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Re-reading, Re-writing, and Re-imagining Texts:  
Critical Literacy in a Kindergarten Classroom

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A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis  
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**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative action research study focuses on the integration of critical literacy practices in a kindergarten classroom. Critical literacy recognizes that no texts are neutral, and that authors position their readers in particular ways. Thus critical literacy practices are those concerned with positioning readers to inquire into issues of language and power, and to disrupt, critique, and challenge texts. In this study, critical literacy was brought to life through a curriculum of rereading and revisiting texts over time. The study took place in the researcher's kindergarten classroom, and follows students' discussion, written responses, and dramatizations around texts read aloud in the classroom focusing on themes of power, justice, and equity. Data was collected across the school year, including fifty lessons. Data analysis such as coding, discourse analysis, and multimodal analysis was conducted during the year and informed instructional decisions. Data analysis also occurred after the year had ended and focused on identifying the different ways that students engaged in critical inquiry into the texts through rereading, rewriting, and reimagining scenes in the texts, as well as how the teacher was able to support students with engaging in critical literacy in the read-aloud setting. In particular, analysis of the read-aloud lessons documented ways that students were able to disrupt stereotypes, consider multiple perspectives, engage with sociopolitical issues, and take social action. Critical literacy is shown as a tool for accelerating young students' literacy development, and students' reading and writing skills are documented as they develop through rereading and responding to texts across the study. This study not only offers a sustained look at how young students can be scaffolded over time to engage in critical literacy practices, but also expands the notion of what types of literacy practices young students

are capable of engaging in. Using the tools of process drama as a way to revisit and rethink read-alouds provides early childhood teachers a way to simultaneously engage their young students in rigorous critical thinking around texts that is also active, social, playful, and imaginative.

*Keywords:* critical literacy, early literacy, read-alouds, children's literature, action research



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wonderful network of colleagues outside of my school as well, many of which I met through the Educators for Social Justice Group. These fantastic educators have provided a crucial support system as I struggled with how to teach for social justice, and have given me some of the most valuable inspiration and feedback along the way.

Finally, I would like to thank the many wonderful students and families I have been lucky enough to work with in my teaching career. These children have filled my days with enthusiasm, energy, and joy, and affirm for me every day that I made the right decision in becoming a teacher. When I see how open-minded and caring these young students are, and their eagerness to take action to improve the world both within and outside of our classroom walls, it gives me hope. There is no place I would rather be, than sitting on my classroom rug, with a book in hand, reading and imagining a better world together with our next generation.

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

This is a story of a year in the life of my kindergarten classroom. In many ways, my kindergarten classroom is similar to other kindergarten classrooms. My students and I read stories together, make art projects, do messy science experiments, and love playing outside at recess. Yet, my classroom is different because of my commitment to creating a classroom filled with joy, justice, inquiry, and collaboration. Based on my understanding of how young children learn, grow, and develop, I create a literacy curriculum that stretches across the year and guides children to inquire into substantial issues of fairness, equity, and taking action for social justice. Literacy is more than just reading and writing—it is a social and transformative practice set within a sociopolitical context. This is what I refer to as critical literacy. Every school year, I begin by reflecting on previous years' successes and challenges and planning for the year ahead with my new students. This year I also planned a year-long action research study to document and share our journey of becoming critically literate. Action research is a cyclical process of inquiry into

classroom practices and is nicely aligned with my goals as a critical literacy teacher as it allows me to critically examine issues of language and power in my classroom.

As you will come to read, our ongoing engagement with critical literacy in our kindergarten classroom took many twists and turns along the way, as is only natural for action research. At the beginning of this school year, I started with a plan for reading social issues themed text sets, and students' interests guided us into what would be a significant investigation around issues of friendship, kindness, and bullying. While I planned to focus on a diverse range of children's literature, students interrupted this plan with their excitement for rereading previously read texts, rather than always allowing us to move on to new read-aloud texts. In fact, had you asked me in August, if I planned on reading a text like *Hooway for Wodney Wat* (Lester, 1999) ten times- I would have laughed and said "Absolutely not!" However, as you will read in Chapter 4, that is exactly what I did, and with good reason, as my students learned so much from this text and their critical work around it. While I planned to engage students in critical literacy through discussion, drawing, and writing, little did I know then, that this was to become a year of drama. Yet, as you will read about in Chapter 5, drama was the tool I had been in search of for years, a tool that at once combined the imaginative and joyful play of early childhood with the social action component of critical literacy. My students played with texts, took on a range of perspectives in texts, and reimagined texts in ways that were more fair and just as they practiced making the world a better place.

Throughout you will hear my voice as a teacher, as well as the voices of my students. Too often in education, teachers' and students' voices are lost, or replaced with the voices of administrators, scripted curriculum and textbooks, outside researchers, and

policy makers, who do not spend their day to day life in real classrooms listening to teachers and students. However, expertise in education lies in classrooms across the country, with teachers and students working daily to improve their instruction and learning, and trying innovative approaches. While I will provide data from my action research that a year of rereading, rewriting, and reimagining texts with drama led to critical literacy, you will not just hear my voice, you will hear the voices of my young students. In Chapter 6, my kindergarteners describe the power of rereading, as they discuss both their enjoyment of these practices as well as reflect on the many ways it deepened their literacy learning. Throughout this dissertation, I hope you will see what is possible, when young students are given time and space to inquire into texts and linger in texts, considering texts in relation to the world around them. I hope you will also see the possibilities for teachers, as professionals, when they claim their classrooms as spaces for research and joint-inquiry with students.

### **Framing the Study**

As a kindergarten teacher, I spend a significant portion of my day engaging students in literacy learning. Literacy skills are heavily emphasized in the elementary setting, and it is typical for elementary teachers to devote nearly half of their day to a “literacy block” where they teach reading, writing, and other literacy skills to students. In comparison with other subject areas (including social studies, science, and the arts) literacy instruction is given priority in the elementary setting. Elementary schools spend a substantial share of their budgets on literacy instruction- employing reading specialists to provide remediation to struggling students, purchasing expensive reading curriculum and instructional materials, and providing literacy coaching and professional development to

teachers. With the United States government now requiring states to administer standardized reading tests to elementary students, teachers feel the pressure to make sure their students are learning to read and performing at grade level on these high-stakes tests. In particular, this high-stakes testing culture has pushed many literacy demands down into the lower grades (including kindergarten) so that students are being pushed to learn how to read earlier in order to better perform on state literacy tests in their upper elementary years. Increasingly kindergartens are not spaces of free play, exploration, and project-based learning, but rather they are becoming places where pencil and paper work on literacy skills is replacing more active and playful learning.

While the crucial need for high quality literacy instruction in elementary schools is clear, what type of instruction will engage students in high levels of literacy learning while also preparing them for the literacy demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The increased move toward a mandated and standardized curriculum means that teachers in the U.S. often don't have time to venture out of the "textbook" language and test-preparation structure to explore the real world in which the students live and to make meaningful and culturally relevant connections across the curriculum (Valli & Buese, 2007; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). Teachers often feel that they can't slow down and allow their students to linger in a text, but rather feel pressure to move on to the next text, lesson, and skill, and keep with a strict curriculum calendar. Further, educational stakeholders often underestimate the depth of young children's potential for thinking and learning. Instead of beginning to foster critical thinking skills in early childhood, emergent readers are often inundated with instruction in basic reading skills instead of being introduced to the tools they will need for critically analyzing more complex texts. Rather than focus on

comprehension and the dimensions of critical literacy like considering multiple perspectives and engaging with the sociopolitical (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008) kindergarten reading lessons can tend to focus heavily on phonemic awareness, phonics, and concepts of print instruction in short repetitive texts.

As an elementary teacher with twelve years of teaching experience, I have found my young students to be capable of so much more than basic literacy when it comes to learning. Although kindergarteners may be just beginning to read short texts independently, they are able to dive in and discuss much more challenging texts when those texts are read aloud to them by a teacher. Interactive read-alouds offer the potential to scaffold students in learning skills that accelerate their literacy development and can later be used when reading independently. My curious kindergarteners have proven capable of asking deeply probing questions about texts we have read together. They have wondered aloud about the stories we read, shared how the texts connect to their own lives, voiced their opinions, and even challenged their classmates' interpretations or an author's portrayal of a situation as we have discussed books together. While I have seen the power of engaging students in critical discussions around texts read aloud in the classroom, I have also seen firsthand how challenging this work can be.

Reading stories aloud to children is a common practice in early childhood classrooms, and is often seen as a key component to fostering literacy with young children (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004; Layne, 2015; Price & Bradley, 2016; Trelease, 2013). It wouldn't be unusual to walk into a kindergarten classroom anywhere in the United States and see students huddled around their teacher eagerly listening to a new book. However, not all teachers

have the same goals for story time. A significant goal of the read-aloud sessions in my classroom is to create a space for students to respond to texts and engage in critical literacy. By critical literacy I mean engaging with who holds the power in texts and who does not, and considering how issues of power and equity in texts relates to students' lives and the world around them. Critical literacy recognizes that no texts are neutral, and that authors position their readers in particular ways. Thus critical literacy practices are those concerned with positioning readers to inquire into issues of language and power, and to disrupt, critique, and challenge texts. Instead of shying away from texts that deal with critical issues, like power and inequality, I find that these texts offer the substance necessary to generate rich classroom discussions. I believe it is vital for students to see themselves represented in the classroom literature, and to have a safe space to share their lived realities. Further, through reading social issues themed texts throughout the school year, there is potential for students to become more open-minded regarding issues of social justice, and to begin challenging stereotypes and possible misconceptions.

When teachers do use more traditional or popular children's literature in the classroom, it is essential to realize that this literature is not neutral. Rather, all literature has messages and value judgments embedded within the text and illustrations. Thus, it is important for teachers to consider what ideas are being presented to children through the literature traditionally read in classrooms. What types of characters and settings are shown and what kinds of lives are presented as normal? What perspectives are missing? A book's ideology can become a "powerful part of the way a child sees and understands the world" (Kelley, Rosenberger, & Botelho, 2005, p. 26). In my own classroom practice, I encourage my students to not only critically analyze the texts we read together,



but also to engage with issues of power and justice in classroom read-alouds because “books offer visions of who we can be, who we are, who an ideal person is and how lives are lived and dreams are dreamed” (Jones, 2008, p. 44). Rather than glossing over issues of inequity in a text, we explicitly discuss who has power and who does not in a text. Race, gender, class, and culture are brought to the forefront of the conversation around texts as we look at authors’ representations of characters and multiple perspectives around an issue. Children’s literature that intentionally focuses on issues of equity and justice can provide a powerful starting place for critical literacy discussions. Leland, Harste, and Huber (2005) argue that social justice themes are important for teachers to engage with in the classroom, since “While we might wish that children did not have to deal with issues like racism, poverty, and war, the fact of the matter is that many children are deeply concerned about these difficult issues when they walk into our classrooms. Ignoring what they need help to understand and deal with is not productive or humane” (p. 267).

Over the last several years, I have undertaken several action research studies with the purpose of better understanding how my students engage in critical literacy and how I can support that as a teacher (Jenkins et al., 2009; Labadie, Pole, & Rogers, 2013; Rogers & Labadie, 2015; Rogers & Labadie, 2016; Rogers, Labadie, & Pole, 2016). As a White, English speaking, able-bodied, middle class woman, living in the Midwestern United States, I recognize that I look like the majority of the teaching force. I teach in a suburban school district and many of my students tend to be White and middle class. I recognize the importance of teaching from a critical stance with all students, even students of privilege. Students as young as five years old have already begun to notice differences in

the world around them, and to construct stereotypes around race, gender, and class. In order to help disrupt these stereotypes, as well as help students recognize systems of privilege, a critical pedagogy is a necessity. Oftentimes students think that only adults can take action for change, however, a critical literacy curriculum can help students see how even young children are able to take action for social justice.

My interest in critical literacy runs deep, originating with my own family and early schooling. I grew up in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb on the western edge of Chicago that is known for being progressive. There I attended local public schools where I had teachers that emphasized and appreciated the diversity in our classrooms. In elementary school we took field trips to learn about African dance, took Spanish classes to learn another language, had a yearly ethnic festival where we learned about students from around the world, and routinely had parents invited into the classroom to share about their family's unique religious and cultural traditions. As I grew older, the pedagogy I was exposed to grew more critical. In high school, my English teachers made sure we broadened our scope outward from traditional novels into reading works by authors of color, my world history teacher had us put Columbus on trial for genocide, and I had the opportunity to participate in extracurricular clubs focused around social justice. At home, my parents were working hard to raise three daughters as strong, open-minded women. They encouraged us to read about and debate controversial issues and current events at the dinner table- politics was never off the table. My mother in particular, made sure to expose us to diverse experiences, taking us on weekend excursions to the National Museum of Mexican Art in nearby Pilsen or for an afternoon wandering Chicago's Chinatown, helping to broaden our view of the world outside of the small suburb where

we lived. She also wove a strong feminist thread through all of her stories to her daughters, the narrative effect of which was, you are from a long line of strong women, and you will be one too. I remember bedtime stories about how our great grandmother had protested Marion Anderson not being allowed to sing at an auditorium in Washington D.C. due to her race, and how our grandmother had attended college at a time when many women had not and had successfully raised four kids as a single mother. I remember my mother telling stories of what it was like for her to be one of the only women working at her law firm, and having to advocate for herself and even write her own maternity leave policy when she was pregnant with me, since none of the other lawyers at her firm (as they were men) had ever had to take a maternity leave. These stories and experiences stuck with me, and shaped who I am as teacher today, they also showed me how a child's early experiences with diverse perspectives, both in and out of school, can have a lasting impact.

Presently my interest in critical pedagogy has been fostered for many years by my participation in a local teacher research group that focuses on literacy and teaching for social justice. As I have shared my work in teaching critical literacy with other teachers, I often hear that they are interested in trying similar methods out in their own classrooms, but they don't know where to start. They may want to talk about current events, local issues, or recent legislation that involves race, gender, or class, but aren't sure how to broach the topic. They may see an incident of discrimination or bias occur in their school or classroom, but are unsure how to handle it sensitively. Educators have asked me: Are children ready for literature that addresses such heavy issues? Do students' parents or school administrators have concerns about reading about and discussing social justice

issues in the classroom? Where is the best place to begin when teaching about social issues? What resources are available to help teachers that want to engage with critical literacy and social justice in their classrooms?

The current literature available on teaching reading and the instruction given to pre-service and in-service teachers often does not adequately address methods for integrating critical literacy into the early childhood setting. In order for early childhood teachers to begin to more routinely engage their students in critical literacy, more information is needed on what critical literacy really looks like in early childhood classrooms. What are the challenges of reading social issues themed texts in an early childhood setting, and what can be done to support students throughout the school year as they begin to think critically about issues of justice and analyze read-aloud texts collaboratively?

In an era of a less play and a faster paced curriculum, even for young children, it may be difficult to imagine creating space for a both a joyful and critical literacy kindergarten classroom. However, in this dissertation, I will argue that it is entirely necessary and I will demonstrate how I built a yearlong curriculum of reading and writing based on important social justice themes where students reread, rewrote and reimagined texts. The practice of rereading texts is one teachers can use to help students slow down and think more deeply about social issues, allowing young students the necessary time and space to linger in the text, explore the text together, and unpack more complex themes. In this way, rereading helps make even seemingly challenging texts accessible to the youngest elementary students, as they revisit and collaboratively build on their understanding of a text with each subsequent rereading.

### **Purpose of Study**

This study explores the ways critical literacy can be integrated into the early childhood setting. Specifically, the study shows how young students can be supported through repeated readings of children's literature to consider and respond to issues of power and justice. This research looks at critical literacy in the classroom through an action research lens, in order to improve classroom practice and to consider ways other practitioners might similarly engage their students. My research questions include: In what ways does rereading open spaces for critical literacy? What does critical literacy development look like across an entire school year for kindergarten students as they engage with social issues focused texts in the read-aloud setting?

This study takes a sustained look at integrating critical literacy into a kindergarten classroom, starting early in the school year, and documenting the progression through the end of the school year. Over nine months, students engaged in studies of children's literature focused on different themes during our classroom read-aloud time. A diverse range of social issues were included in the read-aloud texts, including: gender, social class, race, cultural differences, and taking action for social change. A key theme that cut across many of the books read-aloud, was the theme of bullying, and students explored this theme in depth across the entire school year and across a range of read-aloud texts.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

For this study, I situate my work within constructivist theory and sociocultural theory. Further, I draw on several perspectives on critical literacy to inform my study.

**Constructivist Theory**

I approach my research from a constructivist perspective. Constructivist theory “assumes that what we take as real, as objective knowledge and truth, is based upon our perspective” (Charmaz, 2010, p.197). Charmaz (2010) asserts that researchers coming from a constructivist point of view feel that “the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed” and that “what a viewer sees will shape what he or she will define, measure, and analyze” (p. 197). I see myself as a researcher interacting with my participants and data, and bringing my background and perspectives to my study, which has an effect on my analysis of the data. I find this to be particularly true given that I am conducting action research inside my own classroom, where I spend a significant amount of time building relationships with my students. Given my familiarity with the research setting, and my close relationship to the research participants, my observations could conceivably differ from what an outsider would note about my classroom. However, I also believe that my insider perspective can be considered an asset, as I detail my action research and how my research and teaching evolved over the course of the school year, and bring that added insight on the classroom and critical literacy instruction from a teacher perspective.

**Sociocultural Theory**

I also draw on sociocultural theory to inform my research. Sociocultural theory acknowledges that literacy is a social practice that occurs within a social, cultural, and historical context. Looking at classroom literature discussions through the lens of sociocultural theory necessitates a close look at the classroom environment as well as the background and cultural identities of both teacher and students and how that shapes the

interaction and meaning making around different texts. Sociocultural theory allows the recognition that “meanings are multiple, changing, and contextual” in any discussion of literature (Hammerberg, 2004, p. 655). Instead of focusing students on discovering one true meaning in an author’s words, critical literacy and sociocultural theory recognize that “the author’s meaning is situated in reader’s heads in such a way that the message can be questioned, critiqued, and used in socially empowering ways” (Hammerberg, 2004, p. 655).

Drawing on the work of Vygotsky, sociocultural theory also emphasizes the social nature of reading and writing. Vygotsky (1978) asserts, “Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88). Translated into the classroom environment, as students collaboratively discuss literature together with the support of their teacher they may come to a deeper understanding and comprehension of the text as a result. Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of learning describes the role of more knowledgeable others, facilitating a learner’s growth within a “zone of proximal development.” This assistance, also described as scaffolding, helps learners engage in tasks beyond those they are able to do independently and keeps their learning propelled forward on the edge of their development. With my research focus on student discussion and critique of texts, it was key to examine the types of scaffolding that supported students in engaging critically with texts beyond what they might do independently - and beyond what much of the educational literature believes is possible for young children.

### **Critical Literacy**

Current theories of critical literacy education draw on the Paulo Freire's (1970) groundbreaking work with liberatory adult education, and have roots in feminist, postcolonial, and anti-racist traditions. There are currently many different perspectives on critical literacy in the education world. Luke and Freebody (1997) in their work with critical literacy in Australia, place critical literacy within their Four Resources Model of reading. The Four Resources Model looks at the different ways that readers must to engage with texts in order to understand what they are reading (e.g. code breaking, making meaning, using texts functionally, and critically analyzing and transforming texts) (Luke, 2000). Janks' (2000) work with critical literacy in South Africa emphasizes that while the main focus of critically literacy involves looking at the relationship between language and power, "different realisations of critical literacy operate with different conceptualisations of this relationship by foregrounding one or the other of domination, access, diversity, or design (p. 176).

In my work, I rely primarily on Lewison, Leland, and Harste's (2008) definition of critical literacy. Lewison et al. (2008), in their work with critical literacy in the United States, identified four distinct dimensions of critical literacy: disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on the sociopolitical, and taking action to promote social justice. These four dimensions offer concrete ways that students can go beyond a more passive reading of a text and begin to engage in critical analysis. Critical literacy work with children's literature aims to help students understand that texts are not neutral; all texts are written from a point of view and authors position readers in particular ways. Using the tools of critical literacy, readers can challenge the



texts they read, resist the perspective presented in the text, and even entertain what viewpoints might be left out of the text entirely. By reading multiple texts around a theme, students have the opportunity to compare the perspectives presented in each text, and to consider multiple viewpoints around the same topic. Critical literacy goes beyond the basic literacy skills of decoding and making meaning, and pushes the reader to actively interrogate and critique the text.

### **Significance of Study**

A significant amount of research in the field of literacy has focused on literature discussion and read-alouds (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004; Lane & Wright, 2007; Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker, 2008). However, these studies have less often examined classroom literacy practices through a critical literacy lens. This study fills a gap in the literature on how critical literacy read-alouds can be facilitated in the early childhood setting, and more specifically, at how young children deal with the issues of power and justice in texts. This study documents how young children can begin to engage in critical literacy with the support of themed text sets around different social justice issues as well as teacher scaffolding. It sheds light on strategies early childhood teachers can use to engage students in critical literacy and foster discussion around issues of power and justice.

Current trends in critical literacy research over the last ten years, show an increased focus on English language learners (Huang, 2012; Lau, 2012; Lau, 2013; Waterhouse, 2012), media literacy (Barden, 2012; Harouni, 2009; Turner, 2012), and preservice teacher education (Assaf & Delaney, 2013; Jones & Enriquez, 2009; Scherrf, 2012; Souto-Manning & Price-Dennis, 2012; Woodcock, 2009). Much of the literature on

fostering critical literacy focuses on older students in classrooms and extracurricular settings (Cridland-Hughes, 2012; Foss, 2002, Hayik, 2012; Kelly, 2012; Park, 2012; Saunders, 2012). Studies with younger children have had a diverse range, and focus on topics from critical analysis of current events (Silvers, Shorey, & Crafton, 2010), to writing workshop (Flint & Laman, 2012; Ghiso, 2013; McCloskey, 2012), to students' critical inquiry into school and community issues (Kuby, 2013a; Silvers, Shorey, & Crafton, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2009).

The smaller subset of research studies that have been focused specifically on the use of children's literature often describe the power of using a set of social issues texts centered around a particular genre (Bourke, 2008) or theme (Souto-Manning, 2009; Vasquez, 2010). Comber (2003) points to the need for more research on critical literacy in the early years and for "studies of what critical literacy looks like in different communities and what different groups of children do with the critical discourses which are made available to them" (p. 364). My research helps to address this gap in the research, and adds many unique contributions. Rather than wait until most of the class is able to read independently, my study starts right at the beginning of the school year, and looks at how critical literacy can be fostered even with kindergarten students that are not yet reading and may have limited experiences with formal schooling. Further, my study goes beyond the quick snapshot of one themed unit or inquiry offered in many studies, and provides an in depth look at what students' critical literacy development looks like over the course of an entire year, inquiring into a diverse range of topics and themes, and looking at their writing, discussion, and dramatizations around texts.

This study expands the literature on critical literacy read-alouds by specifically focusing on the early childhood setting- an age group where not as much work has been done around critical literacy. Further, this study offers a sustained look at this work in the classroom over many months, looking at how children engage with different themed texts sets and how their critical literacy skills might develop over time. Rather than focus on just one theme in the literature, many different themes related to power, equity, and justice are explored with students.

As an action research study, this study uniquely offers practitioners a case study of critical literacy implementation over time and provides teacher insights along the way. The goal of action research is for researchers to engage in self-study of their own practices, with a focus on ways those practices might be improved. While action research involves many of the same facets of typical research studies (identifying a problem, developing a research question, observing and collecting data, etc.), there are also several unique components of action research (Hubbard & Power, 2003; MacLean & Mohr, 1999; Meier & Henderson, 2007). Action research is often cyclical in nature, and after a researcher has collected and analyzed the data, the research does not stop. The researcher then reflects on ways to adjust her practices, puts new practices into action, and then starts the research cycle again by investigating and collecting data on the effects of the newly adjusted practices to come to a deeper understanding of the research problem. By utilizing an action research design, this study gives a look at teacher reflections along the way and the adjustments teachers can make over a school year to fine tune facilitation of young students' critical literacy discussions. This type of action research design is uniquely able to give an in depth perspective on the research problem from the viewpoint

of the teacher; and further “unlike traditional research, action research produces knowledge grounded in local realities that is also useful to local participants” (Herr & Anderson; 2005, p. 98). However, action research is not only useful to the researcher and other practitioners, as it begins “to build a knowledge base that can inform the research community about the actions and beliefs of practitioners- a knowledge base that is otherwise unavailable” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 34).

This study offers many potential implications for practitioners, including providing a glimpse of what critical literacy can look like with young students and what types of critical analysis young students can be capable of. This study can offer a look at what a teacher and her students can learn over a sustained attempt at engaging in critical literacy and what the successes and challenges can be with integrating critical literacy into the classroom. In addition to implications for classroom practice, there are possible educational policy implications as well. As Herr and Anderson (2005) point out, although action research may be seen by some as a research specific to one practitioner’s setting, in actuality “local problems and local settings are parts of larger problems and broader social forces” (p. 67). This study helps to expand current ideas of what types of literacy practices are possible with young students and ways in which students’ early literacy skills can be strengthened by engaging in critical literacy practices.

### **Delimitations**

The main delimitations for this study stem from the constraints of the action research design. In action research, the teacher identifies an issue in her classroom, and then undertakes inquiry towards improving her practice. While action research can afford many unique insights into classroom practice, it can also impose some limits. As an

action researcher, I conducted the research in my own classroom where I served as a kindergarten teacher, and I was both a participant and researcher in the study. The study was confined to one classroom, in one suburban St. Louis school district. Action research studies necessitate the use of convenience sampling since they are conducted in the practitioner's own setting. Thus, the participants in the study involve a pool of 20 kindergarten students assigned to my classroom for this particular school year.

### **Organization of Chapters**

Chapter 1 gives an introduction to my research topic, background on the research problem, and an overview of the significance of studying critical literacy practices with young students. Chapter 2 focuses on a review of the literature in the areas relevant to this research. The main areas covered include: classroom literature discussions, teacher read-alouds of texts, the development of critical literacy, and sociocultural theory. Chapter 3 describes the methods for conducting this research. This includes a description of the research design, setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis. In Chapter 4, I give a case study of rereading, focusing on the lessons around just one read-aloud text: *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. I look at both the initial reading of this text as well as nine subsequent rereading sessions that occurred around this text spread across the school year, in order to better understand how critical literacy develops across multiple interactions with a text. In Chapter 5, I explore how engaging in drama around a read-aloud text is one way that students can further linger in the text, re-examine and reconsider scenes in the text and different character's perspectives, and resist the neat closure of the text. I analyze multiple process drama lessons, including techniques like writing in role, creating tableaux, and improvising scenes. Chapter 6, focuses on

perspectives on rereading, and includes both teacher and student reflections on rereading. In Chapter 7, I discuss the study's conclusions. In this concluding chapter, I pull together key points around rereading and critical literacy, give additional discussion and implications of the study, and highlight potential areas for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research study focuses on how the students in my kindergarten classroom connected and critically responded to texts in a variety of ways through discussion, writing, drawing, and dramatizations. Specifically, I look at how students engaged with repeated readings of multicultural and social issues themed children's literature. This chapter reviews the relevant literature in the areas of classroom literature discussions, teacher read-alouds of texts, process drama, and the development of critical literacy. A framework of sociocultural theory is also used to consider classroom read-alouds and literature discussions in relation to how students collaboratively construct understanding of texts through dialogue and how teacher scaffolding can support that process.

### **Literacy in Context**

Context is critical when considering any literacy event, since, as Hammerberg (2004) asserts, "Different sociocultural contexts yield different ways of being literate" (p. 650). How a specific context, in this case the school, classroom, and teacher define literacy and what literacy acts are appropriate shape the ways students discuss and come to understand a text. Students' background knowledge and sociocultural identity are also critical to how they make meaning during literacy instruction because "literacy is neither context nor content free; instead it is always socially and culturally situated" (Hammerberg, 2004, p. 651). Literacy instruction occurs throughout the school day, and opportunities for discussing texts may take place in varied settings such as book clubs, guided reading groups, shared reading lessons, and read-alouds. Thus the specific literacy context offered in my study, a teacher read-aloud and accompanying class discussion, is important to consider.

Maloch (2004) describes how literature discussions are complex events that “do not occur in a vacuum; they are influenced by a number of factors that precede and surround the actual events” (p. 16). Literature discussions are an example of the public ‘commons’ where people learn to listen, learn, and debate about public sphere issues. Teachers must acknowledge the diversity in the classroom as well when considering class discussions. Classroom literature discussions “bring together a number of unique participants, all with distinct histories and prior experiences with regard to their personal background, their family background, and their educational background” (Maloch, 2004, p. 16). While my students have many things in common (such as their age, the neighborhood where they live, etc.) they also each have many unique aspects to their backgrounds that contribute to how they interpret the texts we read and the responses they contribute to our discussions. In addition to considering students’ diverse cultural backgrounds, it is important to consider the shared history of the class in determining what direction the literature discussions take, as students have been learning over the course of the school year what “read-aloud” and “literature discussion” mean in the unique context of their classroom and individual teacher. The expectations and norms for a read-aloud in my classroom might be very different from a read-aloud in another teacher’s classroom. While some students are having their first formal schooling experience in my kindergarten classroom and may come in with an open mind on how to respond to texts, other students that have had preschool experiences with read-alouds and book discussions might be accustomed to different participation styles or different expectations for engaging with texts.



In analyzing classroom literature discussions, the students' backgrounds and expectations about the literacy event are not the only factor to consider. Rather, focus can also be put on what the teacher's agenda may be and what the teacher's values around literature discussion and student comprehension are, as this influences the discussion that takes place. What types of responses to literature the teacher privileges and allows are important to analyze as "readers are both constrained and enabled by the rules of the interpretative communities to which they belong" (Sipe, 2000, p. 256). A clear example of the importance of considering cultural values and definitions of literacy comes from the research of Shirley Brice Heath (1983). In Heath's (1983) study, students who were considered literate in their home communities struggled with school literacy tasks because of how the school and teacher defined literacy in the classroom. Thus looking at what ways of discussing and interpreting texts are available to students in the classroom and what ways perhaps are not valued is important to any analysis of literature discussion. In the case of my classroom, I am placing emphasis on critical analysis of multicultural texts, and I value students' open discussion around topics of equity and justice in the texts.

### **Discussions of Multicultural Literature**

The current body of research on literature discussions points to the importance of selecting high-quality children's literature. In particular, McGee and Schickedanz (2007), in their study of early childhood read-alouds, advocate for using "sophisticated picture books" rather than simply "predictable" books in order to engage students in more analytic talk (p. 743). In my study, I focus on facilitating critical literacy read-alouds through the use of multicultural children's literature around particular social justice

themes. Critical literacy read-alouds challenge traditional notions of how students can interact with texts and the types of texts and topics that are appropriate for students to interact with. Critical literacy read-alouds focus on issues of power and inequality and may use books around themes like race, gender, social class, and peace. Current research has provided recommendations for teachers on the different multicultural literature available to address different social issues (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2013; Vasquez, 2010) as well as different invitations teachers can use to engage student in self-study of these social issues in texts (Van Sluys, 2005).

From a sociocultural perspective, the type of literature discussed in the classroom is an important consideration. DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) assert that “Literature that reflects students’ lived realities offers additional benefits to the language arts classroom because it raises questions about literature and teaching as a racially neutral process” (p. 168). Additionally, what the aim of the discussion is, whether it be “comprehension” or “critical literacy” is important as well. Reading comprehension may be seen as a skill or strategy that resides “in the print and the students’ cognitive abilities” or instead as “being more socially and culturally situated,” which perhaps complicates more traditional notions of comprehension (Hammerberg, 2004, p. 655). Further, since texts are not neutral and students bring different experiences relevant to understanding different texts, it makes sense that comprehension is not a fixed skill and that a “good comprehender of one text might struggle with a different text” (Hammerberg, 2004, p. 650).

The research of DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) provides insight on literature discussion in the context of multicultural children’s literature. They analyze how a diverse group of bilingual fourth graders, from multiple cultures, work together to

analyze multicultural literature that is culturally relevant to the Hispanic background of many students in the class. They found that certain key parts in the texts sparked intense student discussion, particularly parts in the text that were controversial or surprising. These “critical encounters” in the texts, were central in developing student-driven discussion where students were engaged and eager to discuss the text. The discussion of literature that was culturally relevant to students in DeNicolo and Franquiz’s study “invited students to use their life experiences as linguistic and cultural tools for personal understanding and for bringing about understanding in others” (2006, p. 163). The selection of multicultural texts was critical since “quality multicultural children’s literature provided students with multiple opportunities to explore societal issues and understand diverse perspectives” (p. 167). Students collaborated to make sense of the issues in the text, often questioning each other, sharing personal experiences, and functioning as “mediators for one another” (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006, p. 167).

Multicultural literature is not something that should just be used in diverse, multicultural classrooms. Rather multicultural literature and critical literacy are particularly important for children who have relative privilege or that may be amongst a group of homogenous classmates. Multicultural literature, featuring diverse characters and settings, can serve as a window for students looking into cultures different from their own. These books can also help students begin to reflect on their own lives and actions in a new way.

### **Instructional Supports & Scaffolding during Literature Discussions**

Vygotsky’s (1986) concept of the zone of proximal development helps to shed light on ways teachers can support students in their learning during classroom literature

discussions. The zone of proximal development is the difference between what a child is able to do independently and what a child is able to do with the help of a more experienced peer or adult. Vygotsky (1986) emphasizes the importance of teaching students within their zone of proximal development, with the teacher or a more knowledgeable peer providing the necessary amount of scaffolding for the child. Gradually, a student's zone of proximal development shifts upward, so that skills that the child used to be able to do with teacher assistance become independent level tasks, and the child is able to attempt more challenging tasks with teacher support. Vygotsky (1986) asserts that "instruction must be oriented toward the future, not the past" so that the child doesn't remain in the lower level stage of thinking, but rather the child's development is stretched through learning (p. 189).

Using the concept of the zone of proximal development, teachers may consider how best to scaffold classroom literature discussions to help students stay on the forward edge of their development. In this study, I look at students' zone of proximal development in relation to critical literacy. The concept of the zone of proximal development will be useful not only in considering each student's individual critical literacy development, but also what the zone of growth is for the class as a whole in developing the skills of textual analysis and critique. Several studies on literature discussions have included an analysis of scaffolding (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Maloch, 2004; Sipe & Brightman, 2006). Maloch's (2004) study suggests that strong teacher scaffolding may be necessary for a while to begin to foster truly "student-centered" discussions, as the teacher models and then gradually releases responsibility for deciding on topics of discussion, facilitating turn-taking, and asking questions over the

course of many literature discussions. The role of the teacher in a literature discussion must be dynamic and changing to meet the needs of students, as different points in the conversation may require the teacher to serve as “facilitator, participant, mediator, or active listener” (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006, p. 162). DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) detail the “gradual release of responsibility” from teacher to students for “leading the discussion, navigating multiple perspectives, [and] deciding next steps” (p. 160). For critical literacy discussions, teachers may choose to serve as facilitator and foster inquiry into the book and multiple interpretations instead of a single interpretation of the literature. Research has shown how scaffolding is required not only to help students develop understanding of ideas from the texts, but also for interpersonal skills during class discussions as students negotiate turn-taking and disagreements (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Maloch, 2004).

Sipe and Brightman’s (2006) analysis of literature discussions with first and second graders found that teachers play varying roles during literature discussions. They identified five main roles that teachers take on, including those of: reader, manager/encourager, clarifier/prober, fellow wonderer/speculator, and extender/refiner (Sipe & Brightman, 2006). The role that the teacher plays depends on what is happening in the moment, and what the teacher determines to be the best way to facilitate and scaffold student discussion. Sipe and Brightman (2006) assert that scaffolding is not a “univocal construct, but rather involves the teacher playing multiple roles” and that these roles may change from “moment –to-moment” in the discussion (p. 277). At times the teacher might want to draw out student comments or ask students to tell more about their thinking, while at other times the teacher might want to move the discussion forward by

initiating a new line of inquiry. Sipe and Brightman's (2006) analysis also found that what a teacher doesn't say can be just as important as what the teacher does say in the course of the literature discussion. Is the teacher evaluating student responses or praising certain types of thinking? Is the teacher responding to students, or stepping back and allowing students to respond to each other? As Sipe and Brightman (2006) analyzed one specific teacher, they found that "it was her *silence* and willingness to entertain multiple ideas and interpretations from the children that seemed to help them feel in control of the conversation" (p. 281). The research of Sipe & Brightman (2006) not only looks at the amount of scaffolding as relevant, but also at the types of teacher scaffolding as a critical issue, as the type of support may be more important than the amount of support. With my research's focus on how students can be supported in taking on critical literacy in book discussions, teacher scaffolding is one key element to consider. However, I recognize that the teacher is not the only source of scaffolding during the read-alouds, as students may be supported by modeling and questioning from peers and even by portions of the text and illustrations in the literature we are studying.

### **Literature Discussions and the Social Construction of Meaning**

Many studies have pointed to the importance of student interaction and dialogue in understanding texts. Sociocultural theory, and in particular the work of Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes the social nature of learning. As students discuss a text together they co-construct knowledge and negotiate possible meanings from the text. Successful literature discussions require "robust social interaction and the willingness of teacher and students to (re)position their roles while layering meanings by building on each other's responses to the selected literature" (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006, p. 162). DeNicolo and

Franquiz (2006) found in their analysis that student engagement in discussions “depends on the degree to which students are allowed to delve into uncomfortable issues, share their confusions and concerns, question the author’s perspective, and figure out collaboratively what perspectives made sense to them” (p. 168).

The current body of literature on classroom book discussions shows that students respond to texts in diverse ways. It is important to consider what readers bring to the text since that shapes the meanings they construct. Hammerberg (2004) discusses how students use identity resources (cultural tools) and knowledge resources (background knowledge) to draw meaning from text. Hammerberg (2004) looks at three different ways that readers interact with text: decoding and reading (word level meaning), getting the gist (the author’s message), and constructing knowledge (a deeper understanding and analysis). A main goal of critical literacy discussions would be helping students to engage in that deeper analysis at the “constructing knowledge” level. Sipe’s (2000) research also looked at the different ways readers interact with text and identified five main categories of children’s talk during read alouds: analytical, intertextual, personal, transparent, and performative. Sipe (2000) also discusses the intertextuality of literature discussions, and how “the specific language and cultural systems in any given learning environment determine what intertextual connections are available and valorized there” (p. 256). It is evident from the current literature on book discussions that there are many different ways that students may choose to talk about a text. Rather than one type of talk being more useful than another in text discussions, allowing students multiple opportunities to connect to their personal experiences, bring in connections with other texts, and engage

in questioning and critical analysis of the text enables a richer understanding of literature to emerge.

### **Read-alouds as a Setting for Literature Discussion**

#### **Effective Read-aloud Practices**

A significant amount of research in the field of literacy has been devoted to investigating read-aloud practices as a unique setting for literature discussion. While it is commonly accepted that read-alouds benefit students and are an important component of literacy instruction, the benefits of read-alouds are varied. Read-alouds provide a “powerful context for word-learning” and are one way that teachers can introduce vocabulary to students, both incidentally through the read-aloud and purposefully by stopping to explain vocabulary (Kindle, 2009, p. 202). Vocabulary and comprehension development are often major goals of read-alouds in classrooms, and many studies have looked closely at how to teach these reading skills in an effective and engaging way through the read-aloud context (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004; Kindle, 2009; Lane & Wright, 2007; Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009; Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker, 2008).

One key component of effective read-alouds is that high-quality children’s literature that is appropriate and interesting for students must be chosen (Fisher et al., 2004; Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009). Read alouds may also be connected to a theme of study in the classroom or selected to enrich science and social studies curricular content (Santoro et al., 2008). Another common thread of effective read-alouds is that the teacher has previewed the text and has set a purpose for the reading, whether it be specific vocabulary, comprehension skills, or enjoyment (Fisher et al., 2004, Kindle, 2009). During interactive read-alouds, it is expected that the teacher will be periodically pausing



to question students and discuss portions of the text and then often the read-aloud is followed up with additional discussion or independent written response activities (Fisher et al., 2004; Morrison & Włodarczyk, 2009; Santoro et al., 2008).

### **Read-alouds & Re-reading in the Early Childhood Setting**

One subset of the research on effective read-aloud practices has focused specifically on read-alouds in the early childhood context. Reading aloud to young children can be a way to improve oral language skills and vocabulary, but simply reading a book aloud is not enough; rather “the way books are shared with children matters” (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007, p. 742). In an interactive read-aloud, students must be actively engaged in the read-aloud, and contributing to a discussion of the read-aloud, instead of just listening passively. Some effective read-aloud strategies for preschool and kindergarten age students include: inviting students to retell or dramatize the story, reading several books on a similar topic, and giving repeated readings of the same book (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). In their study of early childhood read-alouds, McGee & Schickedanz (2007) found that “effective teachers model what ideal readers do by explicitly talking aloud as they read, making children aware that they are predicting, making an inference, or changing their ideas about what is happening in a story” (p. 743).

Introducing the text, thinking aloud, and questioning have all been found to be important components of effective read-alouds with early childhood students. Teacher modeling and questioning supports young children in beginning to engage in analytic thinking. Repeated readings of the same book can then serve to “enrich children's comprehension of the story and provide further opportunities for children to engage in

analytic talk” and often students begin to take a more active role in the discussion on second and third readings of the text (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007, p. 745).

Serafini and Ladd (2008) looked at the types of responses and meanings young readers construct during their transactions with contemporary picturebooks. Similar to the work of McGee & Schickedanz (2007), Serafini & Ladd (2008) studied the results when the same book was read aloud several times over the course of the week. They found that this practice of repeated readings was critical because “the extended time dedicated to each picturebook created an extended interpretive space for readers to delve more deeply into each picturebook and develop more sophisticated interpretations” (Serafini & Ladd, 2008, p. 17).

Other early childhood read-aloud research has focused on how to use read-alouds to develop higher level literacy skills. In contrast with focusing on literal understanding of the text, it is important for students to analyze texts and engage in “interpretative meaning making” (Hoffman, 2011). Hoffman (2011) studied how this could be accomplished with kindergarteners by encouraging student talk and a free participation structure, strategic use of reconstruction of meaning when students exhibit misunderstandings of the text, and strategic use of co-constriction of meaning. Through co-constructing meaning as a class, “students can shift understandings of ‘meaning’ from something preexisting in texts to something constructed through texts, themselves, and others” (Hoffman, 2011, p. 193). While this and other early childhood read-aloud research has begun to consider how higher level literacy skills might be included, critical literacy is still often being left out of the discussion on read-alouds with emergent

readers; despite its potential for strengthening and accelerating beginning readers' literacy skills.

## **Critical Literacy**

### **Models of Critical Literacy**

Critical literacy goes beyond a more passive concept of literacy as an individual skill, and considers how literacy is a situated social practice in communities. Critical perspectives on literacy have roots in feminist, postcolonial, and anti-racist traditions. Current critical literacy work in schools can be traced back to the work of Brazilian social activist Paulo Freire, whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) explored how liberatory education for adults could be designed. Rather than engaging in a passive and receptive style of literacy learning focused on teacher imparted knowledge, referred to as the “banking model,” Freire considered how students could actively take part in learning that was meaningful to their lives and ultimately disrupt relations of domination and power.

Readers can interact with texts in many different ways. Luke and Freebody (1997) introduced the Four Resources Model of literacy, which describes four ways that readers engage with texts. In engaging with new texts, they assert that readers must break the code of texts, participate in the meanings of texts, use texts functionally, and critically analyze and transform texts. The Four Resources Model offers a lens to use in considering students' discussions of texts, and what resources they are relying on in their responses to the texts. While teachers more commonly engage young students in aspects of breaking the code and taking meaning from texts, the Four Resources Model of literacy acknowledges the complexity of the reading process and that critical literacy is one of the key ways that readers must engage with texts.

In looking more specifically at what is involved in critical analysis of texts, Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2008) have identified four distinct dimensions of critical literacy: disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on the sociopolitical, and taking action to promote social justice. Critical literacy work with children's literature focuses on helping students understand that stories are constructed by authors who position the reader in particular ways; stories are told from a particular point of view with some voices and perspectives left out; and it is possible to challenge and resist the dominant or preferred reading of a text (Simpson, 1996). Adopting a critical stance in the classroom helps to enable critical literacy. Lewison et al. (2008) assert that a critical stance requires consciously engaging, entertaining alternate ways of being, taking responsibility to inquire, and being reflexive. In order to better gain perspective on a text's point of view, readers may need to read multiple texts, comparing them and reading texts against one another.

### **Current Trends in Critical Literacy Research**

Recent research on critical literacy has had a significant focus on older students, and ways to incorporate critical literacy into middle and high school settings (Cridland-Hughes, 2012; Hayik, 2012; Kelly, 2012; Park, 2012; Saunders, 2012). This research has been varied, looking at critical literacy practices not only in the English classroom, but also in social studies' classes and after school programs. Fostering critical media literacy has been another focus, with studies looking into ways to foster students' critical consumption of Facebook (Barden, 2012), Wikipedia (Harouni, 2009), and popular culture/music (Turner, 2012). Another recent direction in critical literacy studies is engagement of English language learners, and how critical literacy instruction can

increase their engagement in the classroom and further empower students to address issues specifically related to the immigrant experience (Huang, 2012; Lau, 2012; Lau, 2013; Waterhouse, 2012).

In addition to a strong focus on secondary students, English language learners, and media literacy, another recent trend in critical literacy research is the study of pre-service teachers. Many research studies in the last few years have begun to look at how to introduce education majors to the tools of critical literacy in college coursework and potentially prepare them to try out these methods in their future classrooms. These studies range from preparation of elementary teachers all the way to high school teachers, and focus on different aspects of critical literacy in the classroom, including media literacy (Assaf & Delaney, 2013; Jones & Enriquez, 2009; Scherff, 2012; Souto-Manning & Price-Dennis, 2012; Woodcock, 2009)

While the field of critical literacy has had a strong focus on work with teens and adults, there have also been studies of critical literacy work with younger students. For example, researchers have looked at elementary-aged students' critical analysis of current events (Silvers, Shorey, & Crafton, 2010), historical events (James & McVay, 2009), and inquiry into everyday issues of inequity and fairness (Goss, 2009; Kuby, 2013a; Kuby, 2013b; Souto-Manning, 2009, Vasquez, 2004). Another area of interest with young students has been integrating critical literacy in the writing workshop setting (Heffernan, 2004), including critical literacy through poetry writing (Flint & Laman, 2012), nonfiction/historical writing (Ghiso, 2013), and writing about topics that may be controversial (McCloskey, 2012).

My study focuses on an area that has been less well addressed in the research-investigating social issues through read-alouds of themed children's literature. The research studies that have been focused on the use of children's literature often describe the power of using a set of social issues texts centered around a particular genre (Bourke, 2008) or theme such as gender, race, culture, social class, or the environment (Jones, 2006; Jones, 2013; Labadie, Wetzel, & Rogers, 2012; Souto-Manning, 2009; Vasquez, 2010). Reading multiple texts around a theme offers students repeated opportunities to engage with a topic and to extend their understandings of that topic. Although initially students may take more literal meanings from texts on an unfamiliar theme, as they continue to be exposed to texts around the same theme and develop a more complex understanding of that theme, they can start to complicate that theme and engage in more critical analysis of the texts. Further, a set of themed texts can allow students to see a range of perspectives on the same topic and the chance to make connections between multiple texts that broaden and deepen their understanding of the texts' theme. This supports the approach that I took in my research, utilizing multiple themed units of read-alouds throughout the school year. However, unlike most recent studies, which provide a brief snapshot of just one short unit or theme (such as civil rights), my study looks at many different themes in texts across an entire school year, looking at how students connect to a range of themed text sets. My research focuses on how using multiple units and multiple themes across many months supports a deeper development of critical literacy. Further, since my study started at the beginning of the school year, it offers a unique angle on how to use children's literature to engage young students in critical literacy from the first months of school, instead of further along into the school year

when many classroom literacy routines and practices are better established and when emergent readers have had more experience with reading.

### **Critical Literacy and Children's Literature**

Reading multiple texts and engaging with multiple perspectives is a common theme running through much of the literature on critical literacy instruction in classrooms (Behrman, 2006; Lewison et al., 2008; Van Sluys, 2005; Vasquez, 2010). However, the instructional setting varies depending on the study, with some research looking at students' independent or small group guided reading lessons, and other studies looking at whole-class lessons and read-alouds. Behrman (2006), in a review of over 30 recent articles on critical literacy practices, provides a look at what types of critical literacy practices are being tried in classrooms. Behrman (2006) was able to identify six main classroom activities associated with fostering critical literacy, including reading supplementary texts, reading multiple texts, reading from a resistant perspective, producing counter-texts, conducting student-choice research projects, and taking social action. While Behrman (2006) doesn't evaluate which of these practices are most effective in engaging students in critical literacy, he emphasizes that practices like reading multiple texts and considering multiple perspectives can help students understand that "text is given meaning, as opposed to containing meaning" and that "reading and writing are necessarily interpretive events" (p. 497).

Critical literacy read-alouds using multicultural children's literature can help students to see diverse characters and situations represented in literature, have the opportunity to discuss and respond to issues power and justice, make connections between the texts and their own lived reality. Further, there is the potential with these

critical read-alouds for students to become more open-minded regarding social justice issues and to challenge stereotypes and possible misconceptions. Finally, an important goal for young students, who may not have engaged in this type of critical analysis before, is to begin to critically read and critique their world with support from their teacher and peers.

### **Critical Literacy & Process Drama**

Process drama in today's classrooms has roots in Boal's (1985) *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Boal's pedagogy was rooted in the work of Paulo Freire, and sought to use drama as a tool for social change. Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* involved the audience as participants in dramatizations of everyday events with oppressive power relations, in order to help audience members become more aware of and practice disrupting and transforming those power dynamics. Audience members were invited up to the stage to replace actors, change the way a scene unfolded, and intervene on behalf of justice. Process drama can be used in diverse ways (O'Neill, 1995) and can have many of these same goals when used in conjunction with social issues themed texts in a critical literacy lesson.

As an instructional technique, teachers and students can "respond to a work of fiction in the curriculum, explore issues and ideas that emerge from classroom discussion, delve more deeply into literature through reading and writing in role, and pursue numerous other possibilities where learners enact meaning." (O'Neill, 2006, p. xiv). Process drama may include activities like improvising a scene from a text, creating a frozen depiction of a scene called a "tableau" or even writing in role from the perspective of a particular character (Edmiston, 2014). O'Neill (2006) describes the collaborative



nature of process drama, pointing out that “Process drama is primarily social, because it is realized in the company of others and involves negotiation and renegotiation of meaning as participants interpret and reinterpret their own views in concert with participants in a drama sequence.” (p. xiv).

Several studies have explored how students can use process drama to better understand multiple perspectives (Enciso, Edmiston, Volz, Lee, & Sivashankar, 2016; Edmiston, 2014; Schneider, Crumpler, & Rogers, 2006). Much of this work has been done with upper elementary, middle, and high school students, rather than engaging early childhood students. Medina (2006) in her work fifth grade students that had recently immigrated to the United States, used techniques like tableaux and writing in role in conjunction with a bilingual picture book, to help students analyze a story connected with their own experiences as immigrants. Kelley (2006) in her work with upper elementary students, used process drama in connection with reading a chapter book. Kelley (2006) asserts that “the success of any process drama experience relies not only on careful selection of a pre-text but also on the selection of the mode of activity for each episode.” (p. 72). In her study, a book dealing with racial tensions during the Civil Rights Movement provided a strong pre-text, while an imagined trial and family dinner set in the world of the book provided modes for allowing students to process the text and its racial tensions together, with the ultimate goal of helping students both better comprehend the text and put themselves in the shoes of different characters. These studies of process drama show how powerful drama can be in a classroom, however, Cordova (2006) points out that the arts often not valued in comparison to other curriculum in schools and traditional literacies. Yet, the arts are a way that students can take the literature they are

already reading to the next step, and develop empathy and humanity as they make sense of the complex world in texts and around them. As Cordova (2006) asserts, “children need opportunities to create and imagine hypothetical worlds where they can theorize about how their lives might be” and using process drama in connection with literature in the classroom is a way to provide these much needed opportunities (p. 136).

### **Action Research & Critical Literacy**

Several landmark studies by teacher-researchers have added to the field by giving an insider look at daily life inside an early childhood classroom. Gallas (1994, 1997), Gregory (1996), and Paley (1993, 1998) have shown a glimpse into the day to day life in their classrooms as students developed and readers and writers. Vivian Vasquez’s (2004) action research in her early childhood classroom specifically focuses on the topic of critical literacy to show how students engaged with issues of fairness and equity as they came up throughout the year as connected to both classroom readings as well as school events.

A small number of early childhood critical literacy studies have used an action research model, and give valuable examples of ways that researchers can investigate their own teaching (Goss, 2009; Kuby, 2013a; Souto-Manning, 2009). For example, Goss (2009) describes an action research study conducted in her primary classroom around the topics of civil rights and elections. In her analysis, Goss (2009) found five reoccurring themes in her students’ writing and conversation around social justice, including: empathy, identifying with the oppressed, collective action, standing up for oneself, and fairness. Goss not only used literature as a tool, but also introduced students to critical analysis through discussion of a popular children’s movie. Goss found that while she

initially planned to study the Civil Rights Movement with her students, her critical literacy curriculum had to gradually shift to other topics (slavery, lunchroom issues, etc.) in order to follow the interests of her students.

An important goal of critical literacy is to empower students both in and out of the classroom, and rather than only consider critical literacy within the context of the classroom unit, Goss (2009) found that over time students were able to “apply their classroom learning about social justice in everyday life” and other situations that arose at school (p. 11). This idea echoes what Souto-Manning (2009) found in her action research with first graders; as the students studied the Civil Rights Movement they began to question unfair practices they saw being enacted in their own school. Souto-Manning (2009) emphasizes that books are only tools for critical conversation, and that “the classroom dialogue about the book is as important as, if not more important than, reading the book itself” (p. 65). These action research studies both emphasize that children’s literature is only a starting place, and that as students engage in deep discussion of texts, they begin to apply a critical lens to the world around them.

Many of the recent studies of critical literacy practices in early childhood classrooms point to the critical need for following students’ interests and questions in social justice work (Goss, 2009; Kuby, 2013a; Silvers, Shorey, & Crafton, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2009). Many studies also utilize an audit trail, where students’ critical literacy work was displayed along a classroom wall to show how their thinking evolved (Kuby, 2013a; Silvers, Shorey, & Crafton, 2010; Vasquez, 2004). Kuby (2013a) in her action research study conducted with 5 and 6 year olds in a summer enrichment program, explores critical inquiry and “forming a curriculum based on children’s experiences with

injustice” (p. 2). Kuby describes how a playground incident eventually led to an inquiry into the Civil Rights Movement, segregation, and Rosa Parks. Through the framework of action research, it is possible to better understand not only the classroom instruction, but also the reflections of the teacher. Kuby shares that she struggled with how to co-create the curriculum with the children and figure out what her role as teacher should be, so that her teacher agenda didn’t overshadow students’ interests and questions. Further, Kuby notes that there were challenges to doing critical literacy with such young students, including introducing unfamiliar vocabulary and how to dialogue about historical injustices with the students without oversimplifying. The action research studies that have focused on early childhood critical literacy, show clearly the value of engaging in this work with young students, but also the struggles involved. These teacher researchers have realized “the importance of placing critical literacy at the core of the curriculum rather than adding it as an extra - curricular item” and their work encourages other teachers to continue this critical type of instruction with young students (Souto-Manning, 2009, p. 58).

### **Critical Literacy and the Construction of Childhood**

Critics of critical literacy may argue that early childhood students are too young to handle this type of critical analysis and engage in dialogue around issues of power and inequality. However, to position children as innocent, unknowing, and unable to handle complex conversation around critical social issues, removes power from children and fails to acknowledge the knowledge and background they possess. Cannella (1997) discusses how our society’s current concept of childhood “is grounded in enlightenment/modernist cultural bias that places limitations on younger human beings,

[and] constructs privilege and power for those who are older” (p.158). Cannella advocates that early childhood educators challenge this construction of childhood, as it serves to silence youth, “removing all possibility of social justice for them” (1997, p. 162). Critical literacy instruction is one way that early childhood teachers can begin to empower students in the classroom. Critical literacy gives young students tools they can use as they encounter texts in their world; further “critical multicultural analysis of children’s literature equips the reader with strategies to unmask dominant ideologies, integrate what they know about themselves with what they learn about others, and translate their reading and thinking into social action” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p.9).

Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are not only encountering traditional print-based texts, but instead “much of the textual landscape in which children are developing their literate habitus bubbles up and flows around popular and consumer culture and emergent electronic texts, often outmaneuvering or subverting the supervisory gaze and control of adults” (Carrington, 2005, p. 13). Children are not only using new types of media and literacies, but have access to increased information that requires processing with a more critical eye. Carrington (2005) argues that “models of early literacy instruction, regardless of pedagogic or theoretical approach, have tended to unproblematically assume an ‘unwordly’ child” and that a shift is needed (p. 23-24). Critical literacy read-alouds are one way that early childhood teachers can begin to scaffold students, in a supportive setting, to take on a critical perspective. This developing critical perspective will then aid students later as they encounter texts independently both in and out of school, in order for them to have a toolkit to rely on to process these texts.

### **Conclusion**

All literacy practices are situated in a sociocultural context, and thus the values around what it means to be literate in a specific context are important to consider. Further, the types of literature being discussed, as well as the unique cultural backgrounds of the teacher and students, are also key in gaining a deeper understanding of classroom literature discussions. A review of the current literature on classroom book discussions shows both the different roles that teachers can take in supporting student understanding and the variety of ways students can connect and engage critically with texts in a discussion. While current literature supports the value of read-alouds in the kindergarten setting, new conceptions of this type of literacy instruction are called for to empower students to meet the changing literacy landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to critically read texts.

In the next chapter, I move into a discussion of my action research methodology. I include information on my research setting, participants, and myself as a researcher. I discuss the different sources of data (including classroom video with transcripts and student work) and how I chose key portions of data for closer analysis. I also describe how I analyzed these data sources both during and after the study in order to better understand how my students were engaged with critical literacy during our read-aloud sessions.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In this chapter, I describe the methods I used to conduct my research study. I include an overview of my research design, as well as descriptions of the participants, research setting, and my role as researcher. I detail the types of data collected as well as the methods utilized for analyzing the data.

This action research study explores the ways critical literacy can be integrated into the early childhood setting. Specifically, the study shows how young students can be supported through repeated read-alouds of children's literature to consider and respond to issues of power and justice. This research looks at critical literacy in the classroom through an action research lens, in order to improve classroom practice, and to consider ways other practitioners might similarly engage their students. Research questions included: In what ways does rereading open spaces for critical literacy? What does critical literacy development look like across an entire school year for kindergarten students as they engage with social issues focused texts in the read-aloud setting?

This study takes a sustained look at integrating critical literacy into a kindergarten classroom, documenting the progression throughout the entire school year. Over nine months, students engaged in studies of children's literature focused on diverse themes, with an emphasis on books that addressed issues of bullying, friendship, and kindness. Additional themes touched on in these texts included: gender, social class, race, different cultures, and taking action for social change. In total, the study included 50 read-aloud sessions (each approximately 1 hour in length) over the course of the school year, with students having many opportunities to develop their critical literacy skills around a variety of texts.

Many different data sources (lesson transcripts, teacher notes, student work samples) collected during the study contributed towards holistically answering the research questions and showing how kindergarten students engage with critical literacy in the classroom. Analysis methods included coding, discourse analysis, document analysis, and constant comparative analysis to document the themes that emerged in the lessons, as well as the different entry points students found when discussing issues of power and justice and engaging critically with texts.

## **Research Design**

### **Action Research**

This qualitative research study was designed as an action research study. In conducting this study, I took on the dual roles of teacher and researcher. I also took the stance of participant-observer, which means that “the researchers’ observer activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher’s role as participant” (Merriam, 2009, p.124). In action research, the teacher identifies an issue in the classroom, and then undertakes systematic inquiry towards the goal of improving practice (Hubbard & Power, 2003). The action research process is often cyclical in nature with the teacher taking action, analyzing the outcomes, reflecting, and subsequently taking new action for improvement. In this study, my inquiry focused on how students in my classroom responded to themed text sets read aloud in the classroom and engaged in critical literacy practices. My action research included multiple cycles, as I branched out from considering simple read-alouds to looking at how rereading texts could support critical literacy, and then onto the ways dramatizing texts opened spaces for critical literacy as well.



While action research is beneficial in that it can help teachers reflect on and improve their practice and can offer other teachers insight on the topic being studied, there are also unique challenges that come with this form of research. It can be challenging to observe and collect data as a researcher while at the same time having the responsibility to teach. As a teacher researcher, I have to focus on teaching, while simultaneously attempting to collect data and observe the students. Another issue concerning teacher action research is the teacher's insider status. As a teacher researcher I have insider knowledge about my research setting and participants. While this familiarity can allow for greater insight on the research question, it can also make it challenging to try to step back and see the data with an open-mind and not let prior knowledge of the participants cloud the analysis and conclusions. While there are some challenges associated with action research, I believe that this method allowed a unique perspective on my research questions. It allowed me to collect data on the day to day practices in my classroom in an authentic way, and to note my own personal reflections as a teacher on the successes and challenges of integrating critical literacy into a kindergarten classroom. As I have gained experience as a teacher, I have been moving my instruction toward full integration of critical literacy, so I am able to draw on my experience to interpret findings. I have also completed several action research studies that gave me insight into what data to collect and how to best analyze it.

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was my kindergarten classroom in an elementary school located in a suburban school district in the St. Louis area. The setting of St. Louis is a context in which critical literacy approaches are particularly timely. As I write this

dissertation, racial tensions are simmering around the Stockley verdict, and not long before that the city was erupting in protests around the killing of Michael Brown in nearby Ferguson. In both cases, White police officers were acquitted in the shooting of young African American men. While these events happened after my research had already been conducted in my classroom, I must acknowledge that my students go to school in a city with a deep history of racial segregation and discrimination that continues to current times, and serves as an undercurrent for our classroom work around issues of race and justice.

The elementary school where the study took place serves roughly 500 students in grades K-5. The majority of the students that attend the school live close by in the neighborhood surrounding the school. The school serves an economically diverse population, with some families owning homes and other families renting houses or apartments near the school. While some students' families would be considered middle-class and economically stable, some students' families are struggling financially and, as a result, approximately a third of the school population receives free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch at school. There is a significant population of minority students, including African-American students and immigrant students, in the school. At the time of the study, many of the immigrant students were bused to this school since it was one of just three elementary schools in the district that offered an English Language Learner program.

The school utilizes balanced literacy methods for literacy instruction, which includes daily shared reading, guided reading, and read-aloud lessons. Students also read independently and complete literacy center activities independently each day. Interactive

writing lessons, writing workshop, and word study also support students in developing their writing and spelling skills. In addition to the books available in my personal classroom library, the school also has a large school library as well as a book room of leveled texts sets. The district allows teachers to choose the reading materials used in the classroom, and teachers are given freedom in designing lessons using the balanced literacy framework to meet grade level expectations. Teachers are encouraged to differentiate instruction instead of attempting a “one size fits all” approach to literacy instruction. I am able to choose all of the texts that I read aloud during the study, and the study took place during the daily story time in the afternoon, when the whole class gathered together to listen to and discuss stories.

My kindergarten classroom is a print-rich environment (see Appendix A for photographs of the classroom space). As you walk in the door, you see students’ writing and art on display around the room. At the front of the classroom, as you walk in the door and past students’ cubbies, is a large oval rug where the students sit daily for lessons and read-alouds. There is also a book shelf, chair, and easel at one end of the rug, which is where I sit. In the middle of the classroom are large tables for students to work at. There is also a U-shaped table where students meet with me for guided reading and small group work. All around the perimeter of the classroom are centers, where students engage in independent and small group work throughout the day. These centers include a mix of literacy and play-based work, including a writing center, listening center, big book center, alphabet center, word work center, library center, kitchen/dramatic play center, blocks center, art center, and puppet center (see Appendix A for photographs of classroom centers). A central focus along nearly the entire back wall of the classroom is the

classroom library, where several bookshelves hold a range of books arranged into colorful baskets. While a few books are organized into baskets by guided reading level, the majority of the texts are sorted by topic, genre, author, and series. The classroom is bright, from both overhead lighting and an entire wall of windows on one side of the room.

### **Participants**

Twenty kindergarten students took part in the study (all students' names are pseudonyms, and pseudonyms were chosen by students). As is typical for action research, the participants were invited to participate because they were assigned by the school district to my classroom. For this study, parents of all 20 students consented for them to participate in the study, and all 20 students also gave assent that they wanted to take part in this study. All students in the kindergarten were five or six years old at the time of the study. Nineteen of the students were native English speakers, one student spoke English as a second language. Sixteen students were White, three students were African American, and one student was Asian-American. The majority of students' families would be considered middle class. Approximately half of the students came into kindergarten having attended one of a number of local preschool programs (the programs ranged from the 5-day per week program offered by our school district to 2-3 day per week programs offered by local churches). It is important to note that the school offered both a free "half-day" kindergarten program, as well as a "full-day" tuition-based program. As a result, the students in this full-day kindergarten class were all from families that could afford to pay the monthly tuition for a full-day kindergarten program. As a result, the socio-economic diversity in this classroom did not necessarily reflect the

diversity of the school as a whole. Further, the school district chose to cluster English Language Learners together in one kindergarten classroom in order to provide more support and co-teaching in that one classroom (not this particular classroom), so while the school had many English Language Learners, these students were not represented in this classroom.

### **Researcher Background**

At the time of the study, I had taught at this school for nine years, and this was my sixth year serving as a kindergarten teacher. Although I had been working in this district for several years, I am not originally from this community. However, similar to my students, I attended an elementary school with a very diverse population. I am a White, native English speaker, and come from a middle class background. I have a background in both early childhood education and literacy and hold degrees and teaching certifications in both areas. This is one of several action research studies I have undertaken with the purpose of better understanding how my students engage in critical literacy and how I can support them as a teacher. Two years before this study, I had also undertaken a year-long study of critical literacy, with the study particularly focused on read-alouds of children's literature focused on issues of social class, poverty, and privilege (Labadie, Pole, & Rogers, 2013). I had also undertaken previous studies looking at writing for change in my classroom (Jenkins et al., 2009), looking at reading diverse themed sets of children's literature to scaffold critical literacy in my own and another teacher's classroom (Labadie, Wetzel, & Rogers, 2012), and looking at the assent process in research with young children (Rogers, Labadie, & Pole, 2016).

## Data Collection

### Overview of Data

Data was collected for this study over the course of the entire school year. The study included approximately 50 read-aloud sessions, spread across nine months (see Table 1 for a timeline children's literature used in the study; see Appendix B for a more detailed synopsis of each of the read-aloud texts). The study occurred during the daily story time in the afternoon, as well as during the writing and discussion time following the read-alouds. Lessons typically lasted for approximately one hour, and took place several times per week over the course of a nine month period from September through May.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Focus</u>	<u>Children's literature used for read-alouds</u>
September	Collect consent/assent	N.A.
October- Early November	Taking action for social change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Grace for President</i> (DiPucchio, 2008)</li> <li>• <i>What Can We Do?</i> (Wall, 2005)</li> <li>• <i>Dom's Handplant</i> (Wilford, 1990)</li> <li>• <i>City Green</i> (DiSalvo-Ryan, 1994)</li> <li>• <i>Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type</i> (Cronin, 2000)</li> <li>• <i>Si, Se Puede! Yes We Can!:</i> <i>Janitor Strike in L.A.</i> (Cohn, 2002)</li> </ul>
Mid November	Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Amazing Grace</i> (Hoffman, 1991)</li> <li>• <i>Oliver Button is a Sissy</i> (dePaola, 1979)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>William's Doll</i> (Zolotow, 1972)</li> </ul>
Late November-December	Bullying/Friendship/Kindness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Each Kindness</i> (Woodson, 2012)</li> <li>• <i>Hooway for Wodney Wat</i> (Lester, 1999)</li> <li>• <i>Say Something</i> (Moss, 2004)</li> <li>• <i>Weird!</i> (Frankel, 2012c)</li> <li>• <i>Dare!</i> (Frankel, 2012a)</li> <li>• <i>Tough!</i> (Frankel, 2012b)</li> </ul>
January-April	Rereading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rereading Previously Read Texts</li> </ul>
May	Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Sneetches and Other Stories</i> (Seuss, 1961)</li> <li>• <i>The Sandwich Swap</i> (Al Abdullah, DiPucchio, 2010)</li> </ul>

### Data Sources

Multiple types of data were gathered for this study, including approximately 50 read-aloud lessons with teacher lesson notes and reflections, video recordings and transcripts, student drawing and writing, and a class-constructed learning wall with artifacts representing the books.

**Video recordings and transcripts.** Each of the read-aloud discussions was recorded using a video camera, which was positioned on a tripod at the back of the rug where the students sit. From this position, the video camera was able to both me and the students during the lessons. After many of the read-alouds, students would move from the rug to their tables where they worked on writing and drawing in response to the read-alouds. During this time, I often walked around holding the video camera and having one-on-one discussions with students in order to hear and record their perspectives.

While all of the lessons in the study were video recorded to enable further analysis, not every video was transcribed. A sampling of video recordings across the study were transcribed, after the study was completed, including lessons from the beginning, middle, and end of the study. This allowed for analysis of student and teacher growth and change over the course of the study, from the beginning to the end of the school year.

For lessons I transcribed, I listened to the videotapes and typed up a transcription of the verbal interaction. I often needed to listen to the videos many times just to get the most accurate wording recorded, as well as include more detailed information in the transcript, such as overlapping utterances and pauses. Some portions of the video were difficult to hear with so many students involved in the lesson, so I recorded places in the transcript where there was transcriptionist doubt or where the verbal language was inaudible. I utilized several of Jefferson's transcription conventions as described by Atkinson & Heritage (1999) (see Appendix C for transcription notations, see Appendix D for a sample transcript of a lesson).

**Student work samples.** Documents are another key part of my data and I collected sets of student work samples. Student works samples were not collected during every lesson, as only some of the read-aloud sessions included student response through writing and drawing. It was important for me to include options for students to both write and draw, since as emergent readers and writers, some kindergarteners might feel more comfortable expressing themselves through drawing than writing. These written and drawn responses also offered a way for me to capture the thoughts of students who might be more hesitant to respond to the texts during the verbal discussion, but would feel comfortable sharing their thoughts privately through writing/drawing a response.



In addition to collecting students' work samples, I also engaged students in conversations around their writing and drawing as they worked on creating it. I videotaped many of these conversations. These conversations with students helped provide insight into how students' were interpreting the texts, what their decision making process was as they wrote and made drawings in response to the texts, and why they chose to write/draw about certain things.

**Learning wall with student-created artifacts.** Throughout the study, students collaborated on constructing a learning wall, which offered them a way to visually represent their thinking about each book and discuss relationships among the books (Vasquez, 2004). Using chart paper segmented into columns for each book, and an image of each book's cover, I asked students to create artifacts (writing, drawings) based on prompts, such as "What problems do the characters in this story face?" and "How did they solve them?" Students also had the opportunity to use sticky notes to add their thoughts about the books and connections they made among books to the learning wall as we were engaging in each of the read-alouds during the unit.

### **Data Analysis**

As an action researcher, my analysis was both ongoing during the school year, and continued after the school year as I delved into deeper analysis of particular lessons. Indeed, both my teaching and research are informed by critical approaches to discourse analysis. This means that I recognize my classroom as a sociopolitical site in which classroom interactions and literacy practices are saturated with power. One of my goals as a critical literacy teacher is to make visible these power relations and treat them as sites of inquiry and invite my students to do the same. While I sometimes bring discourse

analysis into my classroom teaching in a formalized way, more often it is part of the culture of the classroom. I invite students to play with and notice language, to think about presences and silences, to create alternative meanings, and to disrupt the commonplace. Inquiry into language and power is part of the fabric of life and literacy learning in my kindergarten classroom. With this inquiry, of course, comes analysis (my students and my own) about what meanings and voices gained power and privilege and what this means for my next lesson.

Often times after a lesson, I would make notes that would inform the direction of the next lesson. For example, on November 12, I reflected that students seemed to have stereotypical ideas of bullies, something I wanted to change. I wrote “The students seem to be identifying bullies as people that do things like hit, kick, bite, and hurt others. It’s interesting that bullying is not seen as verbal teasing, or ostracizing someone, but rather as physical actions. I’m wondering what they would respond if I asked them if there are different kinds of bullies or are all bullies the same? Because they seem to be describing one type of bully. Also, I am wondering, do they think bullies can change? I’d like to read some books that challenge students’ perceptions of bullies, and maybe show a less stereotypical bully.” These reflective notes led me to choose books like *Each Kindness* and *Tough!*, which both depict girls using verbal insults and exclusion to bully others rather than physical bullying, to challenge students’ thinking around what bullies and bullying look like. Sometimes, I had the opportunity to debrief in a more formalized way with a colleague after a lesson, and get another perspective. This also helped me to reflect on what went well in a particular lesson, what I might change in future lessons to help my students think more critically around texts, as well as what I might need to research more

myself. For example, after reflecting with a colleague on a lesson in early April where I tried out using drama for the first time, I reflected that in order to follow students' interest in drama and to better support students in using process drama to critically revisit texts, I needed to do further reading into the theory and techniques of process drama. Between lessons, I found myself reading Carmen Medina's work (Medina, 2004; Medina, 2006; Weltsek & Medina, 2007) focused on using process drama in conjunction with children's literature which supported me in deepening my understanding of the various techniques that could be used to scaffold students in process drama techniques like tableaux.

I also found that students were not the only ones rereading texts, but rereading texts became an integral part of my research process as I reread texts before, during, and after reading them with my students. Before I taught a lesson, I often read a text several times to plan my lesson and consider places to pause for discussion or drama, or places in the text I might question students. After reading a text with students, I often revisited the texts as I reflected on the lesson, flipping through the books to find scenes that generated significant discussion, as well as parts in the texts that were less well-explored and could potentially be revisited again as a way to encourage students to think about the text in a new way. Rereading further helped me consider what additional texts I might want to introduce to students in order to push them to think about a theme in a new way. Rereading texts was also an important part of my analysis as I looked back through texts students had dramatized to compare their dramatizations, tableaux, and writing in role with the actual texts.

In addition to my ongoing analysis that directly informed my literacy teaching from lesson-to-lesson, I also conducted a great deal of analysis after the study had ended.

With such a large data set, of nearly fifty lessons, I knew I would not be able to go back to every lesson for closer analysis. Foremost in my mind was wanting to show snapshots of the classroom, as well as student development, across the entire school year. I knew that rather than focusing in on just a few lessons, or one moment in time, I wanted to make sure I was choosing lessons from the beginning, middle, and end of the school year for analysis. This would help me to see what students were engaging with in terms of critical literacy during read-alouds across the year, and help me to take a closer look at development across time.

As I considered how to provide a year-long look at rereading, I reflected that there was one text that we reread and revisited more than any of the others: *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. This was a text that we initially read in November, and then continued to revisit all the way through May. It occurred to me that a case study, looking at just lessons around this specific text, would provide a way to analyze how repeated engagement with a text affected students' understanding of that text. This was also a text that students identified as important, and brought up repeatedly as a key text from the school year as they reflected together on rereading in May, thus it seemed an important text to look at more closely in my analysis.

As I began my analysis of the ten lessons around *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, I looked at the videos and transcripts for evidence of how students were understanding the text. I noticed the types of things students were saying and asking about the text, as well as their comments around the theme of bullying. In particular, I looked for changing understandings around the text and changing discourses around the theme of bullying (and the roles of bully, victim, and bystander) between one lesson and the next. In this

way, I could see how students' ideas were developing and changing through repeated exposures to the text. A key aspect of my analysis was identifying moments of critical literacy in the transcripts for closer analysis. Lewison, Leland, & Harste's (2008) four dimensions of critical literacy served as a key framework for guiding my analysis as I looked specifically for evidence of these four dimensions in my data. This included identifying places in lessons where students were: disrupting the commonplace and looking at the text in a new way, engaging with multiple perspectives, considering the sociopolitical and aspects of fairness and justice, and taking social action. By looking at moments of critical literacy in the read-alouds across time, I was able to see how repeated readings scaffolded students' critical thinking around the text. As I analyzed the ten lessons around *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, I noticed different activities scaffolding my students in different ways. Some lessons focused strictly on rereading, while other lessons focused on rewriting, or reimagining through drama. I analyzed these different types of read-aloud activities to see how different activities engaged students with different aspects of critical literacy. This analysis is discussed in depth in Chapter 4, and while it gives a snapshot of rereading with just one book (*Hooway for Wodney Wat*), the analysis gives a broad look at how students were growing and developing across the school year from November to May.

In my analysis across a year of rereading one book (*Hooway for Wodney Wat*), I noted that the lessons at the end of the school year, where students were engaged with dramatizing the text, were particularly productive in terms of engagement with critical literacy. I also noticed that, of the three broad revisiting activities my students engaged in (rereading, rewriting, and reimagining texts through drama), that reimagining texts

through drama seemed to be the most engaging and most often requested activity. This indicated to me that lessons involving drama might be productive to analyze more closely. Further, I had a keen interest in more closely examining the drama lessons, as this was the first year I had engaged in drama activities a way to scaffold critical literacy during read-alouds, and as a teacher-researcher I was interested to know how drama in particular might scaffold students' critical engagement. I had a hunch, from my reflections throughout the school year, that drama was engaging my young students with critical literacy in ways that simple classroom discussion could not. The drama lessons were playful and fun, but I had also observed them adding the critical component of taking social action, something I wanted to investigate further as taking action is often a difficult aspect of critical literacy to engage with in the classroom.

To begin my analysis of revisiting texts through drama, I identified the ten lessons out of the larger data set where we had engaged with drama connected with our read-alouds. These ten lessons utilized a broad range of texts, but were connected by the unifying thread of drama. As I delved into the lessons, I noticed that the lessons could be further subdivided for analysis based on the type of process drama: dramatizing and changing texts, tableaux, and writing in role. I looked more closely at each of these three types of drama activities in order to see the affordances and constraints of each in terms of scaffolding critical literacy around classroom read-alouds. A key part of my analysis of the drama lessons, was looking at moments of tension in the data or "cruces" (Fairclough, 1992). As I read through the transcripts of lessons, I noticed that key tensions emerged during lessons (for example around *how* to act out certain scenes or *which* scenes to act out). I returned to these tensions for a closer analysis, and for evidence of students'

engagement with different dimensions of critical literacy. With these lessons, the tools of discourse analysis helped me to look more closely at student and teacher interactions in the transcripts of our lessons. However, I also needed to utilize tools of multimodal analysis (Kress, 2010), as I analyzed students' facial expressions and body positioning during drama activities like tableaux, and students' written and drawn responses to writing in role. In my analysis, I made notes about which scenes in texts students chose to return to, and commonalities among these scenes. I also noted how students chose to change texts, and for similarities among these changes. In my analysis of students' writing in role, I looked at what characters students chose to take the perspective of (e.g. victims, oppressors), and for similarities and differences in how different students portrayed the same character, using both notes and a table to compare students' writing in role. This analysis of process drama lessons is described in depth in Chapter 5, and while it gives a look at lessons from only a short two-month period of time in our classroom (April and May) it shows students' responses to a diverse range of drama activities.

In contrast with the analysis I describe in Chapters 4 and 5, which each include analysis of 10 lessons each, the analysis I describe in Chapter 6 focuses on just one lesson. In Chapter 6, I look closely at a lesson from the end of the school year in May, where students reflected on rereading as a whole class, and also spent time talking to me in individual interviews about rereading. As an action researcher, whose research is student-centered, I knew that it was important for me to move past my own reflections on rereading, to find out what students' perspectives were on rereading. My action research cycles were driven by students' interests across the year, in terms of what they were requesting to read and what activities they were requesting to do in conjunction with

revisiting texts. Although I felt that my students had strongly benefited from our work with rereading, I was curious what they would say about rereading.

For my analysis of this lesson, I used open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 2009) and critical approaches to discourse analysis. I first coded the transcript for any key themes that might emerge around rereading. For example, some of themes that emerged as students discussed the purpose of r-reading, included: more knowledge, different knowledge, evaluating knowledge, remembering, and wondering. I then went back through and refined these themes into several broader themes with subcategories. For example, students repeatedly talked about rereading as a way to “do” a text rather than “read” a text. This was interesting to me because part of understanding learning and transformation is through children’s “ways of interacting,” “ways of representing,” and “ways of being.” Much of becoming a critically literate person has to do with a stance toward talk and text and involves identity work that Fairclough (1992) refers to as “ways of being.” This became a central theme of “ways of doing texts” with subcategories that included talk around different ways of doing texts (such as acting out texts and rewriting texts). Closer discourse analysis of students’ talk around “ways of doing texts” helped me to further understand students’ perspectives and positioning around the topic. I noticed certain words and phrases that were repeated, such as when one student explained why he thought we should revisit books: “Because, it’s like, so you can look at it and talk about it, so you can like remember what they did, and do stuff, do actions, and do stuff, and like it helps you, it helps you like, help you learn about don’t be like mean.” This student repeatedly used words like “do” and “helps you” to describe rereading. I also noticed students revoicing classmates’ ideas, and I noticed pronoun usage (such as using “we”



rather than “I” as they talked about doing texts as a communal activity) as well as intertextuality as students remarked that there were common themes among texts and noticed “I was thinking you picked these books because in all these books there was something the same.”

I suspected that what they had to say about rereading would be signaled through students’ ‘ways of interacting,’ ‘ways of representing,’ and ‘ways of being’ (Fairclough, 2011). Each of these ‘orders of discourse’ provides a different lens into students’ understanding about rereading. For example, students’ lexical choices (ways of representing) signals one aspect of their understanding. When one of the students said “So we act it out, and then do a book so we know it more. Because Rodney Rat is fun and we’re supposed to do books because that’s what you do in kindergarten.” it indicated to me that rereading and using drama and other activities to “do” books, had become a naturalized part of the classroom. That same choice of phrasing also gives me a window into understanding that child’s stance (ways of being) toward rereading. That is, in the example given, I noted the affirmative appraisal of rereading as something that was “fun.” The third lens through which I looked ways ‘ways of interacting’ and this is the genre of the child’s contribution. For example, the child may tell a narrative, exhibit fluency/disfluency, use repetition for emphasis.

In general, my approach to analysis both during teaching and after teaching were informed by critical discourse studies and how institutional and societal discourses circulate and are taken up, resisted, and recreated in the moment-to-moment interactions of classroom life (and read-alouds). While in Chapter 6 I foreground a closer linguistic analysis, in Chapters 4 and 5 I foreground the themes that emerged from my inductive

analysis of tension points. Temporal dimensions also informed my analysis, as I wanted to capture a wide look at the longitudinal nature of the classroom and also the smaller scale interactions.

### **Trustworthiness**

One strength of this research is the repeated observations of the same literacy activity. By observing the read-aloud lessons across the entire school year, I was able to collect a significant amount of data. This data combined with the large number of student drawings and writing samples helped me to be able to reach a saturation point in my data. Merriam (2009) describes how “adequate engagement in data collection” is a strategy that researchers can use to help ensure the internal validity or credibility of a study (p.219). Once the data feels saturated and “you begin to see or hear the same things over and over again” it is a sign that you have collected sufficient data (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). Also adding to the trustworthiness of this study is the study that I completed in my kindergarten classroom during the 2011-2012 school year. This study was similar in many ways to the current study, and also looked at how students engage with critical literacy in the read-aloud setting. Having a complete data set already collected gave me experience with conducting this type of study and confidence that a study using this type of timeline and this number of students would allow me to collect sufficient data.

Another strength of this research study was the collection and analysis of multiple forms of data. Merriam (2009) discusses how researchers can engage in multiple types of triangulation to increase the internal validity of their research, including using: “multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories to confirm emerging findings” (p.215). I was able to engage in triangulation by comparing data

collected for each of the different read aloud sessions across the study, as well as by comparing different forms of data (e.g. teacher reflections, lesson transcripts, student drawings, and student writing samples).

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this research is that it only looks at students' engagement with critical literacy in the read-aloud setting. Different instructional settings (reading groups, science and social studies lessons, etc.) may allow for different critical literacy opportunities. Another limitation of my study is that my findings describe the experience of just one unique set of students; research conducted in a different setting with a different group of students could yield very different student responses to literature. Thus, I attempt to provide detail about both my classroom and my students so that readers can consider how my findings may or may not transfer to their own classroom and teaching practices.

In the following chapters, I delve into presenting my findings. I have organized the findings chapters to give readers a sense of the breadth and depth of this project. In Chapter 4, I give a case study of students' rereading work around one particular text *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. Students' work with this text spanned multiple rereadings, from November through May, and shows how students' rereading developed into rewriting and reimagining through drama over the course of the year. In Chapter 5, I move into analysis of one specific type of rereading, the use of process drama to reread and reimagine texts. I analyze lessons around a range of different texts, where students engaged in multiple types of drama, including dramatizing and changing texts, tableaux, and writing in role. In Chapter 6, I shift the focus on my analysis to students' perspectives

on rereading, analyzing classroom discussion from the end of the school year as students reflected on our year of rereading texts together. I then conclude my discussion of rereading in Chapter 7 by looking at what the key findings and implications were from this year-long study, as well potential areas for future research.

#### CHAPTER 4: A CASE STUDY OF RE-READING

As we started our critical literacy journey in my kindergarten classroom, I sought out books that would be relevant and engaging to my students, and one topic of particular interest to my students was bullying. However, rather than reading a new book each day, my kindergarten students often asked to revisit and reread some of their “old favorites” from previous read-aloud sessions. One such book that they loved to revisit was *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. In this chapter, I focus on my students’ multiple experiences with this one read-aloud text. In order to better understand how critical literacy develops across multiple interactions with a text, I look at both the initial reading of this text as well as nine subsequent rereading sessions that occurred around this text spread across the school year. These rereading sessions show how students developed new and different understandings around the text after the initial reading, as well as ways that students began to use the tools of discussion, writing, and drama to look more critically at the text.

Reading books aloud to students is a common practice in elementary schools, and is done frequently in most early childhood classrooms (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004; Kindle, 2009; Lane & Wright, 2007). However, texts are often read just once and never picked up again. In an era of high-stakes testing and the associated curriculum expectations in early childhood classrooms, most teachers feel the pressure of time, and may not feel they can take advantage of the benefits of slowly reading and rereading texts multiple times. Critical literacy scholars Leland, Lewison, & Harste (2013) describe inviting students to “linger in the text” through revisiting a text for more discussion or writing and drawing around a text. Lengthening the time that students consider a text allows them to come to new realizations, and to consider alternate viewpoints. By

allowing for rereadings and lingering in the text, readers can resist the neat closure of the text and reconsider aspects of the text. In this chapter, I examine the impact of rereading on kindergarteners' critical literacy development, and offer ways to conceptualize child-centered rereading in early childhood settings. I analyze ways that revisiting a text can become more powerful by going beyond a basic rereading and including rewriting, reimagining, and dramatizing work with a text as well.

Out of the larger data set of approximately fifty read-aloud sessions across the entire school year, I focused my analysis on the sessions around just one text, *Hooway for Wodney Wat* (Lester, 1999). *Hooway for Wodney Wat* was read aloud and revisited ten times during the study, by the whole class or by small groups of students, as a part of a year-long unit on bullying. *Hooway for Wodney Wat* was one of eleven books read aloud to the class around the topic of bullying, a topic that the students chose as the focus for our read-alouds. This book in particular was identified for analysis as it was reread and revisited more often than any of the other texts, and was revisited in many different ways by students.

Using video, transcripts, field notes, and student writing/drawing, I used the tools of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2011) to examine the ways that students interacted with the text and each other during each read-aloud lesson. I paid particular attention to the ways that students' responses to the text changed between the initial reading and subsequent readings of the same text, and for evidence of students' engagement in the dimensions of critical literacy. Transcripts were also coded for the types of responses students had to the texts, and in particular their conceptualization of

bullying, during the read-aloud discussions in order to look for patterns in students' responses and to compare students' responses across rereads of the text.

In analyzing the ways that students reread one text multiple times over the course of a school year, I was able to see how new spaces for critical literacy were opened up each time the class revisited the text. I found that rereading provided students with opportunities to reimagine the text, and use social imagination to consider alternate ways a scene could play out, different words characters could have used or actions they could have taken. Rereading also provided opportunities to consider multiple perspectives. While the initial reading focused heavily on the perspective the author portrayed through the main character, upon rereading students began to infer what other characters might be thinking, and what their perspectives might be. The initial reading of the text was a place for students to become acquainted with the characters and plot of the story; students were then able to use their familiarity with the text upon rereading as a way to both connect to the text and to challenge the text.

During the study, rereading and revisiting texts was a central focus of the research, and as a result, nearly every book we read-aloud was revisited. In contrast to some texts which were only revisited once, the ten rereadings of *Hooway for Wodney Wat* were spread across the school year from November to May (see Table 2 for list of lessons associated with this text).

Table 2	
<i>Lessons around the Text: Hooway for Wodney Wat</i>	
<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity</u>
November 15	Initial read-aloud of the text
November 19	Second reading of the text (across two days)
November 20	Shared rewriting of a scene in the text to change what happened

January 29 January 30	Shared rewriting of the text from another character's perspective (across two days)
February 19	Revisiting video clips together of past lessons around this text
April 24	Revisiting the text and acting out changes to different scenes
April 29	Whole class lesson on rewriting a scene in the text as a drama script
April 30	Small group work on rewriting a scene
May 1	Small group of students performs their rewrite of a scene in the text

Further, the class went beyond a basic rereading of the text, and began to experiment with changing the text through writing and drama. Sometimes I initiated the rereading of a text; other times students requested that a book be reread, as was the case with the book *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. This book details a day in the life of Rodney Rat, who is teased by his classmates for a speech impediment that causes him to pronounce his R's as W's. Rodney is teased as he walks to school, and sits alone in the cafeteria during lunch. However, things change one day when a new student, Camilla Capybara, joins his class and starts to bully everyone. Rodney is no longer the only one that is the target of bullying- the whole class is picked on by Camilla as she yells, pushes, and stomps on them. At the end of the book, Rodney uses his speech impediment to his advantage during a game of Simon Says, and is able to rid the school of Camilla., becoming a hero to his classmates.



### The Initial Reading



Figure 1. Students listening to the initial reading of *Hooway for Wodney Wat*.

In November, the class gathered together on the rug at the front of the classroom, to listen as I read the book *Hooway for Wodney Wat* for the first time. Our class learning wall (made out of a long piece of purple butcher paper) hung on the wall next to the rug, showing images and writing about the several other books we had read so far around the topic of bullying, and served as a reminder to students that they might find connections between these previous read alouds and the book we were reading today. As I held up *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, students eagerly leaned in for a closer look at the cover of the book, and showed curiosity about the book's unusual title.

During this initial read-aloud, a significant amount of students' discussion focused around the main character, Rodney Rat. Teacher prompting and closer investigation of the illustrations helped students understand what was happening to the main character in the text and how he was feeling. As we read the initial pages of the text, where other students teased Rodney on the way to school about his speech, Kylee noticed

“It looks like they’re all being mean to him.” Krystal made a similar observation about the picture, saying “In that picture right there they’re laughing at him because he can’t say the R word.” As we continued to discuss how Rodney was feeling, Derrick said, “On that picture he’s looking down at his shirt because he’s sad. That’s why he’s quiet.” The pictures appeared to give the students a strong scaffold into understanding the plot of the story and the feelings of the main character. As the following excerpt from the class discussion illustrates, I also encouraged students to look more closely at the facial expressions of the characters in the illustrations as a clue to how the characters were feeling.

- 1 Meredith: Let's look closer at this picture, how do we think that he's feeling?
- 2 Students: Sad
- 3 Meredith: How can you tell?
- 4 Rachel: Because his head is down.
- 5 Meredith: What kind of face is he making? Can you show me? [Students make
- 6 sad/frowning faces] Yeah. I wonder what they can do to make him feel better.
- 7 Sam: They can say sorry.
- 8 Derrick: They can say sorry.
- 9 Meredith: They can say sorry to him. What could they do? Joey?
- 10 Joey: He can say “I don't like that.”
- 11 Meredith: Yeah maybe he can say “I don't like that.” Joey is right- he could
- 12 maybe stand up to them and say that- “I don't like that.” Yeah?
- 13 Daphne: Or he can just ignore them and walk away.
- 14 Meredith: He can ignore them and walk away right? Just not even say those words
- 15 they're asking him to say.
- 16 Amanda: Or don't listen to them.
- 17 Meredith: Yeah don't listen to them. What do you think Simon?
- 18 Simon: He should just not talk to them.
- 19 Meredith: He should not just talk to them. What are you thinking Derrick?
- 20 Derrick: Or maybe he can go to his own place.
- 21 Meredith: Maybe he could go somewhere else not in that part of the playground.
- 22 What are you thinking?
- 23 Derrick: Probably where the nice kids are.
- 24 Meredith: You think there might be some nice kids at his school?
- 25 Rachel: Probably he can play with somebody else that's nice.
- 26 Meredith: Hmm, Sam?
- 27 Sam: Probably the mouse could probably just go and ask those guys to please stop

28 and if they don't stop and if they don't stop, then he can just walk away and tell  
29 the teacher.

As this excerpt from the class discussion illustrates, students were not just attending to the characters' feelings and the illustrations, but were also beginning to imagine alternate possibilities for the characters. In lines 7 and 8, students imagine alternate possibilities for the bullies, suggesting "they can say sorry." Students also consider multiple possibilities for Rodney, reimagining the scene with Rodney sticking up for himself and saying "I don't like that" (line 10), Rodney ignoring the bullies and walking away (line 13), Rodney walking to another part of the playground and finding "nice kids" (lines 20, 23, 25), and Rodney telling the teacher about the bullying (line 28). As the conversation unfolds, students both build on each other's ideas for Rodney and suggest new ones. Interestingly, just two children suggest that the responsibility for changing the scene lies with the bullies, while seven children suggest that Rodney is the one that needs to do something here. This perhaps points to societal discourses around bullying that encourage the "weak" victim to "toughen up" or "fight back" rather than placing the blame squarely on the bully. It is also interesting to note that none of the children imagine a scenario where a bystander intervenes, or another character enters the scene, but rather stick to reimagining the words and actions of Rodney and the bullies. Although this reimagining of the text was not done consistently throughout the initial reading, students were beginning to think outside of the text and consider possibilities the author had not presented.

The parts in the story students chose to attend to most during the initial reading were the bullying scene at the beginning of the text as Rodney walked to school and the bullying scene in the lunchroom where Rodney ate alone. Students chose to entertain

alternate scenarios for the instances where a group of classmates were teasing Rodney about his speech and ostracizing him at lunch. While students had a lot to say about these scenes early in the text where Rodney alone was bullied, students did not spend as much time discussing or imagining alternate possibilities for scenes later in the book. In particular, students did not look critically at the problematic ending of the text. At the end of the text, Rodney and his classmates trick the bully Camilla during a game of Simon Says at recess and laugh at her, eventually causing her to leave the school. Students were hesitant to consider how Rodney Rat, who had previously been a victim of bullying, might now be considered a bully. When I asked students directly, “Is Rodney a bully?” students all said “No.” Rather, students chose to adopt the point of view presented by the text’s author, that Rodney should be considered a hero for getting rid of the bully Camilla and that it was okay for the students to laugh at her. As Daphne explained, “That’s why they are being mean to her, because she was mean to them.” This line of thinking, that it is okay to bully someone if they bully you, seemed to be held by most of the class during the initial reading of the text. Students appeared to enjoy the ending in the text, saying “The happy part was where the mouse [Camilla] ran away” and that this was a happy ending “Because then the little mouse [Rodney] was a hero mouse.”

As we read the book for the first time, I frequently checked in with the students to gauge their comprehension of the text. I asked questions like “Do you understand what they’re saying?” and “What happened there?” to make sure students were understanding the events in the text. I also frequently asked students to make predictions about what might happen next, using prompting like “What do you think might happen?” During this first reading of the text, some pages were reread if I was unsure that students had fully

understood a particular portion of the text. For example, I paused after the class read a page about bullying, and said “Let’s go back to this part in the book. It says ‘They felt very, very uncomfortable.’ What does that mean, feeling uncomfortable?” This helped the students to better understand the feelings of the characters and also to understand the vocabulary used in the text. Students were also vocal in asking questions to both me and their classmates when they didn’t understand something in the text. For example, the students were unfamiliar with Rodney’s speech issue at first, which prompted Sam to ask, “How could he not say his own name?” This led to student discussion that helped them better understand Rodney’s speech impediment and how he pronounced certain words differently. Students also asked questions focused on clarifying the illustrations, such as when Mickey asked “Is that the teacher?” as we read a page set in Rodney’s classroom.

In my ongoing critical analysis of classroom discourse practices, I noted that noticing and naming bullying behavior was a consistent theme in the first read-aloud of the text. Students pointed out when they saw characters acting “mean” or “like bullies.” On a page where Rodney was quietly keeping to himself, Amanda said “I know why he’s quiet- because he’s sad because those big guys are bullies.” On a page where Rodney was cowering from classmates and appearing to be hiding inside of his jacket, Eric said “He’s hiding in his jacket because they keep being mean to him and because of his name. He’s trying to make the R sound but he can’t do it; he’s making the W sound. And maybe he’s hiding in his jacket because he’s feeling sad.” Carson explained “He’s alone...because the bullies are there.” Derrick also commented on the bullying in the text saying, “And he doesn’t want to play with bullies because bullies make him sad.” Daphne discussed the bullies as well, saying “He’s sad because he has no friends at school they’re all bullies.”

Eric went beyond simply identifying the other kids as bullies, and pointed out some of the specific actions in the text that he considered bullying, saying “They’re being a bully because they just said a bad word ‘stupid’- and they’re being a bully.” While students were able to identify the characters they felt were “bullies,” some of the words and actions they felt were “bullying” behavior, and some of the consequences of bullying (making someone sad), students often were not able to dig more deeply into the issue of bullying during the first reading of the text. Students still held on to many stereotypes about bullies and victims, (e.g. bullies are bigger and victims are smaller, victims cannot act as bullies, bullying is often physical or mean words). Students also still had confusion around why bullies would act that way and what could be done to stop bullying.

### **Re-Reading & Re-Writing the Text**

In order to better understand how critical literacy develops across rereadings, I look at the nine rereading sessions that occurred after the initial reading of the text. These rereading sessions show how students developed new and different understandings after the initial reading, as well as ways that students began to use the tools of writing and drama to look more critically at the text.

### Rereading and Rewriting the Text for the First Time



Figure 2. Students rereading and rewriting *Hooway for Wodney Wat*.

Although they had read the text for the very first time just days before, students requested to read the text again the week after the initial read-aloud. They were eager to read the text again and to continue discussing it with each other. This was done across two days in November to allow time for extended discussion. During the second reading, a part in the book that generated significant discussion was when a new “bigger, meaner, and smarter” student, Camilla Capybara, arrived at school and bullied the kids in Rodney’s class. Students’ discussion centered on Camilla’s actions and the illustrations that depicted her. Just as with the first reading of the text, students were still bothered by instances of bullying. However, during this reading they chose to focus on Camilla Capybara bullying the whole class, rather than the other students in the class who bullied Rodney Rat early in the book (as they had in the initial reading). When I prompted students to consider why Camilla would act like a bully, students remained unsure of the character’s motivations, but emphasized that she was “being really mean” because “she just wants to be mean.” Camilla’s behavior bothered my students, and continued to come

up again and again in our discussion of the text. This unease about the character's behavior in the text ultimately led to the class to take action and rewrite a scene from the text together after we finished rereading it, with students suggesting alternate ways Camilla could act. One student suggested "Instead of being bossy on the first day she came in ... she could say 'Hi. Can I be your friend?'" Another student added that the character could ask "Can I do that with you, what you're doing?"

As we reread and discussed the text together, the students noticed that Camilla was not only doing mean things, but that she was doing these things "on purpose." Particular emphasis seemed to be put on Camilla's intentions in the text, with students feeling that it was an important distinction to make that Camilla was purposefully acting like a bully, and that her behavior was not just accidentally hurting other students. Eric used evidence from the text to support his assertion that Camilla was a bully, saying "Yeah, Camilla Capybara was being a bully, she was doing all the mean things, and she was being mean by stepping on some of the other mice's tails and she was not trying to do it on accident, she was trying to do it on purpose, because she was a bully." Carson agreed with Eric's assessment of Camilla Capybara, saying that "In Rodney Rat, the girl was doing it on purpose, and she was stepping on their tails." Mickey also agreed with his peers, and noted that this was an issue that had come up in many of the books that the class had read recently as a part of their bullying unit, saying "The big girl, she so rude and she just wants to tease everyone. And every single one of the books everyone wants to tease people."

Mickey was not the only student in the class who began drawing connections between *Hooway for Wodney Wat* and other texts we had read together. Several students



made text to text connections as we read the text for a second time- something that had not happened during our initial reading of the text. For example, as we read the scene in the text where Rodney Rat ate lunch alone, Victorious shared that “It is reminding me a little bit of *Say Something*...because of what happened at lunch and she was alone.” Victorious remembered that in the book *Say Something* (Moss, 2004), which we’d read earlier that month, one of the characters was teased in the lunchroom and ate alone. Similarly, as we read and discussed the part in the book where Camilla pushed and trampled other kids to get outside for recess first, Sam brought up a connection to the book *Me First* (Lester, 1992) where the main character similarly did anything in order to be first. Seeing my students beginning to draw connections between the texts we had read in our bullying unit was a signal to me that they were starting to consider some of the bigger themes across the books in the unit.

Similar to the initial reading of the text, bullying was a topic that persistently came up in students’ discussion as we reread the text. While students were in agreement that Camilla was behaving like a bully, and that this bullying behavior was purposeful, students were less clear on why she acted that way, and began to question the text more. Daphne pointed out that the bullying appeared to be unprovoked, and asked “They didn’t do anything to her, so then why is she doing that?” From Daphne’s question, it seemed that she saw bullying as something that the victim could provoke, and that the “bully” would be justified in her action if it was retaliation. Daphne’s peers did not have many answers for her question. They responded with vague statements like, “I know she’s being mean because she wants to be mean,” “Because she’s trying to be mean,” and “Probably because she just wants to be mean and she wants to be a bad student.”

Over the course of the discussion, some students gradually began to change their ideas about Camilla. For example, early in the discussion, Ryan initially said, “I think why she’s doing it is because she’s like a rodent, and that’s what rodents do, they be really mean.” However, when challenged later in the discussion to reconsider “Why would someone *want* to be like that?” and to think about whether all rodents truly just act mean, since we see other examples of rodents not acting meanly, Ryan responded, “She just wants to be mean, because she doesn’t know, she might do it because she doesn’t know any of them.” Here Ryan was beginning to think about Camilla’s perspective, and about how being a new student might impact her behavior. Ryan and his classmates were beginning to see Camilla less as a one-dimensional stereotypical “bully” and more as a multi-dimensional character that had her own feelings and backstory. To facilitate this understanding, I encouraged students to make a connection between Camilla and a character in another book we’d read- *Each Kindness*. In *Each Kindness*, there is a new student named Maya, and we had discussed how Maya might be feeling as a new student (shy, nervous, worried about not yet having any friends at her new school). I challenged students to consider “Do you think Camilla was nervous to come to their class?” This seemed to be a turning point in the way some students began to think about Camilla.

Taking Ryan’s lead, a few other students also began to hypothesize the reasons for Camilla’s behavior, with some students seeming to agree with Ryan’s thinking that it might be because Camilla didn’t know any of the students in her new class. For example, Victorious suggested that Camilla was acting that way because, “Maybe because she’s new, and I bet the other rats they wouldn’t even give her a chance.” Daphne considered that things might have been different at Camilla’s old school and that “Maybe because at

the other school you could shout out” that is why Camilla shouted at Rodney and her other new classmates. Daphne then reconsidered this however, and said “But no school you can shout out.” Daphne then suggested “Maybe she was mean at her other class too” and this was perhaps not the first time Camilla had acted like a bully. Derrick gave another possible reason for Camilla’s actions, and suggested that she might be acting mean “Because she is bigger than them.” Here students worked together to collaboratively problem solve and co-construct meaning around a confusing part in the text, and dug deeper into what the perspective of a key character in the text might be.

As we reread the text, students offered their own opinions of Camilla’s behavior and used their comments around the text to position themselves as students who would not act that way and distance themselves from Camilla the bully. Eddie said “She can’t just be mean if she doesn’t know any of them. You can’t just be mean every day.” Eddie also asserted that, “You wouldn’t want to be mean like her, and you wouldn’t want to barge through a door.” Eddie’s comments make it clear that he did not approve of Camilla’s behavior, and he thought his own classmates would and should act differently. Sam also evaluated Camilla’s behavior and considered what he had done when he was in a similar situation, saying “That’s why people shouldn’t do all that stuff that Camilla Capybara’s doing, and she’s a new student, and whenever you’re a new student you should be nice. And whenever I was a new student, I was not really talking, I was shy.”

In order to further scaffold the class in considering alternate ways for the scenes in the text to unfold and alternate points of view, I suggested after rereading the text that the class try rewriting a part of it. Together the class chose to rewrite the scene they had been focusing on most in their discussion of the text over the last two days, the scene

where Camilla came into Rodney's classroom for the first time. After some discussion about what the new scene would say, the class decided on writing:

A new girl came to Rodney's class. She stepped on kids' tails. All of the kids said "Stop" and they told her "We don't like it when you step on us." Then Camilla said "Can I be your friend?" The kids said "Yes. What would you like to play?"

Together we discussed this rewriting of the text, my goal being to emphasize that this was one possible way to change the text, but not the only way. I explained, "Now, there could be other ways to rewrite this, right? Maybe they'll say 'We don't like it when you step on our tails.' And she keeps doing it, and they need to have a class meeting about it. Or maybe they go and talk to the teacher about it, right? One story could go lots of different ways. Who gets to decide how a story goes?" A discussion ensued about the role of the author as decision-maker. At the end of the lesson, students had time to work on independently rewriting scenes from read-aloud texts. A number of students decided to rewrite parts in *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, although some students decided they wanted to rewrite other texts or even write new stories from their own point of view on the topic of bullying. A key aspect of this lesson was helping students envision multiple possibilities for each scene in the text, and multiple ways a scene could unfold. I wanted my students to understand that while the text's author made the choice when writing *Hooway for Wodney Wat* that this is how she imagined things happening, that we could also imagine many alternate ways Wodney and Camilla's school day could play out. Making it visible to students that all texts have authors, and that authors make choices as they write texts and position their readers in particular ways, is a key part of critical literacy.

As I reflected on these lessons, I realized students were often still thinking very stereotypically about the bully in the text. They struggled to see why the character of Camilla had acted the way she had in the book. I decided I would try a lesson specifically focused around the bully's perspective in a future lesson- a perspective that was not given by the author. I hoped that this would help students see the way that the author was positioning us as readers to view the events in the text from the main character's (Rodney's) perspective, while other viewpoints were missing from the text.

### **A New Way to Re-write Texts: Writing from another Character's Perspective**



*Figure 3.* Students revisiting *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. Students gathered together on the rug on January 30 to review and continue the work they began yesterday on “Camilla’s story” a rewriting of the text from the perspective of Camilla Capybara.

Revisiting the text two months later, in January, I again challenged students to consider multiple perspectives as they discussed the text. This lesson took place later in the school year, after students had participated in many more critical literacy read-aloud

sessions, and had also read several other books around the topic of bullying, something they could use to their advantage to think more deeply about this theme. As we reread the text on this day, I noticed that students were beginning to better understand how the bully Camilla might feel and why she might act “mean.” Students noticed she might be nervous joining the class since “she didn’t know any of the kids” and she might be upset because other characters were playing on a hamster wheel that “she can’t fit on.” This led to rewriting the text from the bully’s perspective - something that would have been challenging to do after just one reading, but revisiting the book multiple times provided the needed familiarity.

The class gathered on the rug across two days in January to rewrite the text together. Instead of changing the character’s words or actions, the scenes were left the same, and just told from a different point of view. The class decided to call the text they wrote together “Camilla’s Story” since it told Camilla’s side of the story. I prompted students to consider what Camilla’s perspective might be, saying “This book told us a lot about how Rodney was feeling. We don’t know how Camilla was feeling. How do you think she might be feeling?” Students made an effort to put themselves in Camilla’s place. They imagined it was their first day at a new school, and suggested that we write that Camilla didn’t know where her classroom was. The class discussed how not knowing where her classroom was, or where the bathroom was, or anyone’s name might make Camilla feel nervous and upset on her first day at her new school. We flipped back through the pages in the text to make sure the same key events took place in our telling of the story. As the class referred to the original text, I told students “Let me read the part in the book, then we’ll decide what to put in our book.” Then the class would consider how

Camilla's version of the page in the text might be written, with me prompting "What do you think we should put in our book?" "What could we write?" We discussed each page and decided together on the words that I should write on the page. I said each word as I wrote it in front of the class, and then read back the whole page to confirm with the class that I had accurately recorded what they wanted the page to say. The class collaboratively wrote the following story over the two days together:

Page 1: Camilla woke up for school. She was feeling nervous because it was her first day of school and she didn't know anyone. She ate breakfast. [Camilla's thinking bubble in the illustration says "Maybe I'll make some friends."]

Page 2: Camilla's parents drove her to school. Camilla didn't know where her classroom was. Camilla asked someone where her classroom was. When she went into her classroom she saw a hamster wheel and it was too small for her.

Page 3: She told the kids, "My name is Camilla Capybara." And she said she was bigger, meaner, and smarter than them. She stepped on their tails and they didn't like it. She wanted to make friends, but she didn't know how.

Page 4: When the class went out to recess, they played Simon Says. Rodney's name was picked out of the hat to be the leader. When Rodney gave directions, he meant rake the leaves, but Camilla didn't understand him and she tried to wake up the leaves. The kids all laughed at her and she felt miserable.

Page 5: Then, Rodney said "Go rest," but it sounded like "Go west" and so Camilla walked west. She kept walking and walking until she got home. When she got home, she told her mom and dad, "I don't ever want to go to that school

again because they were mean during our game and laughed at me. And their hamster wheel was too small for me.”

Several students then volunteered to work on illustrating the text later that day during free choice time. The students that illustrated the text included additional elaboration in their pictures, including facial expressions to illustrate feelings, and speech bubbles and thinking bubbles to show what Camilla was thinking. For example, as Victorious drew Camilla being laughed at during the game of Simon Says on page 4 of our class-made book, she depicted Camilla saying “Wake up!” to the leaves, she drew other students laughing at Camilla, and she shows Camilla thinking “Such bullies.” These additions helped bring out the emotions in the text, and give the reader further clues as to what Camilla was thinking and feeling.

Students also discussed during the lesson why they thought Camilla might have acted like a bully. Daphne and Kylee suggested that Camilla really just wanted attention. Daphne also made a connection to a book we had read recently that was written from the perspective of a bully- the book *Tough!* (Frankel, 2012b). Daphne described how “I’m noticing something...In *Tough!* Sam was a bully because her brother teased her and TV shows” pointing out that the bully in *Tough!* had reasons that she acted the way she did (because her brother bullied her at home and she saw kids on TV acting like bullies). Another student then asked “Does Camilla have a brother?” clearly wondering if Camilla had had similar experiences as the bully in *Tough!*, which might have led to her acting like a bully at school. These comments show that students were developing more complex ideas around bullying and the circumstances that might cause someone to act like a bully. Reading other texts around the theme of bullying, as part of a diverse text



set, was key to helping students think more deeply about *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. In particular, my choice to bring in a text like *Tough!*, which offers a much different perspective on bullying than *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, was key to helping students resist the dominant reading of the text and read *against* rather than *with* the text. Unlike most bullying texts, which are written from the victim's perspective, *Tough!* is one of the few children's books written entirely from the perspective of a child that bullies other kids, and it challenges stereotypes about bullies that are presented in much of children's literature around bullying. In *Tough!* the bully isn't large or physically threatening, but rather just a regular girl in the classroom. She doesn't beat anyone up, or steal anyone's lunch money as you might imagine a stereotypical bully, but rather she quietly whispers insults to classmates, and uses her power as ringleader over a group of girls that follows her around to get them to do her bullying and insulting for her. Further, in *Tough!* we see an example of a bully that has been bullied herself, and is able to decide she wants to change her behavior. Reading texts like *Tough!* helped give students the tool of a counter narrative on bullying that they then brought to subsequent rereadings of *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, and they leveraged this new knowledge to read against the text, humanizing Camilla the bully and considering her backstory and feelings.

After rewriting the text from Camilla's perspective, I asked the class, "Do you see how, any book, you can tell the story from someone else's perspective?" The class then discussed other perspectives missing from the text (e.g. other students in Rodney and Camilla's class, the teacher, the principal). Typically in school settings, adults are in positions of power, and the class wondered about the relative absence of the teacher in the text's classroom bullying scenarios. Looking through the lens of different student

characters in the story helped the class to see the voice youth could have in changing bullying and how other characters could be empowered through retelling and changing the story. Students also began to consider the perspectives of characters that were not in the text, such as the school's principal, and did not feel bound to simply stick to the perspectives of the characters the author and illustrator had put in the story. Engaging in rewriting the text was about more than seeing *Hooway for Wodney Wat* in a new way, it was about learning that all texts are written from a perspective, and that there are other possible perspectives that are missing or excluded from any text we read. I wanted students to begin to think about and question: Who's telling this story? Whose voice is represented here and whose voice is missing?

In February, months after the initial reading, students still entertained alternate versions of the story as the class watched back short video clips of some of their previous discussions of *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. Watching the video clips seemed to jog students' memories about issues in the text they felt uncomfortable with or wanted to disrupt. Students went back to scenes in the text that bothered them and discussed them at length, explaining different things characters could have said. One student suggested, "I'm thinking about if Camilla could say 'I'm sorry, I won't do that again.' And Rodney could say, 'That's ok, you can play with us.'" Another student replied "I was thinking about if Camilla, she would come in her house and in her school and say 'I am a good friend. Can you guys be my friend?'" I also noticed students revoicing and building on each other's ideas about changing the text. Students began to critical analyze the text's ending as well. While previously students had considered the text to have a happy ending, they now began to reconsider the way Rodney got rid of the bully. In the text, Rodney

embarrasses Camilla at recess, since she has difficulty understanding his directions during a game of Simon Says due to his speech. Other characters tease Camilla, and in effect, Rodney gets rid of the bully by bullying her. As we revisited the text, one student suggested the other characters should explain Rodney's speech to Camilla so that she could play the game the right way, "They should have just said, that isn't the right thing. He doesn't really know how to say the word 'R.'" This compassion for Camilla was a stark departure from earlier readings of the text when students had cheered for Rodney the "hero" in the end when he got rid of Camilla and refused to question Rodney's behavior. *Hooway for Wodney Wat* is a text that has several key scenes, or moments of conflict, for the characters in the text. These moments of tension were scenes the students centered their rereading discussions on. However students were not ready, nor did we have time, to deeply delve into all of these scenes during the first reading. Thus, each repeated reading of the text conveniently offered a new opening to consider a different portion of the text more closely, just as this particular lesson did for students with the ending of the text, a scene that we talked more about in February than in any of the prior months.

### Continuing to Revisit the Text in New Ways: Introducing Drama



*Figure 4.* Students dramatizing *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. In April, a group of students gathers in front of the class to dramatize a scene from the text as I hold up the corresponding page from the text.

Later in the school year, in April, students continued to think about which texts they wanted to revisit, and *Hooway for Wodney Wat* was again one of the books that generated the most interest. This brought up some tension from me as a teacher, as I was not sure that we needed to continue rereading this particular text so frequently, as there were many other read-aloud texts we could revisit. However, I recognized that this book had some scenes where students could do some further critical analysis, and the lesson could be productive if students were highly interested in this particular text. When the students brought up rereading *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, I reminded them that “There were some parts in here that we were kind of thinking, oh we don’t like how that’s going in the book we kind of want to change that or maybe there are different ways that can

happen.” I then opened the text up to the page where Camilla entered Rodney’s classroom for the first time. The illustration showed Camilla at the classroom door, Rodney hiding, and other rats playing on a large wheel. The class discussed how this was a part they had rewritten once before, when they had changed this scene back in late November after reading the book for a second time. I explained that today I hoped they would try out something new- using drama to act out scenes from the text. I asked for volunteers and several students were quickly assigned to play Rodney, Camilla, and a few of the other rodents in the book.

The class suggested different things the characters could say to alter the scene in the book, with students suggesting that they wanted to change the way Camilla came into the classroom on the first day. Rather than barging into the classroom as she did in the book, the scene was acted out with Camilla coming in slowly, politely introducing herself, and asking to be friends with the kids in her new class. Her new classmates offered to let her have a turn playing on their hamster wheel and everyone was happy. I then encouraged the students to think of other possibilities for the scene and to try acting them out as well. The class played the scene again, with Camilla barging in using mean words the way she did in the book, but this time her classmates changed their reactions. When the student playing Camilla said “Hi, I’m Camilla Capybara, I’m bigger than you, I’m meaner than you, and I’m smarter than you. So there!” one student responded “You’re being too loud. Can you please stop it? You’re hurting my ears. Can you please stop? You’re hurting my ears. Can you please stop yelling?” and then another student followed up with “Can you be my friend please?” In response, Camilla chose to change how she was acting and said “Yes, forgive me please.” Disrupting this bullying scene and acting

out different possibilities helped students see the power of each character in the text (the bully, the victims, and the bystanders) to change the scene.

The class also dramatized alternate ways the final scene in the text could happen; a scene that during the first few readings of the text students had struggled to read critically. As the students acted out the scene, the child playing Rodney said “Wake the leaves” and other students began to rake the leaves, since they understood that Rodney’s speech impediment was causing him to mispronounce “rake” as “wake.” Camilla, however, did not understand Rodney and began to trying to wake up the leaves, saying “Wake up!” In the text, the students in Rodney’s class laugh at Camilla and allow her to keep making mistakes in the game of Simon Says. However, in our class’s dramatization, one of the students tells her “Camilla, Rodney really means to rake the leaves” and another student helpfully adds “You get a rake and then you rake the leaves [demonstrating the motion of raking leaves].” With this dramatization, I noticed how the class was beginning to see the final scene in the text in a different way and think more critically about the actions of Rodney and his classmates toward Camilla.

The following week in April, the class gathered together for a lesson on rewriting scenes as a drama script using dialogue. First the class brainstormed an anchor chart together on “Ways to Change a Scene” that listed different ways students could change a scene in a text, including: changing a character’s actions, changing a character’s words, changing what a character was thinking, and inserting a new characters into a scene. From there, students moved into investigating different reader’s theatre texts, noticing how authors write in this genre. Finally, the class worked together to write a script to change a part of *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, writing out the dialogue for what each

character would say. The scene the class chose to change was the scene where Camilla stood on her desk, shouted out answers during a lesson, and didn't let any of the other students have a chance to speak. The class used the anchor chart they created on "Ways to Change a Scene" to think about how they might change the text in different ways. As students thought about changing characters' actions, Victorious suggested that we could change Camilla's action of standing on top of her desk so that she instead sat in her chair. Amanda suggested we could change Camilla's actions so that she raised her hand instead of shouting things out during the lesson. As we began to discuss ways to change the characters' words, Kylee suggested that we not change what Camilla said, but instead change how she said it, explaining that Camilla could speak more softly to her classmates instead of shouting at them. At the top of the paper, the class listed the characters they had decided would be in the scene, and then chose dialogue for each character to speak. Several students then acted out the scene for the class. Although students had participated in many prior lessons around this text and rewritten and changed scenes in this text before, this particular scene from the text was one that students had not rewritten before. Many different scenes in the text were rewritten throughout the year, allowing students to gain insight on many different parts in the text; different lessons offered different opportunities to look more closely at and analyze different parts of the text.

Over the next two days, students used the example of the whole class lesson around changing a scene in *Hooway for Wodney Wat* as a model for how they could change other texts we had read together. Ultimately the class split into five small groups of students, with each group choosing a different read-aloud book to change, rewrite, and act out for the class. During this time, students were invited to take the read-aloud books

to their tables and use them as mentor texts. While during read-alouds, I often held the books up for the class to see, I was conscious of the importance of distributing the power associated with the handling of the read-aloud books by giving children access to them as they engaged with rereading and rewriting the texts (see Figure 5).



*Figure 5.* Students collaborating on rewriting a scene from a read-aloud.

One of the small groups of students chose *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. Derrick, Victorious, Mickey, and Liz, flipped through the text discussing possibilities for which scene they wanted to change, pausing on half a dozen pages that they considered as possibilities for rewriting. Eventually they came to a consensus to change the scene at the end of the text where Rodney gets rid of Camilla during the game of Simon Says at recess and collaborated on constructing a script for their scene (see Figure 6).





Figure 6. Students' script for their dramatization of *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. The script illustrates their changes to the text.

Each student also worked on drawing a picture of the character they would play in the scene and writing what they imagined their character saying in the scene. Liz took on the role of one of the mice in Rodney's class (see Figure 7) and Victorious took on the role of Camilla (see Figure 8). In their rewrite of the scene, two mice explained Rodney's speech to Camilla and helped her understand the directions that he was giving in the game. Camilla then thanked her classmates for helping her to play the game.



Figure 7. Liz's illustration of the final scene in *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. Her character (a mouse) is saying "Camilla, come back, come back and play."



Figure 8. Victorious' illustration of the final scene in *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. It shows a mouse saying "come back" and Camilla saying "Thank you for explaining."

After the students performed their scene for the class in May, I asked the class what they noticed about the scene, and discussion ensued comparing the scene in the text to the scene the students had rewritten. The talk that happened after each group acted out their scenes (the debriefing) showed evidence that students deeply understood the original storyline in each text, and were able to keep it in mind as they reimagined many alternatives for the text and characters. In this series of lessons from the end of the school year, students applied what they learned in whole class lessons around the text to collaborate with classmates (with some minimal teacher scaffolding) and try out changing, rewriting, and dramatizing other texts on their own.

### **Discussion**

By looking at the multiple interactions students had with this one text across the school year, it is possible to see how subsequent repeated readings supported deeper comprehension and critical literacy development. Discussions during first readings of books allow children to develop vocabulary and related conceptual understanding, and to become familiar with characters and the plot of a particular text. The students were able to hold this familiarity in their memory, such that when the book was reread weeks or months later, students could recall what they already knew as a way to think more deeply, make more personal connections, and begin to engage in critical literacy. This prompted me to consider how multimodal opportunities to engage with a book, such as the rewritings and dramatizations, would contribute to students' critical literacy. I saw students continuing to engage with each rereading, and using their compounding understanding, opportunities to act out and rewrite scenes from the book, and continuing group discussions as ways to increasingly participate in the kind of thinking that fosters

critical literacy. To frame the findings according to the dimensions of critical literacy described by Lewison, Leland, & Harste (2008), students showed their dissatisfaction with a neat and happy ending (disrupting the commonplace), rewrote scenes from the text so that other voices could emerge (interrogating multiple viewpoints), thought of the reasons why characters might behave as they did (focusing on the sociopolitical), and suggested alternate ways characters could have acted that might have led to more positive relationships (taking action to promote social justice). Engaging in these ways with the text was something that likely would not have happened with just one reading of the text, but rather it was multiple readings spread across time that supported these deeper critical engagements around the text.

The lessons around this particular text are just one example of the type of deep rereading my kindergarten students did as they revisited different texts throughout the school year. After multiple readings students showed greater awareness of the ways the author positioned them as readers, and began to disrupt and rewrite the text as they discussed it. The work students did around *Hooway for Wodney Wat* transferred into their work both with other read aloud texts in the unit and also into texts they read as part of a regular kindergarten balanced literacy curriculum. *Hooway for Wodney Wat* was the text students knew best since they reread it the most. Revisiting this book allowed students to try out new ways of thinking with a book they knew well. All students felt like they could take a role in dramatizing *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. Students knew each character's perspective (what they might say, how they might act, what they might be feeling) in the scenes, so they could act out the story and make changes. Students were then able to transfer what they learned from dramatizing changes to *Hooway for Wodney Wat* as they

wrote and acted out changes to other stories. Students began to imagine new possibilities for stories more frequently on the first reads of texts toward the end of the year, because they had practiced it with familiar texts like *Hooway for Wodney Wat*.

There is some debate on the role kindergarten plays in providing a foundation for literacy. On one side are those who argue that kindergartens should be play-based, and the time for literacy practices and skills comes later. On the other side are those who feel that it is never too early to teach young children literacy skills. The lessons around *Hooway for Wodney Wat* show that students can simultaneously engage in literacy lessons that also invite developmentally appropriate experiences with play. My students saw the rereading activities as fun, and there were many opportunities to play with the texts as students also grappled with deep themes. In fact, at the end of the year, each of the students was interviewed about the books that were part of the bullying unit. Many students mentioned *Wodney Wat* as a favorite and familiar text, and one they thought about outside of school. Students described enjoying rereading this book; it was the most requested text for read-alouds. They talked about the fun they had with the creative drama and writing activities that let them change the story. While some might also question the amount of time spent rereading the same text, when that time could have been spent exploring other texts, I assert that the time spent engaging with *Hooway for Wodney Wat* was key for helping my students acquire critical literacy skills. Their comfort with *Hooway for Wodney Wat* led them to take risks and try out new kinds of thinking with the text and experiment with different response types (dramatizing the text, changing the text). These skills then were able to transfer into our reads of other books, during both read-aloud and guided reading. Further, their work around *Hooway for*

*Wodney Wat* led them to think about issues of friendship and bullying in new and complicated ways, which in turn changed the way they read other texts on these issues.

Throughout our work with the text during the school year, I noticed that students developed agency in how they talked back to text, and disrupted and changed this and other texts so that they could empower certain characters or stop actions they did not like. This agency grew from an increasing flexibility in the students' thinking around bullying, and the way they came to understand the power of changing the behavior of not just the bully, but also bystanders and victims. Over the school year, bullies became more humanized and capable of change, and less one-dimensional and stereotypical. Based on conversations with students, I believe that this perspective extended into the students' lives outside of school. I saw students using what they learned in the *Wodney Wat* sessions as they approached other texts. They began to quickly see multiple perspectives and multiple solutions in the stories that were read aloud. In fact, with each rereading of *Wodney Wat*, I saw more and more transfer of flexible thinking to new texts as students learned to see alternate characters' points of view and as they learned to see the gray areas in social interactions. The first reading of a book can be just the starting point for rich discussions to come if a book is revisited and students are allowed the space to inquire into the text and share their insights and wonderings.

While in this chapter I provided an in depth look at students' work around one particular book, *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, in the next chapter I expand my analysis outward to include students' revisiting of a broad range of texts read aloud in the classroom. In Chapter 5, I look at how, after months of rereading and rewriting texts, students moved into dramatizing many different texts during the final two months of the

school year. In particular, I analyze how students used various types of process drama as a tool for critical literacy and social action as they responded to themes of injustice in our read-alouds.

## CHAPTER 5: USING DRAMA TO CRITICALLY READ AND RE-IMAGINE TEXTS

In this chapter I take a deeper dive into dramatizing texts, one of the methods of revisiting texts I introduced in the last chapter. While simply rereading a text multiple times, and leaving space open in the classroom for continuously engaging with a text was at times enough to spark deeper thinking around a text, I was curious how incorporating drama activities with rereading might push my students in new directions, and more fully engage all students in taking an active role in critical literacy. Drama activities around our classroom read-alouds could offer students new ways to collaboratively explore and play with texts, to engage with issues of power and equity in texts, and to develop a social imagination around texts.

Janks (2013) asserts that critical literacy extends beyond reading the word and the world, and that “it is also about *writing* and rewriting the world: it is about design and re-design” (p. 227). Further, as she analyzes the components of her interdependent model of critical literacy (power, access, diversity, and design/redesign), Janks notes that these components shouldn’t stand alone, but rather work together. One component without another, can be problematic, such as power with design/redesign, as “the deconstruction of powerful texts and practices, without reconstruction or redesign, removes human agency” (p. 226). While discussing the power dynamics between characters and the moments of injustice in our read-aloud texts is an important part of critical literacy; rewriting and redesign are key processes in that they lead students into taking action around injustice. Process drama activities can be an invitation for students to engage in the redesign cycle with texts, by going beyond simply acting out scenes to engage with



disrupting and reimagining and redesigning scenes, and rewriting scenes that innovate on classroom read-aloud texts.

Process drama, including techniques like writing in role, creating tableaux, and improvising scenes, can help students reflect on classroom topics and texts socially and collaboratively (Edmiston, 2014; Schneider, Crumpler, & Rogers, 2006). Rooted in the tradition of Boal's (1985) *Theatre of the Oppressed*, process drama is critical pedagogy that can help make participants aware of and disrupt oppressive power relations. O'Neill (2006), in her analysis of the benefits of engaging students in process drama, points out that "if the students are unable to imagine things differently and imagine the world from unfamiliar perspectives, they will be unable to bring about any change in their circumstances" (p. xi). Students rehearse narratives in their mind about fairness, equity and justice. They need time to develop, rehearse and revise these narratives. A curriculum of revisiting and dramatizing texts supports students' ability to do this, to imagine new possibilities for change, and to take action when they encounter injustice.

I chose ten lessons for this chapter (see Table 3) out of the larger year-long data set for analysis because they involved drama activities around texts that had been read aloud in the classroom. These ten lessons took place during April and May, at the end of the school year, after students had been engaged in multiple critical literacy units. While some of the read-aloud texts used in these drama lessons were new texts that the class was responding to for the first time, more often the texts were ones the class had read aloud previously and was revisiting to respond to through drama. The texts used for the read-alouds focused on diverse issues including: gender, race, social class, bullying, and taking action for social change.

Table 3 <i>Overview of Drama Lessons</i>	
<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity</u>
April 24	Rereading Portions of: <i>Hooway for Wodney Wat</i> and <i>Dare!</i> Acting out parts and how we would change them (whole class). Students independently write about parts in a book they want to change. Students begin sharing parts they want to change and helping class act out their changes.
April 25	Students finish sharing parts they want to change and helping class act out their changes.
April 29	Writing out scene for how to change <i>Hooway for Wodney Wat</i> (whole class). Students begin working in small groups on rewriting a scene/what they want to change.
April 30	Students work in small groups with teacher on planning their scene/writing their scene that they are changing in a text.
May 1	Students perform their changed scenes in small groups for the class.
May 6	Reread of <i>Each Kindness</i> (stopping to dramatize/change scenes along the way).
May 8	Read Aloud: <i>The Sneetches</i> (second half of text). Write in role activity for <i>The Sneetches</i> with sharing of writing afterwards.
May 19	Watch movie of <i>Click, Clack, Moo</i> , pausing to discuss along the way. Write in role activity for <i>Click, Clack, Moo</i>
May 21	Discussion of which previous books they want to revisit.  Acting out changes to: <i>Click Clack Moo, The Sneetches</i>  Read Aloud: <i>The Sandwich Swap</i> (first reading of text, acted out scenes along the way, as well as changes)

Data from these ten lessons includes field notes, video recordings, transcripts, and student drawing/writing. Transcripts of lessons were analyzed for the types of responses students had to the texts during the read-aloud discussions and the dramatizations to look

for patterns in students' responses across texts and across different process drama techniques, and for evidence of critical literacy. Student writing samples were also analyzed for patterns across students' responses and for differences in responses to different texts. A key aspect of my analysis was looking at moments of tension or "cruces" (Fairclough, 1992) in our work around texts, and more closely analyzing these moments. In this chapter, I share the different kinds of drama I used, including: creating tableaux, writing in role, and re-enacting and changing scenes from the read-aloud texts.

### **Re-enacting and Changing Scenes**

As we gathered on the rug one day in April, I shared with the class a new idea, acting out scenes from some of our read-aloud books. What I didn't know at the time, was that this was soon to become the most frequently requested activity in conjunction with our read-alouds. That first day, as we tried out dramatizing texts for the first time, I chose to start with a very familiar text *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. I knew we wouldn't need to reread the entire text in order for my students to remember what had happened in the text and think about how to act out the different characters, as they already had a deep familiarity with this text (see Appendix D for a transcript of this lesson).

This was the first time I had incorporated drama into my read alouds and, as such, I had some uncertainties about how the practice would unfold. As the class revisited the text *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, we lingered over the page illustrating a troubling scene where a new student barges into the classroom using mean words with her new classmates. The class was enthusiastic about engaging in drama. The students improvised changes to the text, deciding that the new student, Camilla, might instead come into the classroom and ask the children if they would like to be her friend and play with her-

leading to a much different scene than what played out in the actual text. In another version the main character, Rodney Rat, speaks up instead of getting bullied and hiding timidly from the new student. Over the course of fifteen minutes, the students acted out multiple dramatizations of this scene, each time the scene proceeding in a slightly different manner, as students grappled with different ways the injustice of the bullying could be addressed. Their different re-imaginings of the text showed that people who are oppressed have a voice (in this case Rodney Rat) and that bullies can change their minds and become nicer.

After students had tried out dramatizing scenes with the familiar text *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, I asked them to move on to trying out the same drama techniques with another read aloud: *Dare!* (Frankel, 2012a). This was a book students had recently been requesting to revisit, and while we had read it before, we had not revisited it with the same frequency as *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. We had never rewritten *Dare!* nor had extensive discussion around how scenes in the text might go differently, so I was eager to see what ideas students would come up with for this text. We chose to revisit a key moment of tension in the book- a scene where a character named Sam is teasing her classmate Luisa for wearing a pair of polka dot boots. The illustration in the text shows that other kids (in particular a girl named Jayla) are observing Sam bully Luisa about her boots, but they remain silent as they observe. One of the first suggestions my students made was to change the bully's behavior, with students suggesting Sam could instead say "I like your polka dot boots" or "I like your boots, please can I try your polka dotted boots, can I try them on?" This was similar to how students initially dramatized and changed scenes in *Hooway for Wodney Wat*- with students' first instinct being to

completely erase the bullying incident, and have the bully instead use kind words with classmates. However, as we continued to dramatize the scene from *Dare!* students found ways to maintain the conflict (bullying) in the scene, and innovate on the role of the victim and bystander to have them interrupt the bullying. Students had the bystander, Jayla, enter the scene and say things like “Stop teasing her, you leave her alone, those boots are not weird.” and “Hey those boots are actually kind of cute and she is a really nice little girl so you need to stop it.” Students not only imagined Jayla sticking up for her friend Luisa, they also imagined Luisa sticking up for herself and saying “I like my boots- they aren't weird.” and “Could you please stop? I don't like that.” Over the course of nearly 15 minutes dramatizing this short scene from *Dare!* students had multiple opportunities to try out different stances from the text as they took on the roles of bully, victim, and bystander, and rehearsed different ways each of these roles could take responsibility for disrupting a bullying conflict. After this lesson, students were eager to revisit many of our other read-aloud texts to try out process drama around these texts as well. Over the course of several days, every student in our classroom had an opportunity to lead the class in a dramatization of a book they wanted to change. Each student wrote/drew a plan for which text they wanted to change and how, and then led the whole class in dramatizing the scene they had chosen along with the changes.

As I observed my students' dramatizations, I noticed that students frequently chose to revisit points of tension in the texts for their dramatic work, engaging directly with issues of justice and equity. Students wanted to revisit parts that bothered them or that they considered “unfair.” In this way they could continue their engagement with the text and “talk back to the text.” The discussion wasn't over once the read-aloud finished,

but rather students showed that they continued to think about the texts and grapple with the topics in the texts after the reading. For example, when collaborating on drama one day, Joey chose for the class to revisit and dramatize a scene in a text we had read several months earlier, *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1991). In the scene Joey chose, the main character, a little girl named Grace, is told by classmates that she can't be Peter Pan in the class play because Peter Pan is white and Grace is black, and because Peter Pan is a boy and Grace is a girl. Students dramatized this particular scene to disrupt it and show an alternate way Grace's classmates could have acted, with Joey suggesting that Grace's classmates should encourage her to be Peter Pan and could say "You can be Peter Pan if you want to" and "Your skin is cool." While there are countless other scenes in this text that students could have chosen to dramatize, the key moment of tension in the text is when Grace's classmates use her gender and race as reasons to discourage her from being Peter Pan. Although we had not read this book in months, this scene in the text was the one that Joey immediately turned to as he revisited the book, which indicated to me that he had felt personal unease with the prejudice in the book during our initial reading many months earlier, to the extent that he could clearly recall that part of the book and felt compelled to take action around it. Looking at students' dramatizing through a critical literacy lens, it is possible to see how students simultaneously engaged in all four of Lewison, Leland, & Harste's (2008) dimensions of critical literacy as they acted out scenes and improvised changes to scenes. As Joey planned for and dramatized the scene from *Amazing Grace*, I saw him disrupting the commonplace as he returned to the text to reconsider it and look at it in a new way, interrogating multiple viewpoints as he thought from the perspectives of both Grace and her classmates, engaging with the sociopolitical

as he chose a key scene in the text centered on gender and race, and taking action for social change as he re-imagined how Grace's classmates could be supportive of her desire to be Peter Pan and appreciate their differences in skin color.

Similar to Joey's unease with the way Grace's classmates treated her in *Amazing Grace*, Sean felt uncomfortable with a key scene in the book *William's Doll*, and with how William was treated by his brother and a neighbor. Just as Grace's classmates had certain ideas around appropriate gender roles for girls, William's brother and neighbor showed biases in the book around appropriate gender roles for boys. In *William's Doll*, there is a scene where William's brother and neighbor yell at him "Don't be a creep" and "Sissy, sissy" when he tells them he wants a doll. This scene was particularly startling for the students because of the strong language of "creep" and "sissy" used in the text. As I conferenced with Sean before the scene, he was upset about the way the other boys had teased William for wanting to play with a doll, and seemed to be imagining how he would have felt if he was William. I asked him about how he wanted the dramatization unfold. Sean said "He [William] will come to their house and ask them do you like my doll?" and then continued "They will say they like the doll and play with it." In Sean's version of the scene, William is not teased and made fun of for wanting to play with a doll. Instead, the other boys are not only okay with William playing with a doll, but want to join in and play with the doll as well. As students followed Sean's directions, and acted out the scene from *William's Doll*, they interrupted gendered stereotypes about children's play, something I would like think transferred into their play throughout the day in our classroom. We had classroom centers in our kindergarten (such as a play kitchen), where traditional gender roles and stereotypes could have played out, however as Sean directed

us in this scene, we came together around his stance that boys and girls should be able to play with what they want- and that toys should not be reserved for a particular gender. With Joey's dramatization of Grace being able to play Peter Pan despite being a girl, and Sean's dramatization of William being able to play with dolls despite being a boy, students were able to take action in our classroom around resisting gender stereotypes, something that can be hard to do in a world where students are constantly bombarded with gendered toys, clothes, and media messages.

While students most often chose to return to texts from our text set around bullying for their dramatizations, these dramatizations engaged with far more than simple childhood issues of friendship and bullying. Many of these texts engaged with complex issues of racism, classism, and gender discrimination in their depictions of bullying. Thus, as students returned to the texts to reimagine how the bullying scenes could play out, they continued and deepened their engagement around many bigger issues of social justice in the world around them.

Although scenes of bullying were often key moments of tension identified by students in the texts as important to revisit and dramatize, students also chose to revisit books with other types of conflicts outside of bullying. One such text was *Si Se Puede*, from our unit on social action. In this book, a young boy supports his mother as she strikes for higher wages for herself and her fellow janitors. Kylee was bothered by how the mother in this text was treated by her boss. She asked the class to revisit the page where the mother is working the night shift, and is mopping the floors. In the illustration of the scene, the mother is hunched over the mop, persisting through her work although she is clearly tired. Kylee was troubled by how hard the mom was working and that her



boss would not pay her a fair wage. Kylee asked her classmates to help dramatize the scene, and Eric came up to play the role of the mother, since Kylee wanted to play the role of the boss. Kylee felt it important that the boss should change her mind, and acted out the boss deciding to pay the mother more for her hard work. In this dramatization, issues of fair employment practices and social class found their way to the forefront. Although the role of the mother and her boss were perhaps farther outside of students' lived experiences than a playground bullying incident, students were bothered by the injustice they saw in the text and wanted to address it.

It was not uncommon for students to suggest that they wanted to revisit and dramatize a previously read text, as was the case with *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, *Amazing Grace*, *William's Doll*, and *Si Se Puede*. However, the more familiar students became with different techniques of process drama, the more frequently they requested to "pause" read-alouds, and dramatize scenes as we read a book the first time through. This was the case with the book *The Sandwich Swap* (Al Abdullah, 2010), when the class stopped mid-reading and decided to act out the scene where two girls from different cultures are teasing each other over the different foods in their lunches ultimately leading to a food fight. Pausing the read aloud to engage in drama not only helped students to consider each character's unique perspective, but also why conflicts in the text arose and how they might be resolved. It seemed critical to me that it was not just me as the teacher that was slowing down the read-aloud process and encouraging students to linger in the text, but that *students* by the end of the school year were requesting to slow down their read-alouds during the initial readings, for example by pausing the read-aloud to dramatize.

This is evidence of their own agency in making the read-aloud lessons fit more to their needs to linger in the text in order to better comprehend it.

### **Creating Tableaus**

After students had gained a familiarity with re-enacting scenes and improvising changes to scenes, and I had observed their enthusiasm for using dramatic approaches with our read-alouds, I decided to introduce them to creating tableaus of scenes from our read-aloud texts. This involved students positioning themselves as described in the scene in the text, and then freezing the scene to create a tableau of that moment in the text. Creating tableaus of scenes in texts helped students see how each character was positioned, and how subtle changes in a character's gaze or body language or proximity to other characters could alter a scene.

During a reread of the text *Each Kindness* (Woodson, 2012) in early May, I chose to introduce tableaus to the class. *Each Kindness* tells the story of a girl named Maya who moves to a new school mid-way through the school year, and who is shunned by the other girls in her class. In particular, a girl in the class named Chloe leads a group of girls in ignoring Maya. They whisper about her at recess and refuse to play with her, and the reader can infer that they treat her differently not just because she is new, but also because she is poorer than the other students and appears to wear second-hand clothes and play with second-hand toys. One day their teacher teaches a lesson on kindness, which causes Chloe to rethink how she is treating Maya, but it is too late to apologize to her as Maya's family has already moved on to a new school.

Before the lesson, I looked back through the text and chose a few key scenes in the text for us to work with. One of these scenes occurred early in the text, and was a key

moment of tension for the characters, and a scene that I believed was central in understanding the rest of the text, as it sets up how each character is feeling at school. This was the scene when Maya first joins the class as a new student. Maya is introduced to the other students by the teacher, and walks over to an open desk near Chloe to sit down. Maya then looks at Chloe and smiles, in a gesture of friendship. When she does this, Chloe immediately scoots her books and desk away, turns her body away from Maya, and gazes out the window to avoid making eye contact with her.



Figure 9. Students create a tableau of a scene in *Each Kindness*.

As I read the text aloud, I paused at this scene in the text. I asked for volunteers to come up to the front of the class to help us set up the scene, and several students eagerly jumped up. As I held up the illustration of the scene in the book, two students created a tableau of Maya and Chloe (see Figure 9). The student on the right, played the role of Maya. She looked at Chloe and smiled hopefully, eager to make a new friend. The student on the left, played the role of Chloe, and positioned her body away from her

classmate, and directed her gaze away so as not to make eye contact with Maya. The student explained to the class that she was imagining that the large white board on the wall was the snowy window in the text that Chloe looked out of. Just out of view of the camera, two other students played the roles of the teacher and another classmate in the scene- they positioned themselves a few feet away watching Chloe and Maya.

As I read aloud the page in the text, the students positioned themselves as described in the text. I then said “Let’s freeze our scene” and the students acting out the tableau froze so that the rest of the class could analyze the scene together. It was a powerful moment to watch the tableau of the scene in real life, rather than just look at the illustration in the text. The students and I could clearly see each character’s body positioning and the expressions on their faces. I pointed to the student playing Chloe and asked the class, “What do you think she might be thinking?” The students observed Chloe’s gaze and how Chloe was looking away from Maya and ignoring her. Students came up with several reasons why this might be the case, suggesting that Chloe “might be kind of shy” or that she might be “scared of the new girl.” One student suggested that Chloe might be reconsidering her behavior and might be thinking “Maybe I should be nicer.”

We then moved on to discussing the thoughts and feelings of the other characters in the tableau. Students suggested that Maya was feeling sad and might be wondering why Chloe wasn’t smiling back at her, since we could see Maya staring at Chloe’s back in the tableau. As Mickey looked at Maya in the tableau, he suggested that “She’s feeling sad because it’s her first day and she hasn’t met anyone, and she doesn’t have any friends. She’s feeling sad because she’s not smiling back.” As we moved on to

considering the roles of the teacher and student observing Maya and Chloe's interaction in the scene, the students playing those roles unfroze the tableau to make suggestions about actions they wanted their characters to take. Students at this point were used to more action during our drama lessons, and rather than keep the tableau frozen, they were eager to dramatize the scene as we had done with other texts. The student playing the teacher wanted to go over to Chloe and interrupt her as she looked out the window to introduce her to Maya. The student playing the role of a classmate wanted to go over to Chloe and tell her to stop looking out the window. Both students were eager to disrupt Chloe's action of ignoring Maya, and wanted to see the scene play out differently.

Before the tableau, as we briefly discussed the scene in the text, students focused in on Maya, and guessed that she might be mad or sad based on her expression in the illustration. However, it was only once we got to acting out a tableau of the scene that students began to more closely consider all of the characters in the scene, and discuss what Chloe, the teacher, and other classmates might be thinking and feeling. Students were able to closely examine the expression on the face of each character as the characters remained frozen in their tableau, and make inferences about why the character was making a particular expression (smiling, frowning, etc.) and where their gaze was directed (out the window, at other students, etc.) gave clues into what they were thinking as well.

As I taught this lesson, I realized that it felt different than other dramatizing activities we'd done prior to this point. The dramatizations we'd done had often occurred rapidly, and it wasn't uncommon for students to act out 3-5 different ways one scene could unfold in just a few short minutes. However, with the introduction of tableaus, we

weren't simply turning to specific pages we wanted to change and immediately acting out changes. We were slowing down and pausing as we reread the text to set up tableaus, and we were first experiencing the moment frozen in a tableau- lingering in that frozen moment and experiencing the tension of that scene in the book drawn out over minutes rather than mere seconds. Setting up the tableaus occurred as a more natural part of the read aloud, rather than a reenactment of the reading after the read aloud. I was conscious to ask students to continually focus in on looking at each character in the tableau and asking "What are you noticing? What are they thinking? What are they feeling? What would you be thinking and feeling?" to help them look through the lens of each character. These questions were productive as students stepped into the shoes of each character and tried to imagine what they would do in that character's place. Daphne shared "If I was Maya, I would ask the kids to please stop being mean to me." However, when asked to stop and consider "Why do you think Maya doesn't say that in the book?" Daphne acknowledged "Because she probably is too scared to" demonstrating that she understood the character's perspective as different from her own. As Daphne considered how she would be more vocal about the bullying if she was Maya, Krystal shared that she had felt the very same way as Maya when someone had acted meanly towards her. Krystal shared that she had not said anything to the child that was teasing her, similar to Maya in the book. However, Krystal also reflected that if this happened again, she would say something back and speak up for herself.

My goal with this lesson was to reread the text and occasionally pause at key scenes to create tableaus together to better facilitate understanding of the text. I didn't plan to stop on every page though, and had marked several pages I thought worth

exploring more deeply with a sticky note. However, as we read through the text, the students at times resisted my agenda, preferring to pick their own scenes in the text to linger on and dramatize. As we paused on a scene that showed the playground, and the students having recess, we engaged in some discussion around what was happening on the page. Then I said, “Let’s keep reading and see what happens” and I turned to the next page in the text. However, the students called for me to stop, saying they wanted to go back and act out the playground scene. They were bothered by the way that Maya was being excluded by the other kids during recess. I agreed to turn back to the previous page, and as soon as I flipped back to the playground scene several students immediately leaned in to get a better look at the illustration. They wanted to see who was in the scene, and then began raising their hands to volunteer to play different characters, eager to jump into role playing the scene. They wanted to change a troubling scene even though I was looking to move on and keep reading the book. They were adamant about remaining in that part of the text and considering how to change it- evidence that they were internalizing the strategy of changing texts and thinking of alternate possibilities for texts.

As we set up the role-play for the scene, it was clear that students had been attending closely to the book. They immediately got into positions to act out the scene, and their positions mimicked those in the book’s illustration. Students huddled together before the scene started to plan what they wanted to say. Students then acted out the scene, making changes along the way to make the scene play out more fairly. In the students’ dramatization, rather than just sitting back and whispering about Maya, Chloe and her friends took the initiative to walk over to Maya and invite her to play. They

joined hands with the child playing Maya and skipped around the classroom smiling at each other (see Figure 10).



*Figure 10.* Students dramatize a scene from *Each Kindness*.

One way I consciously tried to incorporate more choice and agency was by asking students to pick their own characters in the scene, rather than assign them- I think this also created more buy-in and engagement from the students, and allowed me to step out of the drama more and sit back and see what choices students would make. Although it was obvious students were engaged and having fun during this and other dramatic lessons around texts, I argue that the students' dramatic work also showed evidence of their comprehension of the texts. In order to act out the parts, and put the character's emotion behind it, or explain their choices for a character, students had to understand what that character was thinking and what the character's motivation was. In order to manipulate a scene and change it, you have to know what's going on in that scene in the first place. I



saw evidence that students not only understood the scenes, but had reflected on the scenes to the point where certain scenes were causing them a level of discomfort, they understood what was happening and didn't like it, which was prompting them into taking action and changing the scene. As we read *Each Kindness* earlier in the school year for the first time, students struggled to grasp some of the subtle clues in the text around why the kids were treating the character Maya unkindly (markers of her social class, and inability to afford new clothes and toys which would have brought her higher status in the classroom, were subtly indicated by the author and illustrator) and I felt like I had to bring this topic to the discussion over and over again during the initial read aloud to help focus us on it. As we reread and acted out the tableaux and scenes at the end of the school year, students brought some of this understanding into the scenes. This was evidenced by students whispering in their scenes about what Maya was wearing and subsequently discussing how it doesn't matter what someone wears- you can still be friends with them, as Sophie summed up after one reenactment from the book "Don't judge a book by its cover." Students were not only learning how to disrupt scenes of teasing and bullying, but were exhibiting broader thinking and tolerance around differences among students.

### Writing in Role



*Figure 11.* Students sharing their writing.

After all of the impromptu dramatizing of scenes and creating tableaux during the read-alouds, I was curious what students would do if given more time to deliberate over what different characters in the texts might be thinking or feeling instead of having to make a quick on the spot decision about a character while acting a scene out. I decided to try out a new technique with the students called “write in role.” For writing in role, each student would choose a character from the text to write from the perspective of. This activity gave students time to independently reflect on the character they had chosen and to write down what they thought that character would say in a certain scene before acting out their character for the class. Students had independence in choosing which character’s perspective they wanted to write from, and even when multiple students chose to write from the same character’s perspective, the character might be interpreted differently by each student. Thus, after writing in role, each student was able to share or “act out” what they had written from the perspective of the character they had chosen, and the whole class was able to reflect on these multiple perspectives.

Our first writing in role lesson was in early May with the book *The Sneetches* (Seuss, 1961). We then had a second lesson on writing in role two weeks later with the book *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type* (Cronin, 2000). While initially during the first writing in role lesson the majority of students tended to stick to the main characters in the text, I noticed during our second writing in role lesson more students began to consider what supporting characters in the text might say. Although these were the only two formal lessons on writing in role, where every student chose a character and then wrote from their perspective, the concept of taking on a role from a text and considering what that character's perspective might be was not a completely new activity. This was the type of thinking that students had been doing for months as they had been acting out scenes from our read-alouds and improvising character's dialogue on the spot during dramatizations for the class, and also as they had rewritten stories together from other character's perspectives (as was with the case of rewriting *Hooway for Wodney Wat* from Camilla's perspective- as detailed in the previous chapter). As a result, students did not need much support from me to write in role, but rather took to the task without much teacher explanation and guidance, as they were familiar with how to imagine the perspective of a character in the text, and at this point in the kindergarten school year, most students had reached a level of writing proficiency that they could write a page of text with an accompanying illustration independently.

I chose the book *The Sneetches* while we were immersed in a unit focused on bullying. While the book *The Sneetches* (Seuss, 1961) tells the story of fictional creatures called sneetches, it also presents motifs around difference, discrimination, and power. Some of the sneetch characters in the book have a stars on their bellies, and these star-

bellied sneetches only play together and exclude plain-belly sneetches that do not have a star from their activities, making the plain-belly sneetches quite sad. Then one day a man named Mr. McMonkey McBean comes to the beach where the sneetches live and says he can help them with his machine- a machine that will either put stars on sneetches or take them off, whatever the sneetches want. The plain-belly sneetches all rush to pay Mr. McMonkey to get a star so they can be included, but once they have stars, this makes the star-bellies choose to remove their stars so that they can still be different. Chaos ensues with sneetches taking stars off and on over and over again, and Mr. McMonkey making huge profits. At the end of the book Mr. McMonkey leaves and the now penniless sneetches realize that stars are not as important as they once thought, and maybe they can all work and play together. Although the book is about fictional characters and situations, it brings up themes of differences and discrimination, and was written by Dr. Seuss during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States- a time when real discrimination was happening every day based on skin color rather than “stars.”

In looking at students’ writing samples for *The Sneetches* read-aloud, out of 20 students, the majority of the class (17 students) chose to write from the perspective of a sneetch. This makes a lot of sense considering sneetches were the main characters in the text, and thus the words and illustrations focus in on their feelings, words, and actions. The class was pretty evenly split, with 8 students choosing to write from the perspective of the plain-bellied sneetches and 9 students writing from the perspective of the star-bellied sneetches. Within the writing from these two perspectives, there was a fair amount of variation. Some students chose to be more specific and specified the age of the sneetch they were writing from the perspective of (e.g. baby, kid, or adult sneetch). Also,

different students chose to focus their writing in role on different scenes from the text. So while some students chose to write from the perspective of a sneetch during the scene where they were playing ball or having a marshmallow roast, some chose to write from the perspective of a sneetch visiting Mr. McMonkey's star machine on the beach. Interestingly, the scene from the text that arose most frequently in students' writing in role, was the scene of the sneetches playing ball. Perhaps this was because this was a scene that students connected more personally with, as this was a scene one could imagine occurring on the kindergarten playground at recess.

Students that chose to write from the perspective of the plain-bellied sneetches often kept with the perspective presented in the text. This was the perspective of a character that was the victim of injustice and was being treated unfairly. They made visible what it was like to be a victim of oppression. They expressed that they wanted stars and that they wanted to be included in the star-belly sneetches' activities, like the ball game and the marshmallow roast. Students wrote things like: "Let's play together," "Can I play?" and "Do you want to be my friend?" Students' illustrations showed plain belly sneetches who were eager to be included and to be treated the same as sneetches that had stars. This was a main perspective expressed in the text, and students that wrote from this perspective did not have to think outside of the text or do much inferring, and the text made it very clear that this is how the plain-bellies felt.



Figure 12. Eric's writing in role for *The Sneetches*. His writing says, "I am a plain belly sneetch. Even if I want a star on my belly, I don't care. We can all play together." His illustration shows a plain-belly sneetch saying "I want to have a star."

One example of a student writing from the perspective of a plain-bellied sneetch is Eric (see Figure 12). As Eric writes in role, he begins by making it clear what type of sneetch he is, saying "I am a plain-belly sneetch" since he knows this to be the key characteristic of a sneetch. Eric then continues by saying "Even if I want a star on my belly, I don't care." This shows us Eric's keen understanding of the central conflict affecting the sneetches. The plain-belly sneetches want a star so they can be included in the star-bellied games, however, they also realize that it shouldn't really matter if they have stars or not, which is why Eric says "I don't care" to negate the importance of having a star. Eric concludes by saying "We can all play together" making clear that the plain-belly sneetches realize they should all be able to play together regardless of if they have a star or not. Interestingly, in Eric's illustration, he chose to depict the plain-belly

sneetch saying “I want a star” and smiling. Even though Eric wrote that the sneetch doesn’t care, his illustration makes it clear that this sneetch does care very much about how he looks different from other sneetches. Eric’s illustration also shows the plain-belly sneetch alone, and there is a line down the center of the illustration seeming to keep the sneetch separate and divided from whatever might be on the other side (perhaps star-bellied sneetches?).

In contrast, students who wrote from the perspective of the star-bellied sneetches, mostly chose to innovate on the star-bellies sneetches’ perspective and change it from the perspective presented in the text. Perhaps this was because the star-bellied sneetches in the text were bullies, and students did not feel comfortable taking on the oppressive role of a character that acted unjustly, so instead they preferred to change the character and show them acting in a more just way. Students were familiar with changing texts from many of our previous class activities, and so it was not surprising to see that many independently took the initiative to change the perspective of the star-belly characters. Students imagined being star-bellied sneetches who wouldn’t care about whether their friends had stars or not, and who *would* invite plain-belly sneetches to play. In contrast with the star-belly sneetches in the text that excluded the plain-bellies, these star-bellies said things like: “I should invite the plain-belly to the roast,” “Can you be my friends?” and “I can play with you.”

Out of the 20 students, only a very small portion of the class (three students), chose to write from the perspective of a character who was not a sneetch. These three students chose to write from the perspective of the other character in the text, Mr. McMonkey McBean. The small number of students writing from this perspective

suggests that this was perhaps a more challenging perspective to write from. The sneetches were the main characters in the text, and their perspectives were perhaps the most obvious perspectives. It would take more critical thinking and inferring to consider what a character like Mr. McMonkey might be thinking, and to evaluate his character's motivations.

Each of the three students who wrote from Mr. McMonkey's perspective approached it differently. Derrick wrote "I am Mr. McMonkey. Follow me." And his picture showed Mr. McMonkey leading sneetches to his machine. This is more of a "neutral perspective" as it simply shows Mr. McMonkey doing something he did in the text, but does not show Derrick's evaluation of Mr. McMonkey. Simon and Kylee also wrote from the perspective of Mr. McMonkey, but their writing in role shows evidence that they have thought more critically about Mr. McMonkey and his actions in the text. Simon's writing (see Figure 13) gives a more negative spin on Mr. McMonkey's motives, writing "I am Mr. McMonkey and I am thinking I'm goin' to trick the plain sneetches and I's goin' to be 10 dollars. But I's goin' to trick some. I just want more money." Simon sees Mr. McMonkey as someone who does not really want to help the sneetches, but rather wants to "trick" them and is really just thinking about his own profits and making money. In Simon's illustration, he shows Mr. McMonkey telling a plain-belly sneetch "It's going to be 10 dollars" and an angry sneetch replying "Rrrr! I don't believe you." In contrast with Simon's writing in role, Kylee's writing in role (see Figure 14) puts a more positive spin on Mr. McMonkey. Kylee writes "I'm Mr. McMonkey. You guys are spending all of your money. Do you ever want to stop switching back and forth from the stars?" In Kylee's writing, she imagines Mr. McMonkey is not so much trying to trick the



sneetches, and rather it is the silly sneetches that are making themselves victims and wasting their money, and Mr. McMonkey just happens to profit from this, charitably asking them if they have really thought this through and if they really want to keep switching back and forth from star-bellies to plain-bellies in his machine.



*Figure 13.* Simon's writing in role for *The Sneetches*. His writing says, "I am Mr. McMonkey and I am thinking I'm goin' to trick the plain sneetches and I's goin' to be 10 dollars. But I's goin' to trick some. I just want more money."

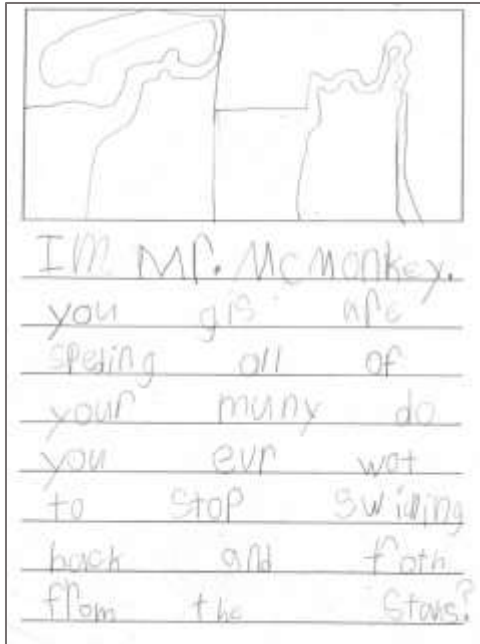


Figure 14. Kylee's writing in role for *The Sneetches*. Her writing says, "I'm Mr. McMonkey. You guys are spending all of your money. Do you ever want to stop swinging back and forth from the stars?" Her illustration depicts Mr. McMonkey's star machine.

It is interesting to note that none of the students chose to introduce the perspective of a new character that was not already in the text. Although perhaps this had more to do with this specific text, and the fantastical nature of the setting/characters, so it might have been harder for students to imagine other characters who would inhabit this imagined setting. This is an area where I could have challenged students to think outside the box more, and imagine what a sneetch teacher or sneetch soccer coach would have said, or what a sneetch from a different town might have said if they visited and observed the scenes in the book. Certainly introducing a new perspective to "talk back" to the sneetches and Mr. McMonkey would have been an interesting way to change this text,

and considering what perspectives are missing from an author's telling of a text is just as important as considering the multiple perspectives within the text.

Two weeks later, I created another lesson that involved writing in role with the book *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type* (Cronin, 2000). This book tells the story of a group of cows that go on strike, and refuse to provide Farmer Brown with milk until he gives them electric blankets as the barn is cold. The cows type letters to Farmer Brown with their demands, and other animals on the farm (chickens, ducks) chime in too with their own demands. Eventually Farmer Brown gives the cows the blankets they want in exchange for them turning in the typewriter they have been using to write him letters. This book was one of the texts we read as a part of a unit on taking action. Although the characters are farm animals, this book brings up critical themes of workers' rights, and taking collective action.

One of the aspects of the children's critical literacy practice that I did not pick up on during teaching was that this second experience with writing in role went quite differently than the first. Students' engagement with multiple perspectives increased as a broader range of characters were considered, and students more closely analyzed the author's intended perspectives for each of these characters. It was only after the study had ended when I listened again to students sharing their writing in role and analyzed their writing samples more closely, that I was able to pick up on some of the key differences between their writing in role for *The Sneetches* and their writing in role for *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type*. This highlights the importance of multiple 'phases' of analysis – before, during, and after teaching.

Students chose a wide variety of characters as they wrote in role for this text. In contrast with their writing in role for *The Sneetches*, where the majority of students in the class wrote from the perspective of a main character- a sneetch, with *Click, Clack, Moo* nearly half of the students in the class wrote from the perspective of a supporting character- the duck. The duck was present on some pages in the text- notably at the end of the book when the duck took the cows' typewriter and wrote a letter asking for a diving board, but the ducks were not a central part of the plot in the way the cows and Farmer Brown were. During this lesson, 9 students wrote from the perspective of a duck, 6 students from the perspective of a cow, and 5 students from the perspective of Farmer Brown.

Overwhelmingly, with the writing in role for *Click, Clack, Moo*, students stuck close to the perspectives the author presented for each character in the text rather than change the characters' perspective (as students writing from the star-bellied sneetch perspective in the previous lesson had done). Students who wrote from the perspective of the cows expressed a desire for electric blankets, and talked about it being cold in the barn. Students who wrote from the perspective of the duck talked about it being boring at the pond and asked for a diving board. Some students used their writing in role as a persuasive writing opportunity, writing a letter in role to Farmer Brown asking for what they wanted, and using words like "please." The students that wrote from the perspective of Farmer Brown (the perspective presented as more "unjust" or oppressive in the text) did not choose to innovate on this perspective or make Farmer Brown act more nicely or treat the cows more fairly. They truly took on the perspective the author had presented for Farmer Brown, and wrote about how they couldn't understand why the cows needed

electric blankets and no they wouldn't give in. Students writing as Farmer Brown also expressed his anger and exasperation with the animals, saying "Doggone it!" and describing the animals as "annoying."

### **Discussion**

The revisiting activities we engaged in were invitations to students to leave the books open and conceptualize the endings as unfinished and negotiable. Students wanted to return to and linger in the moments of tension in the texts, not fast forward through difficult or disturbing parts of texts, embracing the unease. Children's book authors have the tendency to neatly wrap up a text at the end with a happy ending or with the resolution of an injustice in the case of the social issues focused texts we read in my classroom. However, in the real world, often the fight against injustice is ongoing, and not easily resolved. Issues of equity and justice are often complicated, and rather than being black and white, have many gray areas. It is not just children's book authors that often want to move quickly through the difficult parts, teachers can also have the instinct to fast forward through the messy parts in a text or discussion, and to wrap things up neatly. The way curriculums are structured, and the need to squeeze so much content into the short amount of time in the school day can also lead teachers to attempt to move quickly through texts. Using drama as a tool to revisit and rethink read-alouds provides early childhood teachers a way to simultaneously engage their young students in rigorous critical thinking around texts that is also active, social, playful, and imaginative.

Over the course of the year, I grew and developed as a critical literacy teacher. I tried out drama techniques that were new to me. Since then, I have continued to rely on process drama in my kindergarten teaching and also in professional development work

with other educators. As I reflect on this, I can see how vital my stance toward inquiry, experimentation, and improvisation are in the whole enterprise of critical literacy teaching. As a teacher, I was willing to take a risk and try a new technique which, eventually, I have fine-tuned. For example, when I use drama now, I often introduce it on the very first reading of a text. It can provide a way for students to predict what action characters will take next, and experiment with different possibilities, before seeing the words and actions an author has chosen. Dramatizing from the very first reading of a text also allows students the immediate opportunity to jump into the roles of the characters and begin to consider multiple perspectives from the start.

It was clear to me that a curriculum of rereading texts and dramatizing texts helped scaffold my students into increasingly rigorous thinking around texts. I saw how much students both enjoyed acting out texts, and were better comprehending the texts and their themes after using the tools of process drama. However, as a teacher-researcher, I wanted to go beyond my own reflections on the benefits of rereading, to consider what students' perspectives were on rereading. Considering multiple perspectives is also a key component of critical literacy. In the next chapter, I delve into analyzing a lesson at the end of the school year where students reflected together on our year of rereading, and considered what they felt the purpose of rereading was. Their commentary on rereading shows evidence of many different benefits of rereading for young students.

**CHAPTER 6: PERSPECTIVES ON REREADING AND REVISITING TEXTS**

*“If a teacher said ‘We only read them once,’ I would say ‘Why don’t you read them again? That will give your class more thoughts about the books.’” ~Krystal*

After a year of rereading books together, I could clearly see the benefits of revisiting texts in terms of accelerating my kindergarten students’ literacy development and encouraging critical literacy. However, I was curious to get my students’ perspectives on rereading. Did they like to reread books? What did they see as the purpose of rereading? How did they feel it helped them as readers? Did they have preferences for particular ways of revisiting texts? During one of our final lessons of the school year, we came together as a class to discuss rereading and to reflect together. Following our whole class discussion, students went back to their seats to consider the topic independently. They sat at their tables and wrote about rereading. I had asked them to consider what texts they might still like to revisit during our last week of school and how they might choose to revisit the text (rereading, writing, and drama). As students worked independently I walked around the room having individual discussions with them about their perspectives on rereading. These one-on-one discussions had both pedagogical and research benefits. From a pedagogical standpoint, it provided a space for students to talk about their literacy practices. As a teacher, I wanted to provide a space for students to reflect on their own literacy practices and learning. From a research standpoint, eliciting children’s thoughts and experiences about literacy practices is often overlooked and many studies emphasize an adult perspective/lens. In analyzing the transcripts of the whole class discussion and the individual student discussions, several themes emerged around students’ perceptions of the purpose and value of rereading. Students’ discussion

of rereading centered on ways of knowing texts, ways of getting more from texts, ways of “doing” texts, and ways of thinking about rereading and coming together as a community of rereaders.

### **Ways of Doing Texts**

*“We do that so like, so we act it out, and then do a book so we know it more.”*

*~Simon*

One theme that emerged in students’ talk around rereading, was that of action. Students often used the language of “do” as in “do a book,” rather than terms like read, reread, or revisit. “Doing” books is action oriented and not passive; students wanted to go beyond listening to texts and actively discuss and take action around the texts. Included in students’ descriptions of “doing a book” were a broad range of activities connected to our read-alouds, such as: acting texts out, changing texts, writing about and rewriting texts, making posters and books, watching movies of books, and doing “something new.” Students particularly emphasized, during our discussion of rereading, their desire to revisit books or parts of books that they hadn’t had the chance yet to revisit. Sam suggested that we “do different parts that we haven’t really seen yet...we can act them out if we didn’t act one out.” Rachel revoiced Sam’s idea later in the conversation, saying “We should like *do* the other books that we didn’t *re-do*.” Students made clear that they had reasons for “doing” and “re-doing” a book, such as a desire to explore different parts of the book that we didn’t spend much time focusing on during our initial reading. Students also expressed that actively revisiting a text, through methods such as acting out a scene, helped them to learn. This was evident when Simon explained to the class why he thought we revisited texts: “We do that so like, so we act it out, and then *do* a book so



we know it more.” Simon’s idea that doing a book will help you “know it more” is interesting because acting a book out both requires that you have a working comprehension of the book in order to be able to take on the role of a character and act it out, but also points to the idea that by acting out a scene you can come to a deeper understanding of the characters and their thoughts, feelings, and actions in the book.

As I listened to students talk about their rereading, it became clear that students saw rereading as more than just listening to a book over again. The revisiting activities that students talked about wanting to do most were those that allowed for reader agency (e.g. using drama or writing to change parts in the text). Daphne talks about this in her interview, explaining that she rewrites parts in books, particularly if she doesn’t like what is happening, such as scenes with bullying. Rereading became a way for Daphne to grapple with areas of tension in the text and ultimately disrupt the text. Other students were also eager to engage with reimagining the texts we read. Mickey, when describing drama as his favorite rereading activity, describes how what he really likes is not just acting out parts in the books but rather acting out changes to parts in the books. Victorious describes her favorite rereading activity as making books that tell another character’s perspective, like we did when we rewrote *Hooway for Wodney Wat* from Camilla’s perspective. In each of these instances, it seems to be the act of making changes to a text, rather than the mode of text response (writing, drama) that is appealing to the students. As we reflected on rereading, students’ comments revealed that a major motivation for revisiting a text was to go back to parts they didn’t like, key moments of tension, and talk about them more or change them.

### Ways of Knowing & Understanding Texts

*“To like get more questions, to tell about the books, and get some memories that I want, like I can do at home sometimes.” ~Mickey*

During our class discussion of rereading, students also described how rereading helped them to know a text better. Rereading offered a reoccurring space for students to co-construct meaning around a text and to test out and confirm ideas about a text. As we discussed rereading, and students shared that rereading helped them to know texts better, I prompted them to consider if there were some books we’d read that they felt like they knew better than others. Students (Victorius, Ryan, Jacob, and others) consistently shared that the text they felt they knew best was *Hooway for Wodney Wat*- the text that we had revisited the most times during the year. Through rereading and revisiting this particular text in multiple ways, they had become more familiar with the text and its nuances, and had been able to solidify their knowledge of the text through multiple discussions with peers around the text. Texts that we’d only read once though, such as *The Sandwich Swap*, were in contrast identified by the students as texts we needed to revisit because they were still wondering things about the text and had things they wanted to change in the text.

A key aspect of knowing a text better seemed to center around remembering the text and our discussions of the text. This is an idea that Maddie initially brought up in our whole class discussion, sharing that “the reason why we go look back at a book to remember it and to remember what we were talking about.” Many of her classmates reiterated this sentiment later in the discussion and in the individual interviews as well. Carson shared his ideas on the value of using rereading to better remember texts, saying,

“So if we forgot, we can, so we can like remember what they do stuff and what they say.” Ryan voiced the same ideas in his interview, saying “if you reread a book then you can remember what happened in the book.” Mickey also focused on the memory aspect, describing to me that one reason why he wants to reread books is “To like get more questions, to tell about the books, and get some memories that I want, like I can do at home sometimes.” Mickey was not only student that valued rereading as a way to “get some memories,” nor was he the only child that continued to think about the texts at home. When asked, most students described thinking about the texts outside of school, and many were able to name specific books that they found themselves pondering in their time away from the classroom. The students’ descriptions of making memories suggests a materiality to rereading which lives in the body and can be enacted across time, space, and place.

### **Ways of Getting More/Taking from Texts**

*“You want to read it again because you have more questions about it, and because you like, maybe could do something new, with the book.” ~Kylee*

Another theme in students’ talk around rereading, was the notion of rereading as a way to take more from texts- perhaps a natural extension of the theme of knowing and understanding texts. Students described how, upon revisiting a text, they had the chance to reflect and to “get more” from texts. Students described rereading as a venue to share more about a text or “get *more* questions.” As we discussed the value of rereading together, it naturally led some students to bring up lingering questions they still had about some of our read-aloud texts, and to suggest that we revisit them. For example, Eric suggested we reread the book *The Sandwich Swap*, and shared that he still had questions

about the book, including “I’m wondering why if they were both friends, they would say ‘your sandwich looks gross’ and ‘your sandwich looks yucky’” and “Why would they have a food fight in the lunch room when you’re really not supposed to do it? I’m wondering why they would do it?” Eric’s questions show that he continues to think about our read-aloud texts for days after we’ve read them, and that is he is looking to move beyond a literal “knowing” of the text and instead looking for deeper understanding around character’s perspectives, motivations, actions, and feelings. Kylee also reflected on how having lingering questions about a text would be a motivation for revisiting the text, “You want to read it again because you have more questions about it, and because you like, maybe could do something new, with the book.” Interestingly, Kylee also points out that even an “old” text offers readers possibilities for something “new” through rereading.

Students also reflected on rereading as a way to learn more from a text. Jacob and Rachel both used the phrase “learn more about it” as they described the purpose of rereading a book. Victorious and Eddie focused on how a reader can “get more information” from rereading a text, with Eddie explaining “You get more information and you get to say about the book more” when you reread. Victorious shared that she’d reread a book “Because I would want to get more information from the book...like understand more what it’s about.” These comments suggest an understanding that, as readers, they have agency to decide when and how to return to a text for more information, for pleasure, or for taking action around a text.

Students recognized that rereading is not just a way to get more information from a book, but also a way for the reader to consider new and different ideas; as Eric

explained “We would read books over again to have different ideas.” Eddie also voices the idea that rereading helps readers “to get a different idea.” Kylee goes a step further and gives an example, explaining that we reread “Because we got different ideas... Like if someone said, like in the book *What Can We Do?*, that the traffic light wasn’t working, then on a different day we read that book they would say something different than it.” Kylee recognizes that when our class rereads texts, even though we are reading the same text, our conversation during rereading is different from our initial conversation of the text since we make different comments and choose to discuss and investigate different things. This notion of considering different ideas is at the heart of critical literacy.

### **Ways of Thinking about & Explaining the Value of Rereading Texts**

*“It’s just fun to reread books” ~Ryan*

As students discussed rereading together, they discussed it in a way that made clear that revisiting texts had become a naturalized activity in the classroom- just another normal part of our kindergarten day. This can be seen in Simon’s comment, “We’re supposed to do books, because that’s what you do in kindergarten.” Students felt strongly that we should continue to reread books in our classroom, and that students in other classes should do this as well. When I asked students to consider how they might explain rereading to another teacher, pointing out that actually not all teachers have their students reread books, Krystal suggested “If a teacher said ‘We only read them once,’ I would say ‘Why don’t you read them again? That will give your class more thoughts about the books.’” Rereading was not just an activity that students enjoyed in our kindergarten classroom, but also an activity they thought other students would benefit from as well.

As students discussed rereading, a discourse emerged around the appraisal of rereading. Students discussed rereading as an enjoyable and desirable classroom activity. When asked why we reread books, fun was cited as a reason, with students responding “Because it’s fun” (Mickey) and “It’s just fun to reread books” (Ryan). Students also spent time explaining what aspect of rereading they found to be most “fun” and what they “like” about rereading. Eric explained to the class, “I like how we got to write about the books and watch the movie and talk about them.” Victorious also talked about what she liked about revisiting books, the rewriting aspect, saying “I like making books about people from other books.” Rewriting books was also what Daphne described liking best, explaining “I like books and I like changing books.”

Multiple students used the language of “I want to” in order to describe next steps they wanted to take in rereading. Students showed they had thought about rereading, and had plans to continue their rereading in the future with specific books. Carson shared “I want to watch the movie of *Grace for President*.” Mickey similarly shared “I want to reread *Si, Se Puede: Yes We Can!* and *The Sandwich Swap*.” Mickey continued to bring up what he wanted to do in terms of rereading, throughout the discussion with comments like “I want to change that they did a food fight,” “I want to, I want to, I want to act the books,” and “I want to act some books out with my friends.”

Repeatedly as we reflected on rereading in the whole class discussion, instead of just discussing their views on rereading, students tried to persuade me (and their classmates) of titles we should reread. For example, one text that repeatedly came up in the discussion, was *The Sandwich Swap* (a book we had just recently read for the first time the week before). Students brought up parts in the text that bothered them and talked

about wanting to reread and change the text. Students also pointed to other texts on our bookshelf that we'd read, and they still wanted to talk about. Students asked if we could "act it out"- seemingly wanting to stop the discussion of rereading and dig in to working with the texts. Students also advocated for other revisiting activities they enjoyed, such as Carson, who particularly liked watching the movies of texts we'd previously read aloud, as a way of rereading. Carson argued that we should watch additional movies of books we'd read "So you can look at it and talk about it, so you can like remember what they did, and do stuff, do actions, and do stuff, and like it helps you, it helps you like, help you learn about don't be like mean." Students' reflection on rereading shows evidence that they not only enjoyed rereading and but also found it useful as readers and were eager to continue the practice.

### **Ways of Being in a Community of Re-readers**

*"I'm thinking that I want to act some books out with my friends." ~Mickey*

As the students discussed rereading together, they often revoiced and added on to what their classmates said about rereading. During our class discussion of rereading, students described rereading texts in a way that makes it clear that they see rereading as a collective activity, something not done alone but instead in collaboration with peers. Instead of expressing interest in rereading a book on their own, students suggest that "we should" reread a particular book or "we should" do a particular activity together around one of our books. Students continually use the pronoun "we" as they discuss the rereading they have done, their thoughts on rereading, and their future ideas and plans for rereading.

One of the students' favorite ways to revisit texts during the school year, was through drama. As we discussed rereading books, Mickey many times brought up his desire to "act it out." Mickey tells the class about how "I'm thinking that I want to act some books out with my friends." He enjoyed dramatizing scenes from the book because it was something he could enjoy doing with friends-dramatizing was not a solo activity to him. Later, Mickey shares that acting books out is something he can even imagine doing at home: "Like I could have a book and like act it out with my family, and with my grandma and grandpa, and with my cousins." Although Mickey is eager to perform and act out books, he sees revisiting texts through drama as a social and collaborative activity, requiring classmates or family members to share in the process. Similarly, Krystal describes enjoying when the class dramatizes books for another reason, saying she liked when "we got to watch people act it out." While Mickey and Krystal enjoy different aspects of acting out texts (performing vs. being the audience) both point out how enjoyable it is to revisit texts within a community of re-readers, and the way that the shared experience of revisiting texts builds solidarity among readers in the classroom.

### **Discussion**

While it may be counterintuitive to think that a book would be more enjoyable upon a second, third, or fourth reading, since by then students have already heard the plot, my students tended to enjoy books even more once they had been read multiple times. These multiple readings of a text brought students an easy familiarity with the characters and storyline, and enabled them to experiment, take risks, and get creative in their thinking around the texts. While students spoke about enjoying rereading and having fun revisiting books in different ways, they were able to go further and articulate



ways they felt rereading helped them to become better readers. This data offers an important window into how young children experience the practice of rereading. Their perspectives have caused me to reflect on how students grew across the year as a community of rereaders, who helped each other to dig deeper into texts and co-construct knowledge around texts, and who revisited texts for their own purposes. The children's perspectives challenge commonplace understandings of literacy practices as an individual achievement or the emphasis on print literacy with young children. The children's voices offer compelling reasons why we should linger in texts.

The additional ways we revisited the texts beyond a basic rereading (such as through writing, drama, watching movies of the texts, etc.) were activities that made a lasting impression on students. These "revisiting activities" were more requested than a simple reread and were more often brought up in our whole class discussion of rereading as well as students' interviews on rereading. Rather than just stick close to the text as we revisited, students truly wanted to experiment with the texts and developed a literary imagination to reimagine the texts. This helped the students see the texts in new ways and from new perspectives, insert themselves into the text, talk back to the text, and even change the text. This not only fostered critical literacy skills, but also agency. Student agency in our rereading lessons was evident not just in students disrupting and changing texts, but also in students choosing which texts to reread, which parts of texts specifically to focus on in the rereading, and what rereading activity to do (writing, drama, etc.).

In the next chapter, I move on from my analysis of individual lessons, to look more broadly at the implications for rereading as a practice than can help scaffold young students' engagement with critical literacy. I consider the big picture of what my students

and I gained from a year-long curriculum of rereading, rewriting, and reimagining texts, and what other teachers and researchers may take away from this research. I also consider directions for future research.

## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

### Peeling Back the Layers: The Power of Re-reading Over Time to Extend

#### Comprehension

Foss (2002) uses the metaphor of “peeling the onion” as she describes working with privileged students who are not yet questioning texts or viewing them through a critical lens. Layer by layer, their thinking about themselves and the texts and issues changes with each successive activity she plans (reflections, a privilege walk, etc.). Foss’s description of “peeling the onion” with her students also seems an apt metaphor for what occurred with my students across a year of rereading. What helped my students peel back the layers and better understand complex texts and the critical issues within the texts? Activities like rewriting texts, dramatizing texts, and writing in role, where they had to put themselves in a bully, victim, or bystander’s shoes. As we reread books like *Hooway for Wodney Wat* over and over again, we were peeling back layers of understanding with each reread. Each time we picked up the book there was something new to discover- another unexplored layer. Students would read other texts around the same theme (bullying), which then caused them to want to go back and reread a prior text. In this case, one text gave them an inkling that there was something more to think about in another text. I watched this play out in particular as we read the book *Tough!* which was written from the perspective of the bully (one of the few books written from this perspective). After reading this book, students were eager to reread *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, curious to think more about the bully’s perspective now that it was fresh in their mind from another text. If we had never returned to reread, what themes would have gone unexplored or unchallenged in the text? A quiet student like Sean barely spoke up

during our initial reading of *William's Doll*, yet later in the year, he led our class in a reread and dramatization of a key scene around gender stereotyping in this text in order to help us think more deeply about this difficult issue.

Just as the students were exploring new layers of understanding with each reread, as a teacher I too was expanding my understanding of these texts and themes, and deepening my own critical analysis of the texts. The rereading activities opened my eyes to how much opportunity one simple picture book could hold. Books that I thought we had looked at from every angle ended up having more to unpack and discuss.

Although we revisited and reread many of our books several times, many of these texts still had missed opportunities in terms of critical analysis. The texts I chose to read aloud had many themes at play, and despite my agenda, students were at times willing to pick up some issues for closer critical analysis while rejecting other themes for closer inspection. For example, books like *Each Kindness* helped us look at issues of friendship, kindness, and exclusion in depth, but the issue of social class was less well explored. Texts like *Amazing Grace*, with a bullying incident focused dually on gender and race, meant that students might explore one issue less (in this case gender) while they explored another issue more closely (racial discrimination). However, while an issue might not be fully explored in one text, that same issue might be picked up in another text in the unit and explored more deeply there (as was the case with students choosing to address gender more critically with the book *William's Doll*). This underlies the importance of teachers putting together a diverse text set, so that the different books both complement each other, but also provide opposing perspectives.

Although our bullying text set only included a handful of texts, I found closer analysis of fewer texts helped my students dig deeper. A broader text set might have introduced new perspectives, but in a way we ended up with “more texts” by simply innovating on the texts in our unit by rewriting and dramatizing changes to them. We didn’t always need a novel text to introduce a new perspective, as we were able to imagine and role play new perspectives ourselves. Time also afforded students new perspectives. When we returned to a book after weeks or months to reread it, we brought new perspectives and experiences we’d gained in the interim- we were not the same readers we were before- we had accumulated new understandings of the world and the theme of bullying. The text hadn’t changed, but the readers had, and thus the readers’ responses were different.

### **Taking Action: Jumping Inside the Text**

Through rereading, writing, and drama students were engaging in the dimensions of critical literacy. While some components of critical literacy are easy to imagine working into any lesson, such as looking at a scene from multiple perspectives, some aspects of critical literacy can be more challenging. Social action is often the hardest dimension of critical literacy for classroom teachers to enact. The approach I used with my students brings action into play through embodied enactments. To become a person that actually takes action when witnessing injustice, it helps to rehearse taking action, and to build confidence and courage in speaking back to oppression and injustice. Drama allows students to rehearse ways to make the world a better place and rehearse alternate narratives. As Krystal mentioned in one of our book discussions around bullying, she had been bullied before, and she’d said nothing. However, after our discussions and role

plays, she said she planned to act differently should she ever find herself in a situation like that again, and that she would speak up and tell the other child to stop bothering her.

Simply discussing texts read aloud in the classroom can allow both students and teacher space and distance from the injustice in the text- and this can be a privilege. As readers, we can passively read about an act of oppression, and refuse to engage, or speak up about it, rather remaining complicit in the author's scenes of injustice and in how that author has chosen for the characters to treat each other. Dramatizing texts offers a way for students to get closer to the issues in the text, taking on the roles of characters as they face injustice or even perpetuate injustice. Students were forced into problem solving as they dramatized the scenes, thinking: Why did this happen? What should I do? How could this be different? Students in our dramatized scenes showed they acutely felt the weight of injustice- I immediately think back to an image of Victorious playing the role of the bully Camilla- Victorious balling up her fists, arms muscles tensing as she shouts insults at a classmate. I also vividly remember Sophie (in the role of Rodney Rat), shrinking away from Victorious's portrayal of Camilla, hiding behind our easel, trying to make her body smaller and more invisible by hunching over and not making eye contact. Through these dramatizations these students truly felt, both physically and emotionally, what it was like to be a victim and what it was like to be a bully. Just as that memory of those scenes stick with me as the teacher, a student's memory of what it felt like to dramatize and embody a character could stick with them, and add to their understanding both of the text, and of injustice more broadly.

### **Opening Spaces for Critical Literacy**

Critics of critical literacy approaches with young students often point to the texts and topics addressed as being too challenging. Save these texts for when children are older, for when they can decode the texts independently, for when they can meet the comprehension and vocabulary demands, and for when they are more mature and better able to handle the complex themes. However, perhaps it is not the texts that need to change so much as our conceptualizations of how to scaffold young learners so that even more complex texts are accessible. Through a curriculum of rereading, students can be exposed to texts multiple times, with their understanding spiraling and compounding with each exposure. Through supportive discussion, writing, and drama activities, students can begin to dissect the complexities of power and justice in these texts. Through revisiting texts, young learners can begin to build a set of tools for critically analyzing texts, tools which I argue they can then begin to bring to even the initial reads of seemingly complex texts, such that rereading is no longer a necessity for every text.

I found that using drama techniques to further explore read-aloud texts could open a variety of spaces for students to engage in critical literacy. Process drama techniques provided my students with opportunities to reimagine texts, and to use social imagination to consider alternate ways a scene could play out, different words characters could have used or actions they could have taken. Drama also provided opportunities for students to consider multiple perspectives. While a text's author might focus the reader in only on the perspective of the main character(s), upon acting out scenes in texts and writing from the perspectives of different characters, students began to infer what other characters might be thinking. Students also developed agency through the drama activities, and

disrupted and changed stories so that they could empower certain characters or stop actions they did not like. This agency grew from an increasing flexibility in the students' thinking around texts, and students' increasing awareness that texts are written from a particular author's perspective and authors position their readers in different ways. These dramatizations also provided a different mode of representing understandings about texts, particularly for students who were not or who did not perceive themselves to be accomplished writers, and thus were less comfortable with written modes of response.

Each process drama technique offered different affordances and constraints. A key affordance of utilizing tableaux was lingering in a moment of tension and more closely dissecting each character's stance- this was of immense benefit when supporting students in considering multiple perspectives. A constraint of tableaux however, was the lack of action. If students enact an oppressive tableau from a text, the logical next step for critical literacy is to disrupt the scene and take action by changing it- which is exactly what my students did as they dramatized scenes. The technique of dramatizing scenes, and acting out changes to scenes allowed students to take action for social justice, and empower characters in the text (such as victims of bullying, and bystanders). One constraint of this dramatizing though is that it can happen quite quickly and spontaneously, so unless the teacher calls for reflection and discussion afterwards, this type of dramatization doesn't get the same fine-grained analysis and forethought that writing in role and tableaux can have. Writing in role helps zoom in on individual characters more deeply. Yet, for some students that may not be confident writers, the writing process can be a constraint of writing in role. We found creative ways to work around this in my classroom, by having students that were less comfortable with writing



instead spend more time drawing the character, paying attention to include facial expressions, attention color and mood, and speech bubbles or thought bubbles (which require less text).

### **Teacher-Researcher Tensions**

Ruth Shagoury Hubbard (1995) describes how “Teacher research often starts with a tension: an un-named ‘something’ that rubs against our teaching life like a pebble in a shoe.” (p.140). It is this tension that propels teacher action research cycles, and continuous reflection, and we need to “pay attention to those little stones that make us uncomfortable.” (Hubbard, 1995, p.140). Over the course of the school year, I found many such tensions as I reflected on my practice. Indeed, it was the central tension of how to support my kindergarteners in taking on critical literacy from the very first days of school that led to this study in the first place. As my action research developed over the course of the school year, new tensions arose, and required reflection and action on my part, thus leading my teaching and research in new directions. These tensions are inevitable for teachers intent on improving their classroom practice, and are to be embraced by teacher-researchers.

### **Tensions in Lesson Planning**

Over the course of the study, I found that teacher-researcher tensions surfaced for me around: following students’ lead, allowing students to take up certain texts/issues while they resisted critically examining other texts/issues, balancing critical literacy with curricular demands and time limitations, and the extent of teacher facilitation during lessons. As I worked to plan lessons that would engage my students in critical literacy, I often struggled with how I could plan a lesson in advance, yet still aim for it to be

student-directed and student-led as much as possible. Wasn't planning a lesson that I wanted students to lead contradictory? As a result, I would often plan certain pages I wanted to pause and discuss further in a text, or certain questions I might ask students during the read-aloud, but I would leave flexibility in my plans in case students had interest in discussing other pages in the text or other questions arose out of students' discussion. I remained cognizant that it was not about planning the "perfect" teacher prompts, but rather students' questions during a read-aloud can just as often lead to critical literacy. Indeed, as I followed students' lead during lessons, I at times wondered: Is this critical literacy? Are they really getting the deeper messages in this book? Are we going somewhere productive with this question/comment/activity? It took ongoing reflection and analysis after each successive lesson to help me identify moments of critical literacy in our read-alouds, and closer analysis of these moments to see how they arose and were sustained.

The issue of time was also recurring tension as I planned and taught the read-aloud lessons. Each of the lessons was roughly an hour in length, which is a significant amount of time in the typical kindergarten day. Feeling pressed for time is something that most teachers can identify with, as there is so much curriculum to squeeze into the school day. The time I had set aside for read-alouds certainly could have been used for other types of literacy lessons. However, I found that my students were engaging in literacy in diverse ways during our read-aloud sessions. Rather than sitting on the rug, passively listening to me read for an hour, students were engaged in whole group and small group discussion around texts, interactive writing around texts, independent and small group writing in response to texts, and dramatizing around texts. Further, having done other

action research studies that included read-alouds, I was aware that students need extended blocks of time in order to collaboratively co-construct meaning around a texts and come to understand a text more deeply- this is work that cannot be rushed. As a result, there were times when we spent 10-15 minutes discussing one page in a text, and other times when we moved through an entire text in that same amount of time.

An additional tension for me as I planned my lessons was a constant sense of uncertainty in how the lessons would go. I had the ever-present feeling that I didn't know what might come up in our discussions, and this was compounded by the fact that many of the read-aloud texts dealt with difficult social issues, ranging from racism to gender discrimination and stereotyping. Although I had read many of the read-aloud texts to previous kindergarten classes, and thus had built some expertise in facilitating conversations around social issues, I recognized that no two classes are the same and one class can approach and discuss the same book very differently than another class. This unpredictability can deter some teachers from engaging in critical literacy lessons in the classroom, as it often seems safer to teach a low-risk lesson where you are more confident in the anticipated outcome. However, by taking risks into unexpected pedagogies, like dramatizing texts, my students and I both were able to make tremendous growth. I found as a teacher-researcher inquiring into critical literacy, I really had to become comfortable with the uncomfortable. It helped that I had been conducting action research in my classroom for many years, and had experienced those same unsure and uncomfortable feelings before, yet knew that they had many times resulted in positive learning experiences for both me and my students.

### **Tensions around Text Choice**

Another tension that arose for me during the school year, was around text choice. I knew the power of a diverse and supportive themed text set from prior action research studies in my classroom (Labadie, Pole, & Rogers, 2013). Thus, I wanted to carefully pre-plan many of the texts in order to support my students in their critical literacy engagement. However, I also recognized the power of student choice in reading. Ultimately, I was able to find some balance. During initial units, like our first unit on taking action for change, I picked all of the texts. As the year went on, I increasingly looked to students to pick both our themes and our texts- this is how we settled on the theme of bullying, a theme we investigated spanning much of the school year. Students picked this theme, and I brought into the classroom a range of texts for them to pick from- some that I had read before and some that I had not. At times students would pick the text, as they did with *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, and other times I would pick the texts in order to introduce new perspectives on the topic, as I did with the book *Tough!* I never anticipated reading a book like *Hooway for Wodney Wat* over and over again, eventually revisiting it ten times across the school year. This is something that arose out of student interest, but yet was useful to my teacher goals in that students' engagement and familiarity with the text enabled me to introduce new critical literacy techniques.

I continued to struggle a bit both during and after the school year with *Hooway for Wodney Wat* as it was not a text I would have picked to highlight in my classroom, and is not one I have chosen to return to as a read-aloud since. I found some aspects of the text troubling, such as the stereotypical depiction of the bully as bigger than all of the other characters, and the celebration of Rodney for his exclusion of the bully. I also was

bothered by the fact that we were spending so much time on a text with cartoon animals, rather than a text with diverse and relatable human characters. I was concerned that my students might be able to distance themselves from the text since the characters were animals, rather than real children, and perhaps not make connections between the text and the types of bullying they were likely to encounter in real life. I wondered if they had picked the text for its illustrations alone, which were clearly targeted to kids used to books, shows, and movies depicting cute little animals. I wondered if it wouldn't be better for me to suggest we return to revisiting books like *Amazing Grace* and *Each Kindness* instead, as they are books that clearly brought up issues of race, gender, and class in the context of friendship and bullying. However, as I began analyzing my lessons, and I realized the critical work that students were able to do with this particular text, I was reminded that it's not about choosing the perfect text (no text is perfect) and that a problematic text can in fact offer many productive places for critique. I was also pleasantly surprised that my students were able to grow their expertise with dramatizing and changing texts using *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, and then with time they were then choosing to transfer this expertise to other texts like *Amazing Grace* and *Each Kindness*.

My hope is that this action research study demonstrates the power of leveraging tensions arising from creating a critical classroom and using these tensions to transform the classroom and empower students as agents of change. In an era of high-stakes testing and scripted curriculum, teachers are often silenced and lack autonomy. Action research is a vital way for teachers to have a voice in education and reclaim their classrooms as spaces for inquiry, self-reflection, and action.

## **Contributions to the Literature**

### **Critical Literacy & Social Action with Young Children**

This study is novel in several regards. First, it contributes to a gap in the literature on how critical literacy read-alouds can be facilitated in early childhood, and more specifically on how young children engage in critical literacy practices through rereading and lingering over texts together. Comber (2013), in her review of critical literacy research, points out that “research in critical literacy remains comparatively rare in early childhood sites” and that there is a need for researchers to “conduct micro-analyses of the ways different children participate in critical literacy curricula” (p. 596-597). Studies of critical literacy have shown the power of reading texts aloud to facilitate critical discussion (Leland, Harste, & Huber, 2005; Souto-Manning, 2009) but often the text is read just once. Studies of rereading have focused on how it supports comprehension, vocabulary development, and enjoyment (Hedin & Conderman, 2010; Lynch, 2008; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007) but have not often engaged with facilitating critical literacy. Thus, this study bridges the gap between studies of critical literacy and those that address repeated read-alouds.

This study also contributes to the field of critical literacy by reimagining what constitutes the social action dimension of critical literacy. Social action need not only occur outside of the classroom, through large public actions. Rather, I argue that my students were taking action for social justice on a daily basis in our kindergarten classroom. Students took action as they re-wrote texts to show new perspectives or imagine alternate possibilities for characters. Students embodied characters during our dramatizations, and rehearsed through these dramatizations ways to treat others more

kindly, ways to stop bullying, and ways to make the world a better place. The stances my students took against stereotypes and discrimination in our texts were a form of individual and collective social action.

### **A Longitudinal Look at Critical Literacy Practices**

The second novel aspect of this study is the longitudinal nature of examining critical literacy learning across an entire school year. Many studies of critical literacy have taken a short-term snapshot of a lesson or unit in a classroom, rather than document a year-long process of critical literacy engagement. By looking at how students' reading changed from November, when they were discussing many read-aloud texts for the first time, to January when students were experimenting with rereading and rewriting texts, to April when students began dramatizing texts, it is possible to see the winding path critical literacy may take in a classroom. A year-long investigation into critical literacy makes it possible to see how students continued to spiral deeper into their understanding of texts and social issues as the school year developed, and how students' understandings layered over time with each rereading and revisiting. Looking just at the beginning or ending of the school year would mean missing that rich development over time- a key component- as critical literacy work with young children takes quite a bit of time. With a longitudinal look at critical literacy, we get to see how children grow and develop in their meaning making across space and time.

### **An Insider Perspective**

Many studies are told either from the perspective of an outside researcher looking in on a classroom, or an outside researcher working in collaboration with a classroom teacher. This study adds to the insider perspective of life in a critical literacy classroom,

from the perspective of the classroom teacher. As a teacher, I long to hear the voices of other educators – their practices, tensions, decisions, and celebrations. In this dissertation, I have tried to provide that window into life in my classroom that will support other teachers in their critical literacy journeys. Similarly, it is rare for teachers to be positioned as knowledge makers. Yet, I am convinced this is what we are. In the midst of state and national standards, increasing numbers of standardized tests, professional development that does not meet teachers’ interests or needs, I fear that educators are becoming ‘de-professionalized.’ I know that as a literacy specialist and coach with years of classroom experience that I have the subject and pedagogical expertise to support my students’ learning and development. I have claimed my classroom as a site where I exercise my professional autonomy and public intellectualism. I should stress that this space was not given to me. In particular, as a teacher-researcher focused on critical literacy, I find that the insider perspective is all the more relevant. As teachers we are modeling for our students how we as adults take action for change, and one of the key ways that I work for change as a teacher is through enacting critical pedagogy in my classroom and using my voice as a teacher-researcher to show other teachers possibilities for social justice education.

### **A New Way to Conceptualize Close Reading and Accelerative Models of Literacy Development**

This study speaks back to prevalent discourses about close reading, and offers an alternative way of understanding how texts can be revisited in ways that move beyond how close reading is being enacted. Close reading has often been conceptualized in connection with the Common Core State Standards as a way to closely analyze short



passages through multiple readings, annotation, use of text-dependent questions where students cite evidence from the text, and discussion- with the ultimate goal being a more precise understanding of the text (Fisher & Frey, 2014). However, I argue that close reading need not only involve rote repeated readings, or use a narrow set of tools. Rather, I found my students were able to do a close read of texts through revisiting texts using writing and drama activities. Rather than cite evidence from the text in answering text-dependent questions posed by a teacher, my students used evidence from the text when they enacted scenes and tableaux; students used clues in the text to show how characters were feeling during dramatizations using facial expressions, dialogue with clear tone and expression, and body positioning in relation to other characters. Students' dramatizations showed evidence of their close reading, as well as a way to reconsider how to help students arrive at a closer understanding of texts.

This study also complicates accelerative models of literacy development. In an era of benchmark standards, teachers and children alike are socialized into the inherent value in progression through guided reading 'levels.' There is value attached to the idea of progressing through books and levels, moving up the alphabet chain of guided reading levels. My practice complicates this understanding a bit. While rereading is built into guided reading instruction, the purpose is quite different from what I have illustrated in this book. Rereading within guided reading is a technical approach meant to provide students with text that is within a range of easy. Rereading provides students with fluency and gets them 'warmed up' as readers. Asking students to reread a text in guided reading provides an opportunity for the teacher to take a running record on a familiar book and assess students' processing strategies. In essence, it is a means to an end; to 'accelerate' a

student as a reader to the next higher guided reading level. This is an important part of literacy instruction; especially for readers who are below their grade level peers or who find print literacy to be complex and confusing. However, my study offers potential new insights into the practice of rereading during guided reading. Rather than treating this important practice as a means to an end; teachers might capitalize on this practice in strategic and critical ways. For example, as students reread their guided reading books, they could be asked to consider alternate possibilities for the text. Student might identify whose perspective the text is written from, and how the text could be written differently from another perspective. Students could consider what information is given in the text, what information is missing, and how that shapes their understanding of the text. Students might also consider, during their rereading, potential actions they could take connected with the text. Likewise, the practice of rereading could be integrated into students' independent reading time. As students take time to reread familiar books independently, they could consider different possibilities in texts- different words or actions characters could take, and how scenes could potentially play out differently. Upon rereading students can also examine the author's purpose for the text, and how that is communicated to the reader.

My practice also troubles certain aspects of the model of literacy acceleration itself. Literacy acceleration implies a quickened pace through levels and texts. What I have shown throughout this book is the need to slow down, to linger in texts, to revisit, and to think again about characters, storylines, and ideas. In the rush to get to the next book and the one after that, we are losing the richness of reading storybooks, and the critical importance of reading for meaning. Comprehension is not the result of the volume

of books read, but rather can be built by examining fewer texts more deeply- quality over quantity. My students showed improved understanding of our classroom read-alouds after they had the time they needed to explore the texts and their illustrations, pose their own questions about the texts, and revisit parts of the texts that interested or confused them, so that they could seek to better understand and connect with these texts.

### **Transferability to Other Classroom Contexts**

While this study was conducted in a kindergarten classroom, I believe it has implications for other classroom contexts. Rereading as a form of critical literacy could be transferred to readers at just about any age/grade level from older elementary students to college students. Readers at all levels could deepen their understanding of texts by revisiting them and looking at them in new ways. While the use of drama was particularly effective with playful and imaginative young kindergarteners, drama could also be used as an entry point into critical literacy with older readers, in particular as a way to engage them with understanding the multiple viewpoints in a text that is more difficult to relate to in terms of characters or setting. By acting out characters, or setting up tableaux, students begin to better understand how characters are thinking and feeling. I noticed that multiple readings also gave my students a greater confidence in discussing texts, and I imagine that repeated readings would similarly be useful for struggling readers across the grade levels, as it could give them an increased familiarity with the text making it easier for them to try out more sophisticated comprehension and critical literacy skills with the texts.

### **Areas for Future Research**

By the end of the school year, our critical rereading work had begun to seep outside of the daily read-aloud time, permeating the whole school day, from guided reading lessons where students started suggesting revisions to their leveled reading group books, to independent reading time where students began to independently revisit books I'd read aloud to them. During literacy centers, students engaged in rewriting books in our classroom writing center, acting out scenes from read-alouds in our drama center, and listening to books we'd read together on tapes at our listening center. Future research might zoom in on rereading, rewriting, and dramatizing in some of these small group settings such as guided reading and centers, or focus more specifically on the transfer of critical literacy skills from whole group lessons (such as read-alouds) into other classroom literacy practices. Future research could also look at the degree to which rereading stays with students as they progress through the grade levels, as it would be interesting to interview students several years later to see the extent to which rereading practices continued to be a part of their literate lives in and out of school.

My foray into process drama began in April, close to the end of the school year. While my students had many opportunities during the final two months of school to delve into a range of process drama techniques, I was not able to see what opportunities process drama would have afforded them in analyzing texts earlier in the school year when they were just beginning their critical literacy journey. More research in process drama earlier in the school year, and across a broader time span and range of texts could bring new insights into utilizing process drama as a tool for critical literacy.

I am fortunate because action research provides me with an authentic venue to plan for my own continued professional development, growth, and learning. During the time I conducted this study and continuing to the present day, I seek out ways to share my practices with other social justice educators. For example, I recently modeled for a group of teachers using the children's book *Ron's Big Mission* (Blue & Naden, 2009) to facilitate conversations about racial justice. During this workshop, I engaged children in drama to reenact parts of the book. As I reflected on this experience, I realized that this is a book I have read and reread many times myself. Every time I do so, I notice new aspects of the text and illustrations. I have new insights on the text based on the different conversations I have with different groups of students and teachers around this book, and the unique background experiences they bring to the text. With each reread, I build my expertise with this particular text, and critically analyze new aspects of the text. Just as my kindergarteners found joy in rereading texts, I too have come to appreciate how lingering in texts supports my work as a social justice educator.

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**APPENDIX**

**Appendix A: Classroom Photographs**



View from the front of the classroom.



View from the back of the classroom.



View of the classroom library.



Students gathered on the classroom rug.



Students painting at the art center.



Students playing together at the puppet center.



Students working on a puzzle together at the alphabet center.



Students working on writing at their tables.

### Appendix B: Synopsis of Children's Literature Used in Study

<p><i>Amazing Grace</i> (Hoffman, 1991)</p>	<p>In this book, a young girl named Grace wants to be Peter Pan in her school play. Classmates cite her gender and race as reasons why she cannot play the role of Peter Pan. However, with the support of her family, Grace ultimately wins the role of Peter Pan.</p> <p>Key themes include: race, gender, bullying.</p>
<p><i>City Green</i> (DiSalvo-Ryan, 1994)</p>	<p>In this book, a young girl named Marcy is troubled by an abandoned city lot near her apartment. Together with other members of her community, they successfully work together to petition for the right to turn it into a community garden.</p> <p>Key themes include: social class, taking action.</p>
<p><i>Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type</i> (Cronin, 2000)</p>	<p>The cows do not believe they are being treated fairly on the farm. They write a letter to Farmer Brown asking for electric blankets in exchange for their milk. Together with the other farm animals, they go on strike, and ultimately they are successful in getting Farmer Brown to meet their demands.</p> <p>Key themes include: labor practices, taking action.</p>
<p><i>Dare!</i> (Frankel, 2012a)</p>	<p>This is one book in a three-book set. Each book in the set tells the story of a bullying incident from a different perspective. This book tells the story of a bullying incident from the perspective of a bystander. A young girl named Jayla watches as her classmate Luisa is bullied for wearing polka-dotted boots. Jayla grapples with what to do about the bullying she is witnessing.</p> <p>Key themes include: friendship, bullying.</p>
<p><i>Dom's Handplant</i> (Wilford, 1990)</p>	<p>This book tells the story of a young boy named Dom. He recognizes the need for a skate park in his local community, so that he and other kids have a safe place to skateboard. He successfully writes a letter and speaks to members of city hall to get a skate park built.</p> <p>Key themes include: taking action.</p>
<p><i>Each Kindness</i> (Woodson, 2012)</p>	<p>This book tells the story of a young girl named Maya, who moves to a new school. Other students refuse to play with her and tease her for having second-hand clothes and toys. After a lesson on kindness, a classmate wants to apologize to Maya</p>

	<p>about how she has treated her, but it is too late as Maya has moved.</p> <p>Key themes include: social class, friendship, bullying.</p>
<i>Grace for President</i> (DiPucchio, 2008)	<p>Grace learns about U.S. presidents in school, and is disappointed that there have been no female presidents. As a result, Grace decides to run for class president against her classmate Thomas. Grace sways her classmates with her ideas for how she can improve their school, and wins the election.</p> <p>Key themes include: gender, taking action.</p>
<i>Hooway for Wodney Wat</i> (Lester, 1999)	<p>In this book, Rodney Rat is teased at school because of his speech impediment. One day a new rodent, Camilla Capybara, joins their class and bullies everyone. In the end, Rodney finds a way to rid the class of the bully and is finally appreciated by his classmates.</p> <p>Key themes include: friendship, bullying, disability.</p>
<i>Oliver Button is a Sissy</i> (dePaola, 1979)	<p>This book tells the story of Oliver Button, a young boy who enjoys taking dance classes. Other children tease Oliver, and call him a sissy for being a boy that dances. However, Oliver persists, and keeps dancing.</p> <p>Key themes include: gender, bullying.</p>
<i>Say Something</i> (Moss, 2004)	<p>In this book, a student watches silently as other students are teased and bullied at her school. When she becomes a victim of bullying herself one day, she learns an important lesson. She decides to stand up for others in the future and say something when she sees bullying happening, rather than remaining a silent bystander.</p> <p>Key themes include: friendship, bullying, taking action.</p>
<i>Si, Se Puede! Yes We Can!: Janitor Strike in L.A.</i> (Cohn, 2002)	<p>This book tells the story of a young boy named Carlitos, whose mother is a janitor. His mother struggles to support their family on her janitor's wages, and she and her fellow janitors decide to go on strike. Carlitos and his classmates make signs to support the janitors as they strike for better pay.</p> <p>Key themes include: social class, labor practices, taking action.</p>



<p><i>The Sandwich Swap</i> (Al Abdullah, DiPucchio, 2010)</p>	<p>This book tells the story of two young girls from different cultural backgrounds. One likes to eat peanut butter and jelly for lunch and the other likes to eat hummus and pita. After teasing each other and starting a school food fight over their negative opinions of their differing lunches, the girls come to realize in the end how to appreciate their differences.</p> <p>Key themes include: cultural differences, friendship.</p>
<p><i>The Sneetches and Other Stories</i> (Seuss, 1961)</p>	<p>This book tells the story of fictional creatures, called sneetches. Some sneetches have stars on their bellies, and some have plain bellies. The star-belly sneetches initially discriminate against and exclude the plain-belly sneetches. However, after a visit from Mr. McMonkey McBean and his star machine, the sneetches come to realize that it doesn't matter if they have stars on their bellies or not, and that they should treat each other equally.</p> <p>Key themes include: differences, bullying, discrimination.</p>
<p><i>Tough!</i> (Frankel, 2012b)</p>	<p>This is one book in a three-book set. Each book in the set tells the story of a bullying incident from a different perspective. This book tells the story of a bullying incident from the perspective of the bully. A young girl named Sam teases a classmate named Luisa wearing polka-dotted boots. The reader is given insight on Sam's background, and what might have caused her to engage in bullying.</p> <p>Key themes include: friendship, bullying.</p>
<p><i>Weird!</i> (Frankel, 2012c)</p>	<p>This is one book in a three-book set. Each book in the set tells the story of a bullying incident from a different perspective. This book tells the story of a bullying incident from the perspective of the victim. A young girl named Luisa is bullied by her classmate for wearing polka-dotted boots. She struggles with how to cope with the bullying.</p> <p>Key themes include: friendship, bullying.</p>
<p><i>What Can We Do?</i> (Wall, 2005)</p>	<p>A group of kids are concerned about the safety of a busy intersection near the park where they play. The kids work together to successfully petition their town to install a stoplight near the park so it is safer for them to cross the street.</p> <p>Key themes include: friendship, bullying.</p>

<p><i>William's Doll</i> (Zolotow, 1972)</p>	<p>This book tells the story of a young boy named William who wants a doll to play with. His father disagrees with boys playing with dolls, and his brother and neighbor tease him about it. Ultimately, his grandma understands that he wants to practice being a dad with the doll and buys one for him.</p> <p>Key themes include: gender, bullying.</p>
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**Appendix C: Transcription Conventions**

<b>Transcript notation</b>	<b>Meaning of Notation</b>
(inaud)	Inaudible
/	1 second pause
<u>Underlined words</u>	Excerpt from a text being read aloud
[ ]	Actions taking place are described in brackets.
(name)	The name in parentheses is the child playing the character in the dramatization.

**Appendix D: Sample Transcript****Transcript from lesson on April 24.**

*Students spend approximately 30 minutes together on the rug revisiting and dramatizing texts. After the whole class lesson, students continue their work by independently around the room by revisiting texts of their choice and considering changes they'd like to dramatize.*

Meredith: I'm going to ask everyone to take a little scoot back behind the yellow line, can you both scoot back for me? Eddie can you sit in your spot please?//////// If there's not enough room for you why don't you just ask your friends to scoot back a little bit so you can have some room. I'm sure that they would do that for you. Great, okay now that we found a great spot for ourselves to sit during the lesson I wanted to tell you what I planned for today now I'm not planning on reading you a new book okay, I'm going to have us look back at some of the books we've already read, okay we talked a little bit about that yesterday and yesterday you gave me some ideas. We talked about some of the books we read before and you gave me some ideas of ones you wanted to revisit okay, so we're going to revisit some of those books; and do you remember when we read about Wodney Wat [Meredith holds up the book Hooway for Wodney for Wat]?

1:00

Meredith: And there were some parts in here that we were kind of thinking, oh we don't like how that's going in the book we kind of want to change that or maybe they're different ways that can happen. Do you remember that?

Students: Yeah

Meredith: Like one of those parts I remember, remember [Meredith opens book] when we wrote our own Wodney Wat story, was this page [Meredith turns to page in book] do you remember that page? Let me read it to you so you remember what happened in the book. It says [Meredith proceeds reads book] Then one day as the rodents were taking turns doing wheelies a new rodent, a very large rodent barged into the classroom and announced my name is Camilla Capybara. I'm bigger than any of you, I'm meaner than any of you, and I'm smarter than any of you. Then she added so there. Then do you remember the next part? Do you remember what's happening? What was happening Kylee?

Kylee: She was stepping on everyone's tails.

2:02

Meredith: Stepping on everyone's tails, yeah, how were the kids feeling?

Students: Sad.

Meredith: Yeah they weren't so happy about that were they when she join the class.

Eric: Yeah she could break their tails.

Meredith: But then you know what I was remembering? When we wrote our book about Wodney Wat, we kind of changed that part because this part of the book can happen lots of different ways. This author, Helen Lester, this is her book and she decided this is what's going to happen. But are there other things that could have happened on this page instead? If a different author wrote it? What else could have happened on this page?

Amanda?

Amanda: Um she could be nice.

Meredith: She could be nice, like what would she do?

Amanda: Um like couldn't be mean to the other people.

Meredith: Okay do you think she could've said something different? Because I know in this book she said (Meredith reading from the book) I'm bigger than any of you, I'm meaner than any of you, I'm smarter than any of you.

3:00

Meredith: Those were like her first words when she came to their classroom when she was a new student. Daphne what are you thinking?

Daphne: She could say "Hi, my name is Camilla Capybara."

Daphne: Would you like to be my friend?

Meredith: You know what she could do that. You know what I'm wondering, what if we could act that out, Daphne would you like to be Camilla Capybara? Come on up here. Because you have an idea of what she could say, and then could someone come up and be Wodney?

(Students raise their hands)

Meredith: Sophie could you come up and be Wodney? Ok hands down, hands down we'll have time to act out other things. Okay so what's Wodney doing in the story?

Eric: Hiding behind the door.

Meredith: Hiding behind the door with some other kids too. Okay then maybe Carson you could come up and you can be one of the rats like going on the wheel. Do you want

to pretend that you're going on the wheel? [Carson acting as a rat in the book] Okay. [Students laughing]. Oh okay sit down so you're going to hide behind the door? Here how about this is a door [uses easel board as the door], hide behind the easel.

4:00

Meredith: [speaking to Daphne] Now you Camilla and you are going to come in okay? So what are you going to say? Whisper to me what your plan is [Daphne whispers to Meredith]. Okay ready, okay are you ready, let's see what happens. [Speaking to Daphne] okay you go on over there and then come on into the room. [Speaking to Carson] Okay now let's see you going on the wheel. Let's look at our new classmate look someone new came to our class let's stop and look at her.

Daphne: Hi I'm Camilla Capybara, would you like to be my friend?

Meredith: [speaking to Carson] Oooh what should we say to her?

Carson & Students: Yes

Meredith: Yes, oooh and what else should we say to her?

Kylee: Would you like to be our friend?

Meredith: Would you like to be our friend?

Daphne: Yes

Rachel: Would you like to have a turn on the wheel?

Meredith: Would you like to have a turn on the wheel? Could we say that to her?

Carson & Students: Would you like to have a turn on the wheel?

Daphne: Yes please.

Meredith: Oh my goodness, sit down let's think about a different way this could go.

5:00

Meredith: Shh, ok, let's say that Camilla, what if she still came in and she wasn't very nice, what if she still said those things? What if she still said those things? Could the kids have said something to her? You have some ideas of what the kids could say to her? Okay what are you thinking Kylee?

Kylee: Umm they could say, she could be nicer because she really didn't say hi, she really didn't be nice to them, she was yelling when she came in.

Meredith: Oh so you can say you're yelling its hurting my ears can you be a little bit nicer? Okay what else can we say if she came in there? [Students raise their hands] Let's hear from some kids that haven't had a chance to share yet. Victorious what are you thinking?

Victorious: Umm they can be like can you start the day in a little bit more nicer way.

6:04

Meredith: Do you think that they could still invite her to play with them?

Students: Yes

Meredith: And do you think she might change her mind and be nicer?

Students: Yeah

Meredith: Maybe. Okay so maybe let's act this out and I want everyone to have a turn so if you're not acting this one out don't worry you have a turn on a different page, no worries. Okay, so Kylee since you had the idea of what we could say, do you want to stand up here and being one of the rodents in the class? Okay and um were going to need someone to be Camilla okay. So Victorious do you want to be Camilla? Okay and then maybe we need another classmate also that can maybe invite her to play, Joey you want to be it, okay come on up. Sit down on your bottoms. No come over here Joey. [Victorious proceeds to hide, Meredith speaking to Victorious] No, no one's hiding. No one is hiding behind the door on this one. Okay so you wait over there Camilla (Victorious) have to talk to the classmates about a plan.

7:00

[Meredith whispering to Kylee and Joey about the scene] What's your plan for what you're going to say [Meredith whispering inaud, 10sec]. [Meredith whispering to Victorious about the scene refers back to the book, 8 sec]. Okay Camilla (Victorious) do you know what you're going to say? [Whispering with Victorious] I'm Camilla Capybara I'm bigger than you, I'm meaner than you, and I'm smarter than you.

Meredith: Okay are you ready? Okay let's see what happens this time Camilla (Victorious) come on in we're looking at you.

Victorious: Hi I'm Camilla Capybara, I'm bigger than you, I'm meaner than you, and I'm smarter than you. So there! [students laughing]

Meredith: Ooh, let's see what the other rodents say to her. Kylee what do you want to say to her?

Kylee: You're being too loud can you please stop it, you're hurting my ears can you please stop you're hurting my ears, can you please stop yelling?

Joey: Can you be my friend please?

Meredith: What do you want to say to them Camilla (Victorius)?

Victorius: Yes forgive me please.

Joey: It's okay

8:00

Meredith: I really like how Camilla change how she acted when some of the kids in her class showed kindness to her. Okay go ahead and sit down. [Students talking and laughing] Shh, okay sit back down, okay this is pretty fun isn't it? [Meredith and whole class is laughing, 5 sec]. Okay I have another part, this is the part I wanted to change because when we were reading this book there was a part in the end where Camilla she was really not really being a bully anymore to them but guess what?

Student (unclear which student): She was being a bully to the leaves.

Meredith: Well she thought that Wodney said to wake up to leaves right, but he really meant rake them up. You know what I noticed that the kids in the class they [Meredith turns page in the book and shows illustration] were laughing at her I was worried about that part because I thought that that's really hurting Camilla's feelings.

Eric: And Wodney.

Kylee: They both are-they're all mean.

Meredith: So I was wondering like is there other ways this could have gone?

9:01

Meredith: Is there something else that could of happen in the end when Wodney was playing Simon Says with them? Wodney said to rake the leaves, but he said to wake the leaves is there something else that could've happened? Okay what are your ideas? What is something else that could have happened there? Oh raise your hand, raise your hand wait, Rachel what are you thinking?

Rachel: She could have said are you saying the r?

Meredith: Yeah but she doesn't know that she doesn't know that he talks differently does she? So she probably couldn't ask that. But like is there anyone in this scene that does know that Wodney speaks differently?



[Students raise their hands] Eddie?

Eddie: Like Camilla Capybara

Meredith: But does Camilla Capybara know that Wodney speaks differently?

Eric: The kids!

Meredith: Oh, do the other kids know?

Students (2-3 total): no/yes

Meredith: So when Rodney says wake the leave and she starts trying to wake them up what can happen different?

[Students raise hands]

Meredith What do you thinking? Liz?

Liz: Maybe she could like pick out a rake and then rake leaves.

Meredith: So she would rake them she would know what he meant? How would she know what she meant Daphne?

Daphne: Also one of them can say you have to rake the leaves.

Meredith: So one of them can tell her oh no Rodney means rake the leaves?

Carson: He doesn't know s words.

Meredith: That he has a hard time saying r's so he really means rake them. So let's try that, so I think that we need someone to be Rodney. Ok, Jacob come on, let's put our, if you've had a chance to come up and perform let's let some other kids have a chance. Now we need someone to be Camilla, how about Rachel. Kindergarteners, I want to continue having a good time with you so can you sit down on your bottoms criss cross.

11:01

Meredith: We probably need some other kids, especially the kid that is going to be able to explain this to Camilla.

[Students raise their hands]

Meredith: You've had your turn, someone who hasn't have a turn Krystal have you had a turn?

Krystal: No

Meredith: Okay come on up and then, how about Maddie do you want to come up too? Okay take a little scoot back. Okay so let's think about this now if you're Wodney. Sit down all the way.

Student: I can't see.

Meredith: We're going to find a way for everyone to see can you scoot back for me so Maddie can stand there? Thank you okay perfect. Okay now if your Wodney you're going to say [Meredith whispers] wake the leaves right?

Jacob: hmm mms [indicates yes]

Meredith: Wake right, wake. Now Camilla (Rachel) when he said that you're going to try to like what?

Rachel: Wake the leaves

Meredith: You're going to try to pick up the leaf and wake it up right? Okay so what about you two [students on the rug start to speak]

Meredith: Ooh ooh let's hear their ideas what are they going to say?

12:02

Krystal & Maddie: (inaud, 6 sec)

Meredith: And maybe you can show him like look (inaud, 5 sec).

Eddie: Ms. Labadie, the leaves can kind of be like that apple.

Meredith: Okay now, in the book the kids are laughing and teasing her. Is that going to happen? When she does that are we going to laugh at her and tease her?

Students: No

Meredith: No no no no

Eddie: Wodney isn't

Meredith: Well I don't know about that, not on that page. Okay let's see what happens okay Rodney (Jacob) are you ready? Ok Rodney (Jacob) we're playing Simon Says- tell us what to do.

Jacob: Wake the leaves

Meredith: Okay what do you do?

[Students role playing to wake the leaves]

Jacob: Stop

Meredith: Oh let's see what her classmates say?

Krystal: Camilla, Wodney really means to rake the leaves.

Maddie: You get a rake and then you rake the leaves [motioning raking leaves]

Rachel: Like this? [motioning raking leaves]

13:00

Meredith: What do you want to say to them Camilla (Rachel)?

Rachel: Thank you.

Krystal & Maddie: You're welcome.

[Students began to talk and laugh amongst themselves 15, sec]

Meredith: You know what we have done a lot of work thinking about different ways that Wodney Wat could happen and you know what I started thinking yesterday one of the books you wanted to look at again was Dare, now this is not a book, [students began talking] So yesterday you told me that this was one of the books you wanted to read again and we never read it again, so I picked out a few pages maybe we can we can look at them again and maybe I don't know how they can happen differently we haven't talked about how they can go differently.

14:03

Meredith: So maybe there are pages that you want to think about. So I'll show you the first page once I see everyone sitting the right way ready. Let's take a deep breath [students inhale/exhale] calm yourself down. Now do you remember in this book Jayla was telling the story and do you remember that Jayla was watching what was happening to some of her classmates. Jayla was watching when Sam was being a bully and at first Sam was//

Student: Who's Jayla//

Meredith: Right here Jayla [points to book] remember Sam was kind of teasing Jayla at first, you remember that and then one day the new kid Luisa came to school and Sam started teasing her remember she was teasing her about her polka dotted boots.

Student: Yeah

Meredith: Ok well Jayla was watching that, so let me read to you this page.

15:04

Meredith: [reading from the book] One day Sam started picking on a girl name Luisa instead of me. Those boots are weird. Luisa's nice she smiles and laughs and wears what she likes, I felt relieved I wasn't the one being bullied, I felt bad for Luisa, but I felt good for me. Why do you think she felt good for herself?

Eric: Because Sam wasn't teasing her, Sam was teasing Luisa.

Meredith: Think your head this author have written this part differently? Could something different have happen on this page? [Students raise their hands] raise your hand if you have a different idea of how this could have gone? Thinking your head, Jacob what are you thinking?

Jacob: Maybe she could say I like your, I like your polka dotted boots.

16:01

Meredith: Who would say that?

Jacob: Sam

Meredith: Sam? Should we try that out? [Students raise their hands] no hands down, let's have someone who hasn't had a turn yet? Let's have kids who haven't had a chance to do it. So Liz you want to come on up you want to be with Luisa? And who would like to be Sam? Sean do you want to be Sam? No you're going to be Luisa with the polka dotted boots. And here is Sam (Sean) he's the bully and we probably need someone to be Jayla who is watching, okay okay how about Simon come on up okay. Okay, Simon, you want to stand right there? Now Liz you're going to be the one with the jump rope and you have polka dotted boots, [Meredith speaking to Sean] and you're going to be Sam the bully, and you you're going to be watching while you do the monkey bars, can you do the monkey bars?

17:00

Meredith: Okay ready? Ok now Liz book over here because Sam (Sean) has to tell you something.

Sean: Your boots are weird [student began laughing].

Meredith: Now what did Jacob tell us, listen now what did Jacob tell us about how this to go differently?

Krystal: That's not Jacob.

Meredith: I know, but Jacob had an idea of how this could go differently, Jacob what did you then could happened differently here?

Jacob: Sam could say I like your polka dotted boots.

Meredith: Oh let's try that scene again and let's have Sam [Sean] say something different. [Speaking to Sean] do you know what you're going to say this time? What are you going to say?

Sean: [whispering to Meredith] I like your boots.

Meredith: [speaking to Liz] what are you going to say back to him?

Liz: [whispers] Thank you.

Meredith: Okay ready let's what's happening okay Sam (Sean) go ahead.

Sean: Those boots are cool.

Liz: Thank you.

Meredith: [speaking to Liz] do you want to invite him to jump rope with you?

Liz: Do you want to jump rope with me?

[Liz and Sean began to jump rope together]

18:05

Meredith: That's different from what happened in the book.

[Students are laughing and talking]

Meredith: Okay go ahead and sit down, eyes this way, shhh ,5,4 3,2,1. Okay Jacob told us the way this could go differently. Jacob changed what Sam said, right Victorious? Jacob changed what Sam said and the whole thing went differently. But you know what, what if Sam still said that, is there another way this could go differently? Okay Sam what are you thinking?

Sam: Sam can say um those boots are cool can I try them on and then you can have them back.

19:00

Meredith: Oh so that's a different way it could go? We can try that way out too. So let's have Sam come on up. Who do you want to be Sam?

Sam: Umm, Sam

Meredith: So Sam is going to try a different thing Sam could say.

[Students raise their hands]

Meredith: No, please put your hands down. Ryan you haven't played a character yet do you want to play someone?

Ryan: Mmm hmm.

Meredith: Okay who do you want to be do you want to be jumping rope over here with the new boots or do you want to be on the monkey bars?

Ryan: Umm, Jumping rope

Meredith: Okay and who's going to be over here on the monkey bars? Who has not had a turn? [Joey raise hand, Meredith speaking to Joey] you did have a turn. Derrick, okay so Derrick is going to be doing the monkey bars, sit on your bottoms so everyone can see, okay ready? So you're [Meredith speaking to Ryan] going to be jumping rope in your boots. What do you want to say Sam (Sam)?

Sam: I like your boots, please can I try your polka dotted boots, can I try them on?

Ryan: Yes

Meredith: [speaking to Derrick] So does it kind of look like they're starting to become friends?

20:02

Meredith: I like that that's kind of interesting now everyone stay up here. Let's, what if Sam still says those boots are weird could one of these other two characters say something different, what could happen, Victorious what do you think?

Victorious: umm//umm [goes closer to the book in Meredith's hands]

Meredith: [points to characters in the book] that's Luisa and that's Jayla

Kaylee: Jayla can go up to Sam and say hey those boots are actually kind of cute and she is a really nice little girl so you need to stop it.

Meredith: So Jayla can stop doing the monkey bars and come over and stick up for her friend Luisa?

Victorious: yeah

Meredith: [speaking to Derrick] Do you want to try that, so when Sam says those boots are weird what are you going to say?

Derrick: Umm//ummm

Meredith: [speaking to Derrick] Are going to say stop it and I like those boots?

[Derrick shakes his head yes]

Meredith: Okay ready [Ryan begins role playing and jumps rope again]

21:01

Meredith: [speaking to Sam} Are you going to say those boots are weird?

Sam: Mmm hmm.

Meredith: Okay

Sam: Those boots are weird

Meredith: [speaking to Derrick] go on over what do you want to tell him?

Derrick: Stop teasing her, you leave her alone those boots are not weird.

Meredith: So look, Jayla is sticking up for her friend. You can stick up for your friends. [Meredith speaking to Derrick] okay do you want to go play with Luisa (Ryan) and be her friend?

[Derrick goes over to jump rope with Ryan, Sam sits down on the rug]

Meredith: I'm thinking that Sam (Sam) could be a little sad because they're (Derrick and Ryan) playing and being nicer to each other. Ok could that have gone even differently? [Speaking to Sam to come back to the front] Oh come back up, come back up. Let's try that one more way, here come over here, let's say, shhh let's say Sam (Sam) still says the boots are weird, and let's say Jayla (Derrick) is still on the monkey bars she doesn't come over. What could Luisa do? Could Luisa say something that's not in here? [pointing to book] What do you think Krystal?

22:01

Krystal: They could say umm

[Ryan role playing jumping rope]

Meredith: Hey let's listen

Krystal: They could say “I like my boots. They aren't weird.”

Meredith: Oh what do you think? Would you try that?

Ryan: Mmm hmm

Meredith: Okay let's try this again, okay Sam (Sam)?

Sam: Those boots are weird.

Ryan: Could you please stop? I don't like that.

Sam: Okay.

Meredith: Sometimes when you stick up for yourself, you can change things too right?  
Oh my goodness, okay let's sit back down, shhh. [student talking]

Rachel: Awesome job!

Meredith: What about, ooh look at this page. The next page now they're at lunch. Do you remember what happened at lunch time? At lunch time Jayla was trying to mind her own business it says but Sam kept saying mean things about Luisa.

23:09

Meredith: Aren't Louise's boots weird don't you think she tells weird jokes I didn't know what to say if I didn't agree she would bully me next. So Sam is telling all these mean things about Luisa and Jayla is just not really saying anything. Maybe we can act out what's going on here and think about if there's a way change this. Okay what do we think? Okay would someone like to come up and be Jayla? Amanda would you like to come up and be Jayla. Eric do you want to come up and be Sam.

Ryan: That was so fun.

Meredith: Hey in the back Simon, Jacob, Ryan I really want you to see what's going on here.

24:01

Meredith: Okay let's think about this. Amanda is going to be Jayla and she's just going to kind of stand there and I think she's kind of feeling a little bit uncomfortable right when she hears Sam saying the bad things the bad words, right. [Speaking to Eric] so maybe think of some those things you can say, are going to try to say some of those things? Okay ready let's listen, you can't really hear Sam (Eric).

Eric: Aren't those boots weird, and don't you think she tells the weirdest jokes.



Meredith: hmm how can this go differently? Stay up here let's go through some ideas of how they can do this differently. What do you think Ryan?

Ryan: Sam could say nice things.

Meredith: Okay do you want to try that Sam (Eric)?

Eric: Mmm hmm.

Meredith: Okay let's see what happens if Sam says something different. [Meredith speaking to Eric] Okay go ahead.

Eric: ///

[Meredith gives some direction to Eric, 9sec]

25:09

Meredith: Okay ready? Okay audience, if you're going to be audience, do you know what happens in an audience?

Rachel: What?

Meredith: You have to look at the people who are performing, shh Jacob, you have to look at what they're saying or you won't hear it.///// Oh let's see, Maddie is ready for the performance, Liz is ready for the performance, and Ryan is really ready for the performance he's being a great audience member. Okay now it's going to go a little differently ready, so they're at lunch, okay Sam what do you want to say to Jayla?

Eric: I like your boots

Amanda: Thank you

Meredith: [speaking to Eric while showing him the book] does Jayla have the boots?

[Eric shakes head no]

Meredith: You could have walked over to Luisa and said that.

26:02

Meredith: I'm wondering if Jayla could say something? Like when Sam said those mean things about Luisa is there something that Jayla could say? What could Jayla say? Remember when Sam said aren't those boots weird, don't you think she tells weird jokes. What do you think Amanda what could you say back to Sam?

Amanda: I don't like what you are saying.

Meredith: What else could you say there?

Eric: Sorry.

Meredith: Would that really happened I wonder? What do you think? What do you think? [points to Daphne]. [Meredith speaking to Eric and Amanda] Here go ahead and sit down you guys did a great job. What do you think?

Daphne: Umm like that could be real, like Sam could go up to Luisa and say do you want to go swing with me outside? Or Jayla could say that.

27:01

Meredith: So they both could like say do you want to play with me, and stuff like that. Umm, here's what I'm wondering, umm, is there one of these books that you would like to change a part in? Maybe you can write about how we can go differently and we can try performing that okay. Maybe you want to change a part in Dare or in Tough or maybe change a part in Wodney Wat? Maybe you want to change your part in another book you remember? Okay who has an idea for something they want to change in a book? Because books can go different ways, there is not just one way to tell a story, things can happen differently. Sophie what are you thinking?

Sophie: I think like in *Tough!* like on the page where she's [Sophie takes book from Meredith to find the page]

Meredith: Oh the page when her brother is at home with her, and he's like taking her stuff.

Sophie: Yeah and like teasing her

28:00

Meredith: You want to change that page? Okay, so why don't you take a piece of paper [gives paper to Sophie] and why don't you go back to your book and think about how you want to change that and maybe we can perform that, okay. [Students raise hands] does someone have an idea for something they want to change in a book what are you thinking Eric?

Eric: *Dare!*

Meredith: You want to change a part in that book, is there a part you're thinking of changing? There's a lot of parts in this book let's remind ourselves. There was the part on the playground, there was a part in the lunchroom. Do you remember the part where they were in the bathroom and they were teasing her about her hair or the part on the bus when they were saying go to tell Luisa she can't sit here?

Victorius: Can I have a piece of paper, because I have an idea for the same book.

Meredith: Ok, go write about that.

[Meredith hands out paper to students, 10 sec]

29:00

Meredith: Do you have an idea of what you want to change in one of the books?

[Meredith continues to hand out paper to students]

Derrick: Can I have Wodney Wat?

[Meredith speaking to Joey]

Maddie: I want to change something in the same book that Krystal has but I don't remember.

Meredith: Okay maybe you can go and ask her if you can look at it.

30:19