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Struggling High School Readers' Responses to a Literature-Rich Curriculum

Fran Harrison Stephens

STRUGGLING HIGH SCHOOL READERS' RESPONSES TO A LITERATURE-RICH CURRICULUM

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the College of Graduate Studies of

Georgia Southern University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

in

Curriculum Studies

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by

Fran Harrison Stephens

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To the Graduate College:

This dissertation entitled "Struggling High School Readers' Responses to a Literature-Rich Curriculum" and written by Fran Harrison Stephens is presented to the College of Graduate Studies of Georgia Southern University. I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Curriculum Studies.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation

to my husband and best friend,

Jim Stephens

and to my son,

Michael Stephens.

Thank you for your

patience and encouragement

and love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many kind and generous people have helped me through this process. I thank Dr. Ronnie Sheppard for chairing my dissertation committee, for being organized and supportive, and for guiding me through this process. Special thanks to Dr. Diane Zigo for pushing me through that brick wall when I was trying to formulate a research question, for sharing innumerable resources, and for offering invaluable encouragement and feedback. I also thank Dr. Ming Fang He and Dr. Margaret McLaughlin for their support and encouragement in this project. Dr. Robert Warkentin, too, deserves special thanks for advising me through my program and for leading me to the dissertation stage.

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VITA

Fran Harrison Stephens

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ABSTRACT

STRUGGLING HIGH SCHOOL READERS' RESPONSES TO A LITERATURE-RICH CURRICULUM

AUGUST 2002

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The purpose of this study was to determine how struggling readers in 11th grade Applied Communications classes responded to literary texts that are typically taught to college-prep students. Differentiation of literature for college-prep and tech-prep students began in the early twentieth century; since then, noncollege-bound students have traditionally studied literary texts that have been rewritten on a lower reading level to accommodate struggling readers in these classes. In this research project, I taught 11th grade Applied Communications students the same literature that college-prep students read; using a qualitative research design, I analyzed the impact of this literature on these students. By observing, interviewing, and analyzing the work of six focal students of varying reading abilities, I attempted to answer the research question:

How do struggling readers in 11th grade Applied Communications classes respond to literature that is typically taught to college-prep students?

a. What approaches to teaching such texts are most engaging?

b. What approaches to teaching such texts are least engaging?

c. To which selections of literature do students respond most positively?

d. To which selections of literature do students respond most negatively?

e. What factors influence students' positive and negative responses to literature and literature instruction?

The instructional strategies that were most successful included conducting Paideia discussions, having regular class discussions, reading portions of text silently and then discussing them, watching videos, having their classmates read aloud, using graphic organizers, and making predictions. One instructional strategy that failed to engage the students was listening to an audio tape and following along with the text. Several works that successfully engaged most of the students included Of Mice and Men, A Raisin in the Sun, "Self-Reliance," "A Worn Path," "The Story of an Hour," and the two Scope stories, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "The Fog Horn." Four of the students' least favorite works included "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Huswifery," and "Walden." Three other themes that emerged during the study that impacted student's experiences with literature were teachers' attitudes toward tech-prep students and classes, students' feelings of control and choice in their placement and education in general, and students' attitudes toward workplace literacy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

PROLOGUE

This dissertation coincides with my tenth year of teaching 11th grade English at the same school. When I first began teaching, all students who were not in special education were placed in A-level or B-level courses. A-level was always considered to be college-preparatory, and B-level was for everyone else. Eventually the tracks were renamed college-prep and technical/career-prep, but the reality remains that college-prep classes prepare students for college, and technical/career prep classes are for those who will attend technical school or enter the workforce after high school. Students perceive that college-prep classes are harder and that the students in them are "smarter." Unfortunately, many teachers' attitudes reflect the same beliefs.

Ten years ago when I began, college-prep and tech-prep students studied different literature books; college-prep used Prentice-Hall anthologies, and tech-prep students used Scope anthologies. Although both anthologies contained American literature, the texts were vastly different. The Prentice-Hall anthology contained complete selections and excerpts from a variety of American writers; these works were arranged chronologically from Native American and Puritan to Contemporary literature. The Scope anthologies were also organized chronologically, but the selections were different. Targeting weaker readers, the editors of the Scope anthology revised literature selections to make them more accessible. Many longer works of fiction such as Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage and Mark Twain's Life on the Mississippi were turned into short plays with very simple

vocabulary. These Scope anthologies were considered more appropriate for tech-prep students because many of these students do not read on grade level. It was true that most tech-prep students could read and comprehend the Scope anthology selections; however, the students and teachers often found them to be excruciatingly boring. "This is so boring" and "I hate to read" were the refrains in these tech-prep English classrooms. In the mid 1990s our county adopted the Applied Communications curriculum for noncollege-bound 11th and 12th graders. This curriculum, which was designed to prepare students for technical school or the workplace, included literature study, but it was still Scope literature that we read. In addition, our literature study in the Applied Communications curriculum was centered on workplace issues like teamwork and business communication.

Four years ago English teachers in our county were asked to adopt new textbooks. Teachers at our school decided unanimously to discard the Scope anthologies and not to replace them. Instead, we would adopt the same textbook for use with college-prep and tech-prep students. We chose the Holt, Reinhardt, & Winston series. I eagerly discarded my old Scope anthologies, but the other teachers did not. Everyone else kept one class set of Scope anthologies "just in case." We all discovered that teaching challenging literature to tech-prep students was difficult. By the end of the year, the other teachers had reverted to their old Scope anthologies out of frustration. Most felt that the Scope anthologies were inadequate but better than the more difficult literature, so they looked for ways to supplement the Scope texts.

Our department's solution was to order Scope and Read magazines. These magazines are designed to be high-interest and easy to read. They include articles and

stories about interesting topics such as sports, media stars, and current events. They also purport to contain literature; however, the literature in them is almost always in the format of scripts, and most are about five pages long. Two examples are David Copperfield and The Picture of Dorian Gray, both of which are represented as five-page plays. These magazines also contain artwork that seems more appropriate for elementary students; Read magazine often features caricatures and cartoons on its covers. Unfortunately, Scope anthologies and Scope and Read magazines are still the staples in the tech-prep English classrooms at my school.

Since I had discarded my Scope anthologies when we adopted the new texts, I did not have an easy way out of the difficulties of teaching challenging literature to my tech-prep students. When I received my first edition of Read magazine to use with my tech-prep students, I was so offended by the childish artwork and dearth of literature that I refused to use it. In a sense, I was stuck with the Holt, Reinhardt, & Winston texts, so I began to look for better ways to use them. Because all of the English teachers expressed frustration about our tech-prep students' reading skills, our principal provided us with instructional support. Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) consultant Shelly Smith began to teach us new strategies for making difficult literature more accessible to struggling readers. As I learned more from Shelly, I began to teach more and more difficult literature to my tech-prep students. Last year my tech-prep students read Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and Katherine Ann Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," among other works. Of course, they needed much assistance with Emerson's vocabulary and sentence structures and Porter's stream-of-consciousness techniques, but I felt very positive

about their responses to the literature. Even the weakest readers got excited about Emerson's reflections on conformity and Granny Weatherall's inability to forgive. One student even connected Granny Weatherall to Roger Chillingworth in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. Every year I add more literature to the tech-prep curriculum, and each year I introduce more challenging works. My intuition tells me that this is a positive thing to do for my students, but my intuition could be wrong. Perhaps I am just frustrating them by expecting more from them than they can give. Maybe my judgment is clouded by my own preferences. This research project is an attempt to look systematically at my students' responses to this challenging literature and to answer this question: How do struggling readers in 11th grade Applied Communications classes respond to literary texts that are typically taught to college-prep students?

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this introductory chapter, I will define the terms used in the study and provide a context for the research study. I will present an introduction, provide background for the study, explain the purposes of the study, define the research question, discuss the significance of the study, discuss the limitations of the study, and provide a brief summary of the chapter.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this research, references are made to "rich," "complex," "classic," "critically examined" and "challenging" literature. These terms are used to describe works that are traditionally accepted as part of the literary canon and to more diverse works that are not traditionally a part of the canon. To be considered "rich," "complex," "classic," etc., a work must be presented in its original form, not revised to be more accessible to weaker readers, and it must be considered worthy of study by other teachers and scholars in the field of English education.

Bloom (2000) explains why some works are more enduring and worthy of study than others: they connect people to each other in a common quest. He says:

> We read deeply for varied reasons, most of them familiar: that we cannot know enough people profoundly enough; that we need to know ourselves better; that we require knowledge, not just of self and others, but of the way

> things are. Yet the strongest, most authentic motive for deep reading of the now much-abused traditional canon is the search for a difficult pleasure. (pp. 28-29)

Literature that is worthy of study will satisfy readers' needs to better understand others, the world, and themselves. Echoing these assertions, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) propose standards for literature study in high school. Included in these standards is the ideal that all students "read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience" (Standards, 1996, p. viii). Literary texts that support these goals and aims are considered "rich," "complex," "classic," "critically examined" and "challenging" in the context of this study.

The terms "weak reader" and "struggling reader" refer to students whose ITBS reading scores fall below the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) average of 50. These students, who are usually placed in tech-prep classes, frequently exhibit difficulty comprehending texts. When they are asked to read literature on their own, they complain that they do not understand it, and their vocabularies are often limited.

Occasionally this study makes reference to students "engaging" with literature. By that I mean that students comprehend and respond to a literary text. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) describe three ways that students can engage with a literary work: they connect it to their lives, they connect it to other texts, and they connect it to the world. Whenever a student makes one of these connections, he or she is considered to be engaged with the text.

Context

Literature has been an integral part of English instruction in American schools since Colonial times. In the early schools, The New England Primer was the principal literature text, and it contained "religious catechism, stories of Biblical heroes and heroines, letters from church leaders addressed to children, and advice about persevering in one's studies" (Tchudi, 1991, p. 3). Today, literature in high school English classes is as diverse as the students who read it (Applebee, 1993). Because some students routinely reach high school with elementary-level reading abilities, however, high school English teachers struggle to teach literature to students whose reading scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) fall well below the average. The compromise that many teachers reach is to avoid the more difficult literature and teach either less challenging contemporary works or classics that have been rewritten on a lower reading level. Consequently, many noncollege-bound high school students never experience complex, critically examined literature. Many teachers assume that these students cannot comprehend and respond to literature that is written above their reading level.

Students' ability to read and comprehend literature is one factor that influences the literature they are offered in high school; their socio-economic class is another. Finn (1999) argues that many believe that "our schools offer literacy equally to all comers, but somehow the have-nots refuse to take us up on our offer. They're not smart enough or they're lazy or simply perverse" (p. ix). Finn disagrees with this supposition. Rather, he contends that upper and middle-class students receive "empowering education, which leads to powerful literacy" (p. ix) and that working-

class and poor children receive "domesticating education, which leads to functional literacy" (p. ix). This schism, he argues, is not the result of a conspiracy, but is the result of many social forces at work simultaneously. He explains:

> The status quo is the status quo because people who have the power to make changes are comfortable with the way things are. It takes energy to make changes, and the energy must come from the people who will benefit from the change. But the working class does not get powerful literacy, and powerful literacy is necessary for the struggle. (p. xi)

So the cycle continues—college-prep students receive the traditional literature curriculum, which is rich in complex, critically examined literature, and the tech-prep students are denied access to that literature because their reading skills are not equivalent. And the justification sounds plausible: college-prep students need to read traditional works to be successful in college, but tech-prep students can be successful in technical schools or the workplace without having read The Scarlet Letter or Of Mice and Men. The insidious danger to this kind of rationalization, though, is that it turns the educational process into a simple training ground for what students will face after high school. Is that right? Should high schools simply prepare some kids for college and others for work?

Anyon (1981) conducted a comprehensive study of five elementary schools comprised of different social classes in New Jersey, and her results have informed Finn's (1999) conclusions. Each school in her study represented a predominate social class, from the working class to the executive elite. Anyon spent considerable time in each school examining the curricula, the teachers, and the students, and she

concluded that "there are profound differences in the curriculum-in-use in the sample schools in this study" (pp. 354-55). The working class schools, she contends, emphasized "mechanical behaviors, as opposed to sustained conception" (p. 355). Anyon's study also supports the assertion that working class children most often are placed in technical/career prep tracks rather than college-prep tracks (Anyon, 1981; Rogers & McLean, 1994). The teachers in Anyon's study seem to endorse the idea that working class students do not need to have the same school experiences as their wealthier counterparts because they will not attend college. Ironically, if the teachers were asked if students needed to read classics in order to succeed in college, many would probably respond that college preparation is only a small reason for studying these works. They would probably give many other reasons for studying classic literature: it broadens a student's mind and experiences, it provides a common cultural heritage, and it enables students to think deeply and critically. These are the experiences they are denying working-class, tech-prep students.

Another factor influencing the kind of literature offered to our students, especially our tech-prep students, is the current emphasis on standardized testing (Heath, 1986). Because students must submit to standardized reading tests, teachers feel obligated to prepare them to succeed. Unfortunately, the pressure to prepare students for multiple-choice reading comprehension tests causes many teachers to forfeit authentic literature study. Kohn (2001) distinguishes between students who are actively engaged and superficially engaged. Actively engaged students reread, question, and make connections between what they are reading and what they already know. Superficially engaged students copy answers, guess, and skip hard parts.

Unfortunately, "it turned out that the superficial style was positively correlated with high scores on the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) and the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT)" (p. 348). It is easy to see how pressure from standardized testing might encourage teachers to abandon challenging, authentic literature study and have students reading simple passages and answering multiple-choice recall-type questions. Kohn (2001) concludes, "As a rule, better standardized exam results are more likely to go hand-in-hand with a shallow approach to learning than with deep understanding" (p. 348). So what are teachers to do? Standardized tests are, unfortunately, a permanent part of our educational system. "Accountability" is the current buzzword, and teachers are being made responsible for their students' performance on these tests. Should teachers ignore the tests and the unsound pedagogy they support, or do they have a moral obligation to prepare their students to succeed on them? There are no easy answers to these questions.

Eisner (1998) contends that "the greater the pressure to standardize, the greater the need for the arts, those places where individuality and productive surprise are celebrated" (p. 7). His answer is to fight the standardization through arts. In essence, we should take greater pains to teach literature and the arts to counter the effects of standardized tests. Applebee (1996) agrees that "a curriculum of knowledge-out-of-context may enable students to do well on multiple-choice items. It does not enable them to enter on their own into our vital academic traditions of knowing and doing" (p. 33). Both advocate that teachers resist the temptation to teach to the tests.

Teachers struggle daily with the complex issues surrounding standardized testing and students' socioeconomic status. These issues are often beyond the teacher's control, but they have a significant impact on the students' lives. Most of the tech-prep students in this school would be considered working class by their socio-economic status, and many of these tech-prep students struggle with standardized tests. This study focuses on these tech-prep students and on the literature curriculum they study.

Background of the Study

Currently in Georgia, students who are not in special education must earn either a college-preparatory (college-prep) or technical/career preparatory (tech-prep) diploma in order to graduate from high school. Academic subjects are divided into two tracks: college-prep and tech-prep; the college-prep track is designed to prepare students for college, and the tech-prep track is designed to prepare students for technical school or the workplace. Counselors consider students' career goals, parents' requests, and teachers' recommendations as they assign students to the tracks. Although it is possible for students to change from one track to the other during high school, students usually begin college-prep or tech-prep work in the ninth grade and continue in the same track until graduation.

In English classes, college-prep students typically study a traditional curriculum that follows a specific pattern: world literature by genre in ninth and 10th grades, American literature chronologically in 11th grade, and British literature chronologically in 12th grade. School systems choose various literature textbooks, but almost all of them follow the same pattern (Applebee, 1993). Tech-prep students

sometimes follow the same pattern in their literature studies, but often they study revised versions of the literature; in essence, their literature is rewritten to accommodate lower reading levels; the sentences are shortened and the vocabulary is simplified. Not all school systems use these revised literature texts for their tech-prep classes; some choose the easiest selections of literature in the college-prep texts—those short stories, plays, and essays with simple vocabulary and sentence structures; others relegate literature study to the bottom of the curriculum and focus instead on communication skills in these tech-prep classes.

The Georgia State Department of Education implicitly endorses this unequal treatment of literature in the college-prep and tech-prep tracks. Its Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) is the mandated curriculum for all courses, and it is the basis for the Georgia High School Graduation Tests that students must pass in order to receive diplomas. The QCC contains standards for college-prep and tech-prep English courses, and they are vastly different. College-prep QCC objectives in Reading/Literature for the 11th grade are:

- Recognizes different purposes and methods of writing; identifies a writer's tone and point of view.
- Reads, discusses, and analyzes American literature representing diversity (e.g., gender, ethnicity).
- Writes and speaks critically about literature.
- Applies knowledge of literary terms to works of literature.
- Develops an understanding of the effect of history on American literature (e.g., literary movements and periods).

- Understands major cultural, religious, philosophical, and political influence on the literature of a given period or culture. (Georgia Learning Connections, 2001)

In contrast, the QCC objectives for Reading/Literature in 11th grade Applied Literature and Composition Lab I, which is the curriculum for 11th grade tech-prep courses, are:

- Recognizes different purposes and methods of writing; identifies a writer's point of view and tone.
- Comprehends and responds to a variety of written materials, including poems, short stories, novels, and business/technical items.
- Experiences a variety of nonprint resources as a part of the study of technical and business applications; creates multimedia presentations (e.g., video, audio, visual, computer, power point presentations).
- Judges technical literature on the basis of technical clarity. (Georgia Learning Connections, 2001)

State-approved curricula for these tech-prep courses support inclusion of literature as a corollary to technical communication skills. For example, students may read a selection of American literature and then examine it superficially in the context of the workplace, asking what the literature can teach about life in the world of work. The QCC objectives for college-prep classes mandate that the student analyze the literature more critically, examining its historical, social, and philosophical contexts. Eisner (1998) argues that all students should examine literature for its artistic value because "schools should not be boot camps for learning how to make a living, they

should be places for learning how to make a life" (p. 22). While many may subscribe to Eisner's beliefs in theory, few seem to put them into practice.

Purposes of the Study

Not all English teachers believe that challenging, critically examined literature should be reserved for college-prep students. Some contend that even tech-prep students whose reading comprehension is below grade-level can benefit from the study of difficult literature. English teachers who are drawn to literature study for its richness and complexity can become frustrated with simplified literature texts. In his coda to Fahrenheit 451, Ray Bradbury (1979) describes his dismay at the textbook publishers who rewrite literature to accommodate weak readers. He colorfully explains the effect of their revisions:

> Simplicity itself. Skin, debone, demarrow, scarify, melt, render down and destroy. Every adjective that counted, every verb that moved, every metaphor that weighed more than a mosquito—out! Every simile that would have made a sub-moron's mouth twitch—gone! Any aside that explained the two-bit philosophy of a first-rate writer—lost!
>
> Every story, slenderized, starved, bluepenciled, leeched and bled white, resembled every other story. Twain read like Poe read like Shakespeare read like Dostoevsky read like—in the finale—Edgar Guest. Every word of more than three syllables had been razored. Every image that demanded so much as one instant's attention—shot dead. (Bradbury, 1979, p. 176)

This revised literature is often monotonous and boring for the teachers and students alike. However, many teachers cling to it because their students struggle with more

complex texts. They also implicitly accept the idea that these revised texts are good enough for the tech-prep students who will not attend college.

When literary works are stripped of their complexity and richness, they are often taught in an "informational manner" (Langer, 1992, p. 38). Langer (1992) distinguishes between reading for information and engaging in a literary experience and argues that "the development of students' abilities to engage in literary understanding is a unique contribution that literature education can make" (p. 38). Too often, when students are confronted with only simple literature, they are asked only to retrieve facts, not to make meaning of the text and relate it to their own lives. According to Langer, this kind of literature and literature instruction limit the students' abilities to think. Rosenblatt (1976) agrees that literature study should involve more than information-seeking and recall; through literature students "acquire not so much additional *information* as additional *experience*. . . . Literature provides a *living-through*, not simply *knowledge about*" (p. 38). Providing students with meaningful literature experiences is difficult to do with oversimplified texts.

According to Applebee (1993), teachers generally do have some power to choose the literature that they teach. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of a literature curriculum of rich, complex works on struggling readers in 11th grade tech-prep classes. These tech-prep students will read and study the same literature that college-prep students typically read; because many of the tech-prep students are struggling readers, however, they will receive additional support from the teacher. If the impact of the literature is positive, perhaps teachers of tech-prep classes might consider using more complex literature with these students. Engaging

these students in more stimulating and rich literature might help them to understand the complex world in which they live and how they fit into it.

Another purpose of this study is to evaluate different instructional techniques on students' experiences with literature. What kinds of instructional strategies work best to help struggling readers to comprehend and interact with difficult literature? Which instructional strategies are ineffective or counterproductive? Helping teachers to understand how to make difficult literature more accessible to their weaker readers can benefit all English teachers to better help their tech-prep students.

Research Question

In order to better understand how to help these struggling readers, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

How do struggling readers in 11th grade Applied Communications classes respond to literature that is typically taught to college-prep students?

a. What approaches to teaching such texts are most engaging?

b. What approaches to teaching such texts are least engaging?

c. To which selections of literature do students respond most positively?

d. To which selections of literature do students respond most negatively?

e. What factors influence students' positive and negative responses to literature and literature instruction?

Significance of the Study

Textbook publishers and politicians routinely make decisions about what literature is appropriate for tech-prep students to study. Teachers are presented with an array of simplified literature and communications-based material to teach their

tech-prep students, and state-level officials and committees dictate through QCC's that tech-prep students are to receive less sophisticated literature instruction. The real decision-making power, however, lies with the classroom teacher who can accept or reject others' ideas about what is right for the students. In reality, many teachers work in isolation; department chairs and administrators may conduct periodic evaluations, but usually the focus of these observations is on the "how," not the "what" of teaching. When curriculum guidelines do exist, teachers are often left to decide for themselves whether to follow or ignore them. In my ten years of teaching, no one has ever examined my lesson plans to determine if I am following state-mandated curriculum guides. If it can be shown that teaching traditional, critically examined literature to struggling readers in tech-prep classes is beneficial to the students, then teachers have the power to change their practices. If teachers can be persuaded to reject the idea that tech-prep education is about job preparation, they can offer their tech-prep students the same kind of enriching literature curriculum that the college-prep students receive. Literature study can connect tech-prep students with the world, with new ideas, and with their cultural heritage.

Limitations of the Study

This study has been personally meaningful to me and to my close colleagues. It has helped us to understand our students' responses to challenging literature and to know how to teach our tech-prep students more effectively. The study was limited in scope, however, by focusing on only six students in one school. There is no guarantee that these six students were truly representative of all tech-prep students or that their responses were typical. This study was also limited by its brief duration of only one

semester. Perhaps a longitudinal study throughout these students' high school years would yield different results.

In addition, the students' responses to me might have been influenced by our teacher-student relationship. I typically have good rapport with my students; this could be positive if the relationship encouraged the students' candor and honest reflection, or it could be negative if the students altered their responses to try to please me. McCracken (1988) addresses the issue of familiarity between interviewers and participants:

> Certainly, the investigator must be careful to establish a relationship of substance, and some kind of "connection" with the respondent. But it is possible to go too far and allow the intimacy to obscure or complicate the task at hand. The most obvious danger is that the respondent who is given the terms and objectives of research is not likely to give fully spontaneous and unstudied responses. The respondent may prove overhelpful, and try to "serve up" what he or she thinks is wanted. (pp. 26-27)

With this in mind, I attempted to establish honest and candid relationships with my participants. However, I also worked to maintain an appropriate distance. Another limitation is that my interpretation of the data might also have been biased by my relationship with my students.

Summary

Literature is a significant part of most high school English classes, but for many tech-prep students literature study is difficult and unproductive. Factors that influence literature selection in these classes include the students' reading abilities,

their socio-economic status, and pressures of standardized testing. In Georgia students earn either a college-prep or a tech-prep diploma, and the literature taught in these two tracks is different. Most 11th grade students study American literature, but often those in tech-prep courses read different literature. Sometimes it is revised to make it more accessible to struggling readers, and sometimes it is relegated to the bottom of the curriculum and barely taught at all. The purpose of this study was to determine how struggling readers in 11th grade Applied Communications classes responded to literature that is typically taught to college-prep students. Specifically, I examined which approaches to teaching challenging literature were most and least engaging, to which selections of literature students responded most positively and most negatively, and what factors influenced students' responses to literature and literature instruction. If this study can conclude that struggling readers in tech-prep classes respond positively to challenging literature, then teachers can make more informed choices about which selections of literature they teach and how they teach it. The study was limited in scope because it focused on only six students in one high school and lasted for only one semester. However, it provided valuable information to me as their teacher and to my colleagues who also struggle with tech-prep students who cannot read well.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Since this dissertation deals with students and their interactions with literature in English classes, the literature review will focus on three primary areas. First, it will provide a brief history of literature education in English, describing what is typically taught in high school English classes and what has been taught throughout our country's history, including the rationales supporting various curricula. Second, it will address the various approaches to teaching literature from rote memorization and drill to reader-response theory. Finally, it will provide a chronology of other studies related to high school students and their experiences with literature. I have divided the studies into two groups: those dealing with struggling readers, and those dealing with students' interactions with literature. They exemplify others' attempts to understand and help struggling readers.

A Brief History of Literature Education in English Classes: What Is and Has Been Taught

In Colonial schools, literature instruction was enveloped in the larger framework of language instruction, and the primary text for both was originally The New England Primer (Draper, 1777). A predecessor of both the modern phonics movement and literature instruction, the primer contained lessons in spelling and

syllabication, as well as reading material that was mostly "religious and moralistic" (Tchudi, 1991, p. 3). In these early schools, literature was not isolated as a subject of study unto itself, but was instead seen as a vehicle for spelling and language instruction (Tchudi, 1991; Applebee, 1974). As the nation evolved, so did its textbooks. Following the model of The New England Primer, Noah Webster developed a series of texts in 1783. His series, The First Part of a Grammatical Institute of the English Language, contained within it a volume of readings called An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking (Applebee, 1974). In this volume, Webster moved the content of literature away from the religious toward more secular themes, including patriotism. Other readers emerged during this same time period; some contained moralistic teachings, while others contained poetry and even Shakespeare. Applebee (1974) notes that:

> Nonetheless there was a strong counter-movement toward "content" readers in which reading exercises were subordinated to the study of other subjects. The century produced, among others, The Christian Reader (made up entirely of tracts and hymns) and The Farmer's School-Book, with offerings on "Making and Preserving Cheese," "Raising Calves," and "The Nature of Manure." (p. 4)

These early readers, despite their unusual content, helped to validate literature's role in reading instruction.

The principal reading primer toward the end of the nineteenth century was the McGuffey Reader, which was published in 1836 (Windhover, 1978; Applebee, 1974). Although these readers were not as religious as The New England Primer or as

patriotic as An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking, the McGuffey Reader was still significantly moralistic and nationalistic. This reading series contained graded levels of difficulty and short selections of literature, and it predominated for the next fifty years (Applebee, 1974).

Although these readers dominated literature instruction in the late nineteenth century, not everyone believed that they were appropriate. As early as 1891, concern was expressed about the content and quality of the literature taught. Charles Eliot, then president of Harvard University, called the content of schools' reading textbooks "ineffable trash" (Langer & Allington, 1992, p. 694). Even then, he argued that "classic literary texts in unabridged form were more appropriate materials for reading instruction" (Langer & Allington, 1992, p. 694). According to Langer & Allington (1992), the National Education Association's Committee of Fifteen on Elementary Education in 1895 advocated that after students mastered the basic patterns of reading, they should then study the works of established authors, including Shakespeare, Tennyson, Bryant, Longfellow, Webster, Emerson, Swift, Milton, Wordsworth, and Irving. Similarly, the California Curriculum Study recommended in 1926 that literature should become the curriculum material for reading instruction by grade 5 (Langer & Allington, 1992).

Despite the questionable literary value of these early primers, they did play a significant role in the development of literature as a subject of study in high schools. Another major influence was the development of college entrance examinations that required students to know works such as Shakespeare's As You Like It and The Merchant of Venice, Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities and David Copperfield, and

Eliot's Silas Marner (Tchudi, 1991). Additionally, in 1893, the National Education Association's Report of the Committee of Ten anointed English as the most important subject in high school and prescribed a tripod approach to its curriculum: three equal legs of literature, language, and composition (Tchudi, 1978; Mason, 1978).

In the early twentieth century, literature was secure in the high school English program, but controversy surrounded the content of the literature curriculum. The NEA Committee on College Entrance Requirements dictated through its Uniform Lists exactly which selections of literature high schools would teach. Because students were tested on specific works of literature, high school teachers taught them out of necessity. In 1907 a study by the School Review revealed that in all sixty-seven high schools surveyed, the Uniform Lists were determining curriculum. Applebee (1974) records the ten most popular selections included on the lists:

Shakespeare	Julius Caesar
Shakespeare	Macbeth
Eliot	Silas Marner
Milton	Minor Poems
Shakespeare	The Merchant of Venice
Burke	Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies
Lowell	The Vision of Sir Launfal
Coleridge	The Rime of the Ancient Mariner
Scott	Ivanhoe
Macaulay	Essay on Addison (p. 50)

A second survey found that all seventy of the high schools in its study were using the Uniform Lists to prescribe literature curriculum, and a third during this same time period determined that the Uniform Lists were being turned into courses of study (Applebee, 1974). Applebee contends that the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) was founded in 1911 in part to protest the Uniform Lists. Through the NCTE's concerted efforts, the Committee on College Entrance Requirements began in 1916 to offer two exams, one based on the Uniform Lists, and the other a more comprehensive exam based on no lists at all. Eventually, as students favored the more comprehensive exam, the Uniform Lists were abandoned in 1931. Now high schools were free to choose their own literature curricula because colleges no longer mandated reading lists (Applebee, 1974).

It was during this time that literature anthologies found their way into the English classroom, as well. Applebee (1974) notes that by the end of the 1930s, anthologies were prevalent in the high schools. The economic depression that most school systems faced made anthologies a wise investment. The most successful collection was the Scott, Foresman Literature and Life series, which included the works that had been required on college entrance tests and more contemporary authors, too (Applebee, 1974).

It was during this period of relative freedom when educators began to address the question of what literature to teach to students who were not bound for college. Applebee (1974) notes that it was teachers who suggested the "adaptation of the classic texts to make them more palatable" (p. 89). No one seemed to care that the adapted works bore little resemblance to the originals: "The startling thing in such

bowdlerizations was the great enthusiasm with which they were carried out. . . . Discussions of such radical adaptations were published throughout the twenties and thirties as practical teaching suggestions" (Applebee, 1974, p. 90).

During the next two decades, a shift occurred in the field of English. Burton (1970) notes that in the 1930s and early 1940s, English teachers seemed almost apologetic about teaching literature. Because of the economic depression and World War II, high school curricula on the whole were concerned with practicality. Burton (1970) says:

> Teachers of literature displayed a marked inferiority complex, covertly admitting that literature was not, after all, very important in the school program. . . . Literature did not contribute much to the aims of secondary education as then identified. Writers of textbooks on education assigned to literature a vague place in the esthetic development of the student, or viewed it as a kind of recreational dessert capping the solid nutriment of the really important components of the curriculum. (p. 4)

During this time, literature study was dropped altogether in many junior high schools and subordinated into larger units on family life or modern living in high schools (Burton, 1970).

Throughout the decades, progressive educators argued in favor of an English curriculum that focused on the needs of the developing child (Tchudi, 1991). Their efforts helped to precipitate the move away from phonics instruction and toward a more holistic approach. However, in the 1950s, school in general, and language arts programs in particular, again came under attack. According to Tchudi (1991), Rudolf

Flesch and Hyman Rickover led the attacks, criticizing the move away from phonics instruction. Flesch was especially critical of the popular "Dick and Jane" readers, but Tchudi (1991) contends that he did not understand their pedagogy: "He properly critiqued the banality of texts like 'Dick and Jane' books . . . but he confused the readers with their methodology and failed to understand the pedagogy behind the look-say" (p. 7). These critics' positions were bolstered by the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957, when media focused on the innumerable shortcomings of American schools (Tchudi, 1991). Likewise, literature study did not fare well in the curriculum during this time. According to Tchudi (1991), "approaches to literature were found to be overly academic, focusing on mastery of names, dates, and terminology rather than on the reader's engagement with a text" (p. 7).

Although literature study was rote and mechanical during the 1950s, it was still a prominent part of the English curriculum. This trend continued through the 1960s. In a joint project sponsored by NCTE and the University of Illinois, Squire and Applebee (1968) conducted a five-year study of 158 high schools in 45 states. The purpose of the study was to examine high school English programs, both exemplary and ordinary, to determine the factors that led to a program's success. The researchers used questionnaires, interviews, and direct observations to compile myriad data about what was happening in English classrooms throughout the country in the 1960s. Over 32,500 minutes of observations in English classes revealed that 52.2% of class time was spent on literature study. Squire and Applebee noted that most literature programs followed the same pattern: thematic study in grades 9 and 10, American literature in grade 11, and English literature in grade 12.

Despite the apparent reprieve from college entrance examinations and their influence on curriculum, Squire and Applebee found many consistencies in the specific works of literature that were taught in the high schools. Still, Shakespeare figured prominently in the canon with Macbeth, Julius Caesar, and Hamlet required reading in most of the schools. Other frequently read titles included Silas Marner, The Scarlet Letter, A Tale of Two Cities, The Return of the Native, Huckleberry Finn, The Red Badge of Courage, Moby Dick, and Our Town. At least, these are the works that were being taught to college-prep students.

Squire and Applebee (1968) also found that in most schools, students were divided into tracks, from two to an unbelievable eleven in one school. In these lower tracks, literature instruction merited only 40% of the total class time, as opposed to 52.2% in college-prep classes. And in the 1960s these noncollege-bound students were reading articles in readers or rewritten classics. Questionnaires revealed that 74.4% of teachers agreed with the statement that "Novels and plays adapted to suit the abilities of slower students are essential to a good English program because they afford these students an acquaintance with the best in literature" (Squire & Applebee, 1968, p. 104). Even though teachers seemed to support the use of these revised works, Squire and Applebee also noted that even these works were used less frequently than "materials of no literary value at all" (p. 104) such as popular magazine and newspaper articles. Their observations led them to the conclusion that these revised works were inadequate for literature study:

> Although the desperation of many teachers to locate materials suitable to the needs of their students is understandable, they mistake the nature of literature

> itself and the purpose of programs of literature if they confuse the shell of Gulliver's Travels, rewritten as it must be for slow readers, with the work of art itself. Although certain books will admit a judicious cutting for classroom presentation, in the majority the very unity of content and form, the essence of art, is attacked through such processes. Widespread use of adapted titles thus represents an evasion of literature more dishonest if not more pernicious than exaggerated concern with historical or social factors. (p. 104)

Squire and Applebee concluded in their study that "terminal" high school students (those who would not go on to college) typically studied revised literature rather than original works and that their education suffered for it.

Interestingly, Squire and Applebee (1968) also discovered that students were not as enthusiastic about the revised literature as their teachers were. They asked 1,617 students in sophomore classes of terminal students to name the books that had been personally significant to them. An overwhelming number who had been allowed access to original works listed Gone with the Wind, The Pearl, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Diary of Anne Frank, and The Yearling. Squire and Applebee concluded from these results that the students who have access to these kinds of books are, "far more likely to develop good reading habits than are [students who participate in] programs which concentrate on exercises involving articles on travel exploits or technological advances, or twenty-nine page versions of major classics" (p. 106).

Not everyone agreed with Squire and Applebee's assessment of these revised works of literature, though. Two years later, Burton (1970) was advocating that

weaker readers should be studying easier literature. He advised that students be grouped according to ability and then study different literature. Dismissing standard textbook anthologies as inappropriate for "slow learners" (p. 222), Burton suggests:

> Literature study need not be abandoned in low-ability groups. The teacher should realize, however, that traditional literature patterns—chronological survey, reading of "classics," and analysis of types—will be of little avail. Short and very simple topical units—such as "Adventures at Sea" and "Brave People"—may be the most fruitful approach. In such units, junior novels and biographies can be used as well as such special series as the Landmark Books of Random House and Teen-Age Tales of D. C. Heath and Company. (p. 222)

In addition to these "helpful" suggestions, Burton also advises that slow learners benefit most from exposure to audio-visual materials and plays, especially those written for television.

Tchudi (1991) also notes that in 1968 professional journals began reporting on another model for English curricula, the electives. These models attempted to replace traditional English I, II, III, and IV courses with shorter elective courses on specific aspects of literature, language, and composition. These electives were sometimes as short as three-weeks, and they eliminated the need for tracking by varying in degrees of difficulty. Students could simply choose the electives that were compatible with their own skill levels. This elective curriculum was wildly popular and spread throughout the nation very rapidly. Critics voiced concern that this elective "reform" was simply the old curriculum in a new package. Hillocks (1972) argued that the elective courses, with a few exceptions such as courses on science fiction, sports, and

media, were identical to the courses taught in the old model. Rather than providing a means for reform, the elective courses soon came under public scrutiny and were eliminated. Tchudi (1991) explains, "Electives were believed to be soft on content and too easy on students. Courses such as 'sports literature' and 'supernatural literature' were held up as examples of how standards in English had slipped" (p. 8).

More recent studies of literature in the English curriculum indicate that literature still plays a prominent role in the classroom. In an extension of his previous study of literature instruction in a sampling of American high schools, Applebee (1993) found that literature still comprises about half of the English curriculum. It continues to receive less emphasis in noncollege-bound and mixed classes and most emphasis in college-preparatory classes. The specific literature taught in college-prep and noncollege-bound classes also varied in this study. Applebee says, "those [literature selections] required for noncollege-bound classes were somewhat more contemporary, more likely to stem from North American authors, and more likely to be written by women or minorities" (p. 61). Applebee attributes these differences to "teachers' attempts to make the literature curriculum more relevant and more accessible" (p. 61). Applebee also notes that, "reports for lower track students typically listed fewer titles of any sort, reflecting a curriculum with less overall emphasis on literature" (p. 69). Since poor children are often placed in lower tracks (Finn, 1999; Anyon, 1981), this finding supports Langer & Allington's (1992) conclusion that "schools with large numbers of poor children scheduled substantially less time for reading than schools with few poor children and that children with the lowest reading achievements routinely receive the least reading instruction and

engage in the least reading" (p. 714). Applebee (1997) notes that for tech-prep students, "the curriculum is sometimes watered down in an attempt to make it more comprehensible. The result all too often is to leave these students with nothing to sustain interest or promote conversation at all" (p. 30). DeLawter (1992) agrees that teachers should, "provide students with authentic whole texts rather than abbreviated, mutilated, or contrived ones" (p. 113). Many argue for a literature curriculum that is rich in critically examined texts rather than watered-down, abbreviated versions of them (Graves, 1998; Bushman, 1991; Short, 1999).

In Georgia, school systems are allowed to adopt their own textbooks, and as Applebee (1993) notes, textbooks often drive the literature curriculum. Some systems adopt the same literature and grammar texts for both college-prep and tech-prep classes; others adopt different anthologies for tech-prep classes. Two popular revised anthologies for tech-prep students are Scope and Globe. Until 1998, the system involved in this study used the Prentice-Hall literature book for college-prep classes and the Scope textbook for tech-prep classes. When new textbooks were adopted, teachers requested that the Scope book be dropped and that all students use the Holt, Reinhardt, & Winston anthologies. However, in the school to be studied, the 9th, 10th, and 12th grade English teachers all kept class sets of the Scope text and continue to use them with tech-prep students. To supplement these texts, several of the teachers also use Read and Scope magazines, which contain stories and articles written on upper-elementary/middle-grade reading levels. These magazines also contain simplified versions of classic literature, often in the format of scripts. In this school, all teachers also used novels to supplement the literature textbooks. The tech-

prep students typically read young adult literature while the college-prep students read the more traditional classics.

It is clear from the literature that no consensus exists about what literature should be taught in high school English classes, especially in classes for tech-prep students. There seems to be some uniformity and agreement about the kinds of literature that college-bound students should study, but teachers and scholars disagree about the best literature for noncollege-bound students. It appears that only Squire and Applebee (1968) actually asked these noncollege-bound students how they felt about the literature they studied; despite the students' negative responses to revised classics and short, simple works of fiction, teachers continue to use them.

How Should Literature Be Taught?

Opinions about how literature should be taught are just as varied as beliefs about what literature should be taught. Early reading materials such as The New England Primer and the McGuffey Readers make clear that one purpose of literature study in the early days of our country was to impart ethical and moral instruction. Applebee (1974) notes that another pedagogy emerging during the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries was that of mental discipline. He explains, "It held that the purpose of education was to exercise and train the mental faculties, in particular the faculties of 'memory' and 'reason'" (Applebee, 1974, p. 6). It was during this time that literature study focused on rote memorization and on names, dates, and places. Applebee offers a sample high school English exam on Milton in 1866 to support this assertion:

1. Give a sketch of Milton's life to 1638.

2. Give a brief outline of "L'Allegro."

3. Give examples of obsolete or obsolescent words from the poems studied.

4. Give examples of words used by Milton in a different sense than they are today. Illustrate.

5. Write a passage from "Il Penseroso." (p. 29)

The entire exam follows this same pattern, requiring the student to recite memorized facts. It is discouraging to note that most literature tests given today still focus on "the content of a literary work or on low-level comprehension" (Purves, 1992). Purves (1992) compares modern standardized English tests and textbook-produced literature tests to the televisions series "Dragnet" with its "just the facts" approach.

Even in the 1800s, however, not everyone agreed that literature should be studied by rote. A few dissenting voices advocated that literature should be taught for appreciation (Applebee, 1974). These voices became louder as Progressivism emerged with its concern for the student's experience of the curriculum. Teachers were urged to find materials that were "manageable and interesting" to the children (Applebee, 1974, p. 56). In 1929, John Dewey published "My Pedagogic Creed" in the Journal of the National Education Association, asserting that, "Education . . . must begin with a psychological insight into the child's capacities, interests, and habits" (Flinders & Thornton, 1997, p. 18). This shifting attitude toward education in general had serious implications for the teaching of literature, as well.

In 1938 Louise Rosenblatt published Literature as Exploration, echoing Dewey's concern for the interests and experiences of the student. In this pivotal and

somewhat radical work, which was revised and republished in 1976, Rosenblatt (1976) argues that an English teacher cannot "keep his [sic] eyes focused only on the literary materials he is seeking to make available. He must also understand the personalities who are to experience this literature" (p. 51). Rosenblatt urges teachers to focus more on the students' responses to the literature. She explains:

> Teaching becomes a matter of improving the individual's capacity to evoke meaning from the text by leading him to reflect self-critically on this process. The starting point for growth must be each individual's efforts to marshal his resources and organize a response relevant to the stimulus of the printed page. (p. 26)

Unlike many of her predecessors, Rosenblatt is unwilling to turn literature study into recitation of facts. She contends that facts about a literary work, its author, its literary period, even its form and content are irrelevant unless they "demonstrably help to clarify or enrich individual experiences of specific novels, poems, or plays" (p. 27). All of this factual knowledge about a work or its author is useless if the student does not connect personally to the piece of literature.

Another theoretical stance that Rosenblatt objects to in literature instruction is New Criticism. New Critics promoted the idea that art could be objectified and studied out of context. According to New Criticism, the merit of a literary text depended on the unity of the elements within it, and its effect on the reader was dismissed. Rosenblatt criticized New Criticism and other approaches that undermine the reader's experience with the text: "Analysis of the technique of the work, concern with tone, metaphor, symbol, and myth, has therefore tended to crowd out the

ultimate questions concerning relevance or value to the reader in his ongoing life" (pp. 29-30). This is not to say that Rosenblatt objected to the study of a work's content and form; instead, she believed that a student's personal involvement in a work would lead to a better understanding of its style, content, and structure.

Rosenblatt's articulation of transactional theory frames a debate that continues today. Some teachers believe that it is their job to teach students the critics' interpretation of literary works; other teachers see themselves as guides who lead students to their own interpretations of the literature. Echoing Rosenblatt's position half a century later, Probst (1988) argues for the latter approach:

> If, as we have suggested, students are unlikely to come to the literature class with a scholarly passion for information about the sources of Shakespeare's plays or the social context of the early American fire-and-brimstone sermons, they will nonetheless bring with them experiences, interests, and a lengthy agenda of ideas, problems, worries, and attitudes, all of which concern and preoccupy them. If literature is enjoyable or if it touches upon some of those preoccupations, then students have a reason to read. (p. 3)

Many English teachers are drawn to the profession by their love of literary criticism, but Probst argues that literary criticism is not what will draw most students to literature. Instead, teachers should try to connect literature to their students' lives (Dias, 1992; Petrosky, 1992).

Squire (1966) agrees that teachers should be careful not to present the critics' interpretations of literature as the final authority. He supports Rosenblatt's (1976) contention that readers' responses are important. He says:

> To have children take over from their teachers an analysis of a work of literature which their teachers in turn have taken over from the critics or their English professors—this is not a short cut to literary sophistication; it is a short circuit that destroys the whole system. (Squire, 1966, p. 6)

Instead, literature study should be an interaction between the work and the student. Smagorinsky and Gevinson (1989) concur "that literature should serve as an important source of personal growth, and that students should relate to literature from a personal standpoint rather than from an imposed critical standpoint" (p. 1).

Maxwell & Meiser (1993) contend that reader-response theory promotes students' engagement with literature because it breaks down the hierarchy of readers "with the renowned critic at the top and the inexperienced student at the bottom" (p. 50). Helping students connect to the literary texts validates the students' abilities to make meaning and create knowledge for themselves. This does not mean, as Sheridan (1993) cautions, that "anything goes" (p. 43) when students read literature; rather, reader response focuses on the experiences that a reader brings to a work of literature. It removes the notion that the teacher possesses the one right answer that students are supposed to learn and tell back (Sheridan, 1993; Purves, Rogers, & Soter, 1995; Yopp & Yopp, 2001).

Strickland and Strickland (1993) relate an experience that one of the authors had with literature in high school. Encountering Robert Frost's poem "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening," she was impressed with the peacefulness and tranquility of the poem. Later, her English teacher related that the true meaning of the poem was about death. As an adult, Strickland reflects, "the truth is that it could

be read that way. Still, the teacher was wrong insofar as she led us to believe that her interpretation of the poem was the 'real' meaning" (p. 60). English teachers should be careful not to present their own interpretations (or the critics') of literature as Truth (Vine & Faust, 1993). Sweet (1994) agrees that it is important for students to make meaning of literature for themselves. She says, "Responding to literature helps students construct their own meaning, which may not always be the same for all readers. Responding helps students develop metacognitive skills important to constructing meaning" (p. 54). Developing thinking skills is a worthy goal of any teacher in any field.

In order to help students to develop their thinking skills with literature, teachers must promote engagement with it. Almasi, McKeown, & Beck (1996) define engagement as "sustained personal commitment to creating understanding while one reads" (p. 108). They then describe activities that promote students' engagement with literature. These include relating literature to personal experience, using the text of literature to support ideas or verify or reject predictions, and piecing information together about different aspects of the text. They also note that the "context of the literary act and the culture of the classroom influence engaged reading" (p. 119). Specifically, they found that students were more likely to engage with literature when they felt free to question the literature's meaning, content, character motives, etc.

Although many teachers would probably agree with Rosenblatt (1976), Probst (1988), Squire (1966), and the others, Squire and Applebee (1968) found very few teachers actually practicing this kind of literature instruction. In their study of English classes in158 high schools, they were disappointed to discover just the opposite:

> More often than not, observers found the hours of literary study devoted to formal or informal talks by teacher or student on the age or period in which a work was written, on the writer himself, on the literary genre as an abstraction to be perceived in and for itself without reference to text, or on isolated facts from the selection. (Squire & Applebee, 1968, p.106)

Squire and Applebee did find some teachers who attempted to relate the literature to the students' lives, but often the connections were vague and general and at the expense of coherent study of the literary work. A later study by Marshall (1989) concludes that teachers continue to dominate literature instruction.

Over two decades after his initial study with Squire (Squire & Applebee, 1968), Applebee (1992) describes similar findings in his survey of 650 schools. Teachers, still focusing heavily on literature instruction, reported that they rely most frequently on whole-class discussion of texts, blending critical analysis and reader-response. Applebee says, "Teachers report a dual emphasis: on techniques that are loosely related to reader-response theories and on those that are associated more directly with close analysis of text" (p. 8). It is encouraging to note that theory is beginning to have an impact on practice; however, teachers seem not to embrace fully the ideals of reader-response theory. Anthony, Pearson, and Raphael (1993) suggest that theory and practice are often vastly different.

Some impediments to the full implementation of reader-response theory seem reasonable, or at least understandable. Applebee (1992) describes the impact of the 1970s "back-to-basics" (p. 2) movement on English curriculum. The public's concern about students' performance in the job market led to an emphasis on basic skills and

minimum competency testing. Both of these had a significant impact on literature instruction (Applebee, 1992). Unfortunately, noncollege-bound students receive the brunt of this basic skills emphasis. Applebee's survey concludes:

> Compared with literature instruction for the college bound, that for the non-college bound entails lower overall teacher expectations, more emphasis on worksheets and study guides, less composition of coherent text, more quizzes and short-answer activities, less reading, more language study (i.e., grammar and usage), less individualized reading, and less use of the library. (p. 14)

Often English classes for the noncollege-bound are derivatives of college-prep English classes with more emphasis on skills and drills, and they are often boring to teachers and students alike (Applebee, 1992; Newell & Johnson, 1993; Resnick & Resnick, 1977).

Probst (1992) offers another reason why teachers fail to fully embrace reader-response theory. The typical arrangement of literature texts according to genre or chronology makes it easy to view literature instruction as a collection of facts about the works, the genres, and the historical periods. Students' reactions to the texts are "harder to describe, to predict, to manage, to arrange" (p. 62). It is so much easier for the teacher to consider a text in the context of its history or genre than to elicit students' responses to it. DeLawter (1992) indicts novel and textbook aids, as well. As an example, she describes workbook activities accompanying the adolescent novel Roll Of Thunder, Hear My Cry (Taylor, 1976) in which the many fill-in-the-blank and vocabulary activities call for the student to produce the one right answer. She

says, "Such worksheets ignore the readers' literary experience. Instead, they focus on small bits of textual material, right answers, and rigid response formats" (p. 104).

Langer (1995) concurs that interaction with the text is critical. She argues for a literature curriculum that encourages students to construct "envisionment" (p. 14) as they read:

> We can think of envisionment building as an activity in sense making, where meanings change and shift and grow as a mind creates its understanding of a work. There is a constant interaction . . . between the person and the piece, and the particular meaning that is created represents a unique meeting of the two. (p. 14)

Attitudes about how literature should be taught have shifted dramatically since the inception of its study in the schools. Literature instruction has evolved from the early primers and their emphasis on recitation and developing memory to current reader-response theories that engage the student in meaning-making. Although the primary research question of this dissertation deals with students' reactions to certain kinds of literature, three of the sub-questions also deal with how that literature is taught. I examined specific strategies and techniques to determine which ones are most and least effective with struggling readers. My own experiences lead me to favor reader-response theory, and many of the techniques I used in this study fit into that theoretical framework.

A Chronology of Research Related to Students' Experiences with Literature

Just as my own research question asks how struggling readers respond to challenging literature, other studies have focused on students' responses to and

interactions with literature. This section of the literature review will provide a chronological overview of relevant studies with commentary on their implications for this research. Because my research focuses on struggling readers and their interactions with literature, I will divide these studies into two groups: those dealing with struggling readers, and those dealing with students of varied abilities and their interactions with literature.

Research on Struggling Readers

Students come to be labeled "struggling readers" in a variety of ways. Some are identified early as having learning difficulties and, after extensive testing, are placed in special education classes. Others do not present severe enough difficulties to warrant special education classes, but their reading scores on standardized tests such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) fall below the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) of 50. Students are also considered to be struggling readers if their reading comprehension skills are below grade-level.

One characteristic of 11th grade tech-prep classes is that the students within them have varied reading abilities. Some are proficient readers who can comprehend most texts with ease, while others struggle with the most basic texts. Johnston (1985) attempts to determine the underlying causes of reading dysfunction in students. He argues that the source of most reading difficulties is the result of a student's lack or misuse of appropriate reading strategies. Johnston uses the case study approach "on the assumption that there can be substantial individual differences in experience and in important dimensions of behavior (both overt and covert) which are as critical as the commonalities between individuals" (p. 155). He focuses on adults because they

are better able to describe their own mental activities than are children. After conducting extensive interview sessions with three illiterate adult males, he concludes that psychological and social contexts are important factors underlying reading difficulties and should not be overlooked in studies of struggling readers. He urges that "we need to consider more seriously explanations which stress combinations of anxiety, attributions, maladaptive strategies, inaccurate or nonexisting concepts about aspects of reading, and a huge variety of motivational factors" (Johnston, 1985, p. 174). All of these factors are worth considering as I study my students' interactions with literature.

Likewise, Kos (1991) uses the case study approach to examine the reading difficulties of four middle school students. Citing Johnston (1985), Kos agrees that many factors work together to support or undermine students' reading abilities. She specifically studies the affective, social, and educational factors that contribute to these students' reading difficulties. From her interaction with four middle school students, Kos concludes that the students are aware of their own reading difficulties and of ineffective strategies that teachers often use to teach them (e.g., worksheets, repetition, sounding out strategies, unmotivating materials). She also notes the impact of stress on these students and describes its expression in the various students, from acting out to passivity. Kos also holds the educational system accountable for hindering these students' reading abilities. Three of the four students are labeled "learning disabled" and receive remediation, but the remediation does not seem to help the students improve their reading skills. Kos's experience with these middle school students underscores the importance of approaching this kind of study with an

open mind; looking too narrowly at the students' reading behaviors can limit the results of the study. A variety of social, emotional, and educational factors must also be considered.

Research on Students' Interactions with Literature

The reading study conducted by Eeds and Wells (1989) focuses on younger readers of varying abilities. The purpose of this study is to examine more closely young readers' interactions with literature. These fifth and sixth graders chose novels of interest and then participated in literature discussions with their leaders (who were also student teachers) over a period of four to five weeks. The literature discussions lasted about thirty minutes each day and were conducted two days per week. Eeds and Wells use field notes, transcriptions of audiotapes and teacher journals to analyze the literature discussions. Eeds and Wells conclude that even young readers are capable of engaging in rich discussions of literature; they can comprehend the literature, connect it to their own lives, read actively, and evaluate the text as literature. The key to eliciting this kind of sophisticated reading is the manner in which the discussions are led. When teachers can relinquish their roles as the interpreters of literature, students can engage more deeply with the literature.

Rogers (1991) looks not just at reading behaviors, but also at how students interpret literature. She studies eight ninth graders reading modern short stories to determine the nature and complexity of their interpretation of the literature. She observes the students as they participate in literature study with their regular English teacher, and she also leads some of the literature discussions herself. She concludes that these ninth graders are "fairly interpretive in terms of their reasoning operations

and fairly textual in terms of the sources of their inferences" (p. 415). In other words, these students were relatively sophisticated interpreters of literature, but they rarely ventured outside the text to make their inferences. A significant flaw in this study is Rogers' superficial description of the participants; it sounds as though they are all proficient readers, but she never makes explicit their academic track or their previous experiences in English classes. She does note that the eight students are of varying abilities, as ranked by the teacher, but her research site is a "highly selective university-affiliated high school" (p. 394), which suggests that the population might be above average.

Hancock (1993) is also interested in students' responses to literature, but her study focuses on ten sixth-grade students who are considered to have above-average reading and writing abilities. Using students' reflective journals, this researcher explores the meaning-making processes that students use to interact with literature. Hancock defines the meaning-making process as "the ongoing attempt of the reader to make sense of unfolding text throughout his or her personal transactions with literature" (p. 337). Beginning with ten students, Hancock narrows her focus to four because of the quantity of data produced. She concludes that, "uncovering process is a challenging task" (p. 366); for some of her students, the meaning-making process changed with each book, and for others, a consistent pattern was discovered. Her study emphasizes the complexity of reading and meaning-making, a caution for any researcher who might neatly categorize discreet skills and subskills in the reading process.

Wilhelm (1995) also examines the process that students use to make meaning of text. He looks at both fluent and reluctant readers in order to discover how the fluent readers make meaning and how reluctant readers might become more engaged in the reading process. Selecting nine of his own students with varying reading interests and abilities, Wilhelm follows their progress throughout one school year. Again, Wilhelm's study reinforces the complexity of the interactions between students and literature. Why are some students more proficient readers than others? Why do some engage more readily with texts? No simple answers to these questions exist, but Wilhelm highlights various strategies that help students to engage with texts: drama, art, literary letters, journals, and discussions. Different strategies appeal to different students, but all are worthy of consideration.

Goatley, Brock, and Raphael (1995) also study students with varied reading aptitudes. Three of the five fifth graders in this study had received special education help in reading during the previous year. These researchers are interested in individual and social construction of meaning, specifically how students draw on their own knowledge and on their peers' knowledge in literature discussion groups. All of the participants in this study, even the ones who had previously struggled with reading, are able to draw on each other's knowledge to make meaning of literature. Goatley, et. al. summarize their findings:

> The elementary students in our study, including nonmainstreamed youngsters, were able to move beyond reading as decoding, or reading as a tool for learning, to respond in ways that including [sic] valuing and evaluating text,

> relating text to personal experiences, making intertextual connections, and, in short, behaving in the ways of mature literate individuals. (p. 376)

Because of these students' experiences with their peers in literature discussion groups, these researchers urge teachers to include even weak readers in sophisticated literary activities.

Ivey (1999) also focuses on middle school readers of varied reading abilities. Participants in this study include three sixth graders, one who reads proficiently, one who is a moderately successful reader, and a struggling reader. Ivey studies these students in their classrooms over a five-month period. Acknowledging the complexity of the reading process and the limitations of her study (e.g., her presence in the classroom, the limited number of students studied, and her own biases), Ivey concludes that her interaction with these three students still provides useful information for teachers. All three students demonstrate that they are capable readers in certain situations. Factors that seem to contribute to their success as readers involve student-choice in reading materials, purpose for the reading, and reading curricula that are individualized to meet students' needs.

As a whole, these previous research studies suggest that studying and interpreting students' experiences with reading and literature is a complex process. It is difficult to isolate single factors that contribute to students' success with literature. While some of the studies include participants who are considered struggling readers, they do not focus on the nature of the literature that these students are offered. These studies often focus on elementary and middle school readers rather than high school students. It is difficult to find research on high school students who do not read well.

Considering the tremendous numbers of high school students who read below grade-level, there is a need for more research on their experiences with literature. Teachers who work with them daily can benefit from a study that explores how struggling readers interact with literature and what kinds of literature they best respond to. All of the studies use a qualitative research design, probably because reading is such a complex process; it is difficult to measure a student's engagement with or reaction to literature by using conventional quantitative approaches.

Summary

Literature's place in the English curriculum has a long and fascinating history. From the early primers to contemporary anthologies, literature has held a prominent place in the English curriculum. Since the early twentieth century, noncollege-bound students have received a different literature curriculum, usually in the form of revised classics; they have also spent less time on literature instruction than their college-bound counterparts. Tracing literature's evolution in the English classroom also reveals shifting attitudes about how literature should be taught. From the early theories of rote memorization and drill to more modern expressions of reader-response theories, teachers have used a wide array of teaching strategies to engage students in literature study. Many have studied students' experiences with reading literature, and most have concluded that it is a complex process. Many factors contribute to students' experiences with literature, and all are considered in this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methods that were employed to study how struggling readers in 11th grade applied communications classes responded to literature texts that are typically taught to college-prep students. Students' responses to specific selections of literature were studied, as were students' responses to specific teaching strategies. I used a classroom-based ethnographic research design in an attempt to understand the students' experiences of challenging, critically examined literature in the context of an 11th grade Applied Communications class (Leedy, 1997). In this chapter, I will describe the research procedures, setting, participants, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and then I will provide a summary of the chapter.

Procedures

Instead of the typical Applied Communications curriculum taught in the tech-prep courses, students read literature selections that their college-prep counterparts read. The literature included American literature selections from the Holt, Rinehart, & Winston Elements of Literature, 5th Course text and supplemental novels and plays, including Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck, The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier, To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee, A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine

Hansberry, and excerpts from The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne. In addition to the college-prep literature selections, the students also read two literature selections from the old Scope textbooks; these included stories of well-known authors that were rewritten on a lower reading level. One of these stories, Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," was presented early in the semester, and the other, Ray Bradbury's "The Fog Horn," was taught near the end of the course. Students' reactions to these revised literature selections were examined in the context of their reactions to the traditional literature, and their preferences were noted.

Because many of these students were struggling readers, with ITBS reading scores below average, much of the literature was read in class both aloud and silently. I used various reading strategies to enable the students to comprehend the challenging literature. One strategy used is called ReQuest (for Reciprocal Questioning) (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). The teacher presents ReQuest as a game in which the students try to ask questions that the teacher cannot answer. Everyone (including the teacher) reads only a part of a story or novel (usually a few paragraphs) and then closes the book with a bookmark to hold the place. When most of the class is finished, the teacher allows students to question her about the passage; when they are finished, the teacher asks them questions about the passage, and then everyone reads another section and repeats the process. This activity promotes close reading of the text as students search for possible questions to ask and prepare themselves to answer the teacher's questions (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

Another guided reading strategy that was employed is the graphic organizer. In this activity, students complete various graphic organizers to visually sort

characters and elements of a literary work. In longer works, students use these organizers to analyze characters' internal and external qualities and their typical behaviors. In shorter works, students use graphic organizers to plot elements of a story or to make predictions about what will occur (Ogle, 1986).

Whenever we studied difficult literature, I always guided the students while they read. In addition to ReQuest and graphic organizers, I occasionally asked the students to read a portion of a literary text and then discuss just that portion before we continued to study the work. This kind of guided reading provided help with basic comprehension as they encountered new literature, as well as assisting the students to focus on the work. When we read fiction, I also asked them to make predictions about what would happen next; this augmented their comprehension and their engagement with the text (Stauffer, 1969).

Occasionally, I encouraged students to work with partners or in peer groups. Sometimes students designed their own strategies when given the freedom to decide what would work for them. I also modeled for them strategies that I use when I encounter difficult literature, such as connecting the literature to my own experiences, to other literature I have read, and to the world (Au, 1979; Duffy Roehler, & Hermann, 1988).

Most of the strategies listed above are designed to help students read and comprehend a literary work. Once that was accomplished, we participated in a variety of activities designed to help the student respond to the literature. One of these is the Paideia discussion (Roberts & Billings, 1999). For a Paideia discussion, the students and the teacher arrange themselves in a large circle. The leader (usually the teacher,

but sometimes a student) asks a series of thought-provoking questions. The opening question is a general question relating to the work as a whole. Four to six core questions follow that elicit responses about details of the work. The closing question is a general question that requires the students to connect the work to their lives. The leader's role in this discussion is to ask questions that lead to student responses, not to guide the discussion with comments. This activity enables the students to make meaning of literary works for themselves without accepting the teacher's interpretation as truth.

Students were also asked to write responses to questions and prompts about the literature. These prompts helped the students to connect the literature to their own lives, to other literature they have read, and to the world. Students shared their responses with a partner, a small group, the whole class, or the teacher. Sharing with others was always voluntary, never forced, so that students felt free to write personal responses without fear of ridicule.

Often students who have difficulty with language are able to respond to literature through drama, music, and visual and artistic projects (Wilhelm, 1995). I tried to incorporate choices as frequently as possible so that all students could find ways to connect to the literature. Applebee (1996) encourages these kinds of creative responses to literature because they help students to progress beyond rote memorization of details and facts from the literature. He contends, "being literate involves much more than just the ability to decode and encode written language; it involves a way of thinking" (p. 8). Langer (1992) also supports transferring control of literature to the students to help them become independent thinkers and learners: "In

this way, students come to understand and internalize the ways of talking about and thinking about literature that have already been demonstrated for them" (p. 50).

As we studied the literature, I studied my students' responses. I attempted to determine if they found the literature's difficulty too frustrating; I noted which selections engaged the students and which selections failed to motivate them. I also noted which teaching strategies were most and least helpful to them as they studied the literature. Specific data collection and analysis techniques will be described in subsequent sections.

Setting

This study was conducted during the fall semester of 2001 in a rural high school in southeast Georgia. The school is located near a university but is not the largest high school in the county. However, the school has received several honors and awards. In 1992 the school was designated as a National Blue Ribbon School and has twice been named a Georgia School of Excellence. Located in the southern portion of the county, the school serves students from the more rural areas of the county. The community is about 75% white and 25% black with a small Hispanic population. Most of the Hispanics are transient migrant workers. The racial diversity at this high school mirrors that of its community: approximately 80% white, 20% black, and less than one percent Hispanic. Approximately 40% of the high school's students attempt college after high school, but only about half of them will graduate. Many receive technical training at the local technical college, some enter the job market immediately following high school, and a few join the military.

The school has approximately 740 students who are divided into two curriculum tracks: college-prep and tech-prep. While most students choose to complete only one track, it is now possible for a student to earn both a college-prep and a vocational seal on his or her diploma. In addition to traditional English, math, science, and social studies classes, students can choose from a variety of electives, such as art, music, drama, horticulture, family living, foreign languages, and technology. Until the 2001-02 school year, students had to be transported to the larger high school in the county to take electives such as auto mechanics, construction, health occupations, and childcare. A new vocational wing was added to the high school in the fall of 2001.

The school is currently operating on a 4X4 block schedule, with students taking four 90-minute classes during one 90-day semester and four different classes during the next 90-day semester. Guidance counselors and the registrar attempt to schedule students' classes so that they have two core classes and two electives each semester. Eleventh grade students are somewhat limited in their scheduling options, though, because of the required Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT). Tech-prep students take English and social studies during fall term each year so that they can receive intensive preparation for the Writing portion of the GHSGT in October. The school began its fifth year of block scheduling during the time of this study.

Because of the block scheduling, some students in these 11th grade tech-prep classes had taken 10th grade English the previous spring, but others had not taken English since the previous fall. Also, some students who failed 10th grade English

were repeating the course concurrently with 11th grade English. Some students were repeating 11th grade English, too, because they failed it the previous year. The majority of students had taken 9th grade literature and composition and 10th grade world literature and composition. In these courses, the students studied a few literature selections from the Holt, Reinhardt, & Winston literature series, selected class novels, and supplementary readings from Scope and Read magazines.

Participants

All 11th grade tech-prep students who were not in special education were enrolled in English during fall semester. I had access to students' 10th grade Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) reading and language scores and grades in previous English classes. Each teacher in this school is required to create class profiles using previous test scores and grades, so this information was available as I selected six students to study. I used purposive selection (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) to choose the six students, looking for a representative subset of the whole population of 11th grade tech-prep students (Ketter & Pool, 2001). Typically, tech-prep classes include students with widely varying reading abilities; one year a basic reading inventory revealed instructional reading levels ranging from second grade to beyond high school in one 11th grade English class. Because I wanted to understand the impact of the curriculum on most 11th grade tech-prep students, I attempted to choose students who represented a broad spectrum of reading levels. Their NCE reading scores on the ITBS ranged from 22 to 82, with 50 being average. I did not choose any of the six students who had failed and were repeating the course because they had already been

exposed to some of the literature, and I did not feel that their responses would be typical.

Participant Selection

Because the study was limited to one semester, I chose my participants early in the process. I spent two weeks getting to know the students and their abilities. During this time students wrote one essay, took one literature test, and took two vocabulary quizzes. Based on earlier impressions and observations, I chose Mitchell and Desiree (all names in this study are pseudonyms) immediately. Both seemed to be skilled readers and motivated students. Since I wanted to understand the impact of the curriculum on the typical tech-prep student, I eliminated special education students, repeaters, and students who were classified as 10^{th} or 12^{th} graders. I also eliminated all students who were in fourth block because that class was taught collaboratively with a special education teacher and was different from the typical tech-prep class.

Next, I classified all of the students in the sample according to gender and ethnicity. I felt that a study of one gender or one ethnic group might yield different results. I discovered that I had 26 white males, 10 white females, 7 black males, and 6 black females. I wanted to keep the ratios of my participants similar, so I chose 2 white males, 2 white females, 1 black male, and 1 black female. Since I had already chosen Desiree, a black female, and Mitchell, a white male, I needed to choose a black male, a white male, and two white females.

One white female was a logical choice. Ellen appeared to be a skilled reader and a motivated student. She seemed to have a positive attitude and had been in college-prep English classes until this year. Selecting an additional white female was

more difficult. I finally selected Melissa because she seemed motivated but not very skilled. She had scored a 61 on the first literature test. Selecting another white male was also difficult. I selected Ed because he seemed to have a positive attitude, was usually attentive, and he scored an 85 on the first literature test.

Choosing the black male was extremely difficult. Of the seven black males in second and third blocks, only two had not been eliminated by other factors. I chose Andre even though he seemed to have a negative attitude. He often slept in class and was seldom on task, but he did somehow make a 91 on the first literature test.

The students I selected were asked to participate voluntarily with the understanding that their participation would have no impact on their grades in the course. All six students agreed to participate, so the students and their parents signed consent forms (See Appendix B). Their parents also received withdrawal forms at that time to submit at any point during the study if they wished to terminate their student's participation (See Appendix C). There would be no penalty for withdrawal from the study. Only one participant dropped out of the study. She and her sister fought two others girls and were sent to the county's alternative school for the remainder of the semester.

Description of the Participants

As I got to know the students better, I sometimes doubted my initial impressions. Considering the pressure I felt to select the participants early in the semester, I think I did as well as I could have. Below is a detailed description of each participant.

Andre, a black male football player, seldom participated in class. I discovered from his other teachers that he was not very interested in any of his classes. He did not have an after-school job that kept him up late, but still he often slept; at first I tried to keep him awake, but as the semester progressed, I sometimes gave up and let him sleep. He was usually polite, especially in private settings. He did have some friends in the class who sometimes encouraged him to play and misbehave. He managed to do well enough on tests to arouse my suspicion that he was cheating. I began to watch him carefully, but I could detect no misdeeds. Toward the end of the semester, I discovered that he usually went home and read what he missed in class. He seemed to feel pressure from his friends to remain aloof in class. His athlete friends seemed to discourage him from participating. Interviews with him were sometimes challenging because he responded in monosyllables. Often I got only a yes or no answer and had to prod for more information. At one point in the semester, Andre became almost hostile. He did not enjoy Robert Cormier's novel The Chocolate War, and his dislike of the novel was sometimes directed toward me.

Desiree, a black female, was preceded by her reputation. During her freshman and sophomore years, she earned the reputation of being a difficult student. She was frequently assigned to In-School Suspension (ISS) for sassing teachers and provoking other students. I had an unpleasant encounter with her in the hallway two years before, and I expected trouble when I saw her name on my roster. I was pleasantly surprised by her cooperative demeanor. She was one of the most enjoyable students in the class. She even helped me with another student who was difficult—one who had a hearing problem that caused him to be confused most of the time. Often after I

explained an assignment, Desiree would pull a chair up to the other student and help him to understand the work.

Near the end of the first half of the semester, Desiree and her sister were involved in a fight with two other girls. During the fight, a teacher was accidentally hit, so the incident was treated as extremely serious. All four girls were sent to the county's alternative school and were not allowed back on campus. Desiree and one of the other girls were allowed to return to school at the end of the semester, but she was unable to continue in my study. I regret that she left not only because she was a participant, but also because she was a real asset to her class.

Ed, a white male, was probably the quietest of the participants. He was shy around his classmates and did not seem to have many friends in the class. He was in the third block class, a more aggressive group than the second block. He did not seem comfortable in that environment. Often in our interviews, I had to prompt him to speak because he wanted to answer only with head nods. He was also a football player, and he seemed reluctant to let others see him participate in class. He did his work quietly and seemed always to be trying not to be noticed.

Ellen, a white female, was probably the most outgoing of the participants. She was extremely eager to please her teachers if she liked them. At one point in the semester, she led a group of classmates to the principal's office to complain about another teacher, and she often complained about her teachers not doing their jobs correctly. She seemed to like me, though, and sometimes came down to visit during my first-block planning period. I worked to keep a respectable distance because she

seemed to want more of a friendship than a student-teacher relationship. She did not seem to have many friends her own age.

Ellen was not very popular with her classmates, either, but she did not seem to mind. She never let their reactions keep her from participating in discussions. Later in the semester, I sat her beside a boy who displayed serious discipline problems. I thought she could be a good influence on him because she seldom disrupted class. Instead, she became very talkative and seemed delighted to be sitting near someone who would talk to her. When I asked her to be quiet during class, she would sulk for the rest of the class.

Melissa, a white female, differed greatly from my initial impression of her. I thought she was cooperative and had a good attitude because she seemed so positive and helpful. As I got to know her, though, I learned that she had a horrible home life. Her mother had abandoned her and her two brothers when she was eight, and she desperately craved positive attention from her teachers, especially from females. Her behavior deteriorated as the semester progressed. She became a real discipline problem in all of her classes. In her ROTC class she was stripped of her rank and dismissed from the program. When I would confront her about her behavior, she would feign innocence and claim she was "just playing."

During our initial interview, Melissa revealed that her older brother was in jail for stealing a school bus, and her younger brother had emotional problems from their mother's abandonment. As the semester progressed, she revealed even more tragic information about her home life, verified by the counselors. Over the Christmas break

she was involved in a serious car accident, but she was not seriously injured. She still comes to see me occasionally, and she claims that I am her favorite teacher.

Mitchell, a white male, is one of those stereotypical rebels. His hair is sometimes purple or green and is often spiked with wax. He wears a ring through his pierced bottom lip. He is a talented artist and loves to draw during class. He claimed that he failed ninth grade because his teachers would not let him draw—he says that is how he processes information that he hears. Mitchell is extremely bright and should not have been in a tech-prep class. He is not very interested in school, but he has learned how to play the game successfully. He is not interested in making A's; he cares only about earning passing grades and getting out of high school.

Although Mitchell appeared to be cooperative and polite, I often sensed disdain from him. I could not tell if the disdain was directed toward me, his classmates, or the class itself. He put very little effort into his class work, doing just enough to get by. He often finished his assignments quickly, drew pictures, or read a book. He was friends with one other boy in the class who also dyed his hair unusual colors, but he did not seem to have other friends in the class.

Data Collection

Marshall & Rossman (1995) describe four primary methods of qualitative data collection, and this study utilized variations of all four: participation, observation, interview, and student portfolios. In addition, I kept a reflection journal for my own observations about my experiences with the research process (Appendix G).

Participation. Marshall & Rossman contend that "immersion in the setting allows the researcher to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as the participants

do" (p. 79). As the teacher, I had the opportunity to experience the curriculum with the focus students. Outside factors that contributed to students' experiences in the curriculum were noted and considered in data analysis. Also, I noted the impact of group dynamics on the class. I have often seen two classes respond completely differently to the same literature, writing assignments, or other activities. These class interactions can also have an impact on individual students' experiences, and as a participant in the classes, I was able to note and consider this as a factor in the research process.

One negative consequence of the researcher being the teacher is the possibility of bias. My relationship with the students and my daily contact with them might have influenced my perspective of their responses. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that three activities can increase the probability of credible findings: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. The researcher's presence in the classroom every day provided opportunities for prolonged engagement and persistent observation; the compilation of multiple sources of data provided opportunities for triangulation.

Observation/Reflection Journal. Observation is the "systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for the study" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 79). I kept a daily record of classroom experiences, highlighting especially the behaviors and responses of the six focus students. These classroom observations were recorded on the left side of the page, and on the right, I reflected on my observations, asking questions, drawing conclusions, and noting themes. My journal was set up like this:

Table 1: Data Recording Chart

DATE	OBSERVATIONS	REFLECTIONS
Here I recorded the date, one entry for every day of the semester	Here I wrote observations about how class went, how the participants responded, and any other factors that seemed relevant to the study.	Here I reflected on my observations, asking questions, drawing conclusions, and noting themes.

In addition, selected class activities were audio taped and transcribed to supplement teacher journals and notes. On one occasion, I asked the students to listen to the audio tapes with me. I asked them to reflect on what they heard, but they were unable to provide any meaningful insights. They focused instead on what their voices sounded like on tape.

Interview. The teacher interviewed the six focus students individually and as a group. Initially, the students were interviewed individually during the week of August 29 – September 5, 2001. These interviews were designed to assess the students' attitudes toward literature study, their previous experiences with literature, their expectations for literature study, and their feelings about themselves as readers (See interview questions in Appendix D). The final individual interviews were also interviews designed to assess the overall impact of the curriculum on the students' attitudes toward and experiences with literature (See interview questions in Appendix

F). These final interviews were conducted on the last three days of the semester, December 10 – 12, 2001.

Halfway through the semester on October 11, 2001, I also conducted a focus group interview with all of the participants collectively (See interview questions in Appendix E). LeCompte and Preissle (1993) suggest that "some data are more productively elicited from several individuals at once" (p. 178). Sometimes individuals will respond more candidly in a group than they will in individual interviews. Each interview followed the format suggested by McCraken (1988): The sessions began with "grand tour" (p. 35) questions that were general and nondirective; I also used "floating prompts" (p. 35) and "planned prompts" (p. 35) to elicit information about specific areas of interest. I attempted to maintain a conversational style to help the students to feel relaxed and comfortable (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). It is possible that the students may have been somewhat inhibited by my role as their teacher, but I encouraged them to be as candid as they could be. Typically, I have a positive rapport with most of my students, including the participants of this study; therefore, my relationship with the students might also have been an advantage in the interview process. All interviews were audio taped and then transcribed so that the students could read and initial paper copies to confirm that the transcriptions accurately reflected the interviews.

Patton (1990) describes five types of interview questions: experience and behavior questions, opinions and value questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, and background and demographic questions. Because I was trying to elicit students' experiences and attitudes toward literature study, I used all five kinds of

questions in my interviews with them. The review of the literature suggests that students' experiences with reading and literature are complex and difficult to categorize neatly. Approaching the interviews from a variety of perspectives yielded rich data.

Student Portfolios. All work from the six focus students was collected and analyzed for data about the students' success with the literature. Throughout the semester, students wrote essays, took tests, took vocabulary quizzes, wrote reading responses, produced technical writing such as business letters and memos, responded to poetry, gave oral presentations, completed comprehension-type questions, and participated in class discussions, both general and Paideia. All of these students' written work was saved as artifacts for later analysis and interpretation. After data analysis was completed, I returned all work to the students' writing folders and returned the folders to them.

Data Analysis

Following LeCompte and Preissle's (1993) model of qualitative data analysis, I organized the raw data in a large notebook with sections labeled "Initial Interviews," "Group Interviews," "Final Interviews," "Paideia and Class Discussions," "Journal," and "Lesson Plans." I reviewed the initial research questions and then scanned the data—looking for patterns and themes to emerge (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Leedy, 1997). I then sorted the various themes and patterns into a tentative outline, organizing the data into the outline.

After this initial organization of the data was completed, I categorized the data by describing my observations and dividing them into units. Next, I moved into the

second stage of categorization by indicating how the units were alike and unlike each other. Finally, I determined which of the items were associated with each other and combined them into groups (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Wolcott, 1994). Through the data, I attempted to tell a story about the students' experiences with the literature, a story that answers the initial research questions and others that were generated through the process. It is difficult to anticipate exactly how the data will be analyzed before it is collected: "Because ethnographers emphasize meaning as defined by participants, they cannot choose all the data collection methods necessary for a study in advance of fieldwork" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 238).

Summary

This study was conducted in a rural high school in southeast Georgia during the fall semester of the 2001-2002 school year. Six students of varying abilities who were enrolled in 11th grade tech-prep English were chosen to participate in the study. These students studied literature that is typically taught to college-prep students, and their responses to the literature and literature instruction were analyzed. I observed them in class, interviewed them individually and as a group, kept and analyzed portfolios of their work, and kept a daily observation journal of the students' behaviors and my own reflections about the classes. In addition, I occasionally asked the students to reflect on their experiences of the class, and I included their responses in my data analysis. Through this process, I attempted to answer the research question:

How do struggling readers in 11th grade Applied Communications classes respond to literature that is typically taught to college-prep students?

a. What approaches to teaching such texts are most engaging?

b. What approaches to teaching such texts are least engaging?

c. To which selections of literature do students respond most positively?

d. To which selections of literature do students respond most negatively?

e. What factors influence students' positive and negative responses to literature and literature instruction?

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter is divided into sections that correspond to the initial research questions. First, I will describe teaching approaches that were most and least engaging, and then I will describe particular literary selections that evoked positive and negative responses from students. I will then outline other factors that emerged as influences on students' experiences of literature study. In a final section, I describe each participant's closing comments about the course and its impact. Using evidence from participants' interviews, taped class discussions, journal observations and reflections, and students' work, I attempt to answer the question: How do struggling readers in 11th grade Applied Communications classes respond to literature that is typically taught to college-prep students?

What approaches to teaching such texts are most engaging?

To attempt to answer the larger research question, I first examined a variety of teaching strategies. The students' responses to specific teaching strategies were as varied as their responses to the literature. Approaches that worked well with some students failed to engage others. Some students, too, had difficulty engaging in any literature with any strategy.

One of the teaching strategies that elicited the most positive responses from the participants was the Paideia discussion, but even that was not met with unanimous approval. In their midterm group interview, I asked the participants which literature activities they liked the best. Ed offered Paideia discussions, and the others agreed. Mitchell suggested that I could get better participation by calling on those who did not respond. He confided, "'Cause I don't really answer that much, but if you'd call on me, I would." Melissa suggested that I offer candy, as well. By the end of the semester, most of the participants still had positive comments about the Paideia discussions. Andre liked them because they helped him on tests, and Ellen liked them because she likes discussions in general:

> Oh, I enjoy any kind of discussion, whether it be literature or politics, any kind of discussion, so I think that's good because everybody's involved, and it's challenging because everybody's, like you give them grades for every time they talk, and it encourages them to give their opinion.

Only Mitchell grew more negative as the semester ended. He offered that the discussions were, "Useless. Just a way for us to get bad grades because not everyone wants to talk. Sitting in the circle like that is kind of like, you don't want to say anything because you don't want to feel stupid." My journal observations describe Mitchell as one who rarely participated and sometimes disrupted class during these discussions.

Mitchell, of course, preferred the less structured general class discussions. The difference between these and the Paideia discussions is that the students sat in their regular seats instead of in a circle, and no one received a participation grade. Andre,

Melissa, and Ed agreed that these discussions were effective. Only Ellen thought they were inferior to Paideia discussions. She said, "I don't think they went as well because they weren't taken as seriously."

Another reading strategy that the participants liked was one that our RESA consultant Shelly Smith advocates. With this strategy the students would read a specific portion of the story silently, usually 2-5 paragraphs at a time, depending on the difficulty and length of the story. The first time I tried this strategy with tech-prep students, I had a difficult time determining when most of the students had finished the designated passage. Although I had instructed the students to look up when they finished, I found that they were reluctant to make eye contact with me. Perhaps they feared that I would call on them. I resolved that problem by giving them signaling cards that were green on one side and pink on the other. They turned the pink side up when they were reading, and then flipped the card to green when they were finished. When about 80% of the cards were green, I proceeded with the discussion of the section we had just read. All five of the participants were positive about that strategy. Ellen said, "It makes the story easier to understand when we would discuss," and Mitchell agreed, "That was good because we wouldn't have to read that much and forget and not know what we're talking about."

In my journal, I noted two stories that we read using this technique. The first was Kate Chopin's "A Pair of Silk Stockings." With this story, I failed to use the signaling cards:

> The reading strategy worked well, though. I had the students read a certain portion (2-5 paragraphs) and then look up. Then we would discuss that

> portion. I tried to focus my questions on inference—what could they tell about Mrs. Sommers from that passage? Then we would make predictions and read some more. They did a good job. (11/15/01)

Later that month I used the technique again, this time with Eudora Welty's story "A Worn Path." I described the lesson in my journal:

> I used Shelly's technique of reading a little silently and then discussing it. This time I used signaling cards to let me know when they were finished reading. It worked well. We did that three times, and then I read the rest of the story to them. Second and third blocks were good—they had lively discussions after the silent reading parts. They all thought Phoenix was blind at first. (11/26/01)

Another strategy that I used to make difficult literature more accessible to these struggling readers was video. Because students typically struggle with Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, I usually read only small portions of the novel with them and then show the video (Hauser, 1998). I do this with college-prep students, as well, since they also struggle with Hawthorne's vocabulary and sentence structures. However, when we use video as text, we treat it as such. For example, we analyze the literary elements such as symbolism, foreshadowing, characterization, and theme. After the video we conducted a Paideia discussion, just as if we had read the novel.

In a rare show of enthusiasm, Andre proclaimed that reading part of the novel and viewing the video was the best strategy of all. Melissa and Mitchell agreed that the video helped with comprehension and that the book would have been too difficult

by itself. Ellen complained that the video made her sleepy, and Ed did not like it but offered no reason why. My own journal reflections about this experience were more positive than the participants' responses: "When I stopped the video today (after about 20 minutes), there were protests. Some classes even offered to do the writing as homework so we could keep watching. I was pleased with their positive responses" (8/23/01). And the next day:

> I had hoped we could finish the video today, but we ran a little short. We got to Election Day and stopped. Again, there was much protesting when we ran out of time. There were a couple of sleepers in each class, but most of the students seem to be really engaged in the story. Today, we watched for a whole hour, and I was worried that I would lose them, but they stayed interested. (8/24/01)

I went on in my journal to describe successful Paideia discussions and positive student feedback. The highlight, though, had to be my entry about Jennifer, a tech-prep student in my fourth block class:

> Jennifer told me that I had made her mad Friday by not letting them finish the video, so she read the end of the book over the weekend. I asked her about the difficulty for her. She seems to be a proficient reader. She said it was hard—that she had to read it three times, but that she finally got it. I was pleased and impressed. (8/27/01)

That a student would voluntarily read the end of a book suggests that the video must have been engaging.

I also used video (Sinese, 1992) to complement our reading of Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men. This time we read the whole novel first, and then after our test, we compared it to the video. Before we watched the video, we pretended we were directors and discussed which actors would be best for the various characters. We also discussed the challenges of filming a novel with such limited settings (the bunkhouse, the barn, and the stream) and predicted how the director might deal with the issue. Then we watched the video and talked about the differences between it and the book. Afterward, many students claimed to have liked the book better. Ellen said about the video, "I think that's good because you read and then your mind sees what happens, and then you actually get to watch it and compare maybe how the director had to change some things and just see how they compare."

One of the most surprising details to emerge from this data is the students' positive reactions to hearing their peers read aloud. This reading strategy is one of my least favorites because it pains me to hear the students struggle through the text. I assumed that my students felt the same way, but I was wrong. I seldom allowed the students to read aloud, but we did read Lorraine Hansberry's play A Raisin in the Sun aloud, and I did occasionally let students read parts of Robert Cormier's The Chocolate War aloud. Only Mitchell had negative comments about his classmates' reading aloud: "I didn't like that because I don't think, like when I read a book, they sound a certain way to me in my head, and when people read out loud, it doesn't sound right to me." Andre, Ed, Melissa, and Ellen thought this strategy was a good one. Ellen said:

> I think that's good, especially for the ones who read and acted out because it really gets you involved in the story. You become a character and you want to learn more about what happened to the family. You seem to enjoy the story more if you can be a part of it.

I attempted this reading aloud technique with The Chocolate War out of desperation. The students were so bored by the story that I asked them how we could make it more interesting. Much to my surprise, they suggested that I let them take turns reading aloud. My journal entry illustrates my surprise:

> They suggested taking turns reading aloud. Mitchell began and did an excellent job. Ricky, Colby, Justin C., and Joshua all read, too. Justin C. was very weak, but they were more engaged even then than when I read. I don't get it. (11/06/01)

Perhaps these literature selections, a play and a young adult novel, were especially well-suited to oral reading.

Another reading strategy that Shelly Smith taught me is to use charts and graphic organizers to help the students visually organize what they are reading. Although some students protested at having to write anything while we were reading, my participants seemed to understand the value of this organizational tool. Melissa and Andre claimed that the charts and graphic organizers helped with their comprehension, and Mitchell said they were especially helpful with Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men because so many of the characters' names begin with the same letter: "Because sometimes we had trouble figuring out which character is which, and that helps a lot, especially with . . . What book was it that all the characters began with a

'C'? Of Mice and Men." Ellen agreed that graphic organizers were helpful for some works, but she cautioned against overusing them: "That was okay, especially when there are several characters, but overall, I don't think it's necessary for every story."

Another strategy that met with approval from most of the participants was prediction. Often as we read stories or plays, I would stop and ask the students to predict what might happen later in the work. For example, with Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men I defined foreshadowing and asked the students after the first two chapters for examples of foreshadowing and predictions about what might come later. This technique worked well with short stories, too, as long as the students who were repeating the class had been cautioned not to give away endings. Ellen explained the appeal of predicting: "I like that because it keeps you guessing, and you're like, 'Well, I think this is going to happen.' And it encourages you to do the work to see if you were right."

What approaches to teaching such texts are least engaging?

As I analyzed the data in search of answers to this question, I was pleased to discover very little to report here. I was also surprised at the one answer to this question that emerged from the data. Our textbook publisher provides audiotapes of many of the literature selections, and occasionally I use them. Until I conducted this research, I believed that the professional readers on the audiotapes were engaging and interesting, at least more interesting than I. My students disagreed. One of the few things the participants were unanimous about is their dislike of the audiotape. I used it with Katherine Anne Porter's story "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," and I stopped

periodically to explain, ask questions, and have the students make predictions. Still, this strategy did not engage the students. I reflected in my journal:

> They were bored to tears. Third block had a brief reprieve when the fire alarm rang. . . . I thought hearing a professional read the story would be a treat that would make it more interesting. I was wrong. Second block went right to sleep. Ellen and Mitchell put their heads down and snoozed, while Andre stared off into space. In third block, Melissa, as I said, paid very little attention. Ed seemed to be hanging in there, though. (11/28/01).

Of course, it is difficult to know which failed to engage the students, the story or the audiotape. Students were negative about both. About listening to the tapes, all of the participants agreed that it was boring and made them sleepy. Ellen elaborated:

> I did not enjoy that at all because of the way the person on the tape comes off. It's cheesy and it's hard to stay focused on the story because you're not being forced to read and you can be doing other things and not listening.

To which selections of literature do students respond most positively?

It is almost impossible to find literature that all students will enjoy. Many factors influence students' engagement with literature; often the same piece of literature will evoke strong positive and strong negative responses from different students. This was true of the literature in this study, as well. Most of the literature selections appealed to some students and not to others. However, some works did emerge as favorites with most students.

In their final interviews, four of the five remaining participants chose John Steinbeck's novel Of Mice and Men as a favorite. Traditionally, this novel is a

success with every class, from tech-prep to honors. Students generally relate well to the characters, and they find the plot engaging and suspenseful. This semester was no different. I noted several times in my journal that students hated to stop reading at the end of the class.

Harvey and Goudvis (2000) describe three ways that students can engage with literature: text-to-self, in which they connect the text with their own lives, text-to-text, in which they connect the text to other texts, and text-to-world, in which they connect the text to literary periods or current events or anything in the world at large. A taped Paideia discussion reveals that these tech-prep students engaged with this novel in all three ways.

In response to a question about the theme of the novel, several students offered text-to-self interpretations. R.J. suggested, "Maybe he wanted to say don't let people hold you back," and Quent offered, "Life is a challenge." Peter concurred, "No matter how hard we try, something will always set you back." With very little prompting, these tech-prep students were able to generalize themes from the novel that related to their own lives. They were also able to put themselves in the characters' positions and to judge the characters by their own values. For example, when asked whether George were right to shoot Lennie, Quent said, "I would have told the other guys that I couldn't find him and then I guess I would have moved on and got back together instead of killing him." Colby argued, "I think he did the right thing because Lennie, if they had let him go, would have gone off and hurt somebody else, so he wasn't really helping nobody else." Desiree offered, "They could have locked him up." Many other students joined in the conversation about what George

should have done and what they would have done in George's situation. Both Desiree's and Melissa's writing folders contain persuasive letters that they wrote from Crooks' perspective, pleading with the men to let him come into the bunk house and play cards with them.

Because this novel was one of the earlier selections we studied, students did not have many opportunities to make text-to-text connections. They did, however, understand the connection between the novel and Robert Burns' poem "To a Mouse," which provided Steinbeck with his title. I explained Burns' poem and asked the students why Steinbeck chose that title for his novel. R.J. answered, "It's just like Lennie and George. They had it all planned out, but it messed up." These students were also able to connect different parts of this work to each other. Desiree compared the deaths of Lennie's puppy and Curley's wife: "I feel like he killed that puppy and he didn't mean to do it, just like he killed Curley's wife and he didn't mean to do it." R.J. connected Lennie's experience with Curley's wife with the girl in Weed: "When they were back in Weed and Lennie had messed with that girl, you could kind of figure that he was going to mess with that other girl." Jim also connected Lennie's death to Candy's dog's death: "It relates to Lennie, like where George kills him like a dog or something. He kills him because, like the dog was suffering, and if they'd have locked him up, he would have suffered."

On a deeper level, the students were also able to make text-to-world connections with this work. For example, when I asked them to speculate about why Curley's wife did not have a name, Mitchell offered, "Because she was a woman and

women were not very important back then." When I asked the significance of Lennie's observation that face cards are the same on both ends, Jim suggested:

> [It has] something to do with life, or whatever. Like, Lennie is like, no matter what or how hard he tries to change or whatever, no matter what he does, he's always going to be the same like the card. You can look at it one way and turn it over and it's the same.

And Colby offered this response to the same question: "It's like when you have a number of cards, it's like . . . I have the same cards, but then when you get a face card, it's different from all the rest. It's like Lennie. He stands out from everybody else."

Another favorite work of the students was Lorraine Hansberry's play A Raisin in the Sun. On their final exams, 36 of 75 students chose this work as one of their three favorites, and only eight chose it as a least favorite. Among the participants, this play received mixed reviews. Melissa, who volunteered for a part and struggled tremendously to read it, was the most enthusiastic. In her final interview, she proclaimed, "Oh yeah! I liked that story." Ed, who was absent when we read the end, said that what he read was "okay," and Ellen failed to offer an opinion of the play; however, she pondered the significance of the title:

> I still have yet to figure out the meaning A Raisin in the Sun. . . . because I can't figure it out. I've thought about it, a raisin in the sun, and I've read the story, and I know that a raisin in the sun has a deeper meaning in the story, but I just cannot see it.

Andre and Mitchell were more negative. Andre described it as "pretty long and boring," and Mitchell criticized the characters' actions: "I didn't like that very much. It's not that it was too long, it's just that, again, they didn't get anything done. They had self-defeating attitudes and they think that's okay."

Despite their varied and sometimes negative responses about how they liked the play, taped discussions show that many students did engage as we read it. Their discussions revealed that they were able to think critically about the literature, even as they claimed not to like it. Students were able to make predictions about what would happen to the Younger family after they moved into Clyborne Park. R.J.'s vivid prediction evoked laughter from his classmates: "I think there's going to be no Jell-O coming at the door welcoming them, and they're going to get bricks throwed in their windows and stuff like that." Colby disagreed: "I think they're going to live happily ever after because they're not going to bother anybody." Darin offered, "I think it might take them a little while to get along with everybody, but I think they'll get along with everybody pretty good because they're a nice family." Jim L. suggested, "I don't think nobody will mess with them because they might be scared of them after the way Walter talked to that white dude."

In addition to making predictions, the students were able to discuss various literary devices within the play. For example, students differentiated between dynamic and static characters. R.J. suggested that Walter is a dynamic character because, "At the end, he gets the respect of his family because he made the right decision." In another class, Darin, too, offered that Walter is dynamic because he became a man: "Because Granny used to run the house, or Mama or something like

that, and now he gonna run the house." Students went on to discuss internal and external conflicts and the symbolism of the plant. Finally, they connected the play to its title. When asked what the title (and its poem, "Harlem") had to do with the play, Mark said, "Because it was all about their dreams with the money, so if they didn't get to do them, it would be like their dreams just dried up like a raisin in the sun."

Another selection that evoked mixed responses from the students was Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance." On their semester exams, only three students chose this work as a favorite, and eight chose it as a least favorite. My participants were also divided: Ed and Melissa disliked it, while Andre, Ellen, and Mitchell liked it. Mitchell's response most closely mirrored my own feelings about the piece: "That was good. I like the discussions we had from that one. Those were good." Mitchell expressed my attitude toward this essay: the students do not always enjoy reading it, but our discussions about the work and its themes are usually insightful.

In our taped discussion of "Self-Reliance," Desiree showed an unusual ability to interpret and explain this challenging work. When asked to interpret Emerson's line, "Envy is ignorance and imitation is suicide," Desiree explained:

> He means like, if you always try to be like somebody else or try to do stuff because everybody else is doing it, you're going to self-destruct. You're killing who you really are. Like, you know, you try to imitate somebody else, you're not being yourself.

Later in the essay she explained Emerson's line, "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members":

> Because people like live, they think you gotta live a certain way. People make you believe you gotta live a certain way and do certain things in life to be good or, you know, like you gotta go to church, or you gotta have a job making good money to be high class, and stuff like that.

Ellen, too, showed insight during our class discussion. She explained Emerson's assertion, "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist." When I asked what a nonconformist was, Ellen replied, "Someone who doesn't conform to things. They go their own way and do, be an individual."

Aside from comprehending and interpreting the essay, the students were able to make connections between the essay and their own lives, other texts, and the world. We discussed issues of nonconformity and peer pressure and self-reliance. Most students initially agreed that Emerson was correct by saying that people should not conform to society. Desiree, however, pointed out that Emerson failed to draw a crucial line: "If people done what they felt, really felt, and didn't worry about what everybody else think, this world wouldn't be, I don't know, it wouldn't be civilized. You know? You gotta, you gotta set limits to some things." Ellen supported Desiree's point:

> I agree with Desiree that if you just want to live your life the way you want to live it and you feel like going out and killing everybody, then, and if everybody did that, if everybody felt that they were able to do that, it would be very uncivilized. Because it would be everybody's free will, there would be no system of government.

Before we read the essay, we discussed the idea of self-reliance, what it is and when people achieve it. Ellen connected the idea to another work we had read, Steinbeck's novel Of Mice and Men. She argued that self reliance does not come automatically with age. She said, "Or Lennie from Of Mice and Men. He's a grown man, but yet he can't take care of himself." In third block, Kathy related the idea of self reliance to the popular television show "Survivor": "The people on the show 'Survivor.' They were trying to be [self-reliant], but it didn't work too well."

In conjunction with our study of "Self-Reliance" and the other Transcendental works, we watched the video A River Runs Through It (Redford, 1992). After we watched the video, I asked the students to relate its themes to the themes of the other Transcendental works we had read, including "Self-Reliance." Mitchell's written response shows the connections he made: "In the movie, Paul was being an individual by changing his last name, changing the way he fly fishes." Ellen's written reflection agrees with Mitchell's: "He [Paul] was very independent and did not like help from others." That these students could connect a popular video with the Transcendental themes of "Self-Reliance" reinforces that they did engage with Emerson's essay, even though they were not enthusiastic about reading it.

Although "Self-Reliance" elicited mixed responses from the students, their discussions showed that they did comprehend it. Their comments about self reliance, conformity, and independence reflect a fairly sophisticated engagement with the text. In my journal entry for that day, I reflected, "I think the discussions were pretty good. . . . I think most of them get it" (10/4/01).

Twice during the semester I taught short stories from the easier Scope text books. Early in the semester during the unit on Romanticism, I taught the revised Scope version of Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" along with Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" and William Cullen Bryant's poem "Thanatopsis." Near the end of the semester I included the revised Scope version of Ray Bradbury's "The Fog Horn" in a Modernist literature unit that also included Eudora Welty's story "A Worn Path" and Katherine Anne Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." Interestingly, one of the stories from each of these units made it onto the students' least favorites list: "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." In contrast, the Scope stories did fairly well.

To see how the Scope version of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" compared to the other Romantic works of literature, I asked students on their tests to tell which selection they liked the best and to explain why. An overwhelming majority of the students in all three classes chose "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" as their favorite. It received 41 of 64 votes; "The Fall of the House of Usher" was second with 17 of 64 votes, and "Thanatopsis" received only 6 of 64 votes. My journal observation about the results expresses my disappointment in their preferences:

> I was so hoping that they would be as disgusted as I was at the elementary vocabulary and sentence structure of "Sleepy Hollow." Instead, most chose it because it was "easy" and "interesting." Maybe they'll feel different at the end of the semester when I try again. (9/21/01).

My participants gave the Scope version of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" mixed reviews. Andre said it was okay, and Ed and Melissa said they liked it, but they did

not elaborate. Ellen said, "It was easy because by the time you're 16, 17 years old, if you've heard the story once, you've heard it 17, so it was easy." Only Mitchell complained about the simplicity of the story: "I didn't like the story we read in class because it was the dumbed down version you gave us. I'd rather read the whole story, even if it was long."

The other Scope story, "The Fog Horn," received more mixed reviews from all of the students. On their semester exam, 28 students chose it as a favorite, while 23 chose it as a least favorite. In their final interviews, Andre, Ed, and Melissa said the story was pretty good, while Ellen called it "weird": "That was just weird! The dragon or the sea monster coming up and the fish worshipping the light house, that was just weird." Mitchell, who was most critical of the other Scope story, liked this one: "I liked that one just because of the monster. That made the story good. I never read anything like it."

As with the other Scope story, I asked all of the students for feedback about the literature on their tests. This time I asked them to choose their favorite and least favorite selections. In this case, "The Fog Horn" was selected as their favorite story by 29 students, but it was also chosen as their least favorite by 16. With similar numbers, Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path" was chosen as a favorite by 27 students and as a least favorite by 11. My journal reflection about the results raises an important question:

> I guess they really didn't like "Granny Weatherall." I was pleased, though, that "The Fog Horn" won best by only two votes and was actually liked least by five more students than "A Worn Path." I guess I can argue that if kids

> respond equally positively to both, then why not teach the "good stuff"? (11/29/01).

Interestingly, Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path" was the only literature selection we read that all five of my participants agreed that they liked. Andre and Ed gave their usual concise reactions, stating that the story was good and that they liked it. Melissa said, "That was pretty weird, but it was neat the way everything added up to one thing, and then it didn't even tell you what happened at the end." Mitchell, too, liked the unexplained ending: "I liked that because of the mystery—we don't know if the son is dead or not, so you just have to wonder." Ellen elaborated on the deeper meaning that she derived from the story:

> I think the story was not about the woman just walking to the hospital. I think it had a deeper meaning of life—that life is a journey with, it's a long journey with thorns, and you're going to fall, but you have to get back up and push on.

Another short story that students responded positively to was Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour." This story is not in the new textbooks we have adopted, so I printed a copy from the Internet and photocopied a class set. This was possible only because it is such a short story. In their final interviews, Ed did not remember this story (he may have been absent), but the other four participants liked it very much. Mitchell responded, "That was great. I liked that because there hasn't been that much irony in the stories we read." My journal describes students' reactions to the story:

> Because it was so short, I read it to them, and we discussed it along the way. They seemed to like it. I always watch their faces at the end to see who "gets

> it." Most seemed to. They were able to tell me pretty coherently how the story fit into the Realism and Naturalism movements. Overall, I think the lesson went well. (11/13/01).

To which selections of literature do students respond most negatively?

Despite my best attempts, some of the literature selections failed to capture my students' interest. Katherine Anne Porter's short story "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," with its stream-of-consciousness technique, may have been too challenging for my participants and their classmates. On the semester exam I asked students to identify the three works of literature from that nine-week period that they would not choose to teach if they were teaching the course, and 35 of 75 students chose this story as one of their three. In their final interviews, my participants had mixed reactions. In an interview, Andre said the story was "boring," and in a reading response assignment, he elaborated, "The story was hard to understand because it had no transitions. The tape was okay, but the woman was talking slow and old and almost made me want to sleep." Ed did not like the story, either, and Melissa said it was "pretty cute," and Ellen explained the story's moral: "I believe that it teaches, try not to hold grudges, but in a way it does teach hold people accountable for what they're accountable for, but don't hold grudges." Mitchell, the most able reader, understood and appreciated Porter's use of stream-of-consciousness: "I liked that because it jumped around and it didn't make any sense." My own journal observations of that day's lesson tell a dismal story:

> To read the story, we listened to the audio tape and followed along. I paused occasionally to ask questions and explain things. They were bored to tears. . . .

> I thought that hearing a professional read the story would be a treat that would make it more interesting. I was wrong. Second block went right to sleep. Ellen and Mitchell put their heads down and snoozed, while Andre stared off into space. In third block, Melissa . . . paid very little attention. Ed seemed to be hanging in there, though. (11/28/01).

It is difficult to separate the literature itself from the instructional method, in this case listening to an audio tape of the story and following along in the book, but it is clear that this experience was not a positive one for the students or for me.

Another disappointment was Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." This selection often presents difficulties for the college-prep students, as well. Poe's subject matter and vocabulary are often foreign to students. In our midterm group interview, Ellen confessed to having slept through that story; Ed thought it was "scary," and Melissa said, "I thought it was a little spooky. I don't know—it was kind of weird." Even though we read parts of the story instead of trying to wade through the entire thing, my own journal entry concluded, "This piece might just be too difficult" (9/20/01). In their final interviews, Andre and Ed claimed to have enjoyed the story. Ellen called it, "the most challenging piece" of literature that we studied; Melissa continued to call it "weird," and Mitchell genuinely enjoyed it: "I like that story because I'd read it before a long time ago, and I liked it, so I like that story. It was good."

The only piece of literature that evoked negative responses from all five participants was Edward Taylor's Puritan poem "Huswifery." This poem is usually challenging for college-prep classes, too. My journal observation reflects that: "Today

we did 'Huswifery,' a difficult poem even for CP students. I think they got the basic idea" (8/15/01). In their final interviews, Ed said he didn't like the poem, and Andre called it "kind of sleepy." Melissa said, "Now that was stupid!" Ellen and Mitchell complained that it was hard to understand. Ellen said, "It was a little hard to really understand," and Mitchell remarked, "That really didn't make any sense to me because I wasn't around back then, so I don't really know what he was talking about." Mitchell was probably referring to Taylor's analogy of the spinning wheel, a device that is unfamiliar to modern students.

Another selection that evoked mostly negative responses from the students was Henry David Thoreau's essay "Walden." In their final interviews four of the five participants were negative, with Melissa summing up their collective attitudes: "Ugh!" Only Ellen said anything positive about it: "I believe that's important, and it teaches you to find out who you are as a person and not how others see you, but how you yourself are." My journal entry for that day reflects the students' negative experiences with this work:

> What a day! Students are so wrapped up in Homecoming that they were really hard to keep on task. We tried to do "Walden," but it was hard to keep on task. I ended up reading less of it than I had planned because the kids were so rowdy and distracted. I read the underlined parts in the book, and the kids discussed them. They thought Thoreau was "weird" and "on crack rock," but most could identify with the complexity of life and the need to simplify. Also, we related his "castles in the air" to Lennie and George's dream of having their own place. Maybe they'll be more focused on Monday. (10/5/01).

It is clear from these participants' varied reactions that no piece of literature evoked the same kinds of responses from every student. In their final interviews, the five participants listed their three favorite and least favorite selections of literature from the course, and many works appear on both lists:

Table 2: Participants' Favorite and Least Favorite Literature

Participant	**Favorite Literature**	**Least Favorite Literature**
Andre	The Scarlet Letter, Of Mice and Men, To Kill a Mockingbird	The Chocolate War, "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," The Wave
Ed	The Scarlet Letter, Of Mice and Men, To Kill a Mockingbird	The Chocolate War, "Thanatopsis," The Wave
Ellen	Of Mice and Men, A Raisin in the Sun, The Wave	"A Pair of Silk Stockings," "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," "The Fall of the House of Usher"
Melissa	A Raisin in the Sun, The Chocolate War, The Wave	"Self-Reliance," "Nature," "Walden"
Mitchell	Of Mice and Men, The Chocolate War, "Thanatopsis"	A Raisin in the Sun, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," "Huswifery"

Some works that appear as favorites for one student are also least favorites for others.

What factors influence students' positive and negative responses to literature and literature instruction?

Aside from the teaching strategies and the literature itself, other factors emerged as relevant to the students' experiences in this tech-prep English class. In their individual and group interviews and class discussions, students often commented on three issues surrounding literature instruction: their teachers' attitudes, the element of control and choice about their education, and the role and importance of literacy in their future vocations.

Teachers' Attitudes

Unfortunately, our school policies often discriminate against tech-prep students. For example, every class in the school must set an attendance goal at the beginning of each semester; the minimum attendance percentage for college-prep classes is 95%, and the minimum attendance percentage for tech-prep classes is 94%. Although we claim to try to validate tech-prep students' career goals and educational experiences, our not-so-subtle message in this policy is that we expect tech-prep students to be absent more than their college-prep counterparts. Likewise, many teachers will issue textbooks to college-prep students only, which communicates to the tech-prep students that we do not believe they will do homework or that they are not responsible enough to be entrusted with a book.

Not surprisingly, these negative attitudes toward tech-prep students are sometimes reinforced by teachers. Our conversations and interviews about literature study and tech-prep education in general revealed some disturbing but predictable truths about teachers' attitudes toward tech-prep classes and students. In my initial

interviews with the six participants, I asked if they had ever felt that they were treated differently than college-prep students. My question was prompted by my students' comments in class about teachers who treated them badly. Only Andre replied that he had not been treated differently. Desiree, Ed, and Ellen expressed frustration at the lack of challenge in their tech-prep classes. Desiree related:

> Yeah. Sometimes we want to, like we'll do an activity or something, and the teacher tells us we gotta take our time, you know, we can't do it yet. We be saying we're ready, but they try to tell us we're not ready for it. We are ready to move on to other things. They'll make us do it for two or three days, and the college-prep will maybe do it for one day.

Similarly, Ed felt that the pace of the classes was sometimes too slow, but he also felt that his teacher did not respect him or his classmates:

> Just like, I know all the material; it's like they go over it, like for instance in Mr. X's class, when it's all just like easy to me. I know it all. . . .Yeah, well, like okay, let me see how I can say this, the teacher kind of acts different towards us, like explains more, slower, and acts like we're dumb.

Ellen, too, complained that teachers moved too slowly in tech-prep classes and that they treated the students as if they were "stupid":

> In one of my other classes, the teacher lets us use every note that they give, and I know on the college-level, they don't get the notes. On tests you can use every worksheet and every note they give. To me, that's saying we can't remember the information, therefore, we need the notes. And they, when they do worksheets, they stop and they spell every single word. And it's like,

> "We're not that stupid. We know how to spell." And then the students have caught on to well, "They're going to spell for us, so why don't we act stupid and ask words that we know how to spell to waste time" So yeah, I do feel that we are treated as maybe not as smart as the rest of the students in the school.

Here Ellen also describes one way in which students have learned to subvert the teacher's condescension; they simply act as though they are as challenged as he believes they are.

Melissa, who often struggled with tech-prep work, did not complain that the pace was too slow, but she gave an example of a teacher who mistreated his tech-prep students: "This person says that we're lousy, we ain't smart enough, he's surprised we're in tech-prep classes, we should be in special ed." Mitchell described an experience in which he saw the same teacher in two different contexts, a tech-prep class and a college-prep one:

> When I was in ninth grade, one of my teachers would, she'd have the printout things, we didn't have the books, but we'd have the printout things, and she'd hand it to us, and some of the other students in the class weren't too smart, and they'd still have trouble with the simple stuff, and she'd just get frustrated and be like angry. But then one time I went—I thought she was just the meanest teacher in the world, I thought it was her—but I went to one of her college-prep classes one time because I was doing something, I was taking a test, and she was so nice. She was like, "Good job, this, good job, that" like

> "You're smart." Not like when I was in there. It was weird. I didn't like being in her class anymore because of how she treated us.

Although it is unprofessional for a teacher to allow students to criticize another teacher, I sometimes hear comments about my colleagues that reflect these students' experiences. I noted in one journal entry:

> Third block students told me today that their history teacher said that tech-prep students would be working for college-prep students and that they're too stupid to go to college. Interesting comment from one of the least intelligent teachers on the staff. I just despise that kind of thinking. (8/20/01).

I have also heard comments in the teachers' workroom that reflect these negative attitudes toward tech-prep classes and students. One day a math teacher was bemoaning her schedule because she would be teaching a tech-prep math class, and a social studies teacher remarked, "Your job with tech-prep classes is to keep them from climbing the walls. Anything you happen to teach them is extra."

Control/Choice

I discovered in my initial interviews that not all of my participants had always been in the tech-prep track. When I asked the participants why they were in tech-prep classes instead of college prep, I learned that Andre, Ellen, and Mitchell had been in college-prep classes. Andre said he was in college-prep English in the eighth grade, but he "couldn't make no A's." When I asked if he decided to move to tech prep or if someone else decided for him, he replied, "I guess the counselor." Apparently he had been left out of the decision-making process and did not have control over his placement.

Mitchell, on the other hand, was allowed to participate in the meetings where his placement was decided. After failing ninth grade in another school system, Mitchell's teachers and counselors decided to move him to tech-prep: "The teachers and counselors were kind of like telling me, 'You're not motivated.' I'm not this, I could do this if I put effort toward it, so I was just like, 'Fine. Put me in tech-prep.'" Mitchell's description of the decision to place him in tech-prep classes sounds more like resignation; the teachers and counselors had already decided what to do with him, and he gave in. Apparently his parents played no role in the decision.

Ellen seemed to have the most control over her own placement, perhaps because she had been in college-prep classes through 10th grade. When I asked her about moving to tech-prep, she explained:

> Well, I did good in my college-prep classes, not as well as I'm doing now, but it was mainly the math. I'm not a math student, and it was really putting me far behind. This was going to be my third time in Algebra I, and I said, "I have to graduate on time." We talked with my mom and then we talked with the guidance counselors, and we all felt that it was best if I transferred.

Here Ellen describes a deliberate decision that she and her parents participated in.

Desiree, who later dropped out of the study, initially described her tech-prep placement as her own decision. She said:

> They—when I was in elementary school, when I got to eighth grade and went to advisement, they wanted me to get in A [college-prep] classes because my scores from elementary school are real good or whatever, but I didn't want to

get in it because I wanted to be with my friends, and so I chose to get in tech-prep because it would be easier for me.

Melissa, too, claimed to choose to be in tech-prep classes. When I asked her why she was in them, she said, "Because I don't think I could make it in college-prep. I think I'd fail because I can barely pass tech-prep classes." It is doubtful that Melissa ever had a real choice about her placement. Typically middle-school teachers will recommend placement, and the issue is considered settled unless problems arise.

Ed claimed he was bored in his tech-prep classes, but he never thought about changing to college prep. When I asked him why he was in tech-prep, he said, "They put me in 'em." He never questioned "their" decisions or tried to control his own education.

Workplace Literacy

One of the frustrating trends in education is the emphasis on workplace literacy skills, especially for the noncollege-bound students. While not necessarily destructive, this emphasis can lead to a curriculum that focuses on preparing students to be effective workers rather than educated adults. The students in this study also seemed to embrace the idea that literature instruction should support their future careers. When asked about the purpose of English classes and literature study in high school, most of the participants described its value in terms of their futures. Melissa's and Andre's answers relate only to work. Melissa said that English classes were, "To get, to learn how to write and stuff when you get older because if you don't have, like on your resumes, if you don't have good English, then you can't do it." When I asked about literature instruction specifically, Melissa again commented on work:

"Because, like when you go to get a job and you have to write a resume, your resume don't look right, they're not going to give you a job." Andre, too, thought the value of English classes and literature study was, "I guess to read and write so you can get older, and when you get a job, you can read and write."

Ellen talked about both job needs and the inherent value of literature study. About the purpose of English classes, she said:

> Not only to prepare you for jobs in the business world, but in life. In the business world you're interacting with people, you're writing documents, you're always in contact with people, and you need to know the correct way to do things, you need to have a good general knowledge of English and literature, even if you're not going into a field where that's required, it will always be important.

About literature instruction specifically, she replied:

> Yes, I believe it's very important because it is part of our past and our present. The stories reflect the times, and they were written as with maybe The Scarlet Letter, that's the only way we're going to know really what it was like from the community and the people in the town's point of view.

Mitchell and Ed focused on the general skills involved in English classes. Mitchell said English classes are important for students, "Because they need to learn how to read, and the more you read, the better you read, and also to learn how to write and better express their thoughts." Ed suggested that, "Well, it gives them, introduces them to different authors, different pieces of work."

Many of these students' comments about literacy seem to echo what they have probably heard from teachers. Perhaps our attempts to link the curriculum to their lives and to make it relevant have given students this superficial view of education. Tech-prep teachers are urged to show students how their content relates to the workplace; it seems that these students have learned this lesson well.

Students' Final Reflections

Aside from the detailed feedback about the literature we read and the techniques we used to study it, the participants were very candid about the impact that this study had on them and about their preferences for literature study. In this section, I will summarize each participant's final assessment of the course, the literature, and the study's impact on them.

Andre was honest about the effort he put forth on this class. He made a 72 for the semester and claimed that this grade was lower than his other grades, but he attributed it to sleeping, which he did frequently. I often wondered how he managed to pass the class at all and sleep as frequently as he did. At one point in the semester Andre was worried about failing, so he and several other students came to tutoring before a test. He could not participate well in the review because he had slept through many of the classes, but I watched him write down the page numbers of all of the stories we had read. I asked him about it in his final interview, and he did confess that he read at home to make up for what he missed in class. When I asked him why he did not just pay attention in class and not have to read at home, he said it was just too boring. He claimed that this English class was no more difficult than previous English

classes, and his favorite part of the class was vocabulary. His least favorite was writing essays.

Several of my final interview questions were designed to gauge the effect of this literature curriculum on the participants. Andre's answers revealed that this study had very little impact on him or his attitudes toward literature study. He said the literature we read had not changed him or his thinking in any way, he suggested that we not study the literary movements, he did not read during SSR time, and the only out-of-school reading he did during the semester was with magazines. He did, though, say that he thought he was a better reader now than when he began the class, but he was unable to articulate why or how he defined "better reader." He did recall Roger Chillingworth from The Scarlet Letter as an especially memorable character. When I asked his opinion about which literature he would prefer to study in his senior English class, he replied, "It really doesn't matter." It was obvious to me that this college-prep literature curriculum had failed to make much of an impression on Andre.

Ed was probably the quietest participant; it was often difficult to elicit responses from him in interviews. I sometimes had to remind him that we were taping the interviews because he would respond to questions with head nods instead of words. He made an 85 in the class and said the class was easy for him. He said this English class was "about the same" as the other English classes he had taken in terms of difficulty. His favorite part of the class was "doing the play like we did with different people," and his least favorite was writing.

Ed recommended that we continue to study the literary movements, and he especially remembered Lennie from Of Mice and Men, but he did not feel that our

literature study had changed his thinking in any way. He did not feel that he was a better reader now than he was at the beginning of the semester, and he sometimes participated in SSR, usually by reading short young adult novels. He did not read anything outside of class during the semester. Ed's most interesting answer was about his preference for literature study next year. Although he claimed that this class with its college-prep literature was easy, he expressed a preference for the Scope literature for his senior English class.

Ellen enjoyed being interviewed and elaborated on most questions. Despite her high class average of 94, Ellen used the word "challenging" frequently to describe the class and the literature we studied. She claimed that she was making A's in most of her classes, and she said that this English class was a little easier than she was expecting; she was, however, coming into a tech-prep class for the first time after having been in college-prep 10th grade English. Her favorite aspect of the class was writing, especially persuasive essays, because that is a skill she felt she would need in life. When I asked her about her least favorite part of the class, she responded:

> At times there were stories that I just did not like, that it was very obvious that the entire class did not enjoy, and that would be the time when it would be really hard to stay focused on the story and not go to sleep.

Ellen was more positive about the literature's impact on her than Andre and Ed were. When I asked her if she could name one character from the literature that she especially remembered or related to, she named Phoenix Jackson from "A Worn Path." She explained:

> I guess it would be the grandmother in "A Worn Path." As you go through life, I've been through ups and downs and stuff that's just horrible that I would never want to go through again, you have to push on, and you're going to fall down, but you have to get back up and try again.

Ellen also claimed that our literature study had changed her thinking in several ways: "Just, they make you think about your own life and maybe racism or slavery or maybe just what you see from the people it affected most, their point of view." She liked that we studied the literary movements because they provided a context for the works we read, and she felt that she was a better reader now than she was at the beginning of the semester. Ellen usually read during SSR time and also at home, usually romance novels and mysteries, and she said that during the semester she had developed a stronger desire to read: "I feel now more involved, like wanting to read more short stories than I would before."

Because Ellen had been in college-prep English in 9th and 10th grades, she had limited experience with the Scope book. She read the two Scope stories that I used as contrasts to the college-prep literature, so it was not surprising that she said she would prefer to study college-prep literature in her senior English class: "In Senior English, you need to read the same books that the college-prep reads because it will be challenging. I don't think you should be given easier stories. You need to be challenged to read the same literature."

Melissa made a 76 in the class for the semester, and she, too, claimed that the class was easy. She said, "I had fun. It was easy. I mean, it wasn't as hard as I thought it was going to be." She told me that her English grade was higher than her other

grades and that this English class was easier than her previous English classes: "It felt easier to me, I guess because I understood it more." Her favorite part of the class was writing a short story, and her least favorite was studying Transcendentalism.

Melissa often complained during the semester that the class was boring or hard, and she especially struggled with the vocabulary quizzes. She would not come in for tutoring, though. Despite her complaints, she did seem to connect to certain selections of literature. Melissa especially related to Hester Prynne from The Scarlet Letter. She explained, "She just, she didn't feel bad about what she did. She knew she did something wrong, and she paid for what she did." Melissa also claimed that the literature had changed her thinking about literature study itself. She explained:

> Well, now I like literature. I used to hate it. When they gave me literature class, I said, "Oh, God!" because I didn't like it. None of my teachers ever helped me. And then I got this class, and it was just a blow through. It felt good.

She also recommended that we continue to study the literary movements even though parts of it were difficult for her. She said, "That part was neat because it helped us understand how it was year after year after year. And some of it was hard, but everything can't be easy." Melissa also felt that she was a better reader now than she was at the beginning of the semester, and she claimed that she often took her SSR books home to read. During SSR, Melissa usually read romance novels. When I asked what she would prefer to study in her senior English class, she opted for the easier Scope literature.

Mitchell could have made a 95 or higher in this class with very little effort, but he sometimes chose to take zeros on papers because he did not want to write them. His final grade was an 88, and he said it reflected what he was making in his other classes. About the difficulty level of the class, Mitchell claimed this was the "easiest English class I've ever had." He reiterated that sentiment when I asked him what he liked best about the class. He replied, "How easy it was." He did not like the other people in the class, though, and complained that they did not try hard enough. Mitchell's attitude toward education in general reflected a "playing the game" mentality. He seemed to see high school as a necessary obstacle to get through. For example, when I asked him about the purpose of high school English classes, he replied, "To get a high school education? To be getting credit for it." He was skillful at calculating what a zero would do to his average and then deciding whether or not to write an assigned essay.

Although Mitchell claimed to relate to Lennie from Of Mice and Men, he said that our literature study had not really changed his thinking in any way. He did, however, like that we studied the literary periods, and he did read during SSR time; usually his selections for SSR were fairly sophisticated. For example, he read William Golding's The Lord of the Flies during SSR and outside of class this semester, and he said that he had been searching for the sequel to Cormier's The Chocolate War, Beyond the Chocolate War. He did not feel, though, that he was a better reader now than he was at the beginning of the semester. Mitchell also expressed a preference for college-prep literature in his senior English class: "Because it's more challenging. Just because we're in tech-prep doesn't mean we have to have dumbed down stuff."

Summary

In this chapter I answered the research question, how do struggling readers in 11th grade Applied Communications classes respond to literary texts that are typically taught to college-prep students? I described several methods of literature instruction that engaged the students. These included conducting Paideia discussions, having regular class discussions, reading portions silently and then discussing them, watching videos, having their classmates read aloud, using graphic organizers, and making predictions. I described one instructional strategy that failed to engage the students: listening to an audio tape and following along with the text. I also listed several works that successfully engaged most of the students. These included Of Mice and Men, A Raisin in the Sun, "Self-Reliance," "A Worn Path," "The Story of an Hour," and the two Scope stories, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "The Fog Horn." I listed four of the students' least favorite works, which included "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Huswifery," and "Walden." Then I examined three other themes that emerged during the study: teachers' attitudes toward tech-prep students and classes, students' feelings of control and choice in their placement and education in general, and students' attitudes toward workplace literacy. Finally, I summarized the students' final reflections about their experiences in this class.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I will restate the purposes of the study and review the research procedures. I will summarize the results and discuss their implications for educators. I will then make recommendations based on the results of this study. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of this study and make suggestions for further study.

Purposes

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a college-prep literature curriculum on 11th grade technical-prep students. Because many tech-prep students are struggling readers, they often study literature that is modified to make it easier to read, or their teachers promote a workplace literacy that focuses on employment skills rather than literature study. However, not all English teachers believe that traditional, challenging literature should be reserved for college-prep students. As Applebee's (1993) study found, most teachers do have some control over what literature they teach. This study attempted to demonstrate that tech-prep students could benefit from studying the same literature that college-prep students read.

Another purpose of this study was to determine the most effective teaching strategies for making difficult literature accessible to struggling readers. Students who read below grade-level need assistance as they confront challenging literature, and

part of the purpose of this study was to test different instructional strategies to see which were the most and least successful in helping the students to comprehend and respond to the literature. In addition, this study examined other factors that play a role in tech-prep students' interactions with challenging literature.

Procedures

This study took place in a small rural high school in southeastern Georgia during the fall semester of 2001. Because the school operated on a 4X4 block schedule, an entire English course lasted one semester, with classes meeting every day for 90 minutes. All technical-prep students who were not placed in resource English in the special education department were enrolled in English during this term. Six students were selected to participate in this study. They were interviewed individually at the beginning and end of the semester and as a group at the semester midpoint. I kept a daily observation journal of their responses to the literature and to the class in general, and I kept portfolios of all of their work. In addition, I audio taped several class discussions to record students' interactions with and responses to the literature that we studied.

Instead of the typical Applied Communications curriculum that is usually taught in the tech-prep classes, I taught these students the same literature that the college-prep students read. In addition, I taught the literature in the context of the literary movements in America, from Puritanism through Contemporary literature. To supplement the literature in the textbook, I also taught Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck, The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier, A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry, excerpts and video of The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the

video only of To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee. Twice during the semester, I also taught short stories from the Scope texts, and I evaluated the students' responses to this modified literature. To assist the students as they encountered this challenging literature, I used a variety of instructional methods including Paideia discussions, graphic organizers, guided reading strategies, prediction, audio tapes, cooperative groups, and reading responses.

Using a qualitative research method, I analyzed the students' interviews, discussions, class behavior, and portfolios to determine the effect of this curriculum on the tech-prep students.

Results and Discussion

In order to answer the research question, how do struggling readers in 11th grade Applied Communications classes respond to literature that is typically taught to college-prep students, in this section I will summarize the results of each of the subordinate research questions and discuss the implications for educators.

What approaches to teaching such texts are most engaging?

Data analysis revealed that students respond positively to a variety of instructional strategies. For helping students to comprehend difficult literature, the most effective strategies were guided reading in which students read sections silently and then discussed them before reading further, watching videos to supplement or contrast with the literary work, reading aloud and listening to their peers read, and completing graphic organizers. For helping students to respond to a work, the most effective strategies were Paideia and general class discussions, in which students connected the literature to their own lives, to other texts, and to the world in general.

Another effective strategy was prediction. Students stayed engaged in works to see if their predictions were correct.

These findings indicate that strategies do exist that will enable educators to assist their students with challenging literature. These strategies offer teachers a way to provide meaningful literature instruction for all of their students, not just those who are college-bound. To those teachers who lament that their tech-prep students just cannot comprehend and engage with complex, critically examined literature, these findings offer practical tools to assist them.

What approaches to teaching such texts are least engaging?

Data analysis shows that the least effective instructional strategy for teaching literature to tech-prep students in this study is having them listen to an audio tape as they read a story. The research participants were unanimous in their assessment that this strategy failed to engage them, and my own journal observations confirm that this strategy failed to engage their classmates, as well.

When our county adopted its current literature book, teachers were enthusiastic about the inclusion of audio tapes to supplement the text. Our special education teachers were especially excited about using the tapes with their struggling readers. While the audio tapes might be helpful for vision-impaired students, they do not seem to engage reluctant readers, at least in this setting. Perhaps special education teachers can effectively use audio tapes with severely dyslexic students, or students may enjoy listening to audio tapes individually rather than in a whole-class situation.

To which selections of literature do students respond most positively?

Analysis of the data revealed that students responded most positively to John Steinbeck's novel Of Mice and Men, Lorraine Hansberry's play A Raisin in the Sun, Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance," Eudora Welty's story "A Worn Path," Kate Chopin's story "The Story of an Hour," and the two Scope stories, Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and Ray Bradbury's "The Fog Horn." These results were compiled from the participants' interviews and from the entire classes' responses to an exam question about the literature. These are the works that they would choose to teach if they were teaching the class. Almost all of these works contain themes and issues that are relevant and interesting to teenagers. Students seemed to connect to the sacrifices we make for loved ones in Of Mice and Men and "A Worn Path." Most of the students could also understand and relate to issues of racism in A Raisin in the Sun and Of Mice and Men. Almost all of the students grapple with issues of independence, conformity, and peer pressure and so were able to relate to "Self-Reliance." Perhaps the familiarity of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" appealed to the students, as did the irony of "The Story of an Hour" and the mystery of "The Fog Horn."

Of the works listed above, only Of Mice and Men and the two Scope stories would probably be found in a typical tech-prep class. Tech-prep teachers would not normally include the works of Emerson, Welty, and Chopin in their literature curriculum, unless they were using the revised Scope versions, because the vocabulary and sentence structures are complex. Even if these works were included,

often they would be read in the context of workplace literacy and not studied for their own literary value.

The two Scope stories were well-received by the students, and any number of factors could have contributed to their popularity. The first, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is a familiar story to most students, and many had seen the recent movie version of it. Also, this story was paired with two very challenging works, William Cullen Bryant's poem "Thanatopsis" and Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Fall of the House of Usher." Perhaps the students' responses were colored by the difficulty of those two works. The second Scope story, Ray Bradbury's "The Fog Horn," was not as well-received as the first, but it was still fairly popular with the students. This story was taught in a unit with Eudora Welty's story "A Worn Path" and Katherine Anne Porter's story, "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." Students expressed frustration with Porter's stream-of-consciousness technique, so their positive responses to the other two stories may have been influenced by that.

These findings can provide teachers with a starting point for teaching more challenging literature. Each class is different, but teachers who want to teach more challenging literature to their tech-prep students can use these works as places to start.

To which selections of literature do students respond most negatively?

Data analysis revealed that students responded negatively to Katherine Anne Porter's story "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Fall of the House of Usher," Edward Taylor's poem "Huswifery," and Henry David Thoreau's essay "Walden." Again, these results surfaced in the participants'

interviews, in my observation journal, and in the classes' responses on their final exams.

Porter's story "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" frustrated the students because they had difficulty following the stream-of-consciousness technique. To prepare them for this aspect of the story, I defined the term for them, and then we practiced writing in stream-of-consciousness ourselves. While they seemed to enjoy writing and sharing their stream-of-consciousness thoughts, this pre-reading activity did not seem to help students comprehend the story. I frequently interrupted the audio tape to explain, ask questions, and have the students make predictions, but all of these attempts failed to engage the students.

Similarly, the students expressed frustration with Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" because his vocabulary and sentence structures are so complex. To make this story more accessible, we discussed the elements of horror stories and movies that they had read and seen, and then we looked for those elements in this story. We also skipped portions of the story that contained more description than action, and I summarized those passages for them. Despite my efforts to make this story accessible, students did not engage with it. Often my college-prep students complain about Poe's writing, too, so I should have known that this would be an ambitious work to teach.

Edward Taylor's Puritan poem "Huswifery" was difficult for students because of the vocabulary, style, and subject matter. In this poem, the speaker uses an intricate metaphor to compare himself to a spinning wheel. Although we discussed spinning wheels before we read the poem, it still is not an image that students could relate to.

To help the students understand extended metaphors, I had them write their own metaphors comparing themselves to vehicles. Students enjoyed writing and sharing them, but, as with the stream-of-consciousness activity, the pre-reading exercise did not help them to comprehend the poem.

Thoreau's essay "Walden" also failed to engage these tech-prep students. Aside from his complex sentences and rambling style, students had difficulty relating to Thoreau's experience of living by himself in the woods. Although they seemed to relate to the idea of wanting to simplify their complicated lives, they did not understand what Thoreau was doing. One student even commented that he must have been on drugs.

Teachers who want to implement a more challenging literature curriculum for tech-prep students might want to exclude these difficult works. Most textbooks contain other works that might be substituted more effectively.

What factors influence students' positive and negative responses to literature and literature instruction?

Data analysis revealed that three factors influenced these students' positive and negative attitudes toward literature study: teacher's attitudes, the students' control and ability to make choices about their education, and their beliefs about the importance of literature study to their future careers.

Data showed that tech-prep students sometimes perceived that their teachers treated them differently than their college-prep peers. Five of the six participants recounted specific instances when teachers made them feel inferior because they were in tech-prep classes. Many expressed frustration at the slower pace of their tech-prep

classes, and yet two of the participants said they would prefer to study the easier Scope literature in their senior English class.

As educators we need to be conscious of our attitudes toward tech-prep students and classes. These students were, perhaps, more conscious of their teachers' attitudes than the teachers themselves were. It is possible that we communicate low expectations to tech-prep students when we choose simple, modified literature for them to read. Clearly, these students did not appreciate being treated as if they were not capable learners, and they were able, for the most part, to study the same literature curriculum as their college-prep classmates.

Another issue that emerged from the data was that of the students' control or choice over their placement and educational decisions. Although Desiree said she chose to be in tech-prep classes, many of the others were just placed there. Those students who had been placed originally in college-prep classes did seem to have a voice in the decision to move to tech-prep classes. It appeared from the data that we allow college-prep students to have more of a role in the decisions about their placement.

A final issue that emerged from the data was that of the students' own understandings of the value of literature study. When asked if and why students should study literature in high school, most of the participants responded with answers about being prepared for the workplace. They echoed the current trend in education that asserts that schools' primary responsibility is to train students for either college or the workforce.

Recommendations

When I finished collecting my data at the end of fall semester, my colleagues asked me what I had learned. They wanted to know if I had been successful in teaching college-prep literature to my tech-prep students. I had no easy answers for them because the issue is complex. As I read and reread my own observation journal and reflections, I saw ambiguity: success and failure, satisfaction and frustration. However, this study has convinced me that tech-prep students can comprehend and appreciate literature that is typically taught to college-prep students. Not all students will respond favorably to all literary works, but that is true in college-prep classes, as well.

It is encouraging that many of the literature selections that we studied did evoke positive responses from the students. Students did engage with difficult works, especially those that contained themes that were relevant to the students' lives. They seemed to enjoy discussing peer pressure, conformity, racism, sacrifice, and love. They had a little more difficulty relating to Porter's dying grandmother, Poe's eerie characters, Taylor's Puritan themes, and Thoreau's separation from society.

It is also important to remember that struggling high school readers need help with these challenging works. Teachers who simply assign these selections without assistance will certainly experience frustration. Many strategies do exist to help students comprehend and respond to difficult literature. Not all strategies work with all literature selections, but teachers must strive to find strategies that do work.

In the 1960s, Squire and Applebee (1968) found that most noncollege-bound students were reading articles in readers or rewritten classics, and the practice

continues today. Ironically, Squire and Applebee (1968) found that teachers were more enthusiastic about these revised literary works than their students were, and my study somewhat supports that assertion. Although students did respond favorably to the two revised short stories, they also engaged with much more challenging, critically examined literature. On the whole, my data support others' studies that argue for a rich literature curriculum for tech-prep students (Langer & Allington, 1992; Applebee, 1997; DeLawter, 1992; Graves, 1998; Bushman, 1991; Short, 1999).

Students engaged with literature when they were given the opportunity to relate it to their lives through Paideia and general class discussions. Their rich discussions of the literature promoted engagement, supporting Rosenblatt's (1976) transactional theory. Had we studied the literature solely in the context of their contributions to their literary time periods, students would not have responded as positively to it (Probst, 1988; Dias, 1992; Petrosky, 1992; Maxwell & Meiser, 1993).

My data also supports Applebee's (1992) finding that teachers generally have lowered expectations for their tech-prep students. As the participants articulated, many of their teachers treat them as if they are not capable of learning very much. These negative attitudes from teachers are certainly reinforced when students are given revised, easy literature to read. In their final interviews, not one of the participants complained that the college-prep literature we studied was too difficult for them, and many commented on how easy the class was. With the right teaching strategies, tech-prep students can study rich, complex literature and not be made to feel inferior to their college-prep classmates.

My data also supports the assertion that tech-prep students, who in this case were predominately from the working classes, feel as though they do not have as much control over their own education (Finn, 1999; Anyon, 1981). The participants who were always in tech-prep classes seemed not to understand how they came to be placed there. Those students who had been in college-prep classes first had more of a voice in the decision to move to tech-prep classes. Teachers and counselors should respect students' assessments of where they will feel most comfortable, and all students, not just college-prep ones, should be consulted about their own placements.

Students themselves seemed to subscribe to the idea that the purpose of high school English classes and literature instruction is to prepare them for the workplace. In their interviews, the participants echoed the popular notion that high school is preparation for college or the workplace; few of them could articulate a belief that literature is worth studying because it connects people to each other and to the world around them. Their comments in interviews, class discussions, and written work, however, show that they gained more from our literature study than just workplace skills.

Next year, I will again choose what literature to teach to my tech-prep students. Although I experienced some frustrations with some of the literature in this curriculum, I will definitely continue to offer my tech-prep students the same challenging literature that college-prep students read. I will probably omit the selections that failed to engage these tech-prep students, but I will substitute different selections for them. I will also continue to search for strategies to help the students study the literature. I am convinced that all students, not just college-bound students,

deserve to be educated, not just trained for the workplace. Literature is an excellent vehicle to educate students—to help them to understand themselves, the world, and their places in it.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

Qualitative research does not purport to be generalizable to the population at large; consequently, this research study does not imply that all 11th grade tech-prep students will respond to college-prep literature in the same way that mine did. Although this study has been personally meaningful to me, it was limited in scope by focusing on only six students in one school. These students may not represent all tech-prep students, and their responses may not have been typical. This study was also limited by its brief duration of only one semester. Future studies might include more students over a longer period of time.

Another limitation of this study is the possibility that my participants' responses to me might have been influenced by their relationship with me. I felt as though I had good rapport with my participants, but our relationships may have prompted them to try to respond in ways that would please me. Perhaps future studies could be conducted by nonbiased researchers who observed but did not teach the students.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a college-prep literature curriculum on 11th grade technical-prep students. This study attempted to demonstrate that tech-prep students could benefit from studying the same literature that college-prep students read. Another purpose of this study was to determine the

most effective teaching strategies for making difficult literature accessible to struggling readers. In addition, this study examined other factors that play a role in tech-prep students' interactions with challenging literature.

Six 11th grade tech-prep students were selected to participate in this study. We read the literature that is typically taught in the college-prep classes, and their reactions to the literature were studied. Results indicated that guided reading, videos, oral reading, and graphic organizers helped the students to comprehend the literature. Paideia discussions, class discussions, and making predictions enabled the students to most effectively engage with the literature. The study concluded that audio tapes did not promote comprehension or engagement with literature.

This study also revealed that students responded most positively to Of Mice and Men, A Raisin in the Sun, "Self-Reliance," "A Worn Path," "The Story of an Hour," and the two Scope stories, Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and Ray Bradbury's "The Fog Horn." Data analysis revealed that students responded negatively to "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Huswifery," and "Walden." This study also suggested that three factors play a role in students' experiences with literature instruction: their teachers' attitudes, their degree of control and choice, and their attitudes toward workplace literacy.

Although some teaching strategies and some selections of literature failed to engage the students, these tech-prep students generally responded favorably to the literature that is typically taught to college-prep students. This study was limited in scope and duration, but further studies could include more students over a longer

period of time. The study was also limited, perhaps, by the teacher's role as teacher and researcher, but future studies could be conducted by objective observers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

APPROVAL LETTER FROM IRB

Georgia Southern University
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Phone: 912-681-5465
Fax: 912-681-0719
Ovrsight@gasou.edu
P.O. Box 8005
Statesboro, GA 30460-8005

To: Fran Stephens
Curriculum, Foundations and Research

Cc: Ronnie Sheppard, Faculty Advisor
Department of Middle Grades and Secondary Education

From: Mr. Neil Garretson, Coordinator
Research Oversight Committees (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: June 13, 2001

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

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After an expedited review of your proposed research project titled "How do struggling readers in 11th grade applied communications classes respond to literary texts that are typically taught to college-prep students?," it appears that the research subjects are at minimal risk and appropriate safeguards are in place. I am, therefore, on behalf of the Institutional Review Board able to certify that adequate provisions have been planned to protect the rights of the human research subjects. This proposed research is approved through an expedited review procedure as authorized in the *Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects* (45 CFR §46.110(7)), which states:

> (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the exempted research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, please notify the IRB Coordinator so that your file may be closed.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Parent:

My name is Fran Stephens, and I am your child's English teacher at Southeast Bulloch High School. I am also enrolled as a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University, and as a part of my studies, I am conducting a research project in my classes this semester. Your child has been selected as one of six to participate in my study if you grant your permission. The purpose of my study is to evaluate students' responses to particular selections of literature and to certain instructional strategies used to teach literature. I hope that the results of my study will help me to be a more effective teacher.

If you grant permission for your child to participate in this study, he or she will receive the same curriculum and instruction as the other students. However, I will interview your child to understand his or her responses to the literature that we study; although these interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed, no one but me will have access to the tapes and transcripts. In addition, I will collect a portfolio of your child's work throughout the semester, and I will keep observational notes on your child's participation and responses as we study literature. The interviews might require that your child stay after school one to three times throughout the semester, or we may be able to conduct the interviews before school or during the lunch breaks. If your child participates, he or she will not receive special treatment, and his or her classmates will not know who is participating in the study. This study will have absolutely no effect on your child's grades in the class. In addition, to protect your child's privacy, I will assign him or her a false name in all written documents pertaining to the study so that his or her identity will be kept secret. If you agree for your child to participate, he or she can withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. Simply complete the attached withdrawal form and send it back to me. Also, your child may refuse to answer any questions in the interviews with no penalties.

If you would like to see the results of my study, I will gladly share them with you when the study is complete. I will finish collecting data at the end of the semester in December; the final study will probably be finished by the following summer.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please call me (Fran Stephens) at 842-2131 (school) or 489-3140 (home). If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study, they should be directed to the IRB Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 681-5465.

Thank you for considering my request. With your child's help, I hope to learn how to meet my students' needs more effectively.

Sincerely,

Fran Stephens
Southeast Bulloch High School

Yes, my child, _____, has permission to participate in your study.

_____ _____
Parent's signature Date

_____ _____
Student's signature Date

APPENDIX C

LETTER OF WITHDRAWAL FROM RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Mrs. Stephens,

I would like to withdraw my child, _____, from your research study. I understand that my child will not be penalized in any way for dropping out of the study.

_____ _____

Parent's Signature Date

APPENDIX D

INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you read outside of school just for fun? If so, what do you typically read?
2. Are you a good reader?
3. What makes someone a good reader?
4. What do you like about literature study in English classes?
5. What do you dislike about literature study in English classes?
6. What kinds of literature have you studied in your other English classes?
7. What kind of literature do you hope to study in this English class?
8. Have you ever been asked to read something in class that you didn't understand? Do you remember what it was? What did you do?
9. When you read literature that is difficult, what kinds of things can the teacher do to make it easier for you?
10. Do you ever feel that what you're reading in class is too easy? Can you give examples?
11. Do you think you will need to be a good reader to be successful in your future job?
12. What kinds of activities do you like the best when you're studying literature?
13. Which activities do you like the least when you're studying literature?

APPENDIX E

MIDTERM GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Think about the literature we have read so far this semester (Puritanism, The Scarlet Letter, Rationalism, Romanticism, Of Mice and Men, Transcendentalism), and tell me what you liked the best of what we have read and why.
2. Which literature did you like the least and why?
3. Now think about the activities we have done. We've had Paideia discussions, and we write papers, and we get into groups, and we talk about the literature. What kinds of activities with the literature do you like the best?
4. Tell me about the pacing. Are we going too fast, too slow, or about right?
5. What about the difficulty level of the literature? Is it too hard, too easy?
6. Do you ever feel that I'm making the literature too easy?
7. When we study the literature, do you generally feel that you are comprehending it?
8. Now I would like for you to give me feedback on the specific pieces of literature we have studied so far:
    a. "Upon the Burning of Our House"
    b. "Huswifery"
    c. "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"
    d. The Scarlet Letter
    e. Ben Franklin's Autobiography

f. Poor Richard's "Aphorisms"

g. Of Mice and Men

h. "Thanatopsis"

i. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"

j. "The Fall of the House of Usher"

k. "Nature"

l. "Self-Reliance"

m. "Walden"

n. "Resistance to Civil Government"

o. The Wave

9. Can you give me feedback about the midterm exam? Why were the grades so low? Was the essay question too hard or unfair?

Is there anything else you can tell me about how things have gone this nine-weeks, what adjustments and changes I should make in the teaching of literature in the next nine-weeks?

APPENDIX F

FINAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Now that this class is almost over, tell me how you feel generally about how the class went.
2. Do you feel that your grade accurately reflects the amount of effort you put into the class?
3. How does your grade in your English class compare to the grades you are making in your other classes?
4. How do you feel about the difficulty level of this English class as compared to other English classes you have had? Is it harder, easier, or about the same?
5. We did some writing and some literature and some vocabulary. How do you feel about the balance among the three? Did we spend too much time on one thing and not enough on another?
6. What aspect of the class did you like the most? Which did you like the least?
7. What is the purpose of high school English classes?
8. Do you think high school students should study literature? Why or why not?
9. When we studied literature, we used a variety of reading strategies and activities. When I describe a particular reading strategy, tell me how effective you thought it was.
    a. ReQuest

b. Reading selections silently and discussing them (with/without signaling cards)
c. Listening to the audiotape and following along
d. Students taking turns reading aloud
e. Teacher reading aloud, students following along
f. Getting into groups and figuring out a portion of the text ("Thanatopsis" and "Poor Richard's Almanac")
g. Filling in charts and graphic organizers as we read
h. Making predictions about what will happen
i. Reading some and then watching the video
j. Reading the whole work and then comparing it to the video
k. Reading responses
l. Paideia discussions
m. Regular class discussions

10. I am going to list all of the works of literature that we have studied this semester. As I do, please tell me how much you liked or disliked the work and explain why if you can.
    a. "Upon the Burning of Our House"
    b. "Huswifery"
    c. "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"
    d. The Scarlet Letter
    e. Ben Franklin's Autobiography
    f. Poor Richard's "Aphorisms"

g. Of Mice and Men

h. "Thanatopsis"

i. "The Fall of the House of Usher"

j. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

k. "Nature"

l. "Self-Reliance"

m. "Walden"

n. "Resistance to Civil Government"

o. The Wave

p. The Chocolate War

q. A River Runs Through It (video)

r. "The Story of an Hour"

s. "The Battle with Mr. Covey"

t. "A Pair of Silk Stockings"

u. "A Worn Path"

v. "The Fog Horn"

w. "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall"

x. A Raisin in the Sun

y. To Kill a Mockingbird (video)

11. Can you name one character from any of the literature we studied that you especially remember or relate to?

12. Has our literature study changed your thinking (about yourself, life, the world) in any way?

13. Was it valuable or worthwhile to study the literature movements (Puritanism, etc.) along with the literature, or should we have omitted that part?
14. Do you feel that you're a better reader now than you were when you began this class?
15. Did you read during SSR time? Did you read anything outside of class this semester?
16. If you were going to teach this class next semester, which three works would you definitely include? Which three works would you definitely omit?
17. Next year in Senior English, would you prefer to read the same literature that the college-prep students read or the easier Scope literature?
18. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your experience in this English class?

APPENDIX G

TEACHER OBSERVATION/REFLECTION JOURNAL

DATE	OBSERVATIONS	REFLECTIONS
8/7/01	Today is the first day of school, and things went fairly smoothly. I was worried about 2nd block because it has 19 boys and 4 girls, but they were really good. Third block seemed to be my "trouble" class. Darin and Jim were unusually loud, and Kathy wanted to sleep all period. Fourth block was very brief because of the Junior class meeting, but it seemed to go well. That's the collaborative class with Kathy Brennan. It contains 7 special ed. kids. I've created class profiles with the students' ITBS scores in reading and written expression and their previous English grades. The scores look pretty low, with most below 50%. The grades are mostly passing, though. I have a few repeaters—Donald, Jim G., Jim L.—but they all say they are determined to pass this time. I will be assessing how similar the 4th block collaborative class is to decide if I can use the 4th block students in my study. If it's too different, I hesitate to introduce another "variable."	Donald, Jim G., and Jim L. all did pass. They were very good students this time, even though this course was very different from the one they had failed.
8/8/01	I talked about SSR today and gave students a chance to choose reading books. Mitchell (2nd block) chose Lord of the Flies and began reading for about 15 minutes. His ITBS scores are the highest in his class (R = 82, W = 63). I don't have his previous grades because he transferred from Graves High School in Savannah. He looks like a good prospect for my study—as an example of an able reader. Desiree is another possibility. She scored 56 in Reading and 52 on Writing on the ITBS and made an 87 in her last English class.	As much as I dislike standardized testing, I notice that I use standardized test scores to support my observations about students. Mitchell and Desiree seem to be able readers, and their scores and previous grades are high. I think, though, that if their scores contradicted my own observations, I would trust my observations over their

8/9/01	No one else really stands out yet. I'm still getting to know them. Boy! If their reading skills are as weak as their writing skills, this should be an interesting group! We're writing our first persuasive essays, and I taught them "the formula"—only four paragraphs and very structured. Over half the students wrote one long paragraph and called it finished. Today I modeled a good introduction for them and asked them to make sure theirs followed that pattern (background/thesis). We'll see. I'm still getting to know the students. I found out today that Michael H. went to the alternative school last year, but I don't know why. Also, we moved Rod to the 4th block collaborative class because the counselors thought he would benefit from mine and Kathy's collaboration. Ellen told me that she has been in CP courses up to this year. Joshua told me he is a diabetic and must leave class to get snacks. He stayed gone a long time. I worry about how much he might miss. Bill told me he comes to school just for my class—he's already had 12th grade English and passed the GHSGT. Lorraine told me she's Ray's sister. He was involved in a murder.	scores. Their writing skills remained weak, and I'm afraid I neglected this area by concentrating so heavily on the literature. We ended up writing 6 persuasive essays, a research paper, a short story, and an essay about prejudice, but I didn't do a good job with any of it. I found out later that Michael is a kleptomaniac; he stole from me twice (that I know of). Rod did very well in the collaborative class. Joshua failed; Bill and Lorraine did well. A factor that we often overlook is all the chaos in these students' lives. Some things are just beyond our control—kleptomania, diabetes, family problems—these can be very distracting for students.
8/10/01	We've made it through the first week! I began the day with a meeting with Les and his mom. He's decided to return—ugh. Last year he was difficult. He's in my 2nd block. In class today we had discussions about possible topics for our next persuasive essays. Things were lively! Ricky, Colby, Peter, Desiree, and Jim were the most active participants in 2nd block. Kathy, Key, Jake, Darin, and Jim dominated third block. Fourth block belonged to Charlie. Jennifer contributed some good comments, as did Diane, Emily N., Annie, and Donnelle.	Les lasted less than three months. He was never interested in an education. He blamed his teachers when he quit again. These stand-outs continued to be leaders in their classes. My initial impressions of them seemed accurate.

	Charlie mostly ran the show with his humor. He seems to be very verbal and relatively bright. Many students in all three classes were reluctant to participate. They just sat back quietly and listened. This time I didn't nudge them because I wanted to see what they would do on their own.	These quiet ones continued to be quiet. I need to learn more strategies for involving the reluctant participants.
8/13/01	I've now graded all of the first persuasive essays, and I was pleased to discover that most (not all) of the students were able to follow the prescribed format. The writing is very basic for the most part, but not as bad as I had feared. Lorraine definitely stands out as one of the weakest students. Her essay was almost incomprehensible. I asked Carol how she was in 9th grade English. She said she failed and repeated but didn't seem to improve much. She sounds like our Demario for this semester. We began literature today. I introduced Puritanism just as I do in CP classes. We got to do only an intro. We'll do our first poem ("Upon the Burning of Our House") tomorrow. I'm eager to see how the kids respond.	I hate teaching this formula, and I will move beyond it before the writing test, but some of these kids need that kind of prescriptive instruction. Lorraine did manage to pass, but just barely. Her daily grades saved her. This is the first time I've ever taught the literary movements to tech-prep kids. It was challenging at times.
8/14/01	We began our literature study today with Bradstreet's "Upon the Burning of Our House." We talked about how the language has changed since 1666 and why the changes make the poem difficult to read. Then we predicted how a Puritan might react to her house burning down. Their predictions were similar to CP classes' in previous semesters. Students thought the burning house might be punishment from God for sin or an omen of some kind. We read the poem (I read it aloud) a few lines at a time, stopping to interpret and discuss. In each class, there were students who understood the lines and were able to discuss them. In 2nd block, Ellen, Colby, Ricky, and Jim	I didn't do it consciously, but I think it was good that I talked about why this poem was difficult—because the language was different over three hundred years ago. This idea came up often—usually from the students—when we encountered difficult literature, and it gave them an "out." They didn't have to say that they were poor readers; they could blame the time period and the language and save face, legitimately, I think.

	participated the most. In third block, Wanda really did a good job. Kathy "got it" but chose to participate infrequently. She tried at one point to lead the class off the topic. Missy also seemed clued in as we read the poem. Fourth block participation was dismal. Annie, Jennifer, and Tran participated some, but this class really struggled. Overall, I have really mixed emotions about teaching this literature to these tech-prep classes. Maybe I'm wrong to assume that they can do it. In each class when I asked if they understood the poem after we had read and discussed it, I got very negative responses. I am eager to see how they will do on their first test on Friday. As for the test—I gave a CP test to Kathy and asked for feedback. I don't know how to write TP tests for this literature. She says multiple choice and maybe quotations, but only if we identify the source and let the students explain them. We also discussed an open-book format. I will draft something tonight and let Kathy look at it tomorrow. After I grade the tests this weekend, I want to choose the participants for my study. Lorraine is probably no longer an option since her custodial grandparents were killed in a car wreck over the weekend. She may not be returning to school. Tomorrow we're doing "Huswifery"—HELP!	These students continued to be leaders in class discussions of literature. I didn't do enough, I don't think, to help the weaker students comprehend this literature. They often "rode the coattails" of these guys. I think these fears are justified. Even though they did well on their first test, I still believe that many didn't "get it." They just listened well to my reviews. I did put a lot of work into making my literature tests fair and challenging. I could have invalidated my whole study by giving easy tests and claiming success. I don't think I did, though. I don't think my students think so, either! I think this fear is justified! I probably wouldn't choose that poem again. It's hard.
8/15/01	I am somewhat encouraged. The students did pretty well with their reviews of Puritanism and "Upon the Burning of Our House." Fourth block is still a challenge because students are so reluctant to cooperate and volunteer. One student, Alexis, is a real problem. We've been told by the counselors that she has "anger	It is amazing how much of an impact one disruptive student can have on an entire class. I dread this class every day because of Alexis; I try to be sympathetic to her difficult home life (I don't know

	management" problems and that we are not to provoke her into a confrontation. She is rude, disrespectful, and apathetic. She also has friends in the class. I think her reluctance to participate sets a negative tone in the class. Other students see how we tiptoe around her, and they're getting more hostile. It's a tough situation. Second and third blocks were good, though. Today we did "Huswifery," a difficult poem even for CP students. I think they got the basic idea. We practiced writing conceits first, comparing themselves with vehicles. Second and third had fun with that. Fourth didn't. Again, I think Alexis has something to do with their negative responses. Tomorrow is the sermon, and we will use one of Shelley's strategies for reading it. Hope it's not too hard.	any details), but she is difficult to sympathize with because she is so mean. They did have fun writing conceits, but I don't think they understood much about the poem. I was happy for them to comprehend that he was comparing himself to a spinning wheel and appealing to God to make him an instrument. That helped them, I think, to understand Puritanism a little better.
8/16/01	We did "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" today, and I think things went well. Again, the students did well with the oral review of literature before we began. Only a few students in each class responded with "I don't know" to review questions. I set up the sermon by talking to the students about their experiences with church and sermons. Then I used a graphic organizer for them to fill in images of God and man. I also told them to look for the thing about the sermon that does not make sense. I read most of the sermon to them, stopping after a couple of paragraphs to explain and discuss. I asked them to read one long paragraph in the middle silently, and they balked. It was the one with the image of God as a dam holding back the flood waters, and in each class some students were able to read the paragraph and write the image in their charts. I think it was hard for them, but this sermon is hard for my CP	I think the oral reviews were key to their success on the test. I just don't know how to handle those who refuse to participate. All of these are strategies that we learned from Shelley Smith: connect to their lives, create a visual organizer, set a purpose for reading. I'm not sure that reading this aloud was the most effective strategy. Probably I should have put them into groups or something. They got bored listening to me read.

	students, too. After we finished reading the sermon, I asked for the inconsistency in it. No one got it without any prompting, but I was pleased that they got it with the same kinds of prompts that I use with the CP classes. I asked them what Edwards' purpose was and then how that purpose (to save souls or convert people) conflicted with Puritan beliefs. I could almost see the light bulbs go off as they answered, "Predestination!" That's usually how it happens in CP and honors classes, too. I was proud of them. We'll see how they retain it on the test tomorrow.	I think this is an example of how their thinking skills surpass their reading skills. They did "get it" with some prompting.
8/17/01	I had anxiety about this test for several reasons. I have not taught this literature to TP kids before, so I didn't have a "proven" test to use. I showed my CP test to Kathy and Jim, and they both had concerns about the format. They believed that by the end of the semester students could probably handle identifying and explaining quotations from multiple sources (in this case, 2 poems and a sermon), but that they've not had any experience or practice with it, so it would be hard at first. So I devised a test with 10 multiple choice items (a format they are experienced and comfortable with), 5 short answer, 4 quotations with sources and contexts provided, and one discussion question. Kathy thought it was good—not too easy or too difficult. I was very pleased with the test results! In 2nd block: 7 A's, 4 B's, 2 C's, 6 F's with a range of 36-95. Third block: 5 A's, 7 B's, 2 C's, 8 F's with a range of 25-100. Fourth block: 6 A's, 6 B's, 4 C's, and 9 F's with a range of 27-100. Also, on the backs of their tests, I asked students to answer the following: -How do you think you did on this test? -If you think you did well, what did you do	I did fret over this test because I seem to rely on the students' scores to validate my teaching. I don't know if that's good or bad. If the students do well, I feel successful. If they do poorly, I feel like a failure. But I didn't want a false success—an easy test that everyone could pass without effort. These results are typical of the college-prep classes, too. I always have students fail, but I was delighted that so many made A's. Kathy was impressed, too. I guess I was looking for validation of my teaching here, and the students gave

	to prepare? -If you think you did poorly, why do you think you did poorly? What can you do next time to do better? I was delighted to discover that NO ONE—not one student—said the material was too hard! Those who failed said they did poorly because they were absent or didn't pay attention or didn't study! With these test results and comments, I feel prepared to choose my participants. I will do that tomorrow.	me what I wanted. I have to wonder, though, if they just wrote what they knew I wanted to hear. I just don't know them well enough yet to trust that they are being honest with me.
8/18/01	**PARTICIPANT SELECTION PROCESS**: It's time to choose. I've had 2 weeks (minus one day—Labor Day) to get to know the students, and I've graded one essay, one test (literature), and 2 vocabulary quizzes. Based on earlier impressions and observations (see previous notes), I chose Mitchell and Desiree. Both seem to be skilled readers and motivated students. Since I want to understand the typical TP students, I eliminated special ed. students, repeaters, and students who were classified as 12th or 10th graders. I also eliminated all students who are in 4th block because that class is taught collaboratively and is different from the typical TP class (besides, they're a difficult bunch). Then I counted all of my students and classified them according to gender and race. I discovered that I have 33 white males, 25 white females, 11 black males, and 7 black females. In just the two classes I will be drawing from, I have 26 white males, 10 white females, 7 black males, and 6 black females. I wanted to keep the ratios similar, so I decided to choose 2 white males, 2 white females, 1 black male, and 1 black female. Desiree is a black female and Mitchell is a white male, so I needed to choose a black male, a white male, and two	Two weeks seems a short time to get to know students well enough to make wise selections, but I feel as though I must go ahead and choose since our time is so limited. I have only 18 weeks with these students, and I've used 2 to get to know them some. I hope my initial impressions are good and that I choose wisely. Eliminating 10th graders ended up hurting me. Some of my best students were behind in credits for one reason or another—Wanda, Lynn, and RJ, for example. But I guess it was wise to eliminate them since they aren't "typical" 11th grade students.

	white females. One white female was an easy choice—Ellen is a skilled reader and motivated student. She has a positive attitude and has been in CP courses until this year. The other white female was a difficult choice. I finally selected Melissa because she seems motivated but not very skilled. She made a 61 on the first lit. test. The other white male was a difficult choice, too. I selected Ed because he seems to have a good attitude, is usually awake, and seems to be an average student. He made an 85 on the lit. test. Choosing the black male was extremely difficult. Of the 7 in 2nd and 3rd blocks, only two had not been eliminated by other factors. I chose Andre even though he seems to have a negative attitude. He often sleeps and is seldom on task, but he did somehow make a 91 on the first lit. test. I am curious about how he did it. So, my final list: Melissa, WF, 3rd block Ed, WM, 3rd block Mitchell, WM, 2nd block Desiree, BF, 2nd block Ellen, WF, 2nd block Andre, BM, 2nd block. I will give them all consent forms on Monday and see if they and their parents will agree to their participation. If I get any no's, I will choose another.	Ellen was tricky. I think sometimes that she was so eager to please that she was not totally honest. Melissa turned out to be a severe behavior problem because of her chaotic family situation (missing mother, brother in jail). Ed was a good example of an average student, not too motivated or eager to please, but not totally apathetic or distracted by family problems. Andre was an enigma. He really seemed to hate the class, but he passed. Usually he slept in class, but then he studied at home. In retrospect, my selection process makes sense to me, and I think I did the best I could with only two weeks' experience with the students. Had I had the whole semester to get to know them, though, I'm not sure I would choose the same six.
8/20/01	All six students agreed to be participants. They have consent and withdrawal forms to bring back tomorrow. I was pleased with their positive responses. I hope their parents are as agreeable. We did two pre-reading activities for The Scarlet Letter today, and both went well.	Again, I am using Shelley's reading

	First we discussed the sin number line, ranking sins according to their severity. The purpose of this is to get the students to think about how we as a society do "grade" sins—some are worse to us than others. We come back to this after we experience the novel and see if they still rank adultery high and judging others low. Then we discussed the "Think Like a Puritan" activity. Students were presented with The Scarlet Letter's scenario and asked how they would punish the adulteress. They were very harsh. Tomorrow we will read Ch. 1 together to get a feel for the language, but then we will get the idea of the novel through the video. This is how I usually teach to CP. As an aside, 3rd block students told me today that their history teacher said that TP students would be working for CP students and that they're too stupid to go to college. Interesting comment from one of the least intelligent teachers on the staff. I just despise that kind of thinking.	strategies by linking the literature to the students' lives and understanding of the world. Then I ask them to put themselves in the characters' places and imagine what they would do. These activities seemed to set up anticipation for the work as they helped the students with the context of the story. This is the kind of thinking that motivates me to do this kind of dissertation. How many ways can we destroy struggling students' self-esteem? This is the kind of thinking I am trying to overcome through my study. It is this kind of thinking that leads teachers to choose insultingly easy literature for their TP students.
8/21/01	Four of the six participants returned signed permission forms yesterday. Mitchell and Ed forgot. We began The Scarlet Letter yesterday by reading only the first chapter. Maybe I underestimated them. As I read, I stopped and asked comprehension questions, and many students were able to answer them. Still, the book is challenging, even for CP, and this is how I have always taught it to CP. After reading and discussing the first chapter, we view portions of the video and discuss it. The objective is for students to know the story and characters and to see a different perspective of the Puritans. It is	I seem a bit defensive here, as if I have to justify taking a shortcut with this difficult work. I guess I need to admit that there are works that are too challenging for most 11th grade students, and to stop apologizing for it. I think it would be a huge mistake to force them to read the work because they would

	my belief that we can accomplish that objective without laboring through the whole book.	then hate it for its difficulty and miss the wonderful story.
8/22/01	2nd block: During TSL video, Andre slept and Mitchell read. Desiree and Ellen watched actively (and asked questions). I tried to wake up Andre for the writing lesson, but he continued to sleep. The other three wrote. 3rd block: During TSL video, Melissa and Ed paid attention and watched actively. Ed and Mitchell did bring their consent forms today. Both Melissa and Ed worked on their persuasive essays. Melissa finished first.	This would be a pattern for Andre throughout the class. Sleeping was his usual routine.
8/23/01	We are continuing with The Scarlet Letter video, but we're not watching the whole four hours. I show key scenes and fast-forward through less important ones, summarizing and explaining as we zip through them. I also ask students to predict, and I've been pleased with their responses. In previous years, I encountered the problem of students having seen the Demi Moore version of this movie, which bears little resemblance to the book. That wasn't a problem this year—only one or two students had seen it. We are also writing—to practice for the grad. test and to break up the monotony of the video. When I stopped the video today (after about 20 minutes), there were protests. Some classes even offered to do the writing as homework so we could keep watching. I was pleased with their positive responses.	In retrospect, I think this is the best way for tech-prep students to experience The Scarlet Letter. I do plan to teach the whole book to my CP students next semester because of pressure from "above" to raise the difficulty level of CP, but I'm not sure it's wise. When we do the novel this way, students seem to like it. I don't know why that's so important to me. I wonder if I should equate liking a work with its being worthwhile to study.
8/24/01	I had hoped we could finish the video today, but we ran a little short. We got to Election Day and stopped. Again, there was much protesting when we ran out of time. There were a couple of sleepers in each class, but most of the students seem to be really engaged in the story. Today we watched for a whole hour, and I was worried that I would lose them, but they stayed interested.	Does their enjoyment justify my teaching it? I don't know. I hope their enjoyment means that they are learning something valuable about literature, themselves, and the world.

8/27/01	What an interesting day! We watched the last 15 minutes of TSL video and then had a Paideia discussion about it. The students did well. Not as many students participated 2nd block, but the ones who did were very insightful. Mitchell was absent; Andre did not participate; Ellen and Desiree did an excellent job. In third block, Ed did not participate, but Melissa did. They were livelier than 2nd block. In 4th block Jennifer told me that I had made her mad Friday by not letting them finish the video, so she read the end of the book over the weekend. I asked her about the difficulty for her. She seems to be a proficient reader. She said it was hard—that she had to read it three times, but that she finally got it. I was pleased and impressed. After our Paideia discussions, I asked the students for feedback about the story and the way we did it. No one said it was not worth doing. They were very positive about the work and about how we did it. Some suggested that we watch the whole video without the fast-forwarding, but I've tried that in CP classes, and students just don't stay engaged. Desiree suggested that we have a Paideia every day after the video to discuss what we had seen that day. I liked that idea. And the test! It was only a 20-question multiple choice test to check for comprehension. Grades were very high—1 F in 3rd and 5 in 2nd, but they were mostly because of absences. Even students who didn't do well on the Puritan test did well on this one. They seemed to "get it." Kathy and I discussed it after school, and we were both impressed with the students' engagement with the story.	The Paideia discussion helped to validate that this work was worth studying. The questions, which are included in my lesson plans, required the students to think seriously about the themes of the work and the author's purposes. That they could discuss these things reassures me that the work was worth doing. That a student was motivated to read the end on her own was thrilling! And the students' own positive responses to the question, "Should we have done this work?" were validating. I'll probably keep this one in the curriculum. Again, I seem to be putting a lot of stock on the tests. Is that really an accurate way to measure students' engagement with a work?

8/28/01	We didn't do literature today, but we probably should have. The students were revising rough drafts, but most just copied them. When they finished, they were asked to read some introductory material and complete a Venn diagram comparing Puritanism and Rationalism. We'll begin tomorrow's lesson with a discussion of it. Then we'll skim over the Rationalist literature, looking at Franklin's list of virtues, Poor Richard's aphorisms, and Fulghum's "All I Need to Know." I don't plan to give a test. These are the same selections I do with CP, except I often do the Declaration of Independence with them, too. They never like it, though. I've never done the Fulghum piece, so we'll see how it goes. It's easy enough to read.	Again, I can see that I didn't do as well with the writing as I should have. They probably would have done a better job of revising if I had done more modeling with them. I really failed them in this area. I seem to be making my literature choices based on what has and hasn't worked with the CP students. I guess that's okay since I want to see how they do with CP literature.
8/29/01	Today was fun! I don't think I've ever said that about Rationalist literature before. First we reviewed the Venn diagram on Puritanism and Rationalism. They had done a good job. Then we read Franklin's list of virtues from his autobiography. The students really seemed to enjoy discussing them, especially "chastity." And someone in each class was able to explain how Franklin's writing represented the ideals of Rationalism. Then we got into groups and each was assigned a saying of Poor Richard to explain to the class. Again, all groups were able to interpret their sayings, and we had some good discussions about them. Interestingly, the modern piece our textbook editors threw in—Robert Fulghum's "All I Ever Needed I Learned in Kindergarten"—didn't go over as well. We read Fulghum's list of "truths" and discussed them. Students in 2nd and 3rd blocks pointed out that he left out the Golden Rule. We concluded with a lively discussion of American English vs. British English and	This shortcut with Franklin's Autobiography is one I have taken with CP students, too. The whole thing is rather boring (to me and to them), and I think they can get the Rationalist features of it from his list of virtues. These were fun. These students did as well with them as the CP students usually do. I probably won't teach this piece again. It really didn't fit into the Rationalist theme, and the students didn't seem to care for it. I didn't either, actually. My students probably won't have to take the

	slang. This was in the text, and I addressed it for the first time because it's on the end-of-course tests.	EOC tests, but it was still a fun discussion.
8/30/01	Today was one of those days when you pray you won't be observed by an administrator. The students got into groups and made entries for their class slang dictionaries. Then we compiled their illustrated entries into class dictionaries. The lesson was based on the QCC's about slang vs. SAE and dictionary skills, but it was mostly just for fun. Students really enjoy this activity, so I do it. I also learn a lot!	This may be one of those lessons that I shouldn't do. I wouldn't dream of making slang dictionaries in a CP class, so why do it with TP? Because they have fun? My QCC justification is a flimsy one. I'll have to think about this one.
8/31/01	Wow! The poetry warm-up today was Stephen Crane's "The Heart" about the creature who eats his own heart and enjoys it because it is bitter. A few kids in each class wanted to deal with the poem on a literal level—"How can he be eating his own heart and still be talking?" But after we moved beyond that, we had good discussions. We talked about how we sometimes hold onto bitterness and hatred in our hearts and even enjoy it. In 2nd block, Ricky said, "That's like that Chillingworth dude"—making a connection to The Scarlet Letter. Pretty cool for tech-prep, huh? In the other classes I had to ask if the poem reminded them of any literary character, but both classes immediately came up with Chillingworth. I love it when they make connections like that! The rest of the class, we corrected our essay errors in groups.	Comments like Ricky's show me that the students are making connections. All of my wondering about the validity of teaching The Scarlet Letter was answered in this one comment. If we had not read it, the students would have missed an important aspect of this poem. Even more important was the way they connected the poem and Chillingworth to their lives. We all have hatred and anger in our hearts, and literature that addresses it is probably worthwhile to study.
9/4/01	What a disaster! Because I am in InTech training, I have to complete four InTech lesson plans. I chose to do the first one today as part of my introduction to Of Mice and Men. I divided the classes into six groups, and each group had to research and summarize a different topic: The Depression, Women's Rights in the 1930s, Racism in the 1930s, The Migrant Experience, Steinbeck's Life, and	This lesson probably failed because it was artificial. I really could have given the students the information they needed more efficiently, but I was required to use the computer, so I did. I think they knew that as well as I did, so their hearts weren't

	Steinbeck's Works. I provided the web addresses and summary sheets, but I could get only six computers to connect to the Internet. Unfortunately, they were all in a row together, so the logistics were awful. The lesson might have worked in a real lab with 30 computers, but it was valuable only because it satisfied a requirement of InTech. On a positive note, we read Ch. 1 of the novel, and students responded favorably. All three classes hated to stop reading at the end of the period.	in it, either. This is an example of one of those frustrating aspects of education—those mandates from "on high" that we must accommodate. This work is always a favorite for students, and I love it, too. Wonder if there is a connection?
9/5/01	I am supposed to be out next Monday and Tuesday, so we're rushing through the novel to try to finish by Friday. To make it a little easier on the students, we sat in a big circle. They liked that, and it worked well in 3rd and 4th. Second was not as good. Also, we read Ch. 2 and then took a break to do vocabulary and a reading response (foreshadowing—what will happen next?). Then we read most of Ch. 3. At least that was the plan. We did that in 2nd block. Third, however, was too involved—they resisted the break and wanted to keep reading. I was worried about tiring them, so we took a short bathroom break together. Then we discussed the foreshadowing and continued reading. They were with me until the end of the block. 4th block didn't go as well. They were more restless and eager to go home. On a positive note, Alexis has moved to 2nd block, so 4th is getting better. Students seem to be opening up and responding to us better. Of course, 2nd is suffering, but that's another story. Another thing happened by accident, but it had a positive impact on the reading. Third block Jim (who is a repeater) started mimicking my Lennie lines. He was so good that I asked him to be Lennie. He was great! The other students loved it. So I	I need to stop reading this novel aloud to the students. I do it because I love it so much and because the logistics of their silent reading are complex. We don't have enough novels to send home with them, and they all read at such different rates that reading silently in class puts us all at different places. It isn't fair, though, to ask students to sit and listen to me read for 60-90 minutes. I hope it doesn't ruin the novel for them. I struggle with students' oral reading. I feel that the weak readers make it more difficult for others to comprehend, but they seem to enjoy reading aloud. I'm not sure how to

	asked Key to be Curley's wife—and she, too, read with flair. Then we had some volunteers for other parts who were not as proficient, and things began to bog down. Students really have no tolerance for poor oral readers. We tried this in fourth block but couldn't get any volunteers, so Kathy and her student teacher and I did all the reading. It wasn't nearly as much fun as Jim' and Key's performances.	best handle this.
9/6/01	Whew! I can slow down! I won't be out on Monday and Tuesday, so we don't have to rush. Today we finished Ch. 3 and then completed a character group activity. Each group was given a large piece of bulletin board paper with a character's name on it: George, Lennie, Curley, Curley's wife, Slim, Candy, and Carlson. They had to write one physical description, one typical behavior, and one internal quality for the character and reference each with a page number. I did Crooks as an example: -His back is crooked (p. 85) -He reads books (p. 84) -He is lonely (p. 92) First block started, and then the other two classes added to theirs so that we had nine things about each character at the end of the day. The papers are now hanging around the room.	I think this helped the students organize the different characters. It's too bad Steinbeck chose so many names that begin with "C." It really confuses the students. This reading strategy, or a version of it, came from Warren Combs, a consultant we have worked with. I think the modeling helped students to understand what to do. They seemed to do a good job with it. I think the visual reminders are good for struggling readers.
9/7/01	Our poetry warm-up today was "Dog's Death" by John Updike. The kids hated it. I thought it related to the shooting of Candy's dog, but the kids didn't like it at all. Today we read Ch. 4 of the novel. They're still hanging in there with me. We finished Ch. 4 and then I had them write why Crooks changed his mind about wanting to go in with George and Lennie and Candy. They shared their answers with a partner, and then we discussed the question as a whole group. They were very insightful. Darin in	Oh well! I guess I can't pick winners every time! For some reason, Chapter 4 is my least favorite. It has the least amount of action, I guess, and it deals with the racism of the era. I think I handle that aspect well, but it's still a little uncomfortable for me.

	3rd block actually used the word "defense" in his explanation. They seemed to relate well to my analogy about not getting a job or being turned down for a date and pretending that's what you wanted. We'll finish the book on Monday and I'll audiotape our Paideia discussion. I hope it's as good as The Scarlet Letter discussion.	Again, I think this is an example of thinking skills surpassing reading skills. I sure wish I'd gotten The Scarlet Letter discussion on tape!
9/10/01	We finished Of Mice and Men today and then had our Paideia discussions. I think things went well. In 2nd block, I taped the discussion and will transcribe it tonight. Third block I failed to plug in the recorder! Duh! It was a good discussion, too, but I didn't get it. Fourth block did well, too. After the "official" discussion I asked for feedback about the book and the way we studied it. All classes were very positive, as they always are. No one claimed not to like the book. We'll see how they do on the test tomorrow.	The transcriptions show some good thought and discussion about the novel, but not every student participated. I need to work on including all learners. Again, I seem to be equating liking the book with its being worthwhile to study. Is that okay?
9/11/01	Well, the terrorist attacks changed my lesson plan somewhat. I did transcribe 2nd block's Paideia discussion last night, and I decided that my microphone isn't as good as I'd hoped. It was fine if the students spoke loudly, but the ones who mumbled were unintelligible. Next time I'll have to pass the mike. I did give the test as scheduled, but then we watched CNN. We'll begin the Of Mice and Man video tomorrow unless there are other developments. Talk about a teachable moment! We got out the Atlas and talked about Israel and Palestine—the kids' interest was incredible!	I should have tested my mike first. I thought I had, but I didn't account for the background noise of 25 students and the soft voices of the reluctant speakers. Live and learn. That was probably a mistake. This kids were so distracted by what was going on in the world that they just didn't concentrate well on Of Mice and Men.
9/12/01	The Of Mice and Men tests were awful! It may have been a mistake to give the test in the midst of the national crisis, but I still thought they knew the book better than they demonstrated. Second block was the worst.	I don't think I've ever had students do so poorly on this test (and this is a test I've used before), so it must have been the

	Today we went over the tests and then talked about their casting choices for the video. Then we talked about setting changes in the video, and I explained what they would see in the beginning (the girl in the red dress). Then we watched the first half of the video. I offered them the chance to stop the video to watch CNN instead about 10 minutes before each block was over, but every class opted to watch the video. They seemed to enjoy it.	distraction of 9/11. Their Paideia discussion led me to believe that they knew the book well.
9/13/01	I had to leave during 1st block planning today to see about my son, Michael. I got my former STAR student, Delaney Davis, to sub. She showed the rest of the video for me and reviewed vocabulary by having students write paragraphs using any five of the words.	I hate that I missed the end of the movie. I always like to discuss it with them. Sometimes life interferes, though.
9/14/01	Michael's still sick, so Delaney's subbing again. She said the students didn't really watch the movie yesterday. That was disappointing. I also missed the opportunity to compare the novel and movie with them. Today Delaney had the students write persuasive letters from one OMAM character to another. She said they breezed through the assignment and didn't take it very seriously. I'm eager to get back to them.	I commented on how the students' lives distract them from learning. I guess it works both ways. Michael's meningitis certainly distracted me this week. I thought this was a clever way to combine persuasive writing and literature, but I guess I needed to be there for them to understand.
9/17/01	Another day with Delaney! I had to attend another InTech session today, and Elaine Brinson was supposed to sub. Apparently she called the secretary on Friday to cancel, so the secretary got Delaney again. Apparently it didn't go well. The lesson plan involved having the students read the introduction to Romanticism and answer questions on a study/reading guide. Most classes got the guide done, but they behaved badly in the process. Kathy says they're tired of subs and sub-work. Michael was discharged from the hospital this morning. I hope I can return to school	I'm beginning to understand why my principal hates for teachers to be out. Instruction really does suffer. This was a bad few days for the kids and for me. I hope to get us back on track soon.

	now!	
9/18/01	I'm back! Today we began our Romantic unit. First (after scolding them for their misbehavior with the sub) we "reviewed" the elements of Romanticism and its relationship to Rationalism. I gave my CP lecture, and they did well with it (I think).	What I mean by "they did well with it" is that they seemed to understand what I was saying, and they answered my questions.
	Then we did "Thanatopsis"—a first for me with TP students. I broke them into 6 groups, making sure I had at least one "able" reader in each group. Then I distributed the weakest readers so they weren't all in one group. Each group was assigned a section of the poem to read, analyze, and explain to the rest of the class. Of course, I circulated and helped, but I resisted the urge to give the answers. I asked questions and prodded, but they came up with their own explanations. Before they got into groups, we had discussed the meaning of "Thanatopsis" (death vision), so they knew up front that the poem was about death. I think that helped some.	This reading strategy is a way for students to help each other. It usually works as long as you don't put all of the weakest readers together. This is a tough poem for all students, but it's too long for me to read and plod through with them. I think this is a good way to break it down into chunks they can handle.
	I was really pleased with 2nd and 3rd block. By fourth block I was so tired (Michael's illness has been stressful) that I did more telling than asking in the groups. It's hard to let the students struggle through it on their own—it's so much easier to just tell them what it means—at least what you think it means.	This is one of the hardest aspects of letting students make meaning for themselves. It's hard to let them. It's so much easier to just tell them.
	When the groups tried out their explanations on me and discovered they were right, they were surprised. They would often say, "Really? That's right?" After all groups presented, I told them how proud I was of them for figuring out such a difficult poem. I think they were proud of themselves.	I love it when students do make meaning and are proud of themselves! I am so proud of them, too!
	Then we discussed the poet's concept of death and compared it to their own. Interesting. They were very open about their	Finally, I wanted to link it to their own lives to help them to process the meaning.

	fears. Some liked Bryant's portrayal of death; others were frightened by it. Overall, it was a good experience for me—I hope it was for them. I guess we'll see on the test on Friday.	Again, I rely on test scores to validate what I've taught!
9/19/01	Ugh! I taught a Scope story today. As part of my plan to get students' reactions to the Scope, I chose a Romantic story, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." I chose to do the Scope story now because I'm not wild about the Romantic stories in the literature book. I had to photocopy the story since we no longer have class sets of the Scope book. I HATED teaching it. It's been 3 or 4 years since I've had to teach from the Scope book, and I can't imagine how I stood it. The story was rewritten so the sentences were so choppy and short. There was nothing to discuss because the story was so flat and one-dimensional. I began reading the story aloud and then had the students finish reading silently. Then they got into their same groups from yesterday and completed some of the end-of-story activities from Scope. We also discussed why the story is Romantic. My 6 focus students are writing response paragraphs to each piece of literature we do this week. I'll be interested to see how they respond to this one. They may like it. I sure didn't!	My feelings about Scope literature are certainly evident in this entry! I wonder if that disgust was conveyed subtly to the students? I hope not. I was trying to be consistent in how we studied the selections in this unit, using the same groups, etc., so that wouldn't be a factor in the kids' responses.
9/20/01	Today we did the last piece of Romantic literature—"The Fall of the House of Usher." I knew it would be difficult—even my CP students struggle with it. It was a challenge. Instead of trying to read the whole thing, we read key passages that I had identified earlier. It was still tough-going. Many students were bored and wanted to sleep. By 4th block I was bored and wanted to sleep! This piece might just be too difficult. I guess I'll know more after the test tomorrow. I don't have high hopes,	This is tough literature. I still hear myself relying on the test results to decide if the literature is worthwhile. I keep making statements like, "I guess I'll know more after the test." I'm not sure that's a valid measure.

	though. On the back of the test I'm going to have students tell me which piece of Romantic literature they liked best and why. I don't think "Usher" will be named by many. We'll see.	Is this more valid than their test results? Does "like" equal worth?
9/21/01	The test results were a little discouraging. Here is a break-down of grades and responses to favorite works. 2nd block: 4A, 4B, 12F 3rd block: 5A, 4B, 5C, 8F 4th block: 6A, 3B, 4C, 7F Not as good as the Puritan lit. test. As for favorite works: 2nd block: Usher 8, Thana 2, Sleepy 11 3rd block: Usher 5, Thana 1, Sleepy 15 4th block: Usher 4, Thana 3, Sleepy 15 Total: Usher 17, Thana 6, Sleepy 41 I was so hoping that they would be as disgusted as I was at the elementary vocabulary and sentence structure of "Sleepy Hollow." Instead, most chose it because it was "easy" and "interesting." Maybe they'll feel differently at the end of the semester when I try again.	There were lots of failures on this test, but did the students fail, or did I? The jury is in! The Scope story won hands-down. What a disappointment! I wonder if their response would have been the same if I had asked them to interact with the text more. Maybe then they would have found it lacking?
9/24 – 9/28	I am not writing separate entries for this week because we are doing only writing, no literature. The Graduation Writing Test is next Tuesday, so we're doing practice tests on Tuesday and Thursday and Elements of Writing book exercises in between. The students were fairly receptive. They griped about the practice tests, but some conceded that they were worthwhile. I guess we'll see in December when the results come back.	I did it again!! "I guess we'll see in December when the results come back." For someone who claims not to believe in standardized tests, I sure to rely on their results! How disappointing to discover about myself!
10/01/01	Today was our final preparation day for the Writing Test. We had a Paideia discussion about current issues to get them ready to think on their feet. They seemed to enjoy it. Tomorrow we'll begin Transcendentalism and The Wave in 2nd and 3rd block and The Chocolate War in 4th block. We don't have enough books for all classes to read TCW at	Another motive for this activity was to relax them. I've found that last-minute "cramming" adds to their stress and anxiety. I hate to get the classes off track with each other, but another reality of public

	once, so we have to rotate. Emerson and Thoreau are tough. We'll see how they do.	school teaching is the lack of resources.
10/02/01	After debriefing on the Writing Test, we got into Transcendentalism a little. I reviewed the timeline and added Transcendentalism. Then I told them that two important ideas of Transcendentalism are nature and individuality. We didn't read any of the selections. Instead we began The Wave, which we'll be reading in conjunction with Transcendentalism. It's all about conformity vs. individuality. Second block went to sleep—they were angry that I had the audacity to make them "work" after the Writing Test. Third block was a little more engaged. Tomorrow we'll be reading "Nature" and continuing with The Wave. I look forward to Thursday when we'll read and discuss "Self-Reliance." That essay usually provokes good discussion. I plan to tape the class.	One disadvantage to The Wave is that I have only one copy (from our school's media center), so I have to read, and they have nothing to follow along. I think this contributes to their sleeping.
10/3/01	I'm getting discouraged. I just can't keep them awake, especially 2nd block. We did Emerson's "Nature" today, and they were not interested at all. After we read it, I put the overhead up with quotations from it, which we "discussed." In reality, I would ask about the quotations, and RJ would explain it. No one really cared. Third block was a little better because I did more of an introduction about nature, and half the kids are hunters. When we got to the quotations, Lana and Wanda answered all the questions. Even Missy slept, and she's one of the best students in the class. And forget The Wave. They act as though it's a bedtime story. Third block is a little livelier, but not much. I'm doing "Self-Reliance" tomorrow and taping it. I may get only snoring.	I wonder if having them all write responses to the quotations might have helped involve more learners. This was a tough piece, but more than one student should have been engaged. These students got more help linking to their lives, an important component in engagement. The Wave reads like a Scope story. It's an interesting event because it's true, but it's written in such a simple, boring way.
10/4/01	Today we did "Self-Reliance" and I taped	

	the discussions in 2nd and 3rd blocks. Fourth is doing The Chocolate War with Kathy. I think the discussions were pretty good. I just need to find a way to involve more students. I didn't do the Paideia format—maybe that would have helped. Or maybe not. Overall, though, I think most of them get it. I guess we'll see how they do on the test. Tomorrow is "Walden"—and Homecoming. Will the fun never end?	Here I go with the test stuff again! Lively discussions should be proof that they're engaged, not test scores, right?
10/5/01	What a day! Students are so wrapped up in Homecoming that they were really hard to keep on task. We tried to do "Walden," but it was hard to keep on task. I ended up reading less of it than I had planned because the kids were so rowdy and distracted. I read the underlined parts in the book, and the kids discussed them. They thought Thoreau was "weird" and "on crack rock," but most could identify with the complexity of life and the need to simplify. Also, we related his "castles in the air" to Lennie and George's dream of having their own place. I also used that St. James book, Simplify Your Life. They thought she was on crack, too. Maybe they'll be more focused on Monday.	I'm not sure it was Homecoming that made this selection so difficult to teach. That could have been a factor, but I seem to jump to that rather quickly. Maybe it just isn't a work they can relate to, or maybe I just didn't teach it well. Or maybe it was a combination of factors. At any rate, the lesson evidently did not go very well.
10/8/01	Today I gave a midterm exam 3rd block. Of the 20 students who took it (3 were absent), 10 failed. I gave them a study guide last week, but when I asked who studied, not one hand went up. That's so discouraging. On a brighter note, 2nd block did Thoreau's "Resistance to Civil Government" today, and they seemed interested. They enjoyed voicing their complaints about government, especially when I brought it down to a local level and asked about school rules and how they would go about changing rules they dislike. We talked about the student movement to protest standardized testing, the Civil Rights Movement, and other peaceful protests. Overall, it was a good	I hate to generalize, but the truth is that tech-prep students are not typically used to studying for exams. I should have done more than just give them a study guide. I should have taught them how to study. Again, they seemed engaged when I tried to link the literature to their lives. Sometimes I wonder, though, if we focus too much on the link and not enough on the literature.

	discussion. Dr. Bigwood gave me permission today to order pizza for my subjects for a midterm lunch interview. All 5 remaining subjects agreed to have lunch with me on Thursday. I lost Desiree to the alternative school because of the fight she was in. I'll have to ask Diane what to do about her.	 No one delivers pizza to Brooklet! I had to get my husband to bring it, which was very inconvenient for him.
10/9/01	Today the classes were reversed. Second and 4th took the exam, and 3rd did "Resistance to Civil Government." Third did a good job with Thoreau. They, like 2nd block, seemed to enjoy talking about resistance—especially to things like Graduation Tests and name tags. Their test is on Thursday—we'll see if they really get it. The exams were disappointing. Even with the study guide and essay question verbatim on it, many did badly. Jim said (after having read Ruby Payne) that poor kids don't think chronologically. I feel like a real failure.	Again, I wonder if they related to the piece or just liked talking about the topic? And there I go with the testing stuff again. This issue has been a tough one for me. I don't understand why they didn't get the discussion question when I gave it to them in advance. I think I should have taught them how to answer it and maybe modeled it for them. I forget that they don't all learn like I do or think like I do.
10/10/01	Today we finished reading The Wave, and then we had a Paideia discussion about it. The students who participated in the discussion did a good job, but too many students chose not to participate. When I asked for modern examples of movements like The Wave, I got good responses. Students mentioned sports, cults, ROTC, the military, Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein. They seemed to get it. Before we finished the book, I asked the students about the midterm. I asked for anonymous written feedback about why the grades were so low. On the whole, they were very gracious and blamed themselves	Although I didn't enjoy The Wave at all and had decided not to teach it again, 26 students chose it as a favorite on their final exam. Only 17 chose it as a least favorite. Now I don't know what to do. If they really liked it, I hate to deny them. I've thought a lot about it and decided that I asked too much and gave too little support. Yes, they had the question, but not

	for not studying or paying attention in class. I'm not convinced, though. I fear they just can't articulate why they did poorly and were just telling me what they think I want to hear.	the tools with which to answer it. I really blew it, and they can't even see that it was my fault!
10/11/01	The Transcendentalism test was today. Ten students in each class failed it. Again, I feel like a failure. There were 100's in both classes, too. I also interviewed my participants at lunch today. I haven't transcribed it yet, but I'm not sure I got very useful information. Maybe it's my questions, or maybe students just can't articulate what I need to know. Tomorrow is a teacher work day (filled with meetings, of course). I've been reading Ruby Payne's book on poverty—Jim thinks that may be an answer to why the kids struggled with my essay question on the midterm—they don't think chronologically. I think I'll make a wall-hanging with words and pictures representing the literary movements. For example, a cross for Puritanism and a science book for Rationalism. Maybe that will help them to focus.	Here I am again, looking for a test to validate my teaching. What about the good class discussions? I got more from them than I had thought. Interviewing is a skill I haven't mastered, though. When I transcribe the tapes, I see so many missed follow-up questions, things I should have asked but didn't. I did make the posters. I don't know how much it helped, except to give kids answers for the tests. I still don't know if most ever made the connections.
10/15/01	Today 2nd and 3rd block got back their test on Transcendentalism. I was fairly pleased. Emerson and Thoreau are tough, but most students seemed to have understood enough to pass the test. Now we're watching A River Runs Through It, and the students will write a page about how the video reflects the ideals of Transcendentalism. They've keyed in on nature and individuality, so it should be easy. On Wednesday 2nd will begin a research paper and third will do The Chocolate War.	The test again! I like bringing in "popular" movies and tying them to literature, though. I hope it helps to make them aware that movies can be "read" for deeper meanings. This is when things got crazy!
10/16/01	We finished the video A River Runs Through It today, and I had the students write about examples of Transcendentalism in it. They did fairly well. Quent was especially perceptive, which surprised me.	Quent was a frequent sleeper and infrequent participator in class. He failed miserably because of it, but he showed here

	Third block finished in time to discuss it. Millie—who didn't seem to be paying attention at all—really did well in the discussion. We'll discuss it in 2nd block tomorrow. Some seemed to really get it. We'll see.	that he could think in some pretty sophisticated ways.
10/17/01	I forgot to write about my "experiment" with the audiotapes of the discussions of "Self-Reliance." I had taped 2nd and 3rd block's classes and then transcribed them. Then I played the tapes for the students and was going to record their comments. Second block listened fairly attentively, but I couldn't elicit any discussion. They laughed at the sounds of their own voices, but they had nothing to say about the discussion. After about 15-20 minutes of listening, 2nd block lost interest completely and wanted to turn it off. Then Donald suggested that I should have played 3rd block's discussion for them and 2nd block's discussion for 3rd. I liked that idea, so I asked 2nd block for permission to play their tape for 3rd. They consented. Third block I tried it—I began by playing 2nd block's discussion on one tape player, with another set up to record their comments and observations. I got no meaningful comments at all, simply laughter and questions about the identities of the speakers. After about 15 minutes, I gave up and gave in to their requests to hear their own tape. That didn't go well, either. Lana and Kathy were extremely uncomfortable hearing themselves on tape. Lana buried her head under a jacket, and Kathy used one of her passes to leave the room. Again, students had no comments on the discussion, just laughter about the voices. What I learned is that if I want students to reflect on their own discussions (or another class's), I need to provide the transcript, not the tape. I'm doubtful, though, that that	I experienced this kind of frustration frequently this semester. I don't think these students have been taught how to reflect. So much of their education consists of memorizing and retelling that it's hard for them to truly think, especially about their own thinking or someone else's. I did not do a good job of modeling this for them. I didn't handle the shy students' concerns very well. They were truly embarrassed, and I didn't know how to handle it. This was a disaster all the way around!

	activity would produce any meaningful insights. I may try it, though. As for today—I began a crazy 9-day period in which I'm teaching something different to each class. Second began a research paper; 3rd is doing The Chocolate War, and 4th is doing Transcendentalism and The Wave. I sympathize with teachers who have 3 preps—it's hard to track all this stuff.	
10/18/01	Fourth block is not officially a part of my study, but I just have to talk about Tran. I'm in love with him. Not really, of course, but he does thrill me in the classroom. I told him once that he seems to be an excellent literature student—his insights are impressive. He is a special ed. student who rarely passes anything but band. He is passionate about music and dreams of being a rap producer. We did Emerson's "Nature" yesterday and "Self-Reliance" today, and Tran just blew us (Kathy and me) away. Every time I stopped to ask what a part meant, Tran not only got it, but could explain it to the others and relate it to his own life. Even his classmates were impressed. One said, "How do you know that?" Kathy and I were so impressed. I wish I could write a whole dissertation on him. I held him after class and told him how wonderful he is. I hope he believes me. As for 3rd block and The Chocolate War, most seem to be engaged. It's still early in the novel, but they seem to be enjoying it. Second is doing a research paper, no literature.	I tried to build Tran's self-esteem because he is so gifted in this way, but one of the counselors undid everything I tried to do. The counselor told Tran he was never going to finish high school because he couldn't pass any of his classes. He was encouraging him to just drop out. Kathy and I saw a drastic change in him after that conversation. He just quit trying. He did manage to pass, but only by the skin of his teeth. These poor kids take such an emotional beating at school. It hurts.
10/19/01	2nd block is still writing their research papers. 3rd block—The Chocolate War. Ed seems to be engaged in the book. He reads along in class and answers questions. Melissa, on the other hand, has become almost hostile. She says she hates the book, that it's boring. She	Sometimes I feel so helpless when it comes to my students. Their lives are so complicated and difficult sometimes. Does she really need to read The

	also is having problems with her other teachers. Roy had to strip her of her rank in ROTC for insubordination. We talked about it and decided there must be something going on at home. She had told me earlier that she rode around in the evenings with a friend until her dad was asleep because they couldn't get along. I wish I could help her. Third also talked me into going outside to read. Jake and Jim L. misbehaved and ruined the experience for the class. The others seemed to enjoy reading outside.	Chocolate War? How will that help her to solve her many problems?
10/22/01	Hectic day! Kathy and I spoke to Mark and Missy's class at GSU first block. That ate up my planning period. Second is still doing research. Third is still reading The Chocolate War. We read aloud for about 10 pages and then do some kind of reading response or work in groups on our character maps. Then we read some more. I'm getting a little bored, and they are, too. I need to do something to break up the routine.	I wonder if I convey my boredom to them. I try not to, but they're pretty good readers of people.
10/23/01	Third block was different today. To satisfy an InTech requirement, I had the students email their writing responses to each other. They seemed to enjoy using the computers, but they didn't put much thought into their responses. I get the feeling I'm blowing this book. Melissa was absent today.	Another artificial lesson to satisfy the powers that be. I guess it didn't do any harm, but it sure didn't help with their comprehension or engagement.
10/24/01	I was absent today—I had to attend a Mini Educators Academy at Ogeechee Technical College. What a waste of time!	
10/25/01	Second block is finally beginning to take their research papers seriously, I think. Everyone except Mitchell and JA worked hard. Mitchell said he had done his paper at home. We'll see. Third block—we'll finish The Chocolate War tomorrow. I am disappointed by their lack of interest and engagement in the novel. A few are reading and seem to be enjoying it, but so many act as though they're being tortured. I don't understand at all. They say they like Of Mice and Men	I have to question the validity of having these students write research papers. They aren't bound for college, and I don't believe OTC requires that kind of writing. My only justification is that they'll have to do one in Michele's class next year. But why? Actually, I should have

	better. I guess it's a good thing we won't have time for To Kill a Mockingbird. Fortunately, Ed seems to be one of the students who is engaged. Melissa is openly fighting and resisting. Fourth block said they hated the novel, too, until we finished, and then they said it was good. Maybe 3rd will be the same way.	done To Kill a Mockingbird instead. More on that later. Ironically, Melissa said in her final interview that she liked The Chocolate War! She actually chose it as one of the three she would teach herself!
10/26/01	This cycle of lessons will rotate again on Tuesday—none too soon for me or 3rd block. They are so uninterested in The Chocolate War. My plan for today was to give a vocabulary quiz and then have the students read the last 25 pages of the novel silently as they finished. Then we were to have a Paideia discussion about the novel to get at its themes and review for the test on Monday. Things didn't work out that way, though. After the quiz had been over for about 15 minutes (with over an hour to go), I began noting on paper who was really reading the book. Ed was one of 7 in the class. That's a little under 1/3. Four had "forgotten" to bring their books. The rest were asleep or staring into space. Toward the end of the block, the 7 readers began finishing the novel, and I went to them one-on-one to quietly ask how they like it. No one liked the ending, though some conceded that it was realistic. All 7 preferred Of Mice and Men to The Chocolate War. I was so discouraged by the slackers that I cancelled the Paideia discussion. I hate to be punitive, but I saw no point in discussing a novel that only 7 people had really read. Also, I hate for the slackers to just listen to the readers and then do well on the test. I have to take some of the responsibility for the failure of this novel. I was so distracted trying to teach three different preps	The final tally on this book on the final exam was 19 for and 27 against. I think it's pretty clear that most students did not engage. I just don't know if it was the book or my teaching of it. I'm not sure I will teach it again.

	(research paper, Transcendentalism, and this novel) that I didn't do a very good job with it. Maybe I can do better with 2nd block—by then I'll be down to two preps. If 2nd block dislikes the novel, too, I may give it up. I was so sure they would like TCW because it is adolescent lit. and high-interest. Very peculiar.	
10/29/01	Mitchell didn't turn in a research paper. He was very apologetic, but he still didn't do it. Andre made a 30 on his—no internal documentation or works cited page. Ellen, of course, did well. We'll be starting The Chocolate War in 2nd block tomorrow. Maybe they'll like it. Third block took their TCW test today. Those who read did well. Everyone else failed. Ed made an 89, and Melissa made a 70, pretty good for the amount I believe she read. I'm getting discouraged. I think they're getting tired of me. I can't honestly say I'm excited to see them every day either. Thanksgiving is coming!	I think Mitchell knows he can do well in this class even with a zero for the paper. That's frustrating. This was a discouraging time. I think rotating through these cycles made the lessons seem monotonous to me. I think I'll try literature circles next time.
10/30/01	Third and 4th blocks began their research papers today. Second began The Chocolate War. Many in 2nd had already heard something about the book from 3rd and 4th. Today I gave them background on the author, novel, and Catholicism. Ellen would NOT be quiet. I had to move Mack away from Andre and Lawrence, so now he and Ellen talk nonstop—when she's not talking to Peter. We had time to read only a little of the novel. They seem mildly interested but not overly enthusiastic. Carol and I visited Michele's 1st block class today to see how her literature circles work. Her seniors are reading Ordinary People, Angela's Ashes, and Night. I read them over the weekend. Her students were supposed to have read some of their books	Again, that discouragement comes through. I think it's good that I recorded my thoughts daily because when I finish a semester

	and then were meeting today to discuss. Many were unprepared. She was disappointed—they are CP. I guess no matter what you try, some kids just aren't going to do it. I hate to sound so defeated, but I'm really discouraged now.	and look back, I tend to remember the high points more than the discouraging ones. This is helpful to remember—it can't all be successes.
10/31/01	We're working our way through The Chocolate War in 2nd. Ellen and Mitchell seem to be reading and following. Andre sleeps and plays when I'm reading aloud and when he's supposed to be reading silently. I read about 15 pages and then let them work on their character maps in groups. Then they were to read about 15 more pages on their own. After about 10 minutes of silent reading, I could tell they were getting sleepy, so I suggested we go outside to read. Big mistake. They just played and talked. Few even tried to read. What a disaster. Third block was bad, too. We went to the media center. Melissa is almost out of control. I hardly recognize her. When I confronted her privately, she confessed that she's having problems at home—her grandmother has told the counselors that she's suicidal. She assured me that she's not. She also promised to behave better. I asked if there was anything I could do, but she says she's fine.	At this point, I was stuck. The other two classes had read the novel, so this class had to read it, too. I should have ditched it at this point and done To Kill a Mockingbird or The Old Man and the Sea or something. I don't know why I thought it would be successful with this class when the others disliked it. I had no idea Melissa's home life was so chaotic when I chose her. I know that's a factor in her ability to engage at school, but I didn't know things were so rough at home.
11/1/01	Andre's apathy toward The Chocolate War is turning into hostility. I asked him and his group (while they were working on their character maps) why they aren't reading. They were almost angry in their responses. He and Lawrence say it's a stupid book and it's boring. Andre is a football player, but he's not interested at all in the football parts of the book. Today when I was reading aloud, Andre was sliding his closed book back and forth across his desk loudly. When I asked him to stop, he slid it off the desk onto the floor, put his head down, and went to sleep.	Andre and Lawrence are both black. I wonder if their apathy has anything to do with the fact that the book is about an all-white boys' school. I wonder how they'll feel about A Raisin in the Sun.

	I've been trying to get the students more involved by letting them tell stories from their own lives as we read. For example, after we read about the practical joke in Room 19, they shared some of theirs. They also told about corporal punishment by teachers and coaches. Stopping for their stories makes us go slower, but more of them seem to be engaged.	Again, I think we're focusing on the link at the expense of the literature, but at this point, I don't care. I just want to finish the book and move on to something they like better.
11/2/01	What a day! Second block didn't even try to pretend to be interested in the book today. They told their stories and then disengaged. I gave up around 11:30. Many were sulking because I wouldn't let them skip my class to watch Phil's trial. I ended 2nd block hoping that the afternoon classes would be better. They weren't. Third block I caught Kathy stealing hall passes from my desk. I wrote her up, and she said that would mean another suspension for her. I was really glad, and I hate to feel that negatively toward my students. Fourth block I got observed by Tom and Michele. Friday, 4th block—great timing! They saw a vocabulary quiz and an explanation of the research paper evaluation. Then the kids got to work on their research papers. I hate being observed. Maybe next week will be better!	Looking at these entries in retrospect, I can't believe I kept teaching the novel that I knew would not be engaging. What was I thinking? This child is seriously troubled. She ended up making a 24 for me this 9-weeks. She's involved in all kinds of things that she shouldn't be, but she's very bright. I encouraged her to go ahead and get her GED and move on. I think it would be good for her to get away from some of the bad influences at school.
11/5/01	I had to stop reading <u>The Chocolate War</u> aloud to 2nd block because of Andre and his buddy Lawrence. They are so un-engaged that they can't even let others enjoy the book. They were supposed to read silently when I stopped, but neither did. Justin C., Mark, Joshua, RJ, Ricky, Jim R, Quent, Jim G., and Andre and Lorenzo weren't even pretending to read. I just don't know what to do with them. Third and 4th are still working on their	I feel so foolish reading these entries. Of course they misbehaved—it was a terrible book. They told me they weren't interested, and I forced them to continue. That was so stupid of me! I've allowed no room for student choice in my literature curriculum, except during SSR. That's not right.

	research papers. Things are going fairly normally. Some are working hard while others goof off. Some will have good (or at least adequate) papers, and others will not.	
11/6/01	An interesting thing occurred in 2nd block today. I just had a frank discussion with them before class about their attitudes toward TCW. I told them we HAD to finish it since the other classes had, but that I was open to suggestions on how to make it as "painless" as possible. They suggested taking turns reading aloud. Mitchell began and did an excellent job. Ricky, Colby, Justin C. and Joshua all read, too. Justin C. was very weak, but they were more engaged even then than when I read. I don't get it. Ellen and Andre were called to guidance for most of the block.	I guess hearing me read is monotonous and boring. Earlier I sensed impatience from them when poor readers volunteered to read aloud, but I guess it was a welcome change from my boring voice.
11/7/01	Tomorrow we finish TCW. I read some and let the students read some. We finished our character maps and did our 3 main idea charts. I modeled it for them with the word "cruelty." They fussed and whined, but most did a good job. They came up with words like "control," "power," "hatred," and "meanness." I collected them and read them to the class, and they observed that all of the words were negative. Andre and Lawrence are still fighting me. Mack has given up and just sleeps all period. I don't know what to do about him. I'll be as happy to finish this book as they are.	Again, their thinking skills surpassed their reading skills. They disliked the book, but they seemed to comprehend it. They came up with good words to express the main ideas of the book.
11/8/01	We finished TCW and had our Paideia discussion. I let Ricky be the one who asked questions and called on people. He did a pretty good job. He and Colby were the biggest contributors. Ellen participated. Mitchell talked to JA, and Andre talked to Lawrence. We did have a decent discussion, though. We'll see how they do on the test tomorrow.	I guess they didn't like it, but they got it. Is that worthwhile? I'm afraid not. Anything that makes them hate reading is probably not good.
11/9/01	I just don't get it. After all the sleeping, whining, and misbehaving, Andre made an	He confessed in his final interview that he reads at

	80 on his test! How? I feel sure he didn't cheat—I watched him carefully. Ellen did well, too—she made a B, and Mitchell was absent. I just can't figure out Andre. How does he do that? Next week we're doing three short stories. I think they're ready for some shorter works.	home. I think it may be difficult for him to be considered "smart" or "interested" by his peers in that class because they struggle so.
11/12/01	I was absent today because I was in my last day of InTech training. I had the students read the introduction to Realism and Naturalism and answer some questions. I will explain and discuss it with them tomorrow.	Another wasted day! At least it was my last absence for the semester. Of the five days I missed, two were for Michael's illness, and three were required by my school system.
11/13/01	We had a good discussion today about Realism and Naturalism. I related it to television to contrast Realism with Romanticism. It was easy to do with all the "reality" shows on today. Then we talked about Naturalism and the idea that we are controlled by outside forces. The students mostly rejected this and claimed that they were in complete control of their own destinies. But many confessed to having said, "If it's meant to be . . ." Then we read Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour." Because it was so short, I read it to them, and we discussed it along the way. They seemed to like it. I always watch their faces at the end to see who "gets it." Most seemed to. They were able to tell me pretty coherently how the story fit into the Realism and Naturalism movements. Overall, I think the lesson went well.	Again, the students seemed to do a good job of linking the ideas to their own lives. They all watch television, so this was an easy comparison for them. I don't know if they liked it because it wasn't The Chocolate War or because it was short or because it was a good story!
11/14/01	Today we read "The Battle with Mr. Covey" using the ReQuest strategy. They loved it. Justin C. in 2nd block said, "You're just trying to trick us into reading the story." I agreed that I was, but they played anyway. We played three times (6 paragraphs) and then I read the rest aloud. Second block did a tremendous job. They asked good questions and seemed to comprehend well.	ReQuest is an effective strategy because it "tricks" the kids into reading carefully. Instead of just running their eyes over the words and claiming they don't understand, they really read, looking for questions to stump me

	Ellen played, but Andre did not participate. Mitchell asked a few questions. Third block did a good job, too. Melissa did not participate, but Ed did. Melissa has become a real discipline problem lately. She is hostile and rude and then wants to excuse her behavior with, "I'm playing." At least Kathy has not been back yet. She was suspended for three days for stealing my hall passes, but that was over on Monday and she still hasn't returned.	with. When we play this "game," I find that they comprehend really well. Even those who are reluctant to play usually read carefully so they can participate vicariously as others ask questions.
11/15/01	Today we did "A Pair of Silk Stockings," our last story before the test. I tried using a graphic organizer and a reading strategy Shelley taught us. The graphic organizer was more distracting than helpful, I think. The reading strategy worked well, though. I had the students read a certain portion (2-5 paragraphs) and then look up. Then we would discuss that portion. I tried to focus my questions on inference—what could they tell about Mrs. Sommers from that passage? Then we would make predictions and read some more. They did a good job. More students were engaged third block—probably because Dr. Bigwood was observing. Again, Andre did not participate, but Ellen did. Mitchell was absent. Ed and Melissa participated little. We had a tutoring session after school, and I was interested in Andre—he wrote down the page numbers of the stories. I suspect he reads at home so he can appear cool and aloof in class. That would explain the 80 on TCW test when he never appeared to be engaged.	This strategy also works well, but one thing I encountered with these students is that they were reluctant to look up when they were finished. It was as if they were afraid I would ask them something if they made eye contact. I think if I do this again, I'll use some other kind of signaling device. Andre did read at home. I think that says a lot about his reading skills if he can sleep in class and then read on his own and get it. He just doesn't want to look too smart for his friends.
11/16/01	Andre made a 78 on his test. Ellen made a 74, and Mitchell made a 91. Melissa made a 68, and Ed made a 67. Ellen was absent for one of the stories and had to read it on her own. Melissa's behavior is almost certainly interfering with her class work. I don't know what happened to Ed. Maybe they can enlighten me during our interviews.	Here I go relying on test scores again, explaining and justifying to try to make them make sense.

	Gene Eden, our counselor, will be teaching and doing career counseling before the Thanksgiving holidays. When we return from Thanksgiving, we have three weeks left—13 instructional days and two half-days for exams. We'll do three more short stories (including one Scope story for contrast) and the play A Raisin in the Sun. We'll write two more essays and watch To Kill a Mockingbird since we don't have time to read it. I can't believe this semester is almost over!	This represents another loss of instructional days, but not one that I can control. Actually, I enjoy having the time to plan and grade while someone else is in charge of my students.
11/19 – 11/20/01	No teaching these two days—Gene is doing career counseling.	
11/24/01	We're still on Thanksgiving break, but I read on the front page of the paper today that one of my participants, Melissa, was involved in a car wreck. Apparently it wasn't too serious—she was treated and released from the hospital. I just don't know what's going on with her, but she's changed so much since the beginning of the year.	Melissa came back to school with scars and stories. I'm afraid she's fallen into the wrong crowd and is doing things she shouldn't.
11/26/01	We returned from break today to do Modernism/Contemporary literature. First we did the introduction—they skimmed and then I lectured. Then we read "A Worn Path." I was afraid we would have time left over, but we didn't finish. We finished the story in 2nd and 4th, but not 3rd. We'll begin tomorrow's lesson with a discussion of it. I used Shelley's technique of reading a little silently and then discussing it. This time I used signaling cards to let me know when they were finished reading. It worked well. We did that three times, and then I read the rest of the story to them. Second and third blocks were good—they had lively discussions after the silent reading parts. They all thought Phoenix was blind at first. Tomorrow we'll talk about Phoenix's name, her journey, and sacrificing for loved ones. Then we'll explore how the story is an example of Modernism.	Kathy's student teacher is teaching fourth block, which is why I don't report on them. The signaling cards were a good idea. They seemed to work well.

11/27/01	Since we ran out of time yesterday, we began today with a discussion of "A Worn Path." Students seemed to like this one. They were able to tell me how it is an example of Modernism pretty easily. We talked about how Welty is ambiguous about whether the grandson is alive or dead and the other unanswered questions in the story. When I asked if they had made sacrifices for loved ones, many offered stories. We also talked about the significance of Phoenix's name. I asked questions, and they did a good job of answering and discussing them. Then we moved on to the Scope story, Ray Bradbury's "The Fog Horn." Of course, I didn't like teaching it, but I wanted their reactions to a Scope story this late in the semester. We used the same reading strategy as the one we used for "A Worn Path." They seemed to like this story, too. I've asked my participants to respond to these three stories each day, and only Ed said this story was boring. I guess monsters are interesting to teenagers, even if they are written about on an elementary level.	On their final exams, 29 chose this story as a favorite; 14 chose it as a least favorite. I think the reading strategy worked well and helped the students to engage. I used the same reading strategy so it wouldn't be a factor in their comparison. On the final exam, 28 chose this as a favorite, and 23 said not to teach it again. I guess I could make a case for it either way.
11/28/01	Our last story was today. It was "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." First Kathy came in (to 2nd block—I did 3rd) to show her rosaries and explain last rites. Then I defined stream-of-consciousness, and we practiced writing it. That was fun in all three classes. They did a good job of starting with the same things (jelly beans, pizza, etc.) and ending in completely different places. Then to read the story, we listened to the audio tape and followed along. I paused occasionally to ask questions and explain things. They were bored to tears. Third block had a brief reprieve when the fire alarm rang. We were almost finished, and on our way back into the room, Melissa said she hated the story because it was boring. I told her to write that in her response if that's	The linking activity—writing stream-of-consciousness—was fun, but I'm not sure it helped with their reading comprehension or engagement. The audiotape was a bad idea. In their final interviews, all five participants said the tape was boring. This story also ranked low on the final exam; 13 chose it as a favorite, and 35 said not to teach it again. I don't

	how she felt, so she did. But when we discussed the last paragraph about Granny going to Hell, she got it before I even asked the questions. She had spent the whole period writing notes and playing with Kathy and Millie. I just don't get her. I thought that hearing a professional read the story would be a treat that would make it more interesting. I was wrong. Second block went right to sleep. Ellen and Mitchell put their heads down and snoozed, while Andre stared off into space. In third block, Melissa, as I said, paid very little attention. Ed seemed to be hanging in there, though. Fourth was a little livelier, but not a lot. Oh well.	know what to attribute to the story and what to attribute to the audiotape. At any rate, it was not a successful experience.
11/29/01	The Modernist literature test was today, and then we watched the video of "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." I guess I just wanted them to like the story somehow. I don't think the video helped at all. My essay question on the test was, "Which story did you like the most? Why? Which did you like the least? Why?" Of course, there was no right answer—I just wanted to see how the Scope story ("The Fog Horn") did. The results were: "Worn Path" 2nd 12-Best, 3-Worst 3rd 6-Best, 4-Worst 4th 9-Best, 4-Worst Total: 27-Best, 11 Worst "Fog Horn" 2nd 8-Best, 4-Worst 3rd 13-Best, 2-Worst 4th 8-Best, 10-Worst Total: 29-Best, 16 Worst "Granny" 2nd 1-Best, 14-Worst 3rd 1-Best, 12-Worst 4th 6-Best, 6-Worst Total: 8-Best, 32-Worst I guess they really didn't like "Granny	I seem determined to make the students like the works I think they should like, don't I? I need to learn when to give up and give in.

	Weatherall." I was pleased, though, that "The Fog Horn" won best by only 2 votes and was actually liked least by 5 more students than "A Worn Path." I guess I can argue that if kids respond equally positively to both, then why not teach the "good stuff"? As for the grades on the test, it was 2nd: 4A, 2B, 7C, 8F, 10F 3rd: 5A, 2B, 7C, 6F 4th: 5A, 5B, 5C I was disappointed by the number of failures, but the test was challenging. I think I could argue that these TC kids are taking tests that are almost as challenging as CP tests.	Here I go with the test stuff again. I guess there may be some connection between their grades and their engagement, but I'm not sure.
11/30/01	Today I returned and discussed the tests. Then we began to write Modernist short stories. First we did a fun pre-writing activity that Kathy shared. I put up a chart on the overhead with 6 categories: hero, heroine, villain, conflict, setting, and resolution. Each category had 11 blank spaces. We brainstormed together to fill in the chart. Then I distributed cards with 6 random numbers to each student. They used their cards to create different combinations of the categories. That was fun. Then they began drafting their short stories. I'm not a good creative writer, but some kids who don't do essays well are really good at this.	Collaborating with Kathy has given me some good resources to use next time I teach this class. She's very good with reluctant learners.
12/3/01	Today we finished our short stories and then did an introduction to A Raisin in the Sun. We discussed MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech first. Most students agreed that we are closer to achieving equality for all, but that we're not there yet. Then we looked at Hughes's "Harlem" and discussed "dreams deferred" and the title of the play. Then we defined internal and external conflict and I gave some examples. Then we assigned	Again, I think I did a good job of creating anticipation by linking the story to their lives. Racism is such a hot topic among these students. I was disappointed that Mitchell didn't volunteer; he's one of the best oral

	parts and will begin reading tomorrow. Only two of my participants volunteered for parts—Ellen and Melissa. There are only three girls in Ellen's class, so we really needed her, but I'm sure she would have volunteered anyway.	readers in the class. Often I sense a feeling of disdain from him. I think this class is way too easy for him and that he's bored most of the time.
12/4/01	We began reading A Raisin in the Sun today. We got through the first scene of Act I. The students moved to the middle of the room to read, and most who volunteered did well (at least fairly well) with the oral reading. Mitchell followed along most of the time but didn't volunteer for a part. Andre slept. Ellen read fairly well, stumbling some. In third block, Ed followed along but didn't read a part. Melissa read and really struggled. After we read the first scene, we began completing our character charts. We'll work on it every day and complete it after we finish the play. I hope it will help them to keep the characters straight in their minds. At the end of class, I asked each student to complete the phrase, "I wish . .." Since the play deals with dreams, I wanted them to think about their own. I will create "I Wish" poems on bulletin board paper—one for each class.	Oral reading is so tough for most of these kids. Even the ones who can read and comprehend silently stumble and stutter when they read aloud. I am proud of them for volunteering anyway. This is another activity that Kathy found in a special ed. journal. It's a good one, I think. It helps the kids get deeper into the characters. Some of their wishes broke my heart. One wished for friends, one for their parents to understand them, etc. Many just wished for money and good jobs and happy marriages.
12/5/01	Today we finished Act I of A Raisin in the Sun. While we were reading, we discussed assmilationism—interesting! So many students believe that America's borders should have closed behind them. One student in 4th block even said, "Immigrants should wear their native clothes so when things happen like 9/11, we can know who they are." How do you respond to that kind of thinking? I tried to compare that kind of thinking to World War II and the interment of Japanese-Americans, but they were supportive of that, too.	This is a hard thing for me as a teacher. I want my students to think critically about their own beliefs, but it's hard to hold my tongue when their beliefs are so different from mine. I say that my motive is to help them to understand themselves better, but it bothers me when they express racism or prejudice or just plain ignorance. Where do I

	Their reading response for today was to write a letter to Mama telling her how to spend the insurance money. Then I played the role of Mama and let some of them come up (one at a time) and persuade me. They seemed to enjoy it. They also enjoyed reading their "I Wish" poems. I tried to relate them to Walter's assertion that "money is life."	draw the line between validating their beliefs and imposing my own?
12/6/01	We read the first scene of Act II today. It went pretty smoothly because it wasn't too long. I got about the same level of participation today as I have been getting. After we read today we discussed prejudice, how it doesn't have to mean racism. We discussed our prejudices against Mexicans, gays, preps, etc. It was a lively discussion in every class. Then I assigned their final essay. I asked them to write a paper about their own prejudice(s). This made some students uncomfortable. One became so belligerent that I had to write him up. For the others I altered the assignment to let them write about a time when they were the victims of prejudice. These papers are due on Tuesday.	Those who are reading are doing fine, but there are many who are not engaged because they do not have a part. I'm not sure how to handle that. If I change readers, I have to force nonvolunteers, which I don't like, and it also confuses the students. Am I trying to change their views? Is that acceptable?
12/7/01	Today was not a good day for me. I was awake all night with nausea and didn't feel well enough to teach. I tried all morning to get a substitute, but I couldn't, so I changed the lesson plan and began showing To Kill a Mockingbird instead. That means Monday will be a bear because we'll have 26 pages to read to finish in time. Oh well.	Again, sometimes our personal lives interfere with our jobs. I feel that the students suffered because I was ill, but I really didn't feel that I could teach that day. The nausea was too great.
12/10/01	Carol saved me! I was dreading having to read 26 pages today, but then Carol brought in her video of A Raisin in the Sun, so we watched it instead. The students were very intent and engaged. Tomorrow we'll have our Paideia discussion during the first half of class and then take our test. Wednesday we'll finish the To Kill a Mockingbird video. Exams are Thursday	The only drawback here was that those who were absent really missed out. They had to read the 26 pages alone, which was difficult. Otherwise, I felt very good about their engagement.

	and Friday.	
12/11/01	Today was wild. Second block became a zoo when two boys had to be removed by an assistant principal. Then we had our Paideia discussion on A Raisin in the Sun. It went fairly well. I taped 2nd and 3rd blocks' and will transcribe them. Then we had our test and watched about 20 more minutes of To Kill a Mockingbird. We'll finish it tomorrow and then have our exams Thursday and Friday.	Again, those who participated in the Paideia showed some good critical thinking, but not all participated. I still am not very good at drawing in the reluctant learners.
12/12/01	Today was the last full day of classes for this semester! We almost finished To Kill a Mockingbird. We'll finish it in about 10-15 minutes on the day of our exam. We took a short break to go down to the media center to look at this year's senior projects. Michele asked me to take the juniors so they could see what they'll have to do for next year. I thought that was worthwhile, so we went. During the video, I also had grade conferences. At this point, 13 of my 71 students are failing. Some are irretrievable and they know it. Some are irretrievable, but they still think they can pass. Some will pass if they do well on their exams. Some are just on their way to dropping out and don't come often enough to pass. I can't believe this semester is over except for exams. In some ways it flew by. I have finished my final interviews with five of my participants—I haven't managed to catch the one who is at the alternative school yet. I sure hope I collected enough data to write my dissertation! If not, I give up!	I thought the trip to see senior projects would inspire them, but many were intimidated by what they saw. I heard more than one say, "I'm going go fail!" I ended up with 12 failures. Those who were close managed to make it. The 12 who failed were mostly chronic absentees who didn't make up their work. I still feel that I failed them in some way, though. I think 12 is a record for me.
12/14/01	Well, it's over, and I have mixed emotions about the success of my "experiment." Interviewing the participants for the final time was somewhat disheartening. Only Mitchell and Ellen said that next year they hoped they got to read the same literature that the college-prep students read, and they were undoubtedly my strongest students.	I need to focus on the data and not on my emotions! I am curious to see what kind of story the data will tell.

Andre said he didn't care one way or another, but he barely passed my class, mostly because he slept so often and thought it was boring. Melissa, the weakest of the participants, and Ed, who is a fairly good reader, both said they preferred the easier Scope literature.

On a larger scale, I asked all of my students on their exams to pretend that they were teaching the class next semester and to choose the three works they would definitely choose to teach, and the three they would definitely omit. The results were interesting. Because it was a 9-weeks exam, I could not include any works from the first 9-weeks. The breakdown is as follows:

Work	Would	Wouldn't
Nature	9	9
Self-Reliance	3	8
Walden	4	4
Resistance to C.G.	3	13
The Wave	26	17
Chocolate War	19	27
Story of an Hour	10	10
Battle w. Covey	18	12
Silk Stockings	15	14
Worn Path	29	14
Fog Horn (Scope)	28	23
Granny Weatherall	13	35
Raisin in the Sun	36	8

What's interesting to me is that so many of the works evoked both positive and negative responses in the students. "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" was clearly disliked by many students (35), but 13 liked it. On the positive side, A Raisin in the Sun seemed to be a favorite with 36 for and only 8 against. The Transcendental literature didn't fair too well, but I feel that our class discussions about the ideas within the works were outstanding. Some students asked where Of Mice and Men was, and I had to

	remind them that we read it the first 9 weeks. I know that it also a favorite. My department chair asked me today how I felt about how things went and what I planned to do next time I teach tech-prep. She wanted to know if I felt that I had been successful with the college-prep literature. I had a tough time answering her question. Some parts seemed to work well, while others clearly did not. For example, "The Fall of the House of Usher" is just too hard, as is "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." I hated teaching the two Scope stories, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "The Fog Horn," but many of the students responded positively to them. Also, I felt negatively about teaching the literary movements to the tech-prep kids. This is the first time I had tried that, and I felt (and Kathy agreed) that the students just weren't making the connections between the works and the movements and among the movements themselves. However, in my final interviews, four of the five participants were emphatic about teaching the movements. They said that it really helped them to understand the contexts of the works. Only Andre said they were boring. I guess the bottom line is I don't know. Did my tech-prep students benefit from studying more challenging literature? I don't know. I *think* it might have been good for them, but I can't be sure at this point. I hope the data I collected will enlighten me!	