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Hicksville School District Summer Reading Program

Exploring YA Fiction Books on the Hicksville Summer Reading List with an Adolescent Female Protagonist

An Honors Program Thesis

by

Leah Marshall

Fall, 2016

English

Faculty advisor (Margaret Hallissy)

Reader (John Lutz)

(date)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A) Researcher information

Background and Researcher's Qualifications

I am an adult student, having started my college career at Nassau Community College in January of 2013, at the age (then) of 35, with three young children, who were at the time 1, 4, and 5. After completing my Associate's degree in August of 2015, I transferred to LIU Post. I am in the BA/MS English Adolescent Education program. I have a 3.98 GPA, and I am an Honors student at Post as well as a member of the National Leadership Honor Society, ODK. I have taken over forty credits of English so far, and am working to become an expert in this field. As an Education major, I have also spent one hundred hours in six different middle school and high school settings, observing English classes being taught, and observing adolescent students, which are applicable and relevant to this project.

When I started delving into what my thesis project would be, I wanted to find something that was, first and foremost, of use and value to me as a future educator. I was also interested in exploring a topic that was specific to women, as the advancement of womankind is important to me; I am a woman, and I have two daughters. I want them to have every opportunity to learn and succeed with no doors shut to them. I met with my thesis adviser, Dr. Margaret Hallissy, and we discussed at length the ideas of exploring a topic that related to English education of young adults, with a focus on female adolescents.

Chapter 1: Introduction

B) Project information

Scope of the Project

This thesis explores adolescent fiction, specifically as it relates to novels with significant female characters, to see how they are portrayed to their audiences. For the purpose of narrowing it down, I chose the Hicksville Public School district, my home district, and I chose the summer reading list, which is not a mandated reading list, but rather simply recommended. I obtained copies of the Hicksville High School and Hicksville Middle School reading lists and I chose six books, three middle school and three high school, from these lists. The only criteria for my selection was they must be fiction, they must be on the list, and they must feature a significant adolescent female character.

As an upcoming adolescent English teacher, as a woman, taxpayer of the Town of Oyster Bay, Hicksville town resident, and as a mother of two girls, I am very interested in what reading material is offered for young girls to identify with. Obviously, I could not pick all of the books which fit my criteria, as there are only so many hours in a day, and six chunky books, each several hundred pages, was enough to get me started.

The middle school books chosen were *I Lived on Butterfly Hill, Little Women,* and *The Hunger Games.* The high school books chosen were *Jane Eyre, Paper Towns,* and *The Book Thief.* Two of the books are in the category of "classics" (*Jane Eyre* and *Little Women).* Two are dystopian society books *(Paper Towns* and *The Hunger Games),* and two are about multi-culturalism and refugees (*I Lived on Butterfly Hill* and *The Book Thief).*

Interestingly, five of the six selected books, quite coincidentally, have also been made into films (all but *I Lived on Butterfly Hill,)* and in some cases, have had many adaptations. This was not something intentional about the choices I selected but an interesting side note. There was no agenda in starting out this process, and the reason for choosing the summer reading list, as opposed to the books on the curriculum, was to explore a potentially unexplored area of development.

The books listed on the Hicksville Public School District Summer Reading list for 2015 include books for adolescent females to identify with, that portray a strong female main character, and have relevancy to a modern reader. Based on my research, I find that these books should all remain on the summer reading list, but that some learning aids, school and teacher support, would result in greatly enhanced benefits to students. Some of the books researched are historical, and more literary, while others are current and popular fiction. This thesis explored specifically adolescent fiction aimed primarily for girls. For that reason, only those books with female main characters were chosen. Of the six books I selected to read and explore in depth, I did not find fault with the choices. It should be noted that the Summer Reading List is not mandatory nor is it highly promoted on the district website. The list is only found with a bit of digging and the middle school list never materialized for 2016.

Chapter 2: Classic Literature

A) Little Women

The first book I studied was *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. *Little Women* appears on the Hicksville Public Schools Middle School summer reading list for 2015. It has a Lexile score of 1300. A Lexile score is based on a scale, which measures the complexity of the text and the reader's skill level required for reading it. While there is no direct grade correspondence to a specific Lexile score, there is a range of Lexile scores for books that typical students of a certain grade will be able to read. *Little Women* is considered a classic book and has been taught as part of school curricula all over the United States. For the purpose of this project, I am defining classic literature as books that stand the test of time, that have been reviewed by scholars and experts in the subject, and have been determined to be exemplary and noteworthy. This novel is also listed as part of the New York State Common Core State Standards Exemplar Text. It is a classic novel written in the nineteenth century about a mother and her four girls, living in Civil-War-era America, caught between a former life of wealth and current poverty due to hard times: their father is in the war and their property has been lost. The family is Christian and the novel very much reflects the time period in which it was written, in terms of what is and is not expected of men and women at this time.The four girls are all very different: Jo is a tomboy, Meg is known as "the pretty one," Amy is somewhat selfish, and Beth is the gentle soul. Despite their differences, they are all wonderful girls and their mother is, in their eyes, somewhat of a saint. There are repeated examples in this story, which is a young adult novel, of the message to young girls reading this book: how these young women (and girls in general) should be. The story spans their adolescent years, and includes their struggles and successes and how the family copes with adversity. The book is appropriate for middle schoolers, and is definitely worth reading, but needs to be taught in the context of contemporary thought on girls' psychological development.

Throughout the book, certain themes kept recurring, such as gender role conformity: there are specific ideals and behavior a girl should have and a boy should have, and in the March household, there is not too much leeway. This book sets up definitive roles for men and women including showing what is and is not acceptable for little girls, as compared to "young ladies," and for married women as well as "spinsters" and older women. As an example, the tomboy of the group, Jo March, is constantly chided and admonished for what they describe as boyish behavior. Early in the book, Jo is whistling, and this whistling is included as a boyish behavior. Mrs.March tells Jo that boyish behavior was acceptable when she was a little girl, but now that she is becoming a "young lady" she could no longer engage in the same type of behaviors. Later, winking is described as unladylike, and any behavior that is rough and wild is discouraged. The role of a girl throughout the novel is to be demure and quiet, submissive and reserved.

The next recurring theme is the superiority of marriage and motherhood over careers for girls. At the end of the novel, all of the surviving March girls, Jo, Amy, and Meg, are married and have children. They are enraptured with their families and Jo March describes her past aspirations negatively, as "cold" and "selfish." Earlier on, Jo intended to be a famous author, and by the end, she has two boys of her own, and runs a school for boys, most of whom are orphaned or wayward. Jo comments at the end of the novel that she has not had time to write her book yet, but is content with that, as her life is full. The clear message is that for women of their time, marriage and motherhood were the be-all and end-all, and once achieved, a woman was “living the dream.” While being a housewife and mother was very typical for women in nineteenth-century America, it is not so requisite for every American woman in the twenty-first century. Meg, Jo and Amy all marry and procreate and worship their lives as mothers, which is held up by other family members as the best part of them. Without being down on motherhood and the very important role it plays, there seems to be an extremely antiquated theme of women having their place, while men go out and do important things, follow intellectual pursuits, make money, and otherwise lead more “serious” lives.

Another important theme is gender dysphoria for the main protagonist, Jo March. Jo is a tomboy who resists the role of a young lady that is consistently enforced upon her. Repeatedly throughout the book, friends and family remind Jo of her place, and Jo struggles with this reality. Jo does marry and have children but is constantly having to force herself into a more traditional female role. While Jo does become a professional writer, this role is not made nearly as important as her overall “female-ness.” When examining the issue of gender, an important issue today more than ever, it is possible that an adolescent girl reading the book today would receive a negative message from the novel, as Jo is repeatedly forced to conform to the gender standards of her time, both overtly and subtly. An approach more suitable to today’s enlightened view would be to examine the issue of gender roles and discuss the conflict Jo had, and compare that to challenges women face today.

Another recurring theme is that being a female means repression in every way. The girls are continually reminded to hold back their strong emotions, not to get too angry, to solve arguments with kisses and to essentially be repressed. The ideal state of a demure female showing serenity and grace is glorified over and over by the role models in the book. This is reinforced when Amy destroys Jo's writings, and is not severely punished for it. Instead, Jo is punished for over-reacting and being angry. Once again, a quiet and unassertive female ideal is promoted and a strong, creative female is considered far less important. Greta Garta's paper examines the theme of anger repression in *Little Women.* As Garta points out, the nineteenth century American woman was not only not allowed to be angry, but was rather supposed to be cheerful, not even pouting or sulking. This standard did not apply to men or boys, of course, who were expected to, allowed to be, and forgiven for, being angry. This standard applied only to girls and women and was reinforced as something girls grew out of, so that they would be able to be desirable for marriage. The first step towards repressing their feelings in the book, Garta says, starts with the initial message of self-sacrifice, when there is little money for gifts, and the girls end up buying things only for Marmee and sacrificing for themselves. The second step in the education of the girls in their roles as women is Marmee's cheerful encouragement that they play *Pilgrim's Progress*, a morality play, and part of their indoctrination into the world of self-sacrifice, self-denial, repression, and enforced morality. Repressing anger, Garta tells, shows up again when Meg is married, and finds being a perfect housewife more difficult than she had imagined. She is at first angry, and her marriage starts to get into trouble, until she remembers her place and contains her anger. Only then does domestic bliss return, and John and Meg are able to find happiness. Meg is schooled once again by her mother, who cautions her that her anger against her husband will cause him to be angry, and consequently not respect her.

Vanity is repeatedly punished in *Little Women*, either directly, or indirectly, as if punishment is a message from God. This is shown when Meg tries to look pretty for the dance, when Jo burns her hair while trying to curl it, and when Amy is humiliated in school for trying to have limes so she can be popular. The message of repression comes up in the letter home from their father, which instructs them to “continue to conquer themselves so beautifully” (Alcott, 18). The continual stifling of any emotion deemed unladylike, un-Christian, or otherwise undesirable is a pattern throughout the novel. Only Beth is held up as an icon of selflessness, self-sacrifice, virtue and humility, and Beth’s perfection is why she cannot live: she is too perfect for this world. The girls are praised by Mrs.March, and even by their father, upon his return, when they act in a way deemed ideal by the senior Marches, that is, without vanity or pridefulness.

Jo’s temper is shown to be dangerous, even life-threatening, as described by Alcott. When Jo and Amy ice skate and an inner demon prevents Jo from warning Amy about the thin ice, Amy nearly dies, and is saved by Laurie, showing the contradiction between anger being deadly, while kindness is a strength and a blessing. In contrast to Jo, the character of Beth is held up as so perfect as to be almost divine, or not of this world. Beth ends her life almost cheerfully, fully accepting her fate, and becoming the ultimate ideal for self-denial, as she has denied herself her own earthly existence. She dies because of her self-sacrifice; she contracted scarlet fever when she cared for a poor child. Garta’s article discusses Marmee as the role model for being a caretaker, which Beth fulfills, leading to her untimely death. Jo’s sensation stories, which are earning income and helping to support her family, are also held up against the religious ideals of the March family, and of women of their time. These stories cause Jo to be on a slightly slippery slope, dealing with elements of society that are immoral, contrary to how she was raised. Jo gives up these types of stories and goes on to try and be the little woman her parents wanted her to be. Jo's marriage to Bhaer follows, and she does love him and seems to live a life where she has both her writing and domestic happiness.

Pilgrim's Progress is juxtaposed with Jo's play, "The Witch's Curse," which is a play about passion, a strong female character, anger, and romance. This interesting dichotomy gives a platform for the readers to examine the morals being laid out before them. In *Pilgrim's Progress,* the girls try to improve their character flaws, which is supposed to be analogous with the Christian allegory written by John Bunyan in 1678. This brings an interesting point to light, which is the comparison between Jo's stories, which are minimized, and made to seem unimportant, compared to the idealized *Pilgrim's Progress* story. Beth quotes from *Pilgrim's Promise* to her family, and sings and plays piano from it as well, as a way of pleasing her father. It is fitting that this is done by Beth, the angel figure of the family. Jo's writing, while it is praised by her friends and family, is ultimately her hobby, and not her career. In the end, she marries and has children and never gets back to the writing that brought her such joy and passion. While there is no direct statement that Jo should not write frivolous stories, they are certainly made out to be far less important than stories that promote strong Christian values. It is implied that morally uplifting stories, and Christian-centered stories in particular, are important, serious and valuable, while fictional tales are silly, comedic, or less meaningful.

Vices and virtues for females are made clear throughout Alcott's novel. Self-sacrifice and humility are virtues, not for all people, but specifically for women. Anger and vanity are, of course, vices for women. Religion is also key; these women and their family are conservative Christians and it is written with a strong Christian message throughout. This includes things like being charitable to those less fortunate, such as when the Marches gives food to another much more impoverished family, even though this means doing without themselves. Sacrifice, in addition to repression, is espoused, not just for everyone, but more specifically, for women. The girls are told about the many benefits of charity, and giving up their own wants and desires is praised as a womanly quality and a wonderful female trait.

While some scholars contend that *Little Women* shows that women can achieve their goals and escape the yoke of society in nineteenth century America and the rules it imposes upon them, others contend that the nineteenth century womanly ideal conveyed in *Little Women* is repressed, obedient, and pleasant. Greta Gaard examines the theme of anger repression in *Little Women.* As Gaard points out, the nineteenth century American woman was not only not allowed to be angry, but was rather supposed to be cheerful, not even pouting or sulking. This standard did not apply to men or boys, of course, who were expected to, allowed to be, and forgiven for, being angry. This standard applied only to girls and women and was reinforced as something girls grew out of, so that they would be able to be desirable for marriage. Susan Naomi Bernstein makes the case for *Little Women* being a subversive text. She states that the book is subverting the patriarchal society of the time period, by focusing on Jo's writing career as her way of self-identification and purpose. Bernstein argues that despite the seeming message of domesticity above all, Alcott, using Jo March as her vehicle, shows young readers that a girl can travel alone, follow her dreams, think for herself and that a girl does not have to conform to specified gender roles laid out for her from birth. Bernstein also points out that Jo March's supporting her family adds to the gender-role reversal, and challenges traditional values of the time period.

Bernstein further discusses how writing the play in which Jo March and her sisters act allows for the girls to take on male parts, using Dickens' male characters. This act, while done for light-hearted entertainment, also takes on another purpose, that of once again challenging the fixed gender conformity of the time. Later on, when Jo is writing as a way of keeping out of trouble, this seems to indicate that writing is moral compared with other actions that may be immoral. The readers are not clued in as to what these actions are, but Bernstein points out that the commentary is once again promoting writing for Jo March. In the scene where Amy destroys Jo's manuscript, the author, Bernstein indicates, is intentionally showing the readers the conflict between the family's view about Jo's writing (that it is insignificant) and Jo's view (that it is her whole world). Much of Bernstein's analysis is based upon other works by Alcott, which Bernstein feels show much more of Alcott's thoughts about women at the time. Having not read the other works, and being that they are not part of my research project, I cannot comment on these, only on the work at hand, *Little Women.* An important note that Bernstein makes is that as a young girl, writing is an amusement for Jo March, and as an adult, writing is a crucial economic solution for her mother and sisters. Jo March expresses herself as an author, not just through her writing for money, but also through her letters home when she is in New York, and in her writing about her sister, Beth. In her letters, Jo March talks about her daily domestic activities, which include sewing and teaching basic household actions, which put Jo March in context of her time, nineteenth-century America. This makes Jo's independence and strong spirit more realistic and approachable to the girl reader of the time. Bernstein states that "Louisa May Alcott demonstrates how woman, though laboring under the constraints of convention, can indeed help to transform herself, and, inevitably her society" (11).

Jo also sees herself as a "literary spinster" and talks about becoming an old maid, never having a marriage or children. This is positioned as being because of her passion for writing and her disinterest in conforming to the role of housewife as society and her parents have dictated for her. Bernstein's message is that *Little Women* contains many contradictions, meant for the readers of her time to examine other possibilities for themselves as females, and to see the value and strength of sisterhood above the male dominating forces in their lives. Jill May, a graduate professor who teaches children's literature, analyzes *Little Women* from a modern perspective. It is her contention that the book has modern relevance and value in education for twenty-first century young adults. May says, "Although the book is no longer a part of popular culture's repertoire, I believe that *Little Women* is a piece of women's history or, perhaps more important, a piece of women's autobiography that depicts female aspirations, family life, and women's career choices" (2). May's analysis of *Little Women* is that it is an atypical story for its time; the March sisters and their family were not like other families, in that they each remained true to themselves, having different aspirations and dreams, and following those dreams. Her comment is that rather than abandoning their dreams, they adjust their lives so they can follow convention of the time for women -- get married and have babies -- while still being their own people. Moreover, May contends that Alcott's book pushes boundaries within the 1860s in terms of femininity by having the character of Jo March, who is a tomboy and a rather unfeminine type of girl.

May goes on to discuss that Alcott's view of female adolescence is "archetypal"(4). She explains that the four March girls each have hopes and dreams as young girls, and have to fit these within the confines of society. They live in a world where the adults around them, like adults today, expect young women to be, act and think in certain ways. These young women have physical expectations for them as well as specific gender roles and duties they are supposed to follow. May comments extensively on the relevance of *Little Women* for male audiences as well. She argues that most, if not all, of the men who have critiqued and commented on *Little Women* have never read the book, and have failed to understand the social messages of this story. May acknowledges that in *Little Women*, “Their [the March sisters’] artistic talents must fit within their married lives, and in order to be considered successful, they must have children of their own”(6). Interestingly, May states that when she conducted an informal survey amongst graduate students in her Children’s Literature class, none of them had read the book *Little Women* in full. A few had read parts of it and others had seen the movie. She comments that this book and other classics have been relegated to being considered “old-fashioned,” and that books about women and children were not considered important literature.

In the article “What Adolescent Girls Read,” Elaine O’Quinn, a professor at Appalachian State University, analyzes a variety of books for adolescent girls and critiques them. While *Little Women* is given only brief attention, O’Quinn makes the point that this book paved the way for books to be published which offered an insight into the specific age group -- adolescent girls -- for young adults. From this point forward, other works followed which addressed topics of interest for adolescent girls, and had main characters that were their ages.

An important comparison can be made in watching the movie made based on the novel. In the movie *Little Women*, produced in 1994, much is similar to the book, with several scenes shortened or left out, presumably for brevity. In one instance, the scene where Amy March spitefully destroys Jo March’s precious manuscript, the scene in the movie is quite different from the book. While in the book, Marmee preaches to Jo about holding her temper; in the movie, Jo is extremely upset, and is not made to feel incorrect for this. Instead, Marmee comforts her and acknowledges how upset she must be. This is an important change because it indicates a changing time, over one hundred years later, where women do not feel that all anger must be repressed, and where women are validated not just for pursuing domestic bliss, but also for pursuing loftier goals.

Additionally, several of the scenes where Meg is frustrated with her married life, and is counselled by her mother on being a proper wife, are omitted, giving the viewer a different opinion than the reader would have. Jo's writing career is emphasized, and Amy's artistic pursuits are emphasized. Marmee's wish that her girls be charitable and marry for love rather than money, just as in the book, are clear, but, perhaps because other scenes are omitted, seem more clear-cut than in the book. The efforts to mold Jo into being feminine and lady-like are far fewer in the movie, with several of the comments from her sisters and mothers that were in the book, not included in the movie, giving it a more feminist, modern feel, and leaving a different impression for one who is only watching the movie.

Since the book was written almost two hundred years ago, it is unsurprising that the standards for females in the nineteenth century do not conform with the standards of twenty-first century America. Despite this, it is still of value to examine and have today's readers compare the roles for females then compared to the opportunities for females now. However, left on a summer reading list, with no discussion, no assignments related to the book, and no context, it is doubtful that it provides the same level of value.

Little Women is also a novel that promotes Christianity, a potential concern for a public school setting, which should be secularized. Jo, Amy, Beth, and Meg are taught that a good Christian woman means specific behavior, and this ideal is used to keep them, and women in general, in their place. This goes hand in glove with the theme of sacrifice being good for women and is yet another means of controlling women and girls. It is interesting to see that in 2015, in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, diverse area, a book with a strong Christian message is on a public school reading list. Christian ideology and morals are strong and repeated throughout the book, from the conversations that Mrs.March has with her girls, to the girls' own inner musings and their interactions with others.

It is fascinating that this book appears on a modern summer reading list. The book is sexist and old-fashioned and teaches a very different message to adolescent girls than the message we are teaching today. If it is suggested reading, perhaps critical thinking questions should be given with it such as this: How would you compare the ideal female of *Little Women* to the ideal female of today? What has changed in society in terms of what is expected for women and what is possible for women? *Little Women* is included here under the chapter "Literary classics and the women in them" in the section "Middle school." While I feel the book has definite literary value, I also think it is important that this book be taught in a classroom, with context given and discussion about potentially antiquated themes and values, so that adolescents can compare these ideas to their modern world, and their own ideals for a twenty-first-century woman.

Chapter 2: Classic Literature

B) Jane Eyre

Jane Eyre was the next book studied as part of examining what books are offered on the Hicksville public schools summer reading list, specifically pertaining to books relatable to, and written primarily for, adolescent females. *Jane Eyre* is on the Hicksville High School Summer reading list for 2015 in the category “New York Common Core State Standards Text exemplars” with a lexile score of 840. While the lexile score would put this book potentially in a middle school, its content is more mature, and therefore it is included under high school. For the purposes of this examination, *Jane Eyre* was classified under “literary classics.” I found the novel useful and appropriate for high school students, and an excellent choice for the summer reading list.

Jane Eyre is a classic novel with multiple film adaptations. The novel was written in 1847 by Charlotte Brontë. The novel is written in first person narration, and spans the life of Jane Eyre, an orphan, unloved and mistreated throughout her young life, from age ten into her mid-twenties. In the beginning of the book, Jane is being raised by her evil aunt, Mrs. Reed, in nineteenth-century England. Jane suffers abuse at the hands of her cousins, especially her cousin John, who is sadistic and terrifying. Jane describes the torture inflicted upon her, and the fear she lives with. All the while, Jane has no allies in the world, as her guardian, Mrs.Reed, ignores and condones Jane’s abuse. When Jane attempts to retaliate and defend herself in any way, she is harshly punished, locked in a room, and not fed.

The psychology behind Mrs.Reed's ill treatment of her niece Jane is an interesting avenue to explore. Mrs.Reed's husband loved Jane, and treated her as he would his own children. It was his dying request to his wife that she care for Jane. Mrs.Reed is jealous and resentful of this affection, and takes out her ill will, quite unfairly, on Jane, through a combination of physical abuse, neglect, and emotional abuse in the form of hostility and lack of affection from her primary caregiver.

When Jane's aunt decides she can no longer cope with her, the decision is made to send Jane off to a boarding school for orphans, Lowood. When one pictures a boarding school, wealthy families and privileged children come to mind. Lowood is quite the opposite, and is where people sent wayward children, unwanted wards like Jane, and other unfortunate orphans. For the first few years of her time there, conditions are abysmal: lack of food to the point of children being near-starving, lack of heat through brutally cold winters, and improper clothing and bedding. Many children die as typhoid rages through the institution, and the insufficient nutrition and poor conditions make them susceptible. The situation is finally investigated after there is community outrage and conditions do improve. Jane manages to make friends, find allies, and attain an excellent education. Upon her graduation from Lowood, Jane works for two years as a teacher at the school, until she decides that she wants to explore the outside world.

Jane obtains a job at Thornfield Hall as a governess for a man named Edward Rochester. She is charged with teaching and caring for his ward, Adele. During the time Jane is a governess at Thornfield, she falls in love with the formidable Mr. Rochester, her employer. Jane and he are about to marry when she finds out Rochester is already married, to a crazy woman named Bertha, who has been kept in the attic of the house. Rochester thought he could forget about this unpleasant detail and simply marry Jane, which was of course illegal. Once Jane finds out, she is devastated and leaves Thornfield with nothing, to make her own life. She has no plan, no destination, and no money, and nearly dies in her journey, were it not for the generosity of strangers, the Rivers family.

Jane is taken in by the Rivers family - three sisters, Hannah, Mary and Diana, and their brother St.John. This is an incredible stroke of coincidence, as later it turns out that she is actually related to them, they are her cousins, and she receives an inheritance with makes her have a small amount of independent wealth - a key factor in the story. Jane helps out with chores around the house, and soon enough, takes a position as a school teacher for the children in their area. The pay is low, and the children, being poor and rural, are far below the level of education Jane is accustomed to, but Jane loves her job, having a place to call her own, her independence, and her freedom. Compared to the life of imprisonment as the Reed's ward, the ill treatment and strict discipline of Lowood, and then the devastation she suffered at Thornfield, Jane is finally happy and fulfilled all through her own efforts.

Jane leaves the Rivers family when she hears the voice of Edward Rochester through some type of supernatural effect. She does not know how or why, but as the reader, we know that when she hears him, he is screaming for her, miles away. She travels to Thornfield Hall to find out what has become of him, and finds that the hall has burned down and Rochester has been gravely injured, losing his sight and losing a hand. His former wife, Bertha, in her madness, had started the fire, and died in it. Jane and Edward reaffirm their undying true love for one another, and are married, and live happily ever after.

While this book is set in a similar time period as the first novel analyzed, *Little Women*, it is undeniably a different story in its feminist and modern message. Despite constant oppression, Jane is a strong and dynamic individual who defies the circumstances of her birth and upbringing. She is not a product of her time but is revolutionary in her resolve, determination, and independence. She is a free thinker long before that was considered truly possible for women. This is at the same time a romance, with a happily ever after, where in the end, love conquers all, and true happiness is achieved through love and marriage. However, Brontë shows that Jane Eyre is satisfied, happy, and fulfilled without marriage and without love, as she has a passion for her job and helping children, and a true joy when she is independent and self-sustaining.While Jane is independent and free, the novel still defines success in life for a woman in terms of marriage. Jane tells Mr. Rochester that being his wife is the best thing that could ever happen and the happiest she can be on earth. While Jane is unconventional for a nineteenth-century woman, this is still a classic love story, with the traditional happy ending of two people getting married and living happily ever as the best possible outcome in the world.

The differences in social class are not examined or challenged. Jane's treatment by her aunt, Mrs. Reed, is considered acceptable, because Jane is an orphan, lucky enough to be fed and clothed and housed by the Reeds. Their superior status is unequivocal and completely acceptable, Jane is told even by servants; the Reeds are not her equals and she should thank her lucky stars for their kindness and generosity. Once at Lowood, the girls there resign themselves to their lot in life; adults treat them severely and do not even ensure they have the bare minimum basic needs met as far as enough warm clothes for winter, sufficient and proper food, and appropriate recreation.

Throughout the novel, the expectations of others are enforced on Jane. In addition to oppression, violence and antipathy under the care of Mrs. Reed, Jane is repeatedly told of her place in life, what is expected of a young lady, that she is less than a servant (also reinforcing the strong social caste system of the time period). Once at Lowood, the message of proper decorum for young ladies is drilled into all the girls, along with the harshest possible school environment. While a governess for Mr.Rochester, Jane's place as a governess puts her above servants and yet below the ladies and nobility that visit. She never quite fits in socially and is put in her place, even if just from the ladies speaking about governesses derogatorily while Jane is there. While Jane is with Hannah, Mary, Diana, and St. John Rivers, they are puzzled about Jane's status -- it is obvious that she is well-educated but at the same time, she comes to them as a beggar, starving and desperate. Once again, there is an effort to assign her a specific social status and standing, as everyone of the time period and locale seems to need to be.

Christianity is another strong theme in *Jane Eyre.* Jane is a devout Christian, whose faith prevents her from engaging in an adulterous affair with Rochester, and whose faith sustains her throughout her many hardships. Religion helps Jane as much as it seems to fetter her. Humility is exalted as a trait more than once, even with Jane's friend, St. John Rivers, who says it is the groundwork of Christian virtues. There is a wealth of hypocrisy among those of supposed strong faith in this novel, however. Jane is herself religious, and is surrounded by many who call themselves religious while violating the tenets of that faith. One such example is Mrs. Reed, Jane's aunt, who is a Christian woman that enables her son to be an abuser and a tyrant, who is jealous of Jane, a child, and who mistreats her repeatedly by locking her in a room as punishment for supposed misbehavior, as well as by physical violence, and then finally by banishing her to

Lowood. At Lowood, Mr.Brocklehurst, the head of the school, is cruel and abusive to the children there, including starving them, not providing heat in winter, or proper blankets, and condoning physical abuse of the pupils. Mr.Brocklehurst espouses Christian sentiments, and an ironic conversation takes place between Mrs.Reed and Mrs.Brocklehurst as they discuss sending Jane to Lowood, where the two talk about Christian values of humility and consistency. They talk about Jane's wickedness of "falsehoods and deceit," of which she is not guilty, while they themselves are duplicitous and hypocritical. Even Jane's cousin, St.John Rivers, who is a devout Christian, is a hypocrite in his own right. He lusts after Rosamond Oliver, but cannot have her, and tries to convince Jane to marry him for convenience. This is yet another way the people in Jane's life attempt to use her for their own purposes while pretending they are being honest and true.

The importance of physical appearance is a constant. Georgiana Reed is described as a beautiful girl, who is spoiled and spiteful and yet her every whim is indulged because of her good looks. In stark contrast, Jane is despised and held to impossible standards, and is also described as an ugly child. It is certainly implied that her lack of classic physical beauty is part of the reason for her being mistreated. Later on, Jane is shocked to discover that Mr. Rochester loves her, because with her lack of the classic standards of physical beauty, she does not see herself as desirable or beautiful. Only once Rochester is physically disfigured and blind do he and Jane get together, which is interesting to analyze in terms of him being blind to her lack of physical beauty. When St. John Rivers proposes to her, he clearly sees her as a worker and religious partner, and not at all as someone he would sexually desire or be physically attracted to.

He is attracted to the beautiful and desirable Rosamond Oliver, who makes his blood stir but is not someone who would want the life of a missionary's wife, supporting his true calling.

Rochester's adultery, wild sexual escapades on the continent, and general lusty behavior are never discussed as needing improvement, yet the focus from Jane herself on staying chaste, sexually repressed and proper, like a godly woman, is a strong theme. This is of course a typical double standard for men and women, not surprisingly for the time in which it is written. At the same time, Jane's incredible integrity, resolution, and strength of character at such a young age is remarkable. She never breaks from her strong views of right and wrong and refuses a loveless marriage of convenience to St. John, because she knows he does not love her, just as she refuses an adulterous affair with Rochester, because this goes against her morals as a Christian woman.

While this is a classic love story, it is also a coming-of-age story, and a story of a strong female adolescent who is forced to grow up fast and whose morals are repeatedly tested. It has a remarkable relevance in modern day, for adolescents who are examining their own upbringing and morals compared to what they themselves think. At the same time as this literary classic has such value and importance, it is also important to note several negative connotations, such as the treatment of the mentally ill, racism, sexism, and classism. This does not give us cause to eliminate the book, rather it gives us reason to discuss the book, its themes, and its time period, and how it relates or does not relate to modern times.

In addition to the book, I reviewed the 2011 movie, a rendition of the classic *Jane Eyre* done differently from the book in many ways, while keeping the famous dialogue that readers know and love from the story. The movie opens with Jane running away from Thornfield, and collapsing outside the door of the Rivers family. It then flashes back to her time as a young girl with the Reeds, to her time at Lowood, and then tells her whole story at Thornfield. There is quite a bit cut out and shortened, as it is a long book to be made into a movie, with details from her childhood rushed through, but the gist remains the same. The movie ends with Rochester blind and her returning to him, and the follow-up from the book, of his regaining partial sight and their having a child, is not included.This is a beautiful love story, and educationally useful. If the book were being taught in a classroom, it would be useful to show some of the movie as a visual aid so students could see the things being described in the book. As in the novel, in the movie, Jane's strength of character, spirit, and determination shines through from beginning to end, even on her darkest days.

In addition to studying the novel, reading and understanding literary criticism is beneficial for the aim of getting students to achieve college and career readiness. Specific themes in the novel are discussed, as well as critiques and various points of view on the usefulness of the novel. There has been over time extensive literary review, analysis, and critique of *Jane Eyre.* Dr. Paul Schacht, a professor of English at Geneseo State University, wrote a literary critique focusing on the theme of self-respect in *Jane Eyre.* As Schacht says, "Brontë makes Jane's concern for self-respect the focus of her demand for freedom from class and patriarchal oppression; as a result, the contradictions that dog the idea of self-respect take the shape of apparently contradictory values or impulses in Jane" (436). This is an important point which Schacht focuses on throughout his article -- the issue of the dichotomy between Jane's seemingly feminist message of self-respect as a tool for strength, versus self-respect as a means of repression, conformity, and self-denial.

The key idea that Schacht points out is that Jane acts in a consistent manner throughout all of the novel. She is firm from beginning to end about her morals, and does not lose sight of them. She holds firm on self-respect when Rochester proposes they have an unmarried liaison, despite her obvious love and passion for him. She is not just doing so because she is bound by custom and tradition, as she was in a position whereby nobody would have known what she was doing -- if being judged by others was all she was concerned with -- but of course, it was not. Jane's concern was that she hold true to herself.

Schacht defines self-respect through the lens of philosophers such as Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith. He states that the word originally meant "'self-love, self-conceit' or 'a private, personal or selfish end'"(430). The change in meaning has occurred through time, with the world self-respect now evolving to mean more of an independent and assertive self. Schact tracks the history of literature from Chaucer and on through sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, with the use of words like self-improvement, self-indulgence and other similar words not appearing until the sixteenth century. Self-respect was more of a trademark of modernism, and part of a push from early feminists for women to stand up for themselves, take care of themselves, and not rely only on men. Throughout *Jane Eyre,* Schacht says, Jane differentiates people who have from people who do not have self-respect, from her fellow students at Lowood, to the poor students she later teaches at the Morton Charity School. This concept of self-respect was not the popular one of Jane's time. Women in nineteenth-century England were not permitted to be responsible for themselves, or to make their own decisions, and thus having self-respect was not easily done. Jane's analysis of self-respect is both consistent and ahead of her time.

In a scholarly article entitled “Jane Eyre and the Self-constructed Heroine,” Lorna Ellis defines an interesting term, the German word *bildungsroman*. The word means a novel dealing with a coming of age story, or a point in a person’s life when he or she is developing spiritually. Ellis contends that Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* conforms to the *bildungsroman* genre, by telling a story of a heroine growing and developing while having to live within the constraints of society. Ellis states that the key characteristics of the female *bildungsroman* genre are “the combination of conservative and subversive elements, its link between social alienation and material concerns, and its emphasis on the gaze as a means of articulating the heroine’s manipulation of appearances” (1). Ellis examines the conflict Jane has between the limitations placed upon her by societal convention, and her own longing to belong in the world. This constant struggle is not one dramatic scenario, but more of a continual struggle for balance. Jane’s poverty and isolation in the world are the key elements that make her such a strong character. She does not rely on others’ generosity or support, or even on the love and care of family, but instead, from a young age, learns to look out for herself.

Ellis argues that *Jane Eyre* puts a romantic twist on the *bildungsroman* theme of self-reflection. Throughout the novel, Jane examines and analyzes herself, her flaws and her strengths, and this self-reflection seems to be a key part of her development. This differs from standard *bildungsroman* themes, because of the novel being written in first person and because of Jane’s hyper self-awareness. As Jane’s story progresses, her self-awareness increases, making her self-reliant as she confronts the challenges in her life, from Rochester’s indecent proposal to St.John’s unromantic marriage proposal. Her deep and complex understanding of the way St.John views her, and her steadfastness throughout his verbal manipulation, show her strength of character and spirit. Ellis is quite clear that while Jane is independent in a way that stands out for her time, she also conforms to the conservative ideals for nineteenth-century women in her religiosity, chastity, and conventional role as a wife and mother, even at the end of the novel. Jane does not defy convention and live outside of social norms, despite being perhaps more independent than most of her other contemporaries. Ellis astutely indicates that throughout *Jane Eyre,* appearances are important, and Jane does not contend this view, but accepts that this is so. Ellis posits that Jane learns the main lesson for a *bildungsroman* heroine, that she has to control her appearance with other people in order to control situations. Jane is in many ways the quintessential *bildungsroman* heroine -- she is living within the demands society places, while being strong and independent. Jane also shows strength of character and her own integrity, by refusing the many gifts Rochester offers and instead keeping her status and belongings as a governess.

Carol Senf calls *Jane Eyre* an important feminist historical book, and indicates that the book has a female narrator, recalling her experiences, development and consciousness, from her eyes and in her values. Senf, a Ph.D. in Victorian studies from SUNY Buffalo, shows the strength of *Jane Eyre* as a feminist work. She points out Jane's own reflections on women feeling just as men feel, and on women needing mental stimulation just like men. Jane, throughout the novel, is aware of the reasons for women's oppression, and aware of the need for women to be educated in more than piano. Senf shows that throughout *Jane Eyre,* Jane is confronted by characters who seek to control her: Mrs. Reed, Brocklehurst, Rochester, and St.John Rivers. Jane never agrees that she should be subjugated and be submissive to the higher powers that surround her and try to hold her down; rather, she fights back, quietly or loudly.

An important part of the book was Brontë's having Jane inherit five thousand pounds. Without this, she was financially dependant on Rochester, but with it, she is economically independent, and therefore not beholden to him. Only after Rochester is injured and he needs her more than she needs him, do they marry. Senf says,"The evolution from history to herstory, from exploitation of the weak by the strong to a kind of mutuality, works in *Jane Eyre* on more than one level" (8). The coined word "herstory" is a fantastic word to explain feminist history from the female perspective. While women in Brontë's time, Senf points out, were not the independent and equal beings they are today, with Jane, there is an indication of the future that is to come, where women have an ability to think freely, be educated, and attain equality with men. Keeping in mind this is a nineteenth-century novel, it is forward thinking, and in many ways ahead of its time.

Haiyan Gao is a professor at Heze University in China. She received her Masters in English language and literature from Liaocheng University in China in 2009. Gao, like many other scholars, believes that Jane is a feminist, and becomes a stronger feminist throughout the novel by pursuing equality, independence, and true love. Gao speaks about the impact *Jane Eyre* had on women in its initial release, in 1847. As a trend-setting and influential book for nineteenth-century readers, the book was the first, most powerful and most popular book at the time. Giving women the idea that they could have choices regarding marriage, their place in society, and their direction in life, let alone fighting to have equal rights, basic to being a human, was completely new and revolutionary. Gao discusses the Victorian era's idea of equality, which was that all people were ***not*** born equally. People of higher ranks look down on those who are lower born than them, and men are always superior to women. Jane's self-realization as a feminist, and her own struggle for equality, make a huge statement for Victorian women. Men are in most cases at this time, oppressive, and women are often either oppressed or neglected. Feminism is not common and not encouraged or nurtured by society. Gao relates *Jane Eyre* to the first feminist movement, which came some decades after the novel, towards the end of the nineteenth century, where women fought for gender equality and political rights. This was followed by the second feminist movement, Gao says, which took place in the United States for sixty to seventy years, throughout the twentieth century. Because of this, gender studies, feminism, and more academic research came about.

Gao compares *Jane Eyre* to its backdrop in history, which is that of a male-dominated Victorian world, where women have few to no choices, and follow the directions of the males in their lives. Equality is not an option; and most women just try to get along. Wealthy women, Gao says, were expected to find husbands that were suitable, in terms of status and financial fortune. Jane is a penniless orphan, making her status in the world low, and despite this, she rises from her inferiority to superiority, and never accepts simply the status she is given in life. Jane is a non-conformist, who does not go along with the social environment of her time. She fights against conventional marriage ideas, which is a shock for Victorian society. Gao says, “Jane Eyre’s story tells us that in a man-dominated society, a woman should strive for the decency and dignity”(9).

From my close reading of this book, as well as from examination of several literary critics and reviews, I think *Jane Eyre* is a worthwhile novel to include as part of a summer reading list. It has merit in its realm as a historical and classic novel, as well as in examining important themes for women that not only took place in the time of this novel, in the nineteenth century, but are still relevant today. Maintaining self-respect in the face of abuse, handling isolation and adversity, strength of character, holding true to one's own values despite the pressure to do otherwise, and gaining independence as a female despite oppression, are all important themes for modern teenagers to explore. Examining the world Jane Eyre lived in, and comparing it to the world they live in, would be a useful activity for a young girl. Any book read on its own, with no curriculum or teaching alongside it, has limited use.

From my analysis of both these classic works, *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women,* for High School and Middle School respectively, I think classic literature should be included on summer reading lists. Since it is not mandatory, there can be no valid argument that a school district is dictating only one type of literature. There are a wide variety of choices for the students to pick from including popular fiction, adventure, science fiction, and many other genres that could pique the interest of an adolescent reader. To assume that a student will not be interested in classic literature, and not to give them the option, is to do them a disservice. Many classics are still taught as part of the routine curriculum in schools, as I have observed throughout my observations in six middle and high schools in the NYC and Long Island areas, and offering other classics, not taught as part of the regular school curriculum offers even more options for these students.

Chapter 3: Multiculturalism

A) I Lived on Butterfly Hill

The next category of this thesis explores books that address multiculturalism and the refugee crisis. This can be about people immigrating to America, or people who are from diverse backgrounds, and the struggle they have fitting in, and adjusting to a different way of life, or possibly even emigrating back to their country of origin. Many books on the list fit this criteria, but for the purposes of being able to complete this project in one year, I could only choose two. The first novel I selected is *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* by Marjorie Agosin in 2014. The story takes place in Valparaiso, Chile, as well as in Juliette Cove, Maine. The book is on the Hicksville Public School's Middle School summer reading list for 2015. It has a Lexile score of 770 and won eleven awards, most prestigiously, the Pura Belpre award. The book is listed under the category of historical fiction on the summer reading list; for the purposes of this project, the book will be considered in the category of multiculturalism and the refugee crisis. Celeste Marconi is a strong adolescent female protagonist and the book is suitable reading for a middle school student, with age-appropriate content that calls attention to important issues.

Agosin focuses on Celeste Marconi, an eleven-year-old girl in the beginning of the novel, who is forced to leave the only home she has ever known, in the rural and beautiful countryside of Chile, and flee to the opposite end of the globe, to Maine, in the northeastern United States. Celeste has to cope with the fear and uncertainty about the fate of her parents and other family members, while she adjusts to a new home, with a new parental figure -- her mother's sister that she has never met. At the same time, she does not know any English, and is on the cusp of puberty and young adulthood.

The story begins with a well-liked and benevolent president, President Alarcon. Alarcon is assassinated by a cruel and dictatorial general. Celeste's parents were supporters of Alarcon, his government, and his ideology. The new dictator starts militarizing more heavily, and exerting his influence by rounding up citizens who then "disappear" and even sending soldiers into school, as well as calling novels and art "subversive." Esmeralda and Andres, Celeste's parents, receive death threats, and they realize how much danger they are in. They tell Celeste that they must go into hiding and she will remain at home with her grandmother, and the family's housekeeper, Delfina. Celeste is devastated at the loss of her parents and their uncertain fate. She cannot even know where they will hide, for her own safety. Not long after Celeste's parents have gone into hiding, the situation in Chile continues to worsen, and Celeste's *abuela* decides she must leave the country for her own safety as well. Celeste travels to the United States and tries adjusting to her new home. Life is not easy for Celeste as she faces a new school with a new language, all new people and a totally different way of life. Celeste faces challenges including struggling to learn English quickly, feeling at first like she has no friends, being depressed about the loss of her family and her homeland, and her general feeling of displacement.

The novel explores not just the typical problems a teenager faces, but also the important theme for modern day learners on the subject of refugeeism. In the beginning of the novel, Celeste's grandmother, Abuela Frida, tells her the story of escaping the nazis in Vienna, and meeting Jose, a Chilean native, who would become her husband. So right away, young readers are thinking of not only a refugee, but also, her assimilation into a different culture. Throughout the novel, Celeste endures unimaginable hardships and obstacles at a young age, however, her love for reading, writing, poetry, nature, and her homeland serves as a coping mechanism for her. The book delves into political ideology as well by exploring the struggles with the new regime and talking about the more liberal and socialist views of Esmeralda and Andres Marconi. Eventually Celeste returns home to Chile, and after some heroic action, and incredibly good fortune, has a happily ever after where she is reunited with her entire family. Despite there being some definite unreality to this, it is uplifting and inspiring for a young reader, and shows that a brave young girl can overcome phenomenal odds.

The story is beautifully and poetically written, with excellent imagery throughout the book, and quite a bit of rich content for discussion. One example to explore would be the issue of classism and opportunity. The Marconi family works tirelessly to provide medical care to the poor and rural people in their village and surrounding area, often for little money or for items the families can barter. This could be related to the current debate of whether or not health care should be free for all, and provided by the government.

Another interesting issue is that the Marconis' housekeeper, Delfina, is illiterate. At the end of the novel, Celeste is reminded that Delfina cannot read or write, and only attended school for two years. Celeste feels ashamed for all that she has, and takes for granted, and decides to help Delfina learn to read. Yet Delfina has been helping the family since before Celeste was born. It does pose the question of why the Marconis did not help her learn to read, considering their community outreach actions and extremely charitable views.

Celeste describes bullying in school as a new English learner, with other girls calling her "Latina" and saying her coat is ugly, imitating her accent, and laughing about her behind her back. She is devastated, and things continue to decline for her when an impatient teacher snaps at her for not knowing the correct pronunciation of an English word. Yet even in these trying situations, Celeste turns to sound advice from her grandmother. She recalls her grandmother saying to her "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent, Celeste" (181). Later in the novel, Celeste confronts a bully with grace and civility, without losing her ground, and is empowered by this, which is a vital conversation for middle schoolers facing bullying.

Celeste befriends two other immigrant children, Kim and Tom, who are from Korea, and together, she and Kim help one another as they struggle to learn English and fit in, in a land far different from the homes they came from. When Celeste first visits them, they live in a trailer park, not far from her aunt's house in Maine. Celeste is embarrassed at her own complaints with the world when she sees how little they have -- the two children and their parents all live in a tiny trailer, sleep on cots, and use a camping stove to cook. They have so little and yet do not complain about it. After forming this friendship, Celeste has to face the loss of her new friends, who move away suddenly without any warning. Celeste tries to go visit them and finds them gone. Losing friends, and having to make new friends, is certainly something that will speak to adolescent readers who have had to struggle with these kind of losses themselves.

After Celeste has adjusted to life in America, learned English, solved her difficulties with being bullied and is adapting, Celeste finds out that the General in Chile has been assassinated, and the military dictatorship is over. She is to go back to Chile, which is at once thrilling as it is heartbreaking for Celeste. She has made friends at last, and has made a home for herself in America. But in the end, she decides that Chile is her home, and she needs to find her parents. Celeste returns to Chile to her grandmother and decides to look for her parents. The issue of re-assimilating, and returning to one's country after two years away, is also an excellent topic to discuss with middle schoolers. Why Celeste makes the decision to go back home, and whether someone else would make that same choice, given her situation, are excellent questions.

Over and over throughout the novel, Celeste faces an obstacle, solves it, and adjusts, only to have yet another hurdle. A teacher-led discussion of this theme of being strong in the face of adversity, and persevering despite the odds, would be more valuable than just reading the book. However, one must acknowledge the fact that there are only so many school days in a year, and there are a plethora of books for adolescent students to read. While this book is an excellent choice, it is far from the only choice, and its place on the summer reading list is fine.

With certain politicians, such as our new President-elect of the United States, demanding a wall be built that Mexico will pay for, and calling for a wholesale ban on immigration from the Middle East, discussing the topics of multiculturalism and refugeeism is certainly challenging for a public school. Obviously, it is not a teacher's job to espouse a particular political view, but the book *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* certainly humanizes a refugee, and deals with her pain, her issues assimilating, and how she is treated. While carefully respecting different political views, students could definitely make text- to-world connections while reading this book.

These connections are reinforced by the fact that although *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* is a fictional story, it is based on many aspects of the life of the author, Marjorie Agosin. In an interview with Shirin Jaafari at Public Radio International as part of a series about immigrants' first days in America, Agosin speaks candidly about her own immigration to America in 1969, when she and her family had to flee her native Chile, due to political turmoil in the country. Similar to her character Celeste Marconi, Agosin arrived in America not knowing any English, at the age of 14. Agosin was unhappy as a teenage immigrant; she was bullied, had few friends, and spent time hiding in the closet at home. She comments that her salvation was writing poetry in her native language of Spanish.

Agosin's two siblings, she comments, adjusted far more easily than she did. She states that they assimilated into American life, while she did not. She recalls begging relatives to take her home to Chile when they came to visit her and her family in America. Because of her experiences, Agosin wants people who come from other countries to feel loved, welcomed and cared for, and says that while she loves America, she is a Chilean at heart. She writes stories similar to her background in the hopes that she can help other immigrants who feel as she did.

Because *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* is a relatively newer novel, and not a "pop fiction" type of story like *The Hunger Games,* there was not much to be found in the way of literary criticism and reviews. The Chairman of the Pura Belpre award committee, Tim Wadham, expresses his opinions on a few books which won Pura Belpre awards in 2015. He discusses the importance of *I Lived On Butterfly Hill* as embracing cultural diversity, and being a story that speaks to immigrant children, as well as any children who have had to leave home for some reason. Wadham points out the excellent interdisciplinary use for this book from a social studies perspective as well as English language arts, in terms of dictatorships, military coups, and even extending to discussions about differences and fitting in. Another reviewer, Jenna Lanterman, comments on the use of the book *I Lived On Butterfly Hill* as a middle school book. She notes that the weightiness of the subject matter and the length of the book itself make it possibly suited only for serious readers. This gives it potential for AP Classes, or extra credit assignments, or possibly enrichment for advanced learners.

One of the difficulties presented with this book is its length for middle schoolers; it is a 454-page book, which may be daunting for many students. While the language in it is not complicated, the subject matter is more serious, and it may not be as engaging for adolescent students to read. In addition, several people die as part of the military coup in Chile, which is potentially strong subject content for adolescents. Another issue is the political leanings of the book. While not advocating a particular political party, the book definitely discusses the unfairness of some people having abundance while others have nothing, and the lack of access to education and health care for the rural poor in Chile. At the end of the novel, Celeste receives a scholarship award from the new president of Chile for winning an essay contest. Celeste decides to donate the money she received to a traveling library that will go to the rural villages of Chile, to help people read. This is one of many examples in the book where the author is promoting selflessness and giving to the poor, ahead of having things for oneself. While the notions are altruistic, a potential argument is that the author has a political agenda she is pushing on her readers.

From the standpoint of this research, which was to specifically analyze the Hicksville Public Schools summer reading list, with regard to the choices for adolescent female students, this book is an excellent choice. The protagonist, Celeste Marconi, is a strong, smart, brave and admirable young girl. She faces challenges many children cannot even imagine, and not only overcomes them, but also behaves heroically and selflessly. One way the reading of this book would be more beneficial to young readers would be to have discussion questions for readers, much like in a book group. These questions could address topics such as the stances the Marconis take on health care, and on resources for the poor. It would also be worthwhile to ask students to look at the bullying Celeste faces, and how she chooses to handle it. Questions could be provided to review what other options she may have, or how her particular method of solving it worked.

Chapter 3: Multiculturalism

B) *The Book Thief*

The Book Thief is listed on the Hicksville Public Schools High School summer reading list for 2015, under the category New York Common Core State Standards Text Exemplars Fiction: Grades 9-10. The Lexile score for this book is 750. *The Book Thief* has won many awards, including the National Jewish Book Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature, the Printz award, the Book Sense Book of the Year Award for Children's Literature, the School Library Journal Best Book of the Year Award, the Daniel Elliot Peace Award and the Bulletin Blue Ribbon Award. In addition to critical acclaim, *The Book Thief* was on the *New York Times* Bestseller list for 230 weeks, and was made into a major motion picture in 2013.

The Book Thief takes place during World War II in Nazi Germany. It is uniquely written, in that the narrator is Death, as a personified character. Death describes when he did and did not succeed in taking the lives of individuals, and the story is told through this lens. The protagonist is young Liesel Meminger, a nine-year-old girl sent to live with a foster family, Hans and Rosa Hubermann, in 1939, when Liesel's mother cannot care for her. The book spans Liesel's whole life but focuses on the few years she is in Germany with the Hubermanns, from when she is nine to when she is about fourteen. There is brief mention of her as an adult at the end but this time period is not explored. Liesel overcomes tremendous adversity from the start, including watching her baby brother die right in front of her on the trip to the Hubermanns, losing her father, and then having to separate from her mother. Once she arrives on Himmel street at the Hubermann's house, life continues to be a harsh reality for Liesel. There is little to eat, and Hans and Rosa struggle just to get by. Liesel cannot read, as she has not had the opportunity to go to school in the past, and has to learn to read, while attending school for the first time, and adjusting to her entire world being different.

It is in the midst of this that the Hubermanns end up harboring a Jew, Max Vandenburg, in their basement. Max's father had served with Hans Hubermann in World War I, and Erik had saved Hans' life. When Erik Vandenburg died in the war, Hans sought out his family, and met young Max as a baby. He gave Erik's wife a note, with his address and let her know if she ever needed anything, to reach out to him. Little did Hans know how much she would need him, and how much he would risk to keep his promise. Nearly twenty years later, in November of 1940, a now adult Max Vandenburg must collect on this debt. He arrives on the Hubermann's doorstep and asks for their help, and Hans and Rosa do not let him down.

Max lives in the basement of 33 Himmel Street for close to two years, until he decides he has put them in enough danger, and leaves them in the middle of the night, knowing he is likely sentencing himself to death. Interestingly, it is Hans' kindness and integrity that puts the family in danger. The Nazis are parading Jews through the streets and, when Hans sees a helpless old Jewish man, he offers him a piece of bread. The man falls to his knees in thanks, clutching Hans' ankles. A Nazi sees this, and whips both the old man and Hans. Realizing that he has now caused more suspicion to rain down on himself, and thus put his family and Max in danger, Hans is sick, but it is too late, and Max leaves that night, to save the Hubermanns from potentially being discovered.

Max ends up later on in a concentration camp, and in 1943, he and several other Jewish prisoners are marched through the town by the SS as they are taken to another prison camp, as a means of degradation and terror. Liesel and Max see one another, and she hugs him. They are whipped, but neither one of them is killed, and Liesel is pulled away by friends. Max continues on his forced journey, beaten and starved nearly to death. The book ends with an epilogue and in it, Max Vandenburg returns to see Liesel after the war, in 1945, when she is fifteen years old, and he is twenty-nine. Ironically, he and one neighbor are the only survivors of her adolescence on Himmel Street, as the rest have been claimed in the war, through bombings and battles.

The content of the book is strong and while the language is straightforward enough for a middle school student, the material and subject matter is better suited to a high school student, hence the placement of the book on the high school reading list, at a ninth or tenth grade level. The book addresses important themes for young adults today, even almost seventy years after World War II. The theme of racism and antisemitism is an important one, as through this historical novel, the rise of Hitler's power and persecution of the Jews, along with others that were perceived as undesirables in Europe, is explored. This is relatable to adolescent students today as they examine examples of racism now, or how society has or has not changed. World War II is taught through both the ELA and Social Studies curricula currently, starting in a small way in elementary school, and in more detail in middle school. Many middle schools read the book *Night* by Elie Wiesel as part of an eighth grade ELA curriculum, in addition to other studies of the Holocaust. While the theme and content would not be a new one, it is another way of looking at the theme, through a fictional, adolescent lens.

Another crucial theme is that of refugeeism. Liesel Meminger is a refugee, fleeing the persecution of the Nazis against her family. While the exact problem with her mother is not defined, she mentions having heard the word "communist" in relation to her mother, and it is known that communists, among others with varying ideologies, were sent to the camps in World War II. Max Vandenburg is also a refugee, fleeing the persecution of the Jews by Hitler.With modern refugee crises around the globe, and debates in the political arena over these, this is one way high school students can get a historical perspective on refugees. The subject of refugeeism, and immigration, as well as the debates over both, is also a part of middle school curricula.

While these life or death concepts of racial persecution and refugeeism take precedence, the book also delves into the concepts of illiteracy, poverty, adolescent love, loss, perseverance and courage. These are all germane for a young high school girl to read about through the lens of Liesel Meminger. Liesel's character is thoroughly explored by Markus Zusak, and one cannot finish the book without rooting for her.

The mother figures in Liesel's life are for the most part negative. She had to be separated from her mother because her mother was deemed a communist and was taken for questioning to the camps. Liesel is sent to live with the Hubermanns on Himmel Street for her own safety, but feels abandoned by her mother. Liesel's foster mother Rosa is stoic and tough as well as verbally and physically abusive, but despite her roughshod behavior, genuinely loves and cares for Liesel. Hans is far more loving with her, soothes her when she has nightmares, covers up for her when she wets her bed, reads to her, and helps to teach her to read.

Liesel Meminger deals with fear and terror as the Nazis take over every aspect of life in Germany. She lives with a huge secret for years, of harboring a Jew in their basement, knowing she and her foster parents could all be killed for this. Liesel also eats little, and has little in the way of material possessions. The nickname of the "book thief" is given to her because she steals books. She steals books because none are available to her in any other way. For almost any teen growing up in twenty-first-century America, even of low socioeconomic status, books are fairly accessible and not something typically stolen. For many adolescents today, getting books, or just one book, would be a terrible present. They would not feel this was a real treasure and a gift the way Liesel Meminger did. But Liesel used reading as a means of escape, as a means of finding pleasure and adventure in a life that was harsh and filled with little in the way of recreation and pleasure.The other concept to explore for present-day adolescents is how the actions of Hitler and the Nazis shaped the world, and how current relationships between America and Israel, as well as American Jews and non-Jews, are shaped by the events of the past.

The saving power of books becomes more than just a theoretical concept, when Max, the Jew they hide in their basement, is escaping to come to them. While on the train, he is reading a copy of *Mein Kampf*, to help cover up the fact that he is Jewish. Reading the book on the train is part of what saves Max. Later, Max paints over the pages of *Mein Kampf* so that Liesel can use the paper to practice writing and learning, as they do not have money for paper. This theme is explored throughout the novel, as Liesel repeatedly turns to books for salvation, solace and comfort. Zusak describes the euphoria Liesel experiences when the Mayor's wife takes her inside to see their personal library. This would be shocking to a twenty-first-century American adolescent child, used to having books easily available in schools, libraries, bookstores or from their devices electronically.

In many ways, Liesel and Max are bonded. Both are refugees at the Hubermann household, for different reasons. Both of them have lost their family because of the war, because of Hitler and because of the Nazi occupation. Liesel has watched her brother die in front of her, and her mother has been taken to the camps, Max has lost his entire family. Their loss and hardships in life do not diminish their spirit and their continued desire to learn. This is evidenced numerous times in the novel, when Liesel stays up late into the night, day after day, learning to read, with the only book available to her being the gravedigger's handbook, which is boring and technical. Despite her obstacles, Liesel is persistent and tenacious and learns to read. Max shows the same strength of spirit, in surviving in the basement, as well as in helping Liesel to continue with her lessons, by painstakingly painting over every page of *Mein Kampf* and writing stories inside for Liesel to read.

While the book is relatively new and has not had much in the way of literary criticism yet, it has been reviewed by scholars and respected authors. One such reviewer happened to be, coincidentally, John Green, the author of *Paper Towns,* a book being reviewed as part of this project. Green loved the book, and felt it was a book for both young adults and adults alike. He pointed out the length of the book (552 pages) as well as the seriousness of the subject (a book about World War II, narrated by Death) may be daunting for some young adults, but the book will resonate with them as well as it is captivating, and an overall great read. He describes our female protagonist Liesel in the same way I saw her, hopeful and strong even when the whole world around her should make her anything but. The use of "Death" as a narrator is fascinating, and makes the story a different one, as the viewpoint describing the story is not your usual narrator.

Yet another review comments on the appeal of this book for both teens and adults, which is a true statement. Marianne Brace points out how *The Book Thief* appeals to children by being raw and open with all of the emotion, by being innocent and simultaneously complex and detailed. What sets this book apart from all the previous Holocaust books is the use of Death as the narrator. This clever tool brings a fresh perspective to a story that has been told over and over. Despite Death being a ruthless monster that consumes millions, it is full of heart and emotion, feeling sad over those it has to take. Liesel as a book thief is being defiant in a small way, one of few ways people could during Nazi-occupied Germany. This defiance and bravery is a hallmark of this character, which is part of her adolescent appeal.

Reviewer Susan Koprince analyzes the interesting aspect of the cellar as a setting in the novel *The Book Thief.* In the story, Max Vandenberg is hidden in the cellar, and the cellar also is what saves Liesel when her neighborhood is bombed, and she is a sole survivor because she spent the night in the basement. Instead of the cellar as a typical literary setting for fear and terror as in the writings of Edgar Allan Poe and Henri Bosco, in Zusak's novel, the cellar is a place for safety and protection, almost a sanctuary. Liesel learns to read in the cellar, and comes most alive spending time with Max in the cellar, and eventually is saved because of it. An obvious historical comparison could be made to Anne Frank's attic, from *The Diary of Anne Frank.* This would be an angle to teach from this novel, in terms of literary symbols, and what students can learn from them.

Another positive for young adults is that the book was made into a movie and in the movie *The Book Thief,* the same story is told. Death acts as a narrator in the film as well, but without the same richness and depth as in the book. Since most of the novelty of this book is in the unique narration, it has quite a different effect done as a movie. We still see Liesel stealing books, learning to read, treated roughly by Rosa Hubermann, and going through all of the things she goes through in the book, but without some of the perspective gained through reading the full story. It would still be a beneficial tool to at least show parts of it, if teaching this book in a class.

The difficulties presented by this novel are firstly, the length of the novel. At 550 pages, not every adolescent student is going to be interested in reading a novel of this size. In addition to its length, the second issue is the subject matter. This is not a book that would be considered a “beach read” in the bookstore, as the content is heavy; many people in the life of the protagonist suffer greatly, and lose their lives. The book, while not portraying the worst graphic depictions of the Holocaust, does not sugar coat the abuses of the Nazis during World War II. Parades of starving and emaciated Jews through the streets are described, as well as violence and murder. This is potentially a trigger for an adolescent, or too mature for some young adults to manage. The other challenge presented would be that because it is a historical novel, the time period may seem irrelevant to some adolescents, without a teacher to assist them in making connections from the book to their present life. Reading about a world across the globe, thousands of miles from home, and events nearly eighty years ago may at first seem inaccessible and unengaging for some young adults and this would present a challenge.

Despite these difficulties, from the perspective of this thesis, which is to address whether the fiction books on the Hicksville Summer Reading list for adolescent girls are worthwhile for young girls to read, this is a fantastic book as it promotes excellent qualities and strength of character. Liesel is not a typical feminine girl of the early twentieth century. While she does domestic type duties, she is also tough and brave. Liesel learns how to read through her foster father, Hans Hubermann. Hans has only a fourth-grade education, and Liesel has never been in formal school until she moved in with the Hubermanns. There is excellent opportunity from this book for adolescents to understand the life of someone who has much less than they do, who lived with hardships much greater than any they themselves are enduring, and this can be quite pertinent to a young adult.

The Book Thief is a book I would leave on the Hicksville Summer Reading list, possibly indefinitely, minimally without a time limit. It explores an important part of history, World War II, from an interesting perspective, that of a non-Jewish but non-Nazi German family, trying to stay alive throughout the war. It gives us insight into a brave young girl and her struggle as a refugee and her tenacity and strength of character. There is a lot about this book with which modern readers can identify, such as the concepts of racial tensions, persecution, adolescent struggles, loss, generational gaps and adapting to change.

It is important that books addressing multiculturalism and refugees are available for Hicksville students to read. Hicksville is a diverse area, and many of its residents have immigrated from other countries. Despite the obvious differences in setting and world affairs, many adolescents today will be able to identify with Liesel Meminger and her struggles to be a teenager, to have friends, to learn the language, and to fit in, all while trying just to have enough to eat and stay alive. Based on reviewing the book, its criticism and the drawbacks (content and length,) it is still a beneficial choice for the Hicksville summer reading list, and even without added study guides or interactive help, would still be of value.

Chapter 4: Dystopian Societies

A) The Hunger Games

The Hunger Games trilogy is on the Hicksville Public Schools Middle School Summer Reading list for 2015, in the science fiction category. The lexile score is listed as 800-820.The trilogy of books, *The Hunger Games, The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* and *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay,* was made into a four-part movie series, with each of the movies reaching blockbuster status and grossing hundreds of millions of dollars. The books have won awards including “Best Book of 2008” from Publisher’s Weekly and “Notable Children’s Book of 2008” from *The New York Times.*

The Hunger Games is a novel portraying a dystopian future society, where the government has absolute control, having chosen to solve the problems of war, famine, and criminality by creating an oppressive regime the likes of which make North Korea look tame. The heroine of the novel is Katniss Everdeen, a sixteen-year-old who has been caring for her mother and sister since the death of her father earlier on. Katniss is a strong female protagonist, expert with a bow and arrow, having learned to hunt in the woods to bring in food for the family to survive, and having to be strong for her younger sister, Prim, since the mental breakdown of her mother. Many of the themes in *The Hunger Games* are relevant just as much in real-life modern day as they are in the novel. Income inequality, crushing competitiveness, bloodthirstiness of entertainment, the necessity for sacrifice, and a strong emphasis on physical appearance and looks are the key themes in *The Hunger Games.*

The novel explains that society has been broken up into twelve districts. Each district has a specific role that its inhabitants follow; in District 12, where Katniss lives, they are coal miners. People cannot travel between districts and cannot freely do anything. As a punishment for the past uprising against the Capitol, every year they have the Hunger Games, a lottery where every adolescent from ages twelve to eighteen must put their name, and two children, a girl and a boy from every district, are chosen to participate. The Games are a fight to the death in an arena created by the Capitol, complete with futuristic horrible obstacles and deadly poisons; they are like *Survivor* on steroids. In the end, only one can win, and all others must die; this is the penance all members of the districts must submit to, and one of many ways in which the government subjugates its people.

Several themes become apparent in this novel. One of which is the competitive atmosphere, which can be analyzed by the reader. It is suggestive of certain similar, albeit less lethal, comparisons for a modern young adult. The process of getting into a prestigious college, getting chosen for the best jobs, or for the highest awards in school, are all highly competitive scenarios that young adults face, where there are many individuals competing and only a small percentage win. This type of cutthroat, survival-of-the-fittest environment is not questioned by most, as it is part of the tenets of our value system, in a capitalist society.

Another prevalent theme throughout the novel, is that of inequality; there is a strong emphasis on the dichotomy between the Capitol and the rest of the districts, the haves versus the have-nots. The contrasts are not subtle at all. In the Capitol, they have an obscene amount of rich food, as well as people made up in high fashion, living in opulence, and a general atmosphere of decadence and over-abundance, while in the districts, people starve and barely survive, living in hovels and stark poverty. Yet again, readers can analyze the comparisons between then and now. In modern America, the top one percent earns twenty percent of the country's income. Economists have provided information showing that today, in America, the wealthiest 160,000 families have the same amount of wealth as the poorest 145 million families, with a collapse of intergenerational mobility, and almost all of the time, the poor staying poor, while the rich keep getting richer. Stark income inequality is a key part of the dystopian society of Panem, much as it is a part of twenty-first century America.

The fascination of the population with watching the games is also important. The games are brutal, with children ripping each other apart for their own survival, triumphant only when everyone else dies. People all over the districts watch in fascination, with rapt attention. In the real world, there are, once again, many modern-day brutal entertainments include cage fighting, bull fighting, public executions, blood fiestas in several Latin American countries, as well as dogfighting and cockfighting.

Then there is the theme of the emphasis on physical appearances and conforming to beauty standards of society. In a world consumed by Kardashians, “real” (ha!) housewives, bachelors and bachelorettes, twenty-first-century America is a society that the inhabitants of the Panem Capitol could truly get behind. Their focus is to make the tributes look physically appealing so that they will become popular with the viewers, and the tributes will be able to get sponsors to help them when they need it. In addition to looks, much concern is placed on a good “story” between Katniss and Peeta. A love story that the public will be infatuated with is not too different from a Kardashian show, and the public of Panem eats it up.

The movie “The Hunger Games” is similar to the book. Katniss Everdeen is portrayed by Jennifer Lawrence as a tough, self-sufficient young woman, fighting to survive and keep her family alive in a world where oppression is the rule and people live in fear of their government, forced to submit or exist no more. For young girls seeing the movie rather than reading the book, they will get much of the same experience. Obviously, in a movie, much of the character’s own insight and personal musings cannot be shown, but this movie does a decent job. The dialogue between characters is kept just about the same and the cinematography depicts the disgraceful state of existence in District Twelve, as well as the opulence and overabundance of the Capitol.

The next step I did in analyzing this novel, was to review the literary analysis and criticism about *The Hunger Games.* Jane Saunders, an assistant professor of literacy at the College of Education at Texas State University-San Marcos, has a background as a teacher of middle school English in North Texas. Saunders describes her first introduction to interdisciplinary curricula through the push from her middle school principal at the time. She explains the complexity of the project, and the challenges the teachers faced with different demands for each area -- Social Studies, Science, Math and English. Saunders cites studies which have found that generic literacy approaches crossing different content areas have not proven to produce results in boosting student learning. Saunders became interested in *The Hunger Games* to solve a problem she encountered when supervising student teachers. These teachers struggled with middle schoolers sneakily reading the book during classes. Saunders decided to embrace the book rather than to fight it, and she personally read the book over a weekend, and then thought about how she could incorporate a lesson into it, as a teacher's teacher. (At this point, Saunders was a college professor at Texas State.)

Saunders worked with another professor, and asked her students to read *The Hunger Games.* She then made a list of important character traits the protagonist of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss Everdeen, exhibits (tenacity, problem-solving, and so forth). She had students do text-to-self, text-to-world and text-to-other-texts connections. She asked her preservice teachers to read their curricular guidelines and figure out how to match *The Hunger Games* to that. These preservice teachers then worked out lesson plans that were based on the state standards, were utilizing literacy tools they had been taught, and were inclusive of models and materials needed to teach the lesson. Students were easily able to see how to incorporate interdisciplinary lessons into the book, such as math probabilities in the arena and the history of Panem. Ultimately, the students were able to use the book across four disciplines - ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies. This experiment proved far more effective than just a generic approach to teaching, without relating information being taught to subjects of interest and relevance to students.

A key reason for the extreme popularity of *The Hunger Games* with middle and high school students, is the authenticity of the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen. This is the message from author Ned Vizzini, who analyzes *The Hunger Games,* both film and novel, from the aspect of Katniss' relationship with the media. In the movie, when Katniss Everdeen is first interviewed by the media person from the Capitol, she comes across as unfiltered, real, and down-to-earth, unusual qualities in a censored, hyper-recorded society, where everyone in "the Capitol" is about as "real" as a "real housewife." Katniss is an everyday girl, living a regular life. She has some skill with a bow and arrow, but she is not formally trained, like those from District Two. She is not a killer or a special fighter. She is propelled into the games by circumstance, and becomes extraordinary, first and foremost because of her likeability and relatability. Without this, she never would have survived the games, never would have gotten all she needed to make it through. Other skills help, like being fast-thinking as well as ruthless when she had to be, but most of all, her ability to be herself in front of the cameras, with the whole world watching, makes her shine.

Vizzini also dissects the attempts the media make at getting Katniss to be the person they want, and how that backfires. Her appeal is strongest when she is not being self-conscious and thinking of everything she says and does, so once she is, she loses her authenticity. It is only when she drops this, and is herself, that she is so completely adored by people. He points out the impossibility of this effect for young people today, with everyone's hyper-awareness of social media and their online personas. Vizzini relates *The Hunger Games* to his own brief media training for television interviews, following his success as an author. He discusses learning how to look at a camera without looking ***at*** a camera, and how to come across as natural and relaxed, even if you are anything but. Vizzini comments that Katniss is a survivor and one who lives by the mantra "be honest."

The Hunger Games is a novel of dystopian fiction, in which the main character, Katniss Everdeen, along with several other adolescents, is thrust into a game of death as sport. Laurie Penny points out the incredible irony of the book being released in the same year, 2008, as the world financial system fell into crisis, which created a present with certain striking similarities to Panem, the world of Katniss Everdeen.

Penny discusses the current fears of government surveillance, lack of opportunity, environmental disasters, and police oppression against a backdrop of adolescents reading dystopian fiction. She compares the adolescents of *Harry Potter* with those in *The Hunger Games* and talks about the distrust of adults as a key difference. In *Harry Potter,* the children are surrounded with some decent grown-ups who help them navigate difficult circumstances, while in *The Hunger Games,* adults cannot be trusted; they have set the adolescents up as pawns in a game where almost all will die. Any decent adults are murdered, or otherwise silenced by the oppressive government, or destroy themselves with alcohol or depression. Penny says that the youth of today are more connected, more aware, and more courageous than any generation before them, and need the support of adults who can be trusted to be decent allies.

Other reviewers focus on the aspect of the qualities about Katniss that cause her to be idolized by adolescent girls. In her article “Girl Power in Dystopia,” Kathi Maio compares a few books and the movies that follow them, within the fantasy and science fiction genres -- specifically as they relate to young adult fiction. *The Hunger Games* trilogy, she notes, is remarkably similar to *Divergent* and its sequels. Both have a cute, tough female heroine, forced to survive in a near apocalyptic society, facing challenges for day-to-day survival, and having to choose being two bad options. Katniss is a successful female role model for young adults because she is neither sexualized nor supernatural. As other reviewers and critics have commented, she is an ordinary girl put into extraordinary situations, and it is her method of handling things and getting herself out of her predicament that is what makes her so incredibly popular.

In addition to being a strong female protagonist, Katniss importantly conveys, in both the books and the movies, the horror of having to watch and participate in the murder and brutality of her fellow citizens. Katniss Everdeen is human, raw in her emotions, and is both a ruthless warrior and a revolutionary. This, along with a story of romance, makes for an appealing read for young adults.

While the literary value of *The Hunger Games* is a bit debatable, it became a complete cultural popular sensation, and Katniss became a character middle school girls wanted to dress up as for Halloween, and a persona they could aspire to be. Katniss does not disappoint the adolescent reader; she is as strong as she is brave and as powerful as she is determined. She never gives up and fights hard, and is also kind, loyal and loving, sacrificing for her little sister and for her mother, and even willing to die to save her friend Peeta. This makes it a relevant and valuable choice to keep on the Hicksville Summer Reading list, until such time as a more up-to-the-minute popular book hits. For this choice, those picking and choosing books for the Hicksville Summer Reading list should re-assess each summer so as to stay current and relatable to their audiences. Resources such as the *New York Times BestSeller List* or others may be valuable.

The positives for this book that sway me to recommend keeping this on the Hicksville Summer Reading List is that the book is relatable to young adults, the content of a dystopian society with a tyrannical government has interdisciplinary educational value to middle schoolers, and it is thought provoking on many levels. While the society being described is fictional, there are elements these students can examine to see in the world around them. The fact that the book was made into a movie is another reason to keep it on the list, as it has achieved popularity, making it more interesting for impressionable teenagers, who may want to read it simply to keep up with what is current. Another plus is that the book itself does not require much in terms of reading aids or assistance to grasp the higher-level concepts. Most of the points are obvious and not as subtle as some of the other texts examined.

A caveat I would offer is that as time goes forward, the novel will lose relevance. Even now, it is eight years after the release of the first book and the sensation has died down. Likely we will have more current popular fiction books as each year progresses to keep on the list. Another difficulty with the novel for middle schoolers is the somewhat casual and sociopathic approach to extreme violence. The games themselves are a battle to the death where only one (or two) contestants can win by killing all of the others. The people killed are innocent young people just like themselves. This is questionable in terms of appropriateness for the age levels, while the reading level itself would not place the book at a higher age level. I would recommend that this book be reviewed each year for relevance and interest, taken by a pulse of the librarians at the middle and high school as well as the ELA teachers if applicable. As other, more current novels fill this slot, this book could be archived from the list without detriment to students.

Chapter 4: Dystopian Societies

B) *Paper Towns*

Paper Towns is on the Hicksville High School summer reading list, in the category of realistic fiction. It has a lexile score of 850 and was written by John Green, an award-winning author of several *New York Times* bestsellers. *Paper Towns* won the 2009 Edgar Award for Best Young Adult Mystery and was adapted to a movie in 2015. It is a realistic novel which takes place in modern day, in a small town, Orlando, Florida. The main character is Quentin (Q) Jacobsen, and his dream girl, Margo Roth Spiegelman. Margo is as courageous as Q is nervous, as rebellious as he is conformist and as brazen as he is shy. Margo is not your typical heroine: she suffers from depression and seems to contemplate suicide. She comes from a dysfunctional family, with parents who do not understand her or her free-spirited nature, and her struggle to have her own identity, to be the person she wants to be, and to have her own place in the world, is much unsupported by her uber middle class and conservative parents.

Despite Margo's depression and relative instability, she is also incredibly noble, with strong personal integrity and a desire to right wrongs, to live her life to the fullest, and in so doing, she helps her friend Q to break free from the chains of repression that have kept him in check. She convinces Q to sneak out of his house and go out on a spree with her, involving breaking the law but not indiscriminately; it is a quest to right wrongs and put things to order.

Margo is extremely identifiable for the young adult. She does not follow authority just because. She does not believe that all adults are right just by virtue of being adults, and she does not think that the middle class ideal of college, a white picket fence, and a couple of kids and a dog, are the be-all and end-all of everyone's life. She is a dreamer and a thinker and a completely out-of-the-box free spirit. She forces Quentin to stop being so "good" and to take a few risks, something he has done way too little of in his life up until this point.

Important themes for young adults to explore in this book abound, not the least of which is the situation of Margo, a popular girl, well liked by everyone, desired by guys, but who feels all alone, as if nobody in her world -- not her parents, not her best friends -- really knows her. This gives her an incredible sense of loneliness, feelings with which many adolescents can probably identify. When someone is popular, so people think they are perfect and do not have real problems, and don't take the time to really know them and really listen, or when someone is a smart honors student, or because someone is beautiful or someone is held to others' ideals and standards, the adulation can paradoxically be isolating, and it is important for young adults to understand that these are normal feelings that others could have.

The concept of a "paper town" is an interesting concept as well. John Green says he first learned about paper towns in college. They are fictional places, made by mapmakers, to see if other people are copying them. They are not typically towns but more often, streets or bridges. According to Green, encyclopedias and dictionaries also did that. This is an interesting point of analysis for young adult readers, the concept of something fictional turning into something more. In the book, Margo points out to Quentin that she is not just a "paper girl," but that she cultivated that idea, of an image, and what people wanted her to be.

Through the course of the novel, and finally spending some time with Margo, Q realizes that for years, he has been in love with the idea of Margo, rather than actually Margo herself, and that his idea has been based not on reality, but on his imagination. He loved how pretty she was, how mysterious she was, and his memories of hanging out with her when he was younger, when in actual fact, he has not spent any time with her in years, since they went their separate ways as they got older. When he finds out more about the real Margo Roth Spiegelman, Q truly falls in love with her, faults and all.

The way adults analyze and see their children, and how they treat them, is a prominent feature in this book. Margo's parents, first of all, express frustration and disgust with what they consider are her antics, with no effort to understand her as a person. Her mother expresses relief at her being gone, and says she is changing the locks of the house; Margo is eighteen, so therefore not her problem any more. Q's parents, both psychologists, continually analyze Q and others, using psychoanalytic terms. Q's friend Radar's parents have a gigantic collection of black Santas that causes Radar extreme embarrassment. In each of these cases, the prominent adults in the lives of these teenagers appear to not fully understand the other person, most especially the Spiegelmans.

In the movie *Paper Towns*, the character Q is much more present than Margo. In the book, much of what we know about Margo is from Q's perspective. The movie has a narrative method which is similar to that of the book, of Q's internal dialogue and explanations; however, the viewers see much more about how Q feels about Margo. Her important lines, such as being a "paper girl" much like a paper town, where there is nothing real about her, are included. There is not too much about Margo Roth Spiegelman that appears heroic, or appears as a role model for young girls. It is a classic coming-of-age story, and Margo is a lost young woman, struggling to figure out who she is. The movie ends like the book, with Margo in the paper town of Agloe, NY, and Q returning home to reality -- prom, college, and presumably, the rest of his life.

The reviews of the book and of the ideas presented in it are interesting, and explore the idea of the specific code in which Margo and the other high school students in the book live by. In the article, “Nerdfighters, *Paper Towns* and Heterotopia,” Lili Wilkinson focuses on the comparisons of John Green’s mission in his “nerdfighters” website, to his novels, among them *Paper Towns.* The Nerdfighters online community was founded in 2007 by John Green and his brother, Hank, through a series of YouTube videos. Their website became popular through fans of Green’s novels, and it has many goals, amongst them activism for world good, but also creating a supportive online community for adolescents. Wilkinson describes the novel *Paper Towns* as “heterotopia,” which is essentially a philosophical concept made popular by philosopher Michel Foucault, wherein physical spaces and mental or emotional spaces occupy the same space at the same time. In these spaces, normal rules of behavior are suspended, and their inhabitants are members of subcultures such as adolescents, the elderly, pregnant women, or other people living outside the normal realm. Foucault described two scenarios for heterotopia -- the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation. Crisis would be situations like adolescence (rectified by growing up) and deviation would be mental institutions and prisons. Wilkinson cites interviews with John Green and discusses the relationship between the Nerdfighters online community, and the book *Paper Towns.* In the book, the adolescents are all living in both a dystopia and a utopia at the same time. They are, to the adults in their lives, young and carefree, without jobs and responsibilities, but they are also broken, trying to figure out who they are and what they want. Through the book *Paper Towns*, as well as through the online community, Wilkinson says, there are supports for young adults who feel different, as if they are other than “normal.”

Mason Smith describes the plot of *Paper Towns,* and discusses the friendship between Margo and Quentin and the unusual way Margo re-enters Quentin’s life, after the two drifted apart for years. She describes Quentin and Margo as both being in specific roles -- Margo as essentially self-absorbed and elusive, and Quentin as a goody-goody, dorky kid. Through pushing Quentin to get past his inhibitions, Margo permanently helps Quentin to change and shed some of his uptightness, which helps him to know himself, and know her, better.

This book is interesting in terms of its value to adolescents on a reading list. I would say it does have a place, insomuch as it is a typical coming-of-age novel, and Margo is excellent as a flawed character, with a wealth of material to explore. This again would be a book to review each summer for timeliness and relevance and if other books come out that are more current and popular, it could easily be replaced by another.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

As part of this thesis, my advisor, Dr. Margaret Hallissy, interviewed a class she was teaching in the Fall of 2016. The class was English 35, Childhood and Literature, and the topic the class was discussing was the short story “Summer Reading is Killing Me!” by John Scieszka. After telling them about my thesis and the concluding chapter, in which I make recommendations for the future, Dr. Hallissy asked the students to brainstorm suggestions for making summer reading more valuable to the students,

The LIU Post college students all had experiences with summer reading from their own middle and high schools, and many of these students plan on becoming teachers, and are looking to ways they will utilize summer reading with their own students. One student’s high school did something particularly creative in that they put the students into secret book groups, and required them to have a book group meeting at the start of school and hold each other accountable (plus incidentally meeting people outside their usual posse!).

Several students mentioned ways to do follow-up assignments, based on assignments they had been given as students. Some examples were book reports, tests, shoebox dioramas, posters, ad prizes for number of books read (although the last assignment encouraged reading shorter and easier novels). These students also had ideas for ways the process of choosing books could be improved, including allowing recommended books instead of or in addition to required books, allowing completely free choice instead of “the list," recommending authors rather than specific works, expanding reading genres to include graphic novels, newspapers, non-fiction, publications in other media than print, comparison of books to films made from them, and teachers picking their own list of favorite authors.

The students surveyed were ambivalent about the “classics” approach (force-feeding books that are “good for you” to have read, even if nobody enjoys actually reading them). They were also wondering how controversial content (or non-PC content) should be handled. One student reported that her district had banned *To Kill A Mockingbird* because of discussion of racism.

These students also had some suggestions for improving the after-reading experience including the book group approach as described above, a packet of guided questions prepared on each book, asking students to do background research before reading a book or providing it to them, requiring fewer books but using the above strategies to cause them to read more deeply, and an interactive website on which they conduct a virtual book chat.

Another important part of this thesis research was interviewing Dr. Tom Moss, the English Language Arts Supervisor for the Hicksville School District. The interview was conducted conversationally, rather than interrogatively, and all of the information was gathered through the course of a one-hour discussion. The Summer reading list is compiled through input from each individual school librarians. It is updated every year. Many selections stay on the list year after year. The choices are made with an effort to span various genres so as to pique student interest, and find age-appropriate and enriching reading material. There is no formula to gathering input from students, parents, or other people, but the books are chosen using collaboration with other librarians and with an effort to stay current, as well as including classic literature suggestions. There is no enforcement of summer reading. It is purely optional and no testing is done on it, and no grades are improved or reduced based on participation. Legally, this cannot be required, except in specific AP classes, but they have exact required reading. Rarely are there parent complaints, and where there have been, they were about parents not wanting their child to be required to read over the summer.There is no formal feedback obtained, but it is estimated that approximately 10% of students do summer reading.

There is an effort to choose books that are both typically suitable for female readers, as well as more typically appealing to male readers, such as having a large sci-fi list, as well as love stories and more. While there are no "girl book lists" and "boy book lists," the titles are in a large variety of categories and are chosen so as to appeal to multiple interests. There are no taboos per se, however, there is definite mindfulness with regard to age appropriate content, and the like. For example, a book like *Paper Towns* is on the high school list, and not on the middle school list, as it deals with teenage sexuality, suicide, and depression. Other books like *Night* by Elie Wiesel and *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park are done as part of the curriculum in middle school, and are about heavy subject matters that can be intense for these adolescents to learn about, but are not disallowed.

The summer reading list is included in the Hicksville Public Schools website but is not widely disseminated beyond that. Dr. Moss has done several things to make the lists more appealing, such as adding pictures of the book covers to the selections, so as to be a visual aid to the students, and creating lists of genres so students can quickly look at their particular interest area for book selections. With stringent curriculum requirements for required reading, there is not much time or space for pushing reading that is completely optional, and cannot legally be enforced.

In conclusion, the original question I asked myself in this thesis project was: are there fiction books on the summer reading list for Hicksville middle school and high school that are relatable to adolescent female students? This question has been answered to my satisfaction; yes, there are books on the summer reading list for Hicksville middle school and Hicksville high school, with strong female protagonists, that are relatable to adolescent girls. There was no possibility of reading every book on this list, as the lists are broken down into fifteen different categories, with anywhere from as few as five, to as many as twenty-five different books per category, totalling over two hundred book choices. In order to choose a representative sample of books, I selected six books, three for the middle school, and three for the high school. The books were grouped into three categories -- classics, dystopian fiction, and multiculturalism. I thoroughly read and annotated each book, and analyzed them from the perspective of the young adults that would be reading these. Coincidentally, five of the six books chosen also had been made into movies, so this was another interesting aspect, and I watched every movie after reading the novels, and compared them. I reviewed literary criticisms and book reviews about the novels chosen and reflected on themes and messages from the books.

The district I chose was my home district, because it was applicable to my life, as a mother of two pre-teen girls who will soon be in middle school. The middle school books chosen were *I Lived on Butterfly Hill, Little Women,* and *The Hunger Games.* The high school books chosen were *Jane Eyre, Paper Towns,* and *The Book Thief.* Two of the books are in the category of "classics" (*Jane Eyre* and *Little Women).* Two are dystopian society books *(Paper Towns* and *The Hunger Games),* and two are about multi-culturalism and refugees (*I Lived on Butterfly Hill* and *The Book Thief).*The reason for choosing the summer reading list, as opposed to the books on the curriculum, was to explore a potentially unexplored area of development, as there has already been much research and discussion about the curriculum, and the common core has been dissected at length, and continues to be so.

While the book selections are acceptable, and there is no specific objection I found to the choices, the way that Hicksville school district engages in summer reading is slightly problematic. Because summer reading is not mandatory, and non-enforceable, it has taken such a back burner as to be non-existent. The list itself is hard to find on the district website (www.hicksvillepublicschools.org) and was only able to be found after some hunting around on the internet. This does not present an easy option for students looking to enhance their studies over the summer, and their parents trying to oversee their children's' progress. While the choices are not objectionable, the topics are varied, and there is ample subject content for students with a diverse array of interests, they need to be made more accessible to students.

The second issue is the lack of resources invested by the school librarians to help students succeed with the summer reading lists. There are many ways the students could be encouraged to do summer reading, including some of the ideas presented by the LIU English Education majors interviewed as part of this research. An option I like, that incorporates the use of technology, is creating an online book club over the summer where students can participate and post comments and questions about books they like. They could also earn extra credit from this, or other projects such as handing in a book report, or art project about a book they read.

Other options that should potentially be explored are audio books; by providing books that are also available to be listened to, auditory learners can benefit. Some adolescents like magazines or graphic novels, and these should be choices as well. Others may be interested in a specific topic they can study in a magazine. I found there were no magazine options on the summer reading list either. Many other children have a favorite series, and the book list did not leave many series choices. This could be far more varied, as some suggested, even not having a list, but rather only suggestions, or links saying if you like this (for example, the Harry Potter books) try this (for example, J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings novels.) Also, there are a plethora of short stories available, including ones of high literary significance, such as the works of Edgar Allan Poe, or others. Many children feel they do not have choices in day-to-day school life, instead having to follow strict rules, assignments, and a mandated curriculum. Nurturing lifelong readers, as well as overcoming summer slump, are some of the goals for a summer reading list, and this could be better accomplished, potentially by providing far greater choices for children.

Last year, one school district in Massachusetts created a game whereby students were asked to read at least one book over the summer and submit a book report on it. Those who submitted the book report would be entered into a drawing to win gift cards, and a grand prize of a Kindle Fire tablet. All of these items were donated by local businesses. The district ran this with their fourth through twelfth grades, and awarded a Kindle Fire to one student per grade, and gift cards to three student per grade. According to their district website (www.WarePS.org) they had a total of 385 students eligible to win. In another area, in rural upstate New York, the New York State Senator for their district decided to make summer reading one of her agenda items. Senator Patty Ritchie partners with local libraries and participates in the New York State Senate's Summer Reading Program. Their 2015 theme was "Every Hero Has a Story," and it celebrated heroes in literature. Students keep an online reading journal, tracking their books read. Parents can also log in to see progress. When they complete their journal, their state senator sends them a certificate in the mail. Additional actions were being done including increased funding to libraries and collaboration with their local libraries.

Through my interview with the ELA supervisor for Hicksville, it was apparent that summer reading has not been considered a priority. He mentioned an instance of a parent suing for a student being required to read books over the summer, but losing the suit because their child was in an AP class, and the judge determined AP classes were allowed to require extra activities since the class itself was for college credit, and not part of the basic curriculum. With pressure on common core requirements, testing, and demands for solutions to day-to-day problems, summer reading is taking a back burner. There is no data available for the Hicksville Public School district as far as participation or success in their summer reading program, so it is not known who is or is not reading, but the estimate was low, approximately 10%. The books being chosen for the summer reading program in Hicksville are satisfactory books and there is nothing in them that is objectionable, in fact, on the contrary, the books are beneficial and worth reading, with ample options for adolescent girls to read about that provide educational value, with the only changes recommended being in the amount of student participation in the program.

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