

“Our brokenness kind of connects us”: exploring social justice topics through read-alouds in a ninth-grade classroom

by

Kayln Jealee Hoppe

B.S., Kansas State University, 2011

M.S., Kansas State University, 2013

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

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Abstract

For decades, K-12 teachers across the United States have read aloud to their students, whether it be to model fluent reading, to promote vocabulary acquisition, or out of pure enjoyment. As social justice becomes a more prevalent topic in classrooms across the country, interactive read-alouds are being used to introduce and discuss complex and delicate topics, like human rights and social justice. While students at all junctures of development and learning embrace and benefit from reading aloud, existing research primarily takes place in elementary school settings. Furthermore, literature used to explore social justice issues usually involves picture books rather than longer texts like chapter books. This study was designed to gain insight into how a classroom teacher facilitated a nonfiction chapter book read-aloud and how the students responded to the social justice themes represented in the chapter book. The study took place over the span of 18 days in a Midwest ninth-grade classroom. The theoretical underpinnings that framed the study were constructivism, transactional theory of reader response and critical literacy. Data were collected and analyzed using qualitative case study principles. Study results reveal five emerging themes across the research questions, including expressive reading; spontaneity; redemption; empathy; and awareness.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Lotta Larson

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

We let down our guard when someone we love is reading us a story. We exist together in a little patch of warmth and light.

— Kate DiCamillo

Reading aloud is a long-established tradition of which many people have fond memories, whether it is at home with loved ones curled up before bedtime or at school with a classroom full of peers surrounding a teacher. Read-alouds elicit a wide range of emotions and invite readers and listeners into worlds beyond their own, even if it is just for a short amount of time. Undisputedly, read-alouds are affable, enjoyable, and inexpensive tools that engage the whole person- mind, body, and soul (Trelease, 1989; Wan, 2000).

The art of oral storytelling dates to the Golden Age in Greece, where a rhapsode, or a “stitcher of songs,” would narrate and perform poetry from memory (Cox-Gurdon, 2019,). Not just in Greece but across the globe, histories, poetry, folktales, and additional narratives have been shared through human voice (Cox-Gurdon, 2019). Eventually, stories like these transferred to print text, but people still entrusted their voices to make sense of the written words (Cox-Gurdon, 2019). Thus, reading aloud came alive. According to anthologist Alberto Manguel, Arabic and Hebrew, widely known ancient languages of the Bible, viewed reading, and speaking as one act (Cox-Gurdon, 2019). Speakers and listeners alike experienced a story in a lively and oral form (Cox-Gurdon, 2019).

Read-alouds began as a method of storytelling but have transformed into extraordinarily efficient and sometimes underestimated classroom teaching tools. Some of my fondest memories as a classroom teacher involve read-aloud experiences that my students and I shared together. One special memory I have is reading Wilson Rawls’ (1961/2016) *Where the Red Fern Grows* to

my fourth-grade students. What I witnessed as I read this book aloud was nothing short of miraculous. My students fully invested themselves in a story about a main character with whom they had little in common. They demonstrated profound empathy to the point of literal tears, mourning the loss of Billy's two hound dogs Old Dan and Little Ann (Rawls, 1961/2016, Chapter 19). For the first time that year, my students collectively supported one another, disengaged from outside distractions, and were fully present in the moment together. It was then that I realized that my classroom, which embodied unique individuals who had never seemed to get along before, were transforming into a community of readers right before my tear-stricken eyes. As a result, class dialogue became richer, independent reading became more prevalent, and assessment scores improved. Looking back, I cannot help but wonder, if one chapter book read-aloud can inspire change in a classroom full of reluctant and resistant students, how empowering could it be to read aloud daily for an entire school year?

Overview of the Issues

Read-Alouds

Reading aloud is “the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading” (Anderson et al, 1985, p. 23) and should occur daily throughout K-12 education (Fisher et al, 2004; Layne, 2015; Routman, 1991; Slay & Morton, 2020; Trelease, 2019). In essence, reading aloud helps cultivate children's lifelong reading success. In addition to academics, shared reading experiences like read-alouds can also influence social-emotional growth. Teachers who facilitate interactive read-alouds activate and build background knowledge (Kaefer, 2020); model proficient and animated reading (Hurst et al., 2011; Trelease, 2019); support vocabulary and language development (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Layne, 2015; Routman, 2003; Trelease, 2019); and strengthen listening and speaking skills while engaging

students dialogic reading (Johnston, 2016; Kraemer et al., 2012; Lane & Wright, 2007; Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009; Santoro et al., 2008; Trelease, 2019). Furthermore, read-alouds introduce students to diverse genres, authors, and perspectives (Fisher et al., 2004) and inspire cultural awareness and understanding (Kesler et al., 2020; Routman, 2003; Sipe, 2008). Read-alouds also nourish social-emotional health by sharing unique perspectives, building relationships, and promoting empathy (Fisher et al., 2004). Essentially, read-alouds are co-teachers that address both cognitive and affective factors of learning (McCarthy, 2020).

Teaching for Social Justice

Social justice is a pertinent and timely topic in the heart of many conversations outside of school and has made its way inside school classrooms. One way to facilitate these conversations is through the integration of literature and intergroup dialogue. Social justice-themed literature stimulates students' feelings and emotions and fosters critical thinking (Dressel, 2003; Griffith, 2009). Intergroup dialogue brings together students from two or more social groups to engage in honest face-to-face conversation (Zúñiga et al., 2012). Dialogue relating to social justice topics, like racial inequality, incarceration, and poverty enables students from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds to interact with one another while confronting and even dismantling internal biases (Griffin et al., 2012; Zúñiga et al., 2012). Children's and young adult literature offer an innocuous avenue to initiate consequential discussions about complex social justice topics (Griffith, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

This study was driven by three theoretical perspectives: constructivism, transactional theory of reader response, and critical literacy theory. Constructivist theory espouses that meaning is constructed on an individual basis (Bhattacharya, 2017; Schwandt, 2007) and can

vary from person to person (Crotty, 1998). Transactional theory of reader response concentrates on the relationship between reader and text, and what the reader brings to the text to construct meaning (Rosenblatt, 2005). Critical literacy uses literature to evaluate and challenge power relationships and other sociopolitical issues, and to promote social justice (Lewison et al., 2002). These theories helped capture individual participants' perspectives and experiences as related to read-alouds and the social justice themes discussed in this study.

Statement of the Problem

The older students get, the less they are read aloud to (Laminack, 2017; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003; Trelease, 2019). Layne (2015) argued that more research should focus on reading aloud to older students and asserted that “Many great educators jump to the assumption that reading aloud is what we do ‘for the little ones’ and when that is the mind-set of some practitioners, it is easy for the researchers to follow suit” (p. 7). In other words, if teachers in upper grades do not see the value in implementing read-alouds, researchers may not see the value in studying that phenomenon in secondary settings. When compared to research conducted in elementary settings, less is known about the extent to which secondary teachers conduct read-alouds in their classrooms.

In a society of culturally and linguistically diverse school populations combined with a politically charged climate, teachers and students are urged to read and discuss high quality literature that examine multiculturalism and social justice issues they encounter on a regular basis (Johnson et al., 2017). When teachers share literature with social justice themes, students are not only engaged in “reading the word” but also “reading the world” (Freire, 1974/2005). Students bring their knowledge of the world to the reading of the word, which in turn can change their outlook on the world (Freire, 1974/2005). Picturebooks are often used to discuss

multicultural and social justice topics from multiple viewpoints (Enriquez & Shulman, 2014; Husband, 2019; Norris, 2020), but little is known about how chapter books are used for similar purposes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into how a nonfiction chapter book read-aloud was implemented in a ninth-grade reading classroom and how students responded to the text. Expanding on the instructional context of an interactive read-aloud, which involves readers and listeners actively processing and discussing the text together (Fountas & Pinnell, 2021), this study examined how a ninth-grade reading teacher facilitated a chapter book read-aloud and how the students comprehended the complex social justice issues presented in the text. Some researchers are committed to addressing social justice topics by using read-alouds (Kesler et al., 2020; Kibler & Chapman, 2018; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2019). By using a young adult nonfiction chapter book that confronts racial injustices and wrongful incarceration, among other issues, this study sought to understand participants' unique connections and responses to the text.

In this qualitative case study, I observed how a ninth-grade reading teacher planned and implemented an interactive read-aloud of a young adult nonfiction chapter book from start to finish. This study involved the analysis of semi-structured individual and focus group interviews, audiovisual materials, student-generated literature response journals, and reading anticipation guides. The findings from this study offer valuable insight for secondary teachers who wish to implement read-alouds in their classrooms. In addition, the results may encourage secondary education teachers to use children's and young adult literature to discuss social justice topics with their students.

Research Questions

Researchers and literacy experts generally agree that reading aloud is valuable across all K-12 grade levels and content areas (e.g., Albright & Ariail, 2005; Anderson et al., 1985; Routman, 1991; Serafini & Giorgi, 2003; Trelease, 2019). Yet, most of the existing research reflects read-aloud experiences in elementary school settings. In addition, some researchers assert that literature should function as “mirrors”, “windows” (Bishop, 1990) and a context through which readers can view and examine the world around them (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Scholars and authors acknowledge that teachers grapple with issues like social injustice and educational inequality in the classroom (e.g., Dover et al., 2016; Williamson, 2017) and should have autonomy to discuss these topics safely and constructively (e.g., Booth et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2017) The following research questions steered this case study:

1. How is a nonfiction chapter book read-aloud facilitated in a ninth-grade reading classroom to promote student engagement and learning?
2. How do students in a ninth-grade reading classroom perceive and respond to the social justice topics presented in a nonfiction chapter book?

Significance of the Study

It is known that read-alouds at the secondary level might look different than they would in an elementary setting (Routman, 1991; Easley, 2004). The results of this study provided additional insight into how read-alouds are implemented in secondary education. The results illustrated how a secondary reading teacher planned for and facilitated read-alouds. The results of this study may inspire secondary teachers to implement read-alouds for the first time and/or adjust their read-aloud routines.

Teachers sometimes use read-alouds to introduce and critically discuss social justice issues from both the past and present societies (Ciardiello, 2010; Neumann, 2009; Oslick, 2013 Piper, 2019). The findings of this study led to further questions surrounding the use of social justice-themed literature in K-12 education. The results of this study also add to a growing body of read-aloud research conducted in secondary classrooms and the research related to the use of social justice-themed literature in secondary classrooms.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations present in this study. The first limitation was a small sample size restricted to the setting of one high school reading classroom. Moreover, the classroom teacher and focus group students were not randomly selected. I used reputation-case selection (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004, p. 60) with the suggestion of my professors to locate and recruit a secondary teacher. The class size was small, and eight of the nine total students voluntarily participated in the focus group interviews. Since the students were minors, participation in this study was limited to only the students whose parental consent was obtained.

Another limitation involved the analysis of reader response. Because reader response is mainly internal, it was impossible to fully capture the readers' transactions during the read-aloud events (Rosenblatt, 1995). The results of this study include information the participants willingly shared in their literature response journals, as well as in discussions during and after the read-aloud events. Due to the unique and individual nature of the participants' responses to the literature, the results are not generalized to other classrooms that might use the same read-aloud routines and text.

The last limitation included researcher bias. I believe in the power of read-alouds, and I am also passionate about social justice discourse. To minimize researcher bias, the classroom

teacher facilitated the read-aloud events. During these read-aloud events, I remained a hands-off observer and did not interact with participants until it was time for interviews. At that time, I refrained from disclosing my own opinions about social justice issues so as not to project my own ideas onto the participants during the interviews. While it was impossible to ignore my positionality and subjectivities as a licensed teacher conducting research in a classroom setting, I maintained ethical dignity that kept the focus of the research findings solely on the participants' lived experiences and realities.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used operationally in this study:

- **case study:** a social inquiry strategy used to seek answers to questions in real-life context (Schwandt, 2007)
- **critical literacy:** an instructional approach that allows students to use literature from multiple perspectives to critique, analyze and respond to everyday sociopolitical issues and promote social justice (Lewison et al., 2002)
- **culture:** beliefs, values, worldviews, institutions, artifacts, processes, interactions, and ways of behaving (Harris, 1996, p. 110)
- **dialogue:** an open discussion of ideas and opinions between two or more persons
- **multicultural education:** a concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity that addresses racism, sexism, classism, linguicism, ablism, ageism, heterosexism, religious intolerance, and xenophobia (The National Association for Multicultural Education, 2021).
- **nonfiction:** text that is written, designed, and organized to interpret documentable, factual material (National Council of Teachers of English, 2020)

- **read-aloud:** instructional practice where teachers, parents, and caregivers read texts aloud to children. The reader incorporates variations in pitch, tone, pace, volume, pauses, eye contact, questions, and comments to produce a fluent and enjoyable delivery (Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009, p. 111)
- **reader:** someone whose experiences enables him or her to make meaning in collaboration with a text (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. x)
- **reader response:** a personal and independent experience that occurs when a reader actively engages with a text (Rosenblatt, 1995)
- **secondary education:** commonly known as ‘high school’ and typically includes grades 9-12 (Learn.org, 2021)
- **social justice:** an egalitarian society that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognizes the dignity of every human being (Zajda et al., 2006).
- **text:** a set of marks or squiggles on a page whose potential meaning changes with changes in the reader, the time, or the place (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. x)
- **transaction:** the process of building interpretation that occurs reciprocally between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 2005)
- **young adult literature:** texts written or produced for teen readers in grades 9-12 (Cadden et al., 2020, p. 3)

Researcher Subjectivity and Positionality Statement

I am a thirty-two-year-old, straight, cisgender female who was born and raised in a middle-class family in a small, rural Kansas community. I am also a first-generation college graduate. Even though my parents did not attend a four-year post-secondary institution, they

have always supported my educational endeavors. From an early age, my dad read books aloud to me as part of our nightly bedtime routine. Teddy Slater's (1991) *Disney's Beauty and the Beast (A Little Golden Book)* was a favorite read-aloud for several years in our household. Likewise, my grandmother cherished education, learning, and reading and her book collection consisted of every *Berenstain Bears* book ever published and more. We both shared the notion that one book could not be read too many times. I do not recall my parents or grandparents ever reading books for their own leisure activity, but they always made time to read with me.

After earning an undergraduate degree in elementary education, I taught for eight years as an elementary school teacher. In those eight years, I taught in six different classrooms. While I switched schools and/or grade levels almost every year, there was one constant in my classroom each year – teacher read-alouds. Whether I was a self-contained generalist or a departmentalized English Language Arts teacher, I prioritized reading aloud to my students every day. While the read-alouds were read primarily for pleasure, enjoyment, and gave our brains a “break” from instruction, I soon realized that students were developing a love and motivation for reading that I had not expected.

As a fourth-year teacher, I attended a professional development seminar for librarians and reading teachers hosted by award-winning author and educator, Donalyn Miller. The professional books she authored and classroom stories she shared opened my eyes to the world of possibilities that reading instruction can hold. My encounter with Donalyn Miller led me to two other well-known educators in the literacy community, Pernille Ripp and Jillian Heise. Ripp is a seventh-grade classroom teacher, as well as an author and founder of the Global Read-Aloud initiative. Heise currently works as a library media specialist and is the creator of the #classroombookaday challenge. From book recommendations to authentic and innovative

instruction, these three women filled my head and heart with countless ideas to improve my reading instruction, including my read-aloud experiences.

As recent news of countless acts of police brutality and racially charged attacks circulate the globe, my positionality and priorities as a citizen and educator have shifted. These modern-day lynchings and acts of discrimination served as my wakeup call. I am a privileged Caucasian cisgender female, and over the years I viewed myself as an ‘ally’ or a friend to members of historically underrepresented communities, but I have since learned that sometimes it is not enough to be an ‘ally’ but rather an ‘accomplice’ or a someone who actively, knowingly, and intentionally gives assistance to another (Joseph, 2020). As a person with genuine intent to support and fight for members of marginalized and oppressed populations, I realized I was uneducated about my privilege as a White cisgender female. In addition, I was ill-informed of the magnitude of the acts of racism, police brutality, mass incarceration that have been occurring in the United States for hundreds of years, and sometimes right under my nose. For example, I always thought racism was perpetuated on an individual basis, but I have learned that racism is systemic and embedded into laws, policies, and institutions, even in the American educational system that I have worked in for several years.

Thinking back to my years as a classroom teacher, I realize that I could have been a better advocate for my racially diverse colleagues and students. This realization forced me to consider how I could utilize my privilege and platform as a Caucasian cisgender woman and educator to better serve my future colleagues, students and their families and communities. As a literacy teacher, a great place for me to start was to read more literature written by racially diverse authors and talk about the literature with my family, friends, peers, and students. I started reading both fiction and nonfiction children’s and adult literature to gain a clearer understanding of racial

and cultural groups that are different from my own. This momentous and belated change, along with my love of read-alouds, is what inspired this study.

As a qualitative researcher there were certain aspects of my subjectivity that I had to bracket out to guard against biases, and there were parts that I could leverage to enhance my own insights. As a child, reading with my family and teachers created some of my most cherished memories. Even now as a teacher, several of the memories that put a smile on my face or tears in my eyes involve a shared reading experience with my students. I consider myself fortunate and even privileged to have these experiences, but I know that not every student or teacher can say the same. I knew that some of the students I would meet through my study would not have the same reading experiences that I did as a student and some the classroom teachers may not value read-alouds as much as I do. I also acknowledged that read-alouds will look and sound differently in a secondary classroom, which is a setting I lack experience teaching in.

Respectful rapport is an important tenant for learning in classroom settings, and I used my experience as an educator to build trusting relationships with the participants in this study. Establishing mutually respectful relationships with the participants created more candid and genuine research results. Politically, I consider myself to be liberal-leaning, which impacted my personal opinions about the read-aloud text, as well as how I engaged in dialogue with participants about the text. Because the study focused on the students' unique perceptions and experiences, I articulated my words during discussions so as not to hinder or influence student responses. Paulo Freire (1985) asserted that humility is a crucial characteristic teachers must possess. "Humility accepts the need we have to learn and relearn again and again, the humility to know *with* those whom we help to know" (p. 15). I, too, believe that educators must be great learners as well as great teachers. Throughout this research process, I had to unlearn old biases

and misconceptions and relearn right along with the participants. This humble mindset is what carried me through this study.

Organization of the Study

This chapter introduces the study exploring the facilitation of social justice-themed read-alouds in a ninth-grade reading classroom. Additionally, this chapter provides an overview of the issues, statement of the problem, research purpose and questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, definition of terms, and organization of the study. Chapter 2 offers a review of literature, starting with theoretical perspectives centered around constructivism, transactional theory of reader response, and critical literacy. In addition, Chapter 2 explores existing research focused on social justice education, read-alouds, and the Common Core State Standards. Chapter 3 provides a rationale for using a qualitative study approach and describes case study methodology and research design. Furthermore, population and participant selection, research site, researcher role, teacher role, data collection methods, data management and analysis, data representation, and establishing trustworthiness are discussed. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study using rich description, participant quotes, and visual representations. Finally, Chapter 5 recapitulates the study results, examines practical classroom implications, and suggests ideas for future research and practice.

Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

Everything we do in life is rooted in theory. Whether we consciously explore the reasons we have a particular perspective or take a particular action there is also an underlying system shaping thought and practice.

— bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*

The purpose of this case study was to understand how a ninth-grade teacher implements a nonfiction chapter book read-aloud and how the students respond to the social justice topics represented in the text. In this chapter, I begin by reviewing three theoretical underpinnings that inform this study, including constructivist theory, transactional theory of reader response, and critical literacy theory. Then, I examine how social justice education is perceived and integrated into school systems. Next, read-aloud practices and applications in secondary education are reviewed. Finally, I discuss how Common Core State Standards support social justice education and read-aloud practices. This study intended to investigate the read-aloud practices within the context of a ninth-grade reading classroom. The theoretical perspectives and review of social justice education, read-aloud practices, and the Common Core State Standards provided a roadmap for understanding the intent, design, and analysis of this research study.

Theoretical Frameworks

Constructivist theory, transactional theory of reader response, and critical literacy theory served as the theoretical underpinnings of this study. All three theoretical perspectives adopted the notion that meaning is constructed on an individual basis. Everyone has unique experiences that shape their understanding of the world around them. Lastly, these ideologies embraced multiple perspectives rather than one “correct” truth or reality.

Constructivist Theory

According to constructivist theory, the human mind neither discovers nor creates meaning but uses existing knowledge to actively construct new understandings (Bhattacharya, 2017; Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2007). Similarly, Phillips (1995) maintained that knowledge is invented rather than acquired. The constructivist theory espouses the idea that objective knowledge and truth are the outcome of perspective (Schwandt, 1994). Frank Smith (1971) stated, “Learning is not an occasional event, to be stimulated, provoked, or reinforced” (p. 7). In other words, learning is an active, ongoing, and natural process.

Constructivist ideology recognizes that two or more humans can have contrasting views about the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). The ways in which people make sense of the world are valid and treasured (Crotty, 1998; Jonassen, 1991), and no single interpretation is deemed ‘true’ or ‘valid’. Schwandt (1994) believed that our understandings of the world continuously evolve as we encounter and reflect upon new experiences. The main goal of constructivist framework is to understand human lived experiences through the eyes of those who lived the experiences (Schwandt, 1994).

Although occasionally used interchangeably, there is a distinct difference between constructivism and constructionism. Crotty (1998) described *constructivism* as an epistemology “focusing exclusively on ‘the meaning-making activity of the individual mind’” and *constructionism* as “the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (p. 58). The former assumes each learner mentally constructs his or her own unique meaning while the latter refers to the physical act of constructing knowledge. Schwandt (2007) argued that constructionism is one of two branches of constructivism that focuses on social practices and relations. Social

constructionism emphasizes a collective understanding or interpretation between multiple minds (Schwandt, 2007).

Humans interpret the world based on their own historical, linguistic, and social contexts, experiences, and interactions (Bhattacharya, 2017; Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2007). As people encounter new circumstances, events, and connections, their minds continuously construct and reconstruct new and old ideas (Noddings, 1990; Schwandt, 2007). Schwandt (2007) believed that humans use shared ideas, backgrounds, and languages to construct individual understandings.

Constructivism is not only one of the pillars of qualitative research but can also serve as a foundation for learning in schools. Constructivism as a methodological framework in research is comparable to constructivism as a pedagogical approach in the classroom (Noddings, 1990). Constructivist pedagogy acknowledges and fosters multiple truths while students construct knowledge through experiential learning (Jonassen, 1991; Noddings, 1990). Jonassen (1991) and Noddings (1990) argued that in a constructivist classroom, the focus should be on the process (e.g., what students are thinking, how knowledge is constructed) rather than the final product or behavior. While Noddings' (1990) work is centered on math instruction and Jonassen's (1991) on the evaluation of learning, similar ideas can be applied to the literacy classroom.

Porath (2016) suggested that a shift in epistemology, not pedagogy, is the key to more learner-centered literacy instruction. Pedagogy focuses on how to teach knowledge (Porath, 2016) while epistemology digs deeper to explore what knowledge is and how it is obtained (Kirschner, 2009). Constructivist epistemology, like constructivist pedagogy, aims to move away from traditional teacher-focused instruction to more student-centered learning (Porath, 2016). Through hands-on learning, teachers and students alike can construct knowledge through authentic learning tasks, dialogue, and social interactions (Jonassen, 1991; Porath, 2016).

Transactional Theory of Reader Response

Like constructivist ideology, Louise Rosenblatt's (1978/1994, 1995, 2005a) transactional theory of reader response espoused the idea that knowledge is created rather than acquired. Just as humans construct meaning as they experience new things, readers construct meaning during transactional encounters with texts (Rosenblatt, 2005a). Moreover, Rosenblatt (2005a) stated, "Far from already possessing a meaning that can be imposed on all readers, the text actually remains simply marks on paper, an object in the environment, until some reader transacts with it" (p. 7). In other words, a fixed meaning is not there for students to find or discover in the text; one text can take on multiple meanings in transactions with different readers or with the same reader in different settings or occasions. The individual reader assumes an active role in the construction of knowledge (Tracey & Morrow, 2017).

Reading is a transactional event or a two-way process that brings together a reader and a text and is fundamentally molded by each reader's unique experiences and background knowledge (Appleman, 2015; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, 1982; Tracey & Morrow, 2017). Within a transaction, a human and its environment are not considered separate entities but are both parts of a whole experience (Rosenblatt, 2005a). The transaction underscores the mutual importance of both the reader and text (Rosenblatt, 2005a). Responding to literature is an "event" (Appleman, 2015, p. 35), and the reader uses "selective attention" (James, 1950) to synthesize and make sense of the text (Rosenblatt, 1986). Appleman (2015) metaphorically described the personal nature of literature response as "a kind of literary fingerprint" (p. 37).

Reader Stance: An Efferent-Aesthetic Continuum

According to Rosenblatt's (1978/1994) transactional theory of reader response, there are two main types of stances, or purposes, that readers can have for reading a text, efferent and

aesthetic. The difference between the two types lies in the stance the reader adopts and the text-related actions the reader takes as he or she interacts with the text (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). Efferent stances are public (Rosenblatt, 2005a), literal (Schieble, 2010), fact-oriented (Tracey & Morrow, 2017) and focus on the aftermath of a reading event and the practicality of the information acquired (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). On the other hand, aesthetic stances are private (Rosenblatt, 2005a), require more personal and emotional investment (Schieble, 2010; Tracey & Morrow, 2017), and focus on the experiences that occur during a reading event (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). Additionally, aesthetic reading heightens students' awareness of their personal relationships to the text (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). Soter et al. (2010) argued that the term "aesthetic response" should be expanded to "expressive response" because it increases the scope of responses that readers can make and focuses less on examining how the text influences their responses.

Rosenblatt (1978/1994, 1982) asserted that there is no definitive line that separates the two stances by stating that "The reader's stance toward the text—what he focuses his attention on, what his 'mental set' shuts out or permits to enter into the center of awareness—may vary in a multiplicity of ways between the two poles" (p. 35). The efferent and aesthetic responses engage both cognitive and affective factors, and "both aspects of meaning are attended to in different proportions of any linguistic event" (Rosenblatt, 2005a, p. 12). Flitterman-King (1988) argued that while constructing meaning of a text, readers shift back and forth between the processes of *apprehending* (mentally perceiving) and *comprehending* (fully understanding).

Efferent reading does not necessarily correspond with expository or nonliterary texts; nor does aesthetic reading automatically associate with poetic or literary texts (Rosenblatt, 2005a, b). Successful readers can read a text both efferently and esthetically by obtaining information and

experiencing the text simultaneously (Smith, 2017). Similarly, Galda (2010) believed that successful readers should be able to respond aesthetically to nonfiction as well as literary texts. Because a text can be read with either an efferent or aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1982), the reader should consider the purpose of the reading experience rather than the genre of the text when adopting a stance. (Rosenblatt, 2005a, b).

A Case for Teaching More Aesthetic Reading

Aesthetic reading transforms a reading event from a neutral occurrence to a personal experience (Ryan & Dagostino, 2015). Reading aesthetically and making personal connections to literature is an essential role of the reader (Probst, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1995; Soter et al., 2010; Squire, 1964). Rosenblatt (1995, 2005a) argued that there is an overemphasis of efferent reading in K-12 schools and that literature is often viewed as a source of information rather than a potential experience. Beers and Probst (2013) and Hinchman and Moore (2013) argued that the Common Core State Standards (NGA & CSSO, 2010) favor efferent over aesthetic reading with little emphasis on what the reader brings to the text. Del Nero (2017) recalled her own teaching experiences and how her literature discussions used to be dominated by efferent comprehension questions. Rather than just ask students to respond to literature, Appleman (2015) said that teachers should explicitly teach about reader response to increase students' metacognitive awareness of theory and how it applies to their reading.

Some researchers and classroom teachers have studied aesthetic literary responses in the classroom. In her study that examined secondary pre-service English teachers' reading of *Luna* (Peters, 2006), a young adult novel with a transgendered character, Schieble (2010) found that aesthetic reading could have the potential to challenge stereotypes about gender and sexual orientation. In a self-designed seventh-grade Gothic studies unit focused specifically on aesthetic

transactions, Del Nero (2017) found that relevant text selection played an important role in students' abilities to aesthetically respond to literature. In addition, the students who produced aesthetic transactions with the Gothic texts were able to use those experiences to unpack and heal from personal trauma and conflicts experienced outside of school (Del Nero, 2017). Ryan and Dagostino (2015) reported that when elementary classroom teachers approached reading instruction aesthetically, they felt "liberated" from school obligations that required them to focus on more skills-based, efferent reading instruction.

Aesthetic and Efferent Responses to Nonfiction Texts

Students should read and respond to a variety of nonfiction materials, including informational picturebooks; biographical texts; authentic, first-person documents like journals and interviews; and photographs; (Hancock, 2008). Even though nonfiction texts naturally rouse efferent responses (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), readers may also consciously or unconsciously adopt aesthetic reading stances (Hancock, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1982; Smith, 2017). Rather than choose one dominant stance over another, students should adjust their reading purposes during a transaction (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). Nonfiction texts are multidimensional, and "reading for information can be an enjoyable experience that touches both the efferent needs of the mind and the aesthetic realms of the heart" (Hancock, 2008, p. 354).

Existing research reveals several ways in which classroom teachers and researchers have studied aesthetic and efferent responses to nonfiction literature. While researching critical responses to read-alouds, Bryars (2017) described how fourth-grade students aesthetically compared their own home and school lives to the statistical data discussed in Smith's (2002) *If the World Were a Village: A Book About the World's People*. Similarly, Copenhaver (2001) recounted how small groups of second- and third-grade students recounted personal stories about

incarceration, racism, and violence while reading the biographical picturebook *Malcom X: A Fire Burning Brightly* (Myers, 2000). Chisholm et al. (2017) studied how eighth grade students made sense of and responded to an informational graphic novel, *Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel* (Butzer, 2009). Even though the students were reading a complex informational text, they were encouraged to adopt an empathetic stance to form emotional connections with and humanize the historical figures from the text (Chisholm et al., 2017).

While examining preschoolers' responses to informational picturebooks, Robinson (2020) noticed that most responses were efferent and focused on the images and content vocabulary. Even though students exhibited some aesthetic, emotional responses to the text, the preschool teachers expressed that they primarily read informational texts to build background knowledge and teach facts about the topics the students were most interested in (Robinson, 2020). Heller (2006) studied first grade girls' interactions during nonfiction book clubs and reported that seventy percent of their conversations focused on efferently telling and retelling the expository facts while also exhibiting aesthetic engagement through body language, laughter, facial expressions, and dramatic gestures.

A Sociocultural Perspective on Reader Response

Both efferent and aesthetic reading can elicit critical literacy and transform a reader's sociocultural perceptions (Enriquez, 2014). Literature is a natural mechanism that can be used to expound and connect human differences (Rosenblatt, 2005), and "if we wish young people to participate in literature, we have to be concerned about the world they live in, the experiences they bring to the text" (Rosenblatt, 1969, p. 1012). Freire's (1985) sociocultural interpretation of reading was described as "a matter of studying reality that is alive, reality that we are living inside of, and reality as history being made and also making us" (p. 18). Literary interpretation is

a “social act” (Lewis, 2000) and literary responses are influenced by readers’ individual experiences and cultural and social conditions (Brooks & Browne, 2012; Copenhaver, 2001; Sipe, 1999). Literary response can uncover an awareness and appreciation for cultural differences and foster a more democratic society:

Only by turning a critically appreciative eye upon our own and other cultures, our own and other literatures, shall we avoid with excessive smugness or excessive humility. The fundamental criteria for such a critical attitude are provided by our democratic ideals. The belief in the value and dignity of the human being that has been the leaven throughout our history can be the foundation for such a system of values (Rosenblatt, 2005a, p. 58).

Dong (2005) argued that while Rosenblatt’s (1978/1994, 1995) transactional theory encourages personal connections to literature, it has the potential to overemphasize the individual reader and miss opportunities for cross-cultural understandings while reading multicultural literature. Instead, a more cultural-centered response approach values discussion, promotes empathy, and challenges personal biases (Dong, 2005; Enciso, 1994). A sociocultural perspective on reader response examines the political messages (Lewis, 2000), systems, and social practices that shape both character and reader identities, relationships, and actions (Galda & Beach, 2001).

Researchers have discovered that reading more contemporary literature helps preserve a sociocultural perspective on reader response (Del Nero, 2017; Graff & Shimek, 2020). Some contemporary literature, referred to as “remixes”, embrace the fluidity of genres and integrate elements of both narrative and nonfiction text structures, multimodal texts, (Graff & Shimek, 2020), and digital and media literacies (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008; Thomas & Stornaiuolo,

2016). Furthermore, remixes blend cultural artifacts from different sources (Gainer & Lapp, 2010; Knobel & Lankshear, 2008) to represent modern-day society and invite readers to think critically about the text (Graff & Shimek, 2020).

A sociocultural perspective should also consider how different children's responses to literature from multiple cultures can lead to richer literary discussion and interpretation (Sipe, 1999). While reading Spinelli's (1990) *Manic Magee*, a novel that portrays identity and racial conflict, with fourth- and fifth graders, Enciso (1994) discovered that cultural knowledge impacted readers' meaning-making processes. Furthermore, students' construction of knowledge while interacting with and responding to a text can shape how they make sense of the world around them (Enciso, 1994). In a study involving Irish and American students' responses to literature portraying the Irish famine in North America, Hancock (1995) determined that reading literature outside one's own culture can serve as a catalyst for building empathy for others.

Webster (2001) examined how cultural schemata impacted ninth graders' abilities to respond to multicultural literature and found that when two students from the same cultural group read a story representing their culture, they reacted and responded completely different from one another. These findings showed that the readers' abilities to shape cultural and social practices coincided with their individual circumstances and experiences (Webster, 2001). When studying how culture empowered reader response, Brooks and Browne (2012) found that experiences with ethnic groups, communities, families, and peers influenced the way students positioned themselves in relation to Curtis' (1995) *The Watson's Go to Birmingham*. The study concluded that reading texts with appropriate cultural themes can initiate meaningful literary interpretation and cultural understanding and acceptance.

Literature Response Journals

Reading is fundamental to the writing process (Rosenblatt, 2005a), and journaling enables reader-writers to interpret and convey individual literary responses (Iskhak et al., 2017). Along with reading aloud and bibliotherapy, Daisey (1993) viewed journaling as one of three ways to foster literacy engagement at any age. Flitterman-King (1988) viewed response journals as a tool that enables readers to articulate responses that range from unconscious reactions to reflective examinations. Fischer's (2020) Readerly Explorations approach goes beyond literature response documentation and situates the reader as a "placemaker", engaging them in place-oriented investigative activities and reflecting on reader identity and place identity. When introducing the multifaceted nature of response journals to her own class, Flitterman-King (1988) elaborated:

...the response journal is a sourcebook, a repository for wanderings and wonderings, speculations, questionings—the more ragged, the more chaotic, the more speculative, the better; it is a place to explore thoughts, discover reactions, let the mind ramble—in effect, a place to make room for the unexpected. (p. 5).

Essentially, a literature response journal captures a "permanent record" of a reader's collection of thoughts regarding plot, characters, and personal connections (Hancock, 2008). Because thought and language are interconnected (Vygotsky, 1962), literature response journals are sensible avenues for releasing ideas while reading (Hancock, 1993b).

Written responses build on other response modes, like verbal response, and are positioned nearly at the top of the hierarchy of responses (Hancock, 2008). Whether responding to picturebooks or chapter books, readers must have time to articulate their oral responses in written form (Hancock, 2008). Written response expectations should be taught in a manner that does not

refute students' freedom of response but also offers guidance to explore various response options (Hancock, 2008). Table 2.1 presents literature response guidelines that honor student autonomy but also provide support for how they can respond to the text.

Table 2.1.

Guidelines for Literature Response Journals (adapted from Hancock, 1993a, p. 472)

-
- ***Feel free to write*** your innermost feelings, opinions, thoughts, likes, and dislikes. This is **your** journal. Feel the freedom to express yourself and your personal responses to reading through it.
 - ***Take the time to write*** down anything that you are thinking while you read. The journal is a way of recording those fleeting thoughts that pass through your mind as you interact with the book. Keep your journal close by and stop to write often, whenever a thought strikes you.
 - ***Don't worry*** about the accuracy of spelling and mechanics in the journal. The content and expression of your personal thoughts should be your primary concern. The journal will not be evaluated for a grade. **Relax and share.**
 - ***Record the page number*** on which you were reading when you wrote your response. Although it may seem unimportant, you might want to look back to verify your thoughts.
 - ***One side only*** of your notebook paper, please. Expect to read occasional interested comments from your teacher. These comments will not be intended to judge or criticize your reactions but will create an opportunity for us to "converse" about your thoughts.
 - ***Relate the book*** to your own experiences and share similar moments from your life or from books you have read in the past.
 - ***Ask questions*** while reading to help you make sense of the characters and events. Don't hesitate to wonder why, indicate surprise, or admit confusion. These responses often lead to an emerging understanding of the book.
 - ***Make predictions*** about what you think will happen as the plot unfolds. Validate, invalidate, or change those predictions as you proceed in the text. **Don't worry about being wrong.**
 - ***Talk to the characters*** as you begin to know them. Give them advice to help them. Put yourself in their place and share how you would act in a similar situation. Approve or disapprove of their values, actions, or behavior. Try to figure out what makes them react the way they do.
 - ***Praise or criticize*** the book, the author, or the writing style. Your personal tastes in literature are important and need to be shared.
 - ***There is no limit*** to the types of responses you may write. Your honesty in capturing your thoughts throughout the book is your most valuable contribution to the journal. These guidelines are meant to trigger, not limit, the kinds of things you write. Be yourself and share your personal responses to literature throughout your journal.
-

While some teachers and researchers have employed traditional paper-and-pencil response journals (Bennett et al., 2016; Farris et al., 1998; Hancock, 1992, 1993b; Martinez & Roser, 2008; McIntosh, 2010; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003; Wollman-Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1999), others were interested in adapting the conventional response journal to integrate available

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into the writing experiences. In her study, Larson (2010) explored readers' experiences reading Kindle books and using the Kindle note tool to respond to the texts. Lee (2012) utilized reading response e-journals as an innovative and engaging tool for college freshman learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to share personal and emotional connections while also collaborating with each other. Clarke (2014) made a case reader response 2.0 by discussing how technology tools, like digital story creators, blogs, or iMovie, can be used to create a product that reflects readers' constructed knowledge of texts. Regardless of what journal format was used, students were often encouraged to either read-aloud or discuss their writing with peers during the journaling process (Lee, 2012; Martinez & Roser, 2008; McIntosh, 2010; Wollman-Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1999).

Evaluating Reader Response Journals

Reader response evaluation can be just as challenging to execute as the reading process itself (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003; Squire, 1964). It has been argued that the emphasis on standardized assessments has contributed to ineffective reader response evaluation: "When we predetermine the understandings and responses that children should have, we end up assessing their alignment to our responses, not what is important about their responses" (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003, p. 66). Assessments should reveal students' literate abilities (Meek, 1988) rather than how their ideas align with the text (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003).

Hancock (1993, 2008) asserted that a teacher's written feedback is the most powerful component of using literature response journals. Whether teachers provide feedback in the margins of the notebook or on sticky notes, students need to know that their responses are acknowledged and treasured (Hancock, 2008). Teacher feedback helps maintain writing momentum and can inadvertently encourage students to think more critically about or grow from

their responses (Hancock, 2008). Along with written feedback, many teachers prefer using rubrics or checklists to assess reader responses (Hancock, 2008; McIntosh, 2010). Before teachers assess written student responses, they should establish specific criteria that will help to evaluate students' growing complexity of ideas and how their roles as "reader" plays a part in their responses (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003). Table 2.2 presents a compilation of hierarchies and categories generated from multiple researchers' work that can be used as a reader response checklist (Hancock, 2008; Purves & Ripperre, 1968; Sebesta et al., 1995; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003).

Table 2.2.

Evaluation Criteria for Reader Response (adapted from Serafini & Giorgis, 2003, p. 68).

Engaged/Involved Responses	Associative/ Intertextual Responses	Reflective/Evaluative Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retells story events • relives the experience of the story • immediately reacts (laughs, worries, etc.) • describes visual images created during the reading • makes predictions • follows along with character's actions and decisions • recalls specific events, language, and details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes connects to other stories and texts • makes connections to personal experience • relates story to events in the world • understands challenges the characters face • puts self in character's place; offers suggestions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluates character's motives • evaluates quality of story • infers author's intentions • develops themes • generalizes from literary experiences to life's experiences • analyzes own responses to text • reexamines own worldview • examines internal coherence of story • evaluates the relevance of story to one's life

Beginner responders tend to briefly retell or summarize the story plot after reading, with little to no attention to responding during reading, while *emerging responders'* responses show gradual growth in spontaneity and deeper immersion in the text (Hancock, 2008). Proficient readers (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003) or *maturing responders* (Hancock, 2008) can adopt multiple stances and ways of responding instinctively and emotionally to texts. Finally, *self-directed*

responders naturally and internally respond to texts in their minds and hearts, even if they are not keeping a physical record of their responses (Hancock, 2008).

Critical Literacy Theory

Critical literacy framework arguably has connections to both constructivist theory and reader response theory. Mellor and Patterson (2005) theorized critical literacy practices by embracing two principles that espouse similar characteristics to constructivism and reader response theory: “1) The conception of texts and readings as “made” or constructed, and 2) The idea that literature emerges not from a timeless, placeless zone but from a particular social context and is read in another context” (p. 461). Freire’s (1998b) views on literacy education have laid a foundation for both critical literacy and reader response practices, asserting that we should “never dichotomize cognition and emotion” (p. xviii) and that literacy enables our understanding of the social world and transforms our actions within it (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Lewis (2000) questioned Rosenblatt’s (1978/1994) understanding of the depth of aesthetic reading and perceived it to be “personal, pleasurable, and critical” (p. 257). McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004, 2020) argued that the reader response theory could adopt a third, more critical stance, in addition to Rosenblatt’s (1978/1994) efferent-aesthetic continuum. Reader response takes on a critical orientation when readers not only consider what the text means personally but also the intention(s) of the author (Kerkhoff, 2017; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, 2020; Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998). Bean and Moni (2003) argued that critical literacy “takes the reader beyond the bounds of reader response” (p. 643) and places the reader in a position of power to critique social disparities and individual identities (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, 2020). Similarly, Stewart et al. (2021) avowed that an action-oriented reader

response approach can promote critical consciousness, which signifies an individual's social awareness.

Critical literacy is a multidimensional theory and therefore, has been described in many ways. For example, Freebody (2005) described critical literacy as a tool derived from critical theory and designed to study the “what, why, how, and when” during reading and writing (p. 433). Vasquez et al. (2019) simply stated that critical literacy practices are “a way of being and doing” (p. 300) and vary depending on the students in the classroom and their geographic locations. Earlier work from Freire (1970) and Shor (1999) positioned critical literacy as a tool used to analyze practices of oppression and liberation, the distribution of power, challenge the status quo, and promote transformative action. More current research acknowledges the significant roles that digital technology and other communication medias play in evaluating and revolutionizing conventional rule systems, social practices (Luke, 2012; Marsh & Vasquez, 2012; Petrone & Bullard, 2012), cultural identities (Myers & Eberfors, 2010) and global perspectives (Vasquez et al., 2019).

Common Components of Critical Literacy

Critical literacy takes an “overtly political” approach to teaching and learning (Luke, 2012, p. 5) and many scholars have argued that social justice and equity are at the core of critical literacy framework (Behrman, 2006; Cho, 2015; Comber, 2015; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Luke, 2012; Luke & Woods, 2009; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, 2020; Mellor & Patterson, 2005; Vasquez et al., 2019). McLaughlin & DeVogd (2004) asserted that critical literacy encourages readers to reject passive acceptance to actively question an author's point of view and information that was both included and excluded from the text. Critical literacy education encourages students to view language as a social practice (Janks, 2014) and examine how

language and literacy are both catalysts for and products of social relations and power (Cho, 2015).

Examining Multiple Perspectives. As literacy classrooms become more diverse, multiple perspectives are used to enhance meaning-making (Riley, 2015) and discover how differences can set one another apart and create unity (Appleman, 2015). Since one story can take on completely different meanings depending on who is telling it (Appleman, 2015), literacy also utilizes multiple perspectives to introduce author subjectivities across texts (Behrman, 2006; Kerkhoff, 2017). In addition, it promotes empathy, as readers encounter diverse human narratives (Green, 1993, as cited in Appleman, 2015) and are encouraged to put themselves in others' shoes (Clarke & Whitney, 2009). Essentially, readers who are exposed to a variety of perspectives gain insight into different circumstances, opinions, and understandings and can strengthen their thinking skills (Appleman, 2015; McLaughlin, 2001, as cited in McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004).

Disrupting the Commonplace. Critical literacy is an approach to teaching and learning that seeks to disturb the status quo by using new and analytical frameworks to examine and revolutionize normative social standards and rule systems that are present in our everyday lives (Gee, 1990; Lewison et al., 2002; Luke, 2012). Readers challenge issues of power by questioning texts that represent dominant ideologies (Mellor & Patterson, 2005) and determining whose voices are underrepresented or absent from a text to subsequently uncover inequity and injustice (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). In addition to interrogating dominant perspectives, readers could also produce countertexts or counternarratives for underrepresented groups (Behrman, 2006). Finally, students consider their own positions while reading text (Luke & Freebody, 1997)

and engaging with popular culture and media (Alvermann et al., 2003; Marsh, 2000; Vasquez, 2000).

Emphasizing Sociopolitical Issues. “Teaching is not a neutral form of social practice” (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383); therefore, teachers must use literacy to engage students with everyday politics (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993) and the larger sociopolitical systems related to their lives (Boozer et al., 1999). While explaining why the act of reading is important, Freire and Macedo (1987) stated “reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world” (p. 29). This assertion suggests that to read critically, students must acknowledge the relationship between text and context (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Literacy should be used to bridge cultural identity and politics to increase readers’ consciousness (Giroux, 1993). Emphasizing sociopolitical issues requires readers to reach past their personal experiences to determine how their perceptions of text are impacted by the sociopolitical systems and power relationships around them (Lewison et al., 2002).

Promoting Social Action. Knowledge of the three other components of critical literacy inevitably will lead to the fourth and final dimension, which is acting for social justice (Behrman, 2006; Lewison et al., 2002). Building on Freire and Macedo’s (1978) advocacy for reading the word and reading the world, Lankshear and McLaren (1993) declared that we must “read the world” in order to “rewrite the world” (p. xviii) and Behrman (2006) perceived social action as a way for students to implement action outside the classroom to address their real-life concerns. Reading involves praxis, which encourages readers to take action to change the world (Freire, 1970). Acting for social justice requires students to utilize the power of their voices to interrogate issues of oppression and injustice and to improve their day to day lives (Comber,

2015). While acting to promoting social justice is considered a necessary step in applying critical literacy, it is crucial that students develop functional literacy skills (Delpit, 1995), which include the knowledge required to achieve success within an oppressive system while simultaneously using those skills to challenge the same system (North, 2015; Puechner, 2017; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Cho (2017) believed that students need to develop both functional literacy and critical literacy skills to combat social injustices.

Critical Curiosity and Critical Consciousness

Critical curiosity has been described as the willingness to understand issues of power and inequity and to use that knowledge to challenge dominating groups and systems (Freire, 1998a; Shor, 1992). Readers can make better sense of and find relevancy in a text when teachers instill curiosity in them (Freire, 1998b). Several researchers considered critical curiosity to be both a predecessor to and catalyst of Freire's (1970) process of conscientização, or critical consciousness development (Clark & Seider, 2017; Freire, 1970; Irwin, 2012; Lewis, 2012; Shor, 1992). Freire (1970) considered critical consciousness to be a tool used for reflecting and acting for social justice. Critical consciousness embodies "things and facts as they exist empirically, in their causal and circumstantial correlations" (Pinto, 1961, as cited in Freire, 1974/2005, p. 39), meaning the reality of tomorrow may not be the same as it is today (Freire, 1974/2005).

Critical Dialogue. Dialogue is a fundamental ingredient for developing literacy (Freire, 1974/2005) and awakening students' critical curiosity and critical consciousness (Shor, 1992). Critical dialogue allows for the de-socialization and re-socialization of teachers and students meaning they can un-learn, re-learn, deconstruct, and reconstruct their ideas surrounding sociocultural practices and values (Shor et al., 2017). Dialogue incites a critical disposition and promotes a loving, humble, hopeful, faithful, and trustworthy relationships (Freire, 1974/2005).

Freire (1970) urged teachers and students to collectively use dialogue to investigate real-world problems. Critical dialogue should not be compulsory (Shor et al., 2017); for students to learn from dialogue, they must be curious about the dialogue (Freire, 1970). Critical discussion requires the capacity and inclination to listen to and acknowledge one another's ideas (Bryars, 2017). Lastly, critical conversations have the potential to enhance critical consciousness and inspire immediate change (Kang & O'Neill, 2018).

Social Justice Education

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's ignited the pursuit of educational reform to create anti-discriminatory educational systems across the United States (Banks & Banks, 2013). Marginalized and oppressed communities demanded a fair distribution of resources and opportunities and social justice for all (Banks & Banks, 2013; Martin & Ngcobo, 2015). Banks and Banks (2013) described *multicultural education* as a complete school reform aiming to minimize prejudice and discrimination against oppressed communities. Similarly, Manning et al. (2017) defined multicultural education as both "a concept and deliberate process" (p. 5) intended to teach acceptance and appreciation for cultural, ethnic, gender, religious, sexual preference, socioeconomic, and special needs differences. Furthermore, learners must develop accountability and commitment toward preserving democratic principles (Manning et al., 2017).

As an extension to multicultural education Banks and Banks (2013) identified *multicultural social justice education* as an approach that explicitly teaches oppression and social structural inequality based on race, socioeconomic status, gender, and disability. Multicultural social justice education "actively practices democracy in the schools" (Banks & Banks, 2013, p. 51), promotes "democratic activism" (Sleeter, 2015, para 8), or serves as "direct social justice action and intervention" (Carlisle et al., 2006, p. 61). Along with maintaining democratic values,

multicultural social justice education teaches students how to examine their own personal inequalities, engages students in social action, and attempts to unite various oppressed communities through common interests (Banks & Banks, 2013). With similar values and beliefs, Dover (2016) referred to social justice education as “justice-oriented teaching/curriculum” (p. 518). With slightly different names and priorities, these approaches all have one common goal, which is to promote equity (Dover, 2016) and attempt to level the playing field for all learners (Martin & Ngcobo, 2015).

Social Justice Literacies

To maintain a classroom that values equity and high-quality education for all students, teachers must understand that social justice is “an orientation towards democracy, equality, ecology, and peace” (Shor et al., 2017, p. S16). Moreover, teachers should acknowledge that social practices can be taught and learned; therefore, social justice literacies should be present in school classrooms and instruction (Boyd, 2017). In fact, it is not enough for teachers and students to believe in social justice; they must practice it (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009). Social justice literacies are situated within the realm of critical literacies (Comber, 2015) and new literacies (Hines & Johnson, 2007; Street, 2014), as they relate to social and political dispositions, competencies, and practices (Hines & Johnson, 2007; Street, 2014). Because each classroom serves a diverse set of students and teachers each have unique experiences and interactions with the world, social justice literacies will vary from classroom to classroom (Boyd, 2017).

As individuals navigate their social worlds, they employ various literacies necessary to survive, challenge, and dismantle practices and systems they encounter (Johnson, 2012). Hines and Johnson (2007) characterized two types of literacies that support social justice teaching and

learning: *systems literacies* and *strategic literacies*. Systems literacies enable individuals to understand how individual behaviors are separate from oppressive systems of power (Hines & Johnson, 2007). For example, students who employ systems literacies understand that racism is inherently a symptom of structural, rather than individual, discrimination (Johnson, 2012). Strategic literacies allow for teachers to use their knowledge of specific people, situations, and contexts to make sound educational decisions that promote action within and against a system (Hines & Johnson, 2007). Teachers use strategic literacies cultivate community and to promote, personify, and execute change (Hines & Johnson, 2007).

North (2015) identified five types of social justice literacies: *functional literacy*, *critical literacy*, *relational literacy*, *democratic literacy*, and *visionary literacy*. Functional literacy refers to students' mathematical, reading, writing, and communication competencies within a growing economy and society (North, 2015). North (2015) positions critical literacy within the systemic economic and social contexts, and describes it as the ability to recognize, interrogate, and fight against social injustices. Relational literacy attends to the emotional qualities of social justice and strive to build respectful rapport and trust between teachers and students (North, 2015). While often viewed as an element of functional literacy, North's (2015) definition of democratic literacy promotes political activism at the local, national, and global levels. Finally, visionary literacy encourages students to find hope in difficult situations and to embrace the possibilities that lie ahead (North, 2015).

Dimensions of Social Justice Education

Social justice education allows for teachers and students to engage in curriculum that explores both individual human rights and social activist movements (Skinner & Bromley, 2019). Several educational frameworks have been designed and implemented to teach for social

justice (Banks & Banks, 2013; Carlisle et al., 2006; Dover, 2013, 2015; Gay, 2018; Picower, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Sleeter, 2015). While many social justice curricula share common characteristics, there is not one consolidated approach to teaching for social justice (Carlisle et al., 2006; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009). After synthesizing a variety of frameworks, Dover (2013, 2015) identified *curriculum*, *pedagogy*, and *social action* as three broad dimensions of social justice education.

Curricula

Social justice curricula make connections between curricular standards and social justice issues and engages in “liberatory education” (Carlisle et al., 2006, p. 57), which intentionally teach about historically oppressive and inequitable systems and practices (Dover, 2013, 2015; Picower, 2012). Social justice curricula allow for students to assess their own identities and positionalities within the world (Ayers, 2009). Students’ cultural differences are seen as “assets” (Teal & Obidah, 2008, as cited in Gay, 2018), and their individual and social identities are embedded in their schoolwork (Banks & Banks, 2013; Gay, 2018; Picower, 2012). Within social justice curricula, students of diverse backgrounds and cultures are “validated and affirmed” (Gay, 2018), and are all held to high standards that inspire their individual and academic development (Carlisle et al., 2006; Gay, 2018; Sleeter, 2015).

Pedagogy

Social justice pedagogy cultivates an inclusive and respectful classroom environment (Carlisle et al., 2006; Gay, 2018; Picower, 2012; Sleeter, 2015) that invites multiple perspectives, employs critical thinking and investigation skills, and fosters cognitive, emotional, and civic progress (Ayers, 2009; Dover, 2013, 2015; Gay, 2018; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Teachers adapt their teaching styles to accommodate to various cultural and social needs (Banks & Banks,

2013). Rather than “celebrate” diversity, students are empowered to examine the oppression of underserved communities (Picower, 2012). In addition, students and teachers actively reflect on and confront their own implicit biases and social oppressions (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009).

Social Action

When education is combined with social action, teachers promote students’ social justice awareness and social action through their own activism (Chubbuck, 2010; Dover, 2013, 2015). Students learn about epochal social movements and how they could promote unity and change (Picower, 2012) and envision themselves in positions that transform society (Ayers, 2009; Carlisle et al., 2006; Freire, 1970). Teachers and students strive to achieve allyship and advocate for marginalized groups (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Schools function as social systems (Banks & Banks, 2013) and develop a reciprocal and trustworthy partnership with surrounding communities to address social justice issues that diminish student learning (Chubbuck, 2010; Carlisle et al., 2006; Sleeter, 2005).

Student and Teacher Response to Social Justice

Educators who are well-intentioned advocates for social justice sometimes face resistance when attempting to employ equitable practices in the classroom. Research shows that pressure from standardized and high stakes testing limits teachers’ autonomy to implement curricula that promote critical thinking skills necessary to analyze societal inequalities and act on them (Banks & Banks, 2013; Carlisle et al., 2006; Dillon, 2016; Dover, 2016; Sleeter, 2015). In addition to high demands to perform proficiently on state assessments, educators who try to implement a social justice curriculum also receive pushback from administration, community members, and students’ families (Williamson, 2017). Classroom teachers’ lack of institutional power often leaves them feeling isolated in their social justice teaching, resulting in inconsequential change

(Williamson, 2017). Octavia, a high school language arts teacher who experienced isolation in her social justice endeavors, was determined to deliver equity-driven instruction to all her students. (Williamson, 2017). Even though she taught two courses on different academic levels, Octavia implemented the same social justice curriculum in her “Pre-AP” and “regular” classes (Williamson, 2017, p. 109). Despite the pressure to prepare for standardized tests, Octavia’s students read and analyzed contemporary literature that focused on issues of power and racial discrimination.

Clark and Seiders’ (2017) study found that adolescents’ critical curiosity was sparked by learning about social justice issues, like capitalism, heterosexualism, and social inequalities. Students wanted to learn from a curriculum that was relevant to their cultures, revealed the truth, and gave them a new outlook on the world around them (Clark & Seider, 2017). Williamson’s (2017) findings reported that students exhibited contempt when they felt like instruction only focused on one racial group. Additionally, students showed resistance when race and discrimination were the only social justice topics they learned about (Williamson, 2017). When it comes to learning in a social justice-oriented classroom, students need their teachers to listen and build respectful rapport, provide autonomy, and share multiple perspectives with them. (Cook-Sather, 2010; Shields & Hesbol, 2020).

Identifying Necessary Support and Resources

Educators need administrative and community support, as well as appropriate educational resources to successfully execute social justice curriculum. District and administrative support should start with day-to-day interactions inside classrooms, not in judicial buildings or even inside principals’ offices (Williamson, 2017). District and school-wide policy must reflect social justice principles to encourage teachers to reach the highest levels of social justice education

(Dillon, 2016). Banks and Banks (2013) described school as a “social system” (p. 24) and believed they must seek community participation and contribution to adopt social justice reform. Sleeter (2015) argued that teachers who advocate for social justice should establish “reciprocal relationships” (para 4) with students and their families in the community. In addition to administrative and community support, students need to be granted opportunities to be fully active participants in the creation and execution of the curriculum (Cook-Sather, 2010; Martin & Ngcobo, 2015; Williamson, 2017).

Collaborative effort and social justice dispositions alone will not guarantee student success; proper educational resources must also be accessible to students (Dillon, 2016). Students need authentic curricular materials that enhance their self-identities (Manning et al., 2017; Shields & Hesbol, 2020), incorporate their interests, represent their cultural backgrounds and every-day life, and encourage them to use their existing abilities to reach their full potential (Martin & Ngcobo, 2015). These materials should accommodate both intellectual and emotional needs (Manning et al., 2017). Necessary school-level materials might include relevant and rich reading materials, like books, newspapers, and other sources that integrate social justice education into the classroom (Dillon, 2016; Williamson, 2017). In her teaching for social justice study, Dover (2016) found that secondary teachers can successfully integrate social justice themes with English Language Arts (ELA) Common Core standards and skills. Although this study only focuses on ELA standards, Dover (2016) notes that “standards-based, justice-oriented” curricula can be implemented across all content area subjects (p. 525).

Promoting Social Justice as Best Practice

Aside from educational resources, it has been reported that teachers lack appropriate professional development and training to effectively promote social justice in the classroom

(Alsup & Miller, 2014; Carlisle et al., 2006; Dillon, 2016). Martin and Ngcobo (2015) acknowledged that it is challenging for educators to expand their knowledge of social justice, especially without the proper training. Alsup and Miller (2014) believed that teacher preparation is not just about learning how to design lesson plans; pre-service educators should also develop social justice dispositions. Likewise, Williamson (2017) agreed that policymakers should support social justice training beginning in pre-service teacher programs and continuing into in-service teaching. Because teachers need to feel supported and valued, Dillon (2016) and Williamson (2017) both advocated for more professional learning communities (PLCs) and collaborative relationships in schools. In addition to teachers, administrators and policymakers should educate themselves on social justice best practice (Sleeter & Stillman, 2007, as cited in Dillon, 2016). Professional development should be ongoing and accommodate to the diverse learners teachers encounter year after year (Banks & Banks, 2013).

Teachers employing social justice efforts must face “deficit ideologies about culturally and linguistically diverse populations typical in urban schools, where ‘urban’ can become a racialized code for bad, dangerous, or struggling” (Milner, 2012, as cited in Williamson, 2017, p. 105). In other words, educators must recognize negative stereotypes surrounding urban education. Banks and Banks (2013) insisted that teachers spend time in the communities and homes of their students to better understand their unique challenges and circumstances that might affect their education. Lynn Carroll, a high school principal in a large urban school district, set an example for destigmatizing urban school stereotypes. She offered first-year teachers explicit training related to English Language Learner instruction, as well as other trainings related to trauma, cultural sensitivity, and privilege (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Kinloch and Dixon (2018) conducted a study that implemented the Bringing Learning to Life (BLTL) professional

development initiative in a Midwest urban school district and learned that teachers were able to combat injustice through collaborative critical inquiry, professional development, action research, and community-based projects.

Executing Social Justice Education Curriculum

Teachers and administrators each have important roles and responsibilities when implementing social justice curricula. Together, they must work to corroborate equitable allocation of resources and learning opportunities for all students (Martin & Ngcobo, 2015). Both teachers and administrators should examine their own cultures, as well as implicit biases, assumptions, and stereotypes that might impact their work and relationships with students (Banks & Banks, 2013). They must also critique the importance and effectiveness of standardized assessments and evaluate the amount of emphasis put on them and how it impacts their social justice teaching efforts (Dillon, 2016; Williamson, 2017).

In their study on school leadership transformation, Shields and Hesbol (2020) reported that to create “deep and equitable change” (p. 16) it is imperative that administrators establish respect and rapport with students, school staff, families, and community members. School leaders should continuously be involved in both the school and public communities to accommodate to students’ cognitive and affective needs (Carlisle, 2006; Shields & Hesbol, 2020). In her high school, principal Lynn Carroll used restorative justice to maintain an inclusive and loving environment for staff and students (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Carroll also employed three campus-wide student advocates to make certain that students always feel supported by an adult (Shields & Hesbol, 2020).

Read-Alouds

Though different in nature, *reading aloud* and *read-aloud* are often used as interchangeable terms (Slay & Morton, 2020). Reading aloud is an act (Slay & Morton, 2020) or the art of verbally sharing a print text (Roney, 2001) while a read-aloud is a best practice instructional tool (Johnston, 2015; Slay & Morton, 2020). Fisher et al. (2020) affirmed that *read-alouds* are different from *shared readings*. Students do not have access to the text during read-alouds but can see the entire text during shared readings (Fisher et al., 2020). Similarly, Roney (2001) maintained that the audience may not always have full admission to the text during read-alouds. Routman (1991) described shared reading experiences as “rewarding reading situations” in which the text is accessible to students, they observe their teachers reading it aloud prosodically, and are encouraged to read along (p. 33). *Teacher read-alouds* may be labeled as *listening while reading* when teachers read aloud out of textbooks that students have access to, because students are encouraged to follow along silently as they listen to their teacher read (Ariail & Albright, 2006; Dowhower, 1987).

Traditional Read-Aloud Versus Interactive Read-Aloud

A traditional read-aloud positions students as passive listeners, with little text involvement and interaction during the reading (Barrentine, 1996). Sometimes teachers read aloud texts without interruption to sustain enjoyment (Santoro et al., 2008) or use read-alouds as a calming mechanism (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003). When facilitating a traditional read-aloud, teachers might choose to facilitate discussions at the conclusion of the reading to allow students to reflect, ask questions, and make personal connections (Barrentine, 1996). On the other hand, an interactive read-aloud encourages the teacher and students to respond to a text actively and spontaneously while it is being read (Fisher et al., 2020; Wright, 2019). Barrentine (1996)

compared the nature and intent of interactive read-alouds to instructional conversations, where the nature of the literature discussion is conversational.

Fountas and Pinnell (2021) described an interactive read-aloud as “the foundation of a community that shares literary understandings through thinking and talking together” (para 2). Essentially, interactive read-alouds help cultivate a classroom of engaged learners. Cambourne (1988) argued that rather than passively soak up information, students must actively interact with and respond personally and interpersonally to the text. Students tend to be better listeners if they interact with the text during, not after the text is read (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). Gambrell et al. (2000) espoused that the success of read-alouds depends on the quality of the interactions that take place during the reading. Interactive read-alouds empower students to “read to learn *as* they learn to read” (Wright, 2019, p. 4). In other words, students simultaneously learn *how* to read and learn *from* the text. Elliot-Johns and Puig (2015) took interactive read-alouds one step further by facilitating *collaborative read-alouds*. A collaborative read-aloud combines techniques from both interactive read-alouds and Readers’ Theater to foster student interest and engagement (Elliot-Johns & Puig, 2015).

Read-Alouds as Effective Instructional Tools

According to Anderson et al. (1985), reading aloud is “the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading” (p. 23). Reading aloud is particularly critical for reluctant readers (Clark & Andreasen, 2014), students who cannot read for themselves (Ariail & Albright, 2006), culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Delacruz, 2013) and students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Sun, 2020). Teachers who read aloud demonstrate prosodic reading by emphasizing proper expression, pacing, and intonation (Dollins, 2014; Johnston, 2015; Laminack, 2017). When teachers read aloud, students

experience a book being read by the most fluent voice in the room (Laminack, 2017) and can grasp how pacing, inflection, and rhythm contribute to fluent reading and comprehension (Dollins, 2014). Teachers who read-aloud become a source from which favorable feelings toward reading are shared (Marchessault & Larwin, 2014) and consequently turn students on to reading (Easley, 2004).

Read-alouds are oral language opportunities (Santoro et al., 2008) that alleviate the stress of reading performance, allowing students more time to focus on comprehension (Marchessault & Larwin, 2014). Students' listening skills are generally higher than their reading skills until they reach middle grades (Coiro, 2011; Layne, 2015; Trelease, 2019). When students "listen up" (Layne, 2015, p. 55) or hear texts read one to two grade levels above their own, they are exposed to vocabulary more advanced than what they would encounter in their grade-level texts. Beck and McKeown (2001) viewed read-alouds as the "most highly recommended activity for encouraging language and literacy" (p. 10). Students encounter more sophisticated words through read-alouds than they do through spoken language (Senechal et al., 1996; Trelease, 2019). As teachers read aloud, they use think-alouds to model the thought processes they use to determine the meaning of unknown words (Johnston, 2015; Lapp et al, 2008). Finally, Johnston (2015) suggested that allowing students to fully engage in dialogue about the text will maximize read-aloud events. It is vital that students interact with read-alouds and use critical thinking skills to make text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections (Marchessault & Larwin, 2014).

Read-Alouds as Agents of Critical Literacy

Critical literacy is a collaborative process that involves exploratory dialogue about shared texts (Riley, 2015). Interactive read-alouds endorse several key tenants of critical literacy, like examining multiple perspectives, challenging the status quo, focusing on sociopolitical issues,

humanizing others, and promoting social action (Appleman, 2015; Lewison et al., 2002; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004; Mellor & Patterson, 2005; Riley, 2015). For example, interactive read-alouds allow students to examine multiple perspectives and interpretations presented by the text and their peers rather than one fixed meaning (Glazier & Seo, 2005; Medina, 2010; Norris, 2020; Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015; Sipe, 2000). Bryars (2017) asserted that critical response requires a student's inclination and capacity to listen and give credence to another individual's thoughts. Moreover, read-aloud events offer students opportunities to learn about their own lives and the world around them vicariously through the story's language, characters, and events (Norris, 2020; Sipe, 2008) and critically think about and discuss the sociopolitical issues in the text (Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015).

Purposeful Text Selection

Over 50 years ago, Nancy Larrick (1965), former president of the International Reading Association, declared that for children to connect to literature, they must see themselves in the characters. In her article that criticized the lack of racial representation in published children's literature, Larrick (1965) wrote, "Across the country, 6,340,000 non-white children are learning to read and to understand the American way of life in books which either omit them entirely or scarcely mention them" (p. 62). The lack of racial diversity in literature is not only damaging to non-White children, but it also maintains a message of White dominance and power (Larrick, 1965). Years later, Bishop's (1990) metaphor that views books as "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" echoes Larrick's (1965) sentiments. Readers should be at the center of the reading experience (Rosenblatt, 1995); therefore, books serve as self-affirming mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors that connect the readers to characters and worlds like and unlike their own (Bishop, 1990).

Johnson et al. (2017) linked Bishop’s (1990) “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” to Freire’s (1970) notion that *conscientização* or critical consciousness inspires humans to learn about the world and act upon its social and political contradictions. To maximize critically literate read-alouds, Adichie (2009) and Tschida et al. (2014) argued that teachers must discontinue “single story” or monocultural reading and present stories from multiple viewpoints and cultures to disprove negative or untrue stereotypes. Text selection should include literature written by or about people from marginalized groups (Boston & Baxley, 2007) that connect students from different backgrounds and cultures (Arnold & Sableski, 2020, p. 22) and challenge the status quo (Meller et al., 2009). Many texts are not critical in nature (Meller et al., 2009), so it is important that teachers take a critical stance, avowing the existence of societal inequities while preparing to address these topics through discussion (May & Bingham 2014). A great place to look for high quality literature that celebrates non-White cultures and marginalized groups are book award lists like the Coretta Scott King Award and Honor, Pura Belpré Award, and the Jane Addams Children’s Book Award (Boyd et al., 2015; Kesler et al., 2020).

Dialogue

After teachers choose appropriate and meaningful texts to read aloud, they must create a safe space to facilitate critically literate read-alouds with a disposition that embraces vulnerability and values listening and learning from student voices, responding to what they say, and guiding them to build on multiple experiences and viewpoints (Boyd & Galda, 2011; Dressel, 2005; May & Bingham, 2014; Neumann, 2009; Norris, 2020; Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2019). Purposeful text selection and discussion exposes students to diverse perspectives and populations and help promote empathy and cultivate strong classroom communities (Johnston, 2015; Laminack, 2019; Lopez & Friedman, 2019; Walther,

2019). When interacting with the text and each other, students analyze social justice issues unreservedly, empathize with others, co-construct meaning without instilling in them a certain set of beliefs or opinions, and increase their worldly knowledge by learning more about themselves and others (Bryars, 2017; Coiro, 2000; Duursma et al., 2008; Kesler et al., 2020; Lopez & Friedman, 2019; Neumann, 2009).

Questioning

To promote critical literacy, teachers should invite students to respond to the text by posing open-ended “what, when, where, and why” prompts (Johnston, 2015; Laminack, 2019; Walther, 2019). Unlike literal-level questions that narrow the discussion to only what the book renders (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003), unrestricted questions like “What do you think?” to allow for more fluid responses (Neumann, 2009). Teachers should also prepare more specific questions in case the general questions fail to kickstart conversation (Meller et al., 2009; Neumann, 2009; Sipe, 2008). Finally, when preparing questions, teachers should consider the number of questions they ask and why, because posing too many questions can hinder a good discussion (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003).

Serafini and Giorgis (2003) proposed three types of questions that both teachers and older students can ask to examine texts in new ways: *author and text based*, *reader based*, and *world based*. Readers’ responses to each type of question involve making connections within different contexts; inferential or inductive connections within the text, affective and perceptual connections to oneself, and connections related to real-world problems, events, and experiences. Among other comprehension strategies, making connections is viewed as best practices in reading instruction (Trinkle, 2009). Furthermore, these three types of questions encourage

students to view texts from an aesthetic point of view, which, according to Rosenblatt (2005a) elevates reading comprehension.

Table 2.3 offers examples of each of the three question categories:

Table 2.3.

Question Types (Adapted from Serafini & Giorgis, 2003, p. 59)

Author and Text Based	Reader Based	World Based
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some important ideas in the story? • What is the author trying to tell you? • How did the author describe the character? • What is the setting and plot of the story? • What is the main character like? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think this story is about? • How did you feel as you read the story? • What connections (personal/literary) did you make as you were reading? • Do the characters remind you of anyone? • How would you have acted if you were the main character? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are any of the characters privileged or marginalized? • What attitudes or worldviews are endorsed/diminished? • What assumptions are taken for granted? • How are critical issues (race, gender, class, ethnicity) dealt with?

Audiobooks as Read-Alouds

As literacy continues to evolve in a technology-rich society, teachers must find ways to adapt reading instruction to facilitate new ways of communication and collaboration (Larson, 2015). Therefore, teachers should consider other read-aloud modalities. Audiobooks are of the same quality as print text because they deliver the same content but in a different form (Baskin & Harris, 1995; Cooper, 1993; Grover & Hannegan, 2012). Much like interactive read-alouds, audiobooks introduce students to text beyond their independent reading levels (Grover & Hannegan, 2012; Serafini, 2004); activate background knowledge (Moore & Cahill, 2016); support critical listening skills (Trelease, 2019; Wolfson, 2008); foster language and vocabulary development (Serafini, 2004; Trelease, 2019; Wolfson, 2008); stimulate conversation (Serafini, 2004; Trelease, 2019); and increase the connections between spoken and written literacies (Frey & Fisher, 2006). Comparable to read-alouds, audiobooks level the playing field for all learners,

especially for English Language Learners, struggling readers, and students with impaired sight (Kuehl, 2020).

Although some people may disagree, Moyer (2011) maintained that listening to audiobooks constitutes as “real reading” while Irwin (2009) argued that listening to books is just as good, if not better, than reading print text. The different dialects and voices employed in audiobooks captures listeners’ attention and draws them into the story (Baskin & Harris; 1995; Serafini, 2004). If audiobooks are narrated by the author of the text, the overall ambience of the read-aloud experience is elevated and the book comes to life (Baskin & Harris, 1995; Trelease, 2019). Rather than completely replace print text, audiobooks should be used in conjunction with text-based reading (Mediatore, 2003; Pederson & Have, 2012). Audiobook reading can be employed during whole group instruction, individual learning (Moore & Cahill, 2016; Serafini, 2004), or with flexible grouping (Larson, 2015).

The Global Read-Aloud

The Global Read Aloud (GRA) is a world-wide initiative that uses technology to enhance the read-aloud experience. Author and teacher, Pernille Ripp (n.d.), started the GRA in 2010 to encourage teachers of all grade levels and disciplines to engage in read-alouds to form as many global connections as possible (Ripp, n.d.). During a six-week period in October and November of every year, teachers around the world read aloud the same book and use technology to connect with at least one other class to read and discuss the text. In the last few years, Ripp (n.d.) started sharing up to four-chapter book titles and one picturebook author, then classroom teachers had the autonomy to select the most appropriate books for their class. The GRA promotes global awareness by providing opportunities for students and teachers across the world to learn with and

from each other (Carpenter & Justice, 2017a). As of 2015, at least sixty countries participated in the GRA initiative (Carpenter & Justice, 2017a).

To connect with other classrooms synchronously and asynchronously, teachers have utilized a variety of technology tools including Edmodo, Google Hangouts, Skype, Twitter, Padlet, and Flipgrid (Carpenter & Justice, 2017b; Renwick, 2012; Ripp, n.d.). Carpenter and Justice (2017a) reported that the technology component of the GRA created transactional experiences for readers. Transactional experiences included the exchange of diverse perspectives through multiple language arts, including reading, writing, speaking, listening (Carpenter & Justice, 2017a). While students shared information and ideas, they were strengthening their critical literacy skills and intercultural understandings (Carpenter & Justice, 2017a, Kerkhoff, 2017). Lastly, Carpenter and Justice (2017b) also revealed that the use of technology had even influenced communication between the students and the authors of the selected GRA texts. Authors have responded to GRA discussions on social media platforms like Twitter or classroom blogs and recorded themselves reading the GRA text on YouTube to share within the GRA community (Carpenter & Justice, 2017b). The GRA project uses technology to encourage cross-cultural interactions among students and teachers across the world and maximize student learning opportunities while reading a common text.

Read-Alouds as Text Sets

When implementing thematic units, teachers often gather multiple reading materials to teach and share content with students, as Moss (1995) indicated, “Teachers read aloud to convey content in thematic units” (as cited in Barrentine, 1996, p. 36). This collection of texts is often referred to as a *text set* (Cummins, 2017; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003). *Intertextuality* refers to the relationship that each text has with other texts in the set (Laminack, 2019). The completion of

one book prepares students for the books that follow (Laminack, 2019). Text sets can consist of a picturebooks and/or chapter books (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003), news and/or magazine articles, excerpts from books, or diagrams (Cummins, 2017), graphic novels (Jacobson, 2020), and other multimodal texts (Lannin et al., 2020) that focus on similar themes or topics. Incorporating text sets into content area subjects will help develop critical thinking and synthesis skills while deepening students' comprehension and learning (Cummins, 2017; Laminack, 2019; Nichols, 2009).

Classroom teachers use read-aloud text sets for various reasons and purposes. Author and educator Laura Robb (2008) used biography read-aloud text sets to introduce issues and to differentiate instruction within a unit of study. For example, she read aloud four books written from different perspectives that portray strong characters who are “change makers” (Robb, 2008). Sara Lewis-Bernstein Young (2018) maintained that “one book is never enough” (p. 44), especially when supporting bilingual and dual language learners. She read aloud sets of books written in multiple languages that portray common themes of social injustice, activism, and agency (Young, 2018). High school history teacher Debra Schneider used picturebook text sets to discuss World War II and Japanese internment (Zehr, 2010). Her students reported that they preferred learning content from the picturebook read-alouds over reading out of a textbook (Zehr, 2010).

Read-Alouds in Secondary Education

Students should be read to unceasingly throughout their K-12 careers (Anderson et al., 1985; Daisy, 1993; Routman, 1991; Trelease, 2019). Unfortunately, as students advance through school, their encounters with read-alouds decline and are often replaced with standardized test preparation (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003; Trelease, 2019). Contrary to many teachers' beliefs,

Anderson et al. (1985) found that reading aloud to children improves standardized test scores. Elley's (1992) *How in the World Do Students Read?* study compared high- and low-test scores at the 9-year-old level and the 14-year-old-level, and showed that in high achieving countries, the reading scores were higher at the 9-year-old level than the 14-year-old level. Teacher read-alouds were one of the contributing factors to the younger students' higher scores (Elley, 1992). Daisy (1993) viewed reading aloud as one of three ways to promote literacy at any age, alongside dialogue journals and bibliotherapy. Reading aloud in secondary education supports reader development (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003); enhances independent reading motivation, engagement, and interest (Albright & Ariail, 2005); provides stress-free opportunities to discuss difficult topics and make real-world connections (Trelease, 2019); promotes a wide range of reading materials across multiple content areas (Baumann & Duffy, 1997; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003); and increases background knowledge across content areas (Albright, 2002; Fisher et al., 2002).

Challenges and Limitations

Implementing read-alouds in secondary education classrooms does not come without its challenges. Perhaps one of the greatest obstacles in upper grade classrooms is time (Routman, 1991). Due to scheduling and limited class time, secondary teachers tend to read aloud shorter texts such as articles, picturebooks, poems, excerpts from novels or textbooks, or short stories (Routman, 1991; Easley, 2004; Erickson, 1996; Miller, 2013). Ninth-grade teacher and author CJ Reynolds (2018) read aloud short pieces of writing like song lyrics and poetry to teach imagery. Easley (2004) read aloud Richard Carlson's (2000) *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff for Teens* because of the short book chapters. For the sake of time, secondary teachers also pair read-alouds with other interactional activities (Lapp & Fisher, 2009). For example, Elliot-Johns and Puig

(2015) employed collaborative read-alouds that combined interactive read-aloud and Readers' Theater techniques. In their collaborative read-alouds, they read crossover picturebooks together. (Elliot-Johns & Puig, 2015). Crossover picturebooks are generally narrative texts with controversial characters and social issues that appeal to both younger and older readers (Beckett, 2021; Bintz & Ciecierski, 2021). Reynolds (2018) read aloud play scripts like John Steinbeck's (1937) *Of Mice and Men* with his students then assigned readings from the corresponding novel as homework. High school teacher Stephen Dreher (2003) offered a read-aloud option when his students participated in novel studies. Every day, students had autonomy to choose if they wanted to be read to, to join a shared reading aloud group or to read silently by themselves (Dreher, 2003). Dreher (2003) noted that the biggest challenge with offering student autonomy is finding the physical space for the three different groups to read without disturbing each other.

The Appeal of Picturebook Read-Alouds

The spelling of *picturebook* as a compound word, rather than two separate words (e.g., *picture book*, *picture-book*) symbolizes the inseparable relationship between art and text (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007). Billman (2002) and Senokossoff (2013) argued that many picture books are not always written for young children. Many picturebooks cover serious and mature topics, like physical and drug abuse, violence, suicide (Lightsey et al., 2006). Conversely, Rosenblatt (1938/1995) positioned picturebooks as a child's gateway into the world. Bishop and Hickman (1992) and Sipe (2012) maintained that picturebooks are not just for young children but are enjoyable and aesthetically pleasing for all ages. Massey (2015) stated that picturebooks require readers to employ multiple literacies and can serve as scaffolding tools with older readers.

High quality picturebooks introduce strong vocabulary and syntax structure (Carr et al., 2001; Massey, 2015), offer complex and detailed artwork (Ranck-Buhr, 2013), serve as writing mentor texts (Dorfman & Capelli, 2009; Premont, 2016; Saunders, 1999), boost student motivation and learning (Carr et al., 2001; Massey, 2015), rouse critical thinking and discussion (Richardson, 2000), and can be utilized across content areas (Massey, 2015; Ray, 1999). Unlike textbooks, many picturebooks used in secondary social studies classrooms capture students' interest by focusing on single topics relating to culture, history, and politics (Martinez et al., 2000). Laminack and Wadsworth (2006) viewed picturebooks as a "curriculum bridge" that connects content area learning (p. ix). The short structure, specific topics, and visual attractiveness make picturebook read-alouds an ideal instructional tool for content-area teachers (Alvermann & Phelps, 2002; Neal & Moore, 1991, as cited in Albright, 2002; McCormick & McTigue, 2011).

The Importance of Nonfiction Read-Alouds

Most texts read beyond secondary school are informational (Hancock, 2008; Press et al., 2011; Smith, 2000), therefore, reading and extracting information from nonfiction texts are essential skills (Duke, 2004; Moss, 2003). Students often fail to demonstrate proficient comprehension of nonfiction texts as they advance through middle and high school (Miller, 2013). Even though students naturally enjoy nonfiction literature that elicits emotional responses (Abrahamson & Carter, 1991), their interests in many content areas decrease as they enter middle school (Logan & Skamp, 2005; Murphy & Beggs, 2003; Palmer & Stewart, 2005). Secondary teachers should make time to read aloud nonfiction texts (Maloch & Bomer, 2013; Meehan, 2006) because actively reading and discussing nonfiction texts builds background knowledge (Duke et al., 2003); promotes higher level thinking (Albright, 2002) and critical literacy skills

(Lloyd & Wertsch, 2016); and improves student comprehension, engagement, and content learning (Maloch & Bomer, 2012). Compared to realistic fiction stories, reading nonfiction often requires a much higher level of thinking, so teachers should consider students' background knowledge when planning for nonfiction read-alouds (Layne, 2015). Rather than passively wait for a fictional story to develop, students' schema actively contributes to their interactions with nonfiction texts (Stead, 2014).

To ensure students have access to textbook information during class, many content area teachers either engage students in instructional activities or teacher read-alouds (McCulley et al., 2012, as cited in Reed et al., 2014). Despite their widespread popularity in secondary schools, textbooks are not the only nonfiction texts that should be read aloud to students (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Miller, 2013; Stewart, 1994). A variety of sources can be used as nonfiction read-alouds, including biographical and autobiographical picturebooks and poems; literary nonfiction picturebooks and chapter books; nonfiction trade books; magazine and news articles; book reviews; and diaries (Maloch & Bomer, 2013; NGA & CCSSO, 2010; Sanacore; 1996; Trelease, 2019; Tribunella & Hintz, 2015). As technology demands become more prevalent in and out of school, teachers should consider reading aloud and modeling how to interact with nonfiction digital texts (Cardullo et al., 2017). Teachers who read aloud nonfiction digital texts can show students how to navigate virtual text features, model close reading of complex texts, and foster the development of metacognitive processes (Cardullo et al., 2017).

Content Area Read-Alouds

Serafini and Giorgis (2003) viewed reading aloud as a practice that establishes groundwork for lessons and exploration. Richardson (2000) believed reading aloud brings a new level of excitement, relevance, and applicability when implemented across content areas. Vacca

et al. (2011) claimed that students are more likely to read other texts on the same topic after hearing a book read aloud. However, not all scholars are in favor of reading loud in the classroom. Frager (2010) argued against reading aloud in secondary content areas, stating that despite the efficiency and broad distribution of information that oral reading provides, it is an “empty promise” that “leads to passivity” (pp. 29-30). Because readers construct meaning through their own experiences with text, Frager (2010) argued that the oral reading of a text by anyone other than the students themselves could weaken their understandings. Similarly, Jago (2000) maintained that teachers should not read aloud whole pieces of literature because the students end up reading less. Armbruster and Wilkinson (1991) and Frager (2010) asserted that active silent reading reigns supreme over reading aloud.

While most of the existing research demonstrates the usefulness of reading aloud across content areas, literature also reveals mixed results among secondary teachers’ opinions and attitudes towards reading aloud. Contradictory to Marchessault and Larwin’s (2014) assertion that literacy improvement is a team effort when it comes to supporting secondary students, Ariail and Albright (2006) stated that many middle-school content area teachers do not even think about reading aloud, find reading aloud inappropriate for the subjects they teach, or disregard it altogether due to time constraints. Warner et al. (2015) found that despite lack of training, the participating high school content area teachers felt confident in their abilities to read aloud during class. In the same study, Warner et al. (2015) revealed that high school teachers generally read aloud to reinforce instruction rather than for enjoyment or class control. Ariail and Albright (2006) reported that most middle school teachers surveyed read aloud to both enhance comprehension and promote reading enjoyment.

Reading Aloud in Mathematics. Gurdon (2019) illustrated the direct relationship between reading and mathematics by stating, “When children struggle with math in middle school and the early high school years, it turns out that the difficulty often lies less with numbers and numeracy than with words and reading” (p. 16). In simpler terms, reading and mathematics skills often intersect. Through literature, math teachers can support academic vocabulary development (Monroe et al., 2018; Van den Heuvel-Panhuizen & Elia, 2013), mathematical thinking, and real-world application (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006; Linder & Bennett, 2020). When teachers “mathematize” reading, they are inquiring, organizing, and constructing the meaning of literature through a mathematical lens (Fosnot & Dolk, 2001, as cited in Hintz & Smith, 2013, p. 104).

High school calculus teacher, Sam Shah, held a book club in his classroom to encourage his students to seek mathematical connections, to think and have feelings about mathematics, and to view mathematics from a different perspective (Newhouse, 2018). Shah’s students were able to communicate their curiosities and humanize their conversations about math, which created more meaningful math and reading experiences (Newhouse, 2018). Joel Bezaire, a seventh-grade teacher, integrated a novel study into his pre-algebra class (Newhouse, 2018). The novel study was based on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Haddon, 2003) and required students to write personal reflections and generate mathematical questions based on the text (Newhouse, 2018). When Bezaire combined math, literature, and personal reflection, he found that students were more interested in the content and their active engagement increased (Newhouse, 2018).

Reading Aloud in Science. Secondary science read-alouds introduce and reinforce scientific language and processes (Albright, 2002; Mayberry, 2014; McCormick & McTigue,

2011), address scientific metaphors and build complex conceptual understanding, (Barnes & Oliveira, 2018), promote environmental agency and activism (Oliveira et al., 2015), boost student engagement (Braun, 2010), and provide mentor texts for expository writing (Richardson, 2000). Reading aloud enjoyable, high-quality literature in science class builds connections between students' lives and their scientific literacy (Delo, 2008). Overall, read-alouds have the potential to enrich science instruction (Delo; 2008; Oliveira, 2015; Wright & Gotwals, 2017) and academic achievement (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004).

Seventh grade science teacher Mr. Smith introduced his ecosystems science unit on Chesapeake Bay every year by reading the picturebook Guiberson's (1996) *Into the Sea* (McCormick & McTigue, 2011). Mr. Smith's students could refer to this read-aloud event throughout the science unit make connections to their newly acquired knowledge (McCormick & McTigue, 2011). To promote learning and enjoyment in her high school biology classroom, Judy Jones (n.d.) read aloud stories from Nagami's (2002) *The Woman with a Worm in her Head (and other true stories of infectious disease)*. In her high school science classroom, Delo (2008) facilitated dialogic reading, where students actively engaged with the text, each other, and the teacher. While her students read the text aloud, Delo (2008) posed open-ended questions and allowed students to show comprehension through a variety of strategies, like summarization or retelling, journal writing, and illustrating. Results from Wittrock's (2003) study conducted in an eighth-grade science classroom indicated that when he read aloud an article from the internet about the respiratory system, students favored the shared reading experience over reading independently and felt that it contributed to a better understanding of the content.

Reading Aloud in Social Studies. Reading social studies content in secondary education can simultaneously increase students' reading comprehension and content knowledge (Vaughn et

al., 2013). To understand common themes and concepts like the branches of government, diverse cultures, geography, and politics, social studies teachers must teach facts (Richardson, 2000). While studying the effects of teacher read-alouds and silent reading on high school bilingual students' comprehension of social studies content, Reed et al. (2014) found that teacher read-alouds could increase students' motivation to read more texts independently. Tomlinson et al. (1993) found that reading aloud historical trade books or authentic literature elicit more aesthetic responses and personal connections than reading aloud historical textbooks.

Teacher and author, Lettie Albright (2002), read aloud the picturebook *Discovering the Inca Ice Maiden: My Adventures on Ampato* (Reinhard, 1998) to introduce her unit study of Peru in her seventh-grade class. Albright (2002) assumed the role of facilitator while allowing students to determine and initiate the content they wanted to discuss, resulting in more relevant and meaningful learning experiences. Kasey Short (2019), a middle school language arts and social studies teacher, used Vaswani and House's (2012) novel, *Same Sun Here*, to make social studies and science cross-curricular connection. Auerbach (2006) recommended a set of three read-aloud texts that provide insight into life in Nazi Germany that many textbooks cannot offer, including Zusak's (2005) *The Book Thief*, Bartoletti's (2005) *Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow*, and Poole's (2005) *Anne Frank*.

Common Core State Standards

The state-led Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative was introduced by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in 2009 by governors and commissioners of education to push for more real-world learning. At least 41 states have adopted and implemented the CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010) since its creation. In the section titled "What Parents Should Know", the

NGA Center and CCSSO (2010) affirmed the focus of the CCSS as “developing the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills students need to be successful” (para. 2). These skills are intended to transfer to both college and career endeavors (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

Gorlewski and Gorlewski (2014) argued that the CCSS were initially designed by policymakers and stakeholders as a political mechanism to boost the rigor of teaching and learning in the United States. Even though the NGA Center and CCSSO (2010) claimed that teachers had a “critical role” in creating the CCSS, many classroom teachers criticize the standards for being “excessively challenging” (Berry, 2017) and “developmentally inappropriate” (Strauss, 2014). Eppley (2015) recognized that while the NGA Center and CCSSO (2010) asserted that teachers had the autonomy to design their own lessons, the alignment between the CCSS and standardized testing indicates otherwise. While commending the intentions of the CCSS development, Schieble (2014) acknowledged how the implementation inadequately supported the social, political, and economic changes that the standards were built upon. Jolley (2014) stated that the goal of education should be to help cultivate students into valuable contributors to our democracy rather than focusing solely on teaching the standards.

Regardless of how the CCSS are perceived, they have the potential to elevate how educators prepare students to become lifelong learners (Gorlewski & Gorlewski, 2014; NGA & CCSSO, 2010). All students need strong literacy and communication skills, whether they prepare to enter the workforce or college after they graduate from high school (Berry, 2017). The CCSS help to ensure that no matter what direction students take, they will be equipped with the necessary skills to start their careers or continue their education (Berry; 2017; NGA & CCSSO, 2010; Schieble, 2014).

Viewing the Common Core with a Critical Lens

A decade before the CCSS were introduced, Luke (2000) wondered whether critical literacy would move into a “mainstream, state-mandated curriculum” (p. 449), and the implementation of the CCSS have seemingly answered his question. Both Schieble (2014) and Simon (2014) argued that educators must examine the CCSS with a critical lens to provide a more equitable education for all students. Teachers should not only make critical sense of the CCSS but also critically use them to design meaningful instruction (Simon, 2014). Through a critical lens and with careful text selection, the CCSS could provide students with the tools to analyze texts through social and political contexts, examine systems of power, and identify individual positionalities (Schieble, 2014).

Students, along with teachers, should read literature with a critical lens (Wilson, 2014). Furthermore, Wilson (2014) maintained that teaching critical literacy theory to high schoolers is not only appropriate but necessary for students to understand their own worlds through a theoretical lens. The CCSS not only serve as a framework for critical pedagogy, but also as a catalyst for critical literacy development (Avila & Moore, 2012; Lloyd & Wertsch, 2016; Wilson, 2014). To build their critical literacy skills, students adopt an evaluative approach when interacting with texts, which helps them make sense of the social injustices in their personal lives and in the world around them (Avila & Moore, 2012).

Teaching for Social Justice: Less Canon, More Contemporary

Teaching for social justice within an English language arts program involves reading inclusive, multicultural texts that build empathy and foster critical literacy by recognizing and challenging social injustices, distribution of power, and structural inequalities (Dover, 2013; Picower, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Sleeter, 2015). With theoretical underpinnings like

critical pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy to support justice-oriented teaching, integrating these practices within a standards-based curriculum can be challenging, but not impossible (Dover, 2013). When studying the relationship between teaching for social justice and instructional standards, Dover (2016) found that even though standards-conscious justice-oriented teaching could elevate academic rigor, it may not be an automatic standards-driven practice.

With the adoption of the new CCSS, the phrase *comparable literary merit* influenced teachers' motivations to look outside the "Appendix B- Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks" list (NGA & CCSSO, 2010) for similar, and possibly more current literature to teach with (Miller, 2014). The text exemplars should be used as "guideposts" and are not representative of a partial, complete, nor required list of texts (CCSSO, 2010). Some researchers have made a case for teaching more contemporary literature (e.g., Botzakis et al., 2014; Miller, 2014; Moss, 2013; Ostenson & Wadham, 2012; Perry & Stallworth, 2013; Schieble, 2014; Thein & Beach, 2013) rather than the canonical titles suggested in the Grades 9-12 CCSS (2010). Thein and Beach (2013) described the "literary canon" as an immovable list of classic literature, including texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) or *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorn, 1850).

Research indicates that social justice plays a significant role in literacy education and achievement (e.g., Au & Raphael, 2011; Gardner et al., 2021; Kaczmarczyk et al., 2019;). Schieble (2014) argued that teachers can use critical literacy to teach within and beyond the Common Core text exemplar list, and contemporary young adult literature can provide profound context in which students' academic and social-emotional needs and interests are met (Ostenson & Wadham, 2012). As opposed to canonical literature, a contemporary reading curriculum includes texts that readers enjoy and relate to (Miller, 2014). Author and illustrator Jarrett Lerner

(2021) used Twitter to share personal testimony about the value and possible consequences for only reading canonical literature in school:

Growing up, I wasn't assigned a book written by a living author until I was a junior in high school. That's a problem. Kids — ALL kids — need to see themselves reflected in the characters of they read, and in the creators of those books too...I spent years believing something was wrong with me because I didn't feel connected to such books.

Furthermore, reading contemporary young adult literature exposes students to multiple perspectives that will encourage them to interrogate the social, cultural, and historical contexts of the literature, as well as the authors' purpose and point of view (Perry & Stallworth, 2013).

Nurturing Text Complexity and Visual Literacy through Read-Alouds

The implementation of the English Language Arts CCSS shifted instructional focuses to college and career readiness, thus emphasizing text complexity and critical thinking and discussion (Hoffman et al., 2015; Johnston, 2015; NGA & CCSSO, 2010; Schieble, 2014). Text complexity encompasses more factors than just level of text difficulty, including levels of meaning, text structure, language, readability measures, reader motivation and knowledge, and purposeful tasks related to the reading (Glaus, 2014; NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

While text complexity and text difficulty have been used synonymously (Connors & Shepard, 2013; Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013), Connors and Shepard (2013) argued that text complexity is more related to the inquiries that occur while a text is being read rather than the difficulty level of a text. Hiebert and Mesmer (2013) argued that the push for text complexity should start in Grades 2-3 to proactively narrow the gap in the complexity of texts used in high school and beyond.

Read-alouds enable teachers to model how to read complex texts (Fisher & Frey, 2015) while engaging students in critical thinking and discussion (Hoffman et al., 2015; Johnston, 2015). While building reading and writing skills, text complexity nurtures the acquisition of academic vocabulary through explicit instruction, reading, and discussion (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Teacher-led, interactive read-alouds support vocabulary acquisition as students actively think about and discuss a text while it is read aloud (Fountas & Pinnell, 2021; Hoffman et al., 2015; Johnston, 2015). Within a twenty-minute read-aloud, students have access to academic vocabulary they would likely encounter in content textbooks (Himmele & Himmele, 2012, as cited in Johnston, 2015). Without the pressure of decoding the text, read-alouds allow students the opportunity to “listen up” (Layne, 2015, p. 55) and discuss complex texts that are up to two grade levels higher than their current level. Interactive read-alouds allow teachers to explicitly teach new vocabulary concepts, monitor and scaffold students’ comprehension, and facilitate critical thinking and discussion routines (Johnston, 2015).

Trelease (2019) defined visual literacy as “the ability to interpret and construct meaning from visual images” (p. 134). Namely, visual literacy utilizes the viewing and visual representation strands of language arts and acknowledges the significant relationship between images and reading. As described by NGA and CCSSO (2010), students develop visual literacy by identifying, understanding, and valuing information accessible through visible actions, items, and symbols. Specifically, the CCSS for grades K-5 emphasize the importance in identifying the relationship between illustrations and texts within a story (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Visual literacy skills can be attained by reading and interpreting charts, infographics, graphic novels, maps, multimedia presentations, photographs (Eckhoff, 2010; NGA & CCSSO, 2010; Trelease, 2019).

Picturebook read-alouds offer students opportunities to strengthen their visual literacy skills by discussing illustrations found in the texts (O’Neil, 2011; Pantaleo, 2018; Prior et al., 2012; Trelease, 2019; Williams, 2007). In addition, students strengthen students’ interpretive abilities (Serafini, 2015), critical thinking skills (Pantaleo, 2017), and artistic competencies by engaging with picturebooks (Pantaleo, 2018). To promote visual literacy development, Williams (2007) encouraged her students to conduct illustrator studies of the picturebooks he read aloud by analyzing their drawing styles and how the illustrators’ creative decisions enhanced the stories. Serafini (2015) recommended that classroom teachers partner with art teachers to make enrich instruction focusing on picturebook artwork and illustrations.

The Push to Read More Nonfiction Texts

Even though teachers should teach with both fiction and nonfiction texts, the CCSS for English Language Arts (NGA & CCSSO, 2010) push them to include more nonfiction and informational texts in their literature classrooms (Appleman, 2015; Johnston, 2015; Schieble, 2014). In fact, nonfiction and informational text should encompass around 70% of the texts read across all content areas, not just in literature classrooms (Appleman, 2015; Berry, 2017). Nonfiction and informational texts are structured in multiple ways for different purposes, and include subgenres like news articles, autobiographies, biographies, concept books, informational trade books, literary nonfiction, reference materials (Maloch & Bomer, 2013; NGA & CCSSO, 2010; Tribunella & Hintz, 2015). Hall (2017) even argued that while music lyrics are often taught as “poetry” in school, hip hop lyrics inspired by African and African American history should be referred to as “informational text” because they share information through a narrative arrangement.

Nonfiction and informational texts are written with the purpose of sharing information about the physical and social world (Duke, 2000), and can serve as true and dependable sources of information as well as models of inquiry that promote “objective” reading that focus on text versus context (Lloyd & Wertsch, 2016), enable critical thinking (Latham & Gross, 2020), and support expository writing skills (Maloch & Bomer, 2013). Lloyd and Wertsch (2016) asserted that reading nonfiction texts requires critical literacy skills. Like critical literacy ideology, incorporating nonfiction texts into instruction promotes multiple points of view for students to evaluate (Lloyd & Wertsch, 2016). Along with examining the text itself, critical thinking involves assessing the author’s credentials and determining whether the sources used to compose the text are reliable or not (Latham & Gross, 2020). Reading nonfiction texts can enhance students’ experiences with and strengthen comprehension of fiction texts (Bingham et al., 2018; Fisch & Chenelle, 2016), by building background knowledge (Goodwin & Miller, 2012), fostering vocabulary acquisition, extracting from, and writing about informational texts, and familiarizing students with more complex texts (Appleman, 2015).

Summary

This literature review from this chapter established a background for this study. Alone, constructivism, transactional theory of reader response, and critical literacy are three distinct theoretical frameworks; but together they cemented a harmonious foundation for this study. Constructivism, transactional theory of reading response, and critical literacy embrace a common set of assumptions that propose that knowledge is created, not discovered, through interactions with other people and things in the world. In addition, these theories acknowledged and welcomed a diverse set of realities rather than one fixed truth. Lastly, these theories paid heed to the cognitive and emotional characteristics of reading and responding to literature.

Like the theoretical underpinnings of this study, social justice education nurtures both intellectual and emotional learning (Manning et al., 2017). The goal of social justice education is to provide equitable experiences for all students (Dover, 2016; Martin & Ngcobo, 2015). By engaging in a read-aloud, rather than assigning students to independently read the same text, the classroom teacher is promoting academic equity and leveling the playing field for all learners. The read-aloud events in this study will use authentic literature to explicitly teach about the oppressive and inequitable systems and practices that the author of the text encountered in the United States. By reading and discussing the nonfiction text in this study, the classroom teacher encouraged students to reflect on a diverse set of perspectives, confront personal biases, and participate in social action (Banks & Banks, 2013; Carlisle et al., 2006; Sleeter, 2015).

A read-aloud is a K-12 instructional tool (Anderson et al., 1985; Slay & Morton, 2020) that inspires students to cognitively and emotionally interact with a text (Fisher et al., 2020; Wright, 2019), use listening and critical thinking skills (Coiro, 2011; Layne, 2015; Marchessault & Larwin, 2014; Riley, 2015; Trelease, 2019), engage in collaborative discussions (Fountas and Pinnell, 2021; Johnston, 2015), and consider multiple perspectives (Laminack, 2019; Lopez & Friedman, 2019). In this study, students responded to the read-aloud text through literature response journals and dialogue. Literature responses reflected both their cognitive and emotional investments to the read-aloud events. Students' unique background knowledge and dialogic interactions shaped their ideas and perceptions related to the text. Aside from identifying their personal views, participants encountered and discussed perspectives different from their own.

The English Language Arts (ELA) Common Core State Standards (CCSS) use literature to promote lifelong problem-solving, communication, and critical literacy skills (Berry, 2017; NGA & CCSSO, 2010; Lloyd & Wertsch, 2016; Schieble, 2014). To teach for social justice,

educators are urged to read more contemporary and multicultural literature (Botzakis et al., 2014; Miller, 2014; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Sleeter, 2015), rather than the canonical titles suggested in the CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Read-alouds reinforce the CCSS initiative that pushes for more text complexity and nonfiction text reading (Appleman, 2015; Johnston, 2015; NGA & CCSSO, 2010). The state in which this study takes place closely aligns to the national CCSS. The read-aloud text in this study is a contemporary nonfiction text that was adapted for the young adult audience. Through the read-aloud, the participants responded to and discussed their interactions with complex vocabulary and concepts related to the American criminal justice system.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?

— Albert Einstein

The purpose of this case study was to gain insight into how participants in a ninth-grade reading classroom were impacted by social justice-themed read-alouds. In this chapter, I first provide a rationale for using a qualitative case study approach. Then, I discuss the methodology I used to carry out this study. Next, I define the study's case and offer contextual information about the proposed population and participant selection process, the research site, the researcher's and teacher's role, data collection methods, data management and analysis, data representation, and maintaining ethical standards. The following research questions guided this case study:

1. How is a nonfiction chapter book read-aloud facilitated in a ninth-grade reading classroom to promote student engagement and learning?
2. How do students in a ninth-grade reading classroom perceive and respond to the social justice topics presented in a nonfiction chapter book?

A Rationale for a Qualitative Case Study Approach

Qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that seeks to understand the meaning of human actions and relies on data in the form of words (Schwandt, 2007). Qualitative case studies are driven by research questions that emphasize the “how” and “why” of a phenomenon (Yin, 2017). In addition, qualitative case studies are widely used in educational research to study a single phenomenon, such as a teacher, a classroom of students, a school, a program, or educational policy (Merriam, 1998). Through this study, I learned how a ninth-grade reading teacher facilitated a nonfiction chapter book read-aloud. I also deepened my understanding of

how students in a ninth-grade reading classroom made sense of social justice literature through interactive read-alouds facilitated by their teacher. Numerical data were not the focus of my research findings, but rather participant perceptions and experiences as expressed through spoken and written words. My research findings highlight participants' direct quotes and represent each person's truth and reality as presented through the data.

Research Design

Qualitative case study methodology drove this research study. As a social inquiry strategy, case study research studies a single, bounded system (Smith, 1978) at the time of occurrence and can span from just a few short weeks up to an entire year (Bhattacharya, 2017; Schwandt, 2007). The case is the focus of the study (Schwandt, 2007) and can include a person or group of people, a program, a policy, or any other phenomenon of the researcher's interest (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam, 1998).

Yin's (2017) case study work possessed a positivistic perspective, urging researchers to consider construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability throughout the entirety of the inquiry process. On the other hand, both Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) adopted a more constructivist approach to case study methodology. The constructivist perspective influences how qualitative researchers approach methodology, data collection, and data analysis (Stake, 1995). Similarly, Merriam (1998) believed that all styles of qualitative research centered around the idea that reality is constructed as individuals interact socially with the world.

Collecting interpretations is fundamental to the case study research process (Stake, 1995). To gain understanding, researchers must generate questions based on their own views of the world as well as examine the meaning that participants construct (Merriam, 1998). The

interpretations that researchers gather are unique to each participant and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding (Stake, 1995). Researchers discover new connections, ideas, and interpretations inductively through case study research (Merriam, 1998). Written analytical constructions will reflect how a researcher finds meaning in the data (Merriam, 1998). Findings also allow readers to create their own generalization of the data (Stake, 1995).

Merriam (1998) and Stake's (1995) constructivist approaches to case study methodology aligned best with this research study. I approached my research study with a constructivist eye and described interpretations and experiences as told by the participants. Stake (1995) maintained the notion that knowledge is constructed (p. 99) while Merriam (1998) supported the idea that individual realities are created through social interactions. Furthermore, both Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) agreed that there are multiple understandings of truth and reality. My research uncovered multiple participant thoughts and ideas through their interactions with the read-aloud text and conversations with their teacher and peers. Merriam (1998) advocated for appropriate theoretical framework that informs the research and a strong literature review, research problem and questions, and purposeful sampling to understand inquiry.

For this study, I used a single instrumental case study design (Stake, 1995). Single instrumental case studies use one specific case to gain insight into the research questions determined by the researcher. The case I used for this study was a group of students and their classroom teacher within the parameters of one ninth-grade reading classroom. Through this case study, I gained an understanding of how the teacher facilitated nonfiction chapter book read-aloud events as well as how the students perceived the social justice issues represented in the text.

Population and Sample Size

Once a research problem is determined, qualitative researchers must consider what to study (phenomenon), where to conduct the study (research site), whom to study (participants), and when to collect data (timeline) (Burgess, 1982). Qualitative inquiry often requires researchers to use purposeful sampling rather than probability sampling (Merriam, 1998). Probability sampling, commonly known as random sampling, is used in quantitative research to allow researchers to generalize the findings to the population from which it was selected (Merriam, 1998). On the other hand, qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling to choose a sample from which they can discover, understand, and learn the most from (Merriam, 1998). I used purposeful sampling and specific criteria to select a research site and recruit participants for this study.

Research Site

The research site, Heartland High (pseudonym), is a newly built high school in a Midwest town with a population of approximately 21,000 residents. Heartland High is the only secondary building in town and houses ninth- grade through twelfth grade. About 52% of the student population receives free or reduced school lunch. At the time of the study, school enrollment was 1,585 students total with approximately 44% White; 21% Black; 20% Hispanic; 11% two or more races; 2% Asian; 2% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and < 1% American Indian. Within the secondary school, there are four academies, structured around different learning and career disciplines.

Prior to launching this study, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained (See Appendix A for IRB approval). In addition, I received written authorization from the Teaching and Learning department of the school district to use Heartland High as a research

site. A letter was sent and addressed the researcher credentials, the purpose and design of the study, how it supported the ninth grade English Language Arts standards, how parental permission would be obtained, and the anticipated benefits of the study.

The Classroom and Teacher

This study took place in a ninth-grade Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) reading classroom. Middle school standardized test scores and teacher recommendations determined the students' placement in this classroom. The focus of the MTSS reading classroom was use a variety of strategies to improve students' phonemic awareness, reading fluency, comprehension, and attitudes towards reading. Eight out of the nine students enrolled in this class volunteered to be a part of this study. The racial makeup of the eight participating students was 50% White; 25% Hispanic; and 12.5% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Five participants or 62.5% were on Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs).

This ninth-grade MTSS class took place during the first period of every school day. The ambience of the classroom created an inviting and comfortable environment for the ninth-grade students as they arrived at school. Located in the front of the classroom were two long dry erase white boards, and a Smart Board mounted in between, along with the teacher's desk. Most student desks were organized in pairs with a row of single desks in the back of the classroom. One of the walls was lined with multiple shelves of chapter books, graphic novels, and student textbooks. The length of the back wall, which was made entirely out of dry erase material, extended from the ceiling to about an inch above the floor, creating a small gap that adjoined with the classroom next door. While I was present, the teacher and students did not appear to be distracted by the sounds coming from the classroom next door.

Mr. Walker (pseudonym) has been a high school teacher for twenty years, and in those years, he has taught freshman, sophomore, honors, and Pre-AP English, as well as elective courses like Graphic Novels and War Literature. He balances his reading instruction by integrating both classic and contemporary young adult literature. Shakespeare's (1606/2006) *Macbeth*, Crutcher's (1989) *Chinese Handcuffs*, Homer's (ca. 725-675 B.C.E/1999) *The Odyssey*, and Meyers' (1999) *Monster* are among several texts he has read with his students over the years. Mr. Walker has fond childhood memories visiting the public library with his mother, and even remembers the first book he ever read on his own, Kessler's (1965) *Here Comes the Strikeout*. His fascination with the visual aspect of reading graphic novels stems from reading wordless picture books like Anno's (1978) *Anno's Journey*. His goal as a teacher has always been to create positive and memorable experiences with his students through shared reading experiences.

Participant Selection

Participant recruitment used a combination of two different criterion-based selections: comprehension selection and typical-case selection. Comprehension selection is used when there is a small population that falls into a particular category (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, as cited in deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). The small population of participants eligible for this study were those enrolled in the ninth-grade reading class. Typical-case selection requires typical criteria of someone within a group (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, as cited in deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). In this study, I invited students who would be willing to share their personal thoughts, opinions, and experiences related to the social justice read-alouds to participate in focus group interviews. To preserve students' anonymity, pseudonyms are used throughout the study. Because participation was completely voluntary, not every student participated in every focus group interview. Good

qualitative research seeks to report “multiple perspectives that range over the entire spectrum of perspectives” (Creswell, 2013, p. 151). Aside from a common military connection, the classroom had a good mix of student participants from diverse socio-cultural contexts (e.g., cultures, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, gender dynamics). Table 3.1 indicates the demographic information confirmed by each participant.

Table 3.1.

Participants’ Demographics

Name (pseudonym)	Identified Gender/ Preferred Pronouns	Age	Identified Race/Ethnicity
Ambroes	Female (she/her)	14	Black
Bob	Male (he/him)	15	White
Kris	Male (he/him)	14	White
Luke	Male (he/him)	14	White
Owen	Male (he/him)	15	Hispanic
Pratt	Male (he/him)	14	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
Ryan	Male (he/him)	14	Hispanic
Yurei	Female (she/her)	15	White

I used information gathered from individual interviews to create a short biography for each participant to include in this section. Member checking was used to ensure the written biographies reflected everyone accurately:

Ambroes

Ambroes is a self-described multifaceted person with a range of interests and hobbies. When she’s not in school, she stays active through physical fitness, boxing, and playing competitive sports like soccer and Muay Thai. In addition to athleticism, she demonstrates artistic talents through drawing, painting, and playing musical instruments. Ambroes is drawn to narrative stories written about spies and the mafia and is currently reading Ben Macintyre’s (2020) *Agent Sonya: Moscow’s Most Daring Wartime*. She prefers to read e-books on her phone, as opposed to physical print texts, and would much rather read in her head than out loud. One of

her fondest read-aloud memories from elementary school was when her second-grade teacher would dim the lights after recess and read aloud *Junie B. Jones* (Park, 1992-2013). When Ambroes grows up, she hopes to be one of two things: either an actor or an FBI profiler.

Bob

Bob embodies a chill and easy-going personality and finds enjoyment in playing basketball, video games and listening to music. Of all the genres of music, he prefers to listen to rap, especially the style and ambience of Travis Scott's music. He finds that listening to music while he is working helps him focus and increases his productivity. Bob is not much of a reader outside of school but is willing to read for fun if he has found a book that captures his interests. When given the choice, he prefers when his teachers read aloud in school as opposed to reading independently. One of his most memorable read-aloud experiences was when his eighth-grade teacher read aloud Harper Lee's (1960) *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Unlike his father who serves in the army, Bob sees himself enlisting in a different branch of the military, perhaps the Navy.

Kris

Kris is energetic, outgoing, and considers himself to be a quick thinker. After school, he is either volunteering at a local teen center or playing basketball with his peers. Kris favors reading comic books and graphic novels because they contain more pictures than words. As a reader, he has discovered that creating annotations in the margins of a text helps him retain what he reads. Kris is a natural entertainer and is neither scared nor nervous to read aloud or speak in front of others; he is even likes to write and perform rap lyrics. He also enjoys being read to and has fond childhood memories of reading stories with his grandmother. Even though Kris values his time working with kids, he does not plan to make a career out of it. He hopes to one day use his athleticism to play college and professional basketball.

Luke

Luke is a creative and skilled gamer and revels in constructing new worlds and experiences through Minecraft. He always sports a pair of headphones around his neck and listens to variety of music genres, including country, rock, and pop. Luke's favorite fantasy book series include Tui T. Sutherland's (2012-present) *Wings of Fire* and Kathryn Lasky's (2010-2013) *Wolves of the Beyond*. While he mostly watches YouTube and plays Minecraft outside of school, he will occasionally find time to read. Luke has discovered that, like his mom when she reads, he tries to put himself into characters' shoes to better understand the text. Because he has always been fascinated by oceans and airplanes, Luke hopes to one day study marine biology in college, then join the Air Force to work as a helicopter pilot for Search and Rescue.

Owen

Owen's friendly demeanor serves him well both in and out of school. In addition to spending quality time with his friends, he plays football, both recreationally and competitively, and recently started competing on his school's wrestling team. Even though he does not read outside of school, he appreciates the books his teachers have read to him in school, including C.S. Lewis' (1950-1956) *Chronicles of Narnia* series. Historical nonfiction, historical fiction, and fantasy are just a few of the reading genres that capture Owen's attention. Although no specific book titles come to mind, he fondly remembers when his mom used to read him bedtime stories. Even though he is still undecided about what career path to take, Owen knows he wants to live a successful life and have a loving and supportive family.

Pratt

Pratt is socially active and takes pride in his athleticism. In addition to playing baseball, football, and basketball, he enjoys watching Kansas City Chiefs football and the Los Angeles

Angels baseball. Pratt prefers to read video game subtitles as opposed to print texts or e-books. If he had to choose a favorite type of book, he would read graphic novels. Pratt says he is “surprisingly good” at reading but does not always apply himself when he needs to. Even though his dad gifted him a collection of books from his childhood, Pratt has yet read any of them. As far as his future goes, Pratt has three plans. His first option is to play major league baseball. If that does not work out, he will become a district attorney. His last resort is to join the army and specialize in infantry.

Ryan

Ryan’s amiable qualities shine in school, as he is kind and considerate towards others. Outside of school, Ryan strengthens his horticultural skills by tending to his family garden. In his family’s garden, he grows peppers, brussels sprouts, and carrots. Even though the act of reading often puts Ryan to sleep, he can recall positive elementary school read-aloud experiences. For example, he remembers when one of his teachers used to read aloud Mary Pope Osborne’s (1992-2020) *Magic Tree House* series. If he had to choose a type of book to read, he would most likely pick up a graphic novel because he prefers to see the pictures on the page rather than try to imagine them in his mind. Due to high demand and decent pay, Ryan plans to pursue a career in plumbing after high school.

Yurei

Yurei is family-oriented and considers herself to be an indoor and outdoor person. While she is indoors, she spends her time drawing and painting. Her outdoor activities include family camping and fishing trips and playing with her two dogs. During independent reading time, Yurei likes to read fiction books. She recently read and enjoyed Jeanne DuPrau’s (2006) *The Prophet of Yonwood*. She has discovered that while reading books, she tries to make connections

to the characters and understand how their situations relate to her own life. Yurei hopes to put her personable skills to use one day by becoming an elementary school teacher. She also intends to become a competitive gamer and raise money to donate to various orphanages, children's hospitals, and cancer foundations.

Role of the Researcher

According to Dewalt & Dewalt (2002), a qualitative researcher can assume one of three participant observation roles: *peripheral membership*, *active membership*, or *full membership*. Peripheral members' involvement with the participants are limited and insignificant, even though the participants know who the researcher is and why he or she is there (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). Active members take part in some research activities but also observe from the sidelines like peripheral members (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). Full members completely immerse themselves in the research as if they are part of the group being observed (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). As the sole researcher of this project, I took on two different roles. While the classroom teacher facilitated each read-aloud event and monitored literature response journal writing, I assumed peripheral membership and had little to no interaction with the participants to collect data through observations and field notes. Outside of the read-aloud events and journal writing, I assumed an active membership while facilitating individual and semi-structured interviews with the classroom teacher and participants.

Role of the Teacher

To prepare for this study, Mr. Walker and I selected a read-aloud text that we both felt would be received well by his students, support the ninth grade English Language Arts standards, and exemplify themes of social justice. We coordinated our schedules and prepared a read-aloud timeline to follow throughout the study. Prior to the study, I met with the participants via Zoom

and introduced myself and the study and discussed the introduction parent letter and letter of informed consent (See Appendix B for the parent introduction letter/informed consent). Mr. Walker then communicated with the parents and guardians of his students by sending home a letter of consent, informing them of the study. During the study, Mr. Walker assumed the role of classroom teacher and facilitator of each read-aloud event. He also supported his students by reading and providing written feedback in their literature response journals.

Literature Selection for Read-Aloud

To prepare for this study, I read several young adult novels that were written in the past five years. The goal was to select a book that realistically represented themes of social justice. I narrowed down the list of books and purchased my top four choices for Mr. Walker. The final four choices included: 1) *Punching the Air* by Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam (2020), 2) *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely (2015), 3) *Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults): A True Story of the Fight for Justice* by Bryan Stevenson (2018), and 4) *This Is My America* by Kim Johnson (2020). Of the four texts, Mr. Walker chose *Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults): A True Story of the Fight for Justice* (Stevenson, 2018). When I asked Mr. Walker why he chose this text, his response was:

Using informational texts in the English classroom allows students to experience a greater variety of text types, while building vital context and connections for learning. The complexities of the American legal system generate student interest and create genuine opportunities for questions, reflection, and exploration.

Just Mercy: (Adapted for Young Adults): A True Story of the Fight for Justice (Stevenson, 2018) examines issues of injustice and how they can be remedied, allowing adolescent and young adult readers to see how the justice system works and what actions can be

taken when that system fails. When asked about the significance of reading this text with his ninth-grade students, Mr. Walker suggested, “What *Just Mercy* does is puts a human face on the lives that are stake in a system that overlooks context, mitigating circumstances, and its own systemic biases.”. Ultimately, it was important to me that Mr. Walker had autonomy in choosing the read-aloud text because he knew his students’ needs best and how it would support the curriculum he taught.

Stevenson’s (2018) *Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults): A True Story of the Fight for Justice* is a nonfiction retelling of Stevenson’s work as a lawyer and social justice advocate. It is an adaption of his number one bestselling adult book, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (Stevenson, 2015). Stevenson (2018), founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), exposes the broken United States criminal justice system by sharing stories of his personal work with victims of discrimination and injustice. The young adult adaptation of *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018) is the recipient of the 2019 Flora Stieglitz Straus award for older readers (Bank Street College of Education, n.d.). The Flora Stieglitz Straus award honors the life and legacy of Flora Straus and is given annually to notable works of nonfiction that inspires young people (Bank Street College of Education, n.d.). When asked about why his book’s message is important for young audiences, Stevenson said,

Well, I don’t think there’s any community that’s been more impacted by what’s happened in our criminal justice system than young people. We have thousands of children who have now been prosecuted as adults. We have increasingly subjected kids to the rigors of the justice system in ways that have been quite problematic. There are millions of children in this country who have parents or relatives that have been incarcerated. So, over-incarceration, excessive punishment [has] become to finding realities in the lives of

too many children. I believe kids need to know more, understand more, and to be able to do more about the things that bother them, and I’m hoping that *Just Mercy* and the kinds of issues that are raised in the book will help empower generation of young people to feel like this is an issue they can do something about. (Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau, 2019, 00:49-1:40)

Adults and young people alike are affected by mass incarceration and excessive punishment, and their combined efforts can help fight for a more equitable criminal justice system for all. In addition to reading aloud Stevenson’s (2018) text, I organized a virtual presentation conducted by one of Stevenson’s EJI staff members. Table 3.2 outlines a summarized read-aloud timeline. See Appendix C for a detailed timeline of the read-aloud event and corresponding teacher and researcher roles.

Table 3.2.

Timeline of Read-Aloud Events

Week	Dates	Chapters Read
1	October 25-29	Introduction-5
2	November 2-5	5-8
3	November 8-12	9-13
4	November 15-19	14-Epilogue

Data Collection Methods

The goal of this study was to describe how a ninth-grade reading teacher facilitated a chapter book read-aloud event, and how his students responded to the social justice topics represented in the text. Qualitative researchers collect data through words that contain “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (Patton,

1990, p. 10, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 69). By including direct quotations from the participants, researchers will maximize the authenticity of the study findings. Data are generally collected through researcher observations, interviews, various documents (Bhattacharya, 2017; Merriam, 1998) and audiovisual materials (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Researchers do not gather data as if they are just laying around waiting to be collected; researchers meticulously select data that inform the study's theoretical framework, as well as the research problem and purpose (Merriam, 1998). Data in my study were carefully collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, audiovisual materials, student documents, and student-generated literature response journals.

Observations and Field Notes

Observations take place in natural settings and embody personal encounters with the phenomena being studied (Merriam, 1998). A researcher's observations should directly correlate with the research purpose and questions, as well as utilize the five senses (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To ensure research validity, qualitative researchers often use observations in combination with interviews and document analysis as a form of data triangulation (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Merriam, 1998). Observations can be viewed a highly subjective in nature because they rely on human perception (Merriam, 1998). While employing qualitative observation techniques, I acknowledged my own positionality and subjectivities to ensure the final report was honest and transparent.

Observations in this study took place at the time of the read-aloud events. While I watched the read-alouds happen in real time, I took extensive field notes. My fieldnotes included time stamps (date and time) for each observation, sketches of the classroom setting, retellings of

the read-aloud events as I experienced them. The extensive field notes helped to ensure that my findings included thick descriptions of the read-aloud events and participants.

Interviews

Merriam (1998) stated that, “interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 72). In other words, researchers are not always able to understand participants’ behavior, inner thoughts and feelings, or past experiences through observations and must ask questions to learn more about them. Focus group interviews are helpful when time is limited and when interviewees may be too shy to provide information on a one-on-one basis (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Creswell & Poth, 2016). When researchers employ focus groups, they should function based on the idea that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). This means that the group members’ interactions with each other are essential for a successful focus group. Reaching a consensus should never be the goal of focus groups (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). See Appendix D for the protocol used to guide the focus group interviews.

Two types of interviews were used to gather data: semi-structured focus group interviews and individual interviews. The focus group interviews, which lasted anywhere between 20-40 minutes each, allowed the participants to guide the conversation and openly discuss the text with each other. Due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, I prepared a list of five to six open-ended prompts to use when necessary (See Appendix E for the full list of questions asked during the focus group interviews). Some days, I did not need to use any of my open-ended prompts while other days all prompts were used. For individual interviews, I also prepared a list of five to six open-ended questions to learn more about their personal stories and to also discuss their

thoughts about the text (See Appendix F for the full list of questions asked during the individual interviews). To ensure I collected an adequate amount of data in a four-week span, I conducted anywhere between one to three focus group interviews a week until the novel was read in its entirety. Individual interviews were conducted on the days that focus group interviews did not take place. The “Researcher Roles” column in Appendix C specifies the type of interview I conducted each day.

Audiovisual Materials

When using audiovisual materials to gather data, researchers must consider where to set the camera up for optimal viewing and how close or far away the device should be placed (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Audiotaping is an essential data collecting component of focus groups (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Videotapes help document nonverbal behavior in focus groups (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004) as well as in other research-related activities.

Each teacher read-aloud session, as well as every interview, were recorded on the Camera app on my iPhone then stored on a flash drive. Recording each read-aloud session allowed me to review the teacher’s oral reading prosody and questioning techniques, as well as the participants’ body language and reactions to the literature while it was being read aloud. The Voice Memos app on my iPhone was used to record all individual interviews, as well as my researcher reflections at the end of each day. I used Otter.ai, an online note generator, to review and transcribe each interview. The audiovisual recordings and transcriptions enabled me to use thick, rich descriptions of the read-aloud sessions as well incorporate participants’ direct quotations into my findings.

Documents

Research documents can consist of a variety of written, visual, and physical materials that are relevant to the study (Merriam, 1998). Documents may include public records, such as program documents, educational bills, or previous research studies, or they may include personal documents like diaries, photo albums, or home videos (Merriam, 1998). Physical materials are sometimes referred to as *artifacts* and are found within the location of the study (Merriam, 1998). Artifacts may include any kind of tool or instrument employed for learning or ordinary, daily use (Merriam, 1998). Data found in documents should align with the research purpose and questions, as well as relate to existing data from other sources (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Data were gathered through two different artifacts: a reading anticipation guide and literature response journals. An anticipation guide is pre-reading instructional tool used to activate background knowledge and set a purpose for reading content-area textbooks and nonfiction books (Tompkins, 2013). Some statements may be true, while others might be based on common misconceptions or stereotypes (Tompkins, 2013). Prior to reading the book, each participant received a handout of Miller-Johnson ELA's (2019) *Just Mercy* Anticipation Guide (see Appendix G). After reading each statement on the anticipation guide, participants had to mark whether they "agree" or "disagree" and provide an explanation. The students discussed their responses to the anticipation guide statements during the first three focus group interviews. On the day of the last read-aloud event, the participants were given another blank copy of the *Just Mercy* Anticipation Guide (Miller-Johnson ELA, 2019), reread each statement, and recorded whether they "agree" or "disagree" with an explanation. During the final focus group interview, the students discussed how their responses to the anticipation guides and how their opinions changed or stayed the same.

A literature response journal is an outlet that combines active reading and writing (Bauso, 1988) and captures a reader's inner thoughts (Hancock, 1992). In addition to student responses, teachers offer support and affirmation through daily written feedback (Hancock, 1992). Each participant was given a literature response composition journal and a new ball point pen. They were asked to write personal reflections both during and after each day's read-aloud event. Responses included anything relative to the content in the text. Helpful response guidelines were discussed and glued into the inside cover of each journal to ensure students maximize their journal writing time (See Table 2.1 in Chapter 2). Mr. Walker often gave students prompts related to each chapter, but also encouraged them to write about whatever was on their minds. At the beginning of the study, Mr. Walker provided daily written feedback to confirm that students were following the response guidelines properly, as well as encourage students to build and expand their ideas and/or write about their personal thoughts, feelings, and emotions. As the study progressed, Mr. Walker provided written feedback on a weekly, rather than daily, basis.

Data Management and Analysis

Data management involves managing a large quantity of data (Bhattacharya, 2017). Creswell and Poth (2016) recommended that when handling large amounts of information, qualitative researchers develop backup copies, as well as a master list of the kinds of data collected. All field notes, interview transcriptions, photos of student work, and audiovisual recordings were organized into files and saved on a secure server on a password protected MacBook laptop. After video and audio recordings were transcribed, they were saved on USB flash drives then immediately deleted from my MacBook laptop and iPhone. Data were stored in a locked filing cabinet when not in use. When the data are no longer needed, electronic files will

be erased from the USB flash drives and papers will be destroyed using a paper shredding machine.

Coding

The answers to the proposed research questions were generated by analyzing multiple data sources including qualitative interviews, observations, and student documents. Using a variety of data collection methods ensures research validity and support triangulation (Schwandt, 2007). Merriam (1998) explained that the overall goal for case study data analysis is to obtain patterns within the data collected. There is no one right way or “one size fits all” way to code qualitative data; every researcher must consider his or her research purpose and questions, methodological approaches, and/or theoretical framework (Bhattacharya, 2017). *Coding* (Saldana, 2016) or *Inductive Analysis* (Bhattacharya, 2017) is one of many avenues for analyzing qualitative research data. This process involves working from the ground up, starting with the raw data then working towards identifying patterns across the data (Bhattacharya, 2017; Saldana, 2016).

In this study, analyses of data consisted of two cycles of coding. The first cycle utilized a combination of Subcoding and InVivo Coding. The Subcoding method organized the codes into primary (parent) and secondary (children or sibling) codes (Saldana, 2016). Using InVivo Coding techniques allowed me to identify powerful and unique participant quotes (Saldana, 2016) to identify emerging themes Both Subcoding and InVivo Coding were used to gather sufficient evidence to answer each research question. The first round of coding resulted in over ten primary codes and at least three secondary codes for each.

After conducting the first round of coding, I used Pattern Coding to narrow down the primary and secondary coding to formulate four concrete, emerging themes. Qualitative

researchers use Pattern Coding to establish explanatory or inferential codes that identify themes (Saldana, 2016). Organized within each of my emerging themes are subcategories that endorse the themes’ broad idea. Table 3.3 shows the research question, data collection and analysis that occurred during this study.

Table 3.3.

Research Questions, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

<u>Research Question</u>	<u>Data Collection</u>	<u>Data Analysis</u>
RQ #1: How is a nonfiction chapter book read-aloud facilitated in a ninth-grade reading classroom to promote student engagement and learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations field notes • Audio/video recording of the read-aloud event • Semi- structured interviews with participants • Individual teacher interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review field notes, identify patterns • Review and Transcribe audio/video recording • Cycle 1 Subcoding (identify primary and secondary codes) and InVivo Coding (direct quotes from participants), Cycle 2 Pattern Coding (identify emerging themes)
RQ #2: How do students in a ninth-grade reading classroom perceive and respond to social justice topics presented in a nonfiction chapter book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation field notes • Audio/video recordings of read-aloud events and interviews • Semi-structured focus group interviews with participants • Individual interviews with participants • Literature Response Journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and Transcribe audio/video recording • Review literature response journals, identify patterns • Cycle 1 Subcoding (identify primary and secondary codes) and InVivo Coding (direct quotes from participants), Cycle 2 Pattern Coding (identify emerging themes)

Analytic Memos

One way that qualitative researchers explore data is through memo writing (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Memos may include short thoughts or key concepts that pop into the researcher’s head while reviewing data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Analytic memos help document the research process and record personal thoughts, feelings, and reminders (Bhattacharya, 2017). In his book, Saldana (2016) referred to these kinds of notes as *preliminary jottings* (pp. 21-22). The codes jotted down at this time are not final but are ideas that are up for analytic contemplation (Saldana, 2016). As I reviewed data collected through field notes, interview transcriptions, and

documents, I wrote down coding ideas, personal reactions to the data, self-critiques, and further ideas/questions to explore. Writing analytic memos was a productive way for me as a qualitative researcher to exercise personal reflexivity during the research process.

Data Representation

My findings were reported using a thematic narrative format. Thematic narratives analyze data through inductive analysis and use the main themes as headings in the report (Bhattacharya, 2017). The results were organized by each research question, followed by emerging themes that answer each question. To support my understandings, I presented the data through participants' direct quotations, as well as my own interpretations. The writing speaks for itself and allows readers to draw their own conclusions based off the results presented. This approach is comparable to *particular description*, which uses quotes from interviews, observer field notes, and narrative vignettes (Erickson, 1986, as cited in Merriam, 1998).

Establishing Trustworthiness and Qualitative Rigor

To ensure that qualitative research is carried out in an ethical fashion, researchers must establish trustworthiness and credibility. Qualitative researchers must practice self-reflexivity throughout an entire research process to maintain transparency. Researchers must consider researcher-participant reciprocity and appropriate ethical conduct before, during, and after research. Lincoln & Guba (1986) identified four components of qualitative research that maintain trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Qualitative credibility is like quantitative internal validity in that they both focus on the reality of the research findings. Quantitative validity often illustrates one single, fixed reality, whereas qualitative credibility represents a "holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing

reality” (Merriam, 1998, p. 202). Similarly, Lincoln & Guba (1985) referred to reality as “a multiple set of mental constructions” made by humans (p. 295). In other words, qualitative validity is subjective, rather than objective. To establish credibility, qualitative researchers identify similar themes within and across participants (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The findings of this study represented the unique perceptions of eight student participants and one classroom teacher.

Qualitative researchers also use triangulation and member checking procedures to improve research credibility. Triangulation uses multiple data sources, multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple researchers, and/or multiple methodologies to reach the same conclusion (Merriam, 1998; Schwandt, 2007; Tracy, 2010). I achieved triangulation with multiple data sources, including observations field notes, interviews, audiovisual materials, and student documents; merging themes were present across all data sources. To corroborate results, member checking is used to actively involve research participants in reviewing rough drafts of writing in which their actions or words were used (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). In this study, all research participants, including Mr. Walker, read and approved their written biographies before they were published in this chapter.

Transferability

Transferability is the qualitative version of generalizability and external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) and refers to the readers’ ability to relate the research to their own situations and transfer it to their own actions (Merriam, 1998; Tracy, 2010). Stake (1995) used the term “naturalistic generalizations” to explain how readers look for patterns in the research that help clarify both familiar and unfamiliar experiences. Lincoln & Guba (1985) argued that researchers are less concerned than readers are about generalizing results. Qualitative researchers maximize

transferability by providing rich descriptions, or detailed illustrations that show rather than tell (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Tracy, 2010). In addition, researchers who practice self-reflexivity demonstrate honesty, vulnerability, and transparency (Tracy, 2010) To ensure transferability, I used written analytic memos and personal voice recordings to document and critique my researcher strengths, limitations, subjectivities, and positionalities throughout the research process and report. I presented authentic and valuable research findings through descriptive narrative writing.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is reached when a researcher is fully transparent about his or her research process (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Transparency involves both honesty and vulnerability and requires the researcher to clearly articulate all research decisions and activities (Tracy, 2010). It is also important for researchers to clearly document the research process, disclose expected and unexpected challenges and hurdles, and give credit where credit is due (Tracy, 2010). Like quantitative objectivity, confirmability is contingent upon the researcher's ability to attain credibility, transferability, and dependability (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). This idea is closely related to reflexive practice or self-reflexivity. Researchers practice reflexivity when they "position themselves" in their study by describing their experiences and how they inform the research (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Self-reflexivity reveals researchers' predispositions, weaknesses, celebrations, and missteps related to the research (Schwandt, 2007; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011; Tracy, 2010). In this study, regardless of my anticipated outcomes, I used the participants' direct quotes to report the data exactly how it occurred.

Reciprocity

Researcher-participant reciprocity encompasses the relationships established by the researcher throughout the research process (Schwandt, 2007). Researchers must ask themselves what the participants can gain from the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Reciprocity also includes how the researcher plans to give back to the participants for their involvement in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As a result of this study, the participants gained a greater appreciation for teacher read-alouds, as well as deeper understanding of the social injustices represented in the text. Additionally, they were able to learn more about themselves and their peers through the dialogue exchanged throughout the study. Each participant received their own copy of *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018), a composition notebook, and a ball-point pen to use during the study. Participants were also compensated after their focus group interviews with snacks. I demonstrated reciprocity from the beginning of the study until the end of the study by establishing and preserving respectful rapport with each individual and by honoring their spoken and written truths during data collection and analysis.

Ethical Conduct

As required by the IRB, the minors involved in my study needed parental/guardian consent to participate in the study. Each student was given two letters of consent to take home and discuss with their parents. Both parents/guardians and minors were asked to sign and date one of the consent forms then return it to Mr. Walker. The families were encouraged to keep the other copy for personal records. If necessary, an alternative independent book study approved by the classroom teacher was offered in lieu of participating in this study. Student confidentiality was maintained throughout the course of the study by eliminating the location of the research site in the data and using self-selected pseudonyms for each participant. All confidential data were

stored on a secure network on a password protected laptop and will be destroyed after three years.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the research design of this study. A qualitative case study approach was used to understand and describe the ways in which students in a ninth-grade reading classroom make sense of social justice issues raised through nonfiction chapter book read-aloud events. Assuming both active and full membership role, I collected data through observations field notes, audiovisual materials, interviews, and student documents and artifacts. Inductive analysis was used to attain an understanding of the data. Trustworthiness and credibility were established through triangulation, member checking, and thick description. In Chapter 4, I present the findings of this study.

Chapter 4 - Results

I'm here because I've got this vision of justice that compels me to be a witness. I'm here because I'm supposed to be here. I'm here because you can't keep me away.

— Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*

As children progress through K-12 education, the amount of time they are read aloud to decreases (Trelease, 2019), thus leaving gaps in research related to read-alouds in secondary education. Teachers and students are also encouraged to read and discuss a variety of texts that promote multiculturalism and social justice (Johnson et al., 2017). However, little is known about the extent to which chapter books are used to facilitate those necessary discussions.

A qualitative case study approach was used to study a single case at the time of its occurrence (Merriam, 1998), to answer the “how” of a phenomenon (Yin, 2017). This study was conducted in a ninth-grade high school classroom in the fall semester of 2021. It examined how a ninth-grade teacher facilitated a nonfiction chapter book read-aloud as well as the students’ perceptions of the social justice material presented in the text. As the classroom teacher read aloud Bryan Stevenson’s (2018) *Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults): A True Story of the Fight for Justice*, eight students responded to the text in various ways, including interactive read-aloud discussions, literature response journals, and individual and focus group interviews.

Using an inductive or “bottom-up” approach to analyze multiple data sources, I sought to determine emerging themes to answer the following research questions:

1. How is a nonfiction chapter book read-aloud facilitated in a ninth-grade reading classroom to promote student engagement and learning?
2. How do students in a ninth-grade reading classroom perceive and respond to the social justice topics presented in a nonfiction chapter book?

Chapter 4 addresses each research question and includes findings that support the emerging themes. First, a descriptive account of the implementation of nonfiction chapter book read-alouds is provided. Then, the students' responses to the social justice topics in the read-aloud text are presented. Italicized direct quotes will be used to establish and reinforce emerging themes as well as to honor each participant's original spoken and written word. When necessary, clarifications and spelling corrections are indicated within brackets [].

Research Question 1

The first research question was created to gain insight into how a ninth-grade reading teacher implemented a nonfiction chapter book read-aloud to promote student engagement and learning. One of the significant elements of this question is the emphasis on nonfiction or informational texts. Secondary teachers who read aloud informational texts expose students to new topics and increase their motivation to read about those topics independently (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003). In addition, the teachers model proper reading strategies required for comprehending informational texts (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003). When discussing the importance of reading aloud informational texts, Mr. Walker declared,

It's a really complex text. A lot of times our kids can read literary texts pretty well, they do well with short stories. But when it comes to nonfiction or informational text, that's where the struggle is... informational texts become so difficult... the students need scaffolding and one on one help probably just to get through those texts.

Student participants Ambroes and Pratt echoed similar opinions about high school teachers reading aloud, specifically informational texts and chapter books. Ambroes believed high school teachers should read aloud informational texts because “*they might not know that word. And if the teacher would read it, they might stop and explain what the word is.*” Pratt preferred his

teachers to read aloud “*non picture books, or really long chapter books*” because “*it gives us a break from having to use our brain too much.*”

Another vital component of this research question is the emphasis on reading aloud in secondary education. Research suggests that reading aloud in upper grades yields just as many benefits as reading aloud to young children (Anderson et al., 1985; Trelease, 2019), yet some secondary teachers cannot justify using class time to read aloud (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Merga, 2017). When discussing his read-aloud experiences, Mr. Walker said “*I have always used read-alouds in my English classes.*” He also alluded to the importance of involving high school students in the read-aloud experience because “*if they’re just hearing your voice, you’re eventually going to put them to sleep. So, I do a lot of read-alouds where the kids get a chance to read as well.*” However, since most of the participants in this study demonstrated reading struggles, Mr. Walker opted to read-aloud the entire text, which an uncommon practice for him.

Despite its rarity in high schools across the country, the idea of teacher read-alouds in secondary education were favorable among the participants, including Mr. Walker, who said, “*Scaffolding is essential. While we should expect our students to read independently, part of getting students to that point is showing them how different types of texts sound and work.*” When I asked the student participants during a focus group interview if high school teachers should read aloud to their students, Ryan, Pratt, and Kris implied that reading aloud levels the playing field for readers of all levels and abilities:

Ryan: *It's easier... Cause some people read slower than others, so if we're all reading at the same pace, it's easier for everyone. If we're all reading the same thing, someone would be lagging behind and someone could be ahead of someone else.*

Pratt: *Then they'd have to catch up.*

Kris: *But like some people older people do struggle... So, if you do, say, as a group, it can help everybody understand it. Cause you will have like somebody reading and then have all the information and then you will have somebody that's like, a couple pages behind that doesn't even know what's going on.*

Reading aloud informational texts also provided opportune moments for clarification. Mr. Walker acknowledged that, “*As the reader, I enjoyed clarifying aspects of the book that were complex and required additional context.*” Kris, Ambroes, and Bob recognized the importance of clarification to their comprehension of the text:

Kris: *But when somebody reads something out loud, it just makes it easier for me to understand what's happening in the story. It would be a lot more confusing if I read it by myself.*

Ambroes: *I like how he stops sometimes and clarifies things. Because if we're reading, we're like teens and stuff, so we can just like read through it and not care and not understand it. But when he stops and clarifies what it means and all that, I think it helps us understand it.*

Bob: *...it'd be easier for them to understand and like, give more context.*

Kris: *It makes the story like; it makes the story more interesting to hear somebody else say it because like if I just sit here and read it the story would seem a lot more boring. but if I hear it out loud, and he like explains it more, it just seems like a way better story than if I were reading it in my head.”*

Pratt and Owen believed that teacher read-alouds accommodated to students’ busy schedules both in and out of school. Pratt felt that teachers should read loud “*We got like, four other classes that we have to use our brains.*” In addition, Owen said, “*I think it would be easier*

for the students. Some students do sports and stuff like that. So, once they get back home, they don't want to read.”

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Heartland High required all staff and students to wear face coverings over their mouths and noses. To ensure student understanding, Mr. Walker projected a clear and emphatic voice when he read aloud. Despite his ability to maintain high energy throughout the read-aloud events, Mr. Walker admitted that “*reading an entire book out loud with a mask on was a challenge for me.*” He also stated that, “*It took a bit of time to recognize when the reading went on too long. Even the most engaging text can lose students if the reading experience is not managed and optimized.*” While we had established a read-aloud timeline to follow prior to starting the study, Mr. Walker understood the importance of gauging his students’ demeanors to determine how much he would read each day. While interviewed, he recalled,

There were a couple days, where I just I you get, you can feel like the body language from the kids where they get to the point where they're, like, exhausted with some of those longer chapters. I'm just I was, and I was kind of, like, at the end of the chapter, I'm like, and that was read 23 pages today, I'm spent.

Despite its challenges, Mr. Walker read aloud Bryan Stevenson’s (2018) *Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults): A True Story of the Fight for Justice* from start to finish in 16 school days. After analyzing data from audiovisual materials, observer fieldnotes, and interview transcriptions, I identified the first and second emerging themes of this study. Through his implementation of a nonfiction chapter book read-aloud, Mr. Walker demonstrated characteristics of *expressive reading* and *spontaneity*.

Expressive Reading

According to Eaton (1913), a requirement of teaching English is the “ability to read aloud so that literature shall be lifted from the dead page of print into complete expression” (p. 151). Similarly, Mr. Walker articulated that “*literature is meant to be shared orally in a social setting. And I’ve always tried to do that in my classroom.*” He also viewed read-alouds as a catalyst for scaffolding, “*Scaffolding is essential. While we should expect our students to read independently, part of getting students to that point is showing them how different types of texts sound and work.*” An essential, yet often overlooked, element of fluent oral reading is prosody (Paige et al., 2012), especially in relation to secondary students’ reading comprehension (Kuhn & Schwanenflugel, 2018; Paige et al., 2014). Prosody embodies elements of proper intonation, phrasing, stress, and tempo (Kuhn et al., 2010). According to my observations and the participants’ sentiments, Mr. Walker excelled at reading with expression and modeling for his students proficient reading skills.

While most of *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018) was narrated by Stevenson himself, he sometimes included short dialogue spoken by the individuals he interacted with during the stories recounted in the book. Because most of the events of this text took place in Alabama, Mr. Walker intentionally read with a southern accent, “*I think you noticed there were some parts where I did accents on it where it made it really made sense. It was like super obvious that this character would have a southern accent.*” I documented this same observation in my field notes, and added that “*When he reads as a woman, he does not change his voice.*”

When addressing Mr. Walker’s expressive reading during focus group interviews, the participants shared the following insights about his intonation:

Ambroes: *I think he does pretty good sometimes when he's reading the dialogue, he puts character into it.*

Luke: *It's kind of like movies where you get to a part, and it's always got you on the edge of your seat... I mean, most teachers don't really talk with excitement when they're reading books, unlike Mr. Walker.*

Ambroes: *I feel like they're like when they're reading it can give you like a visual in your head sometimes, of what's kind of going on.*

Ryan: *With attitude. So, say a character acts like this, he changes his voice to act like that.*

Yurei: *He kind of like shouts when someone in the book looks like they're shouting.*

Kris: *He puts excitement his voice. He's not just like, [Kris starts reading a line from the book in monotone.] He like adds more character to it. The voices, he makes it louder...*

Ambroes: *Sometimes people read aloud and they, it doesn't like stick what they read, like in their head, even though like, it's easier for me to remember it when I read aloud. But for like some people, that still doesn't work. So, hearing somebody else say it, and say in different tones can give you different ideas.*

In addition to bringing the characters to life, Ambroes credited Mr. Walker for modeling proper pacing, “*Maybe with like, punctuation because I know some people are going to read right through it and skip all the periods and stuff. You can pick like when they stopped and all that and maybe he could help you.*” I wrote in my fieldnotes about an instance where Mr. Walker changed the rhythm and pace of his reading. While reading aloud the Introduction: Higher, Mr. Walker read the line, “I’d never heard voices so desperate” (p. 6) and emphasized and stressed each word separately, which added a dramatic element to the retelling of Stevenson’s (2018)

experience working with individuals who were sentenced to death row but could not afford legal assistance.

Reading prosody is contingent on reading automaticity and accuracy (Kuhn & Schwanenflugel, 2018). In addition to demonstrating proper intonation and pacing, Mr. Walker modeled correct word pronunciation and self-correction. For example, while reading the word ‘exculpatory’, Mr. Walker first mispronounced the word, but then he paused his reading, announced “*I need to reread that word*”, then pronounced it correctly. No matter how many years of experience a teacher has reading aloud, there will be times when he or she makes mistakes while reading aloud. But, like any good reader would do, Mr. Walker stopped and corrected himself when necessary. Nevertheless, the students shared favorable attitudes about listening to Mr. Walker read aloud, and Mr. Walker described this read-aloud experience as “*natural and comfortable*” because “*when you practice that skill of reading in a meaningful way with students so much after 20 years of doing that, it's something that comes naturally to me.*”

Spontaneity

Mr. Walker’s execution of the read-aloud events in this study generally stemmed from spontaneous decision-making, conversations, and questioning techniques.

Planning

Some researchers argue that a key component of effective interactive read-alouds is purposeful planning (e.g., Johnston, 2016; Wright, 2019). While Mr. Walker “*read [Just Mercy] though before, multiple times*”, he claimed that “*a lot of my planning was based on reacting to how things were going.*” For example, “*the other day, I asked them, ‘Do you have a prediction about what this chapter is gonna be about? We've got the title; we've got the beginning of the*

chapter... ' That's something I didn't plan on doing." He credited his comfort level going into this study to his previous experiences reading aloud Walter Dean Myers' (1999) *Monster*:

Now I do think it helped me a lot that I'd read Monster with my students multiple times, and I got a lot better at teaching Monster... And I always want to get to the heart of the book. And I think because I had experience working with a book like Monster, getting to the heart of Just Mercy felt really natural for me... I didn't feel like I wasn't doing this book justice, or I was missing something. I feel like the things that kids needed to understand the book, I was able to stop, and either through asking questions or giving them some quick explanations, was able to give them the context they needed to really understand the book.

Conversation and Questioning

For informational text read-alouds to be effective and meaningful, teachers must select appropriate and relevant texts (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Horst et al., 2019), facilitate thoughtful dialogue (Ayu et al., 2017), and offer scaffolding (Hurst & Griffity, 2015), especially while reading aloud culturally relevant literature (May & Bingham, 2015). When discussing the role dialogue plays in reading comprehension, Mr. Walker expressed:

I absolutely do think that it gives so much more weight to the text in terms of how it matters to the student, when they're able to engage in dialogue about that book with their peers ... it's a very powerful thing.

He declared his confidence in selecting *Just Mercy* (Stephenson, 2018) for this study, and believed the content of the text did the heavy lifting, in terms of steering the conversation and questioning: *"I feel like Just Mercy definitely is that kind of book and definitely did the hard work and kept the kids engaged... this is my first time using Just Mercy and it just came really*

easily.” Because he believed in the high quality and high interest-level of the text, Mr. Walker explained why he mostly relied on his instincts to facilitate the read-alouds events in this study, “*It wasn't like I was ever up hours, you know, okay, what, what are we going to do? How are we going to talk about this? ... look, we're just going to read this and it's going to be a very natural experience.*” If it felt right, he stopped on the spot and asked a question or prompted his students to write in their journals, rather than waiting until he was finished with the reading.

One of Mr. Walker’s strengths throughout the reading of this text was his ability to stop and ask spur-of-the-moment questions. He wanted to ask questions that “*promote critical thinking*” and that encouraged them to “*consider that there's more than one possibility to view things*”. He relished in the presence of multiple perspectives in his classroom by claiming, “*I don't feel comfortable as a teacher like trying to direct kids to my way of thinking, because I recognize that my way of thinking is not the only valid viewpoint.*” He even acknowledged the role his own privilege plays when promoting the importance of multiple points of view, “*I don't assume that everyone has had the same luck and chances and opportunities that I have. And I'm very open to understanding that.*”

Evidence of Mr. Walker’s spontaneity was clear as he discussed and demonstrated his ability to facilitate authentic conversation while reading aloud to his students, “*I can actually be reading the book, comprehending the text, and thinking of the questions I want to ask students. So that part is more instinctive than planned.*” While some experts claim that using sticky notes is an effective way to plan for discussion and questioning (e.g., Kesler et al., 2020; Shedd & Duke, 2008), Mr. Walker felt that using this strategy would create a less “*productive [and] authentic*” read-aloud experience for his ninth graders.

Throughout the study, Mr. Walker posed a wide variety of questions to his students. Even though his questioning promoted different levels of comprehension, ranging from literal and inferential to more open-ended, application-based, Mr. Walker preferred to ask “*open ended questions that would encourage kids to make their own connections to what was going on in the world* “. Several of the questions asked throughout the read-aloud could be categorized into the three types of questions Serafini and Giorgis (2003) claimed were appropriate for older readers, which were *author and text based, reader based, and world based*. The *author and text based* questions required his students to infer using text evidence. *Reader based* questions either encouraged his students to make personal connections or to put themselves in another person’s shoes. To answer *world based* questions, his students had to examine both local and global issues. See Table 4.1 for a list of questions Mr. Walker asked during the interactive read-aloud events in this study.

Table 4.1.
Just Mercy Interactive Read-Aloud Questions

Author and Text Based	Reader Based	World Based
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What do you think he means by ‘prison conditions’?</i> • <i>Why do you think Walter’s whole family wants to meet Bryan?</i> • <i>Why do you think the duty officer looks at Bryan suspiciously?</i> • <i>What do these individuals have in common?</i> • <i>What does he mean by ‘sensory deprived life’?</i> • <i>Why would they refer to Ralph Myers as a ‘wild card’?</i> • <i>The crowd itself doesn’t influence Walter’s trial, but Bryan thinks it is significant. Why do you think Bryan feels this way?</i> • <i>After reading the first paragraph, can you make a prediction about the topic and focus of this chapter?</i> • <i>It said in the book that the dementia was likely trauma induced. What does that mean?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you were a police officer hearing this, what might your first reaction be as Ralph Myers gives this information?</i> • <i>Are you surprised to see the word ‘children’ after sixteen or seventeen years old?</i> • <i>When you hear the term ‘firing squads’, what do you think of?</i> • <i>If you were Bryan, would you help ABI try to find out who the murderer is?</i> • <i>Think about how prisons are connected to profit. How do you feel about that?</i> • <i>It seems to be saying that if they make one bad mistake, then they’re a bad person their whole life. Would you want to be judged for the rest of your life by your worst moment as a teenager?</i> • <i>When getting in trouble with a parent, is it worse when they say ‘I’m disappointed in you’ or would you rather lose your phone?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can you think of a time when the social status of someone determines how much they are covered in the media?</i> • <i>The events in this book happened in the late 80’s and early 90’s. How have situations like those changed today?</i> • <i>If we compare this description of the death row prison to what we saw about Norway and Finland, what observations did you have?</i> • <i>If this situation happened today, exact same case and details, do you think Walter would’ve been arrested and found guilty?</i> • <i>The phrase that we hear sometimes regarding life without parole, the person is never leaving prison. You may have heard the phrase ‘lock them up and throw away the key’. Do you have any thoughts about that being applied to teenagers and adolescents?</i>

Some experts say that spontaneous student questioning, in addition to teacher-generated questions, is another essential component of effective interactive read-alouds (e.g., May & Bingham, 2015). Evidence from this study proved that Mr. Walker's facilitation of interactive read-alouds inspired spontaneous student questioning. Some days, he handed out index cards for students to use to jot down random thoughts and questions as they came to mind, and other times, students simply raised their hands or used a pause in the reading to ask questions. Compared to the number of questions Mr. Walker posed throughout the study, the amount of student-generated questions was much lower. In fact, only two of the eight participants asked spontaneous questions during the read-aloud events.

Chapter 1: Mockingbird Players discussed the history of interracial sex and marriage in the United States, and more specifically, the extramarital affair between Walter McMillan, an African American male, and Karen Kelly, a white female (Stevenson, 2018, pp. 19-31). The topic of interracial relationships encouraged Ambroes to ask, "*In one part of the book, it talked about interracial sex and marriage. Does that mean they can do it with other races, just not with white people?*" Shortly after, Kris raised his hand to ask a follow-up question, "*So, at the time when they were caught having an affair and you said African Americans were killed and lynched, were there only white southern people who were bothered by this?*" Throughout the rest of the study, Ambroes and Kris would sparingly ask clarifying questions, like "*Isn't that bribing?*", "*What happened to Trina, the one who was mentally ill?*", and "*What does ABI stand for?*" While the other student participants willingly answered the questions Mr. Walker asked, they chose to not ask any of their own questions during the read-aloud discussions.

Research Question 2

The second research question was generated to understand ninth-grade students' perceptions of the social justice topics presented in a nonfiction chapter book. Going into this study, I anticipated diverse participant perspectives related to the text, and Mr. Walker shared similar expectations, "*You know, kids are going to have different reactions to literature and respond to it in different ways. And for some students, it's going to be a life changing experience.*" He beamed with pride when talking about his students' responsiveness to the read-aloud events:

I find that the ninth graders, even though they might, some of them, in particular, are struggling readers and struggling writers, but they're still so good about putting effort into the, into the assignments. And I think I've just been impressed by their perseverance and their willingness and openness to do this. They haven't had a teacher read to them for a couple years.

To understand students' perceptions of the text, Mr. Walker and I arranged for his students to respond to the text in multiple ways. One of the methods used to capture students' daily reading transactions with the text (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, 1982) was literature response journals. When discussing our plans for using literature response journals, Mr. Walker anticipated the challenges that could arise, "*I've noticed that with many, writing is actually a real struggle. And a lot of times that's connected to struggles with reading. There's a correlation, it's literacy skills across the board.*" We soon discovered that most students did, in fact, struggle to transfer their thoughts onto paper.

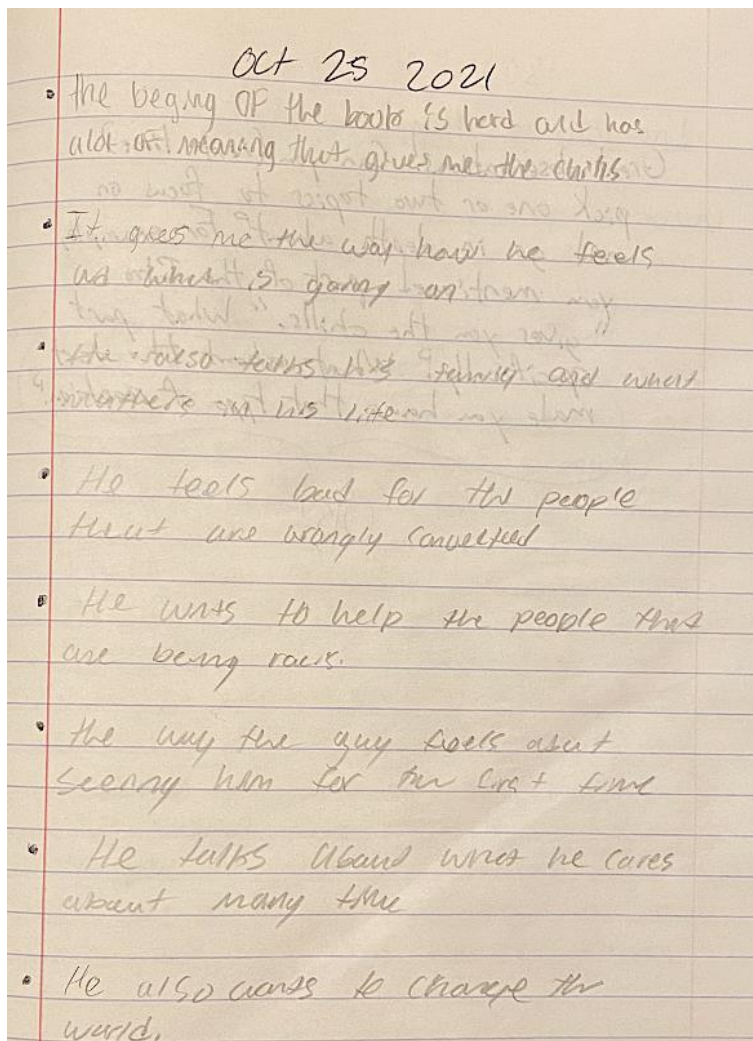
Mr. Walker had not used any form of journal writing with this class, so to gauge how students would approach journal writing, he did not provide any specific prompts for students to

respond to during the first week of the study. We both noticed that without specific prompts to concentrate on, student responses were generally brief or summarized the reading without including personal thoughts and feelings.

Most students were responding efferently, rather than aesthetically. This means that responses were more literal and fact-based, with less personal and emotional investment (Rosenblatt, 2005a; Schieble, 2010; Tracey & Morrow, 2017). Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show how Kris and Owen responded without teacher prompts.

Figure 4.1.

Week 1 Journal Response (Kris)



Oct 25 2021

the beging of the book is hard and has a lot of meaning that gives me the chills

It gives me the way how he feels and what is going on

He also talks his family and what matters in his life

He feels bad for the people that are wrongly convected

He wnts to help the people that are being racis

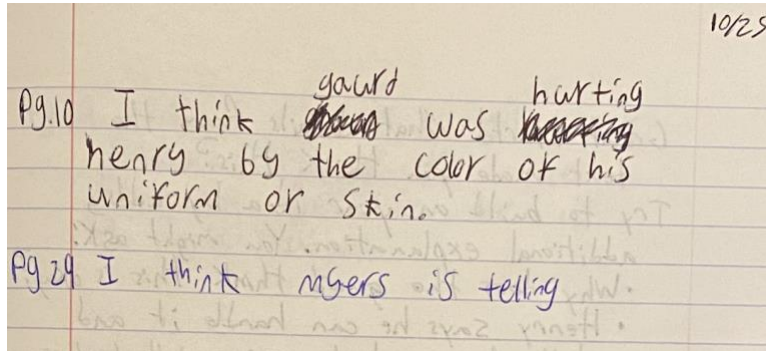
the way the guy feels about seeing him for the first time

He talks about what he cares about many time

He also wants to change the world.

Figure 4.2.

Week 1 Journal Response (Owen)



10/25

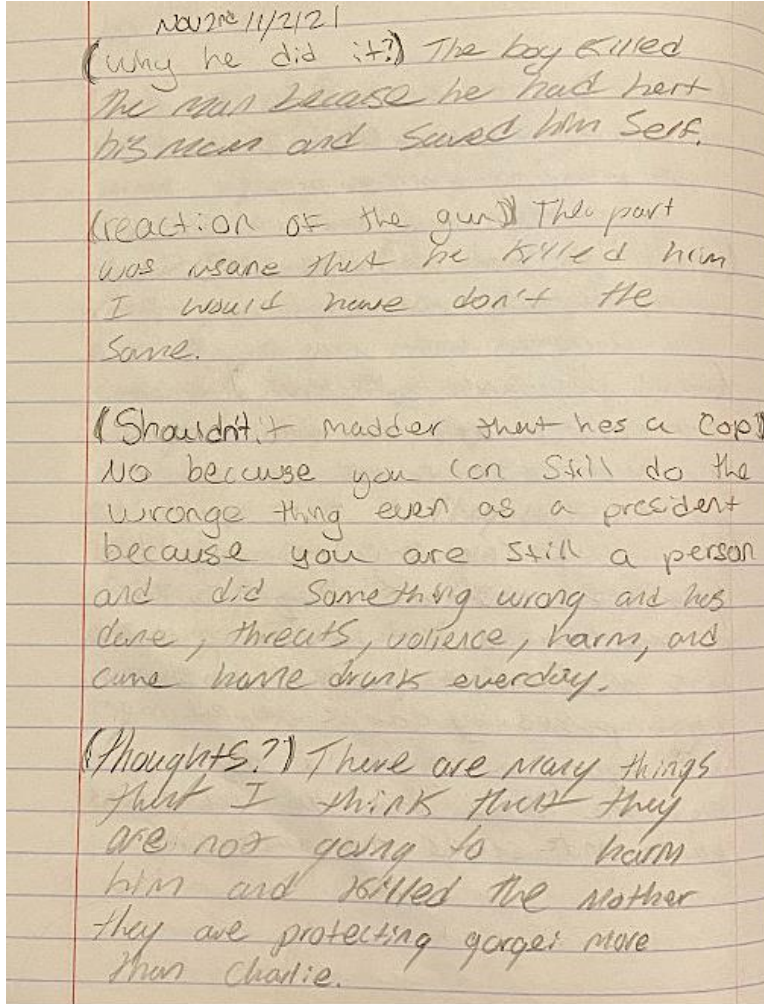
pg. 10 I think guard was hurting Henry by the color of his uniform or skin.

pg 29 I think Myers is telling

By the second week of the study, Mr. Walker had encouraged his students to “*build and expand*” their ideas and to push themselves even further in their writing, “*there’s no limit to how you can respond- drawings, poems, letters, connections between the texts you’ve read...let’s go a step further and more in-depth.*” He also implemented two changes to their journal writing routine. The first was offering at least one specific prompt for students to respond to. The second was giving them multiple opportunities to write. Rather than wait until the very end of each chapter, which could sometimes take 20 or more minutes to read, he would pause once or twice during the read-aloud event to allow students to respond immediately. Then students sometimes wrote again after the read-aloud events. With more structure and guidance, the same students’ written responses became more thoughtful and personal. Ambroes took Mr. Walker’s advice and composed a poem to express her thoughts about children receiving life prison sentences. Figures 4.3 and 4.4 show Kris’ and Owen’s writing improvement after the second week. Figure 4.5 illustrates Ambroes’ poetry writing response.

Figure 4.3.

Week 2 Journal Response (Kris)



Nov 2nd 11/2/21

(Why he did it?) The boy killed the man because he had hurt his mom and saved him self.

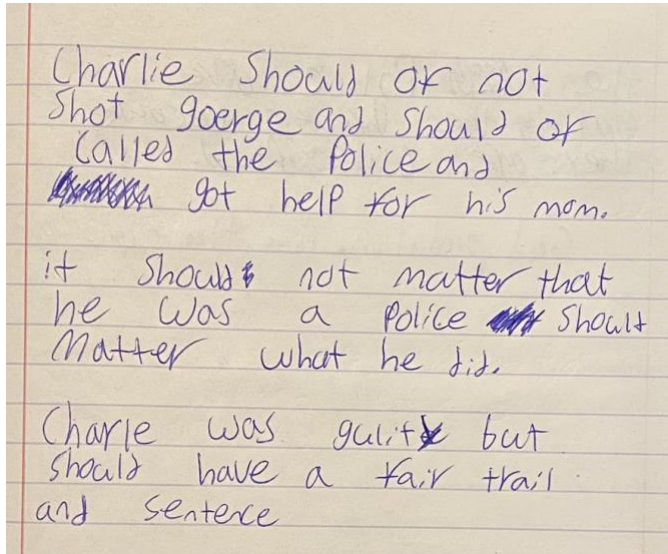
(reaction of the gun) The part was insane that he killed him I would have don't the same.

(Shouldn't it madder that hes a cop) No because you can still do the wronge thing even as a president because you are still a person and did something wrong and hes done threats, violence, harm, and come home drunk everday.

(thoughts?) There are many things that I think that they are not going to harm him and killed the mother they are protecting gorgei more than Charlie

Figure 4.4.

Week 2 Journal Response (Owen)



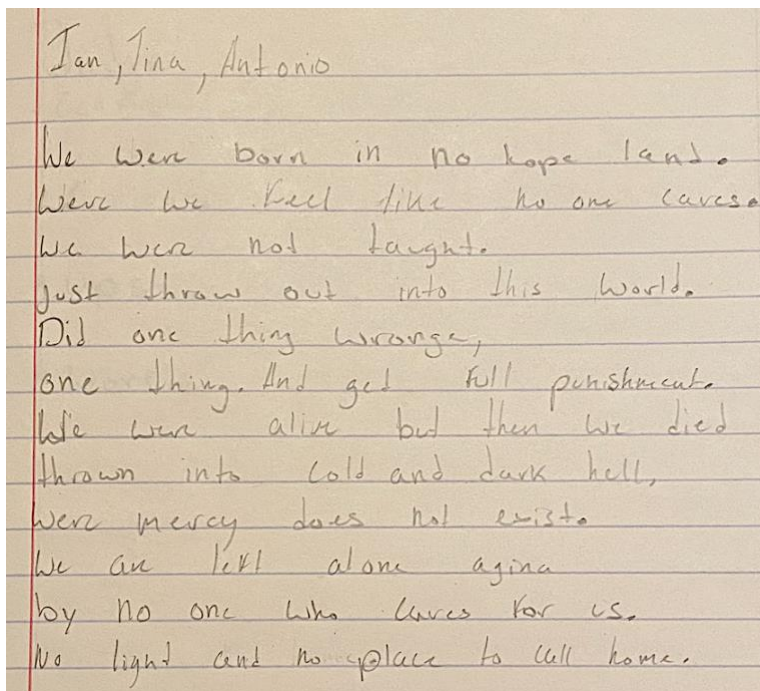
Charlie should of not shot goerge and should of called the police and got help for his mom.

it should not matter that he was a police should matter what he did.

Charlie was guilty but should have a fair trial and sentene

Figure 4.5.

Week 2 Journal Response (Ambroes)



Ian, Tina, Antonio

We were born in no hope land.
Were we feel like no one cares.
We were not taught.
just throw out into the world.
Did one thing wronge,
one thing. And get full punishment.
We were alive but then we died
thrown into cold and dark hell,
we were alive but then we died
thrown into cold and dark hell,
were mercy does not exist.
We are left alone agina
by no one who cares for us.
no light and no place to call home.

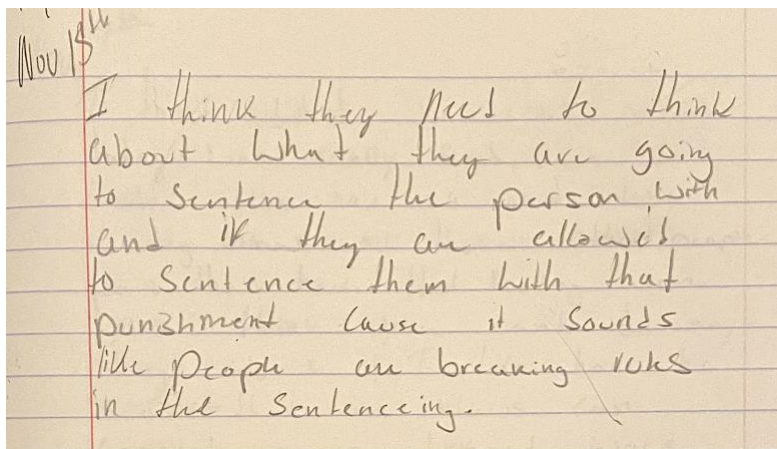
By the third week of the study, Mr. Walker was still brainstorming ways to optimize journal writing time because “with high school students ... if anything becomes too much of a routine, the kids fall into just doing something quickly”. One of his ideas was to use visual prompts:

I might try to have like a picture of a courtroom on one day [or] have something like a picture of the electric chair... you don't necessarily say any words. The fact that the kids have that visual prompt up there, I think would help them write.

Even though he discussed this idea before the start of the third week, a visual prompt was not offered until the final week of the study. After reading Chapter 15: Broken, Mr. Walker displayed a picture of an electric chair on his Smart Board and encouraged his students to “write about what comes to mind when you see this picture.” Ambroes was the only student whose journal response was related to the electric chair visual prompt. See Figure 4.6 for her thoughts.

Figure 4.6.

Journal Response to Visual Prompt (Ambroes)



Nov 15th

I think they need to think about what they are going to sentence the person with and if they are allowed to sentence them with that punishment cause it sounds like people are breaking rules in the sentencing.

As each week passed, students seemed less and less inclined to write in their literature response journals. Ryan even made a comment after reading the Epilogue, “Do we have to respond?” Fortunately, students’ transactions with the text were also documented through

audiovisual materials, observer field notes, and interview transcriptions. Using a combination of these data sources, I identified *redemption* and *empathy* as the third and fourth emerging themes in this study.

Redemption

Redemption can be viewed as both a notion of religious beliefs and Western popular culture (Underiner, 2014). Redemption as an emerging theme of this study espouses the latter concept, embodying “public reparation”, “recovery” and “deliverance from a burden of guilt” (Underiner, 2014, p. 79). The practicability of redemption was brought up during the discussion of several prominent topics from the book, including the death penalty, prison education and vocational training, children imprisonment, and mercy.

As we were reviewing the anticipation guide statements before reading *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018), the term ‘redemption’ was not actually used in conversation but the idea of it was implied during a focus group discussion about using the death penalty as a solution to stop crime. I had asked the group, “*Do you think the only way to get rid of these crimes is to kill people?*” and Pratt responded, “*No, no. But there are certain kinds of people that go to prison, they spend their time there and they don’t learn their lesson, and go right back to doing what they’ve been doing.*” Pratt went on to describe a three-strike rule he believed should be enforced instead: “*I’d say if he goes in three times for the same thing and he hasn’t learned his lesson...we’re going to put you on death row and everything.*” Yurei responded by asking, “*But do you guys think that might work when it comes to serial killers?*” These comments ensued:

Bob: *I think it should be immediately death row.*

Pratt: *Totally. I have no empathy for those types of people. Like none whatsoever.*

Bob: *Because if they let them live, they go back and kill a bunch more people.*

Pratt: *Or some people while they're in prison.*

Yurei: *Oh, nice thinking!*

Pratt: *Because it's a serial killer, they're not gonna learn their lesson...*

This exchanged suggested that serial killers are incapable of redemption because they do not learn from their mistakes, which led me to another question, “*Do y'all believe in redemption? Do you believe that people can do really bad things, and then they get caught, they go to prison, then they realize that it was a bad thing? And they try to do better?*” Pratt and Bob shared their perceptions about redemption:

Pratt: *I believe in redemption for like, certain things, but like murder and stuff like that, I don't believe in redemption for them.*

Bob: *Some people would just like enjoy just like killing people and like those types of people should be dead.*

Researcher: *So, the ones that have no remorse?*

Bob: *They're like beyond redemption.*

Pratt: *People would say that they're insane. But I don't think they're insane. I think they have full control over what they do. And how to do it.*

I then shifted the conversation toward educational and vocational training. First, I asked if prisoners on death row should be able to have jobs and/or receive training or education. Bob and Pratt collectively said “no”, then Pratt elaborated, “*...because their lives are going to be over. What's the use?*” I followed up by asking if the prisoners' execution dates are delayed, should they just “*sit there and waste away their time?*” Bob reiterated his stance on redemption for death row prisoners by saying, “*at that point, there's no redemption for any of them.*”

The following week, Mr. Walker read Chapter 8: All God's Children, which focused on Stevenson's (2018) experiences representing three teenaged clients, Ian, Trina, and Antonio, who were all sentenced to life in prison (pp. 123-138). In her literature response journal, Ambroes wrote a poem titled *Ian, Tina, Antonio*, describing how the possibility of redemption seemed out of reach for Ian, Trina, and Antonio as they were serving out their life sentences (also shown in Figure 4.5). Starting on the seventh line, Ambroes wrote:

*We were alive but we died
thrown into cold and dark hell,
where [sic] mercy does not exist.
We are left alone again [sic]
by no one who cares for us.
No light and no place to call home.*

This poem does not necessarily reflect Ambroes' beliefs about redemption, but it portrayed the unlikelihood of it in the case of these three teenagers. The same day this poem was written, the topic of redemption came up again in our focus group interview. Kris' position on redemption was that it is possible, just not for everyone:

Some people, not everybody. I know that cause like, a lot of people go to jail and come right out and just kill somebody else again and do it over and over. But there are people that have realized that it is wrong and then they try to start over or try to get help.

Bob still believed that redemption was not feasible for serial killers, but considered drug users or addicts to be capable of it, "I feel like it depends on the person. Like, a serial killer, they are not changing, but like when someone did intense drugs ... they can see what's changed." Ambroes felt that some criminals have problems because they have been "treated like really

badly” or “something really bad has happened to them”, but she also believed that “people can change, but it usually takes them a long time because of habits and stuff they build up from that one personality or what they’ve been doing.”

Some of the participants were still contemplating the idea of redemption during the final week of the study. In a one-on-one interview, I asked Yurei if she thought criminals were capable of change, and her response was:

I mean, that depends if they knew they messed up badly and get sentenced to life. They have like life in jail to like rethink of what they did wrong, and what happened, and why did they do this, and try to probably be better if it’s good for them ... I think they’re capable of that but sometimes people just don’t want to show they’re capable of it.”

In their final focus group interviews, I posed the question, “*What does ‘mercy’ mean to you?*” and their individual responses were:

Ambroes: *Showing mercy is like, being able to at least go lie on them or just forgive them...just being kind, to be honest, or forgiving the person.*

Pratt: *Forgiveness.*

Yurei: *I think it means, like, probably forgiveness.*

Luke: *To give somebody another chance.*

Ryan: *Giving someone like an extra chance, not giving up on them.*

Their interpretations of ‘mercy’ signify two essential steps that help pave the metaphorical road to redemption, which includes both ‘forgiveness’ and ‘second chances’.

Empathy

Young adult literature, like *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018), can be used as a tool to encourage empathy and dismantle personal biases and stereotypes (Webber & Agiro, 2019). To

develop feelings of empathy, we can show compassion and sympathy towards others (Batson et al., 2002), imagine ourselves in other people's shoes or adopt others' perspectives (Coke et al., 1978). The following quote from the Introduction: Higher of *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018), articulated the idea that, in order to achieve justice, we must not be so quick to judge others by their worst mistakes:

My work has taught me a vital lesson: *Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done*. I am persuaded that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice. Finally, I've come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to justice, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the respected, and the privileged among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned (pp. 17-18).

This is a message that resonated with Luke, in particular, as he recognized in a one-on-one interview that “*not everybody is as bad as when they get put in prison. Not everybody is a criminal.*” This mindset indicated that we must save our judgements and instead practice empathy towards those who are generally considered to be “less than” or not worthy of our empathy.

When discussing Stevenson's (2018) ability to evoke emotions of empathy in *Just Mercy*, Mr. Walker explained that “*What Just Mercy does is puts a human face on the lives that are stake in a system that overlooks context, mitigating circumstances, and its own systemic biases.*” The organization of the book, with its alternating chapters about Walter and other cases Stevenson (2018) has worked on, plays a key role in providing many opportunities for readers to develop empathetic skills. Bob said the organization of the book “*keeps it fresh*” while Ryan

appreciated the organization because “*it just shows not just one [story], but a lot more and it covers a lot more problems in the world.*”

There were several instances throughout this study where the participants put themselves in the shoes of the characters they were reading about. During a focus group interview, Kris demonstrated traits of empathy before Mr. Walker even started reading the book. For example, when the participants were using the *Just Mercy* Anticipation Guide (Miller-Johnson ELA, 2019) to debate whether or not prisoners should have access to basic luxuries like TV, video games, reading materials, and exercise equipment, Kris said,

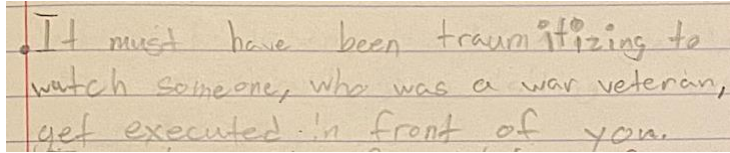
I mean, imagine being in there for 20 years not having the equipment to work out, play video games, or even have a magazine to check what the worlds like outside. I mean, I can't imagine being in prison for 10 years and then coming out and being like, “oh, we have a new president now”. That would be weird, and I don't think a magazine would hurt anybody, especially just to know what's going on in the world.

The next section discusses the characters with whom the students empathized the most:

Bryan. Bryan Stevenson, author, and narrator of *Just Mercy* (2018), recounted several of his past clients' stories, starting with his internship for the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee (SPDC) then continuing on into the startup of his own nonprofit organization, the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI). One of the first examples of participants feeling empathetic toward Bryan was in response to reading about his experience attending his first ever execution. Figure 4.7 shows Yurei's thoughts as she imagines herself in Bryan's shoes.

Figure 4.7. Empathy Journal Response #1 (Yurei)

Empathy Journal Response #1 (Yurei)

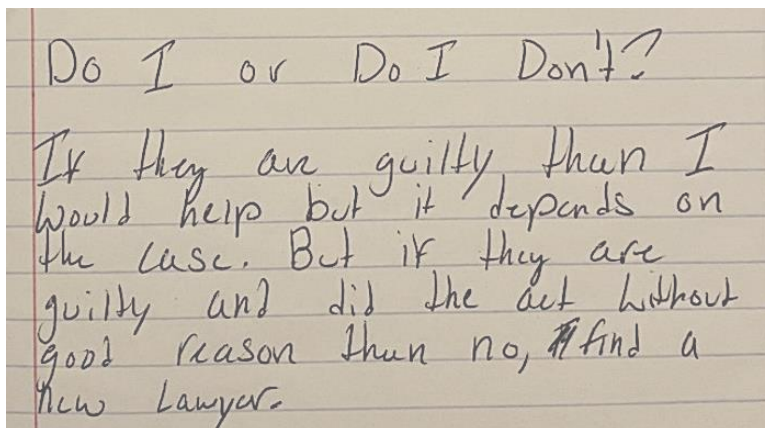


It must have been traumatizing to watch someone, who was a war veteran, get executed in front of you.

Some of the participants imagined themselves in Bryan Stevenson’s position as a lawyer, when Mr. Walker asked them, “*How would you feel if you were meeting someone on death row? What questions might you have?*” Their questions were, “*What did you do?*”, “*What evidence do they have against you?*” and “*Are you going to kill me?*” One of Mr. Walker’s journal prompts asked, “*If you were an attorney [like Bryan] and you know that someone is guilty, would you still be comfortable defending that person?*” Figure 4.8 shows Ambroes’ thoughts about defending someone guilty of committing a crime.

Figure 4.8.

Empathy Journal Response #2 (Ambroes)



Do I or Do I Don't?

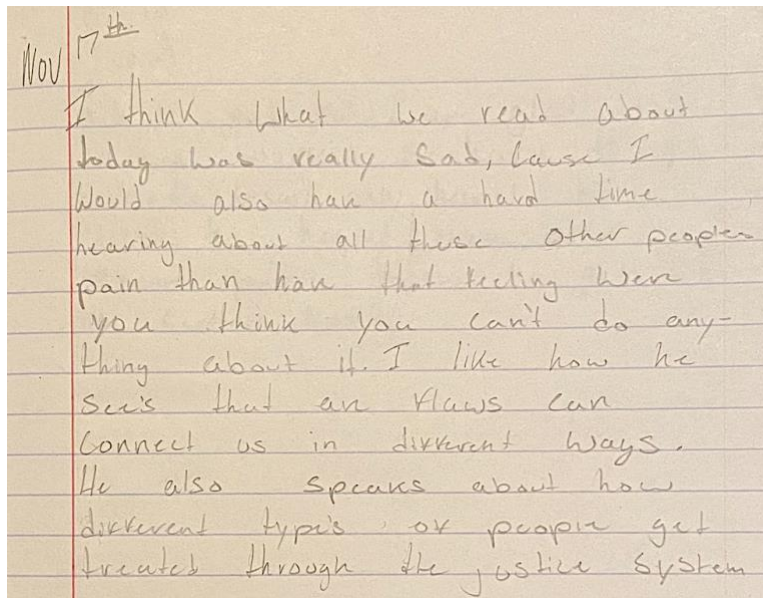
If they are guilty than I would help but it depends on the case. But if they are guilty and did the act without good reason than no, find a new lawyer.

Further along in the study, Ambroes put herself in Bryan’s shoes again. In Chapter 15: Broken, Stevenson (2018) recalled Walter McMillan’s mental and physical decline after his release from death row, and noted that “The whole thing made me incredibly sad and

overwhelmed” (p. 226). In Figure 4.9, Ambroes shared similar thoughts in her literature response journal as she imagined herself as Bryan, unable to help clients after they have reintegrated back into society.

Figure 4.9.

Empathy Journal Response #3 (Ambroes)



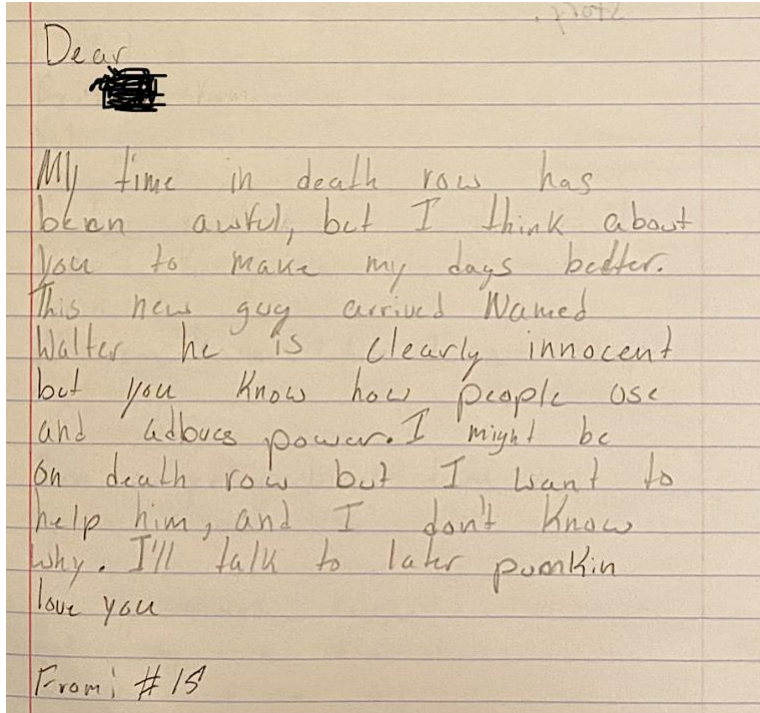
Nov 17th

I think what we read about today was really sad, cause I would also have a hard time hearing about all these other peoples pain than have that feeling were you think you can't do anything about it. I like how he see's that are flaws can connect us in different ways. He also speaks about how different type's of people get treated through the justice system

Walter. Walter McMillan’s story was recounted in alternate chapters of the book, starting with his adulterous interracial affair with Karen Kelly, which led authorities to convict and sentence him to death for a murder he did not commit (Stevenson, 2018). Ambroes wrote a letter as if she was an inmate who had recently interacted with Walter while serving time on death row. As the prisoner, Ambroes empathizes with Walter’s situation because she recognizes his innocence. See Figure 4.10 for the letter Ambroes in which she addressed to herself, written from the perspective of a prisoner, addressed herself. She used her real name when addressing the letter, so I blacked out her name to protect her anonymity.

Figure 4.10.

Empathy Journal Response #4 (Ambroes)



Dear

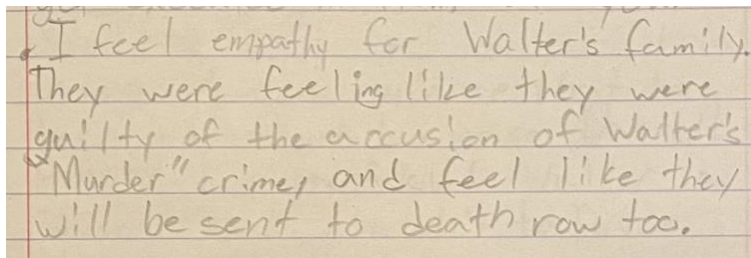
My time in death row has been awful, but I think about you to make my days better. This new guy arrived Named Walter he is clearly innocent but you know how people use and abuse power. I might be on death row but I want to help him, and I don't know why. I'll talk to later pumkin love you

From: #15

In Chapter 5: Homeland, Stevenson recalled his trip to Monroeville to meet with Walter's wife and children while he was being held in jail (pp. 73-99). After reading this chapter Yurei felt compelled to express empathy towards Walter's family. See Figure 4.11 for Yurei's journal response empathizing with Walter's family.

Figure 4.11.

Empathy Journal Response #5 (Yurei)



I feel empathy for Walter's family. They were feeling like they were guilty of the accusation of Walter's "Murder" crime, and feel like they will be sent to death row too.

After reading about Walter’s retrial, which eventually overturned his conviction and released him from prison, Mr. Walker posed the following question to his students, “*Put yourself in Walter’s situation. He’s lost six years of his life and now he’s released. What would you be feeling? What would you be thinking about?*” Two of the participants chose to respond to Mr. Walker’s prompt in their literature response journals. In Figure 4.12 and Figure 4.13, Bob and Ambroes demonstrate empathy by putting themselves in Walter’s shoes post-jail time.

Figure 4.12.

Empathy Journal Response #6 (Bob)

Nov 10th 2021

I feel Walter should be freed because what happened to him was wrong he was fasley accused of something cleary didn't do. If I was Walter I would happy to be finally free but also worried because we still don't know the real killer is

Figure 4.13.

Empathy Response #7 (Ambroes)

I Walters shoes after the case:

Happy
Overwhelmed
I would cry a lot
Curious of what is next

Herbert. The first execution Stevenson (2018) ever witnessed was Herbert Richardson's, a Vietnam War veteran. Like many soldiers, Herbert had returned home from war traumatized, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and found himself behind bars. In Chapter 4: The Old Rugged Cross, Bryan recalled the final words Herbert said to him before his execution, "More people have asked me what they can do to help me in the last fourteen hours of my life than ever asked me in the years when I was coming up." A short exchange took place between Mr. Walker and Bob during the reading of this chapter:

Mr. Walker: *What is it about his last hours that everyone is asking about his needs, wanting to help?*

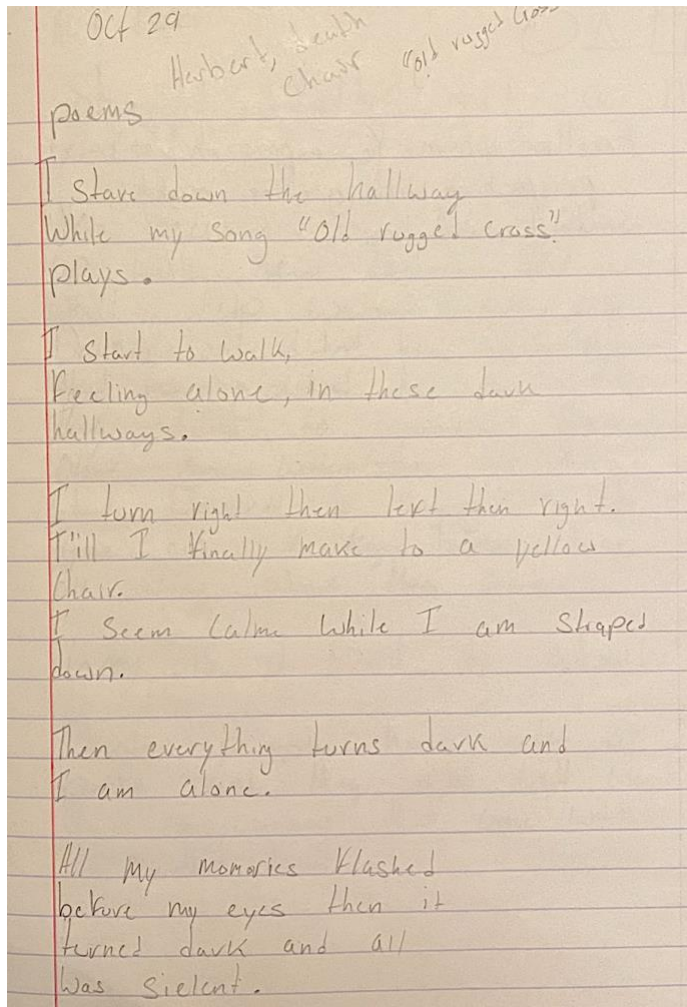
Bob: *Because he's on death row and they'll try to do anything to help him.*

Mr. Walker: *Maybe they empathize in a way they don't normally, something about the finality. Maybe it's easier to put yourself in their shoes when there's a timeline and a finality of their death...He [Herbert] brings out the humanity in others. It's kind of a paradox. Kind of interesting.*

Knowing his execution date was just a short week away, Herbert requested one thing from Bryan: to have the prison play his favorite church hymn, "The Old Rugged Cross", as he made his final descent towards the electric chair (p. 70). At the end of the read-aloud event that day, Ambroes chose to express her reactions to Herbert's situation by composing another poem in her literature response journal. Figure 4.14 shows the poem Ambroes wrote from Herbert's point of view, minutes before his execution.

Figure 4.14.

Empathy Journal Response #8 (Ambroes)



Oct 29
Herbert, death chair "old rugged cross"

poems

I stare down the hallway
While my song "Old Rugged Cross"
plays.

I start to walk,
feeling alone, in these dark
hallways.

I turn right then left then right.
Till I finally make to a yellow
chair.
I seem calm while I am strapped
down.

Then everything turns dark and
I am alone.

All my memories flashed
before my eyes then it
turned dark and all
was silent.

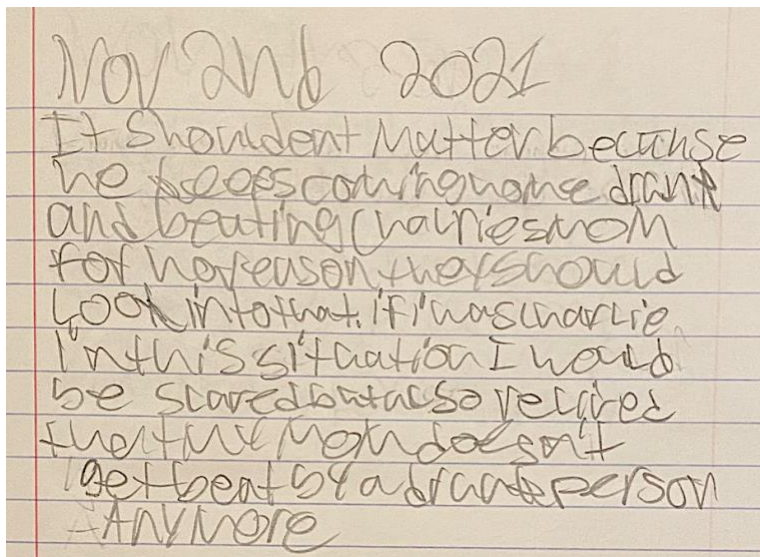
Charlie. As a 14-year-old boy, Charlie was sentenced to death after fatally shooting his mother's abusive boyfriend, George, who also happened to be a police officer (Stevenson, 2018). During his first attempt to speak to Charlie, Stevenson (2018) found Charlie to be radio-silent for several minutes. Charlie finally spoke up about his treatment as a minor sentenced in an adult prison by confessing that he had been sexually abused by three other men during his first night in jail (Stevenson, 2018). While reading Chapter 6: Surely Doomed, which introduced Charlie for the first time and described Stevenson's (2018) interactions with him, I documented in my

fieldnotes that “the room was completely silent” and it appeared that the students were mostly listening and following along with the story. It was not lost on me that this was the first of Stevenson’s stories written about his interaction with and representation of a minor, who was the same age as most of the participants at the time of this study.

At the conclusion of his read-aloud that day, Mr. Walker prompted the students to write about Charlie’s situation in their literature response journals. One of the prompts was, “*If you were in Charlie’s position, would you feel the same way? Would you be talking to Bryan?*” Three of the participants empathized with Charlie. Figures 4.15, 4.16, and 4.17 illustrate how Bob, Kris, and Yurei would react in Charlie’s situation.

Figure 4.15.

Empathy Journal Response #9 (Bob)

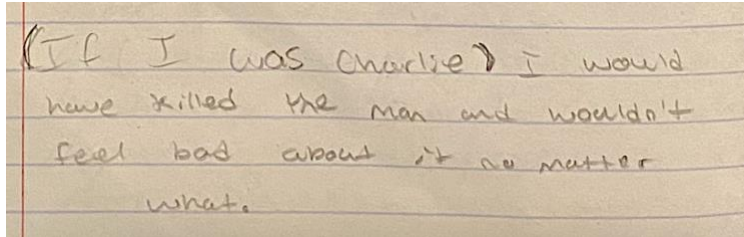


Nov 2nd 2021

It shouldnt matter because he keeps coming home drunk and beating Charlies mom for no reason. they should look into that. if I was Charlie in this situation I would be scared but also relieved that my mom doesn't get beat by a drunk person anymore

Figure 4.16.

Empathy Journal Response #10 (Kris)

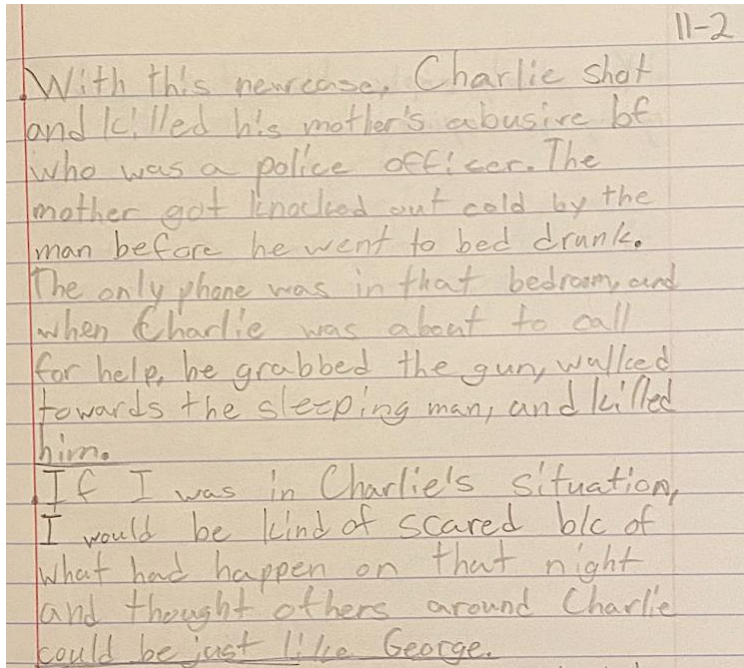


(If I was Charlie) I would have killed the man and wouldn't feel bad about it no matter what.

(If I was Charlie) I would have killed the man and wouldn't feel bad about it no matter what.

Figure 4.17.

Empathy Journal Response #11 (Yurei)



11-2

With this new case, Charlie shot and killed his mother's abusive bf who was a police officer. The mother got knocked out cold by the man before he went to bed drunk. The only phone was in that bedroom, and when Charlie was about to call for help, he grabbed the gun, walked towards the sleeping man, and killed him.

If I was in Charlie's situation, I would be kind of scared b/c of what had happen on that night and thought others around Charlie could be just like George.

11-2

With this new case, Charlie shot and killed his mother's abusive bf who was a police officer. The mother got knocked out cold by the man before he went to bed drunk. The only phone was in that bedroom, and when Charlie was about to call for help, he grabbed the gun, walked towards the sleeping man, and killed him.

If I was in Charlie's situation, I would be kind of scared b/c of what had happen on that night and thought others around Charlie could be just like George.

Trina. Trina was a 14-year-old girl who exhibited signs of intellectual disabilities and whose father physically and sexually abused her and her 11 other siblings (Stevenson, 2018). Eventually, Trina ran away and found herself in trouble with the law when she broke into a house, lit a match so she could see in the dark, and accidentally caught the house on fire (Stevenson, 2018). Despite being a minor, Trina was charged as an adult for second-degree

murder (Stevenson, 2018). As Mr. Walker was reading Trina's story in class, I wrote in my fieldnotes, "*Ambroes was shaking her head in disgust as the teacher was reading about 14-year-old Trina Garnett's father's abusive behavior towards their pet dog.*" I later asked her about her reaction, and she said, "*Trina's story is sad... Because she was used and abused. Um, yeah, I just think it's sad. And the dog part was really sad too... I love dogs.*" When I asked the participants what they would have done had they been in Trina's position, the following exchange took place:

Ryan: *Well, I wouldn't bring a match into a house.*

Ambroes: *If I'm being completely honest, and I went through everything that she went through, I would kill myself.*

Researcher: *You think that would be the only way out of the situation?*

Ambroes: *No, there's probably other ways but that's just what I would do. I feel like, even if you do go through all of it, it's always still gonna be there. And I just wouldn't like that feeling. If I was her, I just wouldn't like feeling like that, always being there with me.*

Trina's story still resonated with Ambroes going into the final day of the study. When I asked if there were any parts of the book she did not like, she immediately said Trina's story, "*A lot of them were really sad, but I don't know why hers was just really sad to me. I felt like she couldn't get a break or something.*"

Ian. As a result of a robbery with his two older friends, 13-year-old Ian Manuel was charged with armed robbery and attempted homicide, then sentenced to life without parole in an adult prison (Stevenson, 2018). Because Ian was "small for his age" (p. 129), he was placed in solitary confinement, where he spent 18 uninterrupted years (Stevenson, 2018). Ian's story led

me to ask the participants about how they think they would act if they were in solitary confinement like Ian:

Kris: *Beating on the wall.*

Ryan: *You know that one meme with the monkey that's on the door and just [he starts to make hand movements like he is rattling a door]*

Researcher: *Is that what you would do? Just rattle the door?*

Ryan: *No, I would get bored, get more confinement.*

Kris: *Become strong.*

Ambroes: *I get bored easily, so I would probably start screaming at them. I'd just be in there for life, always trying to get out.*

Kris: *I would start picking my way out.*

Ryan: *With what?*

Kris: *With one of my fingers.*

In addition to showing empathy for the characters, many of the participants associated 'mercy' with 'empathy' and even considered "empathy" to be one of the overarching themes of the book. One of the final questions I asked each participant was what their definition of the word 'mercy' was. Bob said, "*like, empathy, and like caring in a way for people.*" Similarly, Ambroes expressed, "*I feel like maybe one is that kind of like putting yourself in somebody else's shoes or imagining that their experiences.*" Owen did not mention empathy by name, but described its characteristics, "*I know what it means, but I don't know how to explain it... To kind of like, to think like how that person's feeling. Like how they're feeling right now.*"

In Chapter 15: Broken, Stevenson (2018) avowed, “We are all broken by something” (p. 239), which emphasizes the humanities that binds together characteristics of redemption and empathy. Below are some of the participants’ personal interpretations of this quote:

Ambroes: *Our brokenness kind of connects us in ways that many people don’t think it would...there’s something that probably changed all of us from like, when we were little to now...maybe it’s just talking about, like change ... we’ve all been changed in a way that can relate back to each other.*

Bob: *I feel like a lot of people are extremely broken in many ways...everyone is just broken, and how we can still do something about people on death row and people who clearly didn’t do anything and still save them and get people the help they need.*

Luke: *It means we all have something lost or missing from us. I agree with Bryan everybody is broken [until] they have found their strength.*

Owen: *I think it has something to do with your past and like the way you act. Like childhood, like you might be going through, like parents going through divorces or you might be going through foster care and stuff like that. Just the way you’ve grown up, that’s what I think it means... No matter what happened in your past, you shouldn’t let that determine who you are.*

Pratt: *It means we all have our own problems. You can fix it, but like, it won’t always stay fixed or be broken.*

Ryan: *There’s always something there to bring us down, like, make us feel sad or down.*

Yurei: *I think that means that we all got like, there was something in our lives that made us, like, you know, probably traumatized or feeling like, upset about it in a certain way that causes us to have our mental health probably hurt... no matter if you’re, like, broken*

or like, normal, quote unquote, normal. I mean, that doesn't mean that you're like, different or a terrible person in society.

The participants' individual insights can be assembled into one cohesive thought. We must recognize our own brokenness in order to heal and set ourselves on the path to redemption; our ability to recognize our own brokenness will then allow us to identify and empathize with the brokenness of others.

Research Questions 1 and 2

Analyses of audiovisual materials, observer fieldnotes, interview transcriptions, and student documents led me to the fifth and final emerging theme of this study, *awareness*, which emerged across both research questions.

Awareness

In addition to reading the text aloud, Mr. Walker shared supplemental materials that raised awareness and allowed students to explore the text's topics across multiple sources. As a result of this read-aloud experience, participants communicated newfound or transformed awareness of certain social justice topics from the text.

Promoting Awareness through Supplemental Materials

YouTube Videos. Mr. Walker believed that *"Using related YouTube videos was an effective way to get students thinking about the issues brought up in the book."* After reading Chapter 2: Stand, students were exposed to some of the "horrible conditions" (Stevenson, 2018, p. 33) within the United States prison systems. To underscore the severity of the United States prison system compared to others around the world, Mr. Walker shared two videos that discussed two separate prison systems across the world in Norway and Finland. The first video, titled *How Norway's Prisons Are Different From America's* (NowThis News, 2020), discussed how

Norway's prison system is driven by their ability to maintain humanity through interpersonal relationships, ensuring inmate safety and security, and reintegration into the society. The second video, titled, *Prisoners in Finland Live in Open Prisons Where They Learn Tech Skills* (Insider News, 2020), illustrated why Finland is the home to "one of the most humane [prison] systems in the world" (2:36).

To offer his students a chance to consider perspectives about the death penalty outside of the text, Mr. Walker played a video titled *America Is Still Obsessed With the Death Penalty* (VICE News, 2021). Prior to showing the video, he claimed "*One of the best online resources I found for news source[s] that get you to think about issues like the death penalty is VICE News...it doesn't get you to choose one side over another; just to think more deeply about the topics.*" The video briefly discussed the history of and contemplated the humanity of the different forms of capital punishment in the United States (VICE News, 2021).

Equal Justice Initiative Virtual Presentation. About a month before conducting the study, I emailed Mr. Walker asking what he thought about scheduling a virtual author visit with Bryan Stevenson. His response was "*The students would really enjoy that. I think it would work best after we have read the book (or are close to finishing). The students would have better questions at that point.*" That same day, I took the initiative to contact Mr. Stevenson through his organization, the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) and received a reply within two hours. Unfortunately, one of his staff members explained that while Mr. Stevenson was honored to be thought of, his "*challenging docket and urgent day-to-day work at EJI is preventing him from committing to activities like this one.*" I was then connected with another staff member, and after multiple email correspondences, we solidified a virtual presentation for November 16th, three days before the study concluded.

First, we were given a brief overview of EJI's history and statistics relating to Alabama's prison conditions. Next, the presenter introduced EJI's two cultural sights, *The Legacy Museum* and the *National Memorial for Peace and Justice* (EJI, 2021). Then, the presenter explained EJI's legal frameworks and the narrative of racial hierarchy and how it has evolved from the enslavement of African Americans to modern-day lynchings, or the public killings, of individuals. Then we learned about EJI's *Community Remembrance Project* (EJI, 2021), which allows the families and friends of lynching victims to "*heal and memorialize*". Finally, the students had an opportunity to ask some of the questions they had prepared the day before.

Equal Justice Initiative Website Exploration. The day after the EJI virtual presentation, Mr. Walker gave his students an opportunity to explore the EJI website. He pointed out different sections of the website that were discussed during the virtual presentation the day before, like information about the Legacy Museum and the Community Remembrance Project. He also directed their attention to other resources related to topics presented in *Just Mercy*, like the sections titled, "Challenging the Death Penalty" and "Protecting Children from Abusive Punishment" (EJI, 2021). Before setting students loose to search the website, Mr. Walker clarified, "*I'm not going to make you do any kind of writing; I just want you to have a chance to explore the website.*" While most of the students aimlessly clicked around on the website, Ambroes seized the opportunity and dug into some of the articles. She first read an article written about Walter McMillan, then spent the remainder of her time reading an article titled, "*Targeting Black Veterans*" (EJI, 2021).

60 Minutes Documentary. After the students explored the EJI website, Mr. Walker played *From The 60 Minutes Archives: The True Story Behind "Just Mercy"* (60 Minutes, 2020) until the bell rang, signifying the end of the class period. The short, 15-minute documentary used

footage from the 1992 reporting of Bryan Stevenson’s representation of Walter McMillan, one of the major figures discussed in *Just Mercy*. As I was watching the documentary with the students, I wrote in my fieldnotes that the students seemed “entranced”, and I imagine it was because this was the first time since they started the book that they were able to put faces to the names of the characters they were reading about. At the end of class, Ambroes made the comment, “*What would have been interesting is if we could actually see them in court.*”

Just Mercy Film Adaptation. After the seventh and final focus group interview and my last day in the classroom, Mr. Walker played the film adaptation of Stevenson’s (2015) New York Times best-selling book, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, also titled *Just Mercy* (Cretton, 2019). The film, *Just Mercy*, stars Michael B. Jordan as Bryan Stevenson and Jamie Foxx as Walter McMillan (EJI, 2021). During the viewing of this movie, I pulled each participant out of the classroom individually to conduct one final interview. Because I was not in the classroom during this time, I cannot report on how the students reacted to the movie. However, I do know some of the students were interested in watching it because earlier in the study, they had mentioned that watching the movie would have enhanced the overall read-aloud experience. Unfortunately, the students were unable to watch the entire film during class.

Students Exhibiting Newfound or Changed Awareness

During one of the many conversations that we had about the read-aloud text, Mr. Walker spoke proudly of how its relevance sparked new student learning:

I think of the really cool things about using Just Mercy is it shows when you use compelling contemporary texts that were written for that age group, really amazing things happen ... I think, to understand any sort of system, you have to see what happens when things go wrong in that system ... what happens when things go wrong, and what

is happening is incredibly important for understanding the limitations of the system, for considering alternate possibilities, considering reform, and really looking at laws that need to be changed.

His students participated in productive discourse related to the deficiencies of the United States' criminal justice system, and amazing things DID happen. Many of the participants revealed how the book forced them to reconsider previous viewpoints and some even disclosed newfound awareness as a result of reading this text.

Most evidence of new and transformed perspectives were documented through the students' completed anticipation guides and interview discussions. Before reading the text, the participants were given the *Just Mercy* Anticipation Guide (Miller-Johnson ELA, 2019) and were asked to read and respond to each of the ten statements with "agree" or "disagree" followed by a short-written explanation. The day we finished reading the book, the students were given another copy of the anticipation guide to fill out. Table 4.2 divulges the number of "agree" and "disagree" responses each statement received, both before and after reading. Kris misplaced his first anticipation guide and was absent for the second; Luke was absent for the first anticipation guide and only completed it after reading. Therefore, data in Table 4.2 only reflects the opinions of six of the eight participants.

Table 4.2.

Just Mercy Anticipation Guide Data

Statement	BEFORE READING			AFTER READING		
	Agree	Undecided (UN) or Both (B)	Disagree	Agree	Undecided (UN) or Both (B)	Disagree
1 People who have been wrongfully convicted of a crime & spend time behind bars should be compensated (paid) for the years they lost	+++			+++		
2 Racism in America is a major issue; in fact, things haven't changed much since the Civil Rights era		(UN)			(B)	
3 Trial juries should be made up of a diverse group of people; men, women, different races, different backgrounds, etc. in order to be fair.	+++			+++		
4 People in prison don't deserve luxuries like TV, video games, exercise equipment, books, magazines, etc.					(B)	
5 Law enforcement officials should go through anti-bias training during their education.		(UN)		+++		
6 The death penalty is a great idea for people who commit crimes, however, we should be executing people at a faster rate to cut costs and get "tough on crime".						+++
7 Inmates should receive some type of education/training/job skills while they serve jail or prison time.	+++			+++		
8 Children should not be put in prison for the rest of their lives, regardless of the crime they commit.				+++		
9 Judges/lawyers should take into consideration someone's background before sentencing him/her. (ex: think about poverty, abuse, etc.)	+++			+++		
10 Substance abuse should be treated as a health issue, not a criminal issue.					(B)	

Note. The student participants' responses to each of the ten statements above were documented both before and after reading *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018).

Of the ten anticipation guide statements, two of them sparked the most discussion and encouraged some of the participants to adopt a new or different perspective by the end of the study: the death penalty and life imprisonment for children.

Death Penalty. The sixth statement on the anticipation guide said, "The death penalty is a great idea for people who commit crimes, however, we should be executing people at a faster rate to cut costs and get 'tough on crime'." Before reading the text, many participants believed

the death penalty to be cost-effective and practical solution to cut down on crime, especially for individuals who commit multiple murders:

Bob: *It's fair to a certain extent. let's say some guy went out rampage killed like 20-30 people, that should be immediately death penalty. But if like people killed like a guy kills one person, they shouldn't get it, just like a decent amount of time in jail.*

Ryan: *Or life.*

Pratt: *Maybe. I wouldn't say put to death for like one homicide, or like one, like killing one person, I have to like spend life in prison and have to deal with the mentality of their actions and their consequences. I'd use the death penalty as a last resort*

Pratt: *I feel that it teaches other people a lesson. You do this? well, this is how your life is gonna end.*

Ryan: *An eye for an eye.*

Pratt: *A tooth for a tooth.*

Yurei: *I think it's because they probably like took, like, a lot like other innocent lives away.*

Researcher: *And so, it's justified by killing that person?*

Most Participants: *Yes.*

Ambroes: *I think it depends on the crime because some people I know there's been things where like they're convicted of and stuff, but they're still in prison for a long time. And you're like spending all this money and what not when you can just like put them in the chair and like make them crispy.*

Researcher: *You think it would save us money by just electrocuting them or...*

Ambroes: *if you're 100% sure that they did it, like serial killers and stuff, because I know there's like one, he was staying in there and he got paid for medical stuff, and he had some problems and what not, they were gonna kill him anyway, so why didn't they just do it earlier?*

Ambroes was the only participant in this exchange who considered the possibility that not all individuals on death row were guilty of the crimes they were charged with. After reading about the many innocent individuals Bryan Stevenson (2018) represented in court, some of the participants realized that the number of innocent people sentenced to death was much higher than they had previously thought. I had the following conversation with Bob to explore his newfound awareness:

Bob: *One thing changed for me.*

Researcher: *One thing changed? What was that?*

Bob: *The death penalty.*

Researcher: *Okay, so how did you feel before you read the book?*

Bob: *That the death penalty is a good way to get rid of people in jail.*

Researcher: *Okay, then how did you feel about it after reading the book?*

Bob: *The death penalty is only good for certain people and shouldn't be used for innocent people.*

Similarly, Ryan realized that quick executions are not always the best solution, especially when the prisoners are actually innocent,

Making the death penalty shorter because you put an innocent man on death row and they have only like three months, and it's not enough time to prove they're [not] guilty,

and you're not gonna have enough time to gather all the evidence ... The United States is willing to put so many people in jail for no reason.

Yurei said that Stevenson (2018), *“made me realize how people, in states like Alabama, were favoring death row like a whole lot.”* She also learned that the process to indict or exonerate is a lot longer than she expected, *“It took like six years for Walter’s case. I thought it took like a week or so, or a month or whatever.”*

Life Imprisonment for Children. The eighth statement on the anticipation guide says, *“Children should not be put in prison for the rest of their lives regardless of the crime they commit.”* Pratt, Bob, and Ryan disagreed with this statement. In their explanations for why they disagreed, Bob wrote on his anticipation guide, *“no it doesn’t matter”*; Pratt wrote *“I disagree [because] if someone commits [sic] murder they would be let out.”*; and Ryan wrote *“No what if they [sic] kill someone or a family then get out.”* During our focus group interview, Pratt was the only one who expounded his reasoning:

Pratt: *I disagree with that one.*

Bob: *I do too.*

Pratt: *So, let's say you kill somebody right? You are going to be tried as an adult for like murdering that person. You're like, oh, just because you're a child and you kill this person. Well, he's a child, he didn't know what he was doing. That person knew full well what he was doing. Like she just because he's a child, that doesn't mean he like he can make his own decisions So, yeah, I disagree with that completely.*

Researcher: *Do you think that a young child should be in jail for the rest of his or her life?*

Pratt: *No, because like kids that young don't really understand. Let's say you're in fifth grade or in the middle school, right? You should know right from wrong. You should know what to do and what not to do. Same with high school and everything like that.*

The next week, Pratt shared in our focus group discussion a new fact he learned from his dad—the frontal lobe in the brain does not fully develop until someone reaches 25 years of age. With an impromptu Google search, we confirmed Pratt's statement. We also learned the frontal lobe is the most convoluted area of the brain and houses some of the higher mental functions, like planning and reasoning (Northwestern Medicine, 2019). In light of this new information, I pointed out that these facts contradicted what they had previously said about children and their abilities to know 'right' from 'wrong'. Some of the participants then started to consider children's biggest influencers, their parents, and the roles they should play in convicting children with crimes:

Researcher: *If your frontal lobe doesn't develop fully until you're 25, some of you have said, well, kids should pay the consequences because they know what they are doing. If their brain is not fully developed, do they know what they're doing?*

Ryan: *No ... because they're little. It's smaller [the brain] than older people. So, you're a teen, right? And then you have like an eight-year-old, right? They would copy from what you do because they're still learning. But you semi-know what you're doing, and they have no idea what you're doing.*

Ambroes: *The thing is, kids get a lot of things from their parents, like we do, but some of us are just complete opposites of our parents.*

Researcher: *Do you think kids think about consequences when they do things?*

Pratt shakes his head no

Ryan: *Most of the time I don't.*

Researcher: *The frontal lobe, if that has to do with decision making and that kind of thing then do you think that should be taken into consideration when kids are arrested and sentenced to prison?*

Kris: *I guess it depends on like the person, the parents and everything because I mean a normal eight-year-old I'm pretty sure they're not gonna know what's gonna happen after but I'm pretty sure they know what they're doing... if their parents didn't tell them that was bad That's their fault. if their parents didn't tell him that putting let's say like something metal in the outlet is not bad. That's their fault, they should've told them about it.*

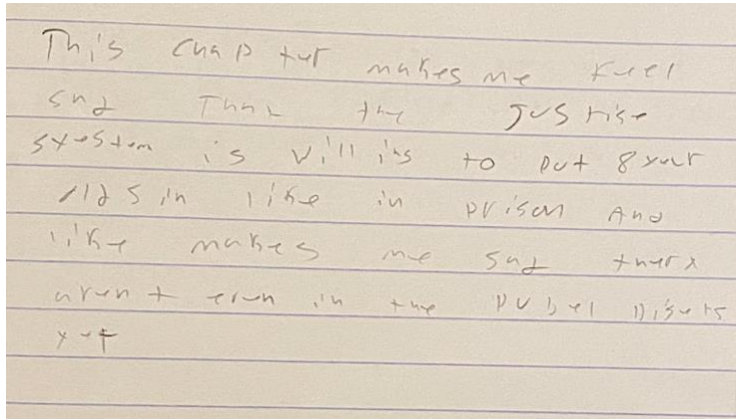
Researcher: *So, you think part of the responsibility is on parents for educating their children?*

Kris: *Yeah, if they are young enough it should be their parents telling them what's good and what's not.*

Reading *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018) aloud in class brought a new awareness of issues of child imprisonment to most of the participants, but especially to Bob, Pratt, and Ryan, who had communicated before the reading of the text, that this idea was just and fair. After reading Chapter 8: All God's Children, Ryan shared his feelings about the criminal justice system's treatment of children in his literature response journal. See Figure 4.18 for Ryan's journal entry.

Figure 4.18.

Awareness Journal Response #1 (Ryan)



This chapter makes me feel sad that the justice system is willing to put 8 year olds in life in prison and life makes me sad they aren't even in the dubel digets yet

A few minutes later in our focus group interview, Ryan still seemed repulsed by the thought of arresting and locking up young children:

Ryan: *What was that part where they said they would put eight-year-olds in prison, or something like that...Like why would you do that? They're not even in the double digits yet? They're eight.*

Researcher: *How would you feel if you saw an eight-year-old in handcuffs being put in the back of a police car?*

Kris: *It all depends on what they did*

Bob: *No...*

Ryan: *What could an eight-year-old possibly do?*

After reading the text and answering the same statement on the second anticipation guide, I noticed that Bob, Pratt, and Ryan all changed their opinions from “disagree” to “agree”. Bob’s explanation said, “*Yes they are young*”; Pratt’s said, “*Yes because they’re children*”; and Ryan’s said, “*Yes because they are young [sic] and they [sic] have a lot of time to change.*”

When I asked them about it in our final focus group, Ryan said, “*For the first one [anticipation*

guide], I put 'yes', but then I changed it to 'no' because children have room to change." I asked Ryan if he thought only children had room to grow and change, and his reply was, "No, other people do, but mostly kids because they're such a young age so they have more room."

One point Mr. Walker made to me as we were discussing *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018) was that "a really cool thing about *Just Mercy* is that Bryan is not only dealing with this individual case; he's going before the Supreme Court to successfully change those applications of the law as they apply to young people." Evidence from this study shows that his students learned just how impactful Bryan Stevenson's work has been, especially when it relates to young people like themselves.

When I asked Ryan what his biggest takeaway from reading this book was, he said, "I'd say the biggest part was the children because up to eight-years-old, you can get life in prison. That's just, it's crazy." Pratt's response was, "Kids aren't going to have life in prison without parole for certain things, and there's no death sentences for minors that go to prison." Ambroes learned that "the justice system is a little bit crooked" and that "a little bit can help a lot ... you know, he just went to Alabama, then he started EJI and all that type of stuff. It was little stuff that led to big stuff to help more than just one person around the world."

In our final interview, I asked Mr. Walker what he hoped his ninth graders would take away from this read-aloud experience, and his response was, "I hope that they would be more motivated to read nonfiction and current events. I would also hope that they would be able to see multiple perspectives on controversial issues like the death penalty and life without parole." The results of this study confirmed both Mr. Walker's and my aspirations for this study and each student walked away with a new perspective.

Ryan credited the book for presenting “*just some of the big problems in the world and the United States.*” Owen said the book gives you an idea of “*how the law works and what really happens in prisons.*” Ambroes recognized that Stevenson’s (2018) *Just Mercy* brought up “*new perspectives to look at ... I find it interesting, but not because like, the law and all that type of stuff, but mostly because like the people's personalities and stuff. I think it shows something about humans.*” Some of the participants liked the book enough to recommend it to others. Three of the participants said they wanted to share their books with their moms. For example, Owen mentioned:

I'll probably give it to my mom because she likes to read ... I think it can relate to her because her parents, they lived in the projects, and there's a lot of bad stuff that happens, like drugs, and she came from a bad childhood, but her parents got her to where she is now.

Bob said he would recommend *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018) to his mom because “*She deals with the therapy part, kind of like how Bryan does. She works with drug addicts, criminals, and stuff, she helps them. So, I feel like I would recommend it to my mom.*” Before consenting to this study, Yurei’s mom took the time to watch the *Just Mercy* (Cretton, 2019) film adaptation, and when Yurei told her that she gets to keep her copy of the book, her mom said, “*Oh, I want to read it!*” Finally, Ambroes believed that everyone could benefit from reading the book, “*I think everybody should read it ... I think it'll make people change and look from a different perspective.*”

Summary

The findings of this study indicate that one ninth-grade classroom teacher used expressive reading; spontaneous planning, conversation, and questioning techniques; and supplemental materials to promote awareness while reading aloud a nonfiction chapter book. Results also show that when the ninth-grade students in this classroom responded to the social justice topics portrayed in a nonfiction chapter book, they examined the practicality of redemption; demonstrated, and identified traits of empathy; and acknowledged their own new or transformed awareness. In Chapter 5, I summarize the research purpose, theoretical underpinnings, methodology, and research questions. Next, I review and discuss the findings that support each research question. Then, I discuss implications for classroom practice. Finally, I provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

There is a strength, a power even, in understanding brokenness, because embracing our brokenness creates a need and desire for mercy, and perhaps a corresponding need to show mercy. When you experience mercy, you learn things that are hard to learn otherwise. You see things you can't otherwise see; you hear things you can't otherwise hear. You begin to cognize the humanity that resides in each of us.

— Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results of this study and share recommendations for future research and classroom practice. This chapter begins with a summary of the study, followed by a summary of the findings of each research question. Next, this chapter will discuss theoretical and classroom practice implications and the strengths and weaknesses of this study. Lastly, using the results of this study, this chapter provides recommendations for future research and classroom practices.

Summary of the Study

Even though it benefits students across K-12 institutions (Anderson et al., 1985; Layne, 2015; Trelease, 2019), reading aloud is an instructional routine generally performed in elementary school settings. To accommodate to growing K-12 student populations that are culturally and racially diverse, teachers are urged to read and discuss children's and young adult literature that embraces multiculturalism and themes of social justice (Freire; 1974/2005; Johnson et al., 2017). Compared to picturebooks (Enriquez & Shulman, 2014; Husband, 2019; Norris, 2020), little is known about how chapter books are used to examine multicultural and social justice topics.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of how a ninth-grade teacher facilitated a chapter book read-aloud of Bryan Stevenson's (2018) *Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults): A True Story of the Fight for Justice* from start to finish, and how his students responded to the social justice topics presented in the text. This study took place at a Midwest high school between the dates of October 25 and November 19, 2021. Although nine students were enrolled in the classroom, only eight voluntarily participated in this study. Data collection methods included researcher observations and fieldnotes; audiovisual materials; focus group interviews and individual interviews; student-generated literature response journals, and reading anticipation guides. Analyses of the data were conducted inductively to identify five emerging themes.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that expressive reading; spontaneous conversation and questioning; and using supplemental materials to promote awareness are vital ingredients of impactful, interactive read-alouds in secondary education. The themes of *expressive reading*, *spontaneity*, and *awareness* support research question one. Moreover, when reading a young adult novel centered around the criminal justice system, ninth-grade students can identify and demonstrate traits of empathy; explore the possibilities of criminal redemption and change, and recognize new or transformed awareness related to the criminal justice system. The themes of *redemption*, *empathy*, and *awareness* support research question two. Table 5.1 recapitulates each emergent theme and its corresponding research question(s).

Table 5.1.

Research Questions and Emerging Themes

Expressive Reading	Spontaneity	Redemption	Empathy	Awareness
RQ 1	RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 2	RQ 1 & 2

Research Question 1

How is a nonfiction chapter book read-aloud facilitated in a ninth-grade reading classroom to promote student engagement and learning? Prior to his participation in this study, Mr. Walker’s comfort-level relating to teacher read-alouds was high. During a one-on-one interview, Mr. Walker explained that his approach to reading aloud in high school was similar to interactive read-alouds, but involved more teacher and student collaboration. Existing research relating to read-alouds in secondary education denotes that many secondary teachers involve students in a more collaborative reading approach (e.g., Dreher, 2003; Elliot-Johns & Puig, 2015; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Reynolds, 2018). Rather than read-aloud an entire text like many elementary teachers do (e.g., Fisher et al., 2004; Wright, 2019), Mr. Walker would typically read aloud a chapter from a novel, then assign the next chapter for students to read on their own at home.

Even though reading aloud an entire chapter book from start to finish was an uncommon practice for Mr. Walker, he felt that because of the class size and the students’ documented reading and writing struggles, this approach was most appropriate for the needs of his Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) reading class. Based on individual and focus group interviews, Mr. Walker’s students agreed with his decision to read aloud the entire chapter book. In fact, his student participants preferred that Mr. Walker read the text because many of them

would not have read the book otherwise. While the students did not discuss the genre of the text often, they did indicate that Mr. Walker's reading skills contributed to their understanding of an informational text. Because most of their reading beyond high school will comprise of nonfiction texts (Hancock, 2008; Press et al., 2011; Smith, 2000), it was vital that Mr. Walker chose to read aloud an informational text.

Expressive Reading

The findings of this study showed that even at the high school level, reading aloud with expression was vital for student engagement and understanding. Expressive or prosodic reading is a vital component of interactive read-alouds (Fisher, et al., 2004; Johnston, 2015; Laminack, 2017), and can lead to improved comprehension (Dollins, 2014; Kuhn & Schwanenflugel, 2018; Paige et al., 2014). When reading with expression, Mr. Walker modeled proper intonation, pacing, automaticity, and accuracy. Most of the student participants recognized and appreciated Mr. Walker's ability to change tone and pitch as he was reading. Some of their comments were that he "*changes his voice*", "*puts character into it*", and "*puts excitement in his voice.*" One of the most obvious indications of intonation was when he read some of the dialogue with a southern accent. One participant felt that Mr. Walker's pacing helped model for others who "*read right through it and skip all the periods and stuff.*" Like any proficient reader would, Mr. Walker practiced self-correction when he mispronounced key vocabulary, like 'exculpatory'.

Spontaneity

The findings of this study revealed that using interactive read-alouds in secondary education can facilitate rich discussion and promote student learning. In addition to expressive reading, successful interactive read-alouds require that teachers preview the text before reading (Fisher et al., 2004) and encourage active student participation before, during, and after reading

(Fisher et al., 2020; Fountas & Pinnell, 2021; Wright, 2019). Both of these characteristics were evident in this study. Mr. Walker mentioned that prior to this study, he read the text through “*multiple times*”. Rather than read the text multiple times to prepare where to stop and ask questions, Mr. Walker read to anticipate how his students would react to the text. He believed in the power of the text and its ability to naturally inspire authentic conversations. Due to the political nature of the text, Mr. Walker’s questioning technique throughout this study embodied the principles of social justice pedagogy, which embrace multiple perspectives, promote critical thinking, and support cognitive, emotional, and civic progress (Ayers, 2009; Dover, 2013, 2015; Gay, 2018; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). In fact, Mr. Walker communicated with me that his goals for facilitating dialogue were to “*promote critical thinking*” and “*consider that there's more than one possibility to view things.*” Overall, Mr. Walker’s expressive reading and spontaneous conversation and questioning promoted active student participation and reading comprehension in a classroom that services reluctant and struggling readers and writers.

Research Question 2

How do students in a ninth-grade reading classroom perceive and respond to the social justice topics presented in a nonfiction chapter book? Student participants responded to the text through interactive read-aloud discussions, student-generated literature response journals, focus group interviews and individual interviews, and reading anticipation guides. The literature response journal was the only response method utilized every day a read-aloud event occurred. Effective interactive read-alouds enable independent writing (Fisher et al., 2004), and literature response journals capture a “permanent record” of students’ thoughts allow students the freedom to express themselves however they wish (Hancock, 1993a, 2008). To determine what was best for his students, many of whom were struggling writers, Mr. Walker changed his

journal writing routine each week. After he offered multiple writing prompts, encouraged artistic responses (e.g., illustrations, letters, poems), and offered multiple writing opportunities throughout the read-aloud events, we noticed improvement in the quality of their responses. While many of the students either summarized the reading or presented a personal connection or opinion related to the text, one of the students chose to go above and beyond by writing letters and poems that evoked strong feelings and emotions.

Redemption

The findings of this study indicated that reading aloud social justice-themed young adult literature can inspire students to contemplate the possibilities of criminal redemption. The term redemption refers to the ideas of “public reparation”, “recovery”, and a “deliverance from a burden of guilt” (Underiner, 2014, p. 79). Student participants contemplated the idea of redemption multiple times throughout the study. First, it came up as the participants were discussing the use of the death penalty to cut down on crime, then again while discussing vocational and education training programs in prisons. Redemption came up again after the student participants learned about life imprisonment sentences for children and teenagers. Overall, the student participants believed that redemption was possible for most convicted criminals except for serial killers. When discussing the meaning of “mercy”, some of the participants associated mercy with “*forgiveness*” or “*second chances*”, both of which are fundamental steps one must take to achieve redemption.

Empathy

The findings of this study revealed that high school students can identify with and demonstrate traits of empathy while reading social justice-themed young adult literature. Hancock (1995) believed that reading literature outside one’s own culture can serve as a catalyst

for building empathy for others. Through focus group discussions, personal interviews, and literature response journals, many of the student participants could not personally relate to content in Bryan Stevenson's (2018) *Just Mercy*, but they were able to show empathy towards the author and narrator of the book, Bryan Stevenson, and some of his clients. Several of the participants placed themselves into the positions of the characters and discuss how they would have reacted or handled certain situations. When I asked each participant what message they thought Stevenson (2018) was trying to send through the writing of this book, Ambroes and Owen believed it was to encourage his readers to have empathy and take into consideration others peoples' experiences or feelings.

Research Questions 1 and 2

Awareness

The findings of this study showed that teachers who employ supplemental materials while reading aloud texts can encourage critical thinking and facilitate new or changed understanding and awareness. To enrich the read-aloud events and enhance student learning, the classroom teacher created multiple opportunities for students to view and analyze supplemental materials that expanded on the topics presented in *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018). The classroom teacher shared multiple YouTube videos to encourage the student participants to analyze the prison systems in the United States and consider the death penalty from multiple points of view. Student participants had an opportunity to attend a virtual presentation facilitated by one of Bryan Stevenson's Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) staff members and learn more about his past and present work with the EJI. In addition to the virtual presentation, student participants explored the EJI website. To wrap up the book, student participants watched a documentary that was filmed at the time of Walter McMillan's murder trial and the film adaption of the book.

As a result of reading this text, analyzing the supplemental materials, and participating in productive discourse about the United State criminal justice system, many of the participants revealed new awareness or learning. Most of the newfound awareness was documented through the student participants' reading anticipation guides that were discussed before and after reading. Results from the anticipation guides indicated that the topics of "death penalty" and "life sentences for children" encouraged student participants' to adopt new or changed understandings. Before reading *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018), some of the students believed that the death penalty was an efficient and productive way to minimize crime, but later realized that many individuals sentenced to death row were innocent. Prior to reading the text, some of the participants had little sympathy for children convicted of crimes and sentenced to life in prison because children should know right from wrong. I have to wonder if the student participants' military backgrounds, which are typically rule-bound and black and white, influenced their opinions about these specific topics. By the end of the book, the student participants believed that children should not serve life sentences because they are young and have the potential to learn and grow from their mistakes. Overall, many of the participants are now more aware of how the United States criminal justice system works.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical underpinnings of this research study were constructivism, transactional theory of reader response, and critical literacy theory.

Constructivism. The constructivist theory promotes that idea that knowledge is neither discovered nor acquired but is actively and continuously constructed (Bhattacharya, 2017; Crotty, 1998; Phillips, 1995; Schwandt, 2007; Smith, 1971). Additionally, constructivism espouses that there is not one 'true' interpretation of a phenomenon (Crotty, 1998; Jonassen,

1991). Moreover, each human interprets the world based on their own history, language, and social experiences and interactions (Bhattacharya, 2017; Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2007). The student participants in this study differed in many ways, including their racial and ethnic makeup, social groups, and family dynamics. Due to their unique experiences and knowledge, the participants interpreted the same topics differently. Evidence of constructivist ideologies was revealed when I asked the student participants to interpret the quote “We are all broken by something.” (Stevenson, 2018, p. 239) and they all shared completely different responses:

Ambroes: *Our brokenness kind of connects us in ways that many people don't think it would...there's something that probably changed all of us from like, when we were little to now...maybe it's just talking about, like change ... we've all been changed in a way that can relate back to each other.*

Bob: *I feel like a lot of people are extremely broken in many ways...everyone is just broken, and how we can still do something about people on death row and people who clearly didn't do anything and still save them and get people the help they need.*

Luke: *It means we all have something lost or missing from us. I agree with Bryan everybody is broken [until] they have found their strength.*

Owen: *I think it has something to do with your past and like the way you act. Like childhood, like you might be going through, like parents going through divorces or you might be going through foster care and stuff like that. Just the way you've grown up, that's what I think it means... No matter what happened in your past, you shouldn't let that determine who you are.*

Pratt: *It means we all have our own problems. You can fix it, but like, it won't always stay fixed or be broken.*

Ryan: *There's always something there to bring us down, like, make us feel sad or down.*

Yurei: *I think that means that we all got like, there was something in our lives that made us, like, you know, probably traumatized or feeling like, upset about it in a certain way that causes us to have our mental health probably hurt... no matter if you're, like, broken or like, normal, quote unquote, normal. I mean, that doesn't mean that you're like, different or a terrible person in society.*

Not one of these ideas is the single true or correct interpretation of the quote; all responses are equally correct and reflect the students' unique understandings of the text.

Transactional Theory of Reader Response. Going into this study, one of the things I was interested in learning more about was the student participants' perceptions of Bryan Stevenson's (2018) *Just Mercy*. Like me, Mr. Walker welcomed the idea of students reacting to the text in their own unique ways, "*You know, kids are going to have different reactions to literature and respond to it in different ways.*" The notion that each reader would have different "transactions" with a text is one of the main principles of the Rosenblatt's (1978/1994, 1995, 2005a) transactional theory of reader response. Similar to the ideologies of constructivism, Rosenblatt (2005a) also asserted that through their transactions with texts, readers create their own knowledge rather than acquire it. Instead of reading a text to uncover a fixed meaning, the transactional theory of reader response espouses that one text can possess multiple meanings through the transactions of different readers (Rosenblatt, 2005a). In this study, unique transactions were captured through student-generated literature response journals.

According to Rosenblatt (2005a), both the reader and his or her environment comprise a whole reading transaction. Mr. Walker honored this idea by asking questions that encouraged the student participants to make connections between the text and their personal and home

environments and the world around them. These types of questions related to Serafini and Giorgis' (2003) *reader based* and *world based* questions. One example of a reader based question that Mr. Walker asked was, “*When getting in trouble with a parent, is it worse when they say, ‘I’m disappointed in you’ or would you rather lose your phone?*” When answering this question, the students had to consider the dynamics of their home environments and relationships with their parents. An example of a *world based* question was, “*If we compare this description of the death row prison to what we saw about Norway and Finland, what observations did you have*” To answer this question, the students had to use what they learned in the text to analyze and assess the prison systems portrayed in two different YouTube videos.

Critical Literacy Theory. Critical literacy is an “overtly political” (Luke, 2012, p. 5) theory that espouses the idea that literacy can be used as a catalyst for transformative action and understanding the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In addition to transformative action, the common components of critical literacy include examining multiple perspectives (Appleman, 2015; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, 2020; Riley, 2015); disrupting the commonplace or challenging the status quo (Gee, 1990; Lewison et al., 2002; Luke, 2012); and exploring sociopolitical issues related to their lives (Boozar et al., 1999; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Lewison et al., 2002). Finally, critical literacy promotes critical curiosity and the development of critical consciousness (Clark & Seider, 2017; Freire, 1970; Irwin, 2012; Lewis, 2012; Shor, 1992).

While reading *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018), the classroom teacher and student participants exercised two components of critical literacy, examining multiple perspectives, and discussing sociopolitical issues. Rather than read a single story of the broken criminal justice system in the United States, Bryan Stevenson (2018) organized *Just Mercy* to present multiple

cases he was involved in. Furthermore, the participants were able to examine how the criminal justice system affected a variety of people, including men, women, children, war veterans, and individuals diagnosed with mental illnesses. The text presented different sociopolitical issues that students discussed, including racism, capital punishment, prison conditions, and substance abuse to name a few. By asking open-ended, high-level questions during the read-aloud events, the classroom teacher promoted critical thinking skills and instilled critical curiosity in his students. Evidence of the student participants' newfound awareness indicated that the students were developing their critical consciousness or understanding of the world around them.

Implications for Classroom Practice

This qualitative case study sought to understand the implementation of read-alouds in a secondary education classroom and how the students responded to and perceived the social justice issues presented in the text. Even though this study took place within the context of one ninth-grade classroom, the findings divulged several implications that can extend into other classrooms and settings. Data from this study impact the fields of secondary education, literacy education, and social justice education, and what follows are five considerations for classroom practice:

- **Secondary education students enjoy teacher read-alouds.** The ninth grade student participants in this study shared positive opinions about teacher read-alouds. They even expressed a preference of teacher read-alouds over independent reading, especially in light of rigorous school and home schedules. Findings from this study illustrated the student participants' appreciation for the teacher's ability to model proficient reading skills, scaffold their comprehension of the text, and provide clarification related to unfamiliar vocabulary and content.

- **Anticipation guides are multi-purposeful instructional tools.** The results of this study showed that anticipation guides can activate and build background knowledge before reading a text. Additionally, anticipation guide statements can be used to facilitate whole-class or small-group discussions. As a result, these discussions may encourage readers to acknowledge and confront their own internal biases or misconceptions. Anticipation guides support readers' metacognition if they take the time to assess how their thinking stayed the same or changed after reading a text.
- **Students need multiple opportunities to respond to literature.** Journal writing opportunities should resemble interactive read-aloud discussions, and should take place before, during, and after reading. Findings from this study indicated that students could produce more quality written responses when they are given multiple opportunities to write. When the student participants waited until the end of a book chapter to write, their written responses lacked depth and personal connection. When the classroom teacher paused once or twice during a chapter and prompted students to write, they were able to digest the text in smaller chunks and provide more immediate responses.
- **Teachers should use supplemental materials to optimize nonfiction text read-alouds.** Supplemental materials help build background knowledge and allow students to make connections and analyze topics across multiple sources. The classroom teachers in this study used a variety of materials to expand on and enhance the content of a read-aloud text, including videos, documentaries, author visits, and website explorations. Findings revealed that when the classroom

teacher shared several interesting and relevant audiovisual materials, the student participants exercised critical thinking and used multiple sources to draw conclusions and form their own opinions about social justice topics like the death penalty, juvenile arrests, life imprisonment, and more.

- **Relevant and interesting literature can help facilitate critical discussions about social justice topics.** As students navigate their social worlds in our politically charged society, they must have positive outlets to process and discuss the social justice topics they encounter. Teachers can use relevant and interesting literature to safely introduce and facilitate dialogue centered around social justice and human rights topics. Results from this study indicated that Bryan Stevenson's (2018) *Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults): A True Story of the Fight for Justice* sparked student interest and inspired the participants to discuss social justice topics related the United States criminal justice system, like racism, capital punishment, juvenile life sentences, recidivism, and reintegration into society.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study illuminated connections between secondary education, literacy instruction, and social justice, the findings led me to consider further avenues for exploration and investigation. What follows are five recommendations for future research:

- **Encourage spontaneous student questioning during interactive read-alouds.**

In this study, findings indicated that the classroom teacher used spontaneous questioning to engage students in interactive read-alouds. Compared to the number of teacher-generated questions, the results also showed a significantly

lower number of spontaneous student-generated questions. The students' lack of questioning is what inspired this research idea. I would be interested in studying how classroom teachers encourage spontaneous student questioning. How do teachers develop questioning skills? How do they teach students to value questioning?

- **Replicate this study in an Honors or Advanced Placement (AP) English Class in the same school.** This study took place in a ninth-grade Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) reading class that served mostly struggling readers and writers. Compared to the students in an MTSS course, it is likely that students enrolled in an Honors and AP English course would generate more thorough and thoughtful written responses to the text. Some of the questions I would consider are: Would the teacher need to provide writing prompts for the advanced students? Would the students in a more advanced English class, who are likely older than ninth-grade, relate more to the text? Would they feel compelled to discuss the same topics or have similar opinions to the ninth-grade students
- **Facilitate a book study of Stevenson's (2018) *Just Mercy* involving students and their parents/guardians.** This research idea came to me after several of the student participants mentioned that they would recommend this book to their moms. Fortunately, each of the participants' parents/guardians consented to this study, but other parents/guardians may be reluctant to provide consent because this text could be viewed as "controversial". If a researcher chose to involve the parents/guardians in the reading of the text, maybe they would be more willing to participate in the study. In a study like this, I would wonder: How would the

parents/guardians respond to the text? Would they allow their children to speak freely and openly about the social justice topics? How would the students feel about reading this text with their parents/guardians?

- **Examine ways graphic novel are used to explore social justice topics.** Several of the student participants in this study expressed interest in graphic novels because they have less text and the illustrations help them understand the text. It would be interesting to conduct a study similar to this one, using a graphic novel instead of a nonfiction chapter book. Like Stevenson's (2015/2018) *Just Mercy*, Jones and Mauer's (2013) *Race to Incarcerate* discusses the United State criminal justice and prison system. I would be interested in using this text either as a read-aloud or literature circle text in a high school classroom and would ask questions that are similar to the research questions from this study: How would the classroom teacher facilitate the reading of this graphic novel? How would the students respond to the text?
- **Explore how schools gain access to censored and banned literature.** Stevenson's (2018) *Just Mercy* has not been censored or banned from any schools, but several social justice-themed texts similar to his have been. In light of the recent widespread effort to censor and ban books in schools, I would be interested in studying how K-12 classroom teachers and librarians gain access to texts that have been or have the potential to be censored or banned. Does the school/district have a process for requesting literature? What protocol do schools/districts follow when families challenge books? How is the banning of books impacting the students in the schools?

Closing Thoughts

Bryan Stevenson (n.d.) once said, “You don’t change the world with the ideas in your mind, but with the conviction of your heart.” With a determination to make reading experiences more meaningful and special, I sought to gain insight into how a teacher in a ninth-grade classroom facilitated an interactive read-aloud and how his students responded to the social justice topics within the text. The topics in *Just Mercy* (Stevenson, 2018) can be difficult to read about and discuss, especially in a school setting, but like Stevenson said, our young people population is arguably among the most impacted by our criminal justice system (Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau, 2019). Author and educator, Glen Mourning, perfectly encapsulated my thoughts about reading aloud social justice literature in K-12 education, “If you are a teacher facilitating a read aloud for these books, it’s your responsibility as an American citizen to make sure that kids have an opportunity to talk about these real serious issues” (as cited in Morgan, 2022, para. 18). This qualitative case study only reflects one attempt at changing the world and integrating secondary education, literacy instruction, and social justice. There is much to be done across these disciplines, and I hope this study inspires others to join me in using the ideas in our minds and the convictions of our hearts to change education for the better.

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Appendix A - IRB Approval



TO: Lotta Larson
Curriculum and Instruction
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number IRB-10811

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 10/12/2021

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Exploring Social Justice Themes Through Read-Alouds in a Ninth-Grade Reading Classroom."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 10/11/2021

EXPIRATION DATE: 10/10/2024

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

No more than minimal risk to subjects

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Electronically signed by Rick Scheidt on 10/12/2021 10:06 AM ET

Appendix B - Parent Introduction Letter/Informed Consent



College of Education
Department of Curriculum & Instruction

September 6, 2021

Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Kayln Hoppe, and I am writing to share about an opportunity for your child to participate in a qualitative research study. I am currently enrolled in the Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program at Kansas State University. I am a licensed classroom teacher and hold current certifications in both Kansas and Texas. I have seven years of classroom teaching experience in elementary school, and just started my third year of teaching undergraduate pre-service teachers at Kansas State University.

The title of my study is Exploring Social Justice Themes through Read-Alouds in a Ninth-Grade Reading Classroom. The purpose of this study is to gain insight on the use of read-alouds in high school, as well as understand how students make sense of the text. The plan is to have Mr. Walker read aloud Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults): A True Story of the Fight for Justice*. This nonfiction chapter book discusses Stevenson's experience as a lawyer and social justice advocate for wrongly convicted and imprisoned men and women.

I plan to collect data through observation, literature response journals, and focus group interviews. I hope to recruit students who are willing to have open and honest dialogue about the read-aloud experience and the book. Data obtained will reflect students' individual perceptions, experiences, and ideas.

This is an opportunity for your child to read and discuss high-quality literature that represents the lived experiences of marginalized and underrepresented groups in the United States. In addition, this study provides a safe space for students from different backgrounds and social groups to interact, build connections, and exercise critical thinking skills.

I am happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have about this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kayln Hoppe". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kayln Hoppe
Graduate Teaching Assistant
785-285-1907 (cell)
khoppe@ksu.edu

This study provides a safe space for you to interact and build connections with your peers who may be from different backgrounds and social groups. You will get to exercise critical thinking and potentially confront internal biases. You will have a chance to get to know other participants' personal stories and experiences relating to the book.

This study might be your first experience with qualitative research, and you may feel a sense of satisfaction participating in a study that contributes to a growing body of research.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

All digital notes, interview transcriptions, and video and audio recordings will be saved on a secure server on a password protected laptop. Upon use, all video and audio recordings will be immediately deleted from technology devices.

All literature response journals will be stored in a locked filing cabinet when they are not in use. Your literature response journals will not be shared with anyone except for me and your classroom teacher.

To protect your confidentiality, you will choose their own pseudonym that will be used in place of your real name. In addition, any identifiers within the data collected will be removed from your personal information. Your information will not be used or distributed for future research studies. Nor will your personal information be shared with sources outside this study.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS? Yes No

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is **voluntary**. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that printing my name and signing below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and **willingly agree** to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT NAME (print name):

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PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE:

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DATE:

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PARENT/GUARDIAN NAME (print name):

--

PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE:

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DATE:

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Appendix C - Timeline of Read-Aloud Events

Date	Chapter/Title	Teacher Roles	Researcher Roles
Day 1: Mon. 10/25/21	Introduction: Higher Ground	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administer the Anticipation Guide and monitor as students fill it out Read Introduction Introduce guidelines and monitor literature response journal writing Provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe anticipation guide completion, read-aloud event, and literature response journal writing
Day 2: Tues. 10/26/21	1: Mockingbird Players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Ch. 1 Monitor literature response journal writing Provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing Facilitate focus group interview #1
Day 3: Wed. 10/27/21	2: Stand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Ch. 2 Monitor literature response journal writing Provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing, Facilitate focus group interview #2
Day 4: Thurs. 10/28/21	3: Trials and Tribulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Ch. 3 Monitor literature response journal writing Provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing Facilitate one-on-one interviews (Interview #1- Yurei)
Day 5: Fri. 10/29/21	4: The Old Rugged Cross 5: Homeland (first half)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Ch. 4 & start Ch. 5 Monitor literature response journal writing provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing, Facilitate focus group interview #3
Day 6: Mon. 11/01/21	5: Homeland (second half)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finish reading Ch. 5 Monitor literature response journal writing provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing, Facilitate focus group interview #4
Day 7: Tues. 11/02/21	6: Surely Doomed 7: Justice Denied (first half)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Ch. 6 & start Ch. 7 Monitor literature response journal writing Provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing Facilitate one-on-one interviews (Interview #1- Kris, Ambroes, Interview #2- Yurei)
Day 8: Thurs. 11/04/21	7: Justice Denied (second half) 8: All God's Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finish Ch. 7 & start Ch. 8 monitor literature response journal writing provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing Facilitate one-on-one interviews (Interview #2- Ambroes)
Day 9: Fri. 11/05/21	8: All God's Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finish reading Ch. 8 monitor literature response journal writing provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing Facilitate focus group interview #5
Day 10: Mon. 11/08/21	9: I'm Here	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Ch. 9 monitor literature response journal writing provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing, Facilitate one-on-one interview (Interview #1- Ryan)
Day 11: Tues. 11/09/21	10: Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Ch. 10 Record read-aloud event Monitor literature response journal writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to absence, researcher viewed read-aloud recording sent from classroom teacher
Day 12: Wed. 11/10/21	11: I'll Fly Away	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Ch. 11 Monitor literature response journal writing provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing Facilitate one-on-one interviews (Interview #1- Bob, Luke, Owen)

Day 13: Fri. 11/12/21	12: Mother, Mother 13: Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Ch. 12 & 13 • Monitor literature response journal writing • provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing • Facilitate focus group interview #6 • Facilitate one-on-one interview (Interview #1- Mr. Walker)
Day 14: Mon. 11/15/21	14: Cruel and Unusual 15: Broken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Ch. 14, start Ch. 15 • monitor literature response journal writing • provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing, • Facilitate one-on-one interviews (Interview #1- Pratt) (Interview #3- Yurei)
Day 15: Tues. 11/16/21	Virtual Presentation with Bryan Stevenson's Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) Staff Facilitate one-on-one interview (Interview #2- Mr. Walker)		
Day 16: Wed. 11/17/21	15: Broken 16: The Stonecatchers' Song of Sorrow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish Ch. 15, Start Ch. 16 • monitor literature response journal writing • provide written feedback in literature response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe read-aloud event and literature response journal writing,
Day 17: Thurs. 11/18/21	16: The Stonecatchers' Song of Sorrow Epilogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish Ch. 16, Read Epilogue • monitor literature response journal writing • provide written feedback in literature response journals • Administer Anticipation Guide and monitor as students fill it out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe completion of Anticipation Guide, read-aloud event, and literature response journal writing • Facilitate one-on-one interviews (Interview #2- Ambroes, Pratt) (Interview #4- Yurei)
Day 18: Fri. 11/19/21	Researcher facilitates focus group interview #7 and one-on-one interviews (Interview #2- Bob, Luke, Owen, Ryan, Interview #3- Mr. Walker)		

Appendix D - Protocol for Focus Group Interviews

- The whole group is better than the sum of its parts → this group will allow for each of you to hear each other's responses and think beyond your own private thoughts
- This is a nonjudgmental focus group → all opinions/ideas are welcome
- The goal of this focus group is not to come to a consensus or agreement → the data I collect from these interviews will help shape my interpretation of your understandings of *Just Mercy*
- You do not have to wait for me to ask questions- you are encouraged to pose questions to the group.
- You are not expected to self-disclose anything beyond your comfort level. If there's something you want to discuss further (outside of this group), we can arrange to meet individually.
- I may also ask to meet with any of you individually as a follow-up to something mentioned in the interviews
- Remember- your identity will remain anonymous throughout this study. When reporting data, I will use your self-selected pseudonyms and no one other than me will have access to the video/audio recordings.
 - participants write real names/pseudonyms on name tents
 - participants go around the table and give quick introductions (my real name is _____; my pseudonym will be _____)
- Before we start, please remember to be considerate of all participants and the ideas, thoughts, and opinions shared. Please do not interrupt one another. If you disagree with other participants thoughts, that is OK, but provide your opposing opinion/idea respectfully.

(Adapted from deMarrais, K. & Lapan S. D., 2004, pp. 87-102)

Appendix E - Focus Group Interview Questions

Interview #1

As a group, we discussed the following statements from the *Just Mercy* Anticipation Guide (Miller-Johnson ELA, 2019):

1. *People who have been wrongfully convicted of a crime and spend time behind bars should be compensated (paid) for the years they lost*
 - a. How do you determine how much they get paid?
2. *Racism in America is a major issue, in fact, things haven't changed much since the civil rights era.*
 - a. Can you think of things that have gotten better?
 - b. Do you think there are neighborhoods where it is still kind of segregated? Do you think it's because of race?
 - c. Do you think racism is an individual act or do you think that it is carried out by groups or systems?
3. *Trial juries should be made up of a diverse group of people, men, women, different races different backgrounds, etc., in order to be fair.*
4. *People in prison don't deserve luxuries, like TV, video games, exercise equipment, books, magazines, and such.*
 - a. Do you know who pays for the prisons to stay open?

Interview #2

As a group, we discussed the following statements from the *Just Mercy* Anticipation Guide (Miller-Johnson ELA, 2019):

1. *Law enforcement officials should go through anti bias training during their education.*
 - a. Anti-bias? Do you know what "bias" means?
 - b. Do you think law enforcement officials should have to go through anti-bias training?
 - c. What race do they usually target?
 - d. What if they don't know any better?
 - e. What if they're like you and they don't know what anti-bias means? Do you think it's good to educate them?
 - f. Do you think they should only be trained before they start their job? Or do you think they should have training throughout their time as a police officer?
2. *The death penalty is a great idea for people who commit crimes. However, we should be executing people at a faster rate to cut costs and get tough on crime.*
 - a. If we're tough on crime, what do y'all think that means?
 - b. Do you think the only way to get rid of these crimes is to kill people?
 - c. You think it's better just to kill them than keep them in jail for their whole lives?
 - d. Do y'all know who Ted Bundy is?
 - e. You think for people like Ted Bundy, we should have the death penalty?

- f. Some people might argue, who are against the death penalty, might argue that what does it solve if these people are going to jail, they're being arrested for killing someone, why are we killing them? Isn't that why they got arrested in the first place?
 - g. And so, it's justified by killing that person?
 - h. Do you consider the circumstances that that person was in when they murdered someone?
3. *Inmates should receive some type of education, training, job skills while they serve jail or prison time.*
- a. Let's say there's someone in jail who starts working as a janitor, right? Could that be an educational experience for that person?
 - b. If we were going to go back to our people on death row, do you think they should be able to have jobs and get training or education?
 - c. What if they're on death row but they don't get sentenced for another five years, or they don't get executed for another five years they just sit there and waste away their time for five years?
4. *Children should not be put in prison for the rest of their lives regardless of the crime they commit.*
- a. We're talking about a grown teenager basically. What if we're referring to like a 10-year-old that shoots someone?
 - b. Do you think that young child should be in jail for the rest of his or her life?
 - c. What if that's their first time picking up a gun and firing it? And they just so happened to kill someone?
 - d. Maybe if their parents own guns, they will know that. But not every child has parents who talk to them like yours have about using guns. So, what if they don't have any of that knowledge?
 - e. What if they prove it's an accidental shooting and it's a 10-year-old who accidentally shot his friend and killed him because they were just playing around with a gun. Does that 10-year-old deserve to be in jail for the rest of his life?
 - f. There are some cases where kids should be in jail for the rest of their life for the crimes they commit?
 - g. How do you prove that they know what they're doing?
 - h. You said, "I would assume", how would you be able to prove that?

Interview #3

As a group, we discussed the following statements from the *Just Mercy* Anticipation Guide (Miller-Johnson ELA, 2019):

- 1. *Judges and lawyers should take into consideration someone's background before sentencing him or her think about poverty abuse etc.*
 - a. You don't think it should be held against them if they've got through all that trauma?
- 2. *Substance abuse should be treated as a health issue not a criminal issue.*
 - a. If the person is just a user, then it should be a health issue but if they're also selling then it's not really a health issue?

- b. If it's considered a health problem, how do you think they should help that person?
- c. You feel like, because they committed a crime, they should still have consequences for that, but they should also get help for it? Is that what you're saying?

Questions asked after all anticipation guide statements were discussed:

- 1. Do you all have military ties?
 - a. What is it like growing up in a military family?
 - b. Anybody want to share their own experience?
 - c. What do you not like about this place?
 - d. And you live on base too?
 - e. What are your experiences on base?
 - f. We've kind of talked about things that we don't like about being in a military family. What are some of the advantages, what are what are the good things about it?
 - g. What else is great about the military, besides the health care the hospitals and traveling?
 - h. Speaking of education, how do you all think being in the military and having to travel around so much, how do you think that has impacted your education?
 - i. How has it impacted your abilities in classrooms? Your learning, how has it impacted that?

Interview #4

- 1. What are your thoughts about the book so far?
 - a. Why do you think you're interested in law?
 - b. You know a lot about the law? How do you know a lot about the law?
 - c. Does anybody else have any family members that are law enforcement?
 - d. What are your thoughts about the book so far?
 - e. Why do you think it's boring?
 - f. You think having pictures in there would be better?
 - g. You think it's kind of boring because there's too many people. Is it hard for you to keep track of all the people?
 - h. What do you think would make this book better?
 - i. You like reading about real people?
 - j. Did you all know that this was actually written as an adult book first? And then it was so popular that he decided to adapt it for young adults?
 - k. What other thoughts do we have about the book so far?
 - l. It's sleepy?
 - m. You like to have visuals in your books?
- 2. How do you all feel about Mr. Walker reading the book to you versus you having to read it by yourself?
 - a. Do you all do that when you read by yourself? Do you stop and clarify?
 - b. What do you mean, it's easier?

- c. Is there something that he does that makes it sound more interesting?
 - d. What about his voice makes it interesting? What does he do?
 - e. Did he didn't make you feel like you were kind of there because he was talking in that accent?
 - f. Do you all read with expression?
 - g. Do you think that hearing Mr. Walker read the story out loud can help you become a better reader?
3. Do you all have memories of your teachers growing up reading aloud to you?
 4. Do you think that reading aloud is only for younger students or do you think that it's okay to read aloud to students your age?
 5. What other thoughts do we have about the read-aloud?
 6. If you saw this book on the shelf at the library, is this a book that you would normally gravitate towards?
 7. Let's talk about what's going on in the book. What is standing out to you the most right now?
 - a. How do you feel about these people that we think are lying about what happened?
 - b. Who do you think is lying?
 - c. Do you think the police and the attorneys are lying?
 - d. How do y'all feel about people coming in and lying about the cases and maybe the police not telling the truth? How do y'all feel about that?
 - e. Can you explain why you think it's messed up?
 - f. Why do we think they're not questioning him about changing his story?
 8. How do you all feel about a war veteran with PTSD being on death row?
 - a. Do we think that war veterans should be treated differently than other criminals?
 - b. They should be treated differently because they served our country? So, by differently, how do you think they should be treated? In hospitality?
 - c. Do you think that in that situation that his mind was right?

Interview #5

1. Does anybody have something they want to talk about, that's related to the book, before I ask my questions? Is there anything that popped into your mind that you really want to just get out and say?
 - a. Can you talk about why you think it's sad?
 - b. How did that make you feel?
 - c. How would you feel if you saw an eight-year-old in handcuffs being put in the back of a police car?
2. You mentioned something about how the frontal lobe in the brain doesn't stop growing or developing until someone is how old?
 - a. Do you know what that part of the brain does?
 - b. What if that's the part of your brain that makes decisions? If your frontal lobe doesn't develop fully until you're 26, some of you have said, well, kids should pay the consequences because they know what they're doing. If their brain is not fully developed, do they know what they're doing?
 - c. Do you think kids think about consequences when they do things?

- d. Think about you when you were younger. Or even now. Do you think about what's gonna happen if I do a, b, or c?
 - e. Do you think if an eight-year-old picks up a gun doesn't know that it's loaded pulls the trigger, Do you think they're thinking about what's gonna happen if this gun is loaded?
 - f. You think part of the responsibility is on parents for educating their children?
3. I want to know what kind of connections you've made from this book to maybe another book, or a movie or a TV show or maybe something that's going on in your life. What connections have you made so far?
 - a. Have you had anything happen in your personal life that's similar to anything that's been talked about in this book?
 4. Do you all think people can change? Like, do you think people are just bad people? Or do you think people make bad choices? What do you think?
 - a. Can you think of anybody in particular who has changed after their sentence? It could be someone in your personal life or it could be a famous person, anybody?
 - b. Do y'all think that there's bad people or do you think that people just make bad decisions?
 5. What is something from this book that you learned that you didn't know before? Any new learning?
 6. If you think about it, some of these people in the book are your age. Like what if you were in that situation? Like what if you were in Trina's situation? What would you all do?
 7. Are any of you interested in the NFL at all? football?
 - a. Have you heard about the Raiders player? Ruggs? Is that his last name? Yeah, he was just in a car wreck a couple of nights ago, and he was drunk driving, ran into a woman and killed her and her dog. How do you think he's gonna feel carrying that weight?
 - b. What do you think his sentence should be?
 - c. Do you think he meant to kill that woman and her dog?
 - d. How do you know that he knows the consequences?
 8. Do you think he should be like Ian and get solitary confinement for several years?
 - a. How do y'all feel about solitary confinement?
 - b. Do you think Ian, because of what he did when he was younger, do you think he's that big of a threat to other people that he should be in solitary confinement and away from other humans?
 - c. Why do you think they thought it was best to put him in solitary confinement when he was younger?
 - d. What happened to him as he was in solitary confinement without human contact?
 - e. What happened to his mental state?
 - f. How do you think you all would react if you were in solitary confinement? If you were in his position, How do you think you would act?

Interview #6

1. A lot has happened since last time we met. We've talked about people with mental illnesses in prison. We've talked about women in prison. Where do y'all want to start? What should we talk about first?
2. Let's start with people with mental illnesses in prison. What were your thoughts about that chapter?
 - a. Do you think that there should be someplace else that they go rather than a prison?
3. Have you all heard of what happens to people once they get out of prison?
 - a. We've kind of seen that with Walter, right? How is he acting now that he is a free man and he's out? What's going on with him?
 - b. Why do you think he's worrying about that?
4. Have you all heard of a guy named Kalief Browder?
 - a. You all know what Rikers Island is?
5. What do you guys think is going to happen to Walter?
6. What did you think about Martha or sorry not Martha, Marcia's story?
 - a. What do y'all think about that? You think she should have gone to prison for that?
 - b. How do you think it should have been handled differently?
 - c. What do you think the consequence should be?
 - d. Let's think about why someone would write a check for something when they know they don't have the money for it. Why do you think people would do that?
 - e. Why do you think women would write a check for something when they know they don't have the money for?
 - f. Well, we know that Marsha was going to be a mother, right? What do you think she could have been spending the money on?
 - g. Should she be criminalized for that?
 - h. If people shouldn't go to jail for writing bad checks, and fining them kind of doesn't really help, what should the consequence be? Should there be a consequence?
7. How do y'all feel about women and children being separated from each other? As in the prison system...
 - a. Do you think there should be like specific education for women who are mothers?
 - b. do you think like for non-violent crimes; do you think that it should be difficult for women to get their children back when they get out of prison?
 - c. How do you think that affects the kids when they see their mom get arrested, and they're separated?
8. We've talked about a lot of different topics that were covered in this book. Is there a particular topic that has interested you the most?
9. Is there someone's story in the book that has interested you the most?
10. I know you've talked about how you're really interested in law. Is that something you want to do when you get older?
11. I've asked you all about what you think about Mr. Walker reading aloud the book to you. If he could make this experience even better, what should he do?
 - a. What else can he do to make this experience even better, besides acting it out and dressing up?
12. Do you like the videos that he shows you?
 - a. What videos have you guys liked so far?

13. If you were on death row, and you had to be executed, how would you choose to be executed?
 - a. What do you think is the most humane way to execute some one?
 - b. Do you think the most humane way is to choose the option that the person suffers the least from?

Interview #7

1. What do y'all notice about your thinking from before and after the book?
 - a. Was there an issue that you felt very strongly about before, and you still feel very strongly about now?
 - b. How did your thinking change, stay the same?
 - c. Do you have any idea why that might be?
2. I want to ask you all how you felt about this research experience? What was it like having me come in, meet with you, ask you a bunch of questions? What is the focus group like for you?
 - a. What did you like about it?
 - b. Was it interesting to see how other people thought about the same issues?
 - c. Would you ever do another research study like this again?
 - d. Why is it boring for you?
3. Do we have any final words about this experience?
4. Any advice for me if I were to ever go out and do a study with high schoolers again?
 - a. Choose freshmen over everybody else? why freshmen?

Appendix F - Individual Interview Questions

Mr. Walker

Interview #1

1. Can you kind of give me a brief overview or description of the ninth-grade reading class that you're teaching?
2. Was there one area of focus that all these students needed to work on with their reading when they came to you?
3. You said that you have taught literature, right? Are there any other classes that you've taught in your 20 years?
4. Do you just use novels in your classes? Or have you ever incorporated picture book read alouds?
5. How are your graphic novel read alouds different from your novels?
6. If we were to do this again, which we're not sadly, how would you do things differently?
7. You mentioned that you don't always read the entire text to your students. It's usually you reading some of it and them reading some of it?
8. Read alouds are primarily done in elementary school. Yeah. And it's all teacher led, basically. So, as you do a read aloud in high school, what have been like some of your biggest challenges?
9. When you talked about having your students split up and read different parts, have you ever had multiple students read one part together, like a choral reading?
10. Would you normally stretch this book out? Like would you read a chapter a day?
11. What did you learn from these particular students this semester?
12. This morning, you mentioned how it's sometimes hard for you not to like, share your own opinion about some of the topics... How do you hold yourself back from that?

Interview #2

1. I'm curious, as a literature teacher, what are your thoughts about all these parents around the country that are trying to get different books banned?
2. Let's say you find a new book that you want to use, and you think it might be controversial. Do you have to go to someone in the district first?
 - a. Even if you're the only one that wants to use that book, all the other ninth grade teachers have to read it, or only the ones that want to use it?
3. Why do you think it's so important for students to read *Just Mercy*?
4. Would you say that there is a good mix of canon and contemporary?
5. Can you talk to me about the dialogic journals that you use?
6. Do you think that dialogue is one of the biggest factors in students interpreting and understanding texts?
7. You mentioned the club that you and your wife started at the high school; can you talk about that?
 - a. Do you plan projects for them, or do you let them come and they kind of decide what to do?

8. Can you recall, like one specific reading experience that really just turned you on to reading like, it just sparked your love of reading?
9. What are your most memorable read aloud experiences as a teacher?
10. What has been your planning process as you've been preparing for your *Just Mercy* read-alouds?
11. Do you think you'll use this book again?

Interview #3 (email)

1. How has *Just Mercy* challenged or changed your thinking?
2. If you could tell or ask Bryan Stevenson anything, what would you say or ask?
3. What has been the best part about reading *Just Mercy* with your 9th graders?
4. What has been the most challenging part about reading *Just Mercy* with your 9th graders?
5. What do you hope your 9th graders will take away from this read-aloud experience?
6. Do you think all high school content-area teachers should read aloud to their students?

Interview #4 (email)

1. Are you the only 9th grade teacher at Heartland High who teaches an MTSS reading class? If not, how many other teachers are there?
2. Did you use the MAZE screener to identify students this semester?
3. In 3-5 sentences, can you explain the purpose and/or focus of the MTSS class you taught last semester? (were there specific literacy skills you targeted?)

Ambroes

Interview #1

1. What are some of your hobbies that you like to do?
 - a. Do you like to try to stay busy?
 - b. So, you like soccer, Are there any other sports?
 - c. Do you have any favorite soccer players, like professional soccer players?

Interview #2

2. What are your reading habits like in and out of school? Or do you have any reading habits?
 - a. What kind of books do you read on your phone?
 - b. Are there any books that you've read lately that were really good?
 - c. Do you use an app to read your books?
 - d. Can you download free books on that?
 - e. Do you ever read physical books? Like print books?
 - f. Do you prefer to read on your phone?
3. You said you like to read adventurous books, right? Is that kind of your favorite genre?

4. Do you have any experiences that you can recall growing up with reading like reading with your family or with your teachers?
 - a. When your teacher would read Junie B. Jones, would she read it at a particular time of the day?
 - b. Do you think that's why she read it then, to try to relax everybody?
5. What have you discovered about yourself as a reader?
 - a. Can you remember at what age you started doing that? Have you always done that? Or is it something new?
 - b. You think that's kind of what stemmed, not your struggles with reading out loud, but like your dislike for it?
 - c. Do you think teachers should stop making students read out loud?
 - d. Do you know why it was different?
6. What are some of your goals and aspirations for what you want to do with your life?

Interview #3

1. Do you think that high school teachers should read aloud to their students?
 - a. Do you think there that there are any particular types of texts that should be read aloud in high school?
 - b. Shakespeare? why Shakespeare?
 - c. Do you think that high school teachers that teach other subjects other than reading and language arts should read aloud?
2. How has this book either challenged your thinking or changed your thinking?
3. If you could tell Bryan Stevenson anything, what would you tell him?
4. Are there any questions for Bryan in particular, that you would want to ask him if you had a chance to?
5. In what ways can you relate your own life experiences to either the events or the characters in the book?
6. What has been the best part of this book, in your opinion?
7. What does this quote, "*we're all broken by something*" mean to you?
8. Are there any parts of the book that you didn't like, or is there anything about the book that you didn't like?
9. What does the word 'mercy' mean to you?
10. What message do you think Bryan was trying to send by writing this book for young people?
11. Do you recommend this book? Like, do you think other people should read it? And is there a particular group of people that you think should read this book?
12. Are there any final words that you have about this book that you want to share, or about this experience?

Bob

Interview #1

1. What are your hobbies? What do you like to do outside of school?
 - a. What kind of music?
 - b. How do you feel about everything that's going on with him right now?

- c. So, you like Travis Scott? Do you listen to rap music usually?
 - d. Do you usually listen to music when you're working? Does that help you focus more?
 - e. What about when you read? Do you listen to music?
 - f. Is there anything else you like to do besides listen to music, and play video games?
2. What has this read aloud experience been like for you?
 - a. What other classes are you taking?
 - b. Culinary? Do you actually get to cook things?
 3. Do you enjoy having Mr. Walker reading the book aloud?
 - a. Or would you rather read it yourself?
 - b. What do you like about his reading aloud?
 4. What are some of your favorite books?
 - a. Is this the type of book that you usually like to read, like about social justice?
 - b. Are there any other genres that you enjoy?
 5. Have you had many chances growing up reading with your family or with your teachers in school?
 - a. You don't have any memories of reading aloud with any of your family members?
 6. What does your reading life look like? Do you read much outside of school?
 - a. Do many of your classes assign homework and reading?
 7. What have you learned about yourself as a reader over the years?
 8. Can you think of like one of your most memorable reading experiences?
 - a. Did you know that they have that as a graphic novel now?
 - b. Is that the one you read in 8th grade?
 - c. You really liked that book? Are you making a lot of connections between what we're reading in here and that book?
 9. What are your life goals and aspirations?
 - a. Do you see yourself going into the military?
 - b. Yeah? A certain branch of the military?

Interview #2

1. Do you think high school teachers should read aloud to their students?
 - a. Yeah? Why do you think so?
 - b. Do you think that it should only be reading and English teachers that read aloud, or do you think all teachers should?
2. You've kind of already answered one of my questions, which was how has this book changed or challenge your thinking? Do you have anything else you want to add to what you said earlier?
 - a. Before you read this book, did you think that most people that were in jail were guilty?
 - b. Did this book kind of make you realize that's not necessarily true for everyone?
3. If you could say anything to Bryan Stevenson, ask him a question, tell him anything, what would you say?
4. Were there any ways that you could relate this book to your own life?

5. What has been the best part about this book?
 - a. Do you like that the book went back and forth? Or did you not like that part?
6. I want you to tell me what it means to you. Okay. So, the quote is, "*we're all broken by something.*"
7. What does the word 'mercy' mean to you?
8. What message do you think Bryan was trying to send to his readers through this book?
9. Would you recommend this book to anybody and who would you recommend it to?
 - a. Do you think you'll take your book home and let her read it?

Kris

Interview #1

1. I want to start with what your favorite hobbies are outside of school. What do you like to do for fun?
 - a. What do you do at the Teen Center?
 - b. Do you help them with their homework?
 - c. Do you just like play games with them?
 - d. You said you volunteer so you don't get paid for that right?
 - e. You also said you play basketball. Who do you play basketball with?
2. You mentioned that you like working with kids. Is that like something you see yourself doing when you get older?
 - a. Do you want to make a career out of playing basketball? Is that the goal?
 - b. Are there any dream colleges that you would love to play at?
 - c. Do you watch college basketball?
 - d. Do you have a favorite team?
3. Do you have any favorite books?
 - a. Like comic books, graphic novels?
 - b. Are there any in particular that you like? Or that you've read that you really like?
4. What does your reading life look like? Do you read outside of school at all?
5. Do you ever read voluntarily in school, or is it only like this when you're asked to do it?
 - a. How did you feel about that?
 - b. Do you think that a lot of kids like to read in front of the class like that, if a teacher calls him out and ask them to read?
6. Do you have any memorable reading experiences growing up as a kid, either at home or in school?
 - a. Did your parents ever read with you when you were growing up?
 - b. You don't know if your grandma ever read to you?
 - c. Like before you go to sleep or something?
7. What have you discovered about yourself as a reader?

Luke

Interview #1

1. What do you like to do outside of school? What are your hobbies?
 - a. How did you get hooked on Minecraft?
 - b. How long have you been playing it?

2. I noticed that you always have your headphones around your neck. Do you like to listen to music normally?
 - a. What do you like to listen to?
 - b. When you work on your schoolwork, do you normally have music playing or when you play your music?
 - c. You like to have the noise?
3. What has this read aloud experience been like for you?
 - a. Do you enjoy having Mr. Walker read the book to you?
 - b. What do you like the most about it?
 - c. Are you glad that he's the one reading it and not you?
 - d. Is it helpful when he reads it?
4. What are some of your favorite books?
 - a. Would those be fantasy books?
 - b. What do you like about those books?
 - c. Do you like books that have a lot of adventure?
5. What is your reading life like? Do you read outside of school at all?
6. Do you read during school when you have a break or when you don't have anything to do?
7. Do you think that you're more of an auditory learner, like, you can listen to something, and you can understand it better than when you read it?
8. Have you ever listened to audiobooks?
 - a. What was that like?
 - b. You had to have the book open with you?
 - c. You would much rather just listen to it and not have to worry about the book as well?
9. Do you have family members that you read with at home or that you've read with at home?
10. What have you discovered about yourself as a reader?
 - a. You said that you're kind of like your mom, does your mom read a lot?
11. Do you have any memorable reading experiences either in or out of school?
12. Did you have teachers growing up that would read aloud to you like Mr. Walker does?
 - a. What is it that that your teachers have to do to really grab your attention?
13. What are your some of your life goals and aspirations?
 - a. How did you become interested in that?
 - b. You have a family member in the military, right?
 - c. What does he do in the military?
 - d. Would you go into the Air Force right out of high school and start your training?
 - e. Any ideas where you want to go to college?

Interview #2

1. Do you think high school teachers should read aloud to their students?
 - a. Why do you think they should?
2. Do you think that when a teacher reads aloud to his or her students, that it might inspire the students to read more?

- a. Do you think that having Mr. Walker read aloud to you has inspired you at all?
3. Do you think that other content teachers should read aloud to their students like math teachers, science, teachers, social studies, all those subjects?
 - a. Do you think it would keep kids awake if teachers read aloud?
4. How has this book changed your thinking or your opinions?
 - a. Did you know to the extent, like how serious it was before reading this book?
5. If you could ask Bryan Stevenson anything, what would you ask him?
 - a. Do you do you think that he's been present for people's executions before?
6. What has been the best part about this book?
 - a. What about the worst part? Is there anything you didn't like?
7. What does the word 'mercy' mean to you?
8. What message do you think Bryan Stevenson wanted his readers to take away from this book?
9. I'm going to read you a quote from the book, and I want you to tell me what you what it means to you. It says, "*we're all broken by something.*"

Owen

Interview #1

1. What are your hobbies? What do you like to do outside of school?
 - a. What do you all do when you hang out?
 - b. What kind of games?
 - c. Do you play football here?
 - d. Anything else you'd like to do besides hanging out with your friends?
2. What has this read aloud experience been like for you?
 - a. Is he your only teacher that reads aloud to you?
 - b. Do you remember what class that was in?
 - c. So just your ELA teacher read aloud to you?
3. What are some of your favorite books?
 - a. I haven't read *Narnia*, but I've heard of it. Is it fantasy?
 - b. You like fantasy books, and you like learning about history, too?
4. Do you read outside of school at all?
 - a. Do you have homework assignments where you have to read outside of school?
5. Do you have anyone at home that you could read to or that you have read with in the past?
 - a. Did your mom used to read aloud to you when you were younger?
 - b. Do you remember any books in particular that she would read that you liked?
6. Do you have any memorable reading experiences?
7. What are some of your life goals and aspirations?
 - a. Do you know how you want to make money?

Interview #2

1. Do you think high school teachers should read aloud to their students?
 - a. Any particular reasons why?
2. How has this book changed your thinking?

- a. Before reading this book, did you have any knowledge of what goes on in prisons?
3. Were there any experiences or incidences in your life that you could relate to this book?
4. If you could tell Bryan Stevenson anything or ask him a question, what would you say or ask him?
5. What has been the best part about this book?
 - a. Were there any cases that that stuck out to you the most?
 - b. What was that like for you reading about kids that are your age that are going through the prison system and everything?
6. I'm gonna read a quote to you from the book and I want you to tell me what it means to you, "*We're all broken by something.*"
 - a. Do you want to add anything to that?
 - b. Do you think that kids that don't go through foster care that maybe like grow up in a semi normal life, do you think that they can still be broken too?
7. What does the word 'mercy' mean to you?
 - a. If someone says, "Have mercy on me", what do you think they're asking of you?
 - b. Are you trying to describe like having empathy?
8. What message do you think Bryan was trying to send to his readers for this book?
9. Do you think there are any life lessons that he was trying to teach his young readers?
10. Would you recommend this book to anybody? And if yes, who would you recommend it to?
 - a. Do you think that your mom could relate to this book at all?
 - b. What does she do for a living?

Pratt

Interview #1

1. What are your hobbies? What do you like to do outside of school?
 - a. What kind of video games do you play?
 - b. You said you like football and baseball, any favorite teams?
 - c. Do you play sports?
 - d. What's sports do you play?
 - e. You don't play here at school?
 - f. How do you feel about that?
 - g. Is it because you get bored?
2. What is what is your reading life like?
 - a. What about audio books? Do you listen to those?
 - b. No e-books or anything?
3. If you had to choose, what would some of your favorite books be?
 - a. Any graphic novels in particular?
4. Is there a particular genre that you're most interested in, whether you're reading it or someone else's reading to you?
5. What has this read aloud experience been like for you?
 - a. Are you glad that Mr. Walker is reading this book and you're not reading it?
6. What have you discovered about yourself over the years as a reader?

- a. You're bad at it or you just don't try?
7. Do you know why you're in this class then since it's an MTSS reading class?
 - a. Is it because you're not trying?
 - b. Does that make you want to try harder to get out of this class?
 - c. What if they make you take another MTSS reading class?
8. What else have you discovered about yourself as a reader? Like, are there any particular strategies or things that help you become a better reader?
 - a. Are you one of those people where you can hear or read something once and remember it? Or do you have to read it over and over again?
9. What were your reading experiences like growing up, either at home or at school?
 - a. Did your teacher read that book out loud like Mr. Walker does? Or did you have to read part of it?
 - b. You don't remember any of your elementary teachers' read alouds or anything?
 - c. Are your parents, readers?
 - d. Do you have any siblings that you read with?
 - e. Do you guys have books at home?
 - f. Where did you get all the books from?
10. What would make you enjoy reading?
 - a. What about audiobooks? You don't have to actually read it, but you're listening. Would that be more enjoyable?
11. What are your life goals and aspirations?
 - a. Is it your dad who's in the military?
 - b. Do you know what his job is?
 - c. Is that something that you would want to do in the military?
 - d. Let me go back to your plan A if you could play baseball anywhere, where would you want to play?
 - e. Then if that doesn't work out, you go to school and become a DA. Any idea where you would want to go to school or be a DA at?

Interview #2

1. Do you think high school teachers should read aloud to their students?
 - a. What kind of books?
 - b. Books that don't have pictures?
 - c. Any specific type of genre, do you think?
 - d. Why do you think it's important for high school teachers to still read aloud to their students?
2. How has the book *Just Mercy* changed your thinking or challenged it?
3. Is there a particular topic that was discussed in the book that maybe you had a certain opinion about before?
4. If you could tell Bryan Stevenson anything relating to the book or his work, what would you tell him?
 - a. What did you like the most about it?
 - b. If there's anything you could ask him, what would you ask him?

5. I'm gonna read you a quote from the book and I want you to tell me what that means to you. Okay? "*We are all broken by something.*"
6. What does the word 'mercy' mean to you?
7. What message do you think Bryan is trying to send by writing this book for young people?
 - a. Do you think things have changed?
8. Do you think there are some things that he talked about in the book that are still happening today?
 - a. Have you seen or heard about any cases lately?
 - b. What have you heard about that trial?
 - c. Has your dad talked to you about the trial at all?
9. Is there anything else that you want to add about this book or about this experience?

Ryan

Interview #1

1. What are your hobbies? What do you like to do outside of school?
 - a. Tell me about your garden.
 - b. Do you keep that garden all year long? What do you do in the winter?
2. Do you have any memorable reading experiences growing up as a kid?
 - a. Not at home or at school?
 - b. Did your parents read with you at home?
 - c. What about siblings? Do you have siblings that you read with?
3. What are some of your favorite books? Or do you have any favorites?
 - a. Is it like the *Magic Treehouse*?
 - b. So, you like historical fiction?
 - c. What do you like now?
 - d. What do you like about graphic novels?
4. Over the years, what have you discovered about yourself as a reader?
 - a. Do you think that you have struggles with reading?
 - b. So, like reading fluency?
 - c. Do you have anybody that works on that with you?
 - d. Do you usually do that in here when I'm not here?
5. Do you have any life goals or aspirations? Like do you know what you want to do after you graduate?
 - a. Do you have anybody in your family that does that?
 - b. How did you become interested in that? Or how did you learn that it was in demand?
 - c. You don't have to go to any school for that, do you?
6. How often have you had to move?
 - a. Has this been your favorite place? Least favorite place?

Interview #2

1. Do you think high school teachers should read aloud to their students?
 - a. Why do you think it's more fun?

- b. And you think Mr. Walker does a good job with that?
2. Do you think that other content teachers should read aloud like math teachers and science teachers? Social Studies? Do you think they should read aloud to?
 - a. Could you bring articles, books, passages, those kinds of things into a math classroom?
 - b. Do you have to know how to read in order to do math?
 - c. If you looked at this page, and you couldn't read any of that, you couldn't read your letters, you couldn't read numbers, nothing, could you still do math?
 - d. Can you read without having to know how to do math? Think about what you do with Mr. Walker, do you have to know math in order to do what you do in there?
 - e. Do you have to know how to read in order to do science?
 - f. What if a math teacher finds a picture book that talks about pi? Like the formula pi? Do you think that would help you understand it better?
3. Do you think there are any particular types of texts that teacher should read aloud? Like, do you think they should just read aloud fiction stories? Do you think they should just read aloud nonfiction? Or do you think they're all important?
4. How has this book changed your thinking or challenged your thinking? I know you mentioned the children in prison topic. Are there any other topics where it really challenged your thinking or made you think twice about something?
5. If you could tell the author Bryan Stevenson anything relating to the book, or maybe the EJI that we learned about- his nonprofit? What would you say to him? Or if you have a question, would you ask him anything?
6. Were there any ways that you could relate this book to your own life?
7. What has been the best part of this book?
 - a. Were there any parts that you didn't like?
8. I'm going to read you a quote from the book. And I want you to tell me what it means to you. "*We're all broken by something.*" What do you think that means?
9. If you were to define the word 'mercy', what would it mean? What does it mean to you?
10. Would you recommend this book to anybody?
 - a. Anybody or any group of people that you think should read it?
11. What message do you think Bryan was sending when he wrote this book? What do you think he wanted you to take away from it?
 - a. Were you aware of that before you read this book?

Yurei

Interview #1

1. What favorite books do you have?
 - a. Can you tell me about that book?
 - b. What genre would you consider that book to be?
 - c. Did it go back and forth between the past and the present?
 - d. Was that the first book in the series?
 - e. Did you read the other two before that?
 - f. Is that the type of genre that you usually like to read?
2. What is your reading life Like? do you read outside of school? Do you usually only read during school? Or what's your day to day?

- a. Do you know why that's changed?
3. Who lives at home with you?
 - a. Does your mom do any reading with you or your little sister?
4. What have you learned about yourself as a reader over the years?
 - a. So, you make those personal connections? Do you think that helps you understand the text better?
5. Can you recall your reading experiences as you were growing up so like when you were in maybe elementary school?
 - a. How did your teacher react when you wanted to read outside of your Lexile level?
 - b. Were you required to pick out books that were on your Lexile?
 - c. Do you think kids should be reading books only at their Lexile level?

Interview #2

1. What is your most memorable reading experience?
 - a. When you got to read when you were done with your work, you got to read anything you wanted?
2. What are your hobbies outside of school? What do you like to do?
 - a. You said your dad's coming back in May, right?
 - b. Do you get to talk to him much?
 - c. You mentioned that you like to draw, is there anything in particular that you like to draw? Or what kind of drawings?
 - d. Are you taking art this year?
3. What are some of your life goals and aspirations? Like what do you hope to do with your life someday?
 - a. You want to teach elementary schoolers?
 - b. What kind of streaming?

Interview #3

1. So, you went ahead, and you read the book. What are your thoughts?
 - a. Was there anything that surprised you about the ending of the book?
 - b. Do you think if you were in that same situation that you would have been as kind to people as he was?
2. Were there any parts in the book that made you second guess your thoughts about different topics?
 - a. How do you feel about that?
 - b. Do you think that people are born bad? Or do you think that they make bad choices?
 - c. If someone murders five people, they go to jail for the rest of their life. Do you think that they have the ability to change?
3. Would you recommend this book to anybody?
 - a. Who would you recommend this book to?
 - b. Do you think it's important that white people read this book?

Interview #4

1. Do you think high school teachers should read aloud to their students?
 - a. Do you think teachers high school teachers should read aloud to their students every day?
 - b. Do you think that there is a particular type of text that teachers should read aloud to their students?
 - c. Do you have teachers that don't teach English or language arts that read aloud to you? Or is it just your reading teachers?
2. How has the book *Just Mercy* challenged or changed your thinking?
 - a. Can you elaborate on that? What was your view before, and now how do you view it?
 - b. Did the book show you that there's more to the process? Is that what you're saying?
 - c. Has this book changed your interest in law? Has it made you more interested?
3. If you could tell Bryan Stevenson, the author of this book, anything about his book or his work with EJI? What would you tell him?
 - a. If you could ask him one question, what would you ask him?
4. What has been the best part of this book in your opinion?
 - a. Do you believe that Ralph Myers was telling the truth the second time? Do you think that the police coerced him?
 - b. Were there any parts of the book that you didn't like?
5. In what ways can you relate your own life experiences to the events or the people in the book?
6. I'm gonna read a quote to you from the book, and I want you to tell me what it means to you. It says, "*we're all broken by something.*"
7. What does the word 'mercy' mean to you?
8. What message do you think Bryan was trying to send by writing this book for young people in this book?
9. Do you have any final words about the book?

Appendix G - *Just Mercy* Anticipation Guide

Just Mercy Anticipation Guide

Statement	Agree/Explanation	Disagree/Explanation
People who have been wrongfully convicted of a crime and spend time behind bars should be compensated (paid) for the years they lost.		
Racism in America is a major issue; in fact, things haven't changed much since the Civil Rights era.		
Trial juries should be made up of a diverse group of people, men, women, different races, different backgrounds, etc. to be fair.		
People in prison don't deserve luxuries like TV, video games, exercise equipment, books, magazines, etc.		
Law enforcement officials should go through anti-bias training during their education.		
The death penalty is a great idea for people who commit crimes, however, we should be executing people at a faster rate to cut costs and get "tough on crime".		
Inmates should receive some type of education/training/job skills while they serve jail or prison time.		
Children should not be put in prison for the rest of their lives, regardless of the crime they commit.		
Judges/lawyers should take into consideration someone's background before sentencing him/her. (Ex: think about poverty, abuse, etc.)		
Substance abuse should be treated as a health issue, not a criminal issue.		

Adapted from Miller-Johnson ELA. (August 14, 2019). *Just mercy anticipation guide*. [Document]. Teachers Pay Teachers.

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Just-Mercy-Anticipation-Guide-4789965>