Honors Projects   **Honors College**

Spring 4-22-2023

Teaching Empathy for Others Through Young Adult Literature

Madison Boeckman
mlboeck@bgsu.edu

Teaching Empathy for Others Through Young Adult Literature

Madi Boeckman

Bowling Green State University

HNRS 4990

Dr. Tim Murnen and Professor Amanda Rzicznek

22 April 2023

Introduction

Exclusion, apathy, and hatred towards others perceived as different are major issues in our world. Empathy and understanding are the antidote, but how exactly can they be taught? Merriam Webster Dictionary defines empathy as being sensitive to or being able to imagine the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another. Empathy can also be defined as "the capacity to see the world from other vantage points" (Fischer, 2017, p. 432). To summarize these two definitions, empathy is the ability to understand and respect others' different experiences, perspectives, and emotions.

Reading allows the reader to immerse themselves in the life on another person. When the reader can experience a character's thoughts and feelings, it can be easier to feel empathy for that character. In this project I will explore how texts can be used to help students become more empathetic by understanding others. This project will focus on the research question: How can literature be used to teach empathy for others?

To address this question, I will explore research on literature and empathy. Rudine Sims Bishop's glass metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding doors, which is enhanced by Uma Krishnaswami's inclusion of the prism to the metaphor, will form the foundation for the research. I will also be utilizing educational theorists Gloria Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy and Gholdy Muhammad's culturally responsive literacy in the research.

I will be creating outlines and materials for activities to address this research question. The unit outlines are flexible and can be adapted to need. This project is applicable to anyone who works with young adult readers, whether that is a teacher, librarian, or book club facilitator. The materials and activities will focus on three young adult texts: the graphic novel *Ms. Marvel: No Normal*, written by G. W. Wilson and illustrated by A. Alphona, I. Herring, and J.

Caramagna; the novel in verse *The Poet X* by E. Acevedo; and the novel *The Marrow Thieves* by

C. Dimaline. These activities will ask students to reflect on the texts in their lives and their

identities, as well as creatively write with empathy for those who may see themselves in the

characters.

Literature Review

This literature review starts with an explanation of the glass metaphor, which will serve

as the foundation for the rest of the research. Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy

explores the educational theory that supports the glass metaphor. Finally, how both reading and

writing can be used to teach empathy are explored.

The Glass Metaphor

The glass metaphor provides a foundation for understanding the need for diverse texts.

Rudine Sims Bishop's introduces the glass metaphor in her article *Mirrors, Windows, and*

Sliding Glass Doors. Some books may be mirrors for readers, who see themselves reflected in

the characters. Some books may be windows that allow readers to peer into a world and culture

different than their own. And finally, some books are sliding glass doors, which allow readers to

step into a new world or culture (Bishop, 1990). Bishop was inspired to create this metaphor by

her desire to see more diverse literature for children. For students outside of dominant cultures, it

is important for their sense of self to see themselves reflected in the characters in the texts they

read. For readers in the dominant culture, it is important for them to see cultures outside of their

own portrayed in texts, to challenge their notions of centrality in the world (Bishop, 1990). Even

though this article was published over thirty years ago, it is still extremely relevant. While more

texts with diverse characters are being published, there is a lot of pushback about using or even

allowing these texts in a classroom. Bishop's metaphor is an accessible argument to support the use of diverse texts with young people.

Uma Krishnaswami expands upon Bishop's glass metaphor with the introduction of prisms, in her article "Why Stop at Windows and Mirrors? Children's Book Prisms," which asks readers to consider how a character's different cultures interact and influence one another (2019). Krishnaswami was compelled to update the glass metaphor because she felt that windows were voyeuristic, allowing readers to peak into someone else's culture without criticality (2019). Prisms allow readers to engage with cultures they do not identify with, without mindlessly consuming the text. Prisms acknowledge that all cultures are worthy of respect, but also show that a culture can have faults that hurt people within or outside of the culture. Prisms like *Ms. Marvel: No Normal* portray one girl's experience with her Islamic faith respectfully, while addressing the misogyny she experiences as a Muslim girl. Krishnaswami addresses an important idea that portrayal of a culture should be respectful but can also critique those cultures. This extended glass metaphor by Bishop and Krishnaswami is especially useful in the classroom, as it is understandable to students and can help them reflect and think critically about the texts in their lives.

Cultural Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy

The glass metaphor is reinforced by Gloria Ladson Billings' theory of culturally relevant pedagogy and Gholdy Muhammad's theory of culturally responsive literacy. Both theories are committed to empowering students from all cultures. This empowerment comes from knowing themselves and the world.

Billings' theory of culturally relevant pedagogy provides theoretical support for the glass metaphor. Billings defines culturally relevant pedagogy in her articles "But That's Just Good

Teaching!" and "Toward a theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as pedagogy relevant to the students with "three criteria: (A) students must experience academic success; (B) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (C) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (1995a, p. 160). Culturally relevant pedagogy is academically rigorous, while also helping students understand their identities. It also helps students not just observe the world, but to question and critique – to be critically conscious – of the world. To understand the world is to understand others, so students must learn about their own culture(s) as well as other cultures in the community and the world. Mirror, sliding door, and prism texts can help students learn about other cultures, as Billings challenges in her second criteria. Prism texts can also help students see how a culture can be both respected and questioned, as Billings calls for in her third criterion.

Muhammad's theory of culturally responsive literacy has many parallels with Billings' theory. Muhammad argues that empowering literacy is built upon a framework of pedagogy that focuses on identity, skills development, intellect, and criticality. Muhammad argues that students need spaces…to make sense of who they are and who they are not" (2020, p. 67). This echoes Billings' support for cultural competence and the idea of mirror texts: that students must be able to learn about and see themselves in the classroom. Skill development and intellect echo Billing's call for academic success. For students to be empowered, they must be able to communicate effectively. Muhammad defines criticality as "reading texts and contexts with an understanding of how power, anti-oppression, and equity operates throughout society. Criticality enables us to question both the world and texts within it" (2020, p. 117). Criticality, Billings' critical consciousness, and Krishnaswami's prism all have the same goal: to understand and question the world.

Literature and Empathy

For students to "live alongside other people, they must deeply know themselves and the histories and truths of other diverse people" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 67). Both Billings' and Muhammad's educational theories require students to be able to understand and empathize with others.

Research on teaching empathy provides a framework for applying the glass metaphor. Cuzzo, Larson, Mattsson, and McGlasson, from various fields, reviewed various ways of teaching empathy in their article "How do you Effectively Teach Empathy to Students?" They define empathy as what "allows us to determine our own needs, discern the needs of others, build interpersonal relationships that are satisfying, and function effectively in stressful and challenging settings" (Cuzzo et al., 2017, p. 61). Culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive literacy are both concerned with students' ability to reach these markers of empathy. Both Ladson-Billings and Muhammad call for students gain skills in understanding themselves and understand the world around them. However, research "suggests a 40 percent drop in the capacity for empathy by current college students as compared to college students in the 1970s (Cuzzo et al., 2017). This shows that students in K-12 grades would benefit from empathy instruction. Cuzzo et al. recommend a variety of ways to teach empathy, including role play, case scenarios, service learning, lectures, listening training, journaling, discussion, and literature. They argue that "literary fiction as meaningful empathy experience and holistic inclusion of human range of emotion" (Cuzzo et al., 2017, p. 69). Bishop's and Krishnaswami's glass metaphor argues that literature exposes students to other experiences, which can help students develop a larger capacity for empathy.

Reading can help develop empathy in a variety of ways. Researchers Kidd and Castano investigated how literary fiction influences theory of mind and shared their findings in the article "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind." Theory of mind is the ability to "understand others' mental states" (Kidd & Castano, 2013). Theory of mind is very similar to empathy, as understanding of others as complex humans is necessary for empathy. Fiction "reduces the strangeness of others…and forces us to engage in mind-reading and character construction" (Kidd & Castano, 2013). Reading door and prism texts allows people to learn about others, leading to understanding and empathy. Readers must work to understand the characters, which may strengthen their ability to understand others in real life. Kidd and Castano had participants in their experiment read literary texts, nonfiction texts, popular texts, or no reading and then complete a test to test their ability to identify emotions on others faces. Those reading literary texts scored significantly higher on the Reading the Mind in the Eyes test, which is frequently used to test theory of mind. Literary texts help readers improve their empathy through practicing understanding.

Reading literature also helps build cultural and personal knowledge, which can help develop empathy. Michael Fischer explores empathy's connection to reading in his article "Literature and Empathy." He argues that literature leads readers to tolerance of others, as reading about others shows that there are other viewpoints in the world. This matches what Cuzzo et al. and Kidd and Castano argued in their articles. He argues that texts by an author about the author's own culture are even more engaging and can lead to greater understanding from readers outside that culture. Fischer claims "we readers expand our awareness of other points of view, thereby making us more responsive to the rights and needs of others" (2017, p.

439). Through understanding others, readers are more likely to be drawn towards compassion and companionship with others who are different than them, which prevents dehumanization.

Literature doesn't just build knowledge and understanding, it can also help develop community. Lopez-Robertson and Haney describe their experiences with using diverse children's literature in an elementary school classroom in their article "Their Eyes Sparkled: Building Classroom Community Through Multicultural Literature." Many of the students in the study had never seen people like themselves represented in literature, which matches Bishop's writing on mirror texts. Lopez-Robertson and Haney found that the students engaged with the diverse books and engaged in discussions with their classmates after reading. Not only does reading about others lead to better understanding of others, as described in the three previous articles discussed, but it also inspires conversations that can help foster community in a classroom.

Writing and Empathy

While reading can be mirrors, doors, and prisms for students, writing is also an important component of language arts. Writing can also help students become more empathetic. Not only does writing help students better understand themselves and their emotions, but it also encourages students to consider others' experiences to be able to write convincing characters.

Creative writing can help writers develop empathy. Young Chicago Authors is an organization that provides creative writing activities to teenagers. Their goal is to "help young people from all backgrounds to understand the importance of their own stories and those of others…to make their communities more just and equitable" (Young Chicago Authors, 2022). They recognize how writing can be a way for students to express themselves in writing and share this writing with the world. When students have a chance to learn about their own feelings, they

will also be able to utilize these skills to understand others as well. The texts students create can be mirror, door, or prism texts for their audience, "sharing those experiences helps others see them more fully, closing the distance between people" (Young Chicago Authors, 2022). In this way, students' creative writing exercises help their readers become more empathetic to others.

Some writers may feel uncomfortable creating characters that have different identities than the writer identifies with, but avoidance of difference will not lead to empathy. In "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance," Dwight
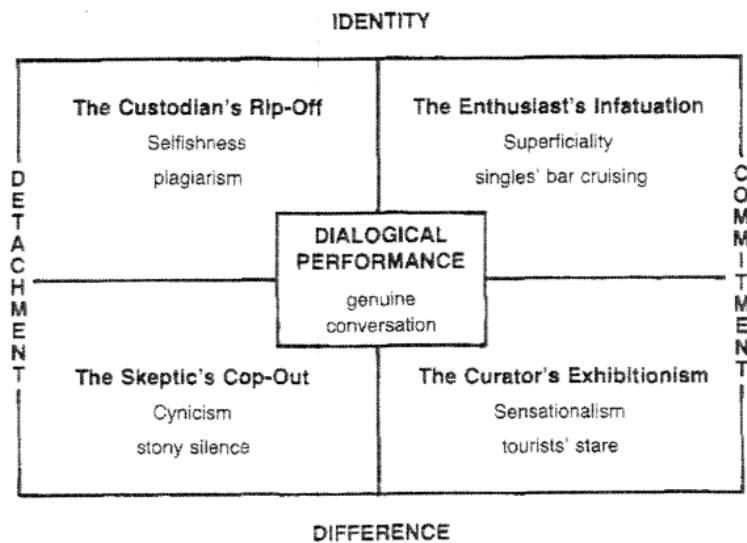

Figure 1: Conquergood's Map of Performance Morality. From Conquergood, 1985.

Conquergood creates a map to explain performances of identities different than the performer. While this article was originally intended for actors and performers, the ideas can be applied to writing characters whose identities differ from the writer. The two axes of the map range from detachment to commitment and then from identity to difference, see Figure 1. Too much focus on commitment and identity leads to superficiality and shallowness. Too much focus on identity with too much detachment leads to plagiarism and selfish performances of closed ceremonies. Too much detachment and focusing on differences leads to cynicism and a refusal to interact with anything you perceive as different. Focusing on differences with too much commitment leads to sensationalism and objectification. This must be kept in mind when writing characters from cultures you don't identify with. The author avoiding writing characters unlike them will

not lead to empathy either. In the center of this map is dialogical performance, a genuine conversation coming from and leading towards more respect. Researching to understand others can lead to better understanding of others and more empathy for others.

While Conquergood published his article in 1985, some writers still agree with his sentiments. Author Max Gladstone who regularly writes characters with identities different than his. He argues in support of writing characters different than oneself, "but if I focused my books on people who look, speak, screw, and believe exactly like I do, well, I'd be using my greatest powers—skills I've spent my whole life developing—to be part of the problem. And to make matters worse, I'd be writing about a world that does not exist" (Gladstone, 2015). Refusing to create characters that are different from oneself contributes to the lack of diversity. Gladwell describes how compassion and empathy are necessary for writing diverse characters. A writer can create a character that is a different identity than their own when they create a three-dimensional character who experiences challenges any human could face, like dealing with a crush, having complicated feelings about their hometown, or working hard to achieve a goal.

Mistakes will be made when creating characters different from the writer's identity, but there are ways to address some issues. Writing teacher Nisi Shawl gives advice on writing characters from other identities in "How Not to Be All About What It's Not All About: Further Thoughts on Writing About Someone Else's Culture and Experience." Shawl acknowledges that writing characters different from oneself can be nerve-racking. Mistakes will happen, but mistakes lead to growth and learning (Shawl, 2020). To help prevent mistakes, writers can collaborate with people who identify with the culture they are trying to write about or use a sensitivity reader. For student groups, bringing in community members may allow students to

learn about new cultures, more feasibly than sensitivity readers. Students can also utilize the internet to research.

Some readers and writers believe that authors should create characters that reflect their personal identities. The #OwnVoices campaign champions authors who write characters that reflect their personal identities. When writing about their own cultures, authors can create authentic portrayals of their own experiences. They also usually have an easier time of avoiding mistakes and stereotypes in their writing. Championing diverse authors in the publishing industry is a commendable goal. #OwnVoices does not need to stand in opposition to Conquergood's, Gladwell's, and Shawl's arguments. Diverse authors creating authentic tales will create more mirror and prism characters. But authors outside of that identity can also create mirror and prism characters that may fall outside of their identities. In educational settings, young people are learning about themselves and the world, and this can include learning how to portray others. In practicing the skill, students can better understand others.

Empowering students to write creatively can be a powerful tool for empathy. Through researching their writing, students will continue to learn about others. The finished products from students will contain characters that other readers can identify as mirrors, doors, or prisms. Language arts can help young people practice and develop their empathy.

Methods and Results

In this section I outline possible units for the three selected texts. This will be a skeletal outline, with spaces around the provided materials that could be filled in with what your students need. Reading and reading comprehension activities are not dictated; one could have students read outside for homework and lead discussions in class or read and dissect during class. The rest of the empty spaces may be filled with grammar, vocabulary, texts you would like to pair with

the novel, etc. These activities could also be used in community settings, such as book clubs or after school activities.

An introduction to the glass metaphor is provided in a slideshow and journal activity (see Appendix A). The presentation is best used at the beginning of the timeline, as it is an introduction to the glass metaphor to students. The slideshow is a mix of definitions, examples, and discussion questions. I designed it to be easy to present with minimal background knowledge; the presenter could quickly familiarize themselves with the presentation and then present it to their audience. It may be a good idea to edit the presentation with mirror, window, door, or prism examples that would be more relevant to the presenter and/or the students. The journal activity (see Appendix B) is designed to help students reflect on the glass metaphor and make connections from their own lives to it. It is ideally done shortly after the presentation. It could be done in class or outside.

Drawing on Ladson-Billings' critical consciousness, students will be learning about cultures that they - or the teacher - may not identify with. A glass metaphor Reading Reflection worksheet is available for each unit. It will help students catalogue their connections to the characters while reading. It also provides a space for the students to reflect on how the character's portrayal affects their thinking about the character's identity(s). These worksheets can be used to start a discussion on what the author and text are trying to say about a particular culture.

Ms. Marvel: No Normal Unit

In this graphic novel, written by Wilson and illustrated by Alphona, Herring, and Caramagna, nerdy Kamala Khan accidentally becomes a superhero. On top of her new superhero duties, Kamala must balance school, family, and religion. While Kamala loves her Pakistani-

American family and follows her Islamic faith, she isn't afraid to question how these two shape her life as a teenage girl. Kamala can easily be a mirror for many students; students may relate to how overwhelmed she is with her responsibilities, her desire to question the world, or even her nerdiness. This graphic novel can also act as a door for students unfamiliar with one of Kamala's identities. Kamala's relatability helps students understand and sympathize with her, even if they don't share in her cultures. Finally, all of Kamala's identities interact and influence each other, like a prism. This can open up conversations for students that can build empathy for identities that are sometimes disparaged in Western society.

Since this text is a graphic novel, it can be a relatively fast read. The minimal words may interest reluctant readers. Many students will have some experience with graphic storytelling from comics or the Sunday funnies. To make sure all students are prepared to read it best to sample a close reading of a graphic narrative to model good strategies for understanding visual storytelling to students. Discussions of different types of text including narration, speech bubbles, and thoughts bubbles is important. Another important detail that should be discussed is visual action across panels and how drawings become dynamic and action filled. Some images will not have any text; the reader must figure out the intended meaning through looking at the images.

The reading reflection (see Appendix C) can be utilized to start a discussion on what students learn about Kamala's identities. The worksheet is to help students recognize how an author can portray a character's identities and how the portrayals make the readers think about those identities. After students complete the worksheet, a class discussion should be utilized to discuss what students noticed about Kamala's or other characters' identities. The goal of the discussion is to help students recognize and respect Kamala's various identities.

Ms. Marvel: No Normal helps start a conversation on important texts in one's life. The main character Kamala Khan is a nerdy teenager who references the Avengers and Harry Potter and the impact these stories have had on her. This creates a jumping off point for students to think about the important texts, which can include novels, movies, music, etc., in their textual lineage (see Appendix D). Muhammad argues that media can shape how one interacts with the world, and reflecting on the significant texts in one's life is important for understanding oneself (2020, p.147-148). Students will reflect on how the texts they listed have influenced their life. Students will also identify whether these texts are mirrors, windows, doors, and/or prisms. The textual lineage activity would work best near the beginning of the unit. This activity is to help students recognize the effect representation in media can have on them and others.

At the end of the Ms. Marvel unit, students will create their own mini comics (see Appendix E). This is a narrative assignment with both written and artistic components. The art can be done with a computer for reluctant artists, but all students should have some visual component, to practice narrative creation with minimal words. Students will have three prompts to guide them in their comic creation; students can choose to focus on their personal mirrors in media, how their identities influence their life, or a time when they realized someone who seemed different from them actually had many similarities. All prompts are created to help students think about identity, whether that be their own or others. Young Chicago Authors recognizes that when students can share their voice, they can develop emotional intelligence that can also help them understand others. The final prompt asks students to think of a time when they empathized with someone who they perceived as different. This assignment is designed to help students start to write with empathy for themselves and others.

The Poet X

The Poet X is a novel in verse that tells the story of Xiomara, a Dominican-American, Afro-Latina teenager growing up in New York City. Xiomara must contend with her devoutly religious mother's pressure and expectations while balancing school, a crush, and a desire to share her voice. This novel can be a powerful mirror for students. While students may not initially see any connections between themselves and Xiomara, with some reflection students may be able to connect with struggling with parental expectations, new relationships, and a desire to be heard. Xiomara's multiple cultures interact and influence one another throughout the novel and provide a strong prism example for discussion.

The Glass Metaphor Reading Reflection (see Appendix F) can be used by the students while they read The Poet X. Similar to the Ms. Marvel reading reflection, it asks students to find scenes they felt were mirrors, windows, doors, or prisms. They are then asked to reflect on how these scenes make them think or feel. The students' work can be used to start a group discussion about what they are learning about Xiomara's (and friend's or family's) identities.

In The Poet X, Xiomara writes about her name, what it means, why she was given it, and her experience with her name in the poem "Names" (Acevedo, 2018, p.7-8). Muhammad recommends students write about their names to help them wrestle with what names reveal about identities, and what they hide (2020, p.75). Students can complete the Story of My Name assignment (See Appendix G) near the beginning of the unit to mirror Xiomara's reflection on her and her family's names. Students will reflect on their own names, how names and identity are connected, and how names influence and are influenced by the culture(s) around them. Thinking about names and their powers will help students start to reflect on who they and what identities are important to them. Understanding their own identity and cultures can help students understand and respect other cultures and identities.

This unit could be expanded with a variety of activities connected to poetry. Other poems could be paired with the text. Langston Hughes's "Harlem" could be paired with Xiomara's "Night before First Day of School;" both have vivid imagery about dreams (Acevedo, 2018, p. 34). One activity could introduce slam poetry; Elizabeth Acevedo's "Rat Ode" and Darius Simpson's and Scout Bostley's poem "Lost Voices" are both excellent examples. Activities on literary devices and writing poetry could also be included.

The final activity for The Poet X would ask students to complete as assignment Xiomara also had to complete, to "write about the most impactful day of your life" (Acevedo, 2018, p.38). Students will write a poem about one the days they have influenced their lives the most (see Appendix H). Students will also be encouraged to consider how that day has impacted their identity. The handout provides tips for writing poetry, which could be supplemented with another activity on writing poetry. Students will first create a rough draft and share with peers for feedback. Sample questions are provided to guide the peer review. After students have written and revised their poems, they will read them aloud in small groups and give positive feedback to their peers. Hearing peers' poems about their impactful days will help students understand that everyone has different experiences and viewpoints. Getting a door to others' lives will help them understand and respect their peers more. Providing positive feedback to each other will also provide students a chance to speak kindly and empathetically with their peers.

The Marrow Thieves

In the dystopian young adult novel, *The Marrow Thieves,* Cherie Dimaline tells the story of Frenchie, an Indigenous teenage boy, trying to survive in in a post-apocalyptic world. In this world, Indigenous people are pursued for their bone marrow, in the hopes it will provide a miracle cure. Frenchie finds a group of other Indigenous people, including multiple people his

age, a very young child, an adult man, and an elderly woman. This group becomes a family who try to keep their culture alive while on the run from hunters. This story doesn't hold back from showing the horrors of oppression that many Indigenous people face in the real world, but it is also a story of survival and resistance.

Frenchie can be a powerful mirror for Indigenous students and other students who feel like they have to hide their culture to fit in. With some reflection students may also be able to see themselves in Frenchie's struggles to prove himself as he comes of age and his crush on one of his traveling companions. This novel also is a door and prism for students who may not be familiar with Indigenous cultures.

There is also Glass Metaphor Reading Reflection (see Appendix I) for *The Marrow Thieves.* Like the other Reading Reflections, it helps students recognize when characters are mirrors, windows, doors, or prisms and what these scenes reveal about the characters' identities. Ideally this material is used to start a discussion about identity in *The Marrow Thieves.*

The Marrow Thieves unit will ideally come after students have read a variety of books that faithfully portrayed a variety of identities (not just the texts in this project). Students will be tasked to create characters and a fictional short story. Students can choose to focus on characters that are mirrors or prisms to them as a writer. The goal is to create a short story that students can share with their peers, who can see the characters as mirrors and prisms as well.

The first material is the Character Creation handout (see Appendix J). Students will have various prompts to help them create a character for their upcoming short story activity. Students can create a character who may not share all of the same identities as the student. The goal of this assignment is to have students recognize that despite different identities and traditions, many people will share similar dreams, experiences, and strengths.

The second material for *The Marrow Thieves* is the Creating a Mirror, Door, or Prism handout (see Appendix K). This material is a guideline for students when creating their short story. The students will be writing a creative narrative with at least one character whose identity(s) influence the story somehow. The material also has a plot outline section with questions that can help students brainstorm and outline the story. The questions could be answered on a separate sheet of paper or a plot mountain diagram. Students could also use the questions to guide the creation of an outline. The material also has some peer review questions for students to answer when reviewing their peer's rough drafts. The final outcome for the short story would be sharing with classmates. This could be done in a variety of ways. The instructor could have students sit in small groups and read their stories aloud or create a shared space students could access to read the stories. To encourage thoughtful listening, students should be encouraged to comment on a number of stories on whether they felt the character(s) were mirrors, doors, or prisms, and why. Through these two activities, students should have a chance to learn about a variety of identities and cultures, to help develop empathy for others.

Implications and Conclusion

This project could be helpful to anyone who is passionate about diverse young adult texts, including those fighting book bans, teacher-education programs, pre-service teachers, and educators.

Diverse young adult texts need to be used more in youth spaces, but more bills and bans are being introduced throughout the country trying to remove divisive topics from classrooms and libraries. Most books that are challenged or removed from classrooms have diverse characters, whether that be race, gender, sexuality, religion, or ability. The literature review proves the importance of keeping these books in youth spaces; young people need to see

themselves in the texts they read. When young people do not see themselves in media, they will have a hard time learning to accept and love themselves. Young people also need to read about others so that are not ideologically isolated from the rest of the world. Reading can introduce others to cultures that are not present in their community, broadening their understanding and empathy for others. Further research in the effects of literature on empathy would be beneficial to provide more evidence to repeal book bans. This information could be utilized by anyone who wants to keep diverse books in the hands of young people, whether that be teachers, librarians, or parents.

Ideally, teacher-preparation programs should better prepare teachers to tackle the issues of teaching empathy, diverse texts, and creative writing. My coursework did not truly prepare for any of these topics. While a few classes introduced me to the glass metaphor and my young adult literature class provided examples of academically enriching texts, they were just a spark that inspired this project. I grew comfortable with the glass metaphor because I chose to keep working with it in other classes. However, many pre-service teachers would not have a chance to work with diverse and engaging texts outside of one or two classes. Most English classes do not use texts that are academically enriching with diverse characters that would be engaging for teenagers. Creative writing instruction is also very lacking in English and Education classes. However, I recognize that teacher-preparation programs are already overloaded with classes. Perhaps other classes could be cut, or the program could have to be made longer. Ideally more classes would integrate using texts with diverse characters and creative writing.

The activities and materials provided highlight ways diverse texts can be incorporated into lessons and hopefully provide educators with a place to start. Lists of academically enriching diverse texts that can be incorporated into lessons would be beneficial to educators, as

this information was a bit lacking when I first started this project. These lists would make

choosing texts easier for busy educators faced with the volume of young adult literature. One

shortcoming of this project is that the books focus on racial and ethnic diversity. In the future,

more materials for books with characters who are diverse in gender, sexuality, ability, and

religion would be beneficial. More available ideas and materials for this wider variety of diverse

texts would also be helpful to inspire lessons and activities. These activities could be matched to

standards for classroom educators. Librarians and creative writing or book club leaders could

also use all or some of these activities. Hopefully this project will help support educators trying

to keep diverse texts in youth education programs.

  Reading diverse texts and creative writing can help young people develop and strengthen

empathy for others. It is important that young people are given the chances to work with these

texts in educational contexts. It is up to us to keep diverse texts in youth hands and empower

them to explore creative writing.

Works Cited

Acevedo, E. (2018). *The Poet X*. Harper Collins Publishers.

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3).

Conquergood, D. (1985). Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance. Literature in Performance 5, 1-13.

Cuzzo, M. S. W., Larson, M. R., Mattsson, L. M. & McGlasson, T. D. (2017). How do you Effectively Teach Empathy to Students? *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, (151), 61-78. https://doi-org.ezproxy.bgsu.edu/10.1002/tl.20249

Dimaline, C. (2017). *The Marrow Thieves*. DCB, Cormorant Books Inc.

Fischer, M. (2017). Literature and Empathy. *Philosophy and Literature*, 41(2), 431-464. doi:10.1353/phl.2017.0050.

Gladstone, M. (2015, July 16). "On Bees and Diversity." *Intellectus Speculativus*. https://intellectusspeculativus.wordpress.com/2015/07/16/guest-post-max-gladstone-on-bees-and-diversity/

Kidd, D. C., & Castano, E. (2013). Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind. *Science, 342*(6156), 377-380. DOI: 10.1126/science.1239918.

Krishnaswami, U. (2019, Jan. 17). *Why Stop at Windows and Mirrors? Children's Book Prisms.* Horn Book Inc. https://www.hbook.com/?detailStory=why-stop-at-windows-and-mirrors-childrens-book-prisms

Ladson-Billings G. (1995). But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *Theory into Practice, 34*(3), 159-165.

Ladson-Billings G. (1995). Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(3), 465-491.

Lapointe, G. (2022, April 25). *What Happened to the Own Voices Label?* Book Riot. https://bookriot.com/what-happened-to-the-own-voices-label/#:~:text=Paradoxically%2C%20the%20own%20voices%20label,call%20the%20story%20own%20voices.

Lopez-Robertson, J., & Haney, M. J. (2017). Their Eyes Sparkled: Building Classroom Community Through Multicultural Literature. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 43(1), 48–54.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Empathy. In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved March 10, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy

Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*. Scholastic.

Naidoo, J. C. & Dahlen, S. P. (Eds.). (2013). *Diversity in Youth Literature: Opening Doors through Reading.* ALA Editions.

Shawl, N. (2020, Oct 27). *How Not to Be All About What It's Not All About: Further Thoughts on Writing About Someone Else's Culture and Experience.* TOR. https://www.tor.com/2020/10/27/how-not-to-be-all-about-what-its-not-all-about-further-thoughts-on-writing-about-someone-elses-culture-and-experience/

Thakur, M. (2021, May 11). *The #OwnVoices Movement: Whose Voices are Being Heard?* Cherwell. https://www.cherwell.org/2021/05/11/the-ownvoices-movement-whose-voices-are-being-heard/

Whitehead, T. S. & Whitehead, R. J. (2018). Young Adult Literature and Otherness: Empathy as a Rhetorical Tool. In T. Girardi & A. G. Scheg (Eds.), *Young Adult Literature in the Composition Classroom: Essays on Practical Application* (91-104). McFarland & Company, Inc.

Wilson, G. W., Alphona, A., Herring, I., & Caramagna, J. (2014). *Ms. Marvel: No Normal*. Marvel Worldwide, Inc.

Young Chicago Authors. (2022). About YCA. YCA. https://youngchicagoauthors.org/about.

Appendix A: Introductory Slideshow for the Glass Metaphor (https://tinyurl.com/2tr2kbxp)

Mirrors

A mirror shows your reflection. When you see yourself in a book character, that book is a mirror

Windows

A window lets you look into another room. When a book is a window, it lets you look at characters or a world that is unfamiliar to you.

Sliding Doors

A sliding door lets you step into another room. When a book is a door, it helps you feel like you are experiencing something new and unfamiliar.

You may find similarities or differences with a character's:

- Education and Schooling
- Gender
- Race
- Interests or Extracurriculars
- Religion
- Family
- Age
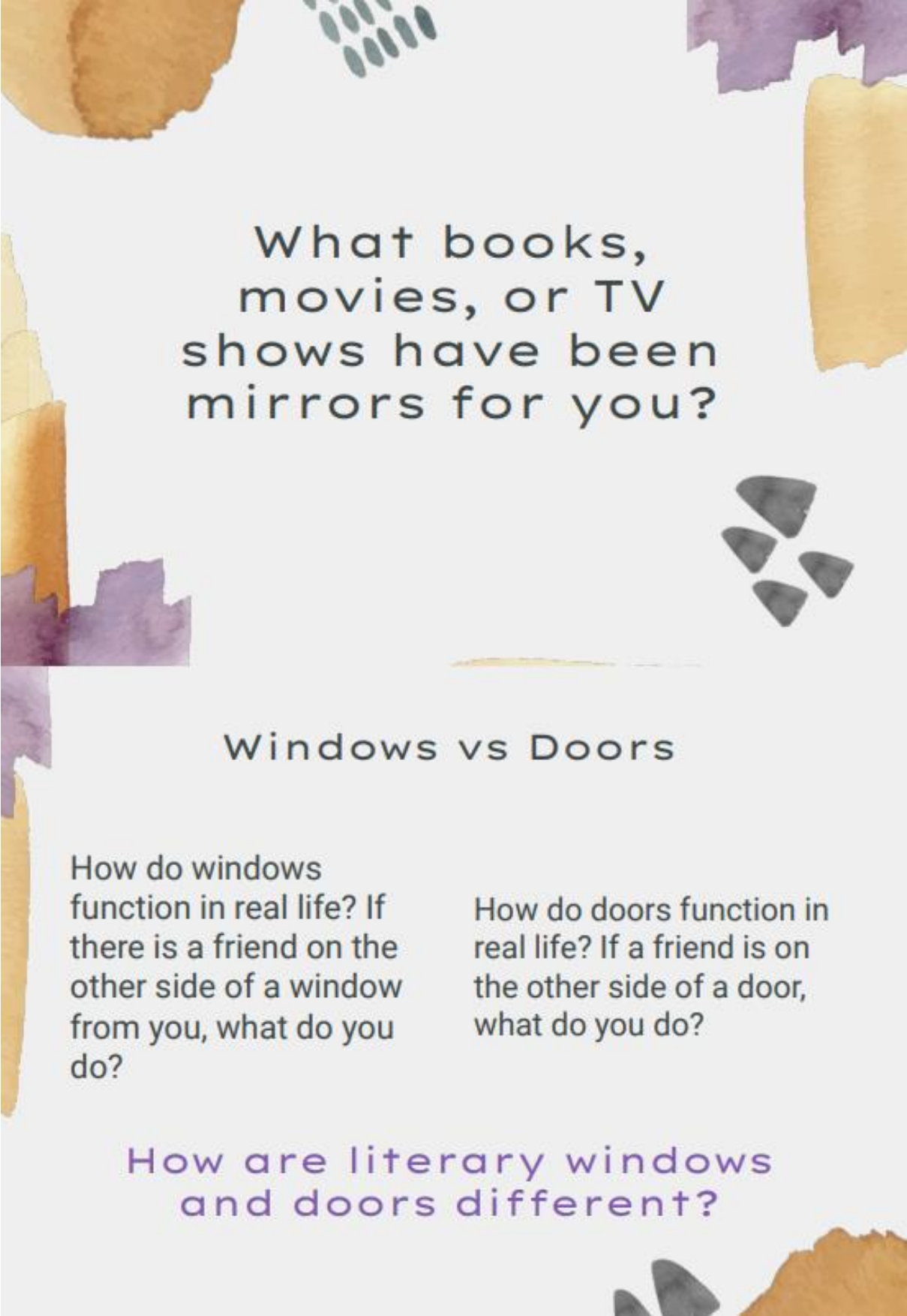- Relationships or Friendships
- Or something else!

Frequently books can be a mixture of mirrors, windows, and doors.

Everyone will experience a book differently; some may find more mirrors, and some will find more windows in the novel.

Example of a Mirror

In the 1960s roles for African-Americans on television were scarce and often inconsequential — with Star Trek being an exception. On the U.S.S. Enterprise, the presence of Uhura on the Bridge crew connected with the young Goldberg, and her lifelong love of Star Trek had begun. "Well, when I was nine years old Star Trek came on," Goldberg says. "I looked at it and I went screaming through the house, 'Come here, mum, everybody, come quick, come quick, there's a Black lady on television and she ain't no maid!' I knew right then and there I could be anything I wanted to be."

What books, movies, or TV shows have been mirrors for you?

Windows vs Doors

How do windows function in real life? If there is a friend on the other side of a window from you, what do you do?

How do doors function in real life? If a friend is on the other side of a door, what do you do?

How are literary windows and doors different?

What books, movies, or TV shows have been windows or doors for you?

Would someone get a great sense of who you are as a person if they looked at you through a window? If someone walked in your bedroom, would they know every detail about you?

Prisms

Prisms, in real life, can turn a single ray of light into a rainbow.

In books, a prism is a character who has multiple cultures that are all part of their identity. These cultures are all important to their character and influence how they experience the world. They resemble people in real life who all have multiple aspects to their identity.

Prism Examples

Kamala Khan is Pakistani-American and participates in both cultures. She is a high school student who likes to learn and write fan-fiction. She loves her family, but she disagrees with their rules sometimes. She is Muslim, but feels some of the rules about women are unfair. All of her identities interact with each other and contribute to her identity.

Can you think of any prism examples from books, movies, or TV shows?

You'll adjust soon enough. This is your home, Kamala--relax and take it easy.

Yeah...

...I *want* to, but--in Jersey, I stick out because I'm *too Pakistani*. Here, I stick out because I'm *too American*. I guess--I guess I'm having a hard time relaxing, period.

Presenter Example

Provide an example of a prism text in your life or a text most of
your audience would be familiar with

Journal Activity

BOOKS ARE...

MIRRORS   WINDOWS   SLIDING GLASS DOORS

Created by Grant Snider

Link to Journal Activity

Appendix B: Glass Metaphor Journal Handout

Name: _____

Glass Metaphor Journal

Answer these questions about the glass metaphor in 2-3 sentences.

What book, movie, or TV has been a <u>mirror</u> in your life? Why would you consider it a mirror?

What book, movie, or TV has been a <u>window</u> in your life? Why would you consider it a window?

What book, movie, or TV has been a <u>door</u> in your life? Why would you consider it a door?

Have the books you have read for school been more mirrors, windows, or doors for you? Discuss.

What book, movie, or TV has been a <u>prism</u> in your life? Why would you consider it a prism?

Appendix C: Ms. Marvel Reading Reflection Handout

Name: _____

Ms. Marvel: No Normal
Glass Metaphor Reading Reflection
Fill out this chart while reading *Ms. Marvel: No Normal*.

What scene/moment did you connect with (and page number)?	Was it a mirror, window, door, or prism for you? Why?	How did it make you think about a part of Kamala's (or another character's) identity?

Appendix D: Textual Lineage Handout

Name: _____

Textual Lineage

A textual lineage is the texts that have been important in your life. They may have shaped how you see the world or yourself. These are texts you have remembered. These texts can be books, movies, TV shows, YouTube videos, music, memes, poems, quotes, short stories, letters, websites, artwork etc.

First, brainstorm a list of texts important to your life in the space below:

Pick five texts from your brainstorm list and write a short response on a separate page that addresses:

- Whether each text is a mirror, window, door, and/or prism for you and why
- How the text has impacted/influenced your life

Appendix E: Comic Creation Handout

Creating a Comic

To wrap up our reading of *Ms. Marvel: No Normal*, we will be creating
miniature comics that explore identity. The comic should be a narrative,
meaning they tell a story.

Guidelines

- A panel is the square (or other shape) that contains a single image/scene. Consider
  the plot mountain (exposition/setting, rising action, climax, falling action, and
  resolution); each panel can only contain one part of the plot mountain, so to tell a
  story, you will probably need at least 5 panels.
- There should be at least 6 elements of text. This could be in a speech bubble or
  thought bubble.
- The comic should tell a story about identity. You can choose between three
  different prompts, which are below. It should have at least one character.
- You can make your comics on paper with any drawing utensils you prefer. You
  can also make your comic online using a comic-creation website like:
  https://makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/ or
  https://www.storyboardthat.com/storyboard-creator.
- Samples are included at the end of this document.

Prompts

You will have three options for the subject of your comic:

1) Think about a character from a story (book, movie, etc.) that was a mirror for you.
   Who was it? What story was it from? How and when did you find this character?
   How did it make you feel?
2) Think about the different identities you have and the different cultures you belong
   to. What does identity mean to you? What does culture mean to you? How do you

feel your identity(s) and culture(s) are related? How do your identity(s) and culture(s) affect your life?

3) Think about a time when you learned someone (real person or character) was not so different from you. Why did you think they were different at first? How did you learn that you shared similarities? What were those similarities? How did this experience make you feel?

For whichever prompt you choose, you don't need to answer every question. You may address something else related to the questions. Use the questions to guide and inspire you.

Process

1) Rough Draft – In this step you will be planning out your comic like a storyboard. You'll need to have some pictures, but they don't need to be fancy, as you'll be editing your comic. Stick figures and simple doodles will work! You'll also need to draft captions and speech bubbles.

2) Peer Review – After completing your first draft, you'll meet with peers to give and receive feedback. (Peer review questions are below).

3) Polished Draft – After reviewing your peer feedback, you'll polish up your comic. Make any changes to improve the narrative of your comic. Enhance your drawings and finalize captions and speech bubbles.

4) Sharing – We'll hang up all the comics and have a gallery walk. You'll have a chance to leave post-it note comments on your peers' comics.

Peer Review Questions

1) What do you think this comic is about? Summarize the narrative in 1-3 sentences.

2) Is there anything unclear about this comic?

3) Do the speech bubbles and/or thought bubbles fit with the images?

4) What did the author do well?

Samples

© tinyeyescomics

From *Ms. Marvel: No Normal*

BOOKS ARE...

GRANT SNIDER (AFTER RUDINE SIMS BISHOP)

Appendix F: The Poet X Reading Reflection Handout

Name: _____

The Poet X
Glass Metaphor Reading Reflection
Fill out this chart while reading *The Poet X*.

What scene/moment did you connect with (and page number)?	Was it a mirror, window, door, or prism for you? Why?	How did it make you think about a part of Xiomara's (or another character's) identity?

Appendix G: Story of My Name Handout

Name: _____

Story of My Name

Names and identities are closely related. Names are influenced by family, tradition, and culture. Xiomara writes about her name in the poem "Names." Her family traditionally uses religious names, but hers isn't. Xiomara thinks the meaning "one who is ready for war" fits her. She also reflects on her experience with others using her name.

Answer at least <u>4 of the 7</u> questions to reflect on how names and identity are connected in a short essay.
1) What does your name mean? (Use this website: https://babynames.com/) Do you think the meaning fits you?
2) Why/how did you get your name?
3) What does a name reveal about someone's identity? What does a name hide?
4) How does culture affect names? How did culture affect your name?
5) How do our names influence the way people treat us?
6) To what extent do we have control of names others use for us?
7) What parts of our identities do we choose for ourselves?

Adapted from Gholdy Muhammad

Appendix H: Poetry Writing Handout

The Most Impactful Day

Xiomara's first assignment in her English class is to "write about the most impactful day of your life." You will also be completing the same assignment. <u>You will write a poem about the most impactful day of your life.</u> Impactful means having an effect; the effect could be positive, negative, or neutral.

Guidelines

- You'll be writing a poem about a day in your life which has greatly influenced you and/or your identity.
  - o We will be sharing them with our peers, so choose a day you are comfortable with others knowing about.
- Your poem should also include why and/or how the day has impacted you.
- The poem should be at least 12-15 lines. It can be longer.

Tips for Writing a Poem

- Poems are usually full of sensory imagery. Consider your five senses and how you can help your readers imagine them.
- Use strong words that reveal a lot with a single word. Pick verbs that show strong actions. Use specific nouns. Choose adjectives and adverbs that are descriptive.
- Use imagery and strong words to create emotion for your readers. Show them why they should care.
- Poems do not have to rhyme.
- Consider the pauses in the poem. Commas create short pauses. Dashes and semicolons are medium pauses. Periods and question marks are longer

pauses. Line breaks can create short or long pauses. Consider the line breaks in *The Poet X* and the effects they have.

- There are no rules for when to start a new line. You can have a certain number of syllables or words per line. You can have all the lines be similar lengths. You can end lines with punctuation marks. You can start a new line in the middle of a thought. Review *The Poet X* for more examples.

Process

1) Rough Draft – Tell a story about the most impactful day of your life and why it is important. Try to include at least 2 action verbs and 2 instances of imagery in the poem. It does not have to be perfect; you will be revising it.

2) Peer Review – After completing your first draft, you'll meet with peers to give and receive feedback. (Peer review questions are below).

3) Polished Draft – Polish up your poem, using the peer feedback as a guide. Refine the punctuation you use and where you end your lines. Try to include 3 action verbs and 3 instances of imagery.

4) Sharing – We'll break into small groups, and you'll read your poem aloud to your peers. When listening to others, you will provide a positive comment either aloud or on a sticky note.

Peer Review

1) How does this poem make you feel?

2) Underline sensory imagery in the poem. Suggest a place the writer could include another instance of imagery.

3) Underline any strong words in the poem. Suggest a strong word (like an adjective or action verb) that could strengthen the imagery.

Appendix I: The Marrow Thieves Reading Reflection

Name: _____

The Marrow Thieves
Glass Metaphor Reading Reflection
Fill out this chart while reading *The Marrow Thieves*.

What scene/moment did you connect with (and page number)?	Was it a mirror, window, door, or prism for you? Why?	How did it make you think about a part of Frenchie's (or another character's) identity?

Appendix J: Character Creation Handout

Name: _____

Character Creation

Answer these prompts and questions to develop a character you'll write about in the upcoming short story assignment. Consider how identity influences various aspects of the character.

When creating a character, remember that everyone has feelings and dreams and people share more similarities than differences, no matter their identity. Research can help you understand a character that may have a partially different identity than you.

- This website has some helpful tips on where to start when creating a character with a different identity than you: https://www.goodstorycompany.com/blog/how-to-write-diverse-characters.
- For writing characters from different cultures, you might find this website helpful: writingwithcolor.org.
- For characters with different abilities, this website might be helpful: https://thewritingplatform.com/2015/12/five-rules-for-creating-disabled-characters/.

Identity

Name and nicknames:

Gender and pronouns:

Age:

Appearance (skin color, eyes, hair, height, etc.):

Questions to Consider

- What culture(s) do they identify with? How do these cultures affect the character?

- How did the character get their name?

- What does their family look like?

- Where do they live? How does the location affect them?

- How do they act around others? Are they introverted or extroverted? Who are their friends?

- What dreams or goals do they have?

- What are they good at? What are their strengths?

- What do they struggle with? What are their weaknesses?

- What do they do with their time? What are their hobbies? Do they have school, work, chores?

Appendix K: Short Story Writing Handout

Short Story Writing
Creating a Mirror, Door, or Prism

We've read a variety of stories and met many characters so far. Some of the characters you might have related to, and some you might have learned more about their identities while reading their stories. Now it is your turn to create a story that introduces characters who your readers can relate to and/or learn from.

Guidelines

- There needs to be at least one character. This main character should have an identity that is somehow referenced in the story. Take inspiration from how Kamala's, Xiomara's, and Frenchie's identities influence their stories.
- There should be some form of conflict. This could be person vs person, person vs nature, person vs self, person vs society, etc.
- The story should have exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.
- Dialogue helps readers understand characters and plot. Listen to the people around you when they talk. People do not speak the same way they write. Try to reflect this in your story.
- The story should be at least two pages. It can be longer.

Prompts

These prompts are to inspire you. You do not necessarily need to use them.

- Is there something you wish people knew about a group you identify with? How could you share that information through a story?

- What does coming of age look like for an identity you are familiar with? What traditions and expectations are included when you transition to adulthood?
- How might a character feel and/or act when no one shares their identity in a group? What challenges and/or opportunities would come from this?
- How might a character feel and/or act when two of their identities conflict in expectations or traditions? How do they reconcile or try to reconcile the differences?

Process

1) Plot Outline – Brainstorm the outline of your story. You can choose how to organize your outline. The questions below can help guide your outline, but you don't have to use them.
2) Rough Draft – Write out the entire story. You should have exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. But it doesn't need to be perfect.
3) Peer Review – After completing your first draft, you'll meet with peers to give and receive feedback. (Peer review questions are below).
4) Polished Draft – Using the peer feedback, polish your short story.
5) Sharing – We'll share our stories with each other (Instructor can choose how: Google Drive folder, paper copies, etc.). You'll read at least three. For each that you read, leave a comment about one of the characters, and whether they were a mirror, door, or prism for you and why.

Plot Outline

Having an outline is helpful when writing a story. Use these questions to help guide your outline. Some stories may not have an answer for every question.

Exposition:

1) What is the setting (time, location, etc.)?

2) How do the readers meet the main character?

3) Who is narrating the story (main character, side character, 3rd person)?

Rising Action

1) What does a normal day look like for the main character? How does their identity(s) affect their normal life?

2) What conflict will the main character face? Does the main character know this challenge is coming?

Climax

1) How does the conflict happen?

2) How does the main character react to the conflict? What do they do?

3) Does the character's identity(s) affect the conflict in any way?

Falling Action

1) How does the main character deal with the conflict?

Resolution

1) Did the main character succeed in the conflict?

2) Did the main character change or learn something?

Peer Review

Having the writer prepare a couple questions they want to ask their peer reviewers can help them get the feedback they need.

1) What is the story about? Summarize in 1-3 sentences.

2) Was the main character a mirror, door, or prism to you? Why or why not?

3) Was/were the character(s) realistic? Did they have strengths and flaws? How can the writer make the characters more realistic?

4) Did the dialogue seem realistic? Did it match the character (informal, formal, lots of slang, etc.)?

5) What is one spot with vivid imagery? Give at least one suggestion to strengthen imagery in another spot.