p. B6). This theory came in opposition to the popular anthologies of the time that offered a great deal of historical and political background about the author as the only lens through which to view works of literature. (Brooks, 1983; Connell, 1996; Scholes, 1989).

New Criticism extolled the importance of close reading of the work itself and rejected attention to the author’s biography or geography. Close reading includes attention to the internal characteristics of the text itself, with focus on elements of the text such as rhythm, meter, theme, imagery, and metaphor. “Meaning exists on the page. . . . [T]he meaning of a text is intrinsic and should not be confused with the author’s intentions not the work’s affective dimension” (Delahoyde, nd, 1).

Among the other ideas of old that the New Critics rejected was the idea of intentional fallacy. William Wimsatt (1954) speaks of intentional fallacy in the following:

*We argued that the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art, and it seems to us that this is a principle which goes deep into some differences in the history of critical attitudes. It is a principle which accepted or rejected points to the polar opposites of classical “imitation” and romantic expression. It entails many specific truths about inspiration, authenticity, biography,*

*literary history and scholarship. . . . [t]here is hardly a problem of literary criticism in which the critic's approach will not be qualified by his view of "intention" (3).*

Intentional fallacy is the mistake of attempting to understand the author's intentions when interpreting a literary work. New Critics rejected the notion that the author's intent was valid, even when statements from the author were available. The meaning belongs to the text, and to consider anything else would, for the New Critics, rob the text of its autonomy.

The sister argument of intentional fallacy is affective fallacy. Affective fallacy is the mistake of equating a work with the emotional effect it has on the reader. For New Critics, a text should not be understood on its connection with or response from its readers. Its merit and meaning must be inherent. "The affective fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its results (what it *is* and what it *does*), a special case of epistemological skepticism, though usually advanced as if it had far stronger claims than the overall forms of skepticism. It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism" (Wimsatt, 1954, 21). The outcome of either affective or intentional fallacy is that "the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear" (Wimsatt, 1954, 21).

In 1941 John Crowe Ransom published a book entitled *The New Criticism* in which he discussed the works of Yvor Winters, T.S. Eliot, and Ivor A. Richards. These men, along with Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, and others listed above, are considered the fathers of the New Criticism (Brooks, 1983; Wellek, 1978). New

Criticism largely came into existence when T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards exchanged letters during the early 1920s. Richards's *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) proclaimed that criticism had become tainted by contemporary historical scholars who "endeavored by underground tactics to invert the covenants of the trust held by literary criticism" (p. 48). In 1919, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Cleanth Brooks were editors of *The Kenyon Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, and *The Southern Review*, respectively. These three men worked closely to try to "preserve aesthetic values from the onslaughts of scientific attitudes" (Patnaik, 1982, p. 3). Tate addressed the issue of science in a lecture in 1940. He spoke of "the vain attempts to emulate the methods of science by tracing influence conceived in terms of forces, causes and effects, or biological analogies of growth and development, or by applying psychology, economics and sociology to literature" (Wellek, 1978, 614). Tate also stated that the historical method "has disqualified our best minds for the traditional functions of criticism. It ignores the meaning of the destination in favor of the way one gets there" (Quoted in Wellek, 1978, 614). Blackmur (1951) dismisses those who approach literature with a scientific attitude by saying that scholarship and science "believe it has made an interpretation by surrounding the work with facts" (487). It was the intent of these men to preserve the study of literature as an aesthetic focus so that it could not be appropriated by other fields of study and therefore watered down or otherwise perverted (Edwards, 2009).

The term *New Critic* "came to stand for those who disparaged a study of the author and his time" (Brooks, 1983, p. 42) and found the meaning of a text "through impersonal analysis of the literary work as an autonomous entity that can be analyzed

objectively” (Connell, 1996, p. 4). Formalist criticisms are highlighted by focusing on a close reading of the text and taking each work at face value, rather than imparting meaning based upon situated truths. For them, the truth of the literature was to be found within the text itself.

The “New Critics were the first professional theorists; the first humanists to make theory into a recognized disciplinary activity” (Bauerlein, 2007, p. B6). They were not the first to establish principles for literature theorizing, “but they were the first to establish theory as a distinct practice in the humanities” (Bauerlein, 2007, p. B7). Like all theories, the New Critics had their tenets for proper reading of literature. Among them, the concept of intentional fallacy flies in the face of previous schools of thought which claim that the author’s original intent is of utmost importance. In contrast, the New Critics do not hold the author’s intention in highest regard at all. Rather it is the reader’s interpretation of written words that gives them life (Marshall, 2002).

This method of reading is what most of my generation would be familiar with from high school literature classes. It is reading a piece of literature and then dissecting it: examining its pieces to determine what makes it what it is. It is “working with patterns of sound, imagery, narrative structure, point of view, and other techniques discernible on close reading of the text” (Delahoyde, n.d., p.1) New Criticism seeks to determine the function and appropriateness of a work of prose.

In response to this criticism came Louise Rosenblatt’s (1938) *Literature as Exploration*. In this book, along with many other publications over the next 50 years, Rosenblatt called for a more transactional interaction between reader and text.

“Reader Response theory locates meaning construction in the personal lived-through quality of a literary experience, making the relationship between the text and the reader central” (Connell, 1996, p. 1). While Rosenblatt and the New Critics share a common interest in restoring literature as art, their methods for achieving this goal are significantly different. New Criticism redefined literature as art by turning exclusively to the text (Connell, 1996) while Rosenblatt (1985) has called the literacy experience, “the process in which the reader selects out ideas, sensations, feelings, and images drawn from his past linguistic, literary, and life experience, and synthesizes them into a new experience” (p. 40). If one is using New Criticism when reading, the same end should be reached regardless of the reader because the text itself does not change. However, with Reader Response, it is the experiences that the reader brings to the work that help create its meaning. In reader response, the “affective fallacy” is not wrong, it is paramount. It is through the interaction of all of these components on the part of the reader, as well as the text itself, that the art of literature comes to life in the reader response realm.

“Reading is a transaction, a two-way process including a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances” (Rosenblatt, 2001, p. 268). For true reading to take place there must be an interaction, a “transaction,” to use the term that Rosenblatt borrowed from Dewey and Bentley (1949). Her reader response theory puts much emphasis on the experience of the reading rather than simply taking the words on the page as existing on their own. A transaction is a relationship between the reader and the text that is “a reciprocal process in contrast to notions of the

passive reader acted on by the text, or the passive text acted on by the reader”

(Rosenblatt, 1985, p. 40).

Rosenblatt’s theory of reading was largely influenced by the words of John Dewey and his work on the knower and the known. Dewey contended that “knowers” (readers) and “the known” (literature) should not be seen in a dualistically isolated way. Instead they should be viewed in terms of their transaction upon one another (Connell, 1996; Dewey and Bentley, 1949; Rosenblatt, 1938). Some have labeled Rosenblatt’s work as a “response to Dewey’s call for an educational theory to be built upon a permanent frame of reference to the organic nature of experience” (Connell, 1996, p. 2). Others have gone further and credited Rosenblatt’s theory with expanding the horizons of literature. “Reader response theories such as Louise Rosenblatt’s have led many of us to challenge beliefs about possibilities for change from an older, traditional model of text-centered literature instruction to a more reader-centered and response-centered model” (Cox & Many, 1992, p. 33).

It is a delicate balancing act and one of some debate to determine the proper method of reading. “Textual fundamentalism is the belief that texts always say just what they mean, so that any honest or decent person ought to be able to understand this perfectly clear meaning without making any fuss about it. The problem with this position is that it requires an infallible author, a perfect language, and a timeless context in order to work.” (Scholes, 1989, p. 52). Is it the job of the reader to divine the author’s intended meaning, or to construct meaning of her own? Some, like the New Critics, would hold that the author imparts meaning into the text and it is the job of the reader to find that meaning. Rosenblatt (1998) counters with the statement that

“the text is simply a set of marks on paper until a reader . . . transacts with it” (p. 890). Rosenblatt contends that it is not the text that holds meaning, but the interpretation of that text by the reader. It is the transaction that is important.

A criticism of texts “focused on the writer’s life and background, a criticism focused on the work that he wrote, and a criticism focused on the reader’s response to that work are all legitimate modes of inquiry and are compatible with each other” (Brooks, 1983, p. 44). It is up to the reader to decide from which direction to approach the reading. The important thing to remember here is that without the written text, there would be nothing to read, but without the reader, the text is dead. “In every act of reading the irreducible otherness of writer and reader is balanced and opposed by this need for recognition and understanding between two parties” (Scholes, 1989, p. 51). When a teacher makes the decision of how to approach reading, this can greatly influence how that the students under her charge receive literature.

### **Contemporary Literature**

How does all of this affect how literature is viewed and used today? Steuer and Steddom (1979) state that “[t]he McGuffey Readers, first published in 1836, are perhaps the most widespread and influential textbooks ever used in American classrooms” (p. 58). This may be true since they seem to have inspired even our current texts. Basal readers in the tradition of the McGuffey readers are still prominent on the educational landscape today. There is an ongoing debate between

the supporters of textbook readers and those who prefer trade books. Supporters of basal readers (Barr and Shadow, 1989; Baumann, 1992; Baumann and Heubach, 1996; Ediger, 2010; Hoffman, McCarthy, Bayles, Price, Elliott, Dressman, & Abbott, 1995; Sosniak and Stodolsky, 1993) believe that they provide a scope and sequence for beginning teachers. They offer organization and activities as well as evaluation options. “Textbooks are also helpful for experienced teachers to lean upon when teaching many curriculum areas and time is needed to gather resources in a crowded school day” (Ediger, 2010, p. 703). In response to claims that basal readers deskill teachers, Baumann (1992) suggests that “there is a simple cause and effect relationship between the materials of literacy instruction, basal readers specifically, and teachers’ freedom, or lack thereof, to direct literacy lessons. . . . Basal materials do not teach, any more than the trade books or maps and globes do” (p. 397). Teachers teach. The instructional materials are simply there to help.

Those who support the use of trade books in school instruction (Apple, 1982; Apple, 1986; Duthie, 1996; Freeman, 1995; Harvey, 1998; Helper, 1998; Shannon, 1987) cite, among other things, the rapidity with which textual books become outdated. “They may also become too formal in use whereby facts are learned by pupils with little or very few opportunities for critical and creative thinking” (Ediger, 2010, p. 703). There is also the concern that teachers may use only the information found in the text books, essentially ignoring any other sources of information that may be equally useful, or even more useful to the students (Ediger, 2010). Shannon (1989) criticizes the use of basal readers by saying that “[v]irtually no one, including the teacher, is offered a literacy which asks readers to go beyond the word and literal

translation of text to tackle the sense, feeling, truth, and intention of an author through the words he or she used in a text. Moreover, no one is asked to develop his or her ability to express understanding of a text – what it does and might mean in one’s life. In short, no one is asked to be truly literate by any criterion beyond a standardized test” (p. 111).

There is also the argument that trade books make knowledge more accessible. As students age, the reading gap widens. By upper elementary school, a classroom may have students with wildly different reading abilities. Social Studies text books, for example, may be rather difficult for a lower level reader due to the density of dates, names, and places (Beck & McKeown, 1991; Beck, McKeown, & Gromoll, 1989). A trade book containing the same information, however, may be on an easier text level and presented in a more compelling format. Another concern is that the excerpts are often taken from what may be a good and engaging book, but without the context of the rest of the story, these excerpts can be confusing and displaced. If the basal publishers are careful in their selections, however, and only choose passages that can stand alone coherently, basal readers may be very useful in engaging the children’s interest, and may even inspire them to go get the book and read it in its entirety. Interest in what one is reading is one of, if not the most important component in comprehension and vocabulary development, which are the two areas that are most focused on and most tested in reading instruction.

Throughout American history, reading enjoyment has been, by far, the least important aspect of educational focus. “In the past 3 decades, only three major empirical studies in library studies and information science have focused on the

selection of books for pleasure reading” (Reuter, 2007, p. 1745). If schools better understood what their students were interested in, they could use information about pleasure reading to stimulate independent reading in students. For example, the vast majority of “educational reading” done in schools is non-fiction. I can remember being told in my teacher training classes in college that most teachers are female and girls prefer reading fiction. Therefore we teachers tend to read fiction more than non-fiction. And, according to my professors, this happens at a detriment to our boys, because boys would rather hear non-fiction over fiction any day. Looking back, I am impressed that my professors were trying to find the texts that the students would be interested in. But when we look at those few studies that have been done on student interests, we find that while boys enjoy non-fiction more than girls, both boys and girls enjoy fiction more than non-fiction (Boraks, Hoffman & Bauer, 1997; Childress, 1985; Harkrader & Moore, 1997; Reuter, 2007; Simpson, 1996).

Harkrader and Moore (1997) conducted a study with fourth-grade boys and girls in an effort to determine how genre affected independent reading book selections. They found that fourth-grade boys have a stronger affinity for non-fiction than do their female counterparts, but both fourth-grade boys and girls preferred fiction more strongly than non-fiction. This puts to rest the much-heralded claim in teacher education that to reach boys a teacher must use non-fiction literature.

The key ingredient for “the majority of children across grade level, gender and geographic region” was that they had “highly similar compelling reasons for liking a book: plot, action and emotional appeal” (Boraks, et al., 1997, p. 335). There is also evidence that physical characteristics play a central role in book selection among

children, and that children, like adults, look for emotional responses and personal connections when choosing books (Reuter, 2007). Nearly all groups of people who enjoy reading want a book that will engage them on a personal level. These people want to spend time with the characters, dwell in the settings, and become a part of the plot.

So much can be learned from spending time with a fictional character. Fiction does not *seem* to teach or preach. It seems to be for entertainment purposes only. But this is not the case. Novels do teach, even if they do not intend to. The characters become very real to the reader. A fictional character can become a friend about whom the reader worries, with whom the reader laughs and cries, to whom the reader listens and with whom the reader relates. The reader connects with the character and therefore, not only does the character become real, but the backdrop to the story does as well. Consider for a moment how much influence our friends have over what we think. Now combine that influence with the power of print. Mark Faust (Vine and Faust, 1993) expresses this thought very well.

*When I was a kid, I read all these adventure stories. At first, I was just an imaginative member of Tom Swift's gang, coping with the neighborhood. But as I grew older, I traveled to foreign lands, climbed formidable mountains, fought my way through forbidding jungles, survived being shipwrecked, flew impossible missions. . . . In many ways these adventures that I took through reading were as real to me as anything else in my life. (p. 31).*

For Faust, and many others like him, the acceptance of this fictitious world was complete. He became a member of the novel's society, and in doing so accepted

their viewpoints, at least to an extent. I have to wonder if he was aware of how much his conceptions of the world were being influenced as he climbed those mountains and fought his way through the jungles. If this was the only chance he had to visit those places, then he would have no other way to formulate schemata about them. Would he be surprised to go there in actuality and find that things are not exactly as he thought them to be?

“[W]e, as readers, must be individually responsible for what we make of the literature.... We should not ... be overawed by anyone, for to accept values, attitudes, and ideas without question is to decline responsibility for one’s own mind, becoming at best the lucky disciple of someone wise, at worst the unfortunate pawn of a fool” (Probst, 1988, p. 23). Readers should not accept the ideas of text without question. It is the responsibility of the reader to question what is written. But is that how most people read? I fear most people, children especially, take texts at face value, as we are taught to do through religious indoctrination, utility reading, and nationalistic traditions. Manguel (1996) writes about the impact that reading in his childhood had on him. As an adult he was “able to dissociate [him]self from their fiction; but in [his] childhood and much of [his] adolescence, what the book told [him], however fantastical, was true at the time of [his] reading, and as tangible as the stuff of which the book itself was made” (p. 11). Manguel was an unsophisticated reader as a child, and therefore, the thought to question what he was reading never occurred to him. Children by nature accept that others know more than they do and accept authority of those they deem wiser than themselves. Print wields this authority with very little effort.

This power of print can be a very useful tool in the classroom. Soublis and Winkler (2004) write about the experiences they have encountered while using literature in their classrooms. Even though their ages have matured well beyond young adult status, these authors contend that “young adult novels are still changing [their] lives” (Soublis & Winkler, 2004, p. 12). Soublis and Winkler read in front of and with their students often. They discuss the literature together as peers. These educators are not focused on being the authority with all of the right answers. They cultivate a relationship with their students as well as with the text. One of their students spoke of his experience sharing his journal entry about a particular novel. He said, “During that instant in time, because my comrades understood the novel, they understood me. I felt respected and warm inside. Who would have thought that a little book could give me the courage and strength to do something that two years ago I never would have been able to do?” (Soublis & Winkler, 2004, p. 13). This student found a safe place in which to reside within the community of readers. He felt sure that his personal experiences would be accepted rather than rebuked because of the acceptance that the class had for the character in the book that had a similar life experience.

I highly advocate reading aloud to students of all ages in every class; as well as public discussion of what has been read. It is my belief that there is no discipline that cannot be enhanced by reading a narrative, either fiction or auto/biographical, which ties into the subject. “High interest materials enable a child to become absorbed in a book and he/she will engage in reading for longer periods of time” (Harkrader & Moore, 1997, p. 325). They also enable the “teacher to expand the

interest of the children and anticipate new areas of interest” (Harkrader & Moore, 1997, p. 325). Literature has the power to make even the most dry and seemingly useless subject matter become interesting when it brings the subject to life.

Ironically, just over a decade ago, Harkrader and Moore (1997) wrote, “With the stress on using authentic literature for a variety of purposes many teachers have moved, or are moving, to literature-based and whole language learning” (p. 326). Another article from the same time period claimed “more elementary teachers use literature-based reading instruction. Both fiction and nonfiction titles are used by some teachers to supplement or *replace* content area textbooks” (Boraks, Hoffman, & Bauer, 1997, p. 310; emphases added). This was obviously written at a time in the educational pendulum swing when children could be left behind to discover a love of reading.

Vygotsky writes about the importance of discussion in the learning process. According to him, what and how we think is impacted by everything in the world around us, and shown in what we create and how we interact with that world. “Vygotsky begins his effort to understand thinking by trying to understand the context of thinking. He tries to understand how people and the things that they create—their buildings, their ways of structuring their world through speech, their routines, and everything else through which they bring order to their surroundings—help to shape the ways in which they and others view the world. Note that the process is (at least) two-way: people's thinking shapes their physical and symbolic worlds, and their engagement with those worlds in turn shapes how they (and others) think”. (Smagorinsky, 2007, p. 62).

Vygotsky's work becomes important in the educational world because he links the importance between thinking and speech. "For Vygotsky, speech is the primary "tool" in the construction of culture. Through speech, people express what is on their minds. They, in turn, help to structure a society through the ways in which their speech both constructs a reality and brings it to order so that others may move easily within it" (Smagorinsky, 2007, p. 64). What that means for the classroom is that by allowing students to speak about their thoughts, a culture of engagement and experimentation will emerge. For Vygotsky, learning is social. "Whereas Piaget sought to understand how the individual child, egocentric and even autistic, gradually becomes socialized, able to decentrate and communicate, Vygotsky saw the child as initially a social creature who only becomes individuated over time" (Packer, 2008, p. 10).

There are many ways in which teachers can allow students to speak and interact socially in their classrooms. One very effective way is by allowing students to have peer-led discussion groups. "Often, small-group discussions allow for such generative, constructive, experimental, developmental speech because there is no officially dominant leader such as a teacher, no central person to direct the flow of discussion, and less formality to limit how kids can think and speak about a topic" (Smagorinsky, 2007, p. 65). The children are able to let their thinking flow freely and are able to feed off of one another's thoughts in order to develop their own. This is especially helpful in literature circles. "Vygotsky's view of speech as serving a developmental role in thinking helps to provide a different approach to talking about literature. This view has found a footing through the "writing to learn" movement, in

which people use writing as a tool to discover what they have to say. Central to this approach is the idea that writing for the purpose of learning has a playful or experimental dimension” (Smagorinsky, 2007, p. 65).

Literature circles offer students the opportunity to be in charge of their education, in much the same way adults engage in book clubs. “Think of the book clubs that adults often form. The speech genre is usually quite different: People laugh a lot, they digress with stories that in some way are inspired by the reading or discussion, they use the discussion to think through new ideas, they co-construct meaning by building on one another's thoughts, they eat and drink, everyone has the same access to the floor, and it's OK to cry. Not surprisingly, they enjoy these discussions a lot more than the typical high school kid enjoys a typical literature discussion in class -they attend these sessions of their own volition and often view them as important social and intellectual occasions” (Smagorinsky, 2007, p. 65).

Literature circles, when used with students, can reflect the environment spoken about by Smagorinsky. Janice Almasi and Linda Gambrell write about the formation and use of literature circles in a classroom setting. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.

Literature circles can also lead to conflict. People tend to hold fast to their ideas once they have been formed. After reading a narrative, and drawing conclusions about that narrative, it is uncommon to embrace a challenge to those conclusions. “When precious interpretations of text are challenged by discrepant evidence or new information, the reader experiences cognitive conflict” (Almasi, 1995, p. 317). It is in the nature of many of us to avoid conflict. “People do not like

what is new because it threatens what is old” (Morris, 2009, p. 4). If someone challenges our thoughts, we may brush them off as ignorant or naïve, or call them stupid and do not give their ideas any credence. But if we are to grow and solidify what we think and what we believe, these ideas must be tested. “Central to the process of creating conceptual change is the notion that conflicts must be confronted head on” (Almasi, 1995, p. 317). Until you have questioned your beliefs and decided to keep them, you cannot claim them as your own. Until then, you are borrowing them because someone or something else has placed them in your mind.

Print not only informs, but it also has the power to shape a person’s thoughts. “Literacy practices are an important medium through which we interact with the human environment and by which we directly and vicariously contemplate who we are at any one point in time, who we might hope to be in the future, who we fear being, and who we expect to be” (Richardson & Eccles, 2007, p. 342). What Richardson and Eccles so elegantly state here is very true. It is through reading that many people define themselves and their perceptions of others. There are examples in the literature of reading even being able to change perceptions of things that are common and well known. Gliner, Goldman, & Hubert (1983) found that after reading a narrative passage, readers’ changed their perceptions of real world objects (in their case, animals) when compared to a pre-reading evaluation. If reading a narrative can change the perception of something the readers are as familiar with as common animals, how much more power does reading have to shape thoughts about an unfamiliar subject?

Many people do not realize how much reading impacts what they think and who they become. They do not understand that “studying the other teaches about the self” (Morris, 2008, p. 5). In Richardson and Eccles (2007) a young man who claims to read a lot as an escape from a difficult adolescence is asked if there is a particular book that may have had a significant impact on whom he has become. The young man replied, “I don’t think so. They’re a good time waster, a good way to get rid of the situation . . . but otherwise they don’t shape my life” (p. 346). Conversely, a young woman who was a low-frequency reader credited books she had read as a child with giving her the strength and role models to transcend her low socioeconomic status and go on to college. (Richardson & Eccles, 2007). Another boy credited his reading about Richard Nixon’s mistakes to have influenced “values as he emerged into adulthood” (Richardson & Eccles, 2007, p. 350). Perhaps the infrequency of the young woman’s reading experiences allowed her more insight into how this reading impacted her, while the young man who read often was unaware because being influenced by reading was so common in his life. Perhaps it could be compared to being asked to notice one’s own breath.

These are but a few examples of how “reading was an important catalyst in the gestation of identity formation related to both gender and ethnicity and career-related possible selves” (Richardson & Eccles, 2007, p. 348). The interesting part is that none of the participants seemed to realize that the print they were reading had these effects on them until they were explicitly asked. Unless one is made aware of the powerful impact print is having over him, it is not likely that he will become cognizant on his own because power is so commonplace. Joe Kincheloe (2002)

writes of the presence of power in our world. “Power is a fundamental constituent of reality, embedded in the social framework of race, class, gender, commerce, occupations, communications, and everyday interaction . . . . Power is present in all human relationships” (p. 119). The relationship between print and the reader is no exception.

### **Representing the Past**

Now that we know why to read and how to frame our thinking about reading, we face the next step in the reading process. We must decide what to read. Which materials deserve our time? What genres are worthy of the powerful transactions that occur when reading takes place? Some people choose to spend their time reading educational text – magazines, journals, and scholarly books. Others just can’t stomach it. Richardson & Eccles (2007) write of a young English major who had put aside her earlier notion of becoming a lawyer because of the *type* of reading that occupation would require. “Not all reading was pleasurable for Antoinette and she did not want a career that involved reading books that were not interesting to her. The type of reading was of critical importance. When she said ‘I love reading’ she was referring to fiction” (p. 351). What people are reading is as important, or perhaps more important, than why or how they read.

The first step in choosing what to read is to determine the purpose for reading. Is the intention of the reading for entertainment, for educational purposes, or both? For most people involved in higher education, reading is the sole method of

uncovering the thinking of others in and out of their field. Reading texts can put us in touch with people from across the globe. It is not hampered by time and space.

Thousands of years ago, St. Augustine was able to read the words of Aristotle, who lived long before him, and he came to realize that letters were “invented so that we might be able to converse even with the absent” (quoted in Manguel, 1996, p. 45).

Intellectual reading is an invaluable tool for gaining knowledge and wisdom, but it is not the only way to learn.

One might think that the two types of reading; educational and entertaining or, as Rosenblatt (2001) refers to them, efferent and aesthetic - can never meet, but that is categorically untrue. For example, if one wished to read in order to learn about some instance from the past, there are two main choices – factual historical texts or (auto)biographical narratives. These narratives may come in the form of memoir, (auto)biographical sketch, or historical fiction. “Autobiography, by virtue of its authenticity, would seem an ideal medium for enabling children to come to terms with the past” (Short, 1997, p. 180). Both narratives and factual text can offer educational value about the past, but only the narrative should be read aesthetically.

Many people may contend that history should be left in the hands of the historians. “[S]ome academics feel that historians are the keepers of memory and represent an authoritative voice of the past. . .” (Morris, 2001, p. 16). Historians, in the minds of some in academe, are the owners of history. They imply that novelists bastardize history by adding to it or offering interpretations of it. Chartier (2006) quotes Cervantes’ fictional character Don Quixote as saying, “The poet may describe or sing things, not as they were, but as they ought to have been, while the historian

has to write them down, not as they ought to have been, but as they were, without adding to or subtracting from the truth” (pp. 134-135). Quixote’s quote expresses a naive view of history; I dare say an impossible one.

There are those in academe who would agree with Quixote that historians are somehow more noble or honest in their representation of history. Among them are Ranke and Popper. Leopold von Ranke famously stated “you have reckoned that history ought to judge the past and to instruct the contemporary world as to the future. The present attempt does not yield to that high office. It will merely tell how it really was” (Bartlett, 1992, np). Karl Popper (1966) claimed that the historian’s perspective is “the official judgment of history” (p. 180). Both are noted for their beliefs that history is more pure and less interpreted when told by historians who report the facts, than by those attempting to find meaning in the past.

However, not everyone agrees with this delineation between history and philosophy. In his book *Narration and Knowledge*, Arthur Danto (1987) went so far as to outline reasons that, not only could historians not adequately retell the past, but that no true statements of the past are possible. He claimed that “[h]istorical statements are made by historians, and historians have motives for making historical statements about one past thing rather than another. Not merely that, but historians have certain feelings about the past things they are concerned to describe. Some of these feelings may be personal, some may be shared by members of various groups the historian belongs to. Such attitudes induce historian to make emphases, to overlook certain things, indeed to distort” (Danto, 1987, 31). Here, Danto is not only claiming that *true* historical statements cannot happen, but also that historians are

human, fallible, biased beings, and as such are incapable of being wholly factual when reporting about the past.

Danto also said “[e]very statement purportedly about the past is strictly speaking meaningless. But then, with meaningless statements, the question whether they are true or false cannot, in principal arise. So, if we cannot make a meaningful statement about the past, we cannot make a true statement about the past” (29). He goes on to explain that a non-analytical position is meaningful only when it is verifiable by personal experience. This provides great support for the use of (auto)biographical sketches and the narrative form when searching for validity in history.

Haden White is well known for his contention that historians can effectively use narrative as a form of communication to help the reader accept the past they are attempting to represent. “Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture specific” (White, 1987, p. I).

White observed “the historical theory of the 1950s and 1960s focused exclusively on the components of the historical text (that is, the individual descriptions and explanations of historical events that we may find in the historical text), while being both unwilling and unable to deal with the historical text as a narrative whole.” (quoted in Ankersmit, 2009b, p. 77). White found the support for which he was searching in the writings of literary theorists about the best practices for

reading and analyzing literary text. “The literary deniaisement of historiography is something we owe, above all, to White. This has, arguably, been his most important contribution to historical theory and will undoubtedly prove to be his lasting legacy to that discipline” (Ankersmit, 2009b, p. 78).

A student of White’s writing, Carr (2009) contrasts historians, or philosophers of history, with history itself. “Most critics of the classical philosophers of history had contrasted it unfavorably with history itself, which seemed to them capable of attaining genuine and possibly even objective knowledge” (p. 16). That ever-elusive “objective knowledge” is unattainable, however. Every story is told from a perspective; even when the historian goes to every length within human possibility to avoid bias, no one can avoid perspective. Carr goes on to say that “the task of telling the story of the past and that of seeking its ultimate meaning, especially in theological terms, were so closely intertwined that the distinction would be an artificial imposition” (Carr, 2009, p. 20).

Jenkins refers to radical historians and contrasts them with traditional historians. For him, “radical historians . . . turn the weaknesses of “proper history” into strengths, celebrate the fact that historians’ representations (including their own) are always failed representations, that historians qua historians always get the past wrong, and that it is these “Facts” which become the basis for a new synthesis which discarding the desire for closure, builds uncertainly on uncertainty” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 112). It is the very embracing of these failures that lead the radical historian to find meaning.

As with everything else in life, some views and ways of interpreting information fit within one person's way of understanding more so than others. "One must face the fact that when it comes to apprehending the historical record, there are no grounds found in it for preferring one way of construing its meaning over another" (White, 1987, quoted in Jenkins, 2009, p. 118). As long as one is honest with oneself and does not attempt to pretend to have the sole view on a subject, then it is up to the reader to determine how she prefers historical information to be presented, be it narrative, factual, or any number of other ways.

Those critics who agree with Cervantes' Don Quixote, Ranke, Popper and the like, seem to believe that historians' history is not interpreted and that no assumptions are made; pure facts are presented as they actually happened. But "historian[s] cannot replicate the past in the way that the physicist can replicate nature" (Weaver, 2001, p. 53). Historians do not present facts as they actually occurred; they present one interpretation of those facts. "Objectivity in the historical community is, and always has been, a noble dream rather than a reality" (Weaver, 2002, p. 157). Historians should make a strong attempt to be objective, all the while accepting that there will inevitably be some subjectivity.

No record, historical or narrative in nature, can be absolute and complete. "Written records never give us immediate, transparent, unmediated access to the past, because their production has been governed by a particular relation to the reality they designate: depiction, representation, prohibition, prescription, quantification, and so on" (Chartier, 2006, p. 136). Everything we know from the past is tainted by the method in which it is delivered. As Anatole France (quoted in Applebee, 1974) said,

“All the historical books which contain no lies are extremely tedious” (p. 1). Readers must choose whether they wish to read a more text-bookish method of redelivery or a more narrative form of redelivery, but readers are not necessarily choosing based on accuracy.

Every historical event that has been written about “was appropriated either by literary fictions or by historical chronicles – which leads us to discuss history as genre and the category of genre within historical writing” (Chartier, 2006, p. 136).

Historians and novelist alike tell a story, it is the presentation of those stories that differ. In all of these circumstances, “[i]t is appropriate to inquire further into why the understanding of the past matters so much to us and why the belief is so strong that it ought to be “meaningful”” (Carr, 2009, p. 19).

Storytelling is an important part of our human past. “All stories are statements” (Moffett, 1989, p. 6). They all have something to say. Stories need to be told to preserve our past. The past comes alive in the telling of stories. Storytelling “is a communal act; it requires a community and it creates a community . . . .By telling stories we remember our past, discover our present, and envision our future” (Feuerverger, 2002, p.15). It is within this community that a love of reading is born. First, children learn to love hearing stories. Then they begin to seek them out for themselves by reading on their own.

Historians tell stories by taking information and synthesizing it to draw conclusions and assign meaning. Novelists also synthesize information to draw conclusions and assign meaning, but they do so in a very different way.

Unfortunately, they are not seen in the same high esteem in academic circles as their

historian counterparts. “[N]ovelists are considered mere dreamers. . . . Literary representations seem second rate, trivial, and unimportant” (Morris, 2001, p. 16). They bring history alive for the reader by allowing the reader to *experience* history for a moment rather than just read *about* it. “Fiction and autobiography, if chosen judiciously, have the power to foster historical insight, knowledge, and understanding. By showing how the events of a previous age touched the lives of ordinary people, these forms of literature inject validity into otherwise arid facts and thus help to excite and sustain historical interests” (Short, 1997, pp. 179 – 180). By using fiction and autobiographies, readers may become genuinely interested in the subject being studied. This, and not rote memorization of facts, should be the goal of education.

### **Holocaust History**

One section of history that has recently been getting a lot of attention from historians and novelists alike is The Holocaust. The Holocaust is impossible to comprehend. Studying its facts alone leaves holes in the human mind. The Holocaust is a sensitive subject. It is difficult for historians to delve into because there is no other moment in human history that can be compared. “For the historian who attempts to understand the holocaust of the Jews, the most important obstacle is the absolutely unique perspective. I doubt that in a thousand years people will better understand Hitler, Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka than we do today. Will they have a better historical perspective? It may be, on the contrary, that posterity will understand all that even less than we do” (Deutscher, 1968, p. 163). I dare to say that

Deutscher may have been correct in his prophetic statement. Now, some 45 years later, I do not believe we as a people understand The Holocaust. We may have gained more knowledge, but understanding still alludes us.

Being a historian for whom the Holocaust is the focus of study causes a conflict. “There lies the dilemma of the historian. On one hand, he cannot but study the “Final Solution” as any other past phenomenon. The reconstruction of the most detailed sequence of events related to the extermination of the Jews is progressing apace. On the other hand, for some historians at least, opaqueness remains at the very core of the historical understanding and interpretation of what happened” (Friedlander, 1989, p. 61). That opaqueness is not an obstacle that can be overcome, but rather one that the historian must learn to live with.

While the definitive numbers are unknown, those with which we work are too large to grasp even if they were clearly known, and the horrificness seems unreal when presented purely in factual form. Historical fiction and survivor autobiographies are trying to fill some of those holes. “Literary representations are just as important to the memory of [an] event as historical accounts. It is not enough to read [only] historical representations of the Holocaust.” (Morris, 2001, p. 16). Historical and literary representations are both important and should be read hand in hand. To gain as full an understanding as possible of any event, both factual historical and factually accurate fictitious/narrative accounts are necessary.

The Holocaust has not always been granted the amount of attention it now receives in the United States. Until 1969 “only two courses on the Holocaust were offered at American universities. This number increased to two hundred by 1979 and

in the 1980s the number [had] increased tenfold to two thousand courses” (Kronendorfer, 1995, p. 40). This overwhelming influx of pedagogical activity surrounding the Holocaust has both positive and negative aspects. Positively, “more students are being introduced to this dark and significant period of history and are, hopefully, being encouraged and assisted to consider the ramifications that this history has for their own lived lives . . .” (Totten, 2001, p. 2).

Conversely, “with the proliferation of materials there is much that is being produced, disseminated, and taught that is a-historical, inaccurate and pedagogically unsound” (Totten, 2001, p. 2). It is incumbent upon teachers of these two thousand courses, and anyone else who dares to teach about the Holocaust, to first take stock of what is going to be taught, how it is going to be taught, and why. If students read information that is inaccurate, they will most likely accept that to be truth. Then when they are presented with different information that conflicts with their already established schema, even if that new information is “correct”, or more historically accurate, they may have a crisis of the mind.

Many issues of the Holocaust are under debate in academic circles. One of those is the actual origin of the Nazi party. The Nazi regime is most often associated with fascism, though it can also be equated with totalitarianism. In totalitarianism, “it is not a fundamental ideological motivation, but rather the will for total domination over individuals and groups that drives the totalitarian system to oppress its victims and to choose them accordingly. When control requires it, the destruction of this or that group is decided upon, indifferently. The enemy to be annihilated becomes a functional element within the system of total domination – in order to terrorize a

whole population or to galvanize its energy, any one group, then another, may be chosen in a more or less arbitrary way” (Friedlander, 1984, p. 13-14). A problem occurs when trying to assign this title to the Nazi actions however. In totalitarianism, according to Hannah Arendt (1958), the deeper one penetrates into the center of totalitarianism, the emptier it becomes. There is no strong belief in ideology; the ideology is merely a means of control that may be changed as necessary. “The Nazi system does not correspond to this model as far as the role of anti-Semitic ideology was concerned” (Friedlander, 1984, p. 15).

Clearly, there was a very strongly held Anti-Semitic belief in the Nazi party. They carried out one of the greatest cases of institutional genocide ever with great intentionality. In the following quote, one of the leaders of the Nazi party makes it clear that their beliefs were deep seated, strongly held and not at all arbitrary. “Most of you know what it means when 100 corpses are lying side by side, when 500 lie there or 1,000. Having borne that and nevertheless – some exceptional human weakness aside – having remained decent has hardened us . . . . All in all, we may say that we have accomplished the most difficult task out of love for our people. And we have not sustained any damage to our inner self, our soul and our character” (Himmler, as quoted in Friedlander, 1989, p. 63). The last sentence is chilling. How can one claim to have sustained no damage to one’s soul after carrying out mass genocide unless one believed at the deepest core of oneself that the actions were morally justified?

If the Nazi regime were totalitarian in nature, the target wouldn’t have necessarily had to be the Jews. They could have just as easily picked another

minority group, such as Marxists, gays, or Gypsies (all of whom were targeted, but not to the same extreme as Jewish persecution). From the guards and foot soldiers that treated the Jews with such inhuman brutality, all the way up to Hitler himself, there seems to be no question of a united and strongly held belief system that they, and the world at large, would be better off when the entire Jewish population was exterminated. “A recent publication of all the early texts of Hitler, up to *Mein Kampf*, allows a better evaluation of the relative importance of anti-Judaism and anti-Marxism. References to the Jews are approximately three times more numerous than those related to Bolshevism, Communism, or Marxism. This brings us back to the obvious difference between National Socialism and other types of fascism: In Nazism, anti-Semitism occupies a central and particular place. And in fact the Jews, not the Marxists, were the target of both Hitler’s first, and last, ideological statements” (Friedlander, 1984, p. 8-9). The Nazis were methodical in their persecution of the Jews, and it started well before there were corpses lying side by side.

Print was a favorite tool of oppression in Nazi Germany. For the Nazis, print was used as a method of inflicting mistreatment. Streets were flooded with signs that told of the degradation of the Jewish people. The Germans put up signs on the ghetto walls reading in German and in Polish, “Warning! The Area Beyond This Wall Is Infected with Typhus!” Big signs were posted at the pools saying “No Jews or Dogs Allowed.” Signs were placed in store windows that read “The Jews Are Our Misfortune” and “Don’t Buy from Jews”. School children read books like *The*

*Poisonous Mushroom* and *How to Tell a Jew* (Hiemer, n.d.) which paint Jews as the destroyers of the modern world. There were even separate yellow benches that were marked “For Jews Only.” Each of these is an example of how powerful the written word can be. If someone took the time to write it down, it *must* be true. Print, in this case, was a weapon used to beat its victims down (Bachrach, 1994; Ellis, n. d; Matas, 1993).

“[The Holocaust] occurred because individuals, organizations, and governments made choices that not only legalized discrimination, but also allowed prejudice, hatred and ultimately mass murder to occur” (The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2001, p. 1). To those people in a place of power within the Holocaust Memorial Museum, those who are largely responsible for driving the education of teachers on the subject, one of the most important lessons of the Holocaust is that choices have consequences. Even the choice not to choose a side or a point of view is a choice to support through inaction those who are making the decisions. It is incumbent upon educators to impress upon their students the importance of wise decision-making. Never is this point more clearly shown than by the often quoted Martin Niemoller:

*First they came for the Communists, but I was not a Communist – so I said nothing. Then they came for the Social Democrats, but I was not a Social Democrat – so I did nothing. Then came the trade unionist, but I was not a trade unionist. And then they came for the Jews, but I was not a Jew – so I did little. Then when they came for me, there was no one left who could stand up for me (cited in Novick, 1999, p. 221).*

Print can also be used as a catharsis. For the survivor, the act of getting their thoughts out and organized on paper may be crucial to their mental well-being. In addition, their words become part of the public domain upon which all others may draw. There are those who object to use of the Holocaust in literature regardless of who does the writing. To render the Holocaust experience to a work of literature, to express it through written language, “necessarily imports some meaning to it, which it arguably does not warrant. In this manner, the representation of the Holocaust becomes intolerably offensive to both the survivors and post-Holocaust cultural sensibility alike” (Richardson, 2005, p. 3). And yet the survivors continue to testify, novels continue to be written, and films continue to be made.

Another case against Holocaust literature is that it imparts validity to the Nazi way of thinking. Perhaps the most well-known edict in reference to Holocaust writing comes from Theodor Adorno’s statement that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (1982, p.34). This quote is often used, and is taken out of context in many places. I believe Adorno is saying that to carry on making art and living life in the shadow of the regime that created Auschwitz without being changed is to condone that regime. More than a statement against poetry, this is an indictment against an unchanged life. (In a lesser known publication, Adorno later says that “[p]erennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living . . .” (Adorno, 1973, 362). Adorno (1997) also notes that, “When even genocide becomes cultural property in committed literature, it

becomes easier to continue complying with the culture that gave rise to the murder” (p.252-253). Anna Richardson (2005) shared Adorno’s thoughts when she asked, “How then does one presume to represent something as extreme as the Holocaust, when in theory one cannot do so without in some way validating the culture that produced it?” (p. 1). These statements represent an opinion that would discourage writing and reading of survivor memoirs, as well as Holocaust fiction. That would be a travesty, as these narrative forms are what spur many people on to learn more and to keep the memory alive.

Without these first-hand accounts there would be no record of what happened. Without the literary representations, it would be quite difficult to connect, grasp, and understand what different people experienced. Each individual’s experience was personal and different. Each point of view dramatically changes the recounting of what happened. Only by assimilating and processing as many of these experiences and points of view as possible does it become possible for the “outsider” to gain an even somewhat complete picture of the “truth”. Adorno’s concern about validating the culture that created the travesty ignores that the Jewish culture was also an important part of the Holocaust. I do not believe that Adorno or Richardson would suggest that they should not be validated. Additionally, it would be most closed minded to say that the German society as a whole during that time should be discounted. The Holocaust was a horrific period in human history, no question. But by ignoring the societal environment that surrounded it we fail to gain what should be learned, and I fear similar crimes against humanity may be repeated.

“The Holocaust, it seems, has secured a place in American education” (Kronendorfer, 1995, p. 40), and it found its way into that place through literature by the likes of Art Spiegelman’s graphic novels *Maus* (1973) , Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (1972) and Primo Levi’s *Rewriting the Holocaust* (2006) and *If Not Now, When* (2000). By reading literature about the Holocaust, whether survivor accounts, S. S. memoirs, factual texts, poetry, or fiction, this generation is able to better understand the enormity of the events. Some object to survivor accounts because they say that no one person’s account is accurate. “Any representation of the Holocaust in literature or art can never adequately convey the reality of a lived experience; it will always be bound to convey a representation of that experience particular to the situation in which it (the representation) was produced” (Richardson, 2005, p. 2). Well of course it is. How could one person’s retelling do anything but retell her own story? Those limitations do not delegitimize that individual’s account.

Richardson and others like her claim that representation is tainted by memory and perspective, and therefore leaves out a great amount. While that is certainly true, “both fiction and autobiography are potentially valuable as sources of historical insight, knowledge, and understanding . . . . [B]y personalizing important events in the past, these literary forms can help bring the past to life” (Short, 1997, p.188). Without personal accounts, no one can know anything about what occurred, because no one else was there. In that case, the secrets of the Holocaust would die with the fallen and be forgotten.

Print can also be used as a tool of healing and catharsis. Print reveals who we are as a culture. We are products of our culture. We are who and what we are due to

the influences in our lives. We can be either concerned with the past and its influence on who we as a society have become, or we can be narcissistic – able only to focus on our present and its impact on us personally (Lasch, 1979). In order to focus on others, educators should turn to Holocaust Literature, narratives and fiction in particular, to help readers connect with the dark past of humanity.

Narratives which are directed toward children are especially poignant due to their simplicity. Books such as *Friedrich*, (Richter, 1987) *Devil's Arithmetic* (Yolen, 1990) and *Jacob's Rescue* (Drucker, Halperin, 1993) – each of which is discussed in great detail in chapter 4 – are marvelous examples of how a narrative can become real. All three of these books takes the reader along a journey – one through the streets of Germany, one to a concentration camp, and one through war savaged Poland. They invite the reader to vicariously experience what the characters are going through. The readers are able to identify with and deeply care for the characters, all the while being educated about the facts of that corner of the Holocaust. A reader will walk away with a better understanding of what happened during this dark time of human history, and though it may not be possible for anyone to ever answer the “why” questions surrounding the Holocaust, narratives such as these will, at the very least, get readers asking the questions. They begin to question, not because they are now full of knowledge, but because they are touched by what they have read.

Our young people should be touched by what they read. “What would it mean for one to be ‘touched’ by the testament of another? To be touched by the memories of others is. . . when one is moved, where one begins to feel a range of possible

psychic states in response to another's story: sorrow, shock, elation, rage. There is obviously some form of human connection referenced here" (Simon, 2004, p.188). It is that human connection that gives print, especially in narrative form, its awesome power. If one can read a compelling account of a tragic time in a person's life, even if that person is fictitious, without being touched, I would wonder about that reader's ability to feel sympathy or connect with other humans at all.

### **Reading Curriculum Theory**

Curriculum Theory is a vast field of study that includes many different areas. Work done in Curriculum Theory could come from the perspective of race text (Berlowitz, 1984; Hicks, 1981; McCarthy, 1988; McLaren & Dantley, 1990; Wexler, 1987), gender text (Butler, 1990; Grumet, 1988; Lather, 1987; Leach 1990; Taubman, 1982; Tyack & Hanset, 1990), political text (Apple, 1979; Giroux, 1981 ; Goodman, 1988 ; Ellsworth, 1984; Freire,1987 ; Simon, 1992;), phenomenological text (Aoki, 1977; Huebner, 1966; Hunsberger, 1985; Langeveld, 1983; Smith, 1988), poststructuralist text (Daignault, 1989; Doll, 1990; McLaren, 1994) and auto/biographical text (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Daignault, 1992; Grumet, 19988; Pinar, 2008; Taubman, 1992). And this just scratches the surface. The beauty of curriculum theory is that one is free to follow one's passions within the field. If you are drawn to pop culture, then intellectual work within the field of curriculum theory allows you to follow those pursuits. The life blood of curriculum theory, and that to which it always returns, is how all of these subjects and more are impacting,

effecting, and being affected by school and education. My work is about reading and thought formation, but it comes back to its roots by focusing on how these things come into play in the classroom.

William Pinar (2008), one of the pioneers of the field, defines curriculum theory as “the interdisciplinary study of educational experience” (2). Further definition is offered by Dennis Sumara (2006) when he writes, “What distinguishes curriculum studies from other disciplines is its explicit interest in analyzing the relationships among language, culture, learning, and teaching” (14). Curriculum theory differs from traditional ways of thinking about school and teaching because it focuses on “what one teaches, rather than on how. Of course, how one teaches remains a major preoccupation of curriculum theorists, but not in terms of devising a “technology” of “what works”, not as a form of social engineering designed to produce predictable effects . . . .” (Pinar, 2012, 30). Rather, it is about how the teacher reaches her students where they are and takes them where they need to be. Curriculum theory is about education. And what is more fundamental to education than reading?

Reading, at its most basic level, is about making meaning from the text. That meaning cannot be built in isolation. For Grumet (1988), reading is “strung between the poles of our actual situation, crowded as it is without intentions, assumptions, and positions, and the possibilities that texts point to” (455). Meaning is found when the textual influences are juxtaposed with the reader’s actual situation. “The meaning of a text is the possible and actual ground of thought and action; it is what the reader makes out of what she finds when she reads. Meaning in this sense is not *in* the text”

(Pinar et al., 1996, 436). Meaning is not found in the text alone, it is found in the transaction between the reader and the text. According to Eagleton, “All literary texts are woven out of other texts, not in the conventional sense that they bear the traces of “influence” but in the more radical sense that every word, phrase or segment is a reworking of other writings which precede or surround the individual work. . . .All literature is intertextual” (1983, quoted in Grumet, 1988, 467-468). For Eagleton, Grumet, and Pinar, reading works of print and creating meaning therein are a highly influential and highly influenced processes.

Hunsberger (1992) speaks of entering the world of the text. He credits the text with creating a real place into which the reader may travel via reading the printed words on the page. “Reading gives us an opportunity to experience time in various ways, to start difficult but significant thinking, to glimpse not-time, and to stretch our imaginative limits” (Hunsberger, 1992, 91). When one is taken within the world to the text time stands still or slows or flies by. It is within these realms that we are able to engage thoughts that may not have come from our own understanding or personal lived experiences. This free reading can cause a disruption in one’s perception of the world as well as the meaning of the text.

Reading in an educational setting can be disruptive as well. It calls into action the imagination, and that can disrupt the silent giving and receiving of knowledge that often takes place in a school setting. Sumara (1996) writes that imagination requires ruptures, “in order to illuminate what is silenced” (128). Pinar (2008) elaborates on this when he says that “Curriculum theory is a complex, sometimes cacophonous chorus, the sound of silence breaking” (1). This theme of rupture and silence is also

found in the writings of Mary Doll (2006). “This idea of rupturing so as to illuminate a silence is highly provocative for educators, the root of education being to lead out that which lies within and of curriculum being to let course that which flows within” (Doll, 2006, 110). As Mary Doll eloquently states, education should not be a simple passing of knowledge from the knowledgeable other (teacher) to the less sophisticated recipient (student). A good education will bring forth that which is resting in silence just beneath the surface for students to examine and explain.

The theme of silence is also repeated in work surrounding The Holocaust. Marla Morris (2009) writes about silence that has haunted her Jewish family. No discussion of The Holocaust is allowed within her family at all. With a subject as remarkable and deplorable as this, being unable to discuss it causes a festering silence that is nearly palpable. “It is the profound silence, both educative and familial, that has marked me. The silence has called me toward the other, toward the memory of the other, and toward the other of memory” (2).

Curriculum theory and reading and discussing Holocaust prose offers a way to break the silence. “Curricularists can approach the black sun of Auschwitz in spite of the limits of understanding. If we refuse the call of remembering this event all together because of the ineffableness of Auschwitz, we lapse back into silence. Silence is not the place to which I wish to return. Silence kills” (Morris, 2009, 5). Through curriculum studies, that silence can be ruptured and conversation is able to flow.

## CHAPTER 3

### How to Read:

#### Rational and Design

*The books that help you most are those which make you think the most. The hardest way of learning is that of easy reading; but a great book that comes from a great thinker is a ship of thought, deep freighted with truth and beauty.*

*- Theodore Parker*

#### **Rationale**

Let me begin this section by making sure my intentions are set forth. This dissertation is not about the Holocaust. Allow me to be very clear about this. Although Holocaust studies are discussed in Curriculum Theory circles, and I did draw upon that body of work, this dissertation makes no attempt to contribute to that conversation.

Rather, this dissertation is about reading, how we read, and how that reading impacts the way we think. It is about how reading affects the formation of ourselves; of what we think, of who we are and why. It examines the forces that impact the formation of those ideas. This dissertation is about the power of the written word. It is set in a school, so it speaks to educators about our responsibilities when choosing texts for our students to read. It can be used to combat the notion that “teaching has been concerned with how to get teachers to do what others (usually administrators) want them to do” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slatterly, Taubman, 1996, p. 745). It can be used

to enlighten teachers to the methods of control being used on them, and that they exert over their students, but it is not about teaching.

This dissertation is about print, specifically students' reading of that print, and the ideas that follow. In contrast to “[t]raditional educational interests in students [which] seems limited to their performance on examinations,” (Pinar et al., 1996, p.782) this research wants to understand students' thoughts. I want the students to express their ideas and then to locate the situatedness of those ideas by using literature circles. Once one has discovered the context from which his ideas have come, only then can the validity of those ideas be investigated. The term *students* is not limited to those pupils enrolled in a formal educational setting. Every literate human being becomes a student every time she opens her mind to the power of the written word.

This dissertation contributes to Curriculum Theory's conversations about being literate, as well as educator and student responsibilities, but it goes far beyond (Bartlett and Holland, 2002; Barton, 1994; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Baynham, 1995, Collins, 1995; Heath, 1983; Street, 2000; Street 2003). Street (2003) speaks of literacy as being “social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (p. 78), while Heath (1982) defines a literary event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interaction and their interpretative processes” (p. 93). Sumara (2006) places interpretation of experiences in the center of Curriculum Theory. “In the last several decades, work in curriculum theory (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995), cultural studies (Grossberg, Nelson & Trichler, 1992) and interpretive research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) has revealed how discursive practices shape experiences and how they

influence interpretations of experience” ( 86). Interaction and interpretative processes are at the cornerstone of this dissertation, as is experiential influence on interpretation

Along with interpretation of the reading, this dissertation focuses largely on the process of reading and thinking about that reading. When writing about her college level literature classes, Mary Doll (2009) finds it “[s]trange” that the students “frequently comment, “While it was only a story, I learned a tremendous amount”. Of course they learned; sadly, of course, they discounted that learning” (Doll, 2009, viii). Can students learn from reading “just a story”? I agree with Ms. Doll. Of course they can! “[T]ogether with curriculum theorists, I insist that the engagement with fiction . . . can be a learning experience of the first order – not because students hunt down symbols or identify themes, not because they check boxes on multiple choice tests, and not because they echo the professor’s beliefs . . . . Rather, out of the very chimney corner from which the humanities huddle, fiction disturbs the status quo” (Doll, 2009, vii). Curriculum Theorists believe that reading has worth not for what it can produce, but for what it is. I can think of no better place for this study than in the conversations of curriculum theory.

This study also speaks about the power of print in all forms. It can transverse pedagogical boundaries because all areas of study employ the power of print. Every discourse in every field of study relies upon the printed word to share its ideas and to combat those opposed to them. This dissertation looks at how those ideas are internalized, and whether or not they should be.

This study is qualitative. I used discussion, journal writing, and the students’ own statements to discern the children’s attitude shifts. They were subtle at times,

and had to be excavated, but they were discernible. To some, this could be seen as a drawback. There are not hard and fast numbers and statistics that can show that the students' attitudes were shifted x stanine points by this particular book. However, numbers are hard and constant, and attitudes are not. Young people's minds are pliable, malleable. I was trying to avoid influencing their attitudes with my research, but rather let the changes happen with as little interference from me as possible. If they perceived this as school with tests containing right and wrong answers rather than a group that hung out to discuss books, they would have behaved differently. I wanted their true responses, not their "school" responses.

## **Design**

I choose to follow the examples set forth by Louise Rosenblatt (1938) in her Reader Response Theory and to draw from Vygotsky on thought development and the social structure of learning (Smagorinsky, 2007), as well as follow the example of literature groups by Janice Almasi (1995). Rosenblatt (2001) sets forth two different mental sets that one may use when reading: efferent and aesthetic. The efferent mental set seeks the building up of meaning, or gathering of knowledge, and is best used with expository texts. Aesthetic reading seeks a story. It focuses on the feel of the narrative, the rhyme and rhythm, and the emotions sparked while reading. It is aesthetic reading that has the capacity to impact and shape readers (Berger, 1996; Connell, 1996; Cox & Many, 1992; Davis & Womack, 2002; Reuter, 2007; Rosenblatt, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1998; Rosenblatt, 1985; Rosenblatt, 1978; Rosenblatt,

1938; Spiegel, 1998; Sobulis & Winkler, 2004). It is through this emotional connection that print is given its power.

Most often, schools spend great amounts of time teaching students to read efferently to the detriment of aesthetics. When students are always reading with an artificial purpose – to find the main idea or the symbolism or to take an Accelerated Reader test (a computer comprehension program that awards the students with points for each test passed), they lack the aesthetic quality that makes reading fun. “It is this which is fundamentally wrong about the current approach to teaching literacy in schools . . . in the whole of the official documentation devoted to advising teachers in [literacy] the verb ‘enjoy’ does not appear once. And it is now becoming apparent even to those responsible for inventing these policies that, as any professional could have told them at the outset, they have missed the central point of a literary education” (Kelly, 2009, p. 73). One must enjoy what he is reading in order to have a transaction with it.

If one is simply sifting through a piece of literature searching for information as one would sift through an instruction manual, then true reading of that literature is not happening. In order to “read” the literature, the reader must comprehend the meaning of the text. “The reader response paradigm highlights the influence of the personal and social contexts of reading on how readers construct meaning from texts” (Reuter, 2007, p.1747). Meaning construction is the key corner stone of reading. “Rosenblatt’s transactional view of literacy highlights the dynamic interplay between reader, text, and context in the construction of meaning” (Perencevich, 2004, 2). Studies of literacy show that reading for pleasure is in decline in the United States,

and even more so for young adults and children, while “entertainment [is] the strongest motive in web searches. . . . 18 of the top 20 web sites among college students are entertainment related” (Reuter, 2007, p. 1746). People like to be entertained, and therefore need time to read for entertainment purposes.

“Sometimes, of course, readers adopt an inappropriate attitude – for example, reading a political article aesthetically when they should be efferently paying attention to facts. And many people, alas, read the texts of stories and poems efferently” (Rosenblatt, 2001, p. 269). Readers need to know how to distinguish between the mental sets and be able to determine which set is most appropriate for each individual reading event. Currently, students are not given enough opportunities to read aesthetically. Schools’ current focus on testing above all else is exacerbating this problem. Our children are no longer taught how to read for pleasure. All reading is being reduced to the utilitarian. They don’t get a chance to read just for the sheer joy of reading. There is always an ulterior motive.

“Children are not allowed to dream, they are not allowed to be creative, they are not allowed to engage in any sort of phantasy life, whether unconscious or conscious. Daydreams are simply not permitted in the world of high-stakes testing” (Morris, 2001, p. 142). As a result, children are either reading a passage to gather information so they can answer the questions correctly, or in those rare moments when they actually pick a book of their own accord to read, they make their choice so that they can take an AR test. Our students are being forced to read novels efferently, and as this becomes more pervasive, they will likely be unable and unwilling to do it

any other way. I'm afraid that in the coming years, we will find that we have managed to raise a generation that hates to read, and what a travesty that will be.

So we are faced with the challenge of helping students remember that they did once like to read and bringing them back to that place. How should we begin? Perhaps we should start by remembering that each individual person approaches a text from a different place. "Important though the text is, a story or poem does not come into being simply because the text contains a narrative or the lines indicate rhythm and rhyme" (Rosenblatt, 2001, p.268). The text is dead, waiting for the breath of life, until the reader grants it. Building meaning from the text is the reader's job, and that meaning may be different each time a text is read. "The same person never reads the same book twice" (Scholes, 1989, p. 19). We are different people each time we read a piece, because the reading changes us. "There is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work. . . . The novel exists, after all, only in interactions with specific minds" (Rosenblatt, 1938, p. 32). If our students are never taught how to interact with novels aesthetically, those novels will not exist, for it is not the print on the page nor is it the author that imparts knowledge unto the reader. Texts are brought into being when the reader imparts life by reading them.

There is a danger here of which educators and readers alike must be wary. It is not entirely within the power of the reader alone to create meaning. The print itself also has a lot of impact on the making of meaning. One must be careful to preserve the author's original intent and the integrity of the work when reading. Rosenblatt (1982) uses the word "transaction" (p. 268) because it requires input from both reader and text.

The author's words are the instrument the reader uses to create meaning. Preserving the author's intent as much as possible is crucial (Rosenblatt, 1982). Paul Valery (as cited in Scholes, 1989) states that "there is no true meaning to a text – no author's authority. Whatever he may have wanted to say, he has written what he has written" (p. 54), and it is up to the reader to use that text to create his own meaning. This is an extreme interpretation that is more in line with the New Critics. This does not mean, however, that the reader has the right to rape the text and use it for a completely contrary meaning. Rosenblatt believes that the author does have the right to his or her own intended meaning, and the reader should acknowledge that intent when forming her own ideas about the text. All the while remembering that both are important. (Rosenblatt, 1982)

Manguel (1996) addresses the issue of author's intent when he says, "for the longest time, [I] attributed purposes to the books I read, expecting, for instance, that Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* would preach to me because it was, I was told, a religious allegory – as if I were able to listen to what was taking place in the author's mind at the moment of creation, and to gain proof that the author was indeed speaking the truth. Experience and a degree of common sense have not yet completely cured me of this superstitious vice" (p. 14). We must try the impossible and attempt to know the authors intent, all the while knowing that it can never be known for sure.

These truths bring to mind the many literature classes in which we read the short story *Hills Like White Elephants* by Ernest Hemingway (1927). The first time around most all of us were shocked to hear the teacher's interpretation (thanks to her teacher's edition) that it was about a pregnant woman on her way to have an abortion.

That thought had never entered our high school minds, but suddenly there in front of us we saw the symbolism to support “her” (the teacher’s) ideas. I remember mentioning the beaded curtain that the woman strokes as a symbol of the path to another way still being open. There was not a shut door but a beaded curtain. My teacher smiled politely, and told me no, those represented the rosary. She was doing her best to uphold the author’s intent, as interpreted by the teachers she had had in her literature classes, and of course the ever present teacher’s edition - even though she could not have possibly known what Hemmingway truly wanted those beads to represent. In the words of Vygotsky (1962), “[a]bsolute correctness is achieved only in mathematics” (221). Why was her interpretation more valid than mine?

Ideally, that English teacher would have stopped for a moment to try to figure out where my ideas were coming from. How had I reached the conclusions I had reached? By what process did I come to that interpretation? If she had taken the time to fish these things out, we may have been able to have a more open and enlightening exchange. “Any attempt to make learning literacy easy by offering only parts of the whole experience is almost certain to violate the meaningfulness of normal written language” (Money, 1988; quoted in Kelly, 2009, p. 78). Discussion should have been an important part of the literature lesson in order to respect the whole experience.

This is where we turn to Vygotsky. “As I read Vygotsky, his emphasis is more on understanding how people learn to think than on judging the kinds of thinking that people develop” (Smagorinsky, 2007, p. 63). Vygotsky spends a great deal of time on the context of people’s thinking. He is largely focused on how

people's surroundings influence what and how they think, and in turn how their thinking influences their surroundings (Smagorinsky, 2007).

For Vygotsky, the social was very important. Vygotsky's theories embrace the importance of social interaction in developing cognition (Vygotsky, 1978), as "he believed strongly that community plays a central role in the process of 'making meaning'" (McLeod, 2007, 1). Individual development is crucially intertwined within social and cultural context. An individual does not develop in a vacuum, and therefore all manner of outside forces act upon her cognitive development.

According to Vygotsky (1978), a large quantity of childhood learning is the result of a social interaction with a skillful mentor or tutor; one that is able to model the desired behaviors and provide verbal instructions. Vygotsky refers to this as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. "The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher) then internalizes the information, using it to guide or regulate their own performance" (McLeod, 2007, 3). Shaffer (1996) describes one such social interaction as a child receiving her first jigsaw puzzle. Her first attempts are not successful, until her father, acting as the tutor, steps in to assist her in developing useful problem solving strategies. After repeated attempts with guidance, the scaffolding is slowly removed and the child is better able to stand on her own.

The more she was exposed to this process and the vocabulary involved with it, the more familiar it became and the more comfortable and competent she became. She began to build a connection between her father's words and her experiences. This same kind of connection occurs in language development. When writing about

the development of word meaning, Vygotsky (1962) states that “[a] connection originates, changes, and grows in the course of the evolution of thinking and speech” (211). The more relational information a person has with regard to a certain word or concept, the more that person is able to construct a deeper and more complex meaning for that word or concept. “Word meanings are dynamic rather than static formations” (Vygotsky, 1962, 217). As word meaning changes, so does one’s thought relationship with that word.

If word meanings are so fluid, then print meanings must be equally fluid. Print means different things to each individual reader. One of the most effective ways to discover what print means to you is by discussing it. “Engaging with literacy is always a social act even from the outset” (Street, 2003, p. 78). In traditional classrooms, teachers assume the role of leader while students assume the role of respondent, and as such, “students become concerned with their performance during the discussion” (Almasi and Gambrell, 1994, p.3). In such environments, there is no meaning making or textual/reader transaction occurring. The meaning of the text is not seen as fluid, but rather as a fixed idea that the teacher must impart. Interactive reading groups attempt to venture away from such teacher-led activities and into an environment in which the students are able to draw their own conclusions and make their own meanings for themselves. As an interactive reading group dives into a piece of literature and differing perspectives are exposed, a new interpretation of the text may be the result. (Almasi, 1995; Almasi, 1994, Fish, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1938; Rosenblatt, 1978).

This study established literature circles by following the guidelines set forth by Almasi (1995). These literature circles took place at school, but after school was finished for the day. It required students and parents to agree to stay after school on their own time. This “extra-curricular” activity could have been viewed by some as a waste of time. Indeed, some parents asked me what reading skills we would be working on during the group. I had to make it clear to the parents and children that I would not be “teaching” reading at all. We would be reading and talking without any formal instruction going on. This was difficult for some people to understand. Some of these parents could not understand that reading had any purpose other than utility. They asked questions such as “Would they take AR tests?” “What strategies would we employ?” “Will this make my kid a better reader?” The answer to that last one was a hardy, “I don’t know! But hopefully it will help him enjoy it.” I would venture to say that those parents who could only focus on utility were most likely illiterate – not meaning that they are unable to read; rather that they chose not to read for pleasure.

For many, extracurricular activities are unrelated to school activities and therefore are not seen as useful. Kelly (2009), when discussing extracurricular activities, states that this dichotomy is “difficult to discern. For activities of this kind are usually regarded as having as much educational validity and point as any of the formal arrangements of the school. Indeed, some would even argue that in certain cases they have more point than many such arrangements” (p. 12). The students who chose to participate, and their parents, must have come to the conclusion that literature circles were a useful way to spend one afternoon a week.

According to Almasi (1995), literature circles should be split into three different time frames. The first five to ten minutes should be set aside for teacher review of procedural information including rules of engagement and proper behavioral expectations as established by the children. The children are also allowed an opportunity to offer hints for how to have a successful discussion time. For Almasi (1995, p. 320), some hints may include:

- \* *Look in your journal for ideas.*
- \* *Tell about your likes and dislikes.*
- \* *Ask a question you had about the story.*
- \* *If you didn't understand something, ask about it.*
- \* *Comment on things others say.*
- \* *Compare characters.*
- \* *Compare the story to things in your life.*
- \* *Talk about and challenge the author's style of writing.*
- \* *Talk about reasons why the author wrote the story.*
- \* *Say whether you agree or disagree with someone's comment and tell why.*
- \* *Check the story to back up your ideas.*

This time may also be used as a time to review points brought up in previous discussion.

The middle section is the largest and is devoted to the discussions themselves. The students are in charge of the discussion; the teacher's involvement is that of an "informed participant" (Almasi, 1995, p. 320). In this capacity, the teacher is able to assist the children when there is confusion or to provide some prompts or questions to

elicit further discussion when the discussion stalls or goes wildly off track. “Thus, the teacher [is] able to cue appropriate opportunities for using interpretive strategies and [is] also able to function as a coach to monitor group process and scaffold desired discussion behaviors until students [can] assume responsibility for monitoring their own group process and use interpretive strategies flexibly (Almasi, 1995, p. 320).

Following the discussion portion comes a five to ten minute debriefing in which the students are asked to reflect on their discussion, behavior and participation. In contrast to those teacher-led experiences in which “[i]dentifying sources of comprehension failure and making appropriate repairs often becomes the focus of post-reading discussions of literature . . .”(Almasi and Gambrell, 1994, p.3), this is a chance for students to point out discussion topics that they found of particular interest that day or to pose questions for their group mates to ponder for the next group discussion. They are given a chance to share example of either positive or negative activities exhibited in that day’s discussion. They are also given a chance to revisit their rules of engagement and decorum and add, revise or edit as they see fit. By following these procedures, the group should be able to flesh out their ideas and develop what they believe the text means.

Making one’s own meaning while trying to holding true to the author’s intent does not mean that the book cannot call to mind other things that are unrelated to the text, in fact it is wonderful if it does. This is one of the hallmarks of good literature. But a skilled reader must be cautious not to let those “other” ideas replace the original intent of the work (Almasi, 1995; Barnitz, Gipe, & Richards, 1999; Gliner, Goldman, & Hubert, 1983; Smith, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1938).

Pamela Smith (1993) drives this point home quite well when she says, “As long as a piece of literature maintains its meaning as I understand the author’s intent, I feel I cannot go wrong”(p. 71). This is where we must pay homage to the New Critics for their insistence on textual purity. “For when literary cultural and textual critics ignore the New Critics, they misconstrue their own genesis and identity, forgetting that the New Critics were the first professional theorists, the first humanists to make theory into a recognized disciplinary activity” (Bauerlien, 2007, p. B7). It was because of the ideas of the New Critics that Rosenblatt and her contemporaries were able to formulate their ideas.

Each reader brings with him experiences, interests, ideas, problems, worries and attitudes, all of which concern and preoccupy him. “If literature is enjoyable or if it touches upon some of those preoccupations, then students have a reason to read” (Probst, 1988, p. 3). When a person is able to establish his own reason to read, the reading is much more memorable and enjoyable. Only when the work is memorable and enjoyable is it able to affect the reader. However, this too can create a problem. The more memorable a work is the more it affects you. This is not inherently a problem, but if the reader is unaware of the power the literature is exerting over her, then it can become so. And so we are back to our research question. How does print affect those who read it? Are people’s ideas being shaped by the narratives they read? Do people realize the extent to which print, narratives in particular, has over them?

## **Methodology**

In order to answer those questions, the students participated in an after school book club. It was run in small group literature circles in which the students had autonomy to lead their discussions on their own. The students in each group read the same piece of literature, keeping journals while reading, and then discussed the book. “Close reading only comes into its own in live discussion among participants intent on seeking together an attentive response” (Marshall, 2002, p. 27). I, as the researcher, tried to limit my contact with the groups so as to avoid becoming the defacto leader of the literature circles.

Before the discussions began the students were given a list of words with which to do word association. Their associations were then taken and analyzed for positive, negative, or neutral responses. These responses were used as the starting point for each student. If their responses contained more negative language (words such as bad, evil, mean, scary, disturbing, wrong) then those terms were considered to have a negative connotation for that child. If their responses contained more positive language (neat, like, good guys, nice, kind, etc.) those terms were considered to have a positive connotation for that child. If their responses contained language from neither end of the spectrum, rather employing the oft used phrase “I don’t know” or unemotional associations such as pets or food, those terms were considered to have a neutral connotation for that child.

The same coding was used to evaluate attitudinal shifts. These shifts would become evident in their journal writing, their taped conversations which were listened

to at a later time away from the children, researcher observations, outside conversations apart from the literature circles, and their final writings at the conclusion of the study. While the students did not participate in formal interviews away from their peers, they were questioned both by me and by their peers about why they said and believed certain things. They were asked to clarify comments that seemed ambiguous, and to explain their reasoning when attitude shifts seemed present, as well as when they were conspicuously lacking. These responses were coded along the same lines for negative, neutral and positive language.

The true indication of how the children thought was not necessarily in the words they chose to use, but in the spirit and meaning with which they used them. For example, the term “persecuted” when used as an exclamation in regards to Nazi treatment of the Jews could be construed negatively. But the same word can also hold a more sympathetic tone when discussing the victims. The tone of the conversation held a large amount of sway when deciding if the comments were positive or negative.

Further, in order to discover if a shift in thought process took place, I looked for connections both intertextually and worldly. If the children had taken the “facts” of their reading to heart and began to express these ideas as if they were their own, then that served as evidence that the students had assimilated the author’s ideas and now claimed them as their own. When people make connections from one text to another, stating that, for example, one culture is like another because of what they read in the prose, they are granting a strong validity to the print and claiming it to be

fact. These sorts of statements of “truth” will be viewed as support for the supposition that print changed the way in which these children think.

## CHAPTER 4

Now that we're reading . . .

Presentation of research

*I have often wondered about two things: First, why high-school kids almost invariably hate the books they are assigned to read by their English teachers, and second, why English teachers almost invariably hate the books their students read in their spare time.*

- *Stephen King*

We began reading groups in the fall of 2010. An invitation was extended to all fifth graders in the elementary school at which I teach. Of the approximately 100 fifth graders, twelve were willing to stay after school to discuss books; a great feat considering we were going up against football, basketball, and soccer! Those twelve children split eight girls and four boys. They were a mixture of socioeconomic classes, family education, family dynamics, and reading abilities. Most of them were there voluntarily, though a few did later confess that their parents had forced them to come in hopes that they would get better at reading. Although there wasn't much racial diversity (11 Caucasian, 1 African American), that was to be expected as there is very little racial diversity in the school as a whole. I was excited to see such an eclectic group and couldn't wait to get started.

Dominic was one of the most boisterous members of the group. He always had an opinion about everything, and was not at all hesitant to share it. The other kids seemed rather put off by his “know it all” attitude, and would try to tune him out or overpower him by talking louder than he was. But Dominic was not one to be pushed around. He defended every stance he took by saying that he had read it in a book. Once he said that, the opposition usually faltered. What arguments could be waged against the all-powerful argument of having seen it in print?

Arthur was a very intelligent boy. He was in the Gifted and Talented program at school and a self-proclaimed lover of books. He wanted to read all of each book before we returned the following week. He had to be reminded that other children did not have as much free time to devote to reading, and we had to be fair to the other members of the group when deciding where to stop reading. He was also kind; and though he knew he was smarter than the average fifth grader, he did not feel the need to flaunt it or make others feel subordinate to him. He often faded into the background of the discussions until asked a direct question, at which time he usually made interesting and insightful comments.

James did not want to be at Reading Club. He was forced to attend by his mother in hopes that it would spur him along in his reading ability. He was very resistant at the beginning, but quickly became a very active and excited member of the group.

Jorge was another boy who was forced to come. In one discussion group, when he forgot the tape was recording their conversations, he confessed to his group-mates “I hate reading. My mother makes me come here.” He was a large and very

good natured kid, and although he took some ribbing from the other, more intellectual members of the group, he never let it show that it bothered him.

Tasha, an immature fifth grader, seemed to be there of her own accord – at least she never said anything to make me think otherwise. She was not very willing to work with the group, however. On more than one occasion she stormed out of the room when she couldn't get her way in the book selection or where they would stop reading. Once, near the beginning of our sessions, the group banished her and James to the hallway in order for them to read what they were supposed to have read the week before. The group gave them the admonition, "If you're not going to read, don't come." Interestingly, Tasha was the most emphatic about keeping Book Club going when we had the option to conclude. When questioned about why she was here if she wasn't going to do the reading, she replied with tears in her eyes, "I LOVE Book Club! I just don't like **this** book!"

Lindsay, the queen of intertextual connections, loved to tell stories and had one for every incident that was mentioned either in the stories or by another member of the group. These stories had usually happened to her or someone in her family, but occasionally they were from TV. She was very opinionated and expected those in her group to listen to every word she had to say. There were some heated exchanges between her and Dominic, who, although they did not get along, were quite alike.

Ken was very quiet. She was characterized by her mother as a "weak reader," but her mother wanted her to find a group that would encourage her to try to read more. Her mother encouraged her to join, but the choice was hers. By the end, Ken

was beginning to ask and answer questions on her own. She eventually began to feel accepted and safe, so she began to open up.

Kerri was our sole member of color. She was, in the words of her mother, “a strong willed black girl” who came from a family of means, but did not flaunt it. She really enjoyed reading and always came to the group packed with questions about what had happened in their weekly readings and why.

Jo was another very quiet girl. When she spoke it was with such a soft voice that the entire room would get silent in an effort to hear what she had to say. She had a hard time learning to read in the lower grades and was in one of the lower reading groups in the fifth grade, but she seemed to do well with the books we chose. She always had her reading done and was able to ask and answer questions.

Kay was a teacher’s child, and the only member of the group that I had previously taught. She loved to read when I had her as a first grader, and I was glad to see that she had not lost that love. A very polite girl, she tried to be respectful of those in her group, but when she found someone’s comment or question outlandish, she just couldn’t help but tell them so.

Holly’s mother also worked at the school. She was a sweet girl who was very willing to do what was asked of her. She was well liked by the members of the group and seemed to enjoy the readings. She willingly participated in the discussions when they were flowing nicely, and when they got off track or a bit rowdy, she would pull out her book and read until things had settled down again.

Sue, another young lady, was best friends with Kay. They decided to come together, and they seemed to enjoy themselves while they were there. Sue always had

her books read on time, and although not at all pushy with her opinions, she was always ready to share them.

When the group started, we were only supposed to meet until Thanksgiving. But when the time came to end, the children were distraught and begged to keep coming. I agreed to keep the Book Club going until Christmas. At that time, the children again begged to continue, so another invitation was extended to all of fifth grade in the spring. At that point, Kay, Holly and Sue had to leave us to take part in other after school activities, and Jeff, Sarah and Stan came in.

Jeff was another bright, nice, well-mannered kid who seemed to enjoy reading and to whom it came naturally. He had some definite opinions of his own, but he was not willing to fight with the louder members of the group to make them heard.

Sarah was also in the Gifted and Talented program. She, unlike Arthur, felt the need to share that with everyone. She would often boast about what adult novel she was reading, and she always read the entire book in the first week, regardless of where the group had decided to stop. She also liked to make herself feel superior by making the other members of the group look foolish. On more than one occasion, she would ridicule Jorge for his less sophisticated approach.

Stan was very quiet and stand-offish. He was friends with Jeff, and I believe joined only because his friend had. Throughout our meetings, he would only echo what Jeff has previously said, or add a “Yeah” or “me too” to someone else’s comments. Once when pinned down to share his own thoughts, he began to cry and excused himself from the group.

At our first meeting, I introduced myself and told the children why we were there. We were going to read and discuss books. As a group, they would be able to choose which books they wanted to read, how far they would go in a week, and what they would discuss. In order for the children to be free to form their own opinions and express their own thoughts, I had to assure them that this was not school as they were used to it. One of the first things Jorge said was, “Is this for a grade?” Followed very quickly by James asking “Will you tell [my teacher] what we say in here?” I informed them that this was going to be fun. It was not “school” and was not for a grade. I assured them what they said was between them and me, and if they didn’t want me to, I would not share their conversations with anyone. They did know that what they said was going to help me with my intellectual work, or “college stuff” as they called it. We spent a few minutes that first day going over their part in the study and their rights as participants. At that point they seemed convinced that they were in charge of how the group went; I was simply there to help.

Before we began our reading tasks, we first had to establish our ground rules. Since this group belonged to the children, I allowed them to set those rules. The rules at the first group were, “Take turns and listen”, “Speak up, don’t be scared” and “You don’t have to agree”. (The last one was my favorite.) I told the kids that they could revise, edit or add to these rules whenever the group saw fit. Later in the process, as the children started to see things in the group that they felt needed to change, they amended these rules to include: “Hush when it isn’t your turn”, “You have to have an opinion on something” and “Read the book or don’t come”.

Then I passed out journals and asked the kids to do some free association with the words “German,” “Jew,” and “Nazi”. As a whole, the children had very little background knowledge on the subject. Their associations to the word German brought responses that were largely neutral, such as the two-word comment from Holly, “German sausage,” and Lindsey’s “It makes me think of a dog.” Perhaps the most factually inaccurate comment came from Jo, who said “German – Irish people/ stage dancing and rainbow with a pot of gold at the end.” While Jo may have needed to brush up on her geography, she did at least have a concept that “German” was related to a different part of the world with different traditions.

Kerri commented “I want to learn German,” and Tasha said that German meant, “People from another country.” Kay had one of the more knowledgeable answers. She wrote, “German: I know this is a country. What I think of when I hear it: German accent.” These initial comments contained a bit of realization that the term German had to do with a place and a people group different than their own. The comments were largely neutral; they did not show a bias either positively or negatively toward the word German. There was only one comment that could be construed as positive. That was when Jo said “I don’t know, but it sounds weird and cool,” and even that is only positive if you consider that in the minds of many youngsters, “weird” is synonymous with different or unusual, and to them that is a good thing.

The only negative comment came from Arthur, who had a lot to say on the subject. “German – a nation – a person who was born in Germany – a language - Nazi – Jews – Nazi death camps – Hitler – World War I and II – Hitler and his wife

poisoning themselves and their dog.” The negativity in this comment is slight, and is open to interpretation. Some could claim that he was merely reciting facts and not casting judgment. What I found most telling is that German was the first term I introduced. I had not already told them what we would be reading or in any way mentioned any of the other terms. I simply asked them to write what the word German meant to them, including what images it conjured in their minds, and this is where Arthur’s mind went of its own accord. He quickly went to the darkest part of German history – likely the only part he knows – and ended with what, to a fifth grader is unthinkable – the killing of the family pet.

Their associations for the word Jew were almost entirely neutral, with one slightly positive comment from James, which made reference to Jews being like Jesus. Some of them had an idea that it was a religion, but most of them simply wrote “I don’t know”. Arthur again seemed to know quite a bit. His association for the word Jew was, “A type of person - a religion - Nazi death camps – Hitler - World War I or II - Germany taking over most of Europe – were being persecuted.”

The term Nazi induced largely neutral responses as well, with only two negative comments. Their neutral responses included Sue’s comment “German,” and Kay’s “type of person”, as well as Holly’s “German army soldier.” The negative responses were Tasha’s “crazy” and Dominic’s “Hitler- an army- very bad - arm bands - death camps – a World War – Germans taking over most of Europe.”

I was excited. They did not have much background knowledge, and their exposure to the matter was very limited. They, perhaps, would not have preconceived biases on the subject matter, and would therefore be even more open to the influence

of the power of print. I would be able to distinguish great schematic shifts due to the influence of the text – or so I thought. And so we began. The children split themselves into three groups. They were presented with three book choices and allowed to choose which book they wanted to read first. As each group finished a book, they would switch until each group had read and discussed all three books,

One group read *Fredrich* by Hans Peter Richter (1987). *Friedrich* is set in Germany during World War II. It is narrated by an anonymous Arian boy who lives next to and is best friends with a young Jewish boy named Friedrich Schneider. This book is about the relationship between the two boys as their country unravels around them, as well as a masterful portrayal of the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany. It does a wonderful job of illustrating the differences between the two boy's lives, even though they live in the same place at the same time. At the beginning of this story, Friedrich's father has a good job and his family lives comfortably. Friedrich's friend, who narrates the story, is poor. His father is unemployed.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, Germany was still enveloped in the financial difficulties that resulted from WWI. Hitler offered the German people someone to blame for their problems – the Jews. He told the people of Germany that they were entitled to greatness, and the Jews were holding them back; the largely anti-Semitic populous was more than willing to accept this assertion. The narrator's family was in the minority, because they did not share this disdain for the Jewish people. They never seemed to harbor any ill will toward Friedrich's family, even though the Schneiders lived a financially more stable life than their own.

The narrator's finds himself in a difficult position. His own family is benefiting from the Nazi regime. Although his father resisted joining the party, eventually he does join. As a result he gets a good job, which even allows the family to go on a vacation- a special treat that hadn't happened in quite a long time. The father is shamed by his acquiesce, and the following lengthy excerpt occurs between the two boys' fathers.

*Guiltily, Father looked at the floor. In a whisper, he told Herr Schneider, "I have joined the party."*

*Equally softly and in a whisper that sounded a little disappointed, Herr Schneider returned, "I know!"*

*Surprised, Father lifted his head.*

*"Your son has told me," Herr Schneider explained. "And," his voice was sad, "I would have guessed it anyway."*

*Father looked at me reproachfully. He puffed at his cigarette. Quietly he went on: "You must understand, Herr Schneider, that I was out of work for a long time. Since Hitler's in power, I have work again – better work than I had ever hoped for. We are doing well."*

*Herr Schneider tried to break in. Soothingly, he said, “You don’t have to apologize; really you don’t”.*

*Father brushed this aside. . . .”I’ve already been offered another good position, and all because I am a member of the Party. Herr Schneider, I have become a member of the NSDAP because I believe it’s of advantage to my family and myself.”*

*Herr Schneider interrupted my father. ‘I understand you very, very well. Perhaps – if I weren’t a Jew – perhaps I would have acted just like you. But I am a Jew.’*

*Father lit another cigarette. “I don’t by any means agree with the party in everything it does and demands. But then, Herr Schneider, doesn’t every party and every leadership have its dark side?”*

*Herr Schneider smiled painfully. “And, unfortunately, I stand in the shadows this time” (Richter, 1987, p. 70-71).*

This conversation highlights the desperation felt by the narrator’s father. He is ashamed of his decision, and though he knows deep down that it is not right, he has done what he feels he must for the benefit of his family. At the end he tries to rationalize it away by saying that all parties have their negatives, and his family is

doing so much better, so maybe what he has done isn't really all that bad. He may not agree with the Party's violence and malice, but he is not actually going to try to stand up against it and become a victim himself.

Herr Schneider understands his decision, but he is not willing to let his neighbor off the hook completely. Later in the conversation, the father asks his friend the question most asked of the victims of the Holocaust. "Why are you and your family still here?" (Richter, 1987, p. 71). Herr Schneider's response touches off another very enlightening exchange between the two men.

*I am German, my wife is German, my son is German, all our relatives are German. What could we do abroad? How would we be received? Do you seriously think they like us Jews better elsewhere? And anyway, it will all quiet down eventually. Now that the year of the Olympics has begun, we're hardly bothered. . . ."*

*"Don't trust the peace Herr Schneider."*

*"There has been prejudice against us for two thousand years. . . . God has given us Jews a task. We must fulfill that task. We have always been persecuted – ever since we were exiled. I have given much thought to this lately. Perhaps we'll manage to put an end to our wandering by not seeking flight any more, by learning to suffer, by staying where we are"* (Richter, 1987, p. 72).

Here we see two very compelling reasons why Friedrich's family, and surely many others, decided not to flee their homeland. They were Germans, and even though the people of their country had turned against them, they still felt as though they had a right to live there in the land that they loved. And, as it was their homeland, it was unfathomable to them that things would eventually get as bad as they did. Surely people would come to their senses now that the country was on the upswing economically. Secondly, there was nowhere to go. Herr Schneider believed that everywhere they went; they would find the same anti-Semitism that his people had endured for thousands of years.

As the Nazi machine gains more and more control of the people, the Jews lose more and more control of their own lives. This book lets you see, through the eyes of the narrator, the decline of Friedrich's family. Friedrich's father is forced to retire from his job in the civil service. Friedrich has to leave the German school and attend a special Jewish school. The movements of Jews are restricted by curfews, they must carry Jewish identification cards, they may not go to the cinema, and they must wear yellow stars on their clothes. Eventually, Friedrich's mother is attacked and killed by a mob in their apartment, and his father is arrested, leaving seventeen year old Friedrich alone to fend for himself.

In the end, Friedrich is forced out of his home by his anti-Semitic landlord. During an air raid, when he was afraid and had nowhere else to turn, Friedrich went to the cellar that the residents of his old apartment building were supposed to use. His former landlord, who was the air raid warden, showed him no mercy, and turned him out into the street during the attack. Once the all clear sounded, the narrator and his

family emerged from the shelter to find absolute devastation. Due to the landlord's cruelty, and other's fear at standing up to him, Friedrich was found dead on the front stoop of their house.

The second group read *Jacob's Rescue* by Malka Drucker and Michael Halperin (1993). *Jacob's Rescue* is a true survivor's story, complete with photographs of the characters later in life. The children were fascinated by this, and it became all the more real when they could see photographic evidence of those involved in the story. As a true story, it is told from a very one-sided perspective. The book makes no attempt to understand the German view point or show that there were differences among the German people. It is told from the view point of a young Jewish boy forced into exile, and the Polish family with which he lived.

This story begins with Jacob as an adult hosting his family's Seder meal. His daughter, Marissa, keeps asking why they have an elderly couple named Alex and Mela visiting them. Once Jacob begins to answer the question, with the exception of the final chapter, the remainder of the story is in flashback. He begins his story before the war came to Warsaw, Poland. Jacob was from a wealthy family who lived in an upscale home in Warsaw. Jacob's mother died giving birth to his youngest brother, David, when Jacob was four years old and his brother Shalom was three years old. Shortly after, "The Nazis had invaded Poland and stolen Jewish homes and businesses, promising the non-Jewish Polish people that once the Jews were gone, the property would be theirs. At that time, the Germans sent all the Poles who were strong enough into work camps to do forced labor. Jews were ordered to move into

ghettos, fenced or walled areas in the city that separated Jews from the rest of the population” (Drucker and Halperin, 1993, p. 6). In this book, all Germans are evil and hard hearted. There is not one German character who is not a fierce Nazi, and the terms German and Nazi are used interchangeably. While the Poles in this novel universally dislike the Nazi’s for conquering their land, there is a range of opinions on how Jews should be dealt with.

Early in the occupation, Jacob’s two younger brothers were sent to live in the country because they were considered too small to keep quiet. His father and grandfather left Poland saying that it was not safe for Jewish men in Poland anymore. However, when Jacob was concerned about being left behind, his father told him not to worry about the Germans because they were “a cultured and sophisticated people only interested in taking men to work in their factories and on their farms. No civilized country would hurt women and children” (Drucker and Halperin, 1993, p. 7). Here we see the echo of Freidrich’s father’s comments about the coming oppression. Most people did not believe things would get as bad as they did, because the treatment of the Jews at the hand of the Nazis was unfathomable.

When Jacob is eight years old, his Aunt Hannah, with whom he now lives in the Warsaw ghetto, takes him to meet his new “uncle”. Alex, his wife Mela, and their children Yurek, age 11, and Mariska, age 8, take on the responsibilities of caring for Jacob and keeping him hidden from the Nazi’s that have taken over their beloved Poland. Jacob is given a new Polish name – Genyek. Although he must be kept hidden because of his dark eyes and dark curly hair, he is required to learn to call the family his own and accept the new Polish name. From the very start of their

relationship, Alex makes Jacob two promises. The first is that although he does not know what will happen, Jacob will always be safe with them. And the second is that even though Alex and his family are Christian, Jacob will always be Jewish. “You’ll be part of my family, but no one will take your religion from you” (Drucker and Halpern, 1993, p. 16).

Alex and Mela accept Jacob right away, and try to put his fears and discomforts at ease. Mariska likes having a new playmate, but gets jealous sometimes when she feels Jacob is getting special treatment. In one case, Jacob is ill from not having enough fresh food and no sunlight, so Alex goes out and gets him a white roll. This is a very special food item that the family used to eat only at Christmas time, and that they had not seen in some time. When she realized that Jacob got to eat it and she did not get one, she began to cry and asked her mother, “‘Why does Genyek get everything?’ Mela hugged Marishka, rocking her back and forth. ‘Because he has lost everything,’ she answered softly. ‘His house, his family, his friends. He can’t even leave this little apartment’” (Drucker and Halpern, 1993, p. 31).

Yurek, on the other hand, makes comments that show he is not entirely sure how he feels about the Jews. In one passage, when Jacob is telling them that the Jews from the ghetto are being rounded up and killed, Yurek counters with “ ‘That’s not what my teacher says. He says that they’re sending Jews away because they caused all the trouble in Poland.’ Mela responded sharply to Yurek. ‘Do you think it’s true? Did the Jews start the war? Did they bomb the city?’” In response to her mother’s questions, Marishka’s quiet response is “No . . . . It’s the Germans”” (Drucker and

Halpern, 1993, p. 19). This interaction is quite interesting for two reasons. One, Marishka responds as though she was the one being reprimanded, which shows that although she said nothing, she may have been thinking a similar thing. Secondly, Yurek is the one to whom the question was addressed, and he does not answer. Perhaps he was ashamed by his mother's comments, but it is more likely that he did not respond because he has not yet decided whom to believe on this topic. On two other occasions, Yurek makes derogatory comments, calling Jacob "Jew boy" (p. 20) and then later saying, "You're not so bad for a Jew" (p. 21).

The book is filled with the hardships that both Jacob and the family face; ranging from the seemingly innocuous problem of Jacob wanting to go play outside but being unable to do so, to the death of their older son, Yurek, at the hands of a Nazi sniper. When Alex had first talked of taking in Jacob, Mela had refused, saying:

*"No. We can't do it. Thousands of children are dying every day. What good would it do?"*

*Alex had replied, "We could save one life."*

*But Mela had protested. "What about our lives and our children's? The Nazis kill entire families if they're caught hiding a Jew."*

*Alex hadn't replied, he'd looked at his wife steadily. Finally she said,*

*"Alright, We'll try it."*

(Drucker and Halpern, 1993, p. 25).

Later, after a visit from a neighbor who had joined the Nazis, Mela said “Alex, I know you love the boy, but I can’t take this. Anyone can report us. Think of Yurek and Marishka! Is it right to do this to your own children?” (p. 25). Yurek listened to his parents’ conversation and then broke in, saying “Papa, two boys in my class this week bragged about telling the Gestapo where a family was hiding a Jew. The soldiers gave the boys chocolate” (Drucker and Halpern, 1993, p. 25).

The family had to move numerous times to escape the suspicions of neighbors and police. Each time they moved to a place in a worse neighborhood than the time before. Finally they ended up living in the basement of a bombed out building without running water. Eventually, the Roslens find out that Shalom, Jacob’s brother, is living in a goat pen on a farm. Alex agrees to take him in, and Mela is furious.

*“It’s hard enough with one Jewish child!”*

*“If they catch us with one, we might as well have two,” Alex said, shrugging his shoulders.*

*Mela burst into tears, “You think this is a joke? It’s not funny!”*

*He nodded sadly and took her in his arms. “I’m afraid, too,” he murmured.*

*“But if we don’t take Shalom, what’s going to happen to him? The people hiding him are too frightened. If someone doesn’t do something, he’ll end up in a camp.”*

*Mela shook her head slowly. “What kind of world is this that hurts children? To save a child we risk our own!” she said with anguish in her voice. “How can I make such a choice? What can I say?” she whispered, closing her eyes, her shoulders drooping.* (Drucker and Halpern, 1993, p. 47).

The family did take in Shalom. Once he got there, Jacob was thrilled to have his brother there to look after. Shalom was filthy and very sick, and sadly did not live long. He dies of Scarlett fever only a few months after joining the family. The Roslens also take in David, Jacob’s youngest brother. He looks more Polish, with blond hair and light eyes, so he is able to go outside. He stays with the Roslens until the war is over and both boys go to live with their father in Palestine.

Throughout the book, the prevailing theme is the oppressive cruelty of the Germans and the destruction of Poland and the Polish way of life at the hands of those Germans. There is absolutely no distinction between the term German and Nazi, with the latter being used only rarely. One would expect a reader of this book to come away with a VERY negative attitude toward the term German, equal to, or perhaps even more negative than to the term Nazi.

Our third novel was *The Devil’s Arithmetic* by Jane Yolan (1990). In this book, the main character is a twelve-year-old girl who is tired of family history. The opening line of the book is, “I’m tired of remembering” (p. 3). She is on her way to her family’s Passover dinner with her Grandpa Will and Aunt Eva. When they arrive at the family dinner, Grandpa Will is screaming at the television and shaking his fists, as across the screen flashed old photos of “Nazi concentration camp victims, corpses

stacked like cordwood and dead-eyed survivors” (Yolen, 1990, p. 8). In his fury, Grandpa Will is gesticulating wildly with his arms, and Hannah once again gets a good look at Grandpa Will’s five digit number tattooed across his left arm.

When Hannah had been younger, she tried to gain favor with Grandpa Will by using a pen to draw her own line of numbers along her left arm. “She thought that it might please Grandpa Will as much as the new baby had. For a moment, he’d started at her uncomprehendingly. Then suddenly he’d grabbed at her, screaming in Yiddish *Malach ha-mavis* [angel of death] over and over, his face gray and horrible” (Yolen, 1990, 9). Hannah had been very upset, and even though the family had tried to explain why it had upset him so, she had never been able to quite forgive him. Hannah asked, “Why does he bother with it? It’s all in the past. There aren’t any concentration camps now. Why bring it up? It’s embarrassing. I don’t want any of my friends to meet him. What if he shouts at them or does something else crazy” (Yolen, 1990, p. 10).

During dinner, Hannah is selected to open the door for the prophet Elijah. What she sees when she opens the door is shocking. Rather than the other side of the hall in her grandparent’s apartment building in New York, she sees a field and a forest beyond. Upon turning around to question her family about this strange event, she finds that her family is gone. She has been transported through time and space to Poland in the year 1942 and has become a person named Chaya. Chaya’s is the only survivor of a mysterious fever which killed her parents and siblings, and she now lives with her Aunt Gitl and Uncle Shmuel. Hannah makes a few feeble attempts to

explain that she is not Chaya, and that she is from the future, but everyone shrugs it off as lingering effects of the fever, and she quickly gives up.

The following day is Shmuel's wedding day. As the procession approaches the village of his fiancé, they see several cars and trucks waiting at the doors of the temple, where the wedding was to be held.

*[A]ll of a sudden, she knew. She knew beyond any doubt where she was. She was not Hannah Stern of New Rochelle, at least not anymore, though she still had Hannah's memories. Those memories, at least might serve as a warning. "Those men down there," she cried out desperately, "they're not wedding guests. They're Nazis. Nazis! Do you understand? They kill people. They killed – kill – will kill Jews. Hundreds of them. Thousands of them. Six million of them! I know. I know. Don't ask me how I know, I just do. We have to turn the wagons around. We have to run!"*

*Reb Boruch shook his head. "There are not six million Jews in all of Poland, my child"*

*"No rabbi, six million in Poland and Germany and Holland and France and..."*

*"My child, such a number." He shook his head and smiled, but the corners of his mouth turned down, instead of up. "And as for running – where would we run to? God is everywhere. There will always be Nazis among us. No, my*

*child, do not tremble before mere men. It is God before whom we must tremble. Only God.*”

Yolen, 1990, p. 63-64

The Nazis take all of the gathering and load them up onto the trucks. They promise that the women and children of the village have already packed their belongings and gone on ahead of them to the resettlement area. They will all be reunited there. As for those people from Gitl and Shmuel’s village, they are promised that all of their needs will be met when they get to their new home. “All will be taken care of,” said the Nazi colonel. . . . “You will want for nothing. . . . When you get to your new homes, anyone who wants to work will be treated humanely. The tailor will sew, the shoemaker will have his last. And you will be happy among your own people, just as we will be happy you have followed the government’s orders”” (Yolen, 1990, p. 69).

The trucks take them to a train station where they are forced to lay down on the ground and stripped of anything they have of value. This is where the pretense of kindness begins to fade. If the Jews do not move quickly enough or ask questions of the Nazis at the train station, they are treated to the butt end of one of the rifles. Then they are loaded onto boxcars. Yolen’s description of the cramped conditions is extremely vivid. She writes of the feel and smell, the lack of air, the palpable fear. The characters trade stories that they have heard about the Nazi’s treatment of the Jews in various areas. Eventually, someone makes a joke and Gitl joins in. Hannah asks how she can joke at a time like this. Gitl responds, “If we do not laugh, we will cry. Crying will only make us hotter and sweatier. We Jews like to joke about death

because what you laugh at and make familiar can no longer frighten you. Besides, Chayaleh, what else is there to do?” (Yolen, 1990, p. 82).

The villagers were kept imprisoned on the train cars for four days, with only one stop for water. On the fourth day, the train stops and the villagers disembark to find themselves at a concentration camp. They are greeted with the sign emblazoned above the entrance ARBEIT MACHT FREI which means “work makes you free.” Here the men are separated from the women and they are lead to the showers. Again, Hannah tries to warn everyone of what is to come, but Gitl convinces her that the hope of something at the other end is far better than the fear of nothing, and after all, what can they do about it now, so she stops trying to share her knowledge of the future.

After they shower, their clothes are gone, and they must all stand around naked and cold while their heads are shaved and they receive their tattoos. At meal time, they are issued their “Every Bowls” (Yolen, 1990, p.108), named so because they are the key to every bite of food and drop of water available. These bowls are the key to life in the camp, and there are no replacements. Hannah meets a girl named Rivka, who teaches her the rules of the camp and tells her how to stay alive. She extols the importance of learning how to read the numbers on their arms. Hers is J18202.

*J because I am – like you – a Jew. The 1 is for me because I am alone. The 8 is for my family because there were eight of us when we lived in our village. And the 2 because that is all that are left now, me and Wolfe, who believes himself to be a 0. But I love him no matter what he is forced to do. And when*

*we are free and this is over we will be 2 again. God will allow it. (Yolen, 1990, p. 113).*

Rivka becomes a great friend and very important to Hannah. They work together cleaning pots, which enables them to get scraps of food that are stuck to the bottom. Through the eyes of Hannah we see camp life as the atrocities become almost mundane. One day, after a young boy named Reuven is “chosen” to be killed, Hannah and Rivka have the following conversations.

*“He is dead” Hannah said the word aloud curiously, as if understanding it for the first time. “Dead”*

*“Do not say that word.”*

*“Monsters!” Hannah said suddenly. “Gitl is right, we are all monsters.”*

*“We are the victims,” Rivka said. “They are the monsters.”*

*“We are all monsters,” Hannah said, “because we are letting it happen . . . “*

*“God is letting it happen,” Rivka said. “But there is a reason. We cannot see it yet. Like the binding of Isaac. My father always said that the universe is a great circle and we – we only see a small piece of the arc. God is no monster, whatever you think now. There is a reason.”*

*Hannah scuffed the ground with her foot. “We should fight,” she said. “We should go down fighting.”*

*Rivka smiled sadly, “What would we fight with?”*

*“With guns.”*

*“We have no guns.”*

*“With knives.”*

*“Where are our knives?”*

*“With – with something.”*

*Rivka put her arm around Hannah’s shoulder. “Come. There is more work to be done.”*

*“Work is not fighting.”*

*... “My mother said, before she ...died ... that it is much harder to live this way and to die this way than to go out shooting. Much harder. Chaya, you*

*are a hero. I am a hero.” Rivka stared for a moment at the sky and the curling smoke. “We are all heroes here”.* Yolen, 1990, p. 141-142

Rivka and her other friends are what keep Hannah as sane as she is able to be in such a place. Eventually, Rivka and two other girls are “chosen”. At the last second and without thought, Hannah grabs the handkerchief off of Rivka’s head and takes her place, telling her, “Run! . . . Run to the midden, run to the barracks, run to the kitchen. The guard is new. He won’t know the difference. One Jew is the same as another to him. Run for your life Rivka. Run for your future. Run. Run. Run. And remember” (Yolen, 1990, p. 159).

As she and the other two girls walk arm in arm into the door of Lilith’s Cave, which is what they call the furnace, Hannah finds herself back at her grandparent’s apartment. Hannah is now able to understand the importance of remembering what has happened to her family and to her people. In fact, she becomes an advocate for remembering because she understands. She understands why her grandfather reacts so strongly when he recalls the camps. She understands how many were lost and what those who survived have to live with. And, upon looking at Aunt Eva’s arm, she understands that before the war, Aunt Eva’s name was Rivka.

The only Germans you meet in *The Devil’s Arithmetic* (Yolen, 1990) are Nazi soldiers who treat the Jewish characters horribly, and then cart them off to the concentration camps. The portrayal of German characters is very one sided and not at all dynamic. In this book, Germans are the bad guys. The cruel irony of the Nazi’s behavior is show repeatedly. One example is that there are not supposed to be any

children in the camp. The guards ignore this rule, with everyone's full knowledge, presumably to avoid an uprising and keep the prisoners willing to work. When the commandant of the camp is coming, everyone begins clicking their tongues, and the children run into the garbage dump to hide. It is obvious by the brightly colored clothes laying scattered on the ground where the children are hiding, and the guards even join in the clicking, thinking it a fun game to watch the children run for their lives. The commandant plays along with the game, ignoring the signs of hiding children and acting as though he has no idea any rules are being broken. If a child is unfortunate enough to not make it into the garbage pile before the commandant gets there to do his "choosing," the child goes into the furnace. It makes me ask why? If the Nazi's wanted to make the world free of Jews, why the games? Why not simply do as they did at the end of the book, and simply send every new shipment directly to the furnace?

Unlike the other two books, *The Devil's Arithmetic* (Yolen, 1990) is not a survivor's tale. It is a work of fiction. The author has a disclaimer at the end of the book in which she states that the characters and the camp "are made up of the bits and pieces of true stories that got brought out by the pitiful handful of survivors" (Yolen, 1990, 168). Although the characters are fictional, the details surrounding them have been critically acclaimed for their accuracy and vividness. It is only fair to point out here that the novel has also received its share of critical detractors as well. It could be said that the "happily ever after" ending of Hannah leaving the camp and going back home just at the moment of truth is unfair to those whom are represented because they were not offered such an escape. I did not find this disturbing. It is, after all, a

children's book, and a work of fantasy no less. It opens with time travel and reminds the reader of this fantastic aspect throughout the book. When a children's book begins with this sort of time travel, it is expected that the character will, at some point, return home with the new knowledge she has gained.

Because of the different ways in which Germans were portrayed in each book, I, as the researcher, had some preconceived ideas about how the children would react to them. What I expected to see was that students who read *Friedrich* (Richter, 1987) would be more forgiving to the Germans because they would be more aware of the plights the Germans were facing themselves, and that those who read *The Devil's Arithmetic*, (Yolen, 1990) and *Jacob's Rescue* (Drucker & Halperin, 1993) would have a far more rigid view of Germans.

Instead, what I found was that the children were remarkably open minded. They were unwilling to assign labels to groups of people based on the characters in the stories as I had presupposed they would. Rather, they made comments like this one by Dominic, who read *The Devil's Arithmetic* (Yolen, 1990). "There are no real good guys or bad guys in this. To us, the Nazi's seem like the bad guys because they see things differently than we do. To them, we were the bad guys. It all depends on how you look at it." After this statement there was a quiet chorus of murmured agreement. The children were unwilling to be definitive in their assessments of an entire group of people. One child, Arthur, challenged Dominic.

Arthur had just finished *Friedrich* (Richter, 1987), and was rather angry at the Germans for their treatment of the Jews. This child held the German citizenry to a

higher standard. He felt that they should know better than to treat the Jewish people with such cruelty because they actually knew them. This was not a group of people in a village somewhere else that they invaded and annihilated, but it was their neighbors, their co-workers, and in many cases, their friends. He challenged Dominic by asking “How do you think German can be a good thing when they captured many people, kicked them out of their home, left a Jew out in the bombs – How can that be a good thing?” Dominic countered with, “Everyone is bad in their own way. American soldiers have done that too. Think about it. They don’t like Americans so they are doing it to Americans. Americans tortured Germans too.” (Murmured disagreement from the other kids). “Yes they did! They had special camps for them.” Ignoring for a moment that Dominic had the facts rather convoluted, I asked how he had come by this knowledge. “I watch a lot of shows and read books about it.”

Dominic was fiercely defending his position that what the Germans did to the Jews was justified from their perspective because of what he perceived as equally bad treatment of Germans here in America during the war. The fact that the Nazi and German army was not committing these atrocities against Americans, but rather their own citizens, was not important to Dominic. He had taken the story of torture he acquired from *The Devil’s Arithmetic* (Yolen, 1990), and compiled it as best he could with his existing schema of Nazi’s and torture based on the information he had gained through watching documentaries and reading nonfiction war books. It didn’t matter if it made no sense to the rest of us. It made sense to him, and he was not willing to budge. Even after I tried to clear up some of his factual confusion, he still asserted

that he was right and we could not judge the Nazi's by our standards because they had a different point of view.

The children half-heartedly agreed with Dominic, less, I believe, because they thought his argument held merit, but because they were not sure how to contradict him without looking foolish, even if they didn't really agree with his statements. He tended to be very vocal and dominate the conversations if allowed. In order to try to alleviate this controlling influence, I encouraged the students to write in their journals about their thoughts while reading. Their journal entries on the subject showed a lot of questions. They asked the oft repeated questions, "Why are the Jews being picked on?" "What did they ever do to the Nazis?" and "Why do the Nazi's hate them?" The groups discussed these topics, but they were never able to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

In addition to their questions, many of the children focused on the details of the story in their writing rather than the big picture. In one group, all four girls wrote in their journals that they liked the part of *Friedrich* (Richter, 1987) about the potato pancakes. In this section the narrator and his family were making potato pancakes for dinner, and they allowed Friedrich to take part. Everyone in the family had a specific role, and it was obviously an important family tradition. To allow Friedrich to participate was to say that he held value and was worthy of their family time. It struck a chord with the girls because of the family interaction while making the pancakes and because it was something they had never heard of before. In the conversation that followed, the girls showed that, although they did not entirely understand the situation, it was clear to them that it was special.

Kay - “So what part did you like? I really liked the potato pancakes.”

Jo – “Oh my gosh, I was just going to say that. It was so neat how they made them, and how they all had jobs and stuff.”

Lindsay – “My family does stuff like that. We all cook Christmas cookies together.”

Other’s talked about the weather, like when Kay commented “It sure snows a lot” and when Holly commented on the physical surroundings, “I wonder what it smells like? Bad I bet.” (talking about the ghetto in *Jacob’s Rescue* (Drucker & Halperin, 1993).

Arthur, who read *Friedrich* (Richter, 1987) first, wrote in his journal, “I wonder why there is an amusement park in Germany when there are so many hardships and unemployment?” And later he wrote, “Important! Why did German’s hate Jews?” While faced with characters showing great diversity in their opinions of Jewish people – For example, the narrator and his parents were very sympathetic and kind to Friedrich, while their landlord’s cruelty and refusal to show even an ounce of kindness inadvertently caused Friedrich’s death, Arthur was trying to understand their motivation and their thought processes rather than passing judgments. He also asked, “Why, if the Jews fought for *their* [German’s] country, why were they treating them like this?” I tried to explain that in World War I, the Jews were not fighting for the **German’s** country; they were fighting for their **own** country because they, themselves, were Germans. That was very difficult for him to understand. In his mind there existed a dichotomy between Germans and Jews. Germans were Nazis and Nazis hated Jews, so to him, Jews couldn’t be Germans.

As the discussion continued, I tried to force them to take a strong stance by asking pointed questions like, “Nazi – good guys or bad guys?” There was a resounding choral “bad guys” from the group. When asked the same question about Jews, the answer was a unanimous “good guys”. But when I asked the same question about Germans their answers were less definitive. Some of them said “bad guys”, but they wouldn’t carry these characterizations over into anything beyond the books themselves. When the groups switched books, they had similar reactions. In our group discussion, I followed the tradition of stimulated research to ask the children what had changed for them after finishing the first round of books.

Stimulated research, (Calderhead, 1981; Yinger, 1986; Gass and Mackey, 2000; Vesterinen, Toom, & Patrikainen, 2010; Dewitt and Osborn, 2010) is a research method in which recorded evidence is used to help people remember what they were feeling at the time they made comments. In most stimulated research, participants are shown video evidence of themselves when comments are made. Then, during interviews the researcher questions the participant in an attempt to get the participant to dissect the core reason for their comments. Following the spirit of this method, I asked the children to look back at some of their earlier thoughts in their journals and to comment on whether or not their minds had changed, how their minds had changed, and why. Some of their responses follow:

Arthur - “I knew a lot about them (death camps), but I didn’t know that even being with a Jew you could be sent to a camp.”

Jo - “I didn’t know what a Nazi was, but then I found out that a Nazi is a type of soldier.”

Tasha – “I keep looking at my couch and wondering if I could hide in there if someone came to kill me like Jacob did. And under the sink too. Now everything makes me think about the book. It changed everything.”

Lindsey - “I didn’t know what a Jew and Nazi was, and I thought the Jews were the bad people, but it turned out that the Jews were the really really nice people and the Nazis were the ones killing them and they are real mean.”

When asked why she thought the Jews were the bad guys beforehand, Lindsay shrugged and said, “I don’t know. I guess I just read or heard something that they were mean.” I pursued this further. Her memories were nonspecific. She was unable to recall a person actually saying that Jews were bad, and she was unable to remember ever reading anything about Jews before, she simply had a vague feeling that somewhere along the line she had been given this impression “Maybe by [her] granddad. He doesn’t like a lot of people.” Then, when asked why she had decided that the Nazis were the bad guys, she looked at me like she could not believe I had just asked the question. “Mrs. Lord. Have you *read* these books?” It was clear that her opinion had been shaped by the interactions of the characters in the books we had read. She accepted the characterizations absolutely enough to say that Jews, not Friedrich or Jacob, were the “nice people”

Tasha, who told me from the outset that she only liked to read funny books about school, and who refused to read any of the first two books she was given, got very involved with *Jacob’s Rescue* (Drucker & Halperin, 1993). She told me that she caught herself looking at her couch and wondering if she could hide in there if anyone

ever came to kill her. Her perception of reality was different now. When asked why she thought she was looking at things differently, she said that the book (Jacob's rescue) had "changed everything." She looked at the same things she had seen every day of her life from a shifted perspective due to the effect that the print had on her.

Another child, James, hated to read when he joined us. He was reading books on a second grade level just to try to meet his AR goal because he said that he didn't "like to think when [he was] reading." Like his female counterpart, Tasha, he also refused to finish, or even begin, the first two books that his group chose. After he did not read *The Devil's Arithmetic* (Yolen, 1990) or *Friedrich* (Richter, 1987), he met Jacob. He and Jacob struck up a friendship right away. He never could make it clear what was different about *Jacob's Rescue* (Drucker & Halperin, 1993) or why it touched him so, but he loved the book. He would find me in the halls at school during his lunch period and say things like, "Did you know that Alex had to take Jacob to the doctor?" He would see me in the library and comment, "Can you believe he could never go outside? That is crazy!"

This boy, who had been at the beginning, an unwilling participant who was forced to be there by his mother, had become one of the leaders of the group. In subsequent book choices, he started leading the discussion and arguing passionately about his beliefs. His mother told me that his reading grade had rocketed from barely passing to a high B. While that was not the goal of the study, it was certainly a happy result. The child had found, for the first time in his life, a character in a book with which he could relate, and an outlet to discuss it. And he became a reader as a result of his transaction with the power of print.

The results I was seeing so far were pleasing. The children had accepted the facts of the stories just as if it had come in a textbook or the History Channel. Not one child asked if that was really the way people treated each other. Some did question why things were that way, but never if they were true. It was printed in the book, so it was true. Period. I was seeing evidence of a shift in their definition of Nazi. It had gone from ambiguous “I don’t know” to a definite negative. Their journal entries now showed largely negative attitudes with Dominic still holding out for neutrality. Their attitudes about Jews had moved slightly toward the positive – now showing about half positive and half neutral statements. The term German brought about an even split on positive, negative, and neutral response from the previous almost entirely neutral and largely uninformed comments.

The results were similar after they switched books. In their literature circles, most of the conversations revolved around one or two elements from the story that struck them. One group (Lindsey, Tasha, Jo, Kay and Sue) discussing *The Devil’s Arithmetic* (Yolen, 1990) was fascinated by the train carrying passengers to the death camp. They discussed at length the little girl who had to go to the bathroom in her pants. And the part that they found most disturbing was the fact that the Jews all had to stand naked in front of one another and bump into each other with wet skin. They did begin to make more negative comments in their talk about Nazi’s as a whole after being exposed to repeated books on the subject. Words like “evil,” “mean,” “disturbing” and “scary” began popping up in all three groups with more regularity than at the beginning. I was seeing attitude changes, but something was missing.

Except for Dominic and Arthur, they were lacking passion. There were no strong commitments to what they were saying. In his journal, after completing all three books, Jorge wrote, “[I learned] nothing new, but Nazi’s are very very negative to Americans, Positive to Germans, Negative to me.” It is worth noting that after the completion of Book Club, Jorge and I had a conversation in which he revealed to me that he was now thinking about the German people, and why they didn’t do anything to help the Jews. During the conversation he began to question if something like that could ever happen again, and if he and his family would stand up to do anything about it. Before this encounter, he knew very little and cared even less about the way the German’s treated each other. Now he had internalized the information and was superimposing it onto his own projected life. His thinking had changed its focus. Before when he thought about World War II or The Holocaust, he was focused on the facts as he knew them. Now he was more concerned with the people. His world had been altered because of his interaction with narrative print. This realization came after he was removed from the book club setting and had time to reflect. While in the situation, his journal entries reflect that he was unaware of any change occurring within him.

In another journal entry, Arthur wrote about Germans: “cold, snow, depressions, mostly negative but some (very little) positives. I can see their motives”. When questioned further, he said that reading Friedrich and the discussions about how things were in Germany helped him “understand a little bit better, even though the Nazis were still wrong. Way wrong.”

The children could be easily swayed in any direction on these subjects by just a few words from another child or from me. When I asked them to defend their positions, they had a hard time doing it. And I realized then what the problem was. The problem was me. Since I wasn't seeing the great commitments or great awakenings that I had expected to see, I realized that I needed to have a paradigm shift of my own. The students viewed these books as academic. They were on very unfamiliar topics, and the children had no choice but to trust me for their background knowledge. They knew that they were being observed for research (more than once they would say, "Will you put that in your book?") and therefore they were giving me the school-politically-correct answers. Once, when I asked James a question, he simply stared at me. "There is no right or wrong answer here; I just want to know what you think?" He narrowed his eyes and replied skeptically, "That is what teachers always say, then they are like, "BAM! You're wrong!" It didn't matter that I told them it was their group, they didn't believe me because they had no ownership.

We had to get off of my turf and move into theirs. After Christmas, I extended another invitation to all of fifth grade. A few of the first group left and three more children joined us. (Football season was finished, baseball had not yet started.) So I started over with the new group. I had a more hands off approach. We split into groups and they got to choose the books they would read out of the sets I had available. The only criterion that I imposed was that the group had to reach a consensus on which books they would read and in what order.

Some of them choose *Freedom Crossing* by Margaret Clark (1980). *Freedom Crossing* is about a girl named Laura who had moved to the south to live with her Aunt and Uncle on their Virginia plantation following the death of her mother. Upon her father's remarriage, she moves back up north to her family's home, bringing with her a southern lady's attitude and accent. Shortly after arriving back home, she discovers that her brother and father are part of the Underground Railroad. While her father is on his honeymoon, she and her brother become responsible for a young escaped slave.

Laura must wrestle with her conflicting attitudes. She knows how the slaves were treated on her Uncle's farm, they were kind to the slaves - and she has great difficulty believing the stories she is hearing of cruelty and abuse. She accuses everyone of lying and says that the boy should be given over to the slave catchers because it was very rude of him to leave. After all, he did belong to his master, and his master was probably worried about him. Laura is given a copy of Uncle Tom's Cabin to read, and that makes her begin to question things. Then, after seeing the vicious behavior of the slave catchers and the terror on the boy's face, Laura slowly begins to accept that maybe she did not know the entire story. In the end, Laura is the only person who can lead the young boy to freedom. Though she is terrified, she has been convinced that it is the right thing to do.

Here is where we found our passion. The students were already very familiar with the dynamics found in the book. They know of black and white people. They see these people every day of their lives. When reading the previous stories, there were a lot of basic understanding questions, like, "What is a Jew?" and "What is a

Nazi?” The question “What is a black boy?” simply did not exist. These children did not seem to understand why there was a difference between the ways black and white people were treated in the past, but they did know that a difference existed. In fact, one child (Tasha) made the comment that “back in the old days they were all racist and stuff;” which implies that, in her eyes, things are now quite different.

When the children started discussing this book, it was less forced. They made comments like this one by Ken. “At first they make it kind of boring. But then, like dangerous business. At the end of the chapter you just want to keep on reading and keep on reading!” And another by Tasha. “He got taken to jail. They were all in the kitchen with the door open and I was just like OH gosh! I started shaking or something. It was interesting like you are really there.”

As the conversation progressed, the children reached the part of the story where Laura is given a copy of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the escaped slave boy begins to tell tales of his life on the plantation. His master was hard and cruel, and would surely beat him violently if he was taken back. He states that he would rather die than go back. The children were very moved by this statement. Part of their conversation follows:

James - “I would not die. I would rather be sent back.”

Jorge - “Maybe he would have died then.”

Ken - “They treat slaves like a dog!”

Sarah - “I treat dogs really nicely. I pet them and . . .”

James - “Ok, they treat them like deers. You shoot deers right?”

Sarah - “Ok, they treat them like animals.”

Ken - “Like scumbags”

James - “Like they are the trash.”

Lindsey - “It is like the concentration camps!”

Note the connection here. With the story of Devil’s Arithmetic (Yolen, 1990) fresh in their minds, when talking of treating people badly, concentration camps was a first thought. This is because they accepted Yolen’s portrayal of the past as fact. They had accepted the word of the print that they had read as truth.

A separate group made the observation that this book reminded them of *Jacob’s Rescue* (Drucker & Halperin, 1993). Tasha commented, “Except for Jews it was slaves. Instead of Nazis there were slave catchers.” Stan countered with “The Jews are kind of like slaves.” To which Tasha replied, “Instead of General Sherman they are Nazis.” Factually Tasha didn’t have it equated quite right. It was the slave catchers who were persecuting a people group rather than General Sherman, but these conversations must be read from the correct southern perspective. All of these children are from the south, as are their families. To the best of my knowledge, none of them moved here from elsewhere within their lifetime. So therefore, to a Southern child, General Sherman was clearly an oppressor in the civil war, as much or perhaps more so than the slave owners. So for Tasha to equate General Sherman with the Nazis was a serious indictment.

These statements proved that the students had internalized the information they got from their previous reading, and although they didn’t feel confident enough in their knowledge of the subject to fight for it, they did fully accept what the books told them as absolute truth. In another similar incident, the students were discussing

the cultural differences between our current culture and that of the cultures represented in the Holocaust books we had read. Holly made a comment about a compliment that was given to Friedrich by the narrator's mother, which the boy immediately dismissed with a negative comment. James said that it was like Chinese culture, in which they are not allowed to accept compliments, but rather must degrade themselves lest they be perceived as rude and vain. The student spoke with such certainty and authority that I had to ask how he had come by this knowledge. "It was in a story we read in our reading book." Upon further investigation, I discovered that it was from a passage in their basal reader that was an excerpt from a children's novel about a Chinese family trying to assimilate into American culture. What struck me was that the student did not say that it reminded him of a *story* about a Chinese person; he said it reminded him of Chinese people. The characters that were painted in the fiction piece found in their basal were, to them, an absolute and accurate representation of actual events and people. There was not a shadow of doubt in the child's mind that this was reality.

Another group chose to read *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen (1996). This is a riveting story of a boy, Brian Robeson, a thirteen-year-old from New York City, whose family has recently been torn apart by divorce. He is being sent from his mother's home to his father's in a small aircraft. Brian is very down trodden by the divorce and the "secret" which he bears. One can assume that the secret is that his mother is having an affair, although he never comes out and says it directly. Brian is leaving his mother's home to go spend time with his father in a logging community. The plane is a very small bush style plane that carries only Brian and the pilot.

During the flight, the pilot gives Brian a brief flying lesson, and turns over the controls for a moment. Shortly after that, the pilot suffers a heart attack and dies. Brian is forced to take over the controls and attempt to land the plane, leading to the plane crashing into a lake in the Canadian wilderness where Brian is stranded, alone, for 54 days.

Just before the trip, Brian is given a hatchet as a gift. This is one of the only tools he has to try to keep himself alive while he is stranded. At first, he believes he will be rescued very quickly. He tries eating some berries which make him very sick. Then he discovers a raspberry patch, and within it a bear, which sends him scurrying away. Brian finds a shelter in a rock outcropping. This serves as his home for the entire time he is there.

Brian quickly realizes that he is not going to be rescued right away and that he needs fire if he is to survive. After many failed attempts, he accidentally discovers that scraping his hatchet against the flint rocks create sparks. He also becomes wiser about food and using the resources he has available to him. He catches a fish, finds turtle eggs, and eventually creates a snare that traps a “fool bird”. While he is cleaning the bird in the lake, he happens upon a moose, which attacks him and injures his ribs and shoulder.

As if to add insult to his situation, when Brian is just beginning to feel like he is figuring out how to make a life out here, a tornado comes along and destroys his shelter. Just as Brian is about to give up and fall into despair, he realizes that the storm had stirred up the lake and brought the plane to the surface. Brian knows that there is a survival pack on board, so he builds a raft and retrieves the pack. In the

process he loses the hatchet into the depth of the water, but with much effort he is able to retrieve it.

After his long ordeal, Brian is too tired to examine the contents of the pack that night. In the morning when he rises, he finds a number of useful items, including some freeze dried food that he decides to prepare right away, and an emergency transmitter. He plays with the transmitter for a few moments, but when he is unable to figure out how to make it work, he turns his attention back to the food. Just as he is sitting down to eat, a plane lands on the lake to rescue an astonished Brian.

All of the children seemed to love *Hatchet* (Paulsen, 1996). In fact, before we were finished, every group had chosen to read it. The only other books that all of the children read were the ones I required them to read at the beginning. Some children connected with the book because of the adventure, some because of the humanistic aspect of it. After reading the first few chapters, Jeff made the comment, “It made me sad to know that his parents were going through a divorce because I know how he feels because my parents are getting one. But what’s weird is it doesn’t say where his dad lives.” That sparked a lively debate about where he was and where he was going. Most of the children thought he was on an island and that he had crashed into the ocean. When I asked why they thought that, one child said, “Well, where else are you going to find water and trees?” As it turns out, they had recently read the novel *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O’Dell (1960) in their reading class, and from there were getting their geographical knowledge.

Another topic of great interest was the plane and the pilot. The children were very intrigued by how the pilot died and why Brian was the one who had to try to land the plane. One exchange centered on the pilot's death.

Jo - "I don't get how the pilot was really young and he had a heart attack."

Lindsey - "It sounded weird like he was jumping out of the seat and gasping for air when he was having a heart attack. I never knew a heart attack made you do that. I thought it just made you sick really fast and it made you die."

The children accepted the way he died, jumping out of his seat and gasping, as the proper way to die when one has a heart attack. Notice that Lindsey did not say, "The book is wrong." Rather she said that her ideas about how a heart attack kills were wrong, because clearly the print was the authority.

A second heated exchange occurred when the boys started talking about the plane itself:

James - "I thought it was pretty scary when the pilot died and he [Brian] had to learn to fly even though it said in the beginning that he was in front of all this gear that he didn't know."

Jorge - "I'd say they need a real pilot that knows how to fly."

James - "They did!"

Jorge - "No, not the kid. I meant the kid didn't know how to fly."

Dominic - "There are only 2 seats"

Jorge - "Whenever they took off there were lots of people [on the plane], trust me."

Dominic - “No, there were only 2 people. The pilot and the co-pilot. And he [Brian] was apparently the co-pilot.

Jorge - “He could sit on the floor”

James - “There was no floor.”

Dominic - “There were only 2 seats, period.”

James - “Those air planes can’t even carry cargo. They carry 2 people, that’s it.

Dominic - “It is called a bush plane.”

Jorge - “OK! I don’t think the boy should have been the co-pilot. That’s what I’m saying.”

Later, I questioned the group on how they had become so knowledgeable about bush planes. The child who was emphatically (and correctly) insisting that the plane only contained two people had read a survival book that talked about bush planes and how to survive a crash. The survival book had become fact for his way of looking at the world, and this book supported those facts, thereby solidifying his schemata even further.

In another conversation, James made the comment that he “never really thought Brian would die out there. I mean, come on, if Jacob and his brother can get rescued, of course Brian would. Someone will always come to the rescue if you really need it.” James made a connection between the much-loved book *Jacob’s Rescue* (Drucker & Halperin, 1993) and Brian in *Hatchet* (Paulsen, 1996), and then transferred that connection into reality. He said that someone will always come to the

rescue if you need it, not speaking of a fictitious reality, but of the reality in which he lived and expected to be rescued should the need ever arise.

There were countless examples of the students accepting the text for truth. Most often not in overt ways, like believing that the fictional characters were actual historical figures, but more subtly. They accepted the setting and background details as factual. The scenes were a photograph upon which the fictitious story was painted. In this way, the children fully succumbed to the power of print.

## CHAPTER 5

## Reflections of what we read

*So much of a child's life is lived for others. . . . All the reading I did as a child, behind closed doors, sitting on the bed while the darkness fell around me, was an act of reclamation. This and only this I did for myself. This was the way to make my life my own.*

- Lynn Sharon Schwartz

“What distinguishes curriculum studies from other disciplines is its explicit interest in analyzing the relationships among language, culture, learning, and teaching” (Sumara, 1996, 14). That relationship is exactly what I examined during this dissertation. From examining that relationship, I learned that I am not alone. I was not the sole person who believed that what I was reading was true. It turns out that most all of the kids in the study did also. This is a cultural truth. Most of them accepted the books’ portrayals that the Nazi’s were evil and that the Jews were innocent and unfairly persecuted. This became evident in the student’s journals and conversations. All of them accepted that these atrocities happened exactly as they were laid out in the stories. There was never an instance of questioning the authenticity of the death camps mentioned in *The Devil’s Arithmetic* (Yolen, 1990), or the state of affairs in Germany in *Friedrich* (Richter, 1987), or of the treatment of the Polish and the Jews in *Jacob’s Rescue* (Drucker and Halpern, 1993).

Most of them believed that slave catchers were heartless and all those who helped with the Underground Railroad were benevolent; but all of them accepted without question, after reading *Freedom Crossing* (Clark, 1980), that there were places where escaped slaves could go to get help and end up in Canada. They questioned the parent's logic in giving their son a gift of a hatchet and they debated the geographic location of the plane crash, but there was never a glimmer of doubt that there was such a place where the plane could wreck or that a young boy could live alone in the wilderness for 54 days after finishing *Hatchet* (Paulsen, 1996).

The children were changed by the power of print, and they did not realize it until they were questioned about it. "Whether one is involved in creating gossip, or narrating past experiences, or identifying with literary characters, one is always in the process of inventing a new relationship among what is remembered, what is currently experienced, and what is imagined" (Sumara, 2006, 70). Jorge, the child who wrote in his journal that he had "learned nothing" during reading club, later confessed that he was now thinking about the humanistic impact of the German's lack of action on behalf of the Jews or in opposition to the Nazis. He also transferred that into current situations and wondered if he would have the nerve to stand up for what he thought was right and defend those who were not able to defend themselves. The power of print had caused this boy to become more introspective in a way that many adults never achieve. He wanted to use what he had gained from his print encounter to better himself and his world. He acknowledged that he had been changed. His world had been altered because of his interaction with narrative print.

James began to view the world as a more open place with possibilities that he had not considered before. There was the possibility of persecution and there was a possibility of danger, but there was also the expectation of salvation. Although he may have always had this expectation in his own life, he had not ever put it into words. He had never had an outlet to express this expectation in his life until he read these printed stories.

Tasha, after reading *Jacob's Rescue* (Drucker & Halperin, 1993) and *Freedom Crossing* (Clark, 1980) began to see how people were mistreated in the world. It made her wonder how she would respond if she were the victim of the persecution. Reading the same books, however, made Jorge wonder how he would respond not as the victim, but as a contemporary to the oppressors. Lindsay and Jo changed their expectations of how a heart attack looks. Arthur found anger at the German people. And all of these changes occurred as a result of an encounter with the printed word.

Dominic gave countless examples of total acceptance of things he had read. His moral relativism was, perhaps, the best illustration of how print's power can be used for propaganda. Dominic fiercely advocated his interpretation of what was read. If he saw something printed, it was a hard and fast fact. If the information clashed with his already formed schema, he simply decided that there must be some way they fit together, because what he already "knew" could not possibly be wrong. Using this blind adherence to the written word was a favorite method of the Nazi regime in spreading propaganda – both about the abomination that was the Jews and about the might that was Germany. Through careful use and a precise mixture of truth and

manipulation, Hitler was able to use printed propaganda to convince multiple thousands of people that mass murder was not only ok, but was a glorious thing!

These examples prove that reading does impact what and how we think. “[M]uch of how we think and what we think about is based on insights and associations generated from what we read” (Wolf, 2007, p. 5). The children themselves credit the reading they had done in our group with the changes they now saw within themselves. There was a notable change in a large majority of the participants by the end of the year. These changes were not always in overt ways, but often subtle and without their noticing. The children created “an active response that renders justice to a book by generating more language in its turn . . . even though that language may remain silent or implicit. Such a response testifies that the one who responds has been changed by the reading” (Miller, 2001, 104). Their language with regard to the terms “German” and “Nazi” shifted from nearly entirely neutral to largely negative. Their responses to the term “Jew” shifted from nearly entirely neutral to nearly entirely positive. This was not due to any direct instruction or influence on my behalf. It was because of the impact of the stories found in the narratives.

This type of reading environment was new to most of the children. They were not accustomed to freedom at school. They were used to their teachers telling them what to read, how long they had to read it, and how they would respond – if indeed they had the chance to respond at all. They were used to utility in their school reading; reading to pass a test or meet an AR goal, to write a report or keep the

teacher off their backs. “Though we may be imprisoned in an abusive relationship, a bad marriage in which we have little power, we, and the academic knowledge we teach, can help our children, our students, find their way out” (Pinar, 2009, 51). They did not know that freedom could be found through reading.

Their experiences with schooling had been largely scripted by those in power above them. Their interactions with print happened mostly in conjunction with school, and therefore were viewed through the lens of control. Freedom, intellectual freedom, was a foreign concept. The children did not know that they were allowed to draw their own conclusions based on their own thoughts and observations from their reading. They did not know that by reading they could begin to develop their thoughts and do it without having the guidance of a knowledgeable other. Freedom through reading had eluded them.

Helping them discover that freedom by turning their thought processes to aesthetic thinking was difficult and took time. Even after they had begun to read for pleasure, there were still utilitarian undertones. They were reading the books because they wanted to read them, but also because they wanted to be able to discuss them. They *needed* to complete the reading to avoid ridicule and punishment by their peers at the next meeting. James became “friends” with Jacob, and that led to him opening up to reading. Which, in turn, led to better grades in school, which is a utilitarian use for what began as pleasurable.

It proved to be a laborious process to get them to take the lead since it was such unfamiliar territory. Their wariness became clear through their questions about my motivations, if they would be graded or if the happenings would be reported back

to their teachers. Even the parents seemed uncomfortable with reading just to read. They wanted to turn the group into a study hall or tutoring session rather than a book club. Historically, school has not been a place for aesthetic reading, and the present situation is no different. Most reading events, even those disguised as literature classes, are utilitarian in nature because they are a means to an end; get the grade, reach the AR goal, and prepare for THE test.

This form of utilitarian reading is a driving force for many people, most prevalently found within, though not limited to, the school setting. As our school psychologist is fond of saying, human behavior always serves a purpose. People do not ever do something without a reason. The key is to identify what that reason is. When the subject is reading, the reason can be to function in one's everyday life – whether it be reading directions while traveling, e-mails at work, or text books at school. Utilitarian reading is a cornerstone of our society. This utilitarian reading is crucial and unavoidable, but it can also be limiting. When this is the ONLY reason for interacting with print, then a world of possibilities is being missed.

A different approach to reading, though just as utilitarian, is the desire to learn, to grow, to better one's self. This may be used when a person discovers she has cancer and needs to know what to expect. It may be used by the scholar who is trying to master his area of interest by learning all he can. It may be used by a teacher trying to find new and creative ways in which to deliver her lessons. This type of utilitarian reading is less limiting and more expansive than that previously discussed, but the end result is still the same. These are all instances of utilitarian use of reading to gain

knowledge for the purpose of application. The antithesis of utilitarian reading is to read aesthetically.

When reading is done more aesthetically, learning takes place on its own. Students learn to draw connections between what they know and what they read. They began to make connections intertextually. Intertextuality can occur when a teacher asks students to find ways in which the stories “The Three Little Pigs” and “Little Red Ridinghood” are similar and ways they are different. When book reviews include “some of the dialogue from the reviewed book. People leaving the movie theater after seeing Lord of the Rings comment that the book was better. The movie Pocahontas is criticized by historians for misrepresenting established historical events. In each of these examples, different texts are brought together, related to one another, or connected in some way. This juxtaposition of different texts is called intertextuality” (Dixon & Johnson, nd, 1).

My participants showed their intertextual thinking when their conversations about *Freedom’s Crossing* (Clark, 1980) lead to connections with *Jacob’s Rescue* (Drucker and Halpern, 1993), as well as when they connected *Hatchet* (Paulsen, 1996) to *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (O’Dell, 1960), and James’ connection between *Friedrich* (Richter, 1987) and the book about the Chinese family. There are also traces of it when the children begin to connect the text of the print with the texts of their own lived lives. Intertextuality “introduces many texts inside the texts, and, as such, is another excellent resource for a reading between the lines of one’s life” (Doll, 2009, 66). Making these text-to-text connections shows that, even though we were

“just reading”, the students were learning, and therefore being changed by the power of print.

Through these new experiences, the students learned that reading could be fun. Like freedom, fun was not something that most of the children associated with school. “In today’s schools . . . sharing knowledge and pleasure is not easy and may even be actively discouraged” (Noddings, 2009, 122). These students seemed to believe that “[e]verything a teacher does has to aim at some fact or skill that will appear on a test” (Noddings, 2009, 122). This is a sad commentary on these students’ educational experiences thus far. This is not to say that they had not had any teachers who were fun or who did fun activities, as I’m sure many of them did. And it is not to say that the students didn’t like school. If they didn’t, why in the world would they volunteer to stay after school to, as they originally thought, do more school work?

No, to be sure these students had experienced some fun at school, but the aspect of play seemed to be gone. For most teachers, “play” is what you do when all of the important learning work is done. Or “play” is a foul word for when one is misbehaving, as in the ever popular admonishment that I hear (and use myself) on a daily basis to “stop playing around and finish the work”. Curriculum theorist, Nel Noddings (2003), contends that “[p]lay can contribute directly to learning, especially for elementary school children, and all teachers should be aware of the power of play in learning” (243). Socrates admonishes that we should “not use force in training a child in the studies, but rather play. In that way you can also better discern what each is naturally directed toward” (Bloom, 1968, 216). Noddings and Socrates speak of

the importance of play in a school setting, but it is important beyond the boundaries of education.

Stiegler (2010) takes it a step further by placing play as not only important for learning, but crucial for healthy human development. "What do these children deserve; what do "our" children deserve; what do children deserve, who(so)ever they are? Do they no deserve, at least, to have fathers, grandfathers, and a family...within which they can play, and through doing so learn to respect, that is, to love, and not merely to fear...To play with a child is to take care of the child . . ." (14). Stiegler clearly puts forth the importance of play in context of humanality. Play is and bonding force that children need in order to learn to love, fear and respect. In the absence of play, children may grow up with holes in their psyche. But play is not only limited to children. Schiller (1988) goes so far as to say that "man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a man, and his is only wholly man when he is playing" (80). Schiller would have us believe that to be fully man, or human, we are required to play. Without it, we are stifled and unable to reach our full potential. Play cannot, *must not*, be pushed out the back door of education as the rigors of trying to keep up in a global market become more and more strenuous each year. If we want our children to learn and not simply memorize facts, they must be allowed to play with their new knowledge in order to solidify it as part of themselves.

In our reading groups, play is exactly what we did. We played with words. We played with ideas. We found connections where there hadn't been any before. We found pleasure in what, for some of them, had before been only work. "When something gives us pleasure, we are inclined to study it more carefully . . . the process

of finding out can be fun because one truly wants to learn, and the end result is a deep form of satisfaction” (Noddings, 2003, 243). The students and I shared a deep satisfaction with the learning and self-discovery that was born of our literary play.

While the experience was fun and playful, there were also serious aspects that needed to be considered. With the first novels that were Holocaust based, and later with the issues of slavery and freedom, we were wading into very dangerous territory. I had to be cognizant of the comments and assumptions the children were making. It was necessary that I intervene to dispel factual errors and help the children discover answers to questions that arose during the reading. The topics were too important to handle glibly.

We also had to be careful when handling the issue of author’s intent. I wanted the students to have the freedom to create their own meaning from the text; to build a relationship with it. But I thought that I may have to keep the students from running away with the text and creating a world all their own. On the contrary, especially at the beginning, the students waited for me to give them the answers of what the text meant. Like when James waited for me to do what all teachers do, and drop the “BAM you’re wrong” on him, they wanted to find the “right” answer.

They seemed to “want to say simply that the author put certain words together to create a certain effect in a certain way. But this presupposes something terribly wrong: either that there is only one possible meaning concocted by this possible combination of words or, if this is not the case, that the author knows all the potential or possible meanings of the combination of words and intends either any one of them, some of them, or all of them together” (Mitscherling, DiTommaso, & Nayed, 2004,

108). This is not how transactional reading works. The author had a part to play in forming the meaning by writing the text, and the reader has a part to play by interpreting what is written. The author's intent is indeed valid and needs to be respected, but to believe that the author by nature of being the creator is, in fact, all knowing about the text, is "hermeneutically unsound" (Mitscherling et al., 2004, 108).

As the students became more comfortable with forming their own conclusions, they began to do so in ways that showed maturity and many showed a willingness to change their existing ideas when the text introduced something new, while some found this to be more difficult. They were able to respect the author's intent and draw their own conclusions at the same time. They gave the plot and characters a great deal of thought and consideration when forming their reactions to the print. What they never did consider, not even one child for one moment, was a hesitance to accept at face value the "facts" as they were presented in the novels. They wholly and completely accepted the power of the print to paint in their minds the portrait backdrop for the stories, and these backdrops were unilaterally accepted as actuality.

The next step in this research is to take it further. It would be fascinating to turn this study into a longitudinal study to see how these children are affected by their future reading, and how much they are aware of it. I would also like to see the perimeters of this research expanded in order to make it more generalizable. When this data was gathered, the CCGPS standards that are now in place had not yet taken effect. It would be most intriguing to see if the results were similar with fifth graders that have come up through an educational setting that is more focused on literature

interaction and writing such as we are currently using. Additionally, I would like to see this research taken beyond the realm of elementary school students, into middle or high school literature classes, as well as adult literature circles. People tend to think that they become savvier and less dupable as they age, but I am willing to guess that the results would be similar regardless of the clientele. We are changed by the power that print exerts in our lives, whether we like it or not. The key is not to fight it, but to recognize print's power.

As educators, we have a huge burden to not only educate our children, but also to shape the future. We do not always realize how much importance is granted to the words we speak. Like writing, if a teacher says it, it must be true. Teachers are granted an expert status that should not be abused and must not be forgotten. Now, combine that with the power of print, and we have real potential to shape the minds of these youngsters in our charge. What a daunting responsibility! The texts that teachers assign hold perhaps even more power than others, because they are imbued with the powers granted to print and those granted to teachers. We must choose carefully and responsibly.

Once print's power has been recognized, it can be harnessed. People will continue to believe what they read. I know I do. But at least I am now AWARE that I believe it. I make the choice to accept the truths that are presented to me. Now that I am more aware of the power of print, I find myself more prone to question the authenticity of, not only books, but also newspapers, magazines, and all forms of media. I find myself asking, "Where did he get his information?" or "Why did she choose to take that slant on this story. What is her agenda?" And the most important

question of all, “why do I believe what I believe about this? Where did I get my information?” I believe that I am now a savvier reader, not because of my age or my reading ability, but because I have discovered the elusive power of print. If that awareness is shared with others, perhaps that will give readers a little more power of their own.

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