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Building Bridges: Connecting to the Classics with Young Adult Literature

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BUILDING BRIDGES: CONNECTING TO THE CLASSICS WITH YOUNG ADULT
LITERATURE

By
Karen Rusyniak Conner

A Dissertation Submitted to the
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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Approval Page

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Abstract

BUILDING BRIDGES: CONNECTING TO THE CLASSICS WITH YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE. Conner, Karen Rusyniak, 2019: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

This study examined the effects of intertextual study using young adult literature and classic literature on both student reading attitudes and student achievement with 10th-grade high school English students in a suburban high school in North Carolina. The convergent parallel mixed methods action research study used qualitative data in the form of an anonymous survey and anonymous open-ended journal responses as well as qualitative data from achievement results on required benchmark tests. The survey results were analyzed in terms of responses, and open-ended responses were analyzed and coded for themes. Multiple themes emerged from the survey responses and open-ended journal responses, including a dislike of classic literature, a preference for young adult literature, and a lack of reading for enjoyment. Benchmark data were analyzed using paired *t*-tests. The results of the paired *t*-tests did not show a significant change in student achievement for any of the reading of literature standards tested.

Recommendations for future study are given.

Keywords: young adult literature, YAL, YA literature, classic literature, canon, canonical literature, reading engagement, reading interest, reading attitudes, intertextual study, intertextuality

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Many experienced teachers have struggled to spark an interest in the classics in students. Developing a love for classic literature takes time and academic maturity, something many high school students have not yet developed (Calvino, 2001). Rosenblatt (1991) believed, similar to beginning readers, adolescents “need to encounter literature for which they possess the intellectual, emotional, and experiential equipment” (p. 26). In other words, students must first become readers then later develop the skills necessary to comprehend literary technique and sophisticated plots. Reading is a pleasurable experience for many students at the elementary level; yet by high school, students no longer show passion for reading. Something happens between then and high school that turns students into nonreaders. Greenburg, Gilbert, and Frederick (2006) found students’ desire to read decreased by the time students were in middle school. Cole (2009) believed that “in our efforts to create readers, [schools] can actually squelch desires by forcing students to read books they don’t love” (p. 38); yet “in today’s economy, the 25 fastest-growing professions have far greater-than-average literacy demands, while the fastest-declining professions have lower-than-average literacy demands” (Stephenson, 2010, p. 59). To best serve students and prepare them for the future, schools must find ways to get students reading.

Statement of the Problem

Reading for pleasure has long been a favorite pastime for many people. Just perusing the popular website for book lovers, Goodreads (www.goodreads.com), or reading the Amazon book reviews (www.amazon.com) proves reading is still a popular pastime. However, recent academic reports suggest this trend is not the case for all,

particularly America's teens. A 2014 National Public Radio broadcast reported from Common Sense Media stated that "nearly half of 17-year-olds say they read for pleasure no more than one or two times a year — if that," a statistic that worries many (Ludden, 2014, para. 2); yet sales in the young adult (YA) sections of bookstores in the U.S. contrast this statement. According to the website The Balance, more than 10,000 YA books were published in 2012 compared to only 4,700 a decade earlier (Peterson, 2017). Alan Sitomer (2010, as cited in Groenke & Scherff, 2010), the 2007 Teacher of the Year in California, stated the YA genre is the hottest genre in the publishing industry. George (2011), a professor at Fordham University, taught an adolescent literature course to preservice teachers and said, "the world of adolescent literature is expanding exponentially in the 21st century" (p. 183). Despite the genre growing in popularity, YA literature (YAL) is neglected as a teaching option in many high schools. The Common Core State Standards includes lists of suggested exemplars, which includes various classic texts and leads many teachers away from YAL (Connors, 2013). Additionally, some teachers feel YAL is not sophisticated or complex even though research shows many YA novels have rich plots and complex characters and storylines (Crowe, 2001; Glaus, 2014; Miller, 2017; Santoli & Wagner, 2004). Some teachers believe that only classic literature can offer students quality literature and quality learning (Jago, 2000, 2004; Koelling, 2004).

Schools are the perfect place to promote reading for both learning and pleasure. Some educators would argue there is no room for "fun" reading during the class day when Shakespeare and other classics must be covered (Jago, 2000), implying classics hold the key to learning and academic growth; however, "fun" works such as YAL can be

the key to encouraging reading in school and even bridging a connection to the classics. Wilhelm and Smith (2016) stated that “pleasure has enormous power in fostering reading engagement and development” (p. 25); however, the researchers also noted reading for pleasure is not seen as important in schools as a means for growing readers (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016, p. 25). In fact, lessons in schools often tend to focus solely on testing. Gallagher (2009) suggested schools are actually killing reading. Gallagher defined *readicide* as, “The systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools” (p. 2). Allington corroborated those thoughts in the introduction writing: “The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 [has] created schools in which lessons are focused primarily on improving test scores. As a result, instruction has been narrowed and made even more mind-numbing than in earlier eras” (Gallagher, 2009, p. vii).

Whether or not teens are reading is debatable, but what is certain is the recent reading results (United States Department of Education, 2015; National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2006). NCTE (2006) published a policy brief stating, “over 8 million students in grades 4-12 read below grade level” (p. 2). In addition, NCTE cited a report by ACT stating only 50% of the students in high schools in the United States are able to read complex texts. In fact, one in four are unable to comprehend the material in their high school textbooks (NCTE, 2006). This is troubling considering the complexity of texts found at the college and career levels. Reported in the Nation’s Report Card (United States Department of Education, 2015), only 37% of high school seniors scored at or above proficient in reading, and the average score for 12th-grade readers had dropped five points since 1992. Clearly, this fact is concerning and one needing

exploration. While all other areas tested by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have seen either a rise in scores or no significant change in the past 13 years, apart from geography, reading has declined (United States Department of Education, 2015). This indicates there is a problem concerning reading.

NAEP national report cards also showed the reading scores of fourth and eighth graders have stagnated in recent years (United States Department of Education, 2015). In North Carolina, the scores on the eighth grade End of Grade reading tests have dropped below the national average. According to recent testing in North Carolina, only 30% of eighth graders are considered proficient at reading (United States Department of Education, 2015). This statistic is problematic considering the complexity of the classical literature currently making up the bulk of the reading curriculum in high school English classes. Many high school readers, because they are not habitual readers, have not developed the skills necessary to comprehend the classical works of literature presented in secondary English courses. In addition, many high school students report a lack of interest in the classical literature citing it does not relate to them (Gibbons, Dail & Stallworth, 2006; Gallo, 2001; Ivey & Johnston, 2017; Miller, 2017). A lack of skills and interest makes comprehension of classic literature difficult. English teachers are often faced with groans and exasperated sighs whenever it is announced the class will be reading Shakespeare, Fitzgerald, or other authors of canonical literature. Broz (2011) insisted students are not even reading the canonical works assigned, and Miller (2017) validated this through research on using YAL and classic literature together. Miller (2017) cited YAs who, in conversation about the texts they were assigned in class, stated the texts to be read in the AP classes were boring compared to YAL. Some of these

students, in fact, did not actually complete the assigned readings, leaning instead on websites to summarize the material (Miller, 2017). According to NCTE (2006), students are often simply choosing not to read. Miller (2017) believed educators need to “diversify their reading lists in order to better engage students as readers” (p. 5). Brauer and Clarke (as cited in George, 2011) believed the English curriculum as a whole needs to be reworked to include current texts.

YAL can be used as a way to engage students in reading while bridging connections with classical texts (Miller, 2017). Connors (2013) believed the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, with its lists of suggested exemplars, leads many teachers away from YAL. Some teachers believe YAL is not sophisticated or complex; however, research shows many YA novels have rich plots and complex characters and storylines (Crowe, 2001; Glaus, 2014; Miller, 2017; Santoli & Wagner, 2004). Glaus (2014) noted this idea is even found in the Common Core State Standards suggested list of texts for Grades 6-8 which included *Little Women* (Alcott, 2004) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1948) among others (NGA Center & CCSSO as cited in Glaus, 2014). In fact, some believe YAL to be of the same quality as classic literature. Gallo (2001) believed some YA novels are worthy to serve as reading in AP level courses. Glaus noted,

Textually complex YA literature also speaks to Rosenblatt’s description of the “human experience” found in stories and the engagement and creative activities that can take place only between the reader and the text. With such engagement, the answer to the question, “why do we have to do this?” is answered for the students because of the connections and exploration that take place during and

after the reading. (p. 411)

Many educators still insist the classics must be taught. Research consistently shows students must be able to make connections to literature to be motivated to read (Gallo, 2001; Gibbons et al., 2006; Ivey & Johnston, 2017). Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) agreed that “facilitating students’ development as lifelong readers” (p. 479) should be a goal of any school. Although recent research has shown students and teachers find those connections in YAL, little research has been done to show YAL can be used to bridge to classic literature and aid in student attitudes toward classic literature. In addition to that, little research has been done using the “voices for whom these books are intended” (Enriquez, 2006, p. 16). While there are numerous studies including teacher attitudes toward YAL, few are concerned with student attitudes. Likewise, while many researchers recommend YAL be used in the classroom, few studies have been concerned with the pairing of YAL and classic literature and its effect on student attitudes. This research intended to study these.

Conceptual Framework

Students need literature with which they can connect in order to grow as learners. Louise Rosenblatt (2005), a well-known researcher and reading expert, stated reading is the making of connections, or the transactions, between the reader and the text. In order for learning to occur, students must bring their experiences to the reading. While classics offer great literature, classics often do not provide the connection adolescents seek (Gallo, 2001). On its own, classic literature does not reflect the typical student. The classrooms of the 21st century are diverse and multicultural, yet the protagonists in most classic literature are adults of European descent (Applebee, 1992). YAL provides the

connection not found in classic literature by using diverse adolescent protagonists who face typical adolescent difficulties. Intertextuality between YAL and classic literature can create a bridge to classical literature for students who otherwise would not respond positively to classic literature. Figure 1 demonstrates this idea.

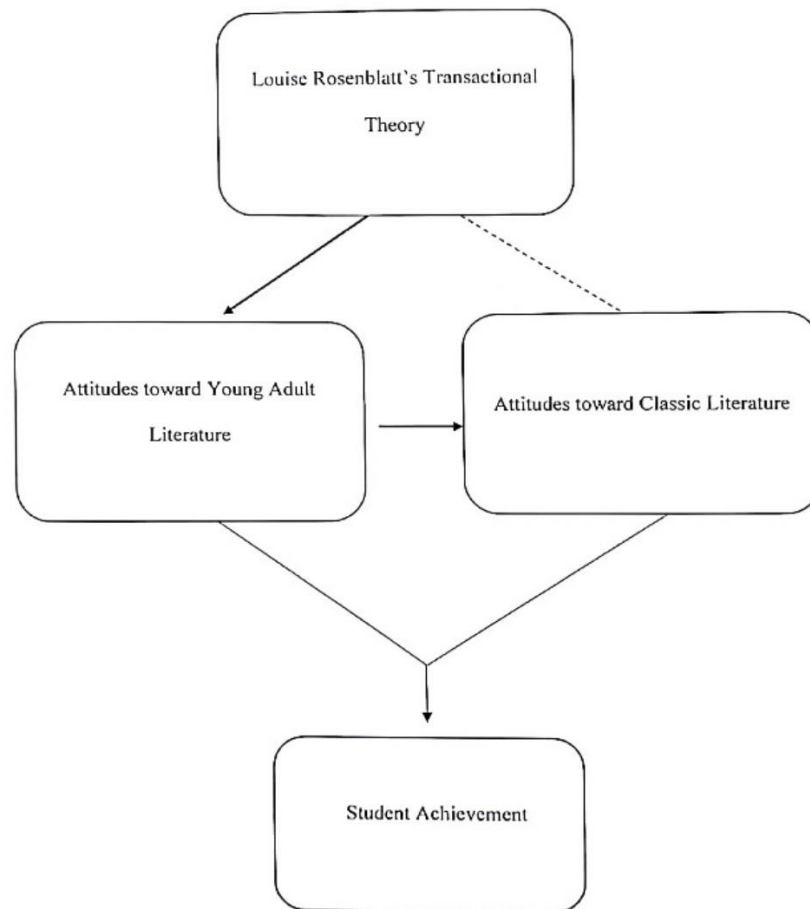


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to describe the

impact of intertextual study between classic literature and YAL on student attitudes toward classic literature and YAL at the high school level and the effect of the intertextual study on student achievement of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) for reading of literature (RL) standards (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2017). Student attitudes toward classic literature in high school were investigated before and after intertextual study with YAL. Student attitudes toward YAL in high school were investigated before and after intertextual study with classic literature, and student achievement on state RL standards was investigated before and after intertextual study. Most of the classic pieces of literature used in high school contain characters and situations with which students do not find relevance. It is important for teachers to frame the classical works in a way which interests students, instead of assuming students will just have to struggle through them. Cherry-McDaniel and Young (2012) believed English classrooms should not favor one type of literature over another but should choose texts that challenge and engage student thinking.

One way to attempt to increase interest in the classical texts is through intertextual study, the use of YAL paired with classic literature to impact the instruction of classic literature. Often, students do not realize what similarities there are between many classics and contemporary texts. Teachers can use contemporary texts to help deepen student understanding of the classics. “Reading is a multidimensional, cyclical process in which readers create new meanings by making connections between and among texts and their own experiences” (Bull, 2008, p. 1). Intertextual studies using YAL can help students make connections enabling engagement with more difficult texts as well as boosting confidence in their abilities to understand difficult texts. Using YAL as a link in

an English language arts program is a way to not only make reading more interesting to students but also more comprehensible (Gibbons et al., 2006).

The participants in this study included 10th-grade students in a suburban North Carolina high school setting. The study was limited to one classroom English teacher and one school district. The school district is situated in a growing suburban area a short drive from the state's second largest metropolitan area and is also a short drive to one of the largest universities in the state.

Research Questions

1. What effect does the pairing of YAL with classic literature have on high school student attitudes toward classic literature at a North Carolina suburban high school?
2. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature?
3. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards YAL?
4. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature when paired with YAL?
5. What effect does the pairing of YAL with classic literature have on high school student achievement of the NC English Language Arts Standard Course of Study standards for reading literature?

Definition of Terms

In this study, certain terminology was used throughout. Many of these terms have multiple definitions. For the sake of clarity, the terms as used in the study are defined in

the following paragraphs.

YAL. Refers to a story that tackles the difficult, and oftentimes adult, issues which arise during an adolescent’s journey toward identity, a journey told through a distinctly teen voice that holds the same potential for literary value as its “grownup” peers (Stephens, 2007, pp. 40-41).

Canon. The canon, or canonical literature, is “A collection of classic literary texts that are distinguished by overall literary quality, lasting significance, and a distinctive style that is worthy of study” (Cole, as cited in Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016, p. 32).

Classic literature.

Any work of literature (fiction and nonfiction, prose and verse) from times long past to the recent past that is acknowledged with some consensus— through the test of time, through literary and/or social review, or through the award-winning status of the work or its author—to be of exemplary merit for its form or style, its original or unique expression of enduring or universal concepts, or its unique reflection of the conditions of its people and times. (Koelling, 2004, p. 9)

Intertextuality. In this study, the term intertextuality is used to mean an instructional approach in which instructors offer multiple texts, “to give students the opportunity to increase background knowledge; make connections among texts; develop multiple perspectives, interpretations, and a broader picture of a topic” (Armstrong & Newman, 2011, p. 9).

Transaction. Rosenblatt (2005) used the term extensively in her work on reading. The term is defined as, “An ongoing process in which the elements or parts are

seen as aspects or phases of a total situation” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 40).

RACE strategy. This strategy is defined as, “RACE is an acronym that reminds students of the specific criteria needed in a quality written response” (Nichols, 2013, para. 5). It is a strategy used to both write open-ended responses and to see student thinking and connections to texts.

GIST strategy. This is an acronym referring to a summarization strategy. It is used to “enhance students’ comprehension by having them use information from texts to create summaries” (Wood, Taylor, & Stover, 2016, p. 52).

Graphic organizers. “Visual representations” which enable students to take the ideas they are learning and categorize them to simplify and improve learning (Fisher & Frey, 2018).

Formative assessment. Black and Wiliam (2010) provided a definition of assessment and clarified when it becomes formative:

Assessment [refers] to all those activities undertaken by teachers -- and by their students in assessing themselves -- that provide information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities. Such assessment becomes formative assessment when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching to meet student needs. (p. 2)

Significance of the Study

Research advocates the use of YAL to create lifelong readers (Gallagher, 2009; Gallo, 2001). Researchers from Rosenblatt (2005) to Gallagher (2009) have discussed the importance of students making connections to literature. Similarly, there is a dedicated group of researchers and teachers who believe only classic literature can

provide students with quality literature and, therefore, quality learning (Jago, 2000, 2004; Koelling, 2004); yet there is little research studying the use of both classic literature and YAL in the classroom – particularly using YAL as a bridge to understanding classic literature. Nor is there much research studying student attitudes toward classic literature and YAL when paired. The significance of this study is that this research hoped to show YAL can provide a bridge for engaging adolescent readers in the study of classical literature by using contemporary literature to help students make connections to the classic literature. This research also hoped to show the effect of intertextual study of YAL and classic literature on student reading attitudes and achievement. This study benefits teachers and students alike. If students are not reading, teachers should work to find ways to encourage their reading. Using YAL to impact the study of classic literature helps develop readers interested in both genres of literature by matching adolescents and their interests. The paired texts study also helps students develop positive attitudes toward the study of classical literature.

In addition, curriculum instruction specialists and teachers also benefit from the added choices and relevance YAL adds to the curriculum. The ability to use YAL to help students understand classic literature provides an avenue for student connection to the canonical works, thereby enhancing not only student attitudes toward classical literature but also student achievement.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Limitations. As with many studies, the nature of this mixed methods action research study was not without limitations. Limitations to this study included the participants, location, and time frame. This study was conducted in three 10th-grade

English classes in a suburban North Carolina high school; therefore, this study can only be used to describe this specific population and may not be generalizable to other suburban schools or to urban and rural schools. The researcher was assigned to teach a majority of English II courses in the 2018-2019 school year, making the participants a sample of convenience. Time was also a limitation of the study. The school is on a block schedule, meaning each course lasts for two 9-week periods, which is approximately 90 days.

Delimitations. The delimitations of the study included the texts used, the researcher, and the data collection methods. The study was restricted to two pieces of literature – one classic text and one YA text. The texts chosen were ones the researcher was familiar with and has taught in previous courses. An additional delimitation of the study was the researcher. Since the teacher of the students in the study is also the researcher, student responses and answers may have been influenced by the teacher-student relationship. Since the teacher also acted as the researcher for this study, choosing students from just one high school and specific to one teacher and researcher can “predispose them to have certain outcomes” (Creswell, 2014, p. 175).

In terms of data, surveys and journals were primary sources of qualitative data in this study. Creswell (2014) noted this type of data collection can have limitations, including “indirect information filtered through the views of the interviewees” (p. 191) and inarticulate responses from those interviewed. Achievement scores were also the primary source of quantitative data in the study. To increase the validity of the study, the participants and their data remained anonymous to the researcher during the course of the study and analysis of the data.

Conclusion

Recent reports of student reading progress indicate reading scores have stagnated in the United States. Although researchers and educators both lament students are not reading, sales of YA books suggest otherwise. Instead, students may simply be choosing not to read – at least not the texts assigned in English classrooms. The current body of research on using YAL to bridge connections to classic literature is limited as is the research on intertextual study on student reading attitudes. Studies and scholarly journals have debated the pros and cons of the use of YAL in the classroom, and many researchers have suggested teachers add these texts to the curriculum. The next logical step is to study the use of these two texts intertextually and the effects of this type of study on student reading attitudes.

The dissertation is broken into five chapters. Chapter 2 is the literature review and Chapter 3 consists of the methodology. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the results of the research and the discussion of the results, theoretical implications, and practical uses of the study, respectively. In Chapter 2, the theoretical framework for the study is defined as are key terms in the study. A review and synthesis of the current literature on attitudes toward and use of classic literature and YAL is presented to establish a context for the research study.

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the theoretical framework of this study as well as present a synthesis of the current research on using YAL and classic literature in the classroom. In addition, research on student reading attitudes toward YAL and classic literature is presented. The gaps in the research in relation to the study are discussed.

Reading Scores

Reading scores have decreased in the United States in the past 2 decades. The scores of 17-year-olds, specifically, have stagnated for an even longer period of time (Hooley, Tysseling, & Ray, 2013). NAEP reports the progress on the Nation's Report Card. The reading assessment is a test of reading comprehension. The most recent results from 2015 show the scores have dropped since regular assessment started in 1992 (NAEP, n.d.). In recent years, the scores have stagnated at some levels and dropped for others. Scores from the 2015 report show reading scores did not change for fourth and 12th grades but dropped for eighth grade (NAEP, n.d.). Binkley and Williams (1997) wrote, according to the scores, "while most students at grades 4, 8, and 12 have mastered basic competencies, too few have reached levels likely to be required for the 21st century workplace" (p. 2). Twenty years later, it seems little has changed in terms of scores; however, much has changed in terms of skills needed in the current 21st century workplace. Hooley et al. (2013) found the 2012 senior class scored lower on reading proficiency on the SAT than seniors from the previous year. In fact, scores have declined since 2008 (Hooley et al., 2013). Current NAEP figures indicate this downward trend is continuing.

Gallagher (2009) pointed out other reports have shown similar trends. The National Alliance for Excellent Education (as cited in Gallagher, 2009) stated one in four secondary students was not able to comprehend the information in their textbooks. Further research by the Alliance shows only 36% of eighth-grade students are proficient readers (“The National Picture,” n.d.). In North Carolina, those figures are even less. Only 30% of eighth graders are reading at a proficient level (“The National Picture,” n.d.). These figures are concerning and indicate students are graduating from high school unprepared for the reading that will be encountered in college and in careers.

The ACT is a test taken by many high school seniors for acceptance into colleges and universities. Reading comprehension is one of the tested areas. The ACT corporation publishes reports each year on the nationwide results of their testing. In 2017, ACT found 49% of the test takers were below proficient on the reading of complex texts, while only 21% were deemed proficient. “The text complexity indicator, beginning in fall 2015, represents students' progress toward understanding complex written material often encountered in college and careers” (“Condition of college and career readiness 2017,” 2017, p. 9).

Regardless of the outlet reporting the information, it is clear that students in the United States are not leaving high school with the reading skills needed. Actions need to be taken to ensure students read widely and are prepared for their postsecondary lives. According to Gallagher (2009), the reading attitudes of teenagers have moved from one of “enthusiasm to indifference to hostility” (p. 3). Gallagher believed an overemphasis on testing has caused a change in reading in schools. “Overemphasizing reading that students will confront on standardized reading tests, schools are working against

developing independent readers” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 7). Gallagher (2009) and others argued this type of reading is causing an aliterate society, readers who simply choose not to read (Gallo, 2001). The emphasis on testing is felt through the country. Pipkin (2000) noted not only are schools overemphasizing testing, the overemphasis comes at the expense of literature. Pipkin’s English department was tasked with raising reading scores. When a teacher recommended adding more YAL to the curriculum, the response from the administration was that this type of reading was not tested, implying it had no value in the classroom (Pipkin, 2000). Regardless of the type of reading tested on standardized tests, students will continue to perform below expectations if not reading at all. Infusing the curriculum with texts students enjoy and relate to can build a bridge to other types of reading, including the oft beloved classics.

Theoretical Framework

Louise Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing. Louise Rosenblatt is considered one of the most influential researchers in the realm of reading. Her influential work, *Literature as Exploration*, was published in 1938 and continues to influence educators and theorists today. Subsequent works continue to influence researchers to this day. In her work, Rosenblatt (1956, 1991, 2005) theorized a text does not make meaning, the reader does. What meaning the reader creates is dependent on individual experiences, or as Rosenblatt (2005) termed it, “transactions.” Readers all have unique experiences and those experiences influence how a reader interacts with a text. Rosenblatt (2005) stated, “There is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work; there are, in reality, only the potential millions of individual readers of individual literary works” (p. 5). In addition, reading, according to Rosenblatt (1956,

1991, 2005), is a social process, meaning readers will have different interpretations of a text in different time periods; therefore, each reader and each generation of readers could shape a different interpretation of a text. Since the publication of the seminal work, researchers have reiterated Rosenblatt's ideas over and over. Beers and Probst (2013) most recently have touched upon these ideas, writing, "The text awakens associations in the reader's mind, and out of the mix, meaning is created. It resides neither in the text nor the reader's mind but in the meeting of the two" (p. 1). The researchers further stated this transaction is what creates the reason to read (Beers & Probst, 2013).

This important concept is often overlooked or forgotten when using literature in schools. Rosenblatt (2005) stated that educators cannot and should not overlook the fact that each student brings different experiences to the classroom and those experiences shape the reader's interactions with a text. Since each reader brings to a text a myriad of individualized experiences and knowledge, the reader cannot be forgotten as an integral part of the reading process, yet schools are often guilty of that very thing, neglecting to consider the reader when choosing literature to be read in the English classroom.

According to Rosenblatt (1956, 1991, 2005), language is social and individual. "The reading of any work of literature is of necessity an individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader" (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 1). Rosenblatt (1956, 1991, 2005) called these transactions as opposed to interactions. With the word transaction, the reader is not a separate entity but a part of the text that must be considered (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 40). In other words, a reader's experiences, emotions, and thoughts are a part of a person's understanding of the text. These cannot be separated. The transactions a reader brings to the text are individual and are a

combination of the reader's experiences, knowledge, age, and more (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 41). According to Rosenblatt (2005), instead of considering just the text, educators need to view the task of reading as a unique and individualized event which is dependent upon that particular moment in time, that particular place, and that particular text. Those pieces make up the whole of the reader's experience with and understanding of the text.

Stances. Rosenblatt (2005) believed a reader's stance is what guides the reader's thoughts on a text. This stance comes from a reader's experiences. The reader's experience history is what determines how the reader interacts with the text. Some features will have more meaning for one person, while different aspects will mean more to another, depending on the reader's personal experiences (Rosenblatt, 2005). Because of this concept, what one reader sees as important may be very different from what another reader values. In schools, educators often discuss literary works in terms of the author's purpose. This idea confuses the reader into believing the texts have just one correct purpose and a student's job is to learn what the correct purpose is and to be able to repeat the specific information on a test; however, Rosenblatt (2005) argued, "a stance reflects the reader's purpose" (p. 10). All too often, students approach texts with assessment in sight wanting to know what is on the test to be prepared to provide the correct answers. In approaching a text this way, students do not find interest in the work and do not connect with it. Instead, the text is seen as a means of getting a grade. "The situation, the purpose, and the linguistic-experiential equipment of the reader as well as the signs on the page enter into the transaction and affect the extent to which public and private meanings and associations will be attended to" (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 10).

Efferent-Aesthetic Continuum. Rosenblatt (2005) described a reading

continuum, the Efferent-Aesthetic Continuum, which determines how a reader views a text. “The reading event must fall somewhere in a continuum, determined by whether the reader adopts what I term a predominantly aesthetic stance or a predominantly efferent stance” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 10). An efferent stance is one which is often used in schools. In this stance, a reader approaches a text in terms of what can be learned from it (Rosenblatt, 2005). An aesthetic stance, on the other hand, is one a reader uses when reading for pleasure. In this stance, “the reader adopts an attitude of readiness to focus attention on what is being lived through during the reading event” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 11). The stance a reader chooses depends on several factors but is very seldom completely efferent or completely aesthetic. Rosenblatt (2005) defined the aesthetic as, “A particular stance determines the proportion or mix of public and private elements of sense that fall within the scope of the reader’s selective attention” (p. 10). Aesthetic readers approach texts with a desire to “[pay] attention to—[savor]—the qualities of the feelings, ideas, situations, scenes, personalities, and emotions that are called forth and participates in the tensions, conflicts, and resolutions of the images, ideas, and scenes as they unfold” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 11).

Comprehension and connections. Rosenblatt (2005) believed student comprehension results from their transaction between them and the text. The researcher believed students must understand how to use their knowledge to understand a text. The idea is reiterated in several later works. For example, Short (1993) stated the definition of learning is a “process of making connections” (p. 284). Individuals learn through the connections among the new concepts and our own experiences. Vygotsky (1981) theorized learners learn best when their already learned capabilities are taken into

consideration and are used to help move the learning forward. In this way, students must make connections among their prior learning and the ideas currently being learned. This idea is important in the English classroom. Teachers often struggle to engage their students in works of classic literature.

Classical Literature in the Classroom

Classic literature has been the primary source of literature in the English classroom for decades. The actual course called “English” is relatively new in terms of education. English courses commenced at colleges in the late 1800s (Applebee, 1976). At first, courses were varied, with writing, reading, and grammar as separate entities, and later became what is now known as English (Applebee, as cited in Miller, 2017). English courses in high schools came afterward. William James Rolfe had much to do with English becoming a high school course. As an educator at Cambridge High School in Massachusetts, Rolfe took the courses already in place and melded them into an English course based “firmly within the classical tradition of instruction” (Applebee, 1976, p. 29). Further requirements by colleges such as Harvard helped create the English classes taught today. In 1873-1874 Harvard required incoming students had experience studying literature as a means for writing. This requirement “institutionalized the study of standard authors and set in motion a process which eventually forced English to consolidate its position within the schools” (Applebee, 1976, p. 30). Other colleges quickly followed suit. Along with the stipulation to study literature came the beginnings of the canon. The canon is “A collection of classic literary texts that are distinguished by overall literary quality, lasting significance, and a distinctive style that is worthy of study” (Cole, as cited in Rybakova & Rocconti, 2016, p. 32). Harvard’s canon included

many of the works that are still taught today: Shakespeare, Dickens, and Hawthorne, among others (Applebee, as cited in Miller, 2017). These works of classic literature are taught because they contain universal themes and “communicate across generations” (Lapp, Fisher, & Frey, 2013, p. 8).

There has been a long-standing debate as to whether English teachers should teach only classics. Many educators and researchers feel the classics should be the primary, if not the only, literature being taught (Gibbons et al., 2006; Hopper, 2006; Jago, 2000, 2004; Lapp et al., 2013; Santoli & Wagner, 2004). As with YAL, there are various definitions of classic literature. Koelling (2004) defined classic literature as,

Any work of literature (fiction and nonfiction, prose and verse) from times long past to the recent past that is acknowledged with some consensus— through the test of time, through literary and/or social review, or through the award-winning status of the work or its author—to be of exemplary merit for its form or style, its original or unique expression of enduring or universal concepts, or its unique reflection of the conditions of its people and times. (p. 9)

In simpler terms, a classic is a text that has withstood the test of time. It has been taught in classrooms for years and even decades because of its literary merit. Jago (2000, 2004) defined classics as “enduring stories” (p. 5) and stories that “tell the truth about human experience across both time and culture” (p. 6). Certainly, classics like *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare & Yates-Glandorf, 1998) and *The Crucible* (Miller, 1976) do tell stories of the human experiences of love and tragedy, universal themes found in many canonical texts. Koelling (2004) stated classics are not the only way students can find literary quality, but they are an “exceptionally” good source (p. 10). Classics also contain the

literary techniques taught in the English classroom – plot, characterization, universal themes, literary devices, and more. They are complex works. Classroom texts, according to Jago (2004), should be texts students struggle to read on their own. She stated, “Great literature deepens our experience, heightens our sensibilities, and matures our judgment” (Jago, 2004, p. 47).

The classics comprising the canon have changed remarkably little in the past 3 decades. Applebee (1992) studied what texts were commonly used in public and private high schools across the United States, finding a set of common texts including the classics, *Romeo and Juliet*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 2010), *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 2004), *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 2014), and *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1994), to name a few. Stallworth et al. (2006) conducted a study, in part, on the book-length works teachers were using in the English classroom. The study found some of the same texts Applebee (1992) found to be popular were still popular, including *The Great Gatsby*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Romeo and Juliet* (Stallworth et al., 2006). In 2011, Stallworth and Gibbons (2012) followed the study up with a survey of schools in southeastern states to determine what book-length texts were being taught. The top five texts represented the classic texts that have been the primary texts in English classrooms for decades.

Advantages of Using Classical Literature

Classics contain many qualities that can make them desirable reads for the English curriculum. Koelling (2004) listed 11 attributes of classic literature that make classic literature worth reading. Classic literature provides the opportunity for

- a good read,

- an appreciation for quality,
- an expansion of thought and experience,
- an introduction to life’s possibilities,
- an ethical guidepost,
- a trip through history,
- a cultural initiation,
- a common point of reference,
- a change of pace,
- an intellectual challenge, and
- an educational foundation (Koelling, 2004, p. 10).

Each of these alone are worthy attributes, but combined, they create a compelling argument for classic literature. Jago (2000) believed the “most potent stories” are classics (p. 2). Texts worthy of whole class study, like classic literature, should meet specific criteria. Classics should have elevated language matching the intention of the literature; reveal to students multifaceted human predicaments; and include gripping, disconcerting characters (Jago, 2004). In addition, texts worthy of study should examine themes relevant to all, pose stories that challenge readers to question their beliefs, and engage the human emotions (Jago, 2004). While critics of classic literature might complain these texts are too difficult for students, proponents of the literature claim this is exactly why it should be studied (Chiariello, 2017; Jago, 2000, 2004).

Defenders hold that the value of such works—beautiful prose, timeless themes, simpatico characters—is undeniable. Students may moan and stumble on archaic words and awkward phrasing, but good instructors use that tension to highlight

the way language changes over time. It's important that students know about a time other than their own. Learning about the past gives us a deeper understanding of our present day, and authors like Hawthorne and Twain help teach those lessons. (Chiariello, 2017, p. 27)

The classics help teach a history of our culture. Missing out on the classics can cause a student to miss out on important cultural references and literary techniques of the time (Chiariello, 2017; Ostensen & Wadham, 2012; Stallworth et al., 2006). Hoyt Phillips, manager of Teaching and Learning at Teaching Tolerance, believed students who miss these educational experiences are missing a sort of "cultural currency" found in news stories, movies, television shows, and more (as cited in Chiariello, 2017, p. 27). For example, the long-running show *The Simpsons* regularly makes references to literature including the likes of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman (Keller, 2011). One particular episode has a character named Mr. Burns who stated, "It was the best of times, it was the blurst of times" (Keller, 2011, para. 5). Without knowledge of the classic Dickens tale, the reference is meaningless. Jago (2004) called classic literature "window books," presenting students with a view of "other worlds, other times, other cultures" (p. 5).

More recently, Johnston (2018) pondered how to get his inner city, poverty stricken eighth graders to understand the commonly taught classic, *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Frank, 1979). Johnston (2018) recognized the novel might prove to be difficult since most of the students in the class had no schema to bring to the novel; however, finding a common experience proved to be the scaffold needed. "When curriculum units are organized around thought-provoking questions, it provides the teachers with a means

for establishing relevance. “Learning is enhanced when the relevance of the material is made clear” (Fisher & Frey, as cited in Johnston, 2018, p. 31). Koelling (2004) added adolescents often judge classics based on a reputation rather than actual reading experience. Koelling believed that once connections with the texts are discovered, adolescents will enjoy classic literature.

Disadvantages of Using Classical Literature

Although a proponent of only using classics in the classroom, Jago (2004) noted students often struggle to read such texts. Many other researchers echo this sentiment (Beers & Propst, 2013; Chiariello, 2017; Cole, 2009; Gallagher, 2009; Gallo, 2001; Ostensen & Wadham, 2012). Often, adolescents do not fully understand the classic literature taught in high school because they lack the maturity to grasp some of the concepts. Calvino (2001) wrote,

reading a great work for the first time when one is fully adult is an extraordinary pleasure, one which is very different (although it is impossible to say whether it is more or less pleasurable) from reading it in one’s youth. (p. 4)

YAL in the classroom

YAL, as a genre, has been around for a number of decades. The idea of creating a separate category for books for young people did not happen until the 1920s and 1930s (Pongratz, 1996). In 1942, a novel called *Seventeenth Summer* by Margaret Daly (1942) was published; it is considered the first “junior novel of quality and distinction” (Carlsen, as cited in Pongratz, 1996). For the next decade, books geared towards teens were on the market but consisted of romanticized stories. The genre, however, began receiving attention in the late 1960s through novels such as *The Outsiders* by Hinton (1967). It was

followed quickly by *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* by Head (1967) and *The Contender* by Lipsyte (1967; Ostensen & Wadham, 2012). The year 1968 brought Zindel's (1968) *The Pigman* (Cole, 2009; Ostensen & Wadham, 2012). These books focused on the needs of adolescents and made the genre appealing to the young audience of readers. YAL offers teens a way to explore their evolution to maturity. Even with the enduring popularity of these YA novels, the use of YAL in the classroom is still a topic of debate among educators and researchers.

Definition of YAL. In addition to being controversial, YAL is also a genre with varying definitions. In 1999, NCTE took on the task of defining the genre. With 28 definitions submitted, the favored one was simply any book an adolescent chooses to read (Kaywell, 2001). Cole (2009) corroborated this idea, stating, "A better approach to defining YAL is to consider what teens *choose* to read as opposed to what they are *required* to read (i.e., classical texts)" (p. 50).

Unfortunately, this definition is too broad for many educators and researchers. Kaywell (2000) noted the problem lies not only in the genre itself but also in the definition of the term "young adult," with age ranges varying from as young as 10 to mid-20s. Such a range makes defining the genre difficult. Ostensen and Wadham (2012) cited Bucher and Hinton when defining YAL. It is literature that "provides a unique adolescent point of view ..., and reflects the concerns, interests, and challenges of ... young adults" (Bucher & Hinton, as cited in Ostensen & Wadham, 2012, p. 5). Yet another researcher, Glaus (2014), defined the term as,

texts in which teenagers are the main characters dealing with issues to which teens can relate, outcomes usually depend on the decisions and choices of main

characters, and oftentimes “all traditional literary elements typical of classic literature” can be found. (Herz & Gallo, 2005, pp. 10-11)

Cole (2009) and Glaus both described these texts as ones that bridge gaps between genres of literature. Others define the genre more specifically citing text length as well as other features. Cole provided a list of characteristics used to define the genre:

1. The protagonist is a teenager.
2. Events revolve around the protagonist and his/her struggle to resolve conflict.
3. The story is told from the viewpoint and in the voice of a young adult.
4. The genre is written by and for young adults.
5. The genre is marketed to the young adult audience.
6. Stories don't have “storybook” or ‘happily-ever-after” endings—a characteristic of children's books.
7. Parents are noticeably absent or at odds with young adults.
8. Books contain under 300 pages, closer to 200. (p. 49)

This list, however, is limiting. Many YA novels do not fit neatly into this list of characteristics. The Harry Potter series is an example of texts that do not fit neatly into these characteristics. Speaking of page length alone, the books do not fit. The first in the popular series *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Rowling, 1999) comes in at 322 pages while, the final book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling, 2007), contains 784 pages, nearly three to four times the size of the texts described. Some researchers do note many YA books are longer than 300 pages. Cole noted YA books range in size from short texts to works closer to 1,000 pages. Another limiting factor is the idea of authorship being by an adolescent. The Harry Potter series

first hit the bookshelves when the author, J. K. Rowling, was 32 years old (“J. K. Rowling,” 2017). John Green, the author of multiple YA novels was 32 when his bestselling *The Fault in Our Stars* (Green, 2012) was published (“John Green,” 2010). Other popular YA authors were also well into their adulthood when published.

Obviously, strictly defining YAL is not easy. For the purpose of this research, the genre was defined as Stephens (2007) crafted in his research. From the researcher’s experience and ambitions to become a YA writer and the careful study of 12 YA novels, Stephens crafted the following definition:

“Young Adult” refers to a story that tackles the difficult, and oftentimes adult, issues that arise during an adolescent’s journey toward identity, a journey told through a distinctly teen voice that holds the same potential for literary value as its “Grownup” peers. (pp. 40-41)

Attitudes toward YAL. Although the sales of YA books are continuing to grow, many teachers are still reluctant to use YAL in the classroom. There seem to be three sides to the issue: those who espouse the use of classical, or canonical, literature only; those who advocate for the use of YAL; and those who believe a mix of the two is appropriate.

YAL often has a bad reputation. Many critics argue it has little value and lacks quality writing (Miller, 2013). These critics advocate using YAL as supplemental reading or independent reading, believing the classics provide fodder for class discussion while YAL does not (Miller & Slifkin, 2010). Daniels (2006) wrote many view YAL as work with no substance or value and therefore should not be placed alongside canonical works. Groenke and Scherff (2010) and Christenbury (2000) agreed with this

assessment, writing there is a common misunderstanding among educators that YAL is something for struggling readers and not for those who are capable of understanding more erudite texts. In fact, many teachers see the use of this genre as “lowering the bar” for students (Groenke & Scherff, 2010, p. 1). Davis (as cited in Daniels, 2006) wrote,

Although a few books do cross over and become literature for both young people and adults ... most young adult books can't cross the boundary into grown-up literature for the following reasons: 1. Because publishers present most of the books in a package that an older teenager or adult wouldn't want to pick up and carry around, let alone read; and 2. Because many of us who write about these books and teach them and have charge of them on behalf of young readers effuse to hold the books to real literary standards. (pp. 78-79)

Others see YAL as something to be used solely for leisure reading or for struggling readers (Gibbons et al., 2006; Jago, 2000, 2004; Monseau & Salvner, 2000). Daniels (2006) and others argued it is a genre well deserving of attention in the English language arts classroom (Groenke & Scherff, 2010). Students find the genre appealing, but the merits of YAL also make it a genre worthy of study. Santoli and Wagner (as cited in Ostensen & Wadham, 2012) argued its worth: “The breadth and depth of young adult literature are equal to any other genre today and that the recurring themes of love, death, loss, racism, and friendship contained in the classics are also present in young adult literature” (p. 8). In addition, YAL offers students an opportunity to read quality literature with protagonists and antagonists that resonate with them because they resemble their current lives. Hipple (2000) also believed the genre is worthy of study even though many dismiss it as juvenile. “Like the best of literature written for adults,

good novels written for adolescents possess themes that merit and reward examination and commentary” (p. 2). Christenbury (2000) took the idea one step further stating YAL has a “rightful place as literature that is respected, used, and recommended by teachers and librarians” (p. 16). In Christenbury’s view, YAL has all the elements needed to make classics worthy of study. Ostensen and Wadham (2012) corroborated this view believing the genre contains works that are complex and literarily robust. Even though many believe YAL to be a worthy choice, rarely do teachers use this genre as a core text for their classroom instruction. Instead, it is supplemental, if used at all.

Advantages of Using YAL

Although some argue classic literature is the only literature that should be read in schools, there is a strong contingency of researchers and educators who believe otherwise. Christenbury (2000) pointed out classical literature is quite limited. The typical literature taught in American high schools is often American and British literature from the 19th and 20th centuries. This literature does not mirror the population reading it. It consists of “the traditional power culture: white, male, Christian, [and] Anglophilic” (Christenbury, 2000, p. 15). Ostensen and Wadham (2012) and Christenbury argued YAL is a valid and, in fact, good choice for use in the classroom. Ostensen and Wadham argued YAL is a good fit with the new Common Core State Standards that advocate for more rigorous text use at the high school level. Ivey and Broaddus (2001) believed teachers may be dismissing a valuable resource when choosing not to use YAL. Research concerning middle school students noted if the goal of reading classes is to create readers, then teachers should be using the type of literature that engages students, citing middle school students who reported displeasure with assigned school readings and

the reason for the dissatisfaction was reading that did not match student interests (Ivey, 1999, as cited in Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). The study found, “in a vast majority of these studies are young adolescents who can and want to participate in literate activities, but who are without appropriate kinds of support or motivation to do so” (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, p. 354). The support and motivation referenced can be found in texts students want to read. Gallo (2001) supported this idea, believing teachers assign texts, at least in part, because of a personal love of these books, and teachers believe students should share that passion, citing personal experiences in school as a struggling reader. Gallo did not find connections to the characters or works. Eventually, Gallo did find a love of both reading and classical literature but not until the college years when the characters and problems related on a personal level. Gallo stated, “I wasn’t READY for classical literature when I was 13, 14, ... 17, 18.... *The classics are not about TEENAGE concerns!* They are about ADULT issues” (p. 34).

Gallo’s (2001) emphatic response is shared by others. Emig (2015) stated students are often disinclined to read classics because the students do not find the texts relevant or engaging. When given a choice, the researcher finds students overwhelmingly choose YAL literature over classical literature (Emig, 2015). Similarly, Creel (2015) reported in a study of the effects of assigned reading on reading pleasure that when students are able to choose their own books, they choose ones in which the characters are like them – teens. The classics chosen for them mostly contain adult characters. In the pivotal work *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt (1991) voiced the connection adolescents seek. “The reader seeks to participate in another’s vision – to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insight that

will make his own life more comprehensible” (p. 7). Rosenblatt (1991) further explored the idea that students must be able to make connections to texts by stating, “Like the beginning reader, the adolescent needs to encounter literature for which he possesses the intellectual, emotional, and experiential equipment” (p. 26). If a student has no experience with adultery or even a Puritan lifestyle, a work like *The Scarlet Letter* may prove to be a difficult one with which to find a connection. Schools, according to Gallagher (2009), are limiting “authentic reading experiences” (p. 5) for students when educators and schools are not allowing texts with which readers can connect. Miller (2013) believed YAL is literature that gives adolescents a genuine look at their own lives.

Crowe (2001), popular YAL author and English professor at BYU, also believed using YAL in classrooms is beneficial for students. Crowe challenged Jago’s (2000) idea that YAL texts do not have a “deep literacy” (p. 7) and cannot evoke powerful discussion, even arguing for its use in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Teachers, particularly AP teachers, often rely on canonical texts because the texts are perceived to be of a high literary quality – one that cannot be found in YAL. Crowe cited an AP teacher, McGee, who used Cormier’s (1974) *The Chocolate War* in his AP class. The book, a YAL text, provided students with an opportunity to engage deeply in discussion about literature. McGee (as cited in Crowe, 2001) found his students readily accepted the YAL without any preconceived notions of its appropriateness, and the book elicited deep discussion. “From the discussion of the spurned artists and comparisons to Stephen Dedalus to an appreciation of Thrasymachus’ edict to Socrates, ‘might makes right,’ I found students willing to experience a work of literature and walk away stronger thinkers” (McGee, as cited in Crowe, 2001, p. 125). The use of the YAL did not water

down the quality of discussion or learning as many feared it would do. It enhanced the learning in the classroom. “High school students who love reading will love a good YA novel just as much as they love a classic, and they will get just as much out of it” (Crowe, 2001, p. 126). Miller (2013) agreed YAL is appropriate for the AP classroom. The researcher conducted a study concerning AP teachers’ inclusion or lack thereof of YAL in the AP classroom.

The data from this study suggests that it is less important today that a student can read a canonical text than that they are able to read widely, shift and apply literary lenses depending on context, unpack meaning, critique ideas, and make sense of literature in a way that is useful and applicable to their lives. (Miller, 2013, para. 22)

Santoli and Wagner (2004), a university professor and a high school English language arts teacher, promoted using YAL in the high school classroom as opposed to classic literature, believing the students do not have the schema to understand classic literature and are bored and often confused by it. In some cases, it may even cause students to dislike reading. In addition, students often struggle to connect to classic literature because its protagonists are often adults with problems unrelated to adolescent experiences; thus, the students have little stance to bring to the reading and the reading becomes efferent versus aesthetic. Ostensen and Wadham (2012), Gallagher (2009), and Gallo (2001) believed this kind of reading creates nonreaders.

Disadvantages of Using YAL in the Classroom

In their research, Gibbons et al. (2006) studied teacher attitudes toward YAL and found most teachers feel this literature “lacks sophistication and literary merit” (p. 55).

Teachers did not believe these texts to be of a quality conducive to meeting curricular standards. Similarly, Daniels (2006) believed many teachers of adolescents see YAL as a genre undeserving of exploration. Many educators just do not see YAL as quality literature. Many feel it is not of the same caliber as classic literature (Bucher & Hinton, as cited in Daniels, 2006; Glaus, 2014; Groenke & Scherff, 2010; Ostensen & Wadham, 2012). Critics of the YA genre may point to texts not of the highest quality, and there are some that exist. Groenke and Scherff (2010) cited the *Gossip Girl* (Ziegler, 2002) novel as such evidence. This popular novel series spawned a television series and its own website; however, many critics of the books challenge the material in the books because it contains references to sex, drugs, and offensive language (Groenke & Scherff, 2010). Other critics of YAL note it does not meet the needs of those intending to go to college (Bigler & Collins, as cited in Stallworth et al., 2006).

Jago, an oft awarded English teacher, prolific educational author, speaker, and former president of NCTE, is one who sees YAL as inferior to classic literature, calling them “lesser books” and stating these books cannot give students the same challenges classics can (Jago, 2000, p. 17). Jago (2000) does not consider YA texts literature and believes YAL should be used for pleasure reading only, adding YAL is used to pacify students who complain classics are too hard. “These are not the kinds of texts that deserve the close scrutiny and probing discussions that a rigorous literature class is designed to promote” (Jago, 2000, p. 73). In her article in *Literacy Today*, Lupo (2017) agreed that students need challenging texts, believing that students need to read texts with “rich vocabulary, complex sentence structure, and complicated themes and ideas” (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 31). Jago (2000) supported this thought:

While I believe that YA fiction has a place in the recreational reading life of teenagers, I don't think these titles are the best choices when your goal is the study of literature. Few young adult books employ rich language or explore complex themes. The characters are often one-dimensional and almost always teenagers themselves. (p. 80)

Many hold this belief. Applebee (1992) completed a study on the book-length texts used in high school classrooms across Canada. This study replicated an earlier study completed by Anderson in the 1960s. Applebee's (1992) findings indicated very little had changed in the past 25 years in terms of book-length texts taught in American high schools. The most frequently used texts were all classics, including Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, Raffel, & Bloom, 2005), and *Hamlet* (Shakespeare, 1992), as well as *The Great Gatsby*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* – the only text by a non-White male (Applebee, 1992, p. 28). The results of this study show, although the classroom has a diverse and multicultural population, the typical texts remain traditional, White, and Eurocentric and unreflective of the audience asked to read them. In fact, Ford (as cited in Nicol, 2008) wondered, “Why do we teach *Romeo and Juliet* at all? Silly young lovers who aren't grown up enough to see past lust. If it weren't for Mercutio and Tybalt, the thing would be unreadable” (p. 23). Although an extreme view, the point is made that texts considered classics are not necessarily the best choices. The literature used in the classroom should reflect the “context in our student's own worlds” (Nicol, 2008, p. 24), yet the classics remain the most commonly taught texts in English classrooms.

Common characteristics of YAL. YAL, as previously noted, is often thought of

as substandard when compared to the classics; however, good YAL contains many of the same characteristics of classical literature. Christenbury (2000) stated, “good young adult literature shares with the classics all the marks of literary excellence and, further, consistently inspires student reading response” (p. 16). Although these novels typically have adolescent protagonists, YAL contains many of the same literary features as classic literature. For example, a good YA science fiction novel would have the same features as an adult science fiction novel. As mentioned earlier, Cole (2009) provided a list of characteristics often found in YAL:

1. The protagonist is a teenager.
2. Events revolve around the protagonist and his/her struggle to resolve conflict.
3. The story is told from the viewpoint and in the voice of a young adult.
4. The genre is written by and for young adults.
5. The genre is marketed to the young adult audience.
6. Stories don't have “storybook” or ‘happily-ever-after’ endings—a characteristic of children’s books.
7. Parents are noticeably absent or at odds with young adults.
8. Books contain under 300 pages, closer to 200. (p. 49)

Christenbury noted although YAL is often, but not always, shorter, it still has settings functioning as important aspects of the novel, universal themes, dynamic characters who face challenges, and plots moving the story through a sequence of events. All of these characteristics are ones commonly taught in English classrooms through the study of classical, or canonical, literature. Although critics of YAL say it is not of the same quality, these characteristics say otherwise.

Pongratz (1996) provided another breakdown of some of the common characteristics of YAL. These are based on the common literary elements studied in classrooms.

- Characters – A main character approximately one or two years older than the reader (12-20 years old), a limited number of characters, well developed characters who reach a mature understanding by the end of the novel, well developed, realistic relationships among central characters.
- Plot – Simple and fast moving, realistic problems, and conflicts.
- Format – Easy to read text, short chapters.
- Theme – Themes that challenge young readers to question, what they think.
- Point of View – Stories that avoid talking down to readers or preaching, told from the viewpoint of the young adult protagonist.
- Writing Style – Tight, simple, lively language, limited descriptions, good, honest writing by an author (Read, as cited in Pongratz, 1996, p. 48).

Clearly, both YAL and classic literature can contain elements commonly taught in the English classroom. The use of either can provide the material necessary for student growth. Stephens (2007) found similar characteristics to Read and Cole. The 12 YA novels he studied were books written about teens. Only one, *The Book Thief* (Zusak, 2007), did not fit this specification with a protagonist of 9 years of age. The other common elements Stephens discussed were the “distinctly teen voice,” the “journey toward identity,” and “tackling adult issues in teenage lives” (p. 41). He added to the list, “the same potential for literary value as grownup novels” (Stephens, 2007, p. 41). Stephens noted although many of the works found in the canon contain adult main

characters, a few do contain teenage protagonists; but even one of the most popular classics with teenage protagonists, *Romeo and Juliet*, can be a struggle for students to relate to since very few teens are considering marriage at the age of 14. YAL appeals to the YA reader with teenage protagonists who face dilemmas and situations similar to the ones faced by the readers.

Intertextuality

Simply defined, intertextuality is pairing multiple texts; however, that simplistic of a definition does disservice to the power of pairing texts. Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) defined it as a “social construction” (p. 305), while Armstrong and Newman (2011), in their study of intertextuality at the college level, described it as an instructional approach. Furthermore, D’Angelo (2009) discussed it as a relationship between a reader and the text. While several researchers have studied different aspects of intertextuality, all agree intertextuality involves connecting multiple texts (Armstrong & Newman, 2011; Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; D’Angelo, 2009; Hartman, 1995). In these studies, intertextuality is discussed as an instructional approach, a textual relationship, and a social activity. As an instructional technique, intertextuality is “an approach where instructors offer multiple texts and materials of a wide variety of genres to give students the opportunity to increase background knowledge; make connections among texts; develop multiple perspectives, interpretations, and a broader picture of a topic” (Armstrong & Newman, 2011, p. 9). From a strictly textual view, intertextuality “describes the relationship that exists between and among texts” (D’Angelo, 2009, p. 33). Socially, Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) described intertextuality as a method in which people react whether alone with the text or with others about the text. For the

purpose of this study, intertextuality referred to Armstrong and Newman's (2011) definition. The study employed the method of using multiple texts to enable the readers' abilities to make connections between and among texts.

Intertextuality is not a new concept. The concept can be traced back to a Swiss linguist's work in the late 1800s (Armstrong & Newman, 2011), but most researchers credit Kristeva with creating the actual term (Armstrong & Newman, 2011; D'Angelo, 2009). Initially and often still, the idea of intertextuality is only concerned with the text itself. Others suggest intertextuality is a strategy in which students can use prior knowledge as a means of helping to understand a text. Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) suggested not only is intertextuality a strategy readers should employ but also one that should be nurtured in the classroom. The problem arises when students have no schema to provide a link to the text – not an unusual occurrence. Armstrong and Newman (2011) believed most readers lack in prior knowledge to properly support comprehension. Educators would likely all agree the use of prior knowledge is important, but when it does not exist, students lack the necessary information for making connections to the text. Without those connections, little more than surface reading is occurring. Rosenblatt's (2005) theory made it clear that meaning comes from aesthetic reading in which the reader brings experiences to the text and not from the text itself. This idea is corroborated by Bloome and Egan-Robertson's (1993) and D'Angelo's (2009) ideas that texts are not solitary entities. Texts exist and are understood based on the relationships occurring between the readers and the texts. Kristeva (as cited in D'Angelo, 2009) stated the idea that texts are always in relationships with other texts. To explore those relationships, readers bring their experiences with other texts, situations,

and events to each new reading.

Without those important experiences, students have difficulty making connections to a text. Classic literature, on its own, is often problematic for students for this reason. When given the ability to choose a text on their own, most teens found assigned readings irrelevant and choose texts relevant to their own lives (Becnel & Moeller, 2015). Gallo (2001) reiterated the idea stating classics are often not about adolescent concerns, citing even *Romeo and Juliet* is about marriage, something few teens are concerned with. In the case of struggling readers, literature of the canon can prove to be irrelevant and difficult. “An English curriculum centered primarily on canonical texts holds little promise, particularly for those who find reading challenging” (Glaus, 2014, p. 407). Providing additional texts can help students fill in their knowledge gaps and aid in comprehension. Armstrong and Newman (2011) saw it as analogous to a building’s foundation. Each block in the foundation represents a student’s existing schema; however, when students are lacking schematic knowledge, their foundation is lacking blocks, thus it is incomplete. The use of additional texts can fill in the missing blocks, thereby creating a stronger foundation. Nicol (2008) believed a “marriage can be arranged between the teaching of the canon and allowing students to discover their own sense of self and the world in which they live through their reading” (pp. 22-23). Of course, readers need to find the supplemental texts relevant to their lives so connections can be made between and among the texts. Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, and Morris (as cited in Crowder, 2016) found pairing YAL and classic literature was a fruitful endeavor. When students find texts that resonate with them, they are more likely to read. Crowder’s research found teachers did not want to give up classic literature but would consider using YAL in their

classrooms. Some respondents in Crowder's study noted that "it would be good to pair a YA book with a classic selection to compare and contrast and discuss changes in theme, style, and time period" (p. 108). Intertextuality is the answer to both the desire of the teachers and of the students for classroom reading.

Applebee (1992), in a study of the canonical texts used most often in high schools, found the literature students were asked to read has changed very little in the past 2-3 decades (Applebee, 1992). Students are still being asked to read the same texts their parents read and possibly, in some cases, even the same books their grandparents read. Some of the top texts included Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Scarlett Letter*, and *Huckleberry Finn* (Applebee, 1992, p. 28). Although the texts have not changed, the students have. What was relevant in the lives of parents as teens is not necessarily what is relevant of the children. Rosenblatt (1956) argued that the "adolescent reader needs to encounter literature for which he possesses emotional and experiential 'readiness'" (p. 69). If the adolescent does not possess those attributes, understanding will not occur.

The world must be fitted into the context of his own understanding and interests.

If the language, the setting, the theme, the central situation, are all to alien, even a

"great work" will fail. All doors to it are shut. (Rosenblatt, 1956, p. 69).

Simply stated, students must be able to connect to the works being read. Choosing the same classic texts simply because they have been used for years is not an effective practice.

Hence a standard literary diet, prescribed for all in standard sequence, negates the reality of our school situation. In our heterogeneous society, variations from

group to group, and within groups from individual to individual, make it necessary for us to plan our reading program in terms of the specific group and the individual differences within it. We need to be guided by an understanding of such matters as the pupils' general background, level of maturity, major interests, social difficulties, and aspirations. (Rosenblatt, 1956, p. 69)

Bridging YA and classic texts can provide the connections students need.

Rosenblatt (1956) encouraged educators to look to students to help make curricular decisions but did not espouse doing away with classic literature completely. In believing classics must be avoided, educators create what Rosenblatt (1956) called a “false dilemma” (p. 69), stating it is not a choice between two texts. Instead, it is a linking of the two – a bridging. In just a dozen years after one of the first YA novels was published, *Seventeenth Summer*, and a dozen years before the groundbreaking work *The Outsiders* was published, Rosenblatt (1956) recognized adolescents engage with texts in which they find connections to their own lives. Rosenblatt (1956) noted *Jane Eyre* (Brontë, 2011) might be more interesting to a student of the 1950s than the more contemporary novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (Smith, 2006) because of the connections the student can make. On the other hand, a more contemporary work such as *Dear Martin* (Stone, 2017) may have more connections for a contemporary youth than the classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*; however, using both can help students connect to the other.

Rybakova and Roccanti (2016) stated classic texts and YA texts are best paired, stating, “We believe these categories of texts are most powerful when they are connected rather than when pitted against one another” (p. 31). Similarly, Gallo (2001) and

Crowder (2016) believed YAL often contains the same literary aspects as classic literature; therefore, it is the perfect text to use as a bridge to classic literature. It can help provide students with connections that otherwise might not be found in the classic work alone. It also provides a contemporary reading experience classics do not provide. For example, Miller (as cited in Glaus, 2014) discussed Alexie's (2009) *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* in terms of its literary aspects. The book deals with many of the themes found in classic literature such as racism, identity, and death and provides a complex text that can be used along with classic texts. *The Outsiders*, although a beloved text, is not a contemporary work of literature. It is a coming-of-age story written and published in the 1960s when many English teachers were not even born. Those who were born then are now approaching retirement age. The novel could pair with Alexie's coming of age novels published within recent years.

Armstrong and Newman (2011) used intertextuality to help provide background knowledge at the college level in developmental courses which are designed for those with low reading and writing skills. The purpose was to "facilitate the building of knowledge base on topics associated with a core text or content topic" (p. 11). Short (1993) advocated for the use of intertextuality through text sets. Through the study, Short noticed when students discussed texts with "shared themes, authors, genres, or topics" (p. 286), their discussions were heavily imbued with their own experiences and connections across texts. The intertextuality helped students make meaning through their experiences and connections. The study subjects frequently made connections to "characters, themes, plot, illustrations, the response of the reader, the author, and their own experiences" (Short, 1993, p. 293). The researchers considered the impact of theme and other literary

elements on the reader as well as choice made by the author. After the research, Short noticed students actively looking for and making connections in later readings as well as other classes.

Hartman (1995) studied how students made intertextual links, noting that “a reader’s understanding transcends his or her comprehension of a single passage” (p. 520). The researcher described the connections readers make as webs of meaning in which readers use connections among various texts. These webs are constantly evolving as new connections are made. Hartman believed that “while readers are assembling an inner text from past as well as evolving texts, they also use their current experiences with the text ... to revise their past texts and the connections among them” (527). This is the transaction Rosenblatt (2005) discussed. It is what enables readers to make meaning and refine meaning while reading.

Student Reading Attitudes

Student attitudes toward reading play an important role in their reading achievement (Hooley et al., 2013). Having a positive attitude and a belief in one’s ability to read is important. Vacca (2006) noted that “self-efficacy is an ‘I can’ belief in oneself that leads to a sense of competence” (p. 56). In other words, students who believe they are capable of understanding complex texts, like the classics, are more likely to do so; however, the students who do not feel confident in their abilities will experience difficulties (Vacca, 2006).

Research-Based Instructional Practices

When teaching the units included in the research study, research-based instructional practices were used. The instructional practices used include the RACE

strategy. This strategy is defined as, “RACE is an acronym that reminds students of the specific criteria needed in a quality written response” (Nichols, 2013, para. 5). In the RACE strategy, students restate the prompt (R), answer the prompt (A), cite evidence from the text that supports the answers (C), and explain how the evidence supports the answer (E). It is a strategy used at varying grade levels. Although on the forefront a writing strategy, RACE also allows teachers to see a student’s thinking about a text as well as connections to the text the student may be making (Nichols, 2013). The strategy helps students formulate formal written responses to text and support their answers with textual evidence. In a study, Nichols (2013) found the use of the strategy was effective in improving student responses.

A second research-based strategy is a summarization strategy called GIST. The acronym stands for generating interaction between schema and text (Cunningham, 1992, as cited in Wood et al., 2016, p. 52). It is a strategy to “enhance students’ comprehension by having them use information from texts to create summaries” (Wood et al., 2016, p. 52). The strategy asks students to find the who, what, where, when, how, and why of the reading; and from that, students write a summary using a limited amount of words, typically 15-20 (Wood et al., 2016). The strategy is useful in determining student understanding of text. An additional skill used is synthesizing ideas and writing (Wood et al., 2016).

Graphic organizers were another instructional strategy used. Graphic organizers allow the student to use a visual representation to help enhance learning. Given there are limits to the amount of information working memory can process, many different instructional techniques may help to reduce the cognitive load on working memory

during reading (Barry, 2016, p. 32). The use of this strategy can help clarify for students by giving them a visual “memory channel” to use for comprehension (Barry, 2016, p. 33). A study done by Fisher and Frey (2018) found graphic organizers, sometimes also known as concept maps, have a significant impact on student learning.

Formative assessments are an important part of teaching and learning. Black and Wiliam (2010) provided a definition of assessment and clarified when it becomes formative: “Assessment [refers] to all those activities undertaken by teachers -- and by their students in assessing themselves -- that provide information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities” (p. 2). The researchers further clarified when an assessment becomes formative: “Such assessment becomes formative assessment when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching to meet student needs” (Black & Wiliam, 2010, p. 2).

Quizizz is a technological tool used to deliver formative assessments in a game-like format. Research has been conducted showing the use of formative assessments advances student success (Bailey & Jakicic, 2012). Black and Wiliam (2010) believed that “formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work” (p. 12). With the inclusion of technology, formative assessment can be made what Eatherton (2016) called “edu-taining” (p. 8). Students are immersed in technology and games as part of their daily lives (Johnson, 2017). The recent Fortnite game craze is a testament to that. Eatherton noted not only are gaming formats for assessment engaging, but they also encourage students to practice skills on their own. Black and Wiliam (2010) believed instruction must be interactive. Using gaming formats provides the necessary interaction.

Conclusion

The current literature in the field notes the English curriculum has not changed much in the past 3 decades. The students, however, have. The classic literature used primarily in most classrooms lacks characters, dilemmas, and plots that ignite an interest in present day students. Casey (2010) believed it makes sense to design the English curriculum based on the students, keeping the standards. After all, students are the people who have the most to gain or lose from the class. “If presented in this manner, the curriculum may serve the needs of the student and bring value to the classroom experience instead of serving up facts that will be regurgitated on a standardized test” (Casey, 2010, p. 6). Students must be able to engage with the literature they are expected to read in order to gain anything from it. YAL is one avenue for aiding student engagement in classroom literature. Chapter 3 discusses the study methodology. In the chapter, the research questions guiding the study are presented. A description of the setting for the study and the population of the study’s participants is discussed. A description of the data sources used is included as well as a description of the intended analysis of the data. A discourse of ethical considerations is provided in the discussion of the research design.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to describe the impact of intertextual study between classic literature and YAL on student attitudes toward classic literature and YAL at the high school level and the effect of the intertextual study on student achievement of the NCSCOS for RL standards. The top careers in the 21st century require above average reading skills (Stephenson, 2010), yet the NCTE (2006) policy brief reported millions of students do not read at grade level. Scores on the NAEP report card corroborate this belief with the finding that recent reading scores show a lack of growth at the secondary level (United States Department of Education, 2015). At the secondary level, focus is often placed on classic literature which alienates young readers who have difficulty connecting to these texts because there is no relevance to their lives (Gallagher, 2009; Gallo, 2001; Gibbons et al., 2006; Ivey & Johnston, 2017; Miller, 2017). Further complicating matters is the finding that reading for pleasure is not imperative in schools as a means for growing readers (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016, p. 25). Despite the adverse statistics, sales of YAL are on the rise, indicating teens do read (Peterson, 2017), just not what is assigned in class. Using a combination of classic literature and YAL can be the bridge needed to help adolescent readers connect to classic literature.

The following chapter describes the research setting as well as the participants of the study. The research questions are presented along with the research design, rationale for the design, and the role of the researcher. Next, the instruments and methods of data analysis are described. Finally, ethical considerations are included in the discussion of

the research methodology.

Research Setting

The study took place in one suburban high school in the piedmont of North Carolina. Specifically, the setting was in one 10th-grade English classroom within the school. The school was one of seven traditional high schools in the county. The population of the school was approximately 1,600 students. The school contained a STEM school and a traditional high school. The setting for this study was in the traditional high school. English II courses in the state of North Carolina end with a standardized End of Course (EOC) exam testing student proficiency on the NCSCOS's standards. The school system uses a testing system called Mastery Connect to deliver common formative assessments and benchmark tests which are used to determine mastery of the standards tested on the EOC exam during the semester. In qualitative research, according to Creswell (2014), the "natural setting" (p. 185) is important to both avoid forced settings and to gather data in the setting in which participants are comfortable.

Two teachers, the researcher, a certified English teacher with 29 years of experience, and a special education teacher with 10 years of experience who also has a bachelor's degree in English and a bachelor's degree in chemistry provided the English II course instruction in one class period of standard English II. The researcher alone provided instruction in two class periods of Honors English II. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the principal of the high school (Appendix A) and the Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary Services for the school district (Appendix B).

Research Questions

To determine the effect of intertextual study on student reading attitudes and student achievement, the research centered on five research questions.

1. What effect does the pairing of YAL with classic literature have on high school student attitudes toward classic literature at a North Carolina suburban high school?
2. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature?
3. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards YAL?
4. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature when paired with YAL?
5. What effect does the pairing of YAL with classic literature have on high school student achievement of the NC English Language Arts Standard Course of Study standards for reading literature?

Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to describe the impact of intertextual study between classic literature and YAL on student attitudes toward classic literature and YAL at the high school level and the effect of the intertextual study on student achievement of the NCSCOS for RL standards. The standards assessed to determine the effect on student achievement aligned with the district's curriculum maps and the NC English Language Arts Standard Course of Study.

The study conducted was a mixed methods action research study. Action research

is a tool educators can use to improve their practice (Bell & Aldridge, 2014). It is “an approach in which the action researcher and members of a social setting collaborate in the diagnosis of a problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis” (Bryman, as cited in Bell & Aldridge, 2014, p. 14) and one whose purpose is “improving teaching quality and practices” (Bell & Aldridge, 2014, p. 14). This method was suited to the intention of the study. Further, the action research method focuses on a “desire to create [an] optimal learning environment which uses stimulating learning materials and learning activities to guide, motivate, and support learning” (Hamilton & Ghatala, as cited in Bell & Aldridge, 2014, p. 18). Action research also helps “free [educators] from constraints” (Shope, n.d., slide 8), which supported the idea in the study of moving from the sole use of canonical texts to an intertextual study using both the classics and YAL. The three Es of data collection for action research are experiencing, enquiring, and examining (Shope, n.d., slide 19). The experiencing aspect was the impetus of the study. The researcher for the study was a veteran English teacher who experienced difficulty engaging most students in classic literature. Journal entries provided the data to fulfill the examining aspect of data collection. For the enquiry aspect, the survey questions fulfilled the need.

The steps of action research were identifying an area of focus, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting data, and developing an action plan (Shope, n.d., slide 7); however, these steps were cyclical, not linear, as evidenced in Figure 2. The researcher developed the area of focus through years of teaching high school English and struggling to engage students in classic literature. Throughout the study, data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted in order to develop a plan of action for future classroom

instruction.

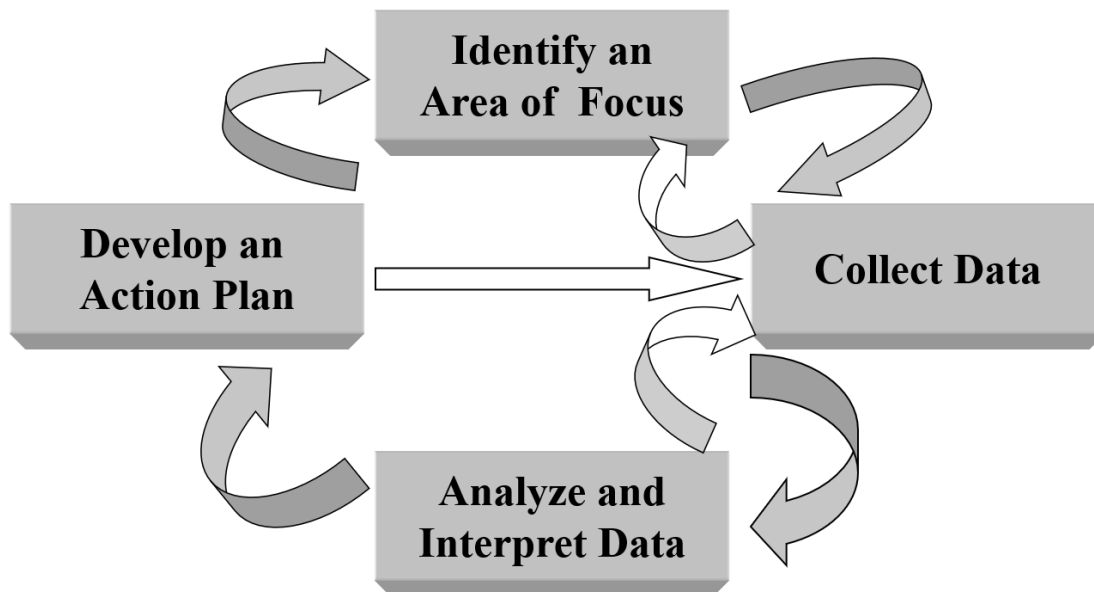


Figure 2. Action Research Steps (Shope, n.d., slide 7).

Mixed methods research is a method of research that has gained interest in the last 15 years (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The mixed method entails using both qualitative data and quantitative data to best focus on the problem. According to Creswell (2014), mixed methods research is

an approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone. (p. 32)

In other words, it is a “mixing or blending of data, [that], provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question than either [quantitative or qualitative] by itself

(Creswell, 2014, p. 264). Mixed methods research allowed the researcher to have a “more complete understanding of research problems” (Creswell, 2014, p. 267) because it integrated the statistical data with the viewpoints of the individuals studied.

Tashakkori and Creswell (as cited in Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) further defined mixed methods as, “research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry” (p. 4). Both definitions provided a method for the research in the study.

The mixed methods approach was chosen because it provided data, both statistical data and anecdotal data, to better understand the given problem. Since this study intended to research the effects of intertextual study on student achievement and on student reading attitudes, the use of qualitative and quantitative data was appropriate since it allowed for quantitative data on student achievement and qualitative data on student reading attitudes.

Specifically, a convergent parallel mixed methods approach was used for the action research study. This method, according to Creswell (2014), is the most popular method of mixed methods research. Bian (2011) described the purpose of the convergent parallel design as, “to best understand or develop more complete understanding of the research problem by obtaining different but complementary data” (para. 12). In such a study, the qualitative and quantitative data are collected separately, and the information is analyzed and compared. An interpretation is derived from the analysis of the data (Bian, 2011; Creswell, 2014).

The key assumption of this approach is that both the qualitative and quantitative

data provide different types of information—often detailed views of participants qualitatively and scores on instruments quantitatively—and together they yield results that should be the same. (Creswell, 2014, p. 220)

This method best suited the intention of the study by examining the effects of intertextual study of YAL and classic literature on both reading attitudes and reading achievement because the quantitative data were compared and contrasted to the qualitative data to interpret the results of the study. The purpose of a convergence model was to confirm and authenticate conclusions about a single idea – in this case, intertextual study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Both types of data were collected and analyzed independently before comparing and contrasting the results. Figure 3 demonstrates the convergent research design.

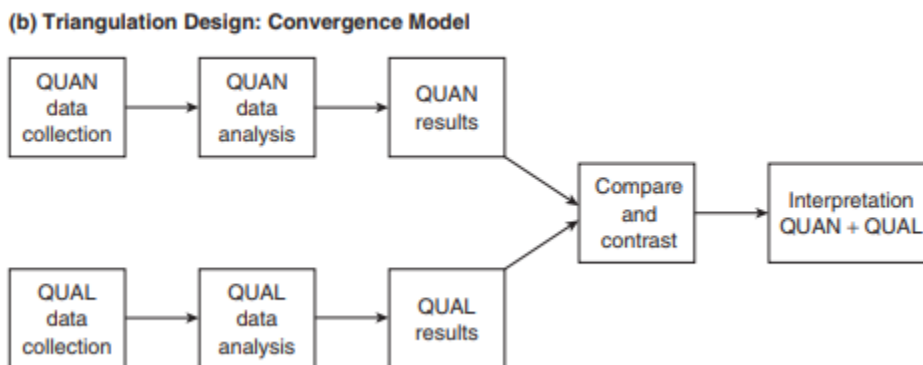


Figure 3. Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design (Creswell, 2014, p. 222).

Ivankova (2015) supported the idea of using a mixed methods approach when conducting action research, noting common features of the two. For example, both follow the “principles of systematic inquiry in designing and implementing research endeavors” (Ivankova, 2015, p. 52). In addition, both seek to provide “comprehensive information” (Ivankova, 2015, p. 52) with mixed methods delivering answers to the

research questions and action research affording solutions to the problem.

For this study, a classic text, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and Shusterman's (2007) *Unwind* were paired. The Shakespearean text was chosen because it is one of the most commonly use canonical texts according to Applebee's (1992) study. In a survey of schools, *Macbeth* ranked third in popularity in Catholic schools, second in public schools, and first in independent schools (Applebee, 1992, p. 28). Bird's (2005) research suggested not much has changed with *Macbeth* being listed as the most commonly anthologized play found in 11th-grade textbooks (p. 162).

The YAL *Unwind* was chosen for its appeal to young readers. The dystopian novel was first published in 2007. Although not an instant bestseller, the book has steadily sold since its publication and has a loyal base of fans who have helped grow its popularity (Maughan, 2012). The book has won numerous awards including ALA Best Books for Young Adults, NYPL Best Books for Teens, and the Abraham Lincoln Book Award Master list among many others (Unwind-awards, n.d.). Both texts deal with themes of power and choice; therefore, they made a good pairing for the study.

The Role of the Researcher

In the study, the researcher had the role of a participant and an observer. As the participant, the researcher was the teacher who provided the English instruction. The researcher was an employee of the school system and school site in which the research took place. As an observer, the researcher analyzed the survey data gathered through an anonymous electronic survey and journal entries gathered anonymously but did not directly ask questions during data collection to avoid influencing student answers or creating a scenario in which students were not comfortable answering candidly. To

further eliminate bias, the participants of the study remained anonymous to the researcher. The Instructional Technology Facilitator (ITF) of the school explained and distributed permission forms to the English II students. He also collected all signed forms, thereby keeping participants anonymous to the researcher. Participants were assigned numbers by the ITF, and all data were gathered by the ITF and numbered to keep the participants anonymous to the researcher.

As a participant in the research process, the researcher carried inherent biases. Having taught for almost 3 decades and having used contemporary and adolescent literature for most of that time, the researcher developed the belief that contemporary literature is useful in engaging students in reading. The researcher's observations also led to the hypothesis that contemporary literature can often be linked to classic literature to help students grow as learners. To avoid lending personal bias to the study, the surveys were administered anonymously through the school system's K12 Insight program. This program allows the school system to develop surveys and distribute them to respondents anonymously. Data from the survey were provided to the researcher from the county, further ensuring participant anonymity.

The journal responses were uploaded to Canvas without any identifying information on the documents. The ITF separated the responses of the participants and delivered the coded responses of participants to the researcher without divulging respondent identities. Responses were numbered. Students were familiar with journaling, having completed several journals as class activities before the research study began.

Research Methodology

Participants. The participants in the study were English II students in the researcher's classroom. Three English II courses were used, two Honors English II classes and a co-taught inclusion English II class. Students self-select into the honors courses through course registration. Although honors courses tend to enroll students who maintain an A or B average, it is not required students do so. Standard students also self-select through registration, but students in the Exceptional Children's (EC) program are strategically placed in co-taught English II classes to benefit from both an EC teacher and an English teacher in the classroom. This was a sample of convenience. The students were readily available to the researcher and were a "naturally formed" (Creswell, 2014, p. 215) group based on placement in the course. The size of the sample was determined by the number of students enrolled in the courses and the number of parents and students who granted permission to participate in the study.

Research study procedures. The study was conducted during the course of two units in three English II classes. Each unit focused on specific standards from each of the domains: reading literature, reading informational text, writing, speaking and listening, and language. The study spanned parts of two curricular units lasting approximately six to eight weeks, or 30-40 class days in total. According to the curriculum maps provided by the county, units average 4 weeks but may be as short as 3 weeks or as long as 5 weeks. The school district provides curricular maps to teachers with the specific standards to be focused on during those units, although it is understood all of the standards are recursive and can, and often do, repeat throughout the units. A sample of a unit map is included (Appendix C). Classes in the high school meet Monday through

Friday for an average of 82 minutes each; however, approximately one fourth of the class was devoted to grammar study each day, and at least the equivalent of one class period per week focused on writing and informational text, leaving the equivalent of approximately three class periods per week devoted to literature. One day a week, the class met for an additional 41 minutes during Connections time. This is a time set aside for remediation, intervention, and extension of class lessons. In the described study, the focus was only on the RL standards.

The independent variable consisted of intertextual instruction consisting of two paired texts – one classic text and one YA text. The same activities were employed with both texts. The various forms of instruction used in teaching these texts included activities such as whole group reading, small group reading, individual reading, discussion, and written responses. Formative assessments were administered during the time frame to gauge student mastery of the standards and adjust instruction if needed. The types of activities students engaged in during the course of the units are listed.

Activities for paired texts:

- GIST summarizing strategy (Wood et al., 2016).
- RACE responses (Nichols, 2013).
- Class discussions- small group and whole group (Short, 1993).
- STEAL characterization chart (Fisher & Frey, 2018).
- Theme statements organizer (Fisher & Frey, 2018).
- Comprehension quizzes and questions.
- Formative assessments (Quizizz, exit tickets, thumbs up/down, etc.; Black & Wiliam, 2010).

The dependent variables were student reading attitudes and student achievement. The intention of the study was to determine if the intertextual instruction affected the two dependent variables. The survey instrument was administered prior to reading the YAL. Students accessed the survey online and provided anonymous answers to the survey questions. The assessments measuring achievement were delivered at the times scheduled by the county. The first benchmark assessment was given toward the end of September. The second benchmark assessment was given in October with the third benchmark following approximately three weeks later. Data from the two benchmarks occurring during the units, the second and third benchmarks, were used to determine if there were any significant changes in student achievement.

There were some differences in instruction between the honors classes and the inclusion class. The inclusion class benefitted from having two teachers, the researcher and the EC's teacher; therefore, students in the co-taught class were afforded the opportunity for more individual attention and instruction than in the honors classes. Students in the inclusion classes also needed, at times, extended time to complete assignments as stated in the Individualized Education Plans (IEP), and some had a scheduled curriculum assistance class in which they were able to continue working on class assignments with the aid of an EC instructor. If students received a separate setting for testing as a modification, they moved to a smaller setting during tests to reduce distractions. Any other modifications specified on student IEPs were provided as stated.

To ensure the lessons were implemented with fidelity, a log of classroom activities was kept by the researcher. In addition, random checks-ins were completed by an administrator who signed the log verifying the fidelity of the lessons.

Instrumentation

The instruments used in the study were determined based on the data needed to answer the stated research questions. The mixed methods study used both qualitative and quantitative instruments as described in the following sections to study the independent variable (intertextual study) and the dependent variables (student reading attitudes and student achievement on benchmark tests).

Quantitative. The intertextual study (independent variable) was used to determine the effects on the dependent variables. In this study, the dependent variables considered were student reading attitudes toward classic literature, student reading attitudes toward YAL, and student achievement. The independent variable was the intertextual study. The quantitative data were gathered from student benchmark assessments delivered through Mastery Connect, the school system's chosen software for benchmarks and formative assessments. The students took three system mandated benchmark assessments throughout the semester. Other formative and summative assessments can be created using the Collaborative Assessment Solutions for Educators (CASE) item bank or uploaded to the Mastery Connect system and delivered periodically throughout the semester.

In a white paper by Research in Education, Inc., CASE assessments are described as, “essentially summative assessments, paralleling the structure and content of summative state and national assessments and providing students an experience that mirrors high-stakes summative tests and scores that predict performance on such tests” (Te21, 2016, p. 1). These assessments are designed to allow teachers to use them formatively to determine student mastery of concepts and standards. “Benchmark

assessments are administered throughout the year to measure student performance and provide teachers with feedback as to the success of classroom instruction and instructional interventions” (Te21, 2016, p. 3). These assessments are aligned with the state standards. The assessment questions are developed through a rigorous, multi-step process to ensure validity and adherence to state standards (Te21, 2016). The assessments are used by the school system to determine student mastery of the standards through the semester. Each student in English II takes three benchmarks over the course of the semester. The benchmarks are scheduled by the county and delivered via school-issued Chromebooks in the English classrooms. At the end of the semester, data were examined to determine if the assessments were valid predictors of EOC state test performance. According to the white paper, the benchmark assessments are reliable and “have about 90% predictability” (Te21, 2016, p. 7). In addition to that, Jonathan Isgett, VP of Accountability at TE21, the company producing the CASE benchmark assessments used in Mastery Connect, provided statistics for the NC EOC CASE assessment predictability rate for North Carolina. The number of students predicted to be proficient on the EOC English II tests based on benchmark testing closely matched the actual number proficient. The overall proficiency rate was 97.5%. Table 1 shows the rates for predictability. The predictability rate was determined by the following formula: $1 - \frac{(\text{Actual} - \text{Predicted})}{\text{Actual}} \times 100\%$.

Table 1

NC Predictability Rates for CASE Assessments of English II in NC

	Case projected % met or > proficiency	Case % met or > proficiency	Predictability proficiency rate
English II	62.1%	63.7%	97.5%

(J. Isgett, personal communication, September 4, 2018).

Qualitative. The independent variable, intertextual study, was used to determine the effects on the dependent variables: student attitudes toward classic literature, student attitudes toward YAL, and student achievement. For the qualitative aspect of the study, student surveys and journals were used to collect the qualitative data. These surveys were cross-sectional. The purpose for choosing a survey was to generalize student reading attitudes to classic literature and toward YAL based on survey responses. Surveys provide a means to collect qualitative data in a rather quick time frame (Creswell, 2014). The format for this survey was a survey created on K12 Insight which the school system uses to create surveys. All students had access to the Internet through classroom-based Chromebooks and free Google accounts through the school system and were able to access the survey. Data collection was anonymous.

Miller (2017) recently conducted a study on pairing YAL and classic literature in the classroom. The research included a student survey asking students to describe their attitudes toward YAL and classic literature. An email was sent to Dr. Miller requesting permission to use the survey in this study (Appendix D). Permission was granted. In addition, Miller's (2017) study included student interview questions. The researcher was also granted permission to use the interview questions; however, the research study proposed here used the interview questions as journal questions with some editing (Appendix E). Janesick (1999) stated journals are a "powerful heuristic tool and research

technique that can help the researcher ‘refine the understandings’ of the participants in the study” (p. 2). Miller (2017) did not include a discussion of the survey reliability or validation process, so for the sake of reliability and validity, the survey and interview turned journal questions were piloted with English II teachers at the school site. To ensure the reliability and validity of the questions, both were piloted with five high school students who were not enrolled in the classes used in the study. Both the survey and journal data were analyzed using coding of the responses to identify themes and analysis of the resulting information. Coding is the “process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins” (Raswell & Rallis, as cited in Creswell, 2014, pp. 197-198). The codes were then used to determine themes found in the data. Finally, the data were interpreted based on the results (Creswell, 2014). The themes found in the surveys and journals were member checked with the participants to assure accuracy. These data were triangulated with the quantitative data, and results and comparisons were discussed.

Procedures for pilot studies. Since the surveys and interview questions used in Miller’s (2017) research have no discussion of validation procedures, the instruments were piloted for the current study. The researcher participated in weekly professional learning communities (PLCs) with the other English II teachers. Teachers in the PLC participated in a trial run of the survey and journal questions to determine if the survey questions needed refinement. To further test the questions, five students who were not part of the study were used to pilot the instruments to ensure reliability and validity. If refinement was needed, the questions would have been piloted again after changes were made to ensure validity. Pilot participants found no need for revisions, reporting the

questions were easily understood.

Data Analysis Plan

Data were analyzed to look for patterns in the responses. Once analyzed, responses were categorized and grouped looking for any common themes. Once themes emerged, a connection between them was deduced based on the data.

Janesick (1999) stated journals are a “powerful heuristic tool and research technique that can help the researcher ‘refine the understandings’ of the participants in the study” (p. 2). Miller (2017) did not include a discussion of the survey reliability or validation process, so for the sake of reliability and validity, the survey and interview turned journal questions were piloted with English II teachers. Both the survey and journal data were analyzed using coding of the responses to identify themes and analysis of the resulting information. Coding is the “process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins” (Raswell & Rallis as cited in Creswell, 2014, pp. 197-198). The codes were then used to determine themes found in the data. Finally, the data were interpreted based on the results (Creswell, 2014). The themes found in the surveys and journals were member checked by a colleague to assure accuracy of the analysis. The data were triangulated with the quantitative data, and results and comparisons were discussed.

For the quantitative aspect of the study, the achievement data were gathered from benchmark assessments delivered through Mastery Connect during the semester. The data were analyzed using a paired *t*-test which determined whether there was a significant difference in the means of two tests (Urdu, 2010).

Triangulation of the Data

The themes determined through the coding of the qualitative data were triangulated with the quantitative data to make inferences regarding the use of intertextual study on reader attitudes and achievement.

Threats to Validity

There were some threats to the validity of the convergent parallel mixed methods design presented. Externally, the setting of the study posed a threat. The setting, a suburban high school, limited the study to one geographic area; therefore, the results may not be generalizable to urban or rural settings. Instrumentation also posed a threat to external validity. The assessments provided by the district differed. This can “[impact] the scores on the outcome” (Creswell, 2014, p. 176), thereby posing a threat to the validity.

Internally, using students from one high school in North Carolina restricted the number of participants from whom data could be collected. Also, choosing only 10th-grade students limited the generalizability of the results; therefore, there was a threat to internal validity with a limited number and scope of participants.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Creswell (2014) defined validity in quantitative research as being able to “draw meaningful and useful inferences from scores on particular instruments” (p. 254). For qualitative data, Creswell stated strategies used to establish validity “demonstrate the accuracy of their findings and are used to convince readers of this accuracy” (p. 254). To establish validity, the data from the research were triangulated. The qualitative data, the survey responses and journal responses that were coded and analyzed, were triangulated

with the quantitative data, student achievement data gathered through Mastery Connect, and analyzed using the SPSS software. The information gathered from the sources was used to “build a coherent justification for themes” identified (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). Member checking, a process by which the qualitative findings were presented to the participants to determine if the participants felt they were accurate, was used to validate the data (Creswell, 2014).

Ethical considerations. The researcher was an experienced and licensed teacher with CITI certification who was in her third year at the research setting. Previous years of experience teaching English language arts to adolescents include 20 years in two neighboring counties and 7 years prior in a different state. This study was conducted following the guidelines and standards set by Gardner-Webb University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). All research, including the study described here, must go through the IRB. This “ensures that the research meets ethical guidelines and does not in any way impinge on the rights of the individuals being studied or harm them in any way” (Butin, 2010, p. 103).

To ensure the study was ethically sound, the researcher obtained IRB approval before commencing to collect data for the study. Participants in the study, as well as the parents of the participants, provided informed consent before participating in the study and had the option to drop out of the study without any consequences. No incentives were provided for participating in the study. In addition to IRB approval, the principal of the school and assistant superintendent of the school system also provided approval for the study to be conducted.

All data and documents collected for the study were kept secure, confidential, and

anonymous. No student names were attached to any of the data. Pseudonyms for the school, adults, and students involved were used in the analysis and description of the study, data, and results. Data in paper form were stored securely in a locked safe at the researcher's residence, and digital data were stored in encrypted password-protected files.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the overall methodology of the study of the effects of intertextuality with classic literature and YAL on student reading attitudes and achievement. The chapter detailed the convergent parallel mixed methods approach in terms of the setting, participants, research design, instruments, data analysis, threats to validity, and ethical considerations of the study. Chapter 4 includes an explanation of the results gained from the study as well as an analysis of the results.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to explore intertextual study of YAL and classic literature and to describe its impact on student attitudes and achievement. The study was conducted at a suburban high school in the piedmont of North Carolina. Data were collected over the course of an 8-week period in three English II classrooms.

Chapter 4 delivers an analysis of the data collected on intertextual study and its effects on student reading attitudes and achievement. Results from a student survey are presented along with an analysis of open-ended journal responses and an analysis of student achievement data from benchmark tests.

Research Questions

The researcher gathered data for five research questions.

1. What effect does the pairing of YAL with classic literature have on high school student attitudes toward classic literature at a North Carolina suburban high school?
2. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature?
3. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards YAL?
4. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature when paired with YAL?
5. What effect does the pairing of YAL with classic literature have on high

school student achievement of the NC English Language Arts Standard Course of Study standards for reading literature?

Description of Participation Data

The mixed methods action research study was conducted in three English II classes in a suburban high school in North Carolina. Participants were all volunteers and were all students rostered in the researcher's classes. The school's ITF both provided and collected IRB permission forms, keeping the participants unknown to the researcher. Participants first took a survey delivered through the school system's email. The survey was delivered at the beginning of the unit in which intertextual study of the YA novel *Unwind* and the classic play *Macbeth* would occur.

Students were surveyed about their reading attitudes at the beginning of the unit. The survey was created using the school system's K-12 Insight program and was administered electronically via school email to participating students in the teacher's English II classes during the first semester of the school year. Results of the survey were gathered by a third party in the school system's technology center and were delivered to the researcher electronically. The survey asked students about reading attitudes concerning reading for pleasure, reading for school, and the amount of time spent reading. Twenty participants agreed to participate in the study, but only 13 participants answered the survey. Two participants turned in permission forms after the survey closed. The reasons why the other five did not participate are unclear.

During the semester, students took county mandated benchmark tests. The initial test was given within the first 4 weeks of the semester, and the final benchmark test was given during the unit of study used in this research study. Benchmark tests are delivered

through Mastery Connect, the school system's benchmark assessment provider. Data from the benchmark tests were accessible to teachers through Mastery Connect's reports feature; however, since the study was a blind study, the ITF collected the data reports for participants and coded them with numbers instead of names and provided the coded information to the researcher.

The final pieces of data were collected through open-ended journal responses posted as an assignment on the school system's learning management system called Canvas. Again, the ITF collected the responses from participants and coded them with the same numbers used for benchmark data and provided the information to the researcher.

Findings for Research Questions 1-4

The findings for the first four research questions were determined from data gathered through the student survey and open-ended journal response questions. The research questions were as follows:

1. What effect does the pairing of YAL with classic literature have on high school student attitudes toward classic literature at a North Carolina suburban high school?
2. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature?
3. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards YAL?
4. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature when paired with YAL?

Survey results. The survey was administered to participating students at the beginning of the study. The number of students taking part in the survey was 13. It asked about student attitudes toward reading in general for the first eight questions. Question 1 asked students if they liked to read. It used a Likert scale of 1 (No, not at all) to 10 (Yes, very much). Of the responses, one student chose the highest ranking, a 10 (Yes, very much) for an answer. A rank of 7 was chosen by three students, and a rank of 6 was chosen by two. One student did not respond. Of those surveyed, six showed a negative response to the question of whether or not they liked to read, while six others showed a favorable response to the question. No response was given by one. Figure 4 shows the data for question 1.

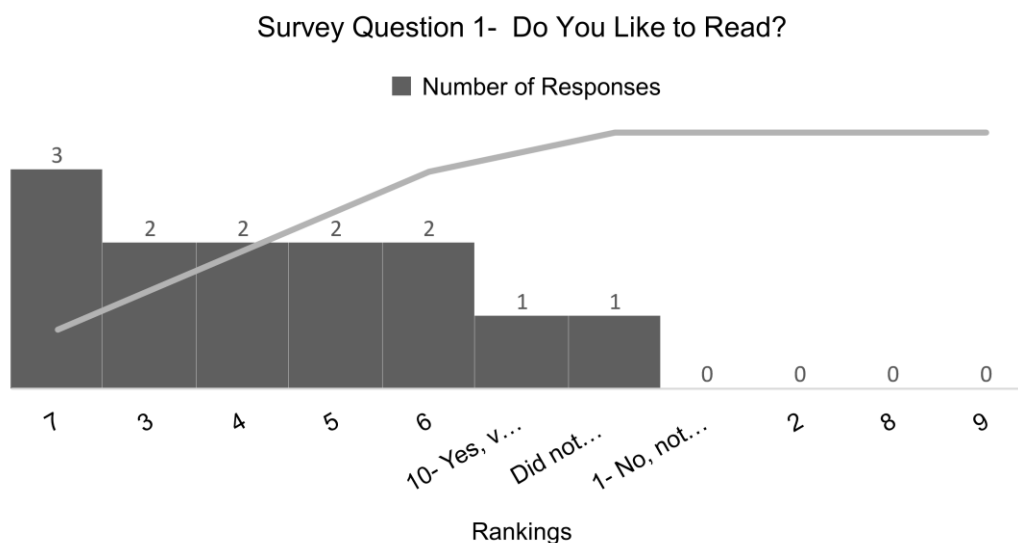


Figure 4. Responses to Survey Question 1.

The second question asked how often students read for enjoyment outside of school. Six of the students indicated they either never read for enjoyment outside of school or only did so once a year. This correlates with the answers from the first question in which six students indicated a negative response toward reading. Although only one

student indicated he or she very much liked reading, two students indicated they read for enjoyment all the time, while three do so once a month and another two students read for enjoyment once every few months. In total, five of the students surveyed read monthly. Six students noted they like to read, but survey answers point out that although some like to read, it does not mean they always do. Figure 5 shows the response data.

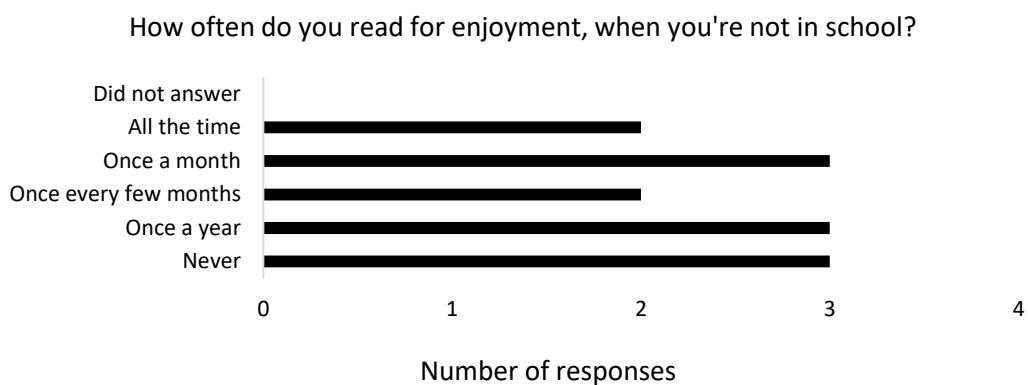


Figure 5. Responses to Survey Question 2.

When asked if they typically liked the books assigned to read for school, student answers showed some variation. A negative response was specified by eight of the students with none choosing “not at all.” The negative responses varied with three students ranking this question with a 5, two students a 4, two others a 3, and one student a 2. On the positive side, two students ranked their answer 7 and two students an 8. A rank of 10 (very much) was given by only one student. Figure 6 shows the response data.

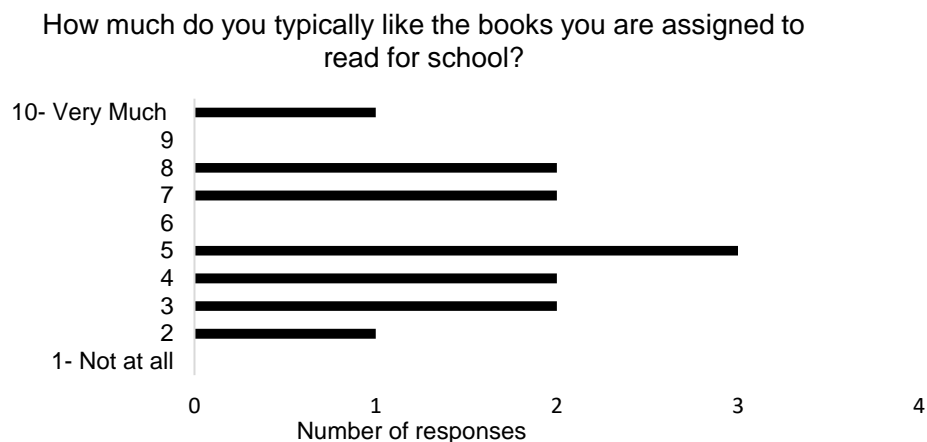


Figure 6. Responses to Survey Question 3.

On the fourth question, “How much of your school reading assignment do you typically complete,” answers deviated from the pattern noted previously. Although six students noted they both do not like to read and do not read for enjoyment outside of school, six others specified they read all of their school-assigned reading and one stated he read most of them. Another four students said they read at least half of their school-assigned readings. In total, 11 of the students surveyed read at least half of their assigned school readings. Only two of the students noted they only read a little of the assignment and zero stated they read none of it. Figure 7 shows the data from participant responses.

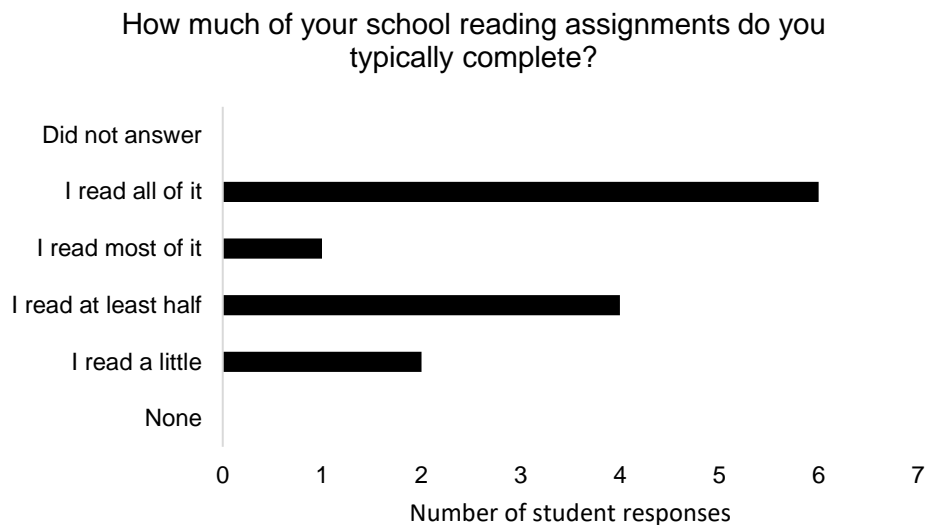


Figure 7. Responses to Survey Question 4.

The fifth survey question asked students why they read school-assigned reading, if and when they do so. The answer choices were “to get a good grade,” “parents make me,” “I like to read,” and “Combination of the above.” No student chose “I like to read” as his or her answer. The most common answer was “to get a good grade,” with seven students choosing the answer. The remaining six chose “Combination of the above.” Figure 8 shows the data from the survey responses.

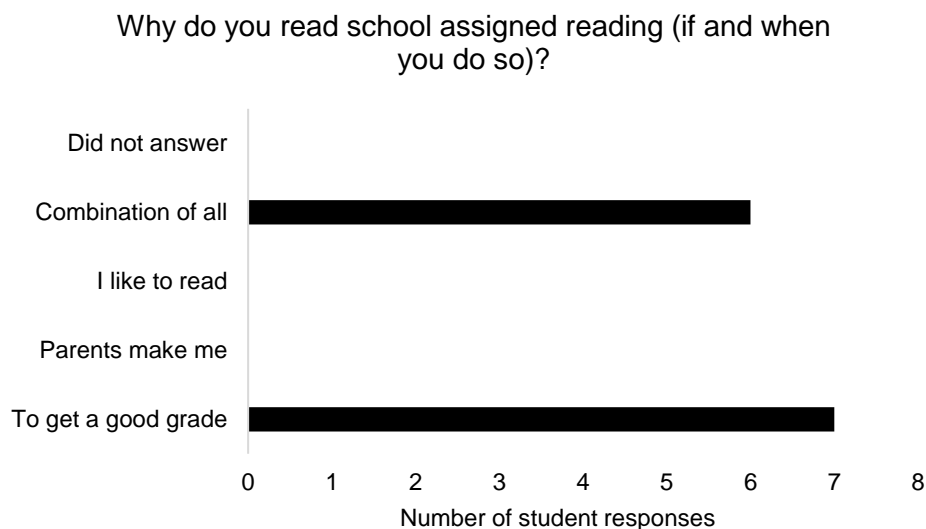


Figure 8. Responses to Survey Question 5.

The sixth survey question asked students about text difficulty. It asked, “Typically, how difficult are the books assigned for school reading?” Participants were given a Likert scale of 1 (very easy) to 10 (very difficult). Very few students noted their texts were difficult with only one choosing 7, and another one choosing 8 as an answer. No students chose 9 or 10 as an answer. On the other end of the scale, four students chose 5 as the answer; two chose 4. Another three students chose 3, and one each chose 2 and 1. Figure 9 shows the response data.

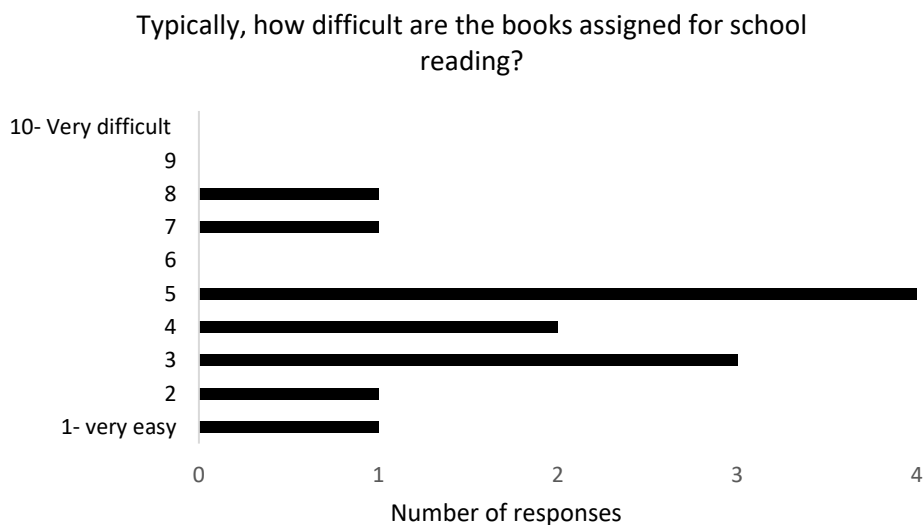


Figure 9. Responses to Survey Question 6.

Survey question 7 inquired about participant time spent reading. It asked, “In a typical week, how many hours do you spend reading for school?” No students chose 5 or more hours as a response. Only one student chose 3-5 hours. The majority, seven students, chose 1-2 hours. Another four students chose less than 1 hour, and one student indicated no reading at all during the typical week. Figure 10 shows the data collected from the survey.

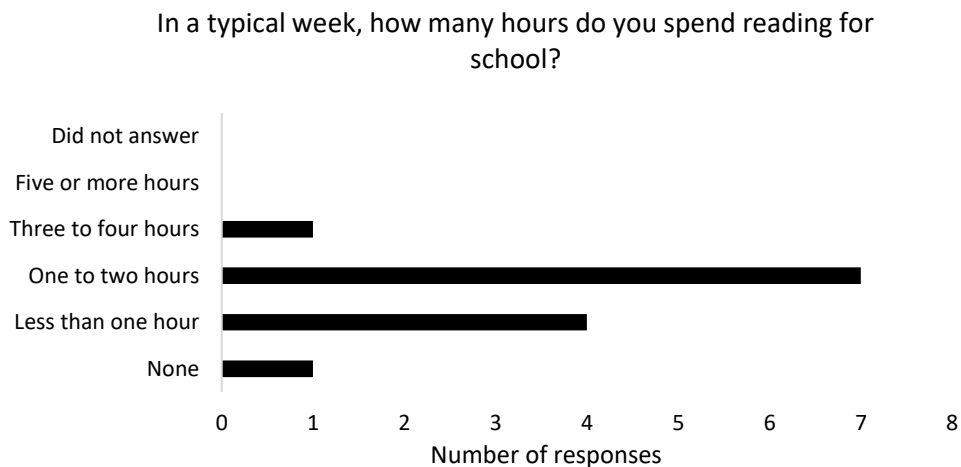


Figure 10. Responses to Survey Question 7.

Conversely, survey question 8 asked students how time is spent weekly reading for pleasure. Answers were distributed much differently than for the previous question. The answer choice “None” garnered the majority of the responses with seven students choosing it. Less than 1 hour and 3-4 hours each received two responses. One student responded to each 1-2 hours and 5 or more hours. Figure 11 displays the data.

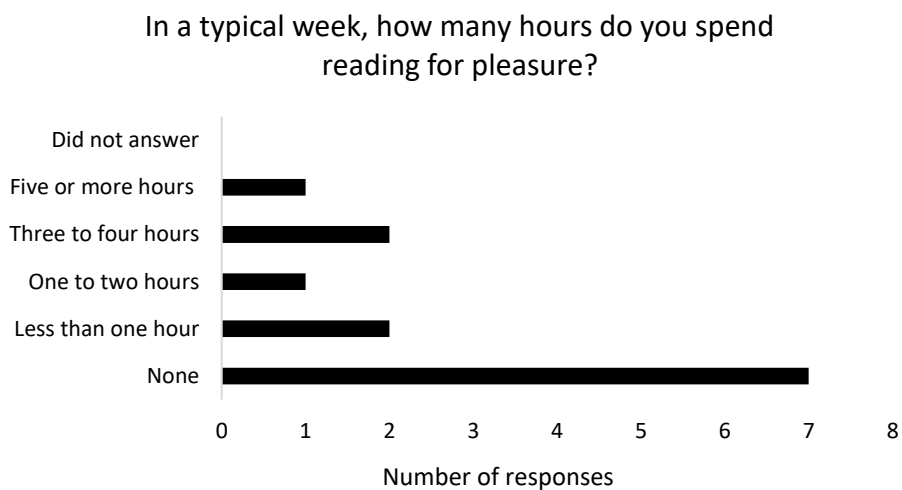


Figure 11. Responses to Survey Question 8.

The rest of the survey questions addressed the following research questions.

1. What effect does the pairing of YAL with classic literature have on high school student attitudes toward classic literature at a North Carolina suburban high school?
2. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature?
3. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards YAL?
4. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature when paired with YAL?

The survey questions delved into whether respondents like classic texts and YA texts and whether, in respondents' opinions, these texts should be taught in high school.

Question 9 asked, "Do you like to read books categorized as 'YAL' or 'teen literature?'" Answer choices were yes or no. Students indicated they like to read YA texts with 11 of the 13 students responding yes. The remaining two students responded no. Question 10 asked, "Should young adult/teen books be taught in school?" Again, the answer choices were yes or no. All 13 students answered yes.

Question 11 asked students if they like to read classics. Yes was chosen by four students, and no was chosen by nine students. Although a majority indicated not liking classic texts, on question 12, eight students indicated classic texts should be taught in school, while only five students did not believe the classic texts should be taught in school.

Question 13 asked how much students felt they learned from the reading

assignments in English class. Answer choices were on a Likert scale of 1 (Learned Nothing) to 10 (Learned A Lot). Answers varied. On the negative side, one student each responded 1, 2, 3, and 5, while two students responded 4. On the positive side, four students responded 6, two responded 7, and one student responded 9. Figure 12 displays the data.

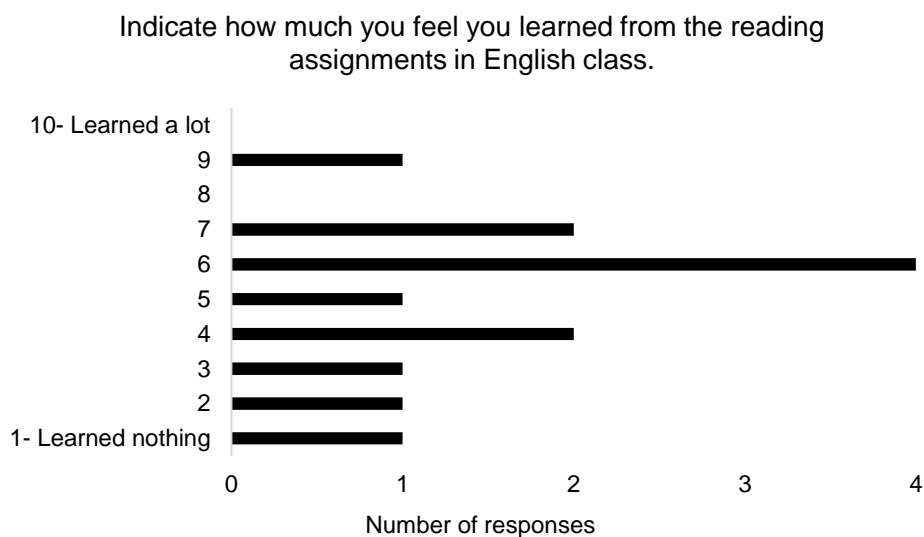


Figure 12. Responses to Survey Question 13.

The final two questions asked students about the future. Question 14 asked students to “indicate how important you think reading is to your success after high school.” Answer choices were on a Likert scale of 1 (Not Important at All) to 10 (Very Important). Answers were varied again. A majority felt reading is important with two students choosing 6 and another two choosing 7. Responses 8 and 9 each had one response. Two students chose 10- very important. Figure 13 displays the data.

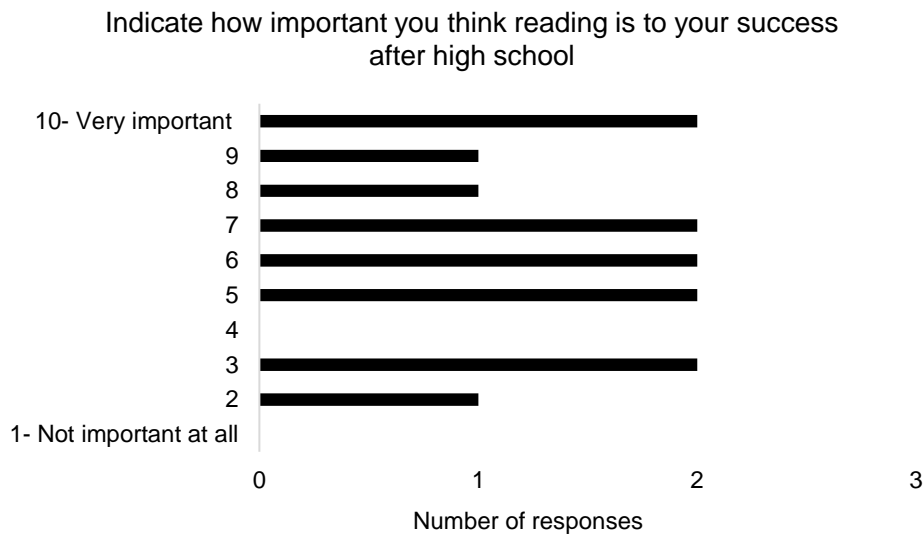


Figure 13. Responses to Survey Question 14.

The final survey question asked students how often they thought they would read as adults. Answer choices were on a 10-point Likert scale of 1 (Never) to 10 (Very Often). A majority responded on the scale between 1 and 5, with three choosing 1 and another three choosing 2. Two students chose 5. On the opposite end of the scale, choices 6, 7, 8, and 9 each garnered one response. No one chose 10 as a response. Figure 14 displays the data.

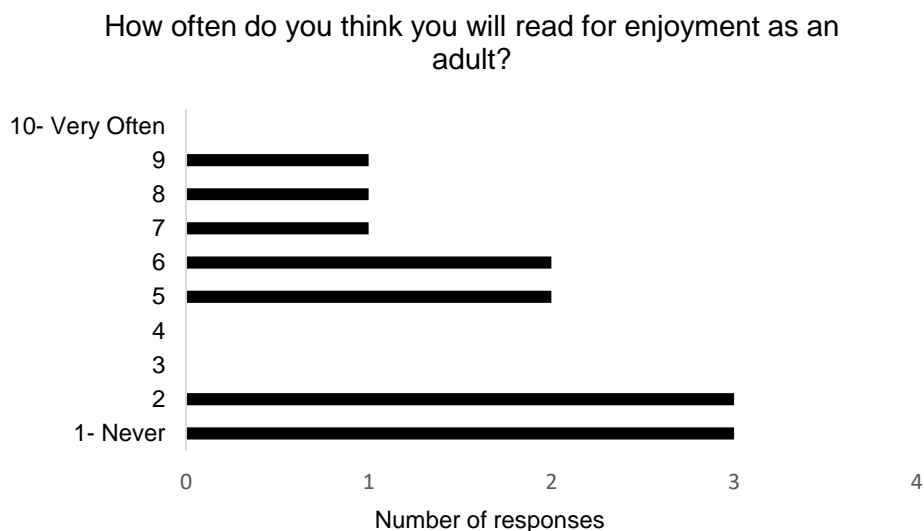


Figure 14. Responses to Survey Question 15.

Journaling results. At the end of the unit of study, students in the English II courses answered open-ended journal questions concerning the use of classic literature and YAL. The responses were delivered through the school's learning management system called Canvas. Responses of the participants were gathered by a third party, the school's ITF, and assigned numbers, thereby keeping responses anonymous. The data were delivered to the researcher with only numbers identifying participant responses. These responses addressed Research Questions 1-4.

1. What effect does the pairing of YAL with classic literature have on high school student attitudes toward classic literature at a North Carolina suburban high school?
2. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature?
3. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards YAL?

4. How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature when paired with YAL?

To analyze the open-ended response data, the researcher used coding. Raswell and Rallis (as cited in Creswell, 2014) defined coding as the “process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins” (pp. 197-198). The codes were then used to determine themes found in the data. Finally, the data were interpreted based on the results (Creswell, 2014). To code, the researcher placed all the responses to each question in a spreadsheet. Responses were then sorted alphabetically, making it easier to see repetition and patterns. Columns were created for emerging patterns, and responses fitting the pattern were coded with a number 1.

The first survey question asked students to describe their attitude toward the YA text *Unwind*. This addressed Research Question 3, “How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards YAL?” Of the 20 students who granted permission to be in the study, 19 responded to the question. A theme that emerged from the responses was enjoyment. Eighteen of the 19 respondents used one or more of the following terms in their responses: liked, enjoyed, and interesting. Of those responses, two students used two of the terms, and one used all three terms, stating,

I thought that reading it was very fun and very interesting. I really liked it and enjoyed the unknown parts of the books. Never being able to anticipate the book was really nice to read. I love that it wasn't just boring non-fiction.

Two respondents used emphatic capitalization to emphasize their responses with one

replying “I LOVED this text,” and the other replying, “I actually enjoyed reading this book and I usually HATE reading.” Only one student gave a negative response, stating he found the book confusing.

Table 2

Emergent Themes and Number of Responses for Question 1 Journal Prompt

Themes	Number of responses
Liked reading <i>Unwind</i>	18
<i>Unwind</i> was confusing	1

The second journal question addressed the research question, “How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature? Again, 19 students responded to the questions. Divergent themes emerged from these responses. Twelve respondents indicated they liked the play, using the term like in their response. For example, one student wrote, “I like it, as it was fast paced, even with some of the characters going from zero to one hundred real quick.” Degrees of like were found in statements such as “I really enjoyed it” and “I kinda liked it.” Conversely, a second theme of “Did not like” emerged. Five respondents indicated a dislike for the play, with one going as far as to write, “For macbeth [*sic*] I actually really hated it.” Another six responses revealed the theme of confusion. Of those, four were respondents who indicated they liked the play. Only one revealed confusion paired with a dislike of the play. One respondent disclosed neither like nor dislike, only confusion. Table 3 shows the data for this question.

Table 3

Emergent Themes and Number of Responses for Question 2 Journal Prompt

Themes	Number of responses
Liked reading <i>Macbeth</i>	13
Disliked reading <i>Macbeth</i>	5
<i>Macbeth</i> was confusing	6

Question 3 asked what was easy or challenging about each text. Responses were varied. Themes that emerged were *Unwind* was easy to read, *Macbeth* was a challenge, the language in *Macbeth* was a challenge, and *Macbeth* was easy to understand. Twenty-six percent of respondents said *Unwind* was easy to read. Additionally, 26% also said *Macbeth* was challenging. A similar percentage, 23%, noted the language in *Macbeth* was challenging. Of those who responded the language was a challenge, two did not state the play was a challenge. In fact, one noted *Macbeth* was challenging only because of the language, and it was “easy to understand what they were trying to get at and what the main focal point was.” Six students noted the novel *Unwind* had challenging aspects. Two stated it was a challenge to predict what would happen. Two others mentioned characters as a challenge. Another stated it was challenging due to plot events. One respondent stated the “different types of speech” were a challenge. It was not clear if this response referred to the Shakespearean language or figurative language. Table 4 shows the number of responses for each theme that emerged from the responses.

Table 4

Emergent Themes and Number of Responses for Question 3 Journal Prompt

Themes	Number of responses
<i>Unwind</i> was easy to read	10
<i>Macbeth</i> was challenging to read	17
The language in <i>Macbeth</i> was a challenge	9
<i>Unwind</i> was a challenge to read	6

The fourth open-ended journal response question asked, “In what ways, if any, did reading *Unwind* first help you with understanding *Macbeth*?” It addressed Research Question 4, “How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature when paired with YAL?” Fifteen of the 19 students who replied indicated the YA novel *Unwind* did not help with understanding the play. Only three of the respondents felt the YA novel helped with understanding *Macbeth*. One student’s response, “some of the obstacles they had,” was unclear. Therefore, it was left out of the analysis. Table 5 displays the data.

Table 5

Emergent Themes and Number of Responses for Question 4 Journal Prompt

Themes	Number of responses
<i>Unwind</i> helped with understanding <i>Macbeth</i>	3
<i>Unwind</i> did not help with understanding <i>Macbeth</i>	15

The fifth open-ended journal response question also addressed Research Question 4, “How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature when paired with YAL?” The question asked, “Do you think your teacher should use this strategy of pairing a YA text with a classic text again? Why or why not?” The majority, 10 students, indicated teachers should pair texts again. Reasons were varied. One student stated the pairing “had me thinking how much they are alike,” while another stated, “we want to read stuff that is written for us.” Another student stated if “they start off reading something they enjoy so they might not mind reading something that might not be what they are used to reading.” Five students indicated the pairing should not happen again. One felt the classic text was boring and YA texts would be more interesting to students. Another stated the pairing did not add

anything to the study of either text. Two students specified a YA and classic pairing should be done again but only if the texts “somewhat” matched. Two responses did not address the question. Table 6 presents the data.

Table 6

Emergent Themes and Number of Responses for Question 5 Journal Prompt

Themes	Number of responses
Yes, texts should be paired again	10
No, texts should not be paired again	5
Maybe texts should be paired again	2
Answers unrelated to prompt	2

Journal question 6 addressed the research question, “How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards YAL?” The questions asked students. “In what ways, if any, did reading *Unwind* help you improve as a reader?” Eleven students specified reading *Unwind* helped them improve as a reader. The ways students improved varied. Three commented it helped with digging more deeply into a text, while five students indicated the text helped with understanding characters and character motivation. One wrote, “Unwind [*sic*] helped me think more critically about characters and plot.” Another wrote, “Unwind [*sic*] helped me improve as a reader by being more interested in action type books. It also helped me dig deeper into the text.” Conversely, seven students felt *Unwind* did help improve reading. One stated the novel was confusing. Another quantified, “I don’t think it helped me improve reading, but I enjoyed the book because I already love reading.” One response was unclear. The student wrote, “the long texts and paragraphs,” but gave no indication as to whether this was a help or hindrance. This answer was not included in the analysis of the data. Table 7 presents the data for this question.

Table 7

Emergent Themes and Number of Responses for Question 6 Journal Prompt

Themes	Number of responses
Yes, <i>Unwind</i> improved my reading	11
No, <i>Unwind</i> did not improve my reading	7
Unclear response	1

Journal question 7 addressed the research question, “How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitudes towards classic literature?” The questions asked students, “In what ways, if any, did reading *Macbeth* help you improve as a reader?” Response answers varied. Four students did not believe reading *Macbeth* helped at all, while four others stated it did help with learning figurative language, vocabulary, and more. One student wrote, “I think *Macbeth* really made me understand a storyline and plot and the thinking process of an author to write a story it was a very cool concept.” Eleven students noted reading *Macbeth* helped them understand Shakespearean language. A responder wrote, “it didn’t really help other than to attempt to better understand Shakespearean English.” One response was unclear. The student wrote, “the speech” but gave no other details to help clarify the response. This response was not analyzed in the data. Table 8 displays the data for this question.

Table 8

Emergent Themes and Number of Responses for Question 7 Journal Prompt

Themes	Number of responses
Yes, <i>Macbeth</i> improved my reading	4
No, <i>Macbeth</i> did not improve my reading	4
Yes, <i>Macbeth</i> improve my understanding of Shakespearean English	11
Unclear response	1

The final open-ended response questions gave students the opportunity to add any other comments. It asked, “Is there anything else you’d like to say about the texts?” Ten students responded with a simple no. The other nine commented on the texts. Four students stated they liked both texts. One wrote, “I really enjoyed both of the texts and am glad I got to read them.” Two stated a preference for *Unwind*. One wrote, “I think that *Unwind* was definitely the best out of the two texts. I would read *Unwind* again. *Macbeth* is really confusing.” Two others stated they liked *Macbeth* without making any reference to *Unwind*: “*Macbeth* is cool and you should read more classics in your class [sic] they are very exciting.” One student made an impassioned plea against *Macbeth* but did not mention the text *Unwind*. The response ended with, “Please do not have students read a play like this again.” Data from question 8 is presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Emergent Themes and Number of Responses for Question 8 Journal Prompt

Themes	Number of responses
Enjoyed both texts	4
Preferred <i>Unwind</i>	2
Liked <i>Macbeth</i>	2
Did not like <i>Macbeth</i>	1

Findings for Research Question 5

In addition to survey data, benchmark data were collected for participants. The school district requires students in English II to take benchmark tests three times during the semester. The benchmarks are delivered through Mastery Connect, a testing system used by the district. The benchmarks test the standards in the NC English II curriculum. The data from the second and third benchmarks addressed Research Question 5, “What effect does the pairing of YAL with classic literature have on high school student

achievement of the NC English Language Arts Standard Course of Study standards for reading literature?”

Student achievement results. Paired samples *t*-tests were used to evaluate whether a statistically significant difference existed between the achievement scores of the second benchmark test for literature standards and the achievement scores of the final benchmark test for literature standards. SPSS statistical software was used to conduct the tests. A paired samples *t*-test is used “to compare two means on a single dependent variable” (Urduan, 2010, p. 94). The scores for each standard on both benchmarks were inputted into the SPSS software and a paired *t*-test was used to analyze the data for each standard. The null hypothesis states there is no significant difference between benchmark scores.

Twenty students participated in the research study. The result of their benchmark tests for the RL standards were used. There are six RL standards. Standard RL.10.1 states students will be able to “cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2017, p. 1). The percentage correct for questions addressing RL.10.1 on benchmark 2 and benchmark 3 were entered into SPSS and a paired *t*-test was conducted. The null hypothesis states there is no significant difference between the scores on the two benchmark tests for RL.10.1. The two-tailed paired *t*-test revealed there was no significant difference in achievement on RL.10.1 from benchmark 2 ($M=68.4$, $S=36.6$) compared to benchmark 3 ($M=62$, $S=29.6$), conditions $t(19)=.750$, $p>.05$; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. Table 10 displays the *t*-test data.

Table 10

SPSS Results for Paired T-Test for RL.10.1

Variable	# of Pairs	Corr	2-Tail Sig.	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
RL.10.1 BM 2	20	.353	.126	68.4	36.66405	8.19833
RL.10.1 BM 3				62.0	29.66479	6.63325
Paired Differences						
Mean	SD	SE of Mean	<i>t</i> value	df	2-tail Sig.	
6.4984	38.14984	8.53056	.750	19	.462	

Standard RL.10.2 states students will be able to “determine a theme of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2017, p. 2). The same procedures were used to test the data as were used for RL.10.1. The null hypothesis states there is no significant difference between the scores on the two benchmark tests for RL.10.2. The two-tailed paired *t*-test revealed there was no significant difference in achievement on RL.10.2 from benchmark 2 (M=55, S=39.4) compared to benchmark 3 (M=56.7, S=37.6), conditions $t(19)=.872, p>.05$; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. Table 11 displays the data for RL.10.2.

Table 11

SPSS Results for Paired T-Test for RL.10.2

Variable	# of Pairs	Corr	2-Tail Sig.	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
RL.10.2 BM 2				55.0	39.40354	8.81088
	20	.272	.246			
RL.10.2 BM 3				56.7	37.69141	8.42805
Paired Differences						
Mean	SD	SE of Mean	<i>t</i> value	df	2-tail Sig.	
-1.7000	46.52798	10.40397	-.136	19	.872	

The third standard tested, RL.10.3, states students will “Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2017, p. 3). Data were entered into SPSS and a paired *t*-test was conducted. The null hypothesis states there is no significant difference between the scores on the two benchmark tests for RL.10.3. The two-tailed paired *t*-test revealed there was no significant difference in achievement on RL.10.3 from benchmark 2 (M=62.5, S=27.5) compared to benchmark 3 (M=53.5, S=36.6), conditions $t(19)=-.418, p>.05$; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. Table 12 displays the results.

Table 12

SPSS Results for Paired T-Test for RL.10.3

Variable	# of Pairs	Corr	2-Tail Sig.	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
RL.10.3 BM 2				65.5	27.50598	6.15052
	20	-.174	.462			
RL.10.3 BM 3				53.35	36.60209	8.18448
Paired Differences						
Mean	SD	SE of Mean	<i>t</i> value	Df	2-tail Sig.	
9.1500	49.47330	11.06257	.827	19	.418	

RL.10.4 states students will be able to “determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2017, p. 3). A paired *t*-test was again conducted using SPSS software. The results showed there was no significant difference in achievement on RL.10.4 from benchmark 2 (M=60, S=23.3) compared to benchmark 3 (M=48.7, S=28.6), conditions $t(19)=-2.078, p>.05$; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. Table 13 shows the data for the *t*-test.

Table 13

SPSS Results for Paired T-Test for RL.10.4

Variable	# of Pairs	Corr	2-Tail Sig.	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
RL.10.4 BM 2				60.05	23.38797	5.22971
	20	.579	.007			
RL.10.4 BM 3				48.75	28.64828	6.40595
Paired Differences						
Mean	SD	SE of Mean	<i>t</i> value	Df	2-tail Sig.	
11.300	24.31612	5.43725	2.078	19	.051	

The fifth standard, RL.10.5, states “Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it, and manipulate time create effects such as mystery, tension, or surprise” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2017, p. 4). The results of the paired *t*-test revealed there was no significant difference in achievement on RL.10.5 from benchmark 2 (M=55, S=32) compared to benchmark 3 (M=48.7, S=28.6), conditions $t(19)=.2.078, p>.05$; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. Table 14 displays the results of the *t*-test.

Table 14

SPSS Results for Paired T-Test for RL.10.5

Variable	# of Pairs	Corr	2-Tail Sig.	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
RL.10.5 BM 2	20	-.159	.503	55.0	32.03616	7.16350
RL.10.5 BM 3				32.5	33.5412	7.50000
Paired Differences						
Mean	SD	SE of Mean	<i>t</i> value	Df	2-tail Sig.	
22.5	49.93417	11.16562	2.015	19	.058	

The final standard studied was RL.10.6. It states students will be able to “analyze a particular perspective or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2017, p. 4). The results of the paired *t*-test revealed there was no significant difference in achievement on RL.10.6 from benchmark 2 (M=37.5, S=35.8) compared to benchmark 3 (M=53.75, S=23.3), conditions $t(19)=-1.628, p>.05$; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. Table 15 displays the results of the *t*-test.

Table 15

SPSS Results of Paired T-Test for RL.10.6

Variable	# of Pairs	Corr	2-Tail Sig.	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
RL.10.6 BM 2	20	-.098	.680	37.50	35.81752	8.00904
RL.10.6 BM 3				53.75	33.33255	5.21732
Paired Differences						
Mean	SD	SE of Mean	<i>t</i> value	df	2-tail Sig.	
-16.25	44.62932	9.97942	-1.628	19	.120	

Further Findings

Although not part of the study, the researcher decided to review the EOC results for the study participants in addition to the benchmark data. For the EOCs, teachers receive reports with student scale scores, converted 100-point score, and their percentile rank. These percentile ranks can then be compared with student projected percentile ranks to see if growth occurred. Projected percentile scores are found in the teacher's Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) reports. This information was gathered by the ITF, maintaining the anonymity of the study. The same student numbers were used for this information as were used for the survey, benchmark, and open-ended response data gathered during the course of the study.

Two of the 20 students who participated in the research had no information in EVAAS, so the data connected to the EOC related to the students were not considered here. Of the 18 whose data were considered, eight students scored below the projected percentile on the EOC. Those scores ranged from as little as three points below the projection to as many as 38 points below projection. The 10 remaining students either

matched the projected percentiles or exceeded them. Two students met their projections with percentiles of 31% and 88%. The eight students whose percentiles exceeded projections did so with the smallest exceeding by eight points and the largest by 32 points. Table 16 displays the projected and actual percentiles on the EOC.

Table 16

Projected and Actual Percentile Ranks on the English II EOC

Students	Projected Percentile	Actual Percentile
11172	42	36
96695	19	10
96512	65	55
41349	53	63
78629	31	39
76534	42	4
11155	50	82
20743	31	31
71822	65	70
91544	88	88
94229	53	50
23222	65	91
61676	75	70
52095	53	36
63808	75	67
86998	90	99
50146	57	63
83654	68	91

To determine if the projected percentiles and actual results were related, a linear regression test was performed in SPSS. A linear regression line uses a slope intercept equation, $Y=a+bX$, where X is the explanatory variable and Y is the dependent variable (linear regression). In this case, the dependent variable (Y) was the actual EOC results and the predictor, or explanatory variable (X), was the EVAAS projected percentiles. The data for the EVAAS projected percentiles and the actual EOC scores were entered into SPSS, and a linear regression was performed.

Based on the model summary provided by SPSS, the adjusted R Square was .646. The p -value was .000, which means 64.6% of the variability in the actual EOC results can be explained by the EVAAS predictions. The overall regression model was significant, $F=(1,16)=32.053, p < .001, R^2=.667$. The model summary is shown in Table 17.

Table 17

Model Summary for Linear Regression

Model ^b	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.817 ^a	.667	.646	16.51412

a=EVAAS projections, b=actual percentile.

Although the linear regression indicated the EVAAS predictions were significant and accounted for nearly 65% of the unique variance in the EOC scores, this left 35% not accounted for. Whether or not any of the variance is due to intertextual study cannot be deduced from this study. Further research would need to be conducted to determine if intertextual study significantly influenced student achievement on EOC tests.

Summary

In Chapter 5, the results and findings from the research are discussed and interpreted. Results are compared to the current literature, and the findings are interpreted. Limitations of the research study are described, and recommendations based on the results of the study and the data are made. Suggestions for future study are given.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Scores on NAEP assessments have consistently shown over the past 23 years stagnated reading scores and even decreased reading scores for some (NAEP, n.d.). Classics are often not about adolescent concerns (Gallo, 2001). This makes it difficult to engage students in the texts; however, “learning is enhanced when the relevance of the material is made clear” (Fisher & Frey, as cited in Johnston, 2018, p. 31). The researcher intended to study whether student attitudes and achievement changed when pairing the classics and YA texts.

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to describe the impact of intertextual study between classic literature and YAL on student attitudes toward classic literature and YAL at the high school level and the effect of the intertextual study on student achievement of the NCSCOS for RL standards. The study explored 10th-grade English II student attitudes toward both classic literature and YAL before and after pairing the texts. Additionally, achievement on RL standards was investigated during the intertextual study.

Discussion of Results

Survey responses. The survey questions regarding student reading attitudes revealed some connections to the current literature. Some questions used a Likert scale to rank responses. These were ranked from 1-10. Those with responses of 5 or below were deemed negative responses, and those of 6-10 were deemed positive. Other responses were yes or no responses, and some provided statements from which students chose their response. The first eight survey questions provided a baseline for comparison

to the intertextual study.

The first question asked students if they liked to read. Answers were evenly split with 46% of the students responding negatively and another 46% responding positively. One student did not answer. Of the positive responses, only one student indicated liking reading very much. In question 2, when asked how often students read for enjoyment, 46% indicated never or only once a year, matching the response rate of those who said they did not like to read. The results of survey question 1 indicated nearly half of the students surveyed do not like to read. Added to that, 46% indicated they choose not to read. Some never read outside of school, while others do so only once a year. Even though 46% indicated a positive response to reading, only 38.46% of respondents specified reading monthly, and only 15% stated reading for enjoyment on a regular basis. Gallagher (2009) pointed out student reading attitudes have changed in recent years from those of enjoyment to “indifference [and] hostility” (p. 3).

The responses suggest, although nearly half of the students enjoy reading, most are choosing not to read regularly. Gallagher (2009) and Gallo (2001) believed it is the type of reading students are asked to do that is causing readers to choose not to read. The answers to survey question 3 validated those beliefs. Students were asked to rank how well the books assigned for school were liked. Nearly 62% responded negatively, and 39% of the responses were ranked low with a 4, 3, and 2. Only one student noted a strong like for school texts, choosing 10 on the scale; and 15% chose a rank of 7 and 8. The results show a discrepancy between the number of students who stated liking to read versus the number liking school-assigned texts. The results clearly indicated a majority, 62%, do not enjoy the texts assigned at school.

As shown in Applebee's (1992) research and subsequent research studies imitating his work (Stallworth & Gibbons, 2012; Stallworth et al., 2006), the typical texts used in high school English classrooms are classic texts from the canon. Many educators and researchers strongly believe classics should be the primary, if not only, texts used in classrooms (Gibbons et al., 2006; Hopper, 2006; Jago, 2000, 2004; Lapp et al., 2013; Santoli & Wagner, 2004); however, the results of the survey indicated students respond negatively to these texts.

Survey questions 4, 5, and 6 asked students how much school-assigned reading is completed, why it is completed, and how difficult assigned texts were. Eighty-five percent of students read at least half of the assigned work, with 54% reading most or all the work. Response choices for completing the reading were "I like to read," "Parents make me," "To get a good grade," and "Combination of all." No student chose "I like to read," but over half, 54%, chose getting a good grade as reason for reading. This indicated students approached school-assigned reading with a purely efferent stance, meaning they saw reading as a means to receive a grade (Rosenblatt, 2005).

The remaining responses were "Combination of all," indicating some may be reading because enjoyment, but some may be reading only because parents require it. When asked to indicate the difficulty of texts assigned for school in the following survey question, few students noted the texts were difficult. Only 15% of responses indicated difficulty with texts, ranking them 7 and 8. No students chose 9 or 10 for the response. On the other end of the scale, 85% of students noted the texts assigned in school were not difficult. The results suggested students are simply choosing not to read if they do not have to. They can read, and nearly half enjoy reading, but school texts are not ones most

students in this class find enjoyable. Results showed some students read because a grade is attached to the reading not because the reading was enjoyable.

Rosenblatt (2005) discussed this idea in her work, stating readers must bring “transactions” or experiences to a reading. Beers and Propst (2013) further explained meaning is created from a student’s experiences brought to the text not from the text itself. The transaction Rosenblatt (2005) referred to is what creates a “desire to read” (Beers & Propst, 2013, p. 1). Results from the survey suggested the lack of reading does not stem from a difficulty in understanding the text but rather from a lack of interest in the text. Rosenblatt’s (2005) transactions are an integral part of the reading process, and educators need to consider students when choosing texts to assign in the classroom. If not taken into consideration, students often do not interact with the text but simply read it to get a grade.

In addition to transactions, a reader’s stance needs to be considered. Rosenblatt (2005) described two types of stances, aesthetic and efferent. Aesthetic stances are ones in which a reader reads for enjoyment, while an efferent stance is one in which a reader reads for learning (Rosenblatt, 2005). These determine how a reader sees a text, and Rosenblatt (2005) believed a combination of the two stances is needed for readers to make a connection to the texts. In the case of the students surveyed in this research study, a high percentage indicated reading school-assigned texts because the texts were connected to grades, indicating a lack of actual connection to the texts. If students only approach texts with an efferent stance, the texts are only seen as a means to receive a grade.

Gallo (2001) believed using YA texts can help students become more aesthetic

readers instead of only efferent readers, believing teachers assign classics because they love them, but student needs should be considered. He emphasized, “*The classics are not about TEENAGE concerns! They are ADULT issues*” (Gallo, 2001, p. 34). Rosenblatt (1991) stated this idea years earlier, writing, “Like the beginning reader, the adolescent needs to encounter literature for which he possesses the intellectual, emotional, and experiential equipment” (p. 26). Gallagher (2009) wrote teachers deny students “authentic reading experiences” (p. 5) if they only choose texts with which students struggle to relate. YAL gives students an opportunity to read and make connections to their own lives (Miller, 2013).

Survey questions 7 and 8 asked students about the time spent reading for school versus the time spent reading for pleasure. Slightly over half the students, 54%, noted they spend 1-2 hours per week reading for school. Another 31% spent less than an hour. In total, 85% of students surveyed indicated they spent very little time reading for school. Interestingly, results for pleasure reading showed a discrepancy from earlier survey answers. When asked how often students read for pleasure in a typical week, nearly 54% answered “none.” An additional 31% indicated reading for pleasure 2 or less hours per week. Earlier, however, 46% of students responded liking to read. The disconnect between liking to read and the time spent reading suggests the nonreaders Gallagher (2009) noted in *Readicide*. The same percentage of students, 54%, responded reading 1-2 hours for school as responded never reading for pleasure; and the same, 31%, responded reading less than an hour for school and less than 2 hours for pleasure. Results suggested students read little in a typical week; but when students did read, it was for school-assigned work instead of pleasure.

Questions 9-15 of the survey addressed Research Question 1, “What effect does the pairing of YAL with classic literature have on high school student attitudes toward classic literature at a North Carolina suburban high school?” Students were asked to describe their feelings toward classic literature, YAL, and intertextual study using both.

Survey question 9 asked if students enjoyed reading YA texts. A majority, 85%, chose yes. Question 10 followed asking if YA books should be taught in school, and 100% chose yes as the answer. The results suggested a preference for YA texts over classic texts. Even the 15% who indicated not liking YA texts felt the genre should be used in school. The results confirmed the beliefs of YA author Crowe (2001) who believed readers who enjoy YA novels and classics can reap the benefits of both.

Research into the use of YAL in schools validates this idea, stating,

It is less important today that a student can read a canonical text than they are able to read widely, shift and apply literary lenses depending on context, unpack meaning, critique ideas, and make sense of literature in a way that is useful and applicable to their lives. (Miller, 2013, para. 22)

YAL is an effective choice for engaging readers. Wilhelm (2013) agreed, writing students read books some consider inferior to classics, “encountering what has to be called both intense pleasure and ‘literary’ experiences” (p. 57). Santoli and Wagner (as cited in Ostensen & Wadham, 2012) also argued YAL’s merit, stating, “The breadth and depth of young adult literature are equal to any other genre today and that the recurring themes of love, death, loss, racism, and friendship contained in the classics are also present in young adult literature” (p. 8). Jewett (2012) conducted a study in the classroom, and the students agreed YAL belonged in the classroom.

When asked about classic literature in survey question 11, results indicated 69% disliked classics and 31% like classics. Conversely, when asked if classics should be taught in school, 62% answered yes and only 38% answered no. Reasons students believe classics should be taught are unclear, but results suggested a belief that classics were worthy of study even if unenjoyable. This idea is readily found in research. Jago (2000) believed the classics to be the most powerful tales. Others believed the classics provide important cultural and time references (Chiariello, 2017; Ostensen & Wadham, 2012; Stallworth et al., 2006). Koelling (2004), however, believed students judge classics based on reputation rather than actual reading experience. Since 69% of students admitted not liking classic literature, but 62% of those same students believed it should be taught in schools, the idea of judging classics based on reputation seems to hold true.

Survey question 13 addressed how much learning took place based on the reading assignments in English. Answers varied widely. On the negative end of the spectrum, one student chose 1, indicating learning nothing. One chose 2, 3, and 5, while a final student chose 4, for a total of 46% of the answers. Of the remaining students, 31% chose 6, indicating some learning, two chose 7, and one chose 9. Although the 54% believed at least some learning occurred, the belief was not strongly held. These results were disconnected from the previous belief that classics should be taught, further indicating students may be judging classics as worthy simply because their reputation indicates they are. It stands to reason if classics should be taught, there is merit or something worth learning in them, yet only 54% indicated they had learned from the texts used in class. Additionally, students unanimously felt YA texts should be taught in school; but again, the results indicated only 54% felt learning had happened.

The final two survey questions asked students about the importance of reading and future reading respectively. Sixty-two percent of responses showed students believed reading is important to success after high school, yet the same percentage, 62%, designated they would read for enjoyment little or not at all as an adult in the following question response. The responses suggested students have not found enjoyment in reading, at least not enough to continue doing so once it is not required as it is in school.

Journal responses. Open-ended journal questions were completed at the end of the unit in the research study and addressed the first four research questions regarding student attitudes toward classic and YA texts. Of the participants in the study, 19 answered the journal prompts. The first open-ended response question addressed student attitudes toward YAL. From the analysis and coding of the data, a theme that emerged was enjoyment. The words “liked,” “enjoyed,” and “interesting” were used by 18 of the 19 students with two using two of the terms and one using all three. A few responses added emphasis. One stated, “I LOVED this text,” and another wrote, “I actually enjoyed reading this book and I usually HATE reading.” The results showed a clear like of the YA genre, surpassing the 85% indicating so in the survey at the beginning of the unit. Gibbons et al. (2006) furthered this idea, stating that YAL is a way to not only not only make reading more interesting but also more comprehensible. Only one student responded negatively to *Unwind*, finding the YA text confusing. In the survey, 85% of students stated they liked YA texts. Responses to the journal prompts verified the results, with 95% responding favorably to the YA text. A few later added to their reasoning for liking the text in responses to various other prompts. For example, in response to whether the pairing of texts should happen again, one student noted they should because

teens want to read what is written for them. Another did not believe the pairing should happen again because of only being interested in YA texts. The student stated YAL interests more people and more would pay attention to it. Christenbury (2000) supported this idea stating classic literature does not reflect the students who are reading it. Classics used in schools are typically British and American literature from the 19th and 20th centuries, which does not reflect the diverse classrooms found in many American schools (Applebee, 1992). More current research continues to find this to be true with classics such as *The Great Gatsby*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Scarlet Letter* being popular choices of text in classrooms (Stallworth & Gibbons, 2012; Stallworth et al., 2006).

The second open-ended journal response addressed student attitudes toward classic texts. The prompt asked students to describe their attitudes toward the classic text *Macbeth*. The themes derived from the answers varied. One theme that emerged was liking the play. Thirteen of the 19 respondents, or 68%, wrote about liking the play; however, differing degrees of like were found. For example, one student noted really liking the play, while another “kinda” liked it. This contradicted the results of survey question 11 in which 69% of students indicated not liking classic literature and 31% indicated liking classic literature. It was clear there was a difference in attitudes toward classic texts from the initial survey to the journal responses at the end of the unit. As stated earlier, reputation of classic literature could have negatively influenced earlier responses to the survey question. Further questioning would be needed to determine the reason.

An opposite theme of dislike also emerged. Twenty-six percent of students stated a dislike for the play. One wrote, “For Macbeth [sic] I actually really hated it.” Again,

this number is different from the 69% indicating dislike for classics in the initial survey. The final theme that emerged was one of confusion. Several students noted the play was confusing; however, some were students who also noted liking the play. Of the six (32% of respondents) who noted the play as confusing, four also indicated liking the play. Only one paired confusion with disliking the play. One was neutral in terms of liking or disliking the play. These findings suggested that although most students surveyed liked *Macbeth*, some found it challenging. Jago (2004) and others believed students should struggle through texts such as the classics (Beers & Propst, 2013; Chiariello, 2017; Cole 2009; Gallagher, 2009; Gallo, 2001; Ostensen & Wadham, 2012). In addition, Chiariello (2017) stated, “Students may moan and struggle over archaic words and awkward phrasing, but good instructors use the tension to highlight the way language changes over time” (p. 27). Calvino (2001), however, believed many adolescents lack the knowledge and maturity to grasp some of the concepts in classic literature, hence the confusion some students had when reading *Macbeth*.

Journal responses for question 3 addressed student attitudes regarding the difficulty of the classic and YA texts. Responses suggested Chiariello (2017) was correct in at least one aspect – students struggling over archaic words. The prompt asked students what was easy and what was challenging about the YA and the classic texts. From the responses, a theme of challenging language in the classic text *Macbeth* emerged with 50% noting it was challenging to read. Specifically, 89% stated *Macbeth* was challenging. Of the 89% stating it was challenging, 53% indicated the challenge was due to the Shakespearean language, corroborating Chiariello’s idea. Earlier, it was noted the survey suggested the lack of reading does not stem from a difficulty in understanding the

text but rather from a lack of interest in the text; however, results from the journal prompts indicated some students do find classics texts challenging to read. Jago (2004), a proponent of teaching only with classics, and other researchers (Beers & Propst, 2013; Chiariello, 2017; Cole, 2009; Gallagher, 2009; Gallo, 2001; Ostensen & Wadham, 2012) all agreed that classic texts are ones for which students struggle. This struggle can be a turnoff to students, causing them to dislike or even abandon reading. Santoli and Wagner (2004) believed students often do not have the schema needed to understand classic literature and are often bored and confused by it. One student, when asked if he or she had anything else to say about the texts, responded, "I think that *Unwind* was definitely the best out of the two texts. I would read it again and *Macbeth* is really confusing." Another wrote the play was so boring that no one connected with it, and although there is an assumption the student's stated opinion was the same as everyone else's, it is clear the student had a negative response toward reading the classic text. These responses validate both the idea that classics texts can be a challenge that discourage readers and adolescents often do not find connections to classic texts but do find connections to YA texts (Gallagher, 2009; Gallo, 2001; Ostensen & Wadham, 2012). Miller (2013) believed YA texts enable students to read books reflecting their own lives. This reflection enables students to make connections to the text which then enables understanding of the text (Rosenblatt, 2005).

Conversely, a theme of reading ease was also found. Nine responses, 47%, indicated finding the texts easy to read. Specifically, eight of the nine indicated *Unwind* was easy to read, and one indicated *Macbeth* was easy to read. The responses, in conjunction with the survey responses, indicated 85% of students enjoyed YA texts and

100% thought they should be used in the classroom, suggesting there is value in adding YA texts to the classroom curriculum. Proponents of using YAL point out various reasons for using the genre in classrooms. Christenbury (2000) pointed out classic literature is limiting because it does not represent the diversity found in American classrooms. Ivey and Broaddus (2001) believed choosing not to use YAL in the classroom is dismissing a valuable resource, especially if the goal is to create readers. Teachers should not be using texts confusing to students, but instead should use literature engaging and interesting to them (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001).

The fourth and fifth open-ended journal response prompts addressed student attitudes towards intertextual study. The data answered the research question, “How do English students in a southern, suburban high school describe their attitude toward classic literature when paired with YAL?” The fourth prompt asked, “In what ways, if any, did reading *Unwind* first help you with understanding *Macbeth*?” Two clear themes emerged from the responses – students either felt the text helped with understanding *Macbeth* or it did not. There was only one response in which the student felt neutral toward the question. The majority, 73%, believed the pairing did not help with understanding. Only four students, 21%, believed the pairing helped.

The fifth open-ended journal response prompt asked if the strategy of pairing texts should be used again. Three obvious themes emerged: yes, no, and maybe. Although most did not feel the pairing helped with understanding, 53% still indicated they believed the pairing should happen again which contradicts the previous responses indicating the use of the YA text did not help with understanding the classic text. Of those saying yes, one reason included seeing how much the texts were alike. Another stated that by

starting off with an easier text like the YAL, students might not be as reluctant to read something like Shakespeare; yet a third wrote, “we want to read stuff that is written for us,” indicating an enjoyment of the YA text. Although most students did not feel they learned from the pairing, when asked if *Unwind* helped the students improve as readers, 68% of students noted specific ways the text helped. Some of the ways noted were improvement in vocabulary, understanding character development and plot, and figurative language, all of which were studied in the unit. Others noted the YA text helped with developing or rekindling an interest in reading. One student stated the YA text helped him or her get back into a reading “groove,” while another stated the text helped him or her become more interested in action texts. Enriquez (2006) believed YA texts are the “voices for whom these books are intended” (p. 16), and the results corroborate this idea and earlier results indicating students enjoy reading YA texts.

Participants were also asked if the classic text *Macbeth* helped them improve as readers. Fifty-seven percent of response indicated *Macbeth* helped with understanding Shakespearean language, the area in which 50% indicated a challenge. These results suggested agreement with Jago’s (2004) idea that these texts will be a challenge for students, but they should struggle through them. On the survey, only 15% of the students indicated a challenge with the texts; yet in journal responses, over half felt they learned to understand the Shakespearean language better after reading the text which indicated growth in understanding the language used in complex classic texts.

Twenty-six percent stated the pairing should not happen again. One felt the classic text was boring and should be left out but the YA text was interesting, continuing to support the idea that adolescents like texts with which they can connect. Another felt

the pairing did not add anything to the study of either text. The two maybes felt the pairing should be done again but only if the two texts matched. For this research, intertextuality was defined as instructional approach in which instructors offer multiple texts “to give students the opportunity to increase background knowledge; make connections among texts; develop multiple perspectives, interpretations, and a broader picture of a topic” (Armstrong & Newman, 2011, p. 9). Data from the responses indicated, while intertextuality was used, most students did not form connections between the texts or did not recognize any connections made. During the study of *Macbeth*, some students made verbal connections to characters from *Unwind*; but in the journal responses, only one student noted seeing how the two texts were alike. However, responses did continue to suggest students preferred the YA texts. Rosenblatt (1956) discussed this idea, stating teens need to read works on their emotional and experiential level. Furthering this idea, Rosenblatt (1956) wrote, “The world must be fitted into the context of his own understanding and interests. If the language, the setting, the theme, the central situation, are all alien, even a great work will fail. All doors to it are shut” (p. 69). In other words, as the student noted in the response to the prompt, “we want to read stuff that is written for us.”

Student achievement. Results from the *t*-tests indicated, overall, there was no significant change in achievement levels for students participating in the research study. Results varied for each standard.

Standard RL.10.1 states students can cite evidence from the text to support answers. The paired *t*-test resulted in a *t*-value of .750 with 19 degrees of freedom, and a 2-tailed significance, or *p*-value, of .462 indicating there was no significant difference

between the achievement on the two benchmark tests. Since $p > .05$, the null hypothesis was accepted. These results could mean the intertextual pairing of classic literature and YAL had no significant effect on student achievement; however, other factors may have contributed to the results. The county provides teachers with curriculum maps stating which standards are to be taught in which unit. Standard RL.10.1 was taught in the first unit. Although taught early in the school year, English literature standards spiral and are continually reinforced throughout a semester. Results could indicate this standard was mastered prior to the beginning of the units used for the research study. Brown, McDaniel, and Roediger (2014) stated the intermittent repetition of information similar to what happens in an English class with the spiraling English standards “arrests forgetting, strengthens retrieval routes, and is essential for hanging onto the knowledge you want to gain” (p. 4). If so, no significant change would be expected. Benchmark overall averages for this standard suggested this possibility. For the second benchmark, 68.4% of participants mastered this standard, compared to 62% who mastered it on the third benchmark. Mastery Connect ranks the questions on the benchmark in terms of depth of knowledge (DoK). There are four levels of 1 (the easiest) to 4 (the most difficult). When comparing benchmark 2 to benchmark 3, benchmark 2 had a higher DoK with two questions at level 2 and one at level 3, yet students performed better on this benchmark than on the final benchmark. A factor to consider is fatigue. Sievertsen, Gino, and Piovesan (2016) found as the day progresses, students experience cognitive fatigue, which impaired their performance on standardized tests. In addition, the researchers found continual cognitive fatigue can lead to lower motivation and performance (Sievertsen et al., 2016). The third benchmark occurred late in the semester when

students were possibly fatigued, whereas the second benchmark fell closer to the midway point of the semester. Interest in the selections on the benchmarks might also be a factor in results. The selections chosen for literature pieces on the benchmarks tend to be from classics. The survey responses indicated 69% of the participants did not like classic literature; however, many feel YAL “lowers the bar” for students (Groenke & Scherff, 2010, p. 1).

Results for standard RL.10.2 also showed no significant change in student achievement. The standard states students can determine a theme of a text and examine its development as the text progresses. Paired *t*-test resulted in a $-.136$ *t*-value with 19 degrees of freedom and $p=.872$ indicating no significant change, so the null hypothesis was accepted. The results suggest the intertextual study had no significant effect on student achievement for this standard. Additionally, benchmark results indicate little change. The average for benchmark 2 was 55% proficient and for benchmark 3, 56.5% proficient. The DoK for the RL.10.2 questions were virtually the same with two questions at a DoK level 2 on each benchmark. Benchmark 3 also had one question at a DoK level 3. Theme tends to be a difficult standard for students to grasp. Further study, specifically on achievement with theme using YA texts and classic texts on standardized tests, would be needed to determine if the use of YA texts with classical texts can enhance student achievement. Santoli and Wagner (as cited in Ostenson & Wadham, 2012) believed it can, stating the themes present in classical texts are also present in YA texts. “Like the best of literature written for adults, good novels written for adolescents possess themes that merit and reward examination and commentary” (Hipple, 2000, p. 2).

Standard RL.10.3 focuses on characters and character development. Paired *t*-tests

indicated no significant change in achievement results. The t -value was a .827 with 19 degrees of freedom, and the p -value was .418; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Additionally, overall averages on the benchmarks showed a decrease in proficiency with the average on benchmark 2 being 62.5% proficient and the average for benchmark 3 being 53.5% proficient. Again, fatigue could be a factor in decreased scores as well as text selection. In addition to Sievertsen et al.'s (2016) findings, Ackerman and Kanfer (2009) found variance in posttests due to mental fatigue. They wrote, "Longer testing times did lead to increases in reports of subjective fatigue that did not recover immediately at the end of the testing session" (Ackerman & Kanfer, 2009, p. 177). The DoK levels were not higher on benchmark 3, indicating question difficulty was not the cause of the decrease.

More research would be necessary to determine if pairing YA texts with classic texts affects student achievement. To do so, YA text excerpts would need to be included on the standardized tests. Stephens (2007) believed YA characters have as much merit as characters in classic texts. Stephens stated YA texts use "a distinctly teen voice that holds the same potential for literary value as its 'Grownup' peers" (pp. 40-41).

Standard 10.4 focuses on vocabulary and figurative language and how it affects a work. Results of the t -test showed a t -value of 2.078 with 19 degrees of freedom and a p -value of .051; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted since no significant change was indicated by the test. There is a large drop in overall average performance from benchmark 2, a 60% proficiency, to benchmark 3, a 48.5% proficiency. At first glance, this might seem troubling; however, the DoK should be considered. In benchmark 2, all RL.10.4 questions were at a DoK of 2; however, in benchmark 3, all were at a DoK 3.

The increase in the level of difficulty could account for the drop in proficiency. Jago (2000) is a proponent of using only classic literature in the classroom. These texts, according to Jago (2000), should have elevated language matching the intention of the literature; yet earlier journal responses noted the language in the classic text used in the research study was a challenge for nearly a third of the participants. The journal responses combined with the results for standard RL.10.4 on the benchmark tests might indicate the elevated language is a detriment to the comprehension for some students.

Standard 10.5 focuses on author technique and how it affects the text. Again, the results of the *t*-test indicated no significant change in student achievement; thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. Results were a *t*-value of 2.015 with 19 degrees of freedom and a *p*-value of .058. When looking at the overall proficiency averages from benchmark 2 to benchmark 3, scores drop from 55% proficient to 32.5% proficient. The number of questions and DoK were identical; however, there were only two questions for this standard on each test. A student who answered both correctly on benchmark 2 but missed one on benchmark 3 would show a drop in proficiency. The researcher noted five students answered both questions related to RL.10.5 correctly on benchmark 2. Four of those five missed both of the questions on benchmark 3. The fifth student missed one question. Of the 20 participants, only three increased proficiency on the third benchmark. Analysis of the test would be necessary to determine why; however, factors such as fatigue, question wording, genre, and time spent working on the standard could play a part in the decrease in scores (Ackerman & Kanfer, 2009; Brown et al., 2014; Sievertsen et al., 2016). RL.10.5 and 10.6 are not covered until the third unit. Benchmark 3 was given at the end of the third unit and beginning of the fourth unit; therefore, much less

time was spent practicing this standard as with standards covered in earlier units.

The final standard, RL.10.6, focuses on the specific technique of point of view. The paired t -test showed no significant change in achievement, so the null hypothesis was accepted. The t -value was -1.628 with 19 degrees of freedom and a p -value of .120. When looking at the overall averages for the benchmarks, this standard was the only one showing a large increase. It was also the standard having the lowest beginning percentage of proficiency with 37.5%. After the third benchmark, the percentage rose to 53.75%. Although not statistically significant, it was the only gain exceeding 1.5 percentage points. Reasons for the increase are not clear; however, it should be noted the first benchmark only contained two questions related to the standard. Missing one or both was common. Only three students answered both questions correctly on benchmark 2. Benchmark 3 had four questions related to the standard. Not one student answered all four questions correctly on benchmark 3. There was no other standard for which this was true. Further analysis of the test questions would be needed to determine why, but genre could be a factor. Two of the four questions on benchmark 3 were from a poetry selection. At that point in the semester, poetry had not yet been studied, and the format may have been troubling to students.

Student indifference could have played a part in at least one student's performance on the benchmarks. The researcher noted one participant's performance was an outlier. The student answered 0% of the questions correctly for the standards on benchmark 3 with the exception of RL.10.4 for which the student answered 50% correctly. No other student had 0% for more than three standards on the third benchmark test. This could indicate an attitude of indifference, fatigue, or previously unrecognized

struggle to grasp the concepts. However, for two of the five standards for which the students answered 0% correctly, the student answered 100% correct on the second benchmark, making the likelihood of unrecognized struggle to grasp the concepts slim. Gallagher (2009) noted that overstressing reading for testing can cause students to become nonreaders. The researcher noted most students' first task on the benchmark tests was to check how many questions were on the test and many were displeased with the length of the tests. Pipkin (2000) believed testing emphasis is a detriment to reading, noting YA texts were cast aside by some as unworthy and unable to help in raising test scores.

Implications for Practice

Reading enjoyment. The results of this study have several implications for practice. First, participants in the study clearly enjoy YAL. Since scores on the nation's most recent report card show the reading scores of fourth and eighth graders have stagnated in recent years and testing in North Carolina shows only 30% of eighth graders are considered proficient at reading, it is clear educators need to rethink their curriculum (United States Department of Education, 2015). The results from this study show clearly for this small sample, students not only prefer but also enjoy reading literature geared toward them, yet classrooms across the country continue to use the same classic texts used for decades (Applebee, 1992). Many researchers report students are not interested in the classical literature because it does not relate to them (Gallo, 2001; Gibbons et al., 2006; Ivey & Johnston, 2017; Miller, 2017). In a time where students have become aliterate, or nonreaders, it is vital educators find ways to engage students in reading (Gallagher, 2009; Gallo, 2001; Soter & Connors, 2009).

Although results from this study indicated close to a third of the participants enjoyed classic literature, two thirds of students are not connecting the texts they are reading in school, if they are reading the texts at all. This study showed 54% percent of participants read most or all the assigned texts; however, 46% are not reading. Continuing to assign texts with which nearly half of readers have no interest is not in the best interest of students. Broz (2011) insisted students are not even reading the canonical works assigned, and Miller (2017) validated this through research on using YAL and classic literature together. If students are reading, this study suggested they are doing so simply for a grade. NCTE (2006) substantiated the idea students are often choosing not to read. A solution to the problem of nonreaders is to find texts with which they can engage. Miller (2017) believed educators need to “diversify their reading lists in order to better engage students as readers” (p. 5). Brauer and Clarke (2008) believed the English curriculum as a whole needs to be reworked to include current texts such as YA texts. Rosenblatt (1956, 1991, 2005) described the need for readers to connect to text through various works spanning decades. Rosenblatt (1956, 1991, 2005) stated reading is the making of connections, or the transactions, between the reader and the text. In order for learning to occur, students must bring their own experiences to the reading. While classics have stood the test of time with adults, classics often do not provide the connection adolescents need to engage with the text (Gallo, 2001).

YA texts and intertextuality. A second implication for practice is change in the texts used in the English curriculum. Applebee (1992) and others (Stallworth et al., 2006) have noted the texts used in the English classrooms across America have changed very little over the decades. The classrooms of today are diverse and multicultural;

however, the protagonists in most classic literature are adults of European descent (Applebee, 1992). YAL provides the connection not found in classic literature by using diverse adolescent protagonists who face typical adolescent difficulties. Fisher and Frey (as cited in Johnston, 2018) noted that adolescents preferred reading works in which characters were relevant to their lives. The YA text used in this study, *Unwind*, contains characters who mimicked the diversity found in the classroom. There were African American, Latino, Asian, and Caucasian characters. There were also diverse family situations. One character has two dads, another has suffered through his parents' acrimonious divorce, one is a ward of the state, and another lived with an aunt because both his parents died.

Using YAL in the classroom does not have to mean giving up the classics. Instead, Rosenblatt (1956) wrote it is not a choice between two texts. Instead, it is a linking of the two – a bridging. Although achievement tests did not indicate changes in student achievement when using YA and classic texts, journal responses noted many students liked the mix of classic and YA texts, and learning occurred in various areas. Students noted greater understanding in character development, figurative language, plot, and vocabulary; whereas with the classic text, only one student noted learning figurative language and vocabulary. The rest noted they learned to understand Shakespearean language. While a step forward, the standards for the English curriculum include figurative language, character development, and vocabulary. They do not include becoming well versed in Shakespearean English. This shows the YA texts also have the elements proponents of classics argue make the classics worthy of study. Santoli and Wagner (as cited in Ostensen & Wadham, 2012) stated, “The breadth and depth of young

adult literature are equal to any other genre today and that the recurring themes of love, death, loss, racism, and friendship contained in the classics are also present in young adult literature” (p. 8). YAL gives students the chance to read quality literature with relatable protagonists and antagonists who resemble the students. Hipple (2000) also believed the genre is worthy of study, writing, “Like the best of literature written for adults, good novels written for adolescents possess themes that merit and reward examination and commentary” (p. 2). Soter and Connors (2009) agreed.

Classic texts and intertextuality. A third implication for change is developing positive attitudes toward classic texts through intertextual study. As noted, Rosenblatt (1956) believed teachers do not have to choose between classics and YAL; instead, both can be used. Miller’s (2017) recent study showed YAL can be used as a way to engage students in reading while bridging connections with classical texts. Koelling (2004) stated adolescents, at times, judge classics based on a reputation rather than actual reading experience. Initially, students in this study indicated not liking classic literature, with 69% of those surveyed indicating a dislike; however, after pairing YAL and classic literature, journal entries showed the majority, 63%, of students liked the classic text *Macbeth*. In addition, when asked if intertextual pairing should happen again, 52% of students agreed it should. Another 10% responded with maybe. Once connections with the texts are discovered, Koelling believed adolescents will enjoy classic literature. The results of this study indicate a positive experience with the classic text, resulting in an increase in positive attitudes toward the classic text.

Intertextuality is a strategy in which students can use prior knowledge as a means of helping understand a text. Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) proposed students and

teachers can both benefit from intertextuality. Koelling (2004) believed student attitudes toward classics can change when connections are made. Preconceived ideas about classics can change once students experience the text. “Learning is enhanced when the relevance of the material is made clear” (Fisher & Frey, as cited in Johnston, 2018, p. 31).

There is no doubt classic texts have value and a place in the classroom. These works of classic literature are taught because they contain universal themes and ideas (Lapp et al., 2013). The stories have been taught for decades because they tell stories with universal themes and transcend time and cultures (Jago, 2000, 2004). “It’s important that students know about a time other than their own. Learning about the past gives us a deeper understanding of our present day, and authors like Hawthorne and Twain help teach those lessons” (Chiariello, 2017, p. 27). Intertextual study can help students understand and appreciate classic texts.

Creating readers. The fourth implication for practice resulting from this study is YA texts can be used in school to help create readers. The initial survey and open-ended journal responses clearly showed students enjoyed reading YAL. Although some were already readers, 46% of the students in the study responded they either never read for enjoyment or only did so once a year. Thirty-one percent of students replied they read 2 or less hours per week for school. In essence, these students are simply nonreaders. They can read but choose not to do so; however, when asked if they liked YA texts, 85% responded yes and 100% responded YAL should be taught in schools. When asked about classics, only 31% noted liking classics. Many high school students report a lack of interest in the classical literature, citing classics do not relate to them (Gallo, 2001;

Gibbons et al., 2006; Ivey & Johnston, 2017; Miller, 2017). To develop students who can and do read classic literature, schools must first develop students who enjoy reading.

Stallworth et al. (2006) agreed, stating, “facilitating students’ development as lifelong readers” (p. 479) should be a goal of any school.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations in the research study. First, the researcher was the teacher of record for the student participants in the study. Although it was a blind study and precautions were taken to keep the participants anonymous to the researcher, it is possible the researcher’s connections to the student participants led to bias in their responses.

Other limitations were the small number of participants and the setting. Only 13 students participated in the survey and the beginning of the study. Nineteen answered the open-ended journal prompts, and 20 took the benchmark tests. All the students were members of the researcher’s English II classes during one semester of the school year. The school is located in a suburban area that is a short drive to the state’s second largest metropolitan area; therefore, the results of this study may not be transferrable to different areas such as rural and urban settings. The small number of participants means the results reflect this population and may not reflect the larger English II population of the school or other schools across the state and country.

The time frame of the study is another limitation. The school in which the study was conducted is on block schedule with, on average, two 90-day semesters. The study was conducted in the second half of the first semester of the school year, limiting the amount of time available for the study. In addition, unforeseen weather events caused the

loss of 5 class days during the first semester. Two of these days were made up during the first semester, but the others were not. In addition, with the study not being conducted until the end of the semester, student fatigue may have been a limiting factor.

Recommendations for Further Study

Teacher attitudes toward the use of YAL in the classroom and the use of classic literature in the classroom have been well-documented through research; however, student attitudes toward the use of these texts in the classroom are not as well documented. Additionally, intertextual study using both YAL and classics, although recommended by some, has been studied very little. Student achievement when intertextual study is used has also been studied very little. The researcher sought to fill a gap with this action research study. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher has recommendations for further study to strengthen the English II curriculum, student participation, and student achievement. The recommendations are as follows.

The small number of participants in this study was a limitation. Future studies could broaden the study to more course sections, thereby opening the potential participant pool to a much larger population. The study could also be replicated in multiple schools in other areas of the country, thus opening the potential participant pool to a much wider population than just a single school. More participants would provide a more statistically sound study. “The sample of students who participate often does not accurately represent the schools' populations, because students from different subgroups are not equally likely to provide informed consent” (Alibali & Nathan, 2010, p. 398).

In addition to more participants, conducting the study in multiple schools in varied demographic areas would provide results more likely to be generalizable to a

larger group. This study was conducted in a suburban southern school, which is close to a large metropolitan area. Miller (2017), a researcher in Maine, found through a study on using YA texts in the classroom that “when presented with literature that is contemporary and relevant to their immediate lives, they are enthusiastic readers” (p. 2). Branching out into rural areas and urban areas in other regions of the country would provide results generalizable to a broader population.

Time was also a limitation in this study. Schools and teachers often have limits on their time due to school calendars and other limitations (Alibali & Nathan, 2010). In the time in which the study was conducted, just one YAL and one classic text were used. Widening the time frame so multiple YA and classic texts could be used could provide more qualitative data to analyze. Students who did not care for one classic text used could find a different one engaging. The same is true for the YA text. Multiple texts would provide more opportunity for students discuss the use of intertextual study.

Finally, the researcher used benchmark tests provided by the county through Mastery Connect. Because of this, the researcher was unable to choose the reading excerpts, which did not include any YAL. Also, the number of questions relating to each RL standard differed from one test to the next as did the level of difficulty for each question. Future replication of this study could use tests with both classic and YAL excerpts and equal numbers of questions per standard with the same level of difficulty. This would enable achievement results to be a true measure of growth.

Reflection

Through the mixed methods action research study, the researcher attempted to fill a gap in current research on the use of intertextual study using classic literature and YAL

in the classroom. The qualitative aspect of the study showed a clear preference on the part of the students for YAL. Too often, student voices are not considered when texts are chosen for study. Rosenblatt (1991) believed adolescents seek connections in the works they read. “The reader seeks to participate in another’s vision – to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insight that will make his own life more comprehensible” (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 7). Rosenblatt (1991) further explored this idea, stating, “Like the beginning reader, the adolescent needs to encounter literature for which he possesses the intellectual, emotional, and experiential equipment” (p. 26). YAL provides quality literature and gives adolescents characters and plots with which they can connect by providing a “story that tackles the difficult, and oftentimes adult, issues that arise during an adolescent’s journey toward identity, a journey told through a distinctly teen voice that holds the same potential for literary value as its ‘Grownup’ peers” (Stephens, 2007, pp. 40-41). Educators who choose to use YAL in the classroom are providing students with the opportunity to become and grow as readers through works resonating with them. One must first learn to enjoy reading before tackling more difficult texts. Developing a love for classic literature takes time and academic maturity, something many high school students have not yet developed (Calvino, 2001).

In this study, the researcher hoped to see not only improved achievement but also improved attitudes toward classic literature through the intertextual study. Although the results of this study did not indicate significant changes in student achievement through the use of intertextual study, more research involving intertextual study is needed to determine if the pairing is effective; however, responses to the open-ended questions indicate an improvement in attitudes toward the classic text *Macbeth*. The responses to

the survey at the beginning of the study showed only 31% of students liked classic literature; however, at the end of the study, when asked to respond to a journal prompt about whether they liked *Macbeth*, 68% of students responded they liked the classic text. Degrees of like ranged from “kinda” to “very interesting.” These responses demonstrate an increase in positive attitudes toward the classic text. In a time when students are reporting not liking to read and reading little, if any, for pleasure, an increase in positive attitudes toward classic texts is beneficial. These results alone should encourage more educators to explore the use of intertextual study with classics and YAL in the classroom.

Conclusion

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to describe the impact of intertextual study between classic literature and YAL on student attitudes toward classic literature and YAL at the high school level and the effect of the intertextual study on student achievement of the NCSCOS for RL standards. Although the achievement results did not indicate any significant changes, qualitative results suggest students prefer and enjoy YA texts. The results of the study were reviewed and recommendations for future research were provided.

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Appendix A

Permission Letter to Conduct Research at the High School from Principal

Karen R. Conner

[REDACTED]

July 30, 2018

[REDACTED] Principal

[REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Shoe,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study entitled *Building Bridges: Connecting to the Classics with Young Adult Literature* at [REDACTED] during the 2018-2019 school year. I am completing this work in order to earn my Doctor of Education degree from Gardner-Webb University.

This study will examine how intertextuality using classic literature and young adult literature affects the reading attitudes of young adults and how it affects their achievement. I intend to use an electronic survey administered anonymously to the students as well as journal entries written by the students and achievement data from Mastery Connect. International Review Board (IRB) approval will be obtained before the research begins and all data and identifying information for the district, school, and students will remain anonymous. Pseudonyms will be used in place of student names and the school and district will be referred to in general terms such as "the school district" and "the high school" when mentioned. All data will remain confidential and follow the specifications set forth by the IRB.

At the completion of the study, I will be happy to share the results with you and the district if interested.

If this request meets with your approval, please sign where indicated below. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Karen R. Conner, English teacher

[REDACTED]

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE ABOVE REQUEST TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY.

Principal, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] County Schools

Appendix B

Permission Letter to Conduct Research at the High School from Assistant Superintendent

Karen R. Conner

[REDACTED]
July 30, 2018

[REDACTED]
Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary Services
[REDACTED]

Dear Dr. Propst:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study entitled *Building Bridges: Connecting to the Classics with Young Adult Literature* at [REDACTED] during the 2018-2019 school year. I am completing this work in order to earn my Doctor of Education degree from Gardner-Webb University.

This study will examine how intertextuality using classic literature and young adult literature affects the reading attitudes of young adults and how it affects their achievement. I intend to use an electronic survey administered anonymously to the students as well as journal entries written by the students and achievement data from Mastery Connect. International Review Board (IRB) approval will be obtained before the research begins and all data and identifying information for the district, school, and students will remain anonymous. Pseudonyms will be used in place of student names and the school and district will be referred to in general terms such as "the school district" and "the high school" when mentioned. All data will remain confidential and follow the specifications set forth by the IRB.

At the completion of the study, I will be happy to share the results with you and the district if interested.

If this request meets with your approval, please sign where indicated below. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Karen R. Conner, English teacher
[REDACTED]

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE ABOVE REQUEST TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY.

Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary Services
[REDACTED] County Schools

Appendix C
District Curriculum Map

Unit #: 1 Subject: English II Grade: 10 Reviewer:

STAGE 1 – DESIRED RESULTS

Unit Title: The Individual's Role in the World

Transfer Goal: Students will be able to independently read, write, speak, and think critically to fully participate in society.

Enduring Understandings:

Students will understand that...

- Actions affect the world around them
- Individuals have differing roles in various communities and that they fit in to local and global communities.
- Perspectives help broaden their worldview.

Essential Questions:

- How do texts define an individual's role in the world?
- How is an individual's action affected by his/her understanding of local and global communities?

Students will know:

- Readers, writers, and speakers use thorough textual evidence to support their claims.
- Formal and informal academic discussions adhere to certain language norms.
- Writing is an ongoing process that takes time, and writers continually consider audience, word choice, grammar, and structure.
- Narratives can include
 - multiple points of view,
 - multiple plot lines, and
 - various techniques to sequence events into a coherent whole, and
 - conclusions that reflect on what was experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

Students will be able to:

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis and inferences.
- Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choice on meaning and tone.
- Write real or imagined narratives using well-chosen details, effective sequencing, and techniques:
 - Sequencing: pacing, plot
 - Techniques: narrative techniques (e.g., flashback, dialogue, foreshadowing), sensory language
- Collaborate to develop and strengthen writing.
- Synthesize text studies and individual composition and reflect on what is experienced, observed, or resolved.
- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative, persuasive discussions.
- Make strategic use of digital media to enhance understanding.
- Demonstrate command of grammar and mechanics within the 9-12 continuum.
- Understand how language functions in different contexts and apply language guidelines in a style appropriate for the discipline and genre.
- Use general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge.

Unit #: 1 Subject: English II Grade: 10 Reviewers:

STAGE 1– STANDARDS	
RL.9-10.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
RL.9-10.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.
RI.9-10.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
RI.9-10.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.
W.9-10.3	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Organize information and ideas around a topic to plan and prepare to write. Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole. Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters. Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
SL.9-10.1	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas. Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.
SL.9-10.5	Make strategic use of digital media in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
L.9-10.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking; demonstrate proficiency within the 9-12 grammar continuum.
L.9-10.3	Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Write and edit work so that it conforms to the guidelines in a style manual appropriate for the discipline and writing type. Use parallel structure.
L.9-10.6	Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in developing vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Adapted from *Understanding by Design*, Unit Design Planning Template (Wiggins/McTighe 2005)

Last revised 7/5/18

2

Unit #: 1 Subject: English II Grade: 10 Reviewers:

STAGE 2 – ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE	
<p>Performance Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit 1 Performance Task • Unit 1 Standards-Based Rubric <p>Click here to access the resources listed above.</p>	<p>Other Evidence: There may not be an assessment of each type listed below for each unit.</p> <p><i>Academic Prompts</i> <i>Quiz and Test Items</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Released Test <p><i>Informal Checks for Understanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative Assessment Brace Map • Checklists <p>Click here to access the resource(s) listed above.</p>

Unit #: 1 Subject: English II Grade: 10 Reviewers:

STAGE 3 – RESOURCES FOR THE LEARNING PLAN

District Resources:

When designing the learning plan, these resources are intended to be a primary resource used by all teachers.

- [Discovery Education](#)
- [Cabarrus County Curriculum Portal: Suggested Titles](#)
- [NCDPI Independent Sustained Reading Guide](#)
- [NCDPI Writing Guide](#)
- Question Stems
- Suggested Titles (condensed)
- Recommended Text Sets

[Click here to access the resources listed above.](#)

Supplemental Resources:

These are considered additional resources that are recommended by the Curriculum Writing Teams. Those resources with an asterisk () may be purchased by each individual school.*

- *Texts and Lessons for Teaching Content-Area Reading*
 - “Conversation Questions” (pp. 73-77)
- *Texts and Lessons for Teaching Literature*
 - “Text Annotation” (pp. 37-42)
 - “Inferring Meaning” (pp. 56-58)
 - “Thirty-Second Look” (pp. 73-76)
- [NCDPI Lesson: W.9-10.3: Setting the Scene](#)
- [NCDPI Lesson: L.9-10.1: Using Podcasts](#)
- [NCDPI Lesson: L.9-10.1: Sentence Structure](#)
- [Lesson: Capturing Authentic Narratives](#)
- [Lesson: Inferencing and the Gettysburg Address](#)
- [Lesson: Using Context Clues](#)
- [Newsela](#)
- [Commonlit](#)

Considerations for Differentiating Instruction (AIG, EL, EC, etc.):

These resources are intended to be used when differentiating instruction to meet the varied needs of students in your classroom.

- [Building Analytical Skills](#) (EL, EC)
- [Lesson on Writing Personal Narratives](#) (EL, EC)
- [Spend a Day in My Shoes: Exploring the Role of Perspective in Narrative](#) (EL, EC)

Appendix D

Email to Researcher Anne V. Miller Requesting Permission to Use Survey and Interview
Questions and Response

 **Karen Conner** 
to amiller 

Mar 11   

Hello Dr. Miller,

My name is Karen Conner, and I am a current doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction at Gardner-Webb University in North Carolina. I writing my research proposal and plan to study pairing young adult literature with classic literature. Imagine my surprise and excitement when I found your study yesterday!

I began my studies at GWU in 2015, and until this year, I did not find any dissertations on this topic. There were plenty of articles from researchers but little in terms of actual studies. When I found your study yesterday, I felt like I hit the jackpot. Your study and my study are nearly the same. I am using Rosenblatt's theory as my framework and plan to study students' attitudes toward classic and YAL and the pairing of them. One difference is that I do not intend to study the teacher attitudes.

I am writing to request permission to use your student survey and interview questions for my study with appropriate credit to your work, of course. I have found two other dissertations with surveys that I could tweak, but I believe your questions directly connect to my study and its intentions.

Thank you for considering this request and congratulations on finishing your dissertation and degree.

Sincerely,

Karen Conner

 **Anne Miller** 
to Karen 

Mar 12   

Hello Karen,

Thank you for writing to ask for permission to use the student survey and interview questions from my dissertation work. You are absolutely welcome to use them. I had an absolute blast observing the students in class and interviewing them! I'm pleased to know that the survey and questions may be of use to your study, and I'm excited to hear that more research examining student attitudes toward YAL is occurring. I think there is so much space and need for for student voices in the research. I would love to know how the study turns out.

Good luck with your research and writing.

Regards,
Anne Miller

...

Appendix E
Journal Questions

Journal Questions

1. Describe your attitude toward the young adult text *Unwind*.
2. Describe your attitude toward the classic text of the text *Macbeth*.
3. What was easy or challenging about each book?
4. In what ways, if any, did reading *Unwind* first help with understanding the classic text?
5. Do you think your teacher should use this strategy of pairing a young adult with a classic text again? Why or why not?
6. In what ways, if any, did *Unwind* help you improve as a reader?
7. In what ways, if any, did the *Macbeth* help you improve as a reader?
8. Is there anything else you would like to say about the books?