KOREAN/KOREAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS’ RESPONSES TO YOUNG ADULT FICTION AND MEDIA CREATED BY KOREAN/KOREAN AMERICANS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Multicultural children’s and young adult literature provides readers with various opportunities: to mirror their lives and reflect the meanings of their own experiences; to gain insight on social issues as well as personal issues; and to enhance cross-cultural awareness. How might Korean/Korean American youth cope with everyday life as a minority or a model minority if they had early and consistent exposure to literature depicting the mirrored experiences of Korean/Korean Americans?

Departing from and/or building on the works on critical multiculturalism, reader response studies, and literary/content analysis, this study was to provide ways to understand and gain insight on how Korean/Korean American adolescents read, interpret, and respond to literature, a film, and newspapers about them.

This study employed a qualitative multiple case study and an interpretive approach which enriched understanding of life experiences, literary experiences, interpersonal interactions, and complex socio-cultural contexts of six Korean/Korean American adolescents. Data were collected through interviews, participant-observations, written documents, and surveys.

The findings revealed that the participants tended to hold positive attitudes toward reading. Circumstances at school and home where reading is encouraged created positive influences on their reading habits and attitudes. The participants’ exposure to the literature and the media provided opportunities to reflect on their own experiences related to the stories, expand their worldviews, increase critical awareness of social issues, enhance understanding of issues and struggles of Korean/Korean Americans, and experience personal transformation. Diverse types of literary responses were produced, such as analytical, personal, intertextual, transparent, and social responses.
To construct meaning, the participants actively employed their cultural backgrounds and knowledge, textual features, and personal experiences. In the culturally conscious Korean/Korean American youth literature, identifiable textual features included racial discrimination and prejudices, family relationships, valuing education, identity struggle, and immigrant hardships. The participants could relate the features to personal experiences and cultural backgrounds. Commonalities in their viewpoints existed because they shared membership in the Korean/Korean American community. On the other hand, each participant’s cultural knowledge, experiences, and perceptions contributed to construction of diverse viewpoints on Korean/Korean American lives. The interpretive community created spaces to deepen literary understanding through chances to share their viewpoints, grapple with alternative point of views, and add layers of meanings.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Significance of the Study

Korean immigration to the United States has progressed in three waves (Hurh, 1998). The first wave was from 1903 to 1949. During that time, around 7,200 Koreans immigrated to the Hawaiian Islands. The second wave was the period of immigration from 1950 to 1964. The immigrants included young Korean women married to Americans, Korean War orphans, a small number of elite students, and professional workers. The third wave is occurring in the period since 1965, after the Immigration Act in 1965. The Immigration Act is significant because it eliminated restrictions on Asian immigration. Between 1965 and 1985, the Korean population jumped to a half a million in the United States (Takaki, 1995). The most recent wave, the fourth, is the contemporary period of immigration. The population has continued to grow and more than one million are people of Korean descent in 2000 (Zhou, 2004).

Even though Korean immigrants have come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, contemporary Korean immigration consists of largely middle-class individuals in Korea (Park, 1997). Since 1965, Korean immigrants have come for various reasons: “Korea’s partition; the continuing involvement of the U.S. government in the Korean peninsula in political, military, and economic issues; the rise of the new middle class in Korea; the development of a new international division of labor and the changing status of Korea in this new situation; and the immigration policies created by both the U.S. and Korean governments” (Park, 1997, p.7).

The increased immigration has both positive and negative consequences for Korean/Korean American (K/KA) adults and youth. Many mobile Asian immigrants come to the U.S. for higher education or postsecondary degrees. Less-educated Asian immigrants have had
chances to offer their children the possibility of achieving mobility through education (Louie, 2004). On the other hand, less spectacular, everyday negative experiences include various troubles and agonies Asian immigrants may face, such as financial issues, racial discrimination, cultural gaps, and a language barrier. The number of suicides by Koreans and Korean Americans rose in 2009. *The Korea Times*, an ethnic newspaper in the U.S., reported that more than 36 Koreans and Korean Americans in the New York region had taken their lives in that year (The New York Times, December, 2009). Financial troubles are major triggers of the sharp rise. An extreme example of such tensions that exist can be found in the Virginia Tech massacre. On the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Mr. Cho, a Korean American college student, killed 33 people and wounded many others in 2007 (The New York Times, April, 2007). Mr. Cho had previously received therapy because of a severe anxiety disorder. The attack sparked the debate about many related issues including U.S. gun violence and laws, the responsibility of college administrators, and the killer’s state of mind and family background. This massacre brought to public scrutiny the pain that sometimes belies the surface of the model minority among K/KA youth who may be overwhelmed by cultural expectations, outsider perspectives, and the general angst that accompanies K/KA adolescents.

K/KA youth responded in various ways to the “Cho’s massacre.” Examples of their feelings and ideas can be found in media outlets such as *LA youth*. In this journal, some students described Cho as a crazy murderer and pointed out that he ruined the societal reputation of Koreans. Other students expressed a feeling of remorse for Mr. Cho’s pain and anger. They explained that he had to release his anger as an outcast having no place to belong in America.

As the number of students of various ethnic and racial communities including those of Korean descent continues to increase in American society, many have noted that curricula in
schools need to include their histories, contributions, and aspects of various cultures if the
students are to be high achievers (Harris, 1994). The cultural mismatches between the school and
their home or communities call for a need for teachers to meet the academic and individual needs
of the students. Intragroup dynamics among various ethnic and racial groups according to
socioeconomic diversity, ethnic identity, gender, and other factors render their experiences
unique and meaningful for consideration.

Integrating quality multicultural children’s and young adult books into a literature
program can help students take a look at various issues and concepts from the perspectives of
diverse groups. Ethnically diverse children will especially benefit from the incorporation of
multicultural children’s literature, which will empower them to have positive self-image, pride in
their cultural heritage, and opportunities to enhance critical awareness (Bishop, 1983, 1997). To
contribute to the achievement of these goals, it is imperative to integrate contemporary children’s
and young adult literature that contains various critical issues youth from non-dominant groups
encounter.

Quality K/KA children’s and young adult literature can have many ways of benefiting
students of Korean descent: aesthetically, educationally, and socio-culturally. The literature can
motivate them to be involved in aesthetic and vicarious experience with pleasure by reflecting
themselves and others (Landt, 2006; Nodelman, 1996). It can also have significant effects on
their literacy development such as reading, writing, and critical thinking (Harris, 1994). The use
of multicultural literature including K/KA literature is beneficial to all students by providing
opportunities to enhance cross-cultural understanding, have information and enjoyment, expand
worldview, reject stereotypical thinking, and cultivate imagination and vision of making the
society a more equitable one (Bishop, 1992).
The impact of quality multicultural children’s and young adult literature will also be affected by how readers interpret and respond to the books when considering readers’ lack of background information, immaturity, readability, socio-cultural frame, and other related elements (V.J. Harris, personal communication, January 7, 2009). K/KA adolescents’ interpretations and responses to literature about their lives might be different from what educators expected when they incorporate the literature into their curriculum. Therefore, understanding how these children read the literature needs to be addressed.

In addition, today’s children engage with media in various ways – films and videos, computers, electronic games, music, communicative networks, and so forth. The impact of media is quite influential on students’ literacy learning. Literacy development and learning take place beyond the boundary of classrooms through the interconnection of school-based and real life literacy learning (Pailliotet, 2001). When children interact with oral, print, and electronic texts, it teaches them many things about themselves, about others, and the world. Empowering students and teachers to interrogate media content and processes with a critical lens will help develop their literacy learning and values because media messages are also texts which are constructed in the economic, social, political, historical, and aesthetic contexts (Pailliotet, 2001).

So then, how might K/KA youth cope with everyday life as a minority or a model minority if they had early and consistent exposure to literature and media depicting the mirrored experiences of K/KAs? The literature and media may empower K/KA youth to play active roles as readers, and acquire skills needed to critique the narratives based on their experiences and background knowledge because the narratives contain various issues they can connect in their lives. Their meaning making process can reveal how those narratives shape them, how they
shape the narratives, and how their meaning making is influenced by contextual factors (Moller, 2001).

In a pilot study, I examined a Korean teen girl’s response to ethnically diverse literature including K/KA young adult novels and picture books. Hemi was fourteen years old and an eighth grade Korean girl who had stayed in America for one year. She came to U.S. in order to acquire a better education with the hope of being a promising pianist in the future. With the following research questions, I collected data through participant observation during literature discussion and interviews and documentary evidence, such as autobiography, letters with friends, and writing samples.

1. What perspectives does she have toward different racial/ethnic groups?
2. How does she position herself among ethnic/racial groups?
3. How are her perspectives toward different ethnic groups and her ethnicity related to her perception on racial discrimination?

Hemi and I had participated in literature discussion once or twice a week for one and a half months. Six multiethnic books were chosen by her with the help of my recommendation. Five books were categorized as fiction and one of the books as a folktale. The books written by cultural insiders portrayed lives of Native Americans, African Americans, and Korean Americans: York’s Adventure with Lewis and Clark (Blumberg, 2006), The Hello, Goodbye Window (Juster & Raschka, 2005), If It Hadn’t Been for Yoon Jun (Lee, 1995), How Rabbit Tricked Otter (Ross, 2003), A Step from Heaven (Na, 2001), and Tae’s Sonata (Balgassi, 1997). When she had some difficulties with understanding vocabulary in the texts, she used a dictionary to figure out the meanings of words.
The discussion sessions and interviews were recorded and transcribed. After the discussion sessions, I wrote short field notes for observation data from first person and third person points of view. Through interviews, I asked questions about Hemi’s personal background and experiences at home and school in Korea and America.

The study found that the participant’s perspective about Native Americans and African Americans was the same. She displayed the feeling of sympathy for both ethnic groups. At that time, I assumed that because she felt sympathy for black people and Native Americans, she must have held negative feeling toward white people who enacted racial injustice on them. However, she described white people as very clever and superior. How she thought of white people was also manifested in her work at school. She talked about writing a research paper about Neil Armstrong and read several books about him. She stated that she could even understand white people who discriminated against other people.

How she positioned herself among ethnic/racial groups was important to understanding her ethnic identity. She saw herself as an Asian, a Korean, and a person from different country rather than a person who belongs to minority ethnic groups. Her ethnic identity as a Korean empowered her not only to express her opinions with confidence, but also to worry about the negative influence of the K/KA young adult novels which contained inaccurate or stereotypical information about Korean people and culture. Hemi tried to not only understand the author, but also criticized the inaccurate information about Korean culture because she was worried about distorted images. Her ethnic identity as a cultural insider gave her impetus to critically respond based on her perception and experiences when she responded.

Interpretation and perspectives are socio-culturally constructed. Hemi’s perspectives have been influenced from her personal experiences at school, her history textbooks, and the
books she read, and other channels. When I asked about racial discrimination, her response was similar to her response about white people before. She said that she could understand those who discriminated against other people. She told about her experiences, racial discrimination at the shop, the experience of ignorance at school because of her English language problem, experiences of isolated students, and her experience in Korea when she met a Japanese student. She put herself in their shoes and tried to understand them. From Hemi’s perspective, the children who were discriminated against or felt isolated might have their own passive and narrow-minded personality and/or English problems. She was seeking some reasons for discrimination based on the victim’s personality or English language problem. It might be possible that as she was from Korea, thus, she might not be aware of racial or ethnic discrimination that had roots throughout American history. Another possible explanation is that she didn’t understand the simple and complex nature of racism. She does understand racism because she believes that those who discriminate against her have a right to do so and that she defines it. This is a Korean internalizing racism.

Hemi was a very empathetic person who tried to understand all people from their perspectives. She even tried to understand the manipulation of some white people. She seemed to have lacked critical perspectives on social-justice issues. Her ethnic identity as a Korean made her furious with the inaccurate or negative images about Korean people and culture. She sought to identify reasons for discrimination as being based on individual personality problems or English language problems and tended to internalize the guilt when she interpreted racially discriminating situations.

Using my pilot study with Hemi as a springboard, this present study attempt to provide educators with an understanding of how K/KA adolescents read and respond to contemporary
K/KA young adult literature and media, what elements shape their responses and interpretations, and what issues are important to them and why. Furthermore, this study will hopefully help teachers understand more about K/KA adolescents through knowledge about various issues they might face in their real lives, such as their problems, worldviews, identity issue, family relationship, peer relationships, loneliness, and other critical issues. This understanding will be helpful for teachers who are to incorporate K/KA young adult literature and media into school curriculum in order to teach K/KA adolescents, and provide all students with a chance to engage with well-written literature outside of canonical literature.

**Purpose of the Study**

Recent research on literary response has begun to examine adolescents’ responses to multicultural literature and has reported students’ positive and negative experiences with the literature which portrays stories about various cultural groups (Beach, 1995; Boyd, 2002; Moller & Allen, 2000; Rice, 2005; Spears-Bunton, 1990). Whereas some elements or factors in multicultural literature might cause resistance from many cultural outsiders or some cultural insiders, those elements might be appealing for many cultural insiders in various ways. Cultural insiders’ hooks into literature about their cultures and experiences help invoke their responses as active agents in meaning making process.

Many studies of cultural insiders’ responses to multicultural children’s literature have focused on African American students’ responses to African American stories which portray contemporary or historical African American lives and cultures (Bishop, 1983; Boyd & Howe, 2006; Brooks, 2006; Brooks & Hampton, 2005). There are many unexplored areas of study which focus on ethnically diverse literature and response-based approach to the literature. There is no known study on responses of K/KA youth to young adult literature created by K/KAs. In
addition, when considering the impact of mass media on children’s lives, exploring their responses to media messages would be a valuable study in understanding the media impact on their literacy development by examining their perceptions and interactions with the media messages. There is a need to study how K/KA youth read, interpret, and respond to literature and media about their lives created by K/KAs when considering the increasing number of students of Korean descent and their academic and individual needs in schools and a society.

This study provide ways to understand and gain insight into how K/KA adolescents read, interpret, and respond to literature, a film, and newspapers about K/KA youth which are created by K/KAs. This response study will provide educators and parents of K/KA youth with chances not only to understand K/KA adolescents’ experiences with literature and media, but also to identify conflicting and contradictory issues they might encounter in their lives and understand their perspectives about the issues. By listening to K/KA adolescents’ voices, educators and parents will find some insights and recommendations to understand and help K/KA youth in their academic and personal lives.

Through reading and discussing the narratives, K/KA youth will have chances to take a look at K/KA youth characters and their experiences in various situations. By interacting with fictional characters and their experiences that are related to their lives, students can identify points of convergence or divergence with their lives and reflect on their experiences. Children’s responses to literature depend on what is being responded to and who is reading in what situations (Purves, Rogers & Soter, 1995). K/KA participants will explore their readings, media, peers, and themselves through active participation in responses to literature and media in a group discussion.
Problem Statement and Research Questions

Currently, in spite of the fact that there has been an increasing population of K/KA children, a relatively small amount of K/KA children’s and young adult literature has been published, and the literature has been excluded from school curriculum (Leu, 2002). The literature that does exist frequently portrays K/KA stereotypes. Deeply entrenched critical issues K/KA adolescents might face have been neglected or overlooked below the surface of model minority images. If the phenomenon persists, there are possibilities of continued insults and slights, absorbing negative messages about themselves and people like them, and perpetuation of stereotypical images. There is a need to publish more and incorporate quality K/KA children’s and young adult literature that contains contemporary critical issues, such as peer pressure, family relationships, racism and discrimination, identity issues (class, race, ethnicity, gender, etc.), loneliness, and other critical issues. Their voices and needs should be heard.

The theoretical framework employed in this study is the mixture of critical multiculturalism, studies of response to literature, K/KA children’s and young adult literature and media analysis, reading habits and attitudes, and studies of K/KA adolescent experiences. Drawing on the framework of critical multiculturalism, this study aims to provide opportunities to listen to K/KA students’ voices which contain challenges, struggles, and troubles in their lives and understand their perspectives about diverse controversial issues that have been trivialized or neglected beneath the model minority myth. Theories and studies of response to literature will provide theoretical foundations to examine how interplay of textual power, readers’ cultural values and backgrounds, personal experiences, and interpretive communities shapes K/KA students’ literary understanding. K/KA children’s and young adult literature and media analysis will provide background information about trends and the roles of the literature and media.
Studies of reading habits and attitudes will inform how various factors influenced young people’s literary experiences, such as gender, the influence of family on students’ attitude toward reading, genre, circumstances at school and home, and attitude toward reading in their first language. Studies of K/KA adolescent experiences will discuss various elements that can contribute to significant psychological distress in K/KA adolescents and various aspects of identity which affect their experiences, such as gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion, age, generation, and religion. The following research questions drive this research:

1. What are the attitudes participants hold about reading, and how do their families assist their reading habits and attitudes?

2. What happens when K/KA youth read and interpret literature, a film, and newspapers created by K/KAs?

3. What types of responses are elicited when they discuss the narratives?

4. What do their responses reveal about identity (gender, class, race, ethnicity, age, religion, and other differences)?

Rather than focusing on questioning their interpretations and responses and finding correct responses, this study explores the distinct themes that emerge from the responses of K/KA adolescents, their perspectives and interpretation about the themes, and the impact of the narratives and the interpretive community. It may also offer ways to understand what elements influence readers’ responses, what types of responses are elicited, how readers’ responses are shaped by the interplay of themselves, the texts they read, and the context in which they engage in discussions of the narratives, and what ideas their responses reveal about identity (class, race/ethnicity, age, gender, religion, and other cultural dimensions).
Definition of Terms

Multicultural

In this study, the concept of multicultural includes different races, ethnicities, genders, classes, disabilities, linguistic variation, and other elements that signify differences (Harris, 1996). Here, there is no intention to equate the concept of multiculturalism to different races or ethnicities. Rather, multicultural refers to cultural groups whose literature is historically excluded from the literary canon.

Cultural Identity

Hernandez (2001) points out that the interaction of the different elements contributes to an individual’s cultural identity and individuals differ in the degree to which they emphasize on the different subcultures.

An individual’s cultural identity is based on a number of traits and values related to national or ethnic origin, family, religion, gender, age, occupation, socioeconomic level, language, geographic region, residence, and exceptionality (Gollnick & Chinn, 1986, 1994; cited in Hernandez, 2001, p.60).

Stereotypes

The Council on Interracial Books for Children (1977) defines stereotypes as follows: An untruth or oversimplification about the traits and behaviors common to an entire people is a stereotype. The stereotype is applied to each member of the group, without regard to that person’s individual character. In this study, stereotypes are applied to appearance, intellectual ability, language, character, culture, work, family life, morality, and other aspects which are found to be distorted in texts and illustrations for and about Korean/Korean Americans.
**Authenticity**

Bishop (1997) defines authenticity as “whether or not the depiction of characters seems accurate or rings true in relation to their physical appearance, and to their behaviors, attitudes, values, language, beliefs, their way of life – in short, their culture” (p.16). However, consensus about the issue of authenticity is not resolved. Who is qualified to write about a culture and to evaluate authenticity of a work is still controversial.

**Theme**

A theme or themes of a book are meanings which are beneath the story’s surface reveal something of the author’s purpose, and go beyond the plot and the plan of action, and “the theme should be worth imparting to young people and be based on justice and integrity.” (Kiefer, Hepler & Hickman, 2007, p. 16). The present study focuses on primary themes, the most distinguishable themes.

**Culturally conscious literature**

Bishop (1982) developed a three-part typology for analysis of African American children’s literature: melting pot, social conscience, and culturally conscious. The three elements of the typology can also be applied to other racial minority group including Korean/Korean American children. A major theme in the social conscious books is that Korean American children are the same as other Americans. The melting pot books are concerned with the universality of human experiences and assimilation of Korean American children into the American society. The culturally conscious books deal with details of the lives of Korean American children and their families and communities from the perspectives of cultural insiders.
**Model minority**

The model minority stereotype for Asian Pacific American children is related to how they are treated in American society. The stereotype implies that all Asian children have been achievers because they overcome racism through hard work, and do not suffer from discrimination (Hune, 1998). Asian Americans have grown up in a world that has placed them in marginal positions in American society. Many Asian Americans have often been seen as invisible. They have attempted to be acculturated to the white majority or seek to be a “model minority” by being exemplary citizens and keeping silent.

**Summary**

Very often, K/KA youth may be overwhelmed by cultural expectations, outsider perspectives, and the general angst that accompanies adolescent youth. Departing from the question of how K/KA youth might cope with everyday life as a minority or a model minority if they had early and consistent exposure to literature depicting the mirrored experiences of K/KAs, this study aims to provide ways to understand and gain insight on how K/KA adolescents read, interpret, and respond to literature, a film, and newspapers about K/KA youth created by K/KAs.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter describes the theoretical foundations and reviews of related-research employed in this study: critical multiculturalism, studies of response to literature, K/KA children’s and young adult literature and media, studies of reading habits and attitudes, and a brief overview of K/KA adolescents’ experiences.

Critical Multiculturalism

Drawing on the framework of critical multiculturalism, this study aims to provide a way to listen to K/KA students’ voices and experiences and understand their perspectives about diverse controversial issues which have been trivialized in the curriculum.

American multiculturalism is, arguably, one aspect of the cultural studies approach. Cultural studies arose in the 1960s. It combines elements of diverse fields, focusing on social, cultural, and political forces, such as Marxism, new historicism, feminism, gender studies, anthropology, studies of race and ethnicity, film theory, sociology, urban studies, public policy studies, popular culture studies, and postcolonial studies (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, & Willingham, 1999). Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg (1992) defined “culture” in cultural studies traditions.

Culture is understood both as a way of life – encompassing ideas, attitudes, languages, practices, institutions, and structures of power – and a whole range of cultural practices: artistic forms, texts, canons, architecture, mass-produced commodities, and so forth. (p. 5)

The important ideas about American multiculturalism are found in the field of education. Assimilationist ideology has been prevalent in American education and criticized for seeking to eliminate minority cultures and justifying racist ideology which victimizes members of minority groups (Sleeter & Grant, 1999). Many scholars and educators espouse cultural pluralism as a
desirable ideology for education. Even though there are numerous definitions of cultural pluralism, many scholars agree that “cultural pluralism includes the maintenance of diversity, a respect for differences, and the right to participate actively in all aspects of society without having to give up one’s unique quality” (Sleeter & Grant, 1999, p.153). The idea of respecting and acknowledging multiple perspectives is based on the assumption that “knowledge is not neutral or fixed, but always contested, negotiated, and changing” (Nieto, 1995, p.197). The ideology of cultural pluralism was applied to race and ethnicity first, and then it embraced gender, class, disability, and other cultural characteristics as dimensions of difference (Sleeter & Grant, 1999).

Major proponents of multicultural education advocate educational equality and diversity within unity with democratic ideals of U.S. core culture, such as justice, equality, and freedom. Despite the fact that equality is a key idea of U.S. culture, some students have better opportunities to learn in schools than other students because of their gender, class, ethnic, racial, or other cultural characteristics (Banks, 2001). Multiculturalists propose multicultural education as an educational reform movement for educational equality and diversity.

Educators such as James Banks, Carl Grant, Christine Sleeter, and Geneva Gay are proponents of education for pluralism which embraces cultural diversity as a theoretical framework in education. James Banks, a pioneering theorist, is dedicated to developing theories of multiculturalism in education. Carl Grant, Christine Sleeter, and Geneva Gay are also leading researchers and have contributed to developing multicultural theoretical frameworks for diversity, educational equality, and democratic schooling. Banks (2004) conceptualizes multicultural education as having three components: an idea, a reform movement, and a process. Multicultural education is an idea that “all students should have equal opportunities to learn regardless of the
racial, ethnic, social-class, or gender group to which they belong” (Banks, 2004, p.391). It is also a reform movement that tries to change schools so that all students have an equal opportunity to learn. Multicultural education is also a process. Its democratic ideals such as justice, equality, freedom will never be completely achieved, but it should be continued.

Theory, research, and practice about multicultural education have four phases (Banks, 2004). The first phase is ethnic studies. The multicultural education movement has a direct root in the ethnic studies movement (Banks, 2004), and educators who are interested in ethnic minority groups demand the incorporation of ethnic studies content into the school curricula. The second phase is multiethnic education which aims to reform the total school for educational equality. Educators realized that incorporating ethnic studies content into school curricula was not enough to meet needs of students of color and “help all students develop democratic racial and ethnic attitudes.”(p.13) In the third phase, other minority groups such as women and people with disabilities demand the incorporation of their history and culture into school curricula. In the fourth phase, studies about multicultural education are concerned with the interrelation of race, class, and gender (Banks & Banks, 2001; Grant & Sleeter, 1986). Even though there are numerous approaches to multicultural education, there is general agreement that a major goal of multicultural education is to change schools and other educational institutions in order for students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups to experience educational equality (Banks, 2004).

In order to successfully implement multicultural education, multiculturalists have addressed broad issues including curriculum, student learning, teacher learning, the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and administrators, and the goals and culture of the school (Banks, 2004; Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, Schofield, & Stephan, 2001; Sleeter & Grant,
Multiculturalists believe that curriculum should incorporate histories and cultures of marginalized groups which are accurately represented (Banks, 1993). Four approaches were developed by Banks (2001): contributions, additive, transformation, and social action. The contributions approach focuses on the celebration of cultural elements such as heroes and heroines, holidays, and other cultural elements. The additive approach focuses on addition of ethnic content, themes, and perspective to the curriculum without changing underlying structure. The transformative approach is to change the structure of school curriculum in order for students to look at various issues and concepts from the perspectives of diverse groups. The social action approach is to help students enable to decide on social issues and problems and take social actions to solve them.

Scholars and theorists have criticized current pluralist multiculturalism for providing a limited solution for radical reform (King, 1991, 1992; McCarthy, 1998, as cited in Harris, 1994). Nieto (1995) points out four general tendencies among the critical issues suggested by critics. First, multiculturalism has avoided the discussions of racism and other controversial issues in its applications. Many schools have attempted to implement multicultural education just by celebrating different cultures. Second, critics of multiculturalism point out that the voices and experiences of marginalized groups have been trivialized in the curriculum, such as incorporating mere artifacts which have no in-depth meaning of the group. Third, multicultural education has been criticized for its role as a tool for assimilation. In other words, proponents of multicultural education emphasize a common culture, but stressing the creation of a common culture often negates the particularities and tensions in this society. Fourth, uncritical acceptance of multiple perspectives means accepting all perspectives regardless of how outrageous they are.
Nieto (1995) reframes critical multicultural education with two goals: enhancing the achievement of all students and providing them with the opportunities to become critical and productive members of a democratic society. Nieto points out that proponents of multicultural education easily forget that student learning should be a primary goal of multicultural education. She stresses that the high level learning should be accompanied with using the experiences and resources students and their communities bring to school for an equitable education. By linking multiculturalism with democracy, Nieto suggests that to become active participants in a democratic society, students should be provided with opportunities to explore what democracy means through theory and practice. She concludes that all educational innovations and ideologies should be in pursuit of achieving the two ultimate goals.

Other critics also suggest critical multicultural approaches. McLaren and Farahmandpur (2001) critique “the dominant ideologies of multiculturalism which seek to legitimize the social order through racial harmony and a national identity based on the Americanization of marginalized cultures” (p.10). They introduce revolutionary multiculturalism which encourages marginalized and oppressed groups to work as political alliances in order to establish social and economic equality. McCarthy (1993, 1995) also points out that current pluralist multicultural approach to education have some limitations in their ability to contribute to restructuring social order. He suggests that current multicultural approach must deal with issues of unequal social structure and unequal distribution of power and wealth. He also critiques the simple addition of diverse cultural knowledge to the dominant curriculum and offers a critical approach to curriculum reform which aims at restructuring the dominant curriculum by placing the experiences and voices of marginalized groups at the center of school curriculum. In addition, he points out that current multicultural approach essentializes the race category, and minorities are
represented as homogenous groups. He suggests that a non-essentialist approach could help understand minority groups in terms of dynamics of gender, class, and other variables. However, many multiculturalists of pluralism doubt its feasibility (Sleeter & Grant, 1999).

Beyond a tourist approach of multiculturalism, critical multiculturalism provides critical lens to reveal and examine K/KA adolescent students’ controversial issues, problems, and troubles which have been hidden beneath the model minority myth. K/KA adolescents’ struggles and experiences as a marginalized group are portrayed in K/KA literature and media I chose for this study. Studying responses of participants with a similar ethnic background to the narratives will reveal challenges and struggles in K/KA students’ lives through their voices and help understand the complexity of K/KA students’ lives beyond the representation of them as a homogeneous group. Policy, programs, curriculum, and services should be developed which are more responsive to their diverse needs.

Studies of Response to Literature

Theories of response to literature

This study employs theories of response to literature as a theoretical framework. The studies will provide theoretical foundations to examine how interplay of textual power, readers’ cultural values and backgrounds, personal experiences, and interpretive communities shapes K/KA students’ literary understanding. In this section, I would like to overview the evolution of literary response studies in brief and examine various theoretical perspectives on response to literature.

Theory and research on response to literature have focused on three dimensions with varying degrees of importance: text, reader, and context. The New Critics proposed text-based theory in the 1940s and 1950s. They viewed that all meaning resided in texts, and the texts
contained unchanging meanings (Galda & Beach, 2001; Sipe, 2008). In contrast to the New Critics’ view, reader response theory shifted attention from the texts as a reservoir of meaning to readers as significant contributors to the reading experience. Reader response theorists challenged the notion of “normative response” to literary texts and focused on various possible interpretations on the part of readers (Beach & Hynds, 1991, p.453). There have been two extreme positions among the theorists (Sipe, 2008). Theorists, such as Fish (1980), view a text as an event which controls readers and focus on readers’ processing of the text including what readers are reading and what happened to the readers. Theorists at the other extreme, such as Bleich (1978, 1980) and Holland (1968, 1975), emphasize totally autonomous readers’ subjectivity and welcome all interpretations.

The interplay between text and reader has been studied by response theorists. The theorists focused on not only texts, but also readers’ active roles in the reading event and what readers bring to reading. Iser (1978) put emphasis on interaction between reader and text and readers’ active search for meanings. Louise M. Rosenblatt, a notable literary theorist, proposed the importance of transaction between a text and a reader. According to Rosenblatt, the reading event “happens during a coming-together, a compenetration of a reader and a text” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p.12). In the transactional phrasing of the reading process, a reader is viewed as playing an active role in the meaning making process, and a text is not viewed as a sufficient condition, but a necessary condition (Rosenblatt, 1995). Rosenblatt’s transactional theory acknowledges the essential importance of both reader and text, in other words, the active role of the reader and the importance of the reading text. The act of reading literature is viewed as an event of “a unique coming-together of a particular personality and a particular text at a particular time and place under particular circumstances” (Rosenblatt, 1985, p.104). Rather than welcoming all
interpretations, validity of interpretation should be interpreted from the interplay of personal, cultural, and social contexts (Rosenblatt, 1995). Rosenblatt (1982) connects the literary transaction with two kinds of reading, aesthetic reading and efferent reading. In efferent reading, readers’ attentions are focused primarily on extracting the public meaning of the text, such as information or facts. In aesthetic reading, readers give attention to more of the experiential matrix, such as personal feelings, thoughts, and images evoked from the text. During reading aesthetically, readers are concerned with what happens during the reading event and focus on pleasure with lived-through experiences. An aesthetic stance is the most effective way to read a literary work of art (Rosenblatt, 1982).

However, Lewis (2000) pointed out that defining aesthetic reading only as a lived-through experience denies students’ abilities to critique or evaluate a literary work of art. Lewis asserts that engagement with literary works involves not only a personal and pleasurable response, but also critical response. She argues for a broader view of aesthetic reading which addresses “the social and political dimensions of texts and invites students to take pleasure in both the personal and the critical.” (p.253). The broad notion of aesthetic reading involves various responses of readers, such as resisting to or identifying with representations of another cultural group, benefiting from questioning.

However, Lewis’ argument is not new. Rosenblatt acknowledged and discussed the importance of critical stance in her article about cultural approach to literature. According to Rosenblatt (1946), by adopting comparative approach to cultures, diverse cultures are to be seen as alternatives produced out of our common human potentialities. In addition to the comparative approach, there is a need to take a critical attitude toward our own and other cultures in order to
avoid excessive cultural superiority or excessive humility. Most importantly, such a critical process should be based on our democratic ideals.

Rosenblatt (1946) pointed out that the sharing of diverse human experiences through foreign literature including minority groups within American society can be seen as a tool for helping broaden students’ perspectives of images of varied lives and values. She explained the cultural approach to foreign literature as follows:

For literature, which permits us to enter emotionally into other lives, can be viewed always as the expression of human beings who, in no matter how different the ways, are, like us, seeking the basic human satisfactions, experiencing the beauties and rigors of the natural world, meeting or resisting the demands of the society about them, and striving to live by their vision of what is important and desirable in life. (p.460)

Langer (1992) studied the relationship readers take toward texts and asserted that during reading, readers could take a series of stances toward the text and develop their understanding through envisionment building process. According to Langer, “envisionment” refers to “the understanding a reader has about a text at a particular point in time; what the reader understands, the questions that develop, as well as the hunches that arise about how the piece might unfold.” (p.39) Readers take four stances in developing their understanding: being out and stepping into an envisionment – readers use prior knowledge, experiences, and textual clues to make sense of the text, which is a first step for constructing envisionment; being in and moving through an envisionment – readers are caught up in their understandings and move forward for their creation of meaning; stepping back and rethinking what one knows – readers use what they understand from the text in order to rethink their previous knowledge; stepping out and objectifying the experience – readers objectify their envisionments of the text and reflect on the content and the process of meaning construction. Langer contends that instruction can support readers in developing their understandings by scaffolding the process of the envisionment building.
Cai (1997) classified the relation between text and reader into three categories: uniactional, interactional, and transactional. Uniactional theory, such as Hirsch (1973)’s theory, views that meaning resides in a text, the only acceptable meaning is what the author intended, and an individual reader decode only shifting significances. At the other extreme, Fish (1980)’s theory is another uniactional theory because he claims that all meaning is provided by a reader, and the meaning the author encoded in the text has become a “nonentity” (Cai, 1997, p.201). Transactional theory by Rosenblatt (1978, 1994) and interactional theories of Iser (1978) and Scholes (1985) view both the reader and text as significant elements in the reading event. Interactional and transactional theories acknowledge both readers and texts as important constituents of meaning-making.

Later, response theorists have begun to consider contextual factors affecting responses. Fish (1980) viewed a variety of social contexts and interpretive communities as significant contributors to determining meaning, and a reader’s interpretation is affected by interactions with others in his/her discourse community. Other researchers explored the influences of teacher practice and/or instructional practices on how students respond (Hickman, 1981; Raphael & McMahon, 1994, as cited in Galda & Beach, 2001).

Response theorists and researchers have characterized and categorized the interplay of readers, texts, and contexts in various ways (Beach, 1993; Probst, 1990). Probst (1990) elaborated the transactional theory proposed by Rosenblatt and classified the experience of literary transaction into five kinds of literary knowing. The literary transaction is a way of knowing about self, others, texts, contexts, and processes of constructing meaning. Through the literary transaction, readers find themselves by connecting their personal experiences with texts and learn about themselves. Readers also see similarities and differences in the individual
responses to texts in the classroom and recognize that meaning resides in readers as well as texts. Readers understand that texts are not the reservoirs of meaning, but the source of intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic experience. For the lived-through experience, readers need a feeling of security to deal with their own reactions to the text. Classroom situation, the role of teachers, and interpretive community are all imperative contextual factors which could influence readers’ responses. Readers can also understand there are many ways of processes of making meaning, such as raising questions, making interpretive statements, expressing feelings, and others. Probst suggests that students know that there are various ways of making meaning, and their own stories are respectable.

Beach (1993) categorized a range of different theoretical perspectives on response on the basis of the historical development within reader-response criticism. The early theorists in the 1920s and 1930s, such as I. A. Richards and Louise Rosenblatt, primarily focused on the reader’s knowledge of text conventions and/or the reader’s experience. In 1960s and 1970s, psychoanalytical and cognitive psychological perspectives influenced theorists to understand response. In 1980s and 1990s, theorists applied social constructivist, poststructuralist, feminist, and cultural studies perspectives to understand how social and cultural aspects shape meaning. Beach pointed out that each theorist has been categorized as falling within one of five theoretical perspectives which underline particular aspects of the reader, text, and context transaction. Textual theories of response highlight reader’s knowledge of text or genre conventions. Experiential theories of response focus on readers’ engagement or experiences with texts. Psychological theories of response give attention to readers’ cognitive or subconscious processes. Social theories of response illuminate readers’ social role and perceptions of the social context on the reader and text transaction. Finally, cultural theories of response focus on readers’ cultural
roles, attitudes, values, and the larger cultural contexts. All of the five theoretical perspectives represent different lenses, but they intersect and overlap.

Research on responses has explored sociocultural perspectives on texts, readers, and contexts. In other words, texts, readers, and contexts are inseparable from one another - blurring boundaries - and each of the three dimensions cannot be separated from the larger sociocultural contexts (Galda & Beach, 2001).

Early research primarily focusing on readers explored expectations, attitudes, and practices of readers with little or no regard of how they were constructed through socio-cultural practices in their communities. Many recent response studies have paid attention to how readers’ responses are constituted by socio-cultural models or discourses (Beach, 1997). Scholars of literary practices view that literary practices as social and cultural practices are related to cultural and social issues, and those issues cannot be fully understood without power and privilege (Rogers, 1999). Those cultural and social issues, such as power, race, class, gender, ethnicity, age, and others, affect readers’ interaction with books both in the classroom and outside classroom settings. With the influences of their socio-cultural frames, readers take various and/or shared positions in their interpretive communities (Rogers & Soter, 1997).

Socio-cultural theories could also contribute to broadening the scope of research on literary response. The notions of Vygotsky’s (1934, 1986) sociocultural nature of learning and Bakhtin’s (1986) dialogic theory have contributed to broadening the awareness of the transaction of text, reader, and context. Vygotsky’s primary tenet is that “learning evolves from social interactions and collaboration, which are then internalized as inner dialogue” (Vygotsky, 1934, 1986, as cited in Beach, 1993, p.105). Bakhtin’s dialogic theory is grounded in the idea that “meaning of any utterance depends on the situation in which it is used” (Bakhtin, 1986, as cited
in Beach, 1993, p.111). For Bakhtin, whatever we speak or write, the utterance is dialogical, involving two levels of dialogue, internal and external. When a reader responds to a text, he/she constructs his/her own internal dialogue by incorporating the author’s utterance with his/her own, and the internal dialogue takes account of external social interaction, in other words, the social and ideological meanings of the external social context. In adopting a dialogic perspective, teachers and students in a classroom guide each other toward multiple interpretations through responding to literary texts.

In this modern world, children engage with not only literature, but also mass media in various ways and “to be literate today means actively engaging with multiple sign systems and constructing critical meanings through them” (Semali & Pailliotet, 1999, cited from Pailliotet, 2001, p. 29). The role of media in shaping their understanding of themselves, others, and social reality is tremendous. Media literacy practices provide students with opportunities to explore the meanings media convey, the meanings audiences construct, technical and symbolic features with which media messages are generated, the attitudes and values media images bolster, and how others might thing about a media text (Luke, 1999). Especially, use of quality K/KA media is of importance in that it provides chances to promote positive attitudes toward people of Korean descent, appreciate Korean culture and people, enhance understanding about complexity of K/KA lives, broaden audiences’ perspectives, empower K/KA students to promote self reflection and positive identity, and develop critical social awareness with democratic values.

There are many parallels between print literacy and media literacy (Pailliotet, 2001). Theories of response to literature allow insights about understanding students’ responses to media. For example, media texts are also historically, politically, socially, economically, and aesthetically constructed and convey messages to construct audiences’ understandings of
themselves, others, and social world. Audiences actively construct multiple meanings through transaction with media messages in the similar way readers do with literature. Their meaning making processes are also shaped by the interplay of audience, media message, and context. Research on students’ responses to media will exhibit how their cultural backgrounds and experiences, media messages, and interpretive communities are interplayed in shaping their interpretive meaning making.

**Research on adolescents’ response to multicultural children’s literature**

In this section, I would like to overview research on adolescents’ responses to multicultural literature in two categories: research on response to reading across cultures; research on culturally conscious literature. Recent research on literary response has examined adolescents’ responses to multicultural literature and has reported students’ positive and negative experiences with the literature which portrays the stories about various cultural groups.

Rice (2005) conducted a study about eight sixth-grade students’ responses to Gary Soto’s Hispanic-American realistic fiction novels. The participants in peer-led literature discussion groups were all whites with mid-to-high middle class backgrounds. The results indicated that the readers’ socio-cultural frame, such as race, class, and gender, influenced their responses to the stories, and they were not able to identify with the themes and viewed the stories as unrealistic. Rice concluded that the students might experience aesthetic restriction and were not able to experience the culture portrayed in the stories.

According to Soter (1997), readers may challenge the cultural representations, especially for multicultural children’s and young adult literature, and show puzzlement and negative reactions to literature of other cultures. A reader experienced in reading literature across cultures
may encounter “aesthetic restriction” when he/she faces unfamiliar content or form from the literature (Soter, 1997). She described her notion of the term:

My notion of aesthetic restriction, on the other hand, dismisses the work out of hand because of elements in the text that the reader finds unacceptable, and it is often as much because of content as of form that the rejection occurs. Thus the literary text cannot “work on the reader” – it is at the level of personal response related to values, tastes, life experiences, predilections, openness to possibilities of other lives and values that the work is untenable for the reader. (Soter, 1997, pp.217-218).

Soter (1997) documented an example of a summer institute in which readers were provided with cultural and literary information. The findings indicated that even though preparing readers for literature of other cultures was not easy, their initial responses could be deepened, refined, and enriched through subsequent engagement. Soter suggested continuing the journey of the literary experiences of other cultures.

Boyd (2002) examined four ninth graders’ responses to literature which portrayed underrepresented, nondominant groups in South Africa and Haiti in English language arts classroom. The research was to develop understanding about students’ responses and experiences for constructing meaning with the questions of what meanings they construct and what intertextual links they make to their own ethnic, cultural and economic contexts. In addition, Boyd examined how struggling students might respond to the literature and tried to understand the strengths they brought to the classroom community. The result revealed that two of the students who were European Americans did not tend to connect with the stories whereas the other two who were African and Trinidian Americans tended to connect with the stories. The latter two readers who struggled with academic performance also provided sophisticated high quality responses. Findings suggested that students’ socio-economic status, ethnic background, school culture, and their life experiences influenced their responses and meaning-making. Boyd
asserted that lack of engagement with multicultural literature by European American students should not be justified for the reasons of neglecting the inclusion of multicultural literature into the curriculum. Multicultural literature could provide students with opportunities to learn about people from diverse background and raise consciousness of differences across context, countries, and cultures. In addition, multicultural literature could empower students who struggled with reading and writing or the processes of schooling to develop their strengths so as to achieve academically.

Spears-Bunton (1990) examined students’ responses to *House of Dies Drear* in an eleventh-grader honors English classroom to see the relationship between reader response and culture. The African American students viewed the themes in African American literature as related to their personal lives whereas the European American students seemed to feel some distance from the culture. Reading of the culturally conscious book could influence an attitude change of European American students toward seeing African American people more positively. In this study, readers, texts, and contexts are imperative factors in influencing readers’ responses, such as transaction between readers and texts, readers’ reflection on their own experiences, and classroom discussion. The classroom teacher’s willingness to incorporate the voices and cultures of African Americans and reflect on her own privilege as a European American could expand literacy experiences for both African American students and European American students.

Beach (1995) described tenth grade students’ responses to *I Go Along* and suggested activities to help students to reflect on their own cultural models. Data was collected through free-writing, interview, discussion from two regular and two advanced English classes in a suburban high school. The study found that students brought their cultural models to their responses. Many regular and advanced students had different perceptions regarding school
success and advantages and disadvantages. Many advanced students did not recognize that the ability-group structure has been constituted by institutional forces. In addition, in gender attitudes regarding school success, the students’ responses were different. An androcentric gender cultural model was found in many male students’ responses, whereas valuing interpersonal effectiveness and resistance to patriarchal attitudes were reflected on female students’ responses. In general, the students did not seem to recognize their own cultural models, or they simply thought that everyone else shared their own cultural models. Unawareness of readers’ own cultural models, which could reflect their responses, might cause them to be reluctant to explore larger cultural perspectives. They may simply impose their cultural models on texts. Therefore, it is imperative to help students recognize how their cultural models shape their responses to texts (Beach, 1995).

In general, many European American students and some African American students tend to show resistance to elements of multicultural literature whereas many African American students tend to connect their personal and cultural lives with the literature. Students’ socio-cultural frames, such as ethnicity, race, gender, and other influences affect students’ responses, and very often students are not aware of the cultural models they bring to reading.

Whereas some elements or factors in multicultural literature might cause aesthetic restriction for many cultural outsiders and some cultural insiders, those elements might be appealing for many cultural insiders in various ways. Many studies of response to culturally conscious literature have focused on Afro-American students’ response to stories that portray contemporary or historical African American lives and cultures.

Brooks (2006) conducted a study about how students of an urban middle school interpreted culturally conscious African American children’s literature within a socio-
constructivist epistemology. With the belief that texts are not the sole sources of meaning, but meaning emerges “as students apply their backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge to the cultural practice of reading” (p.378), Brooks situated this case study by taking three of the five reader response theories categorized by Beach (1993): textual, experiential, and cultural reader response theories. Textual reader response theorists focus on author’s use of textual conventions, such as themes and linguistic patterns. Culturally conscious literature would be appreciated if readers focus on the culturally influenced textual features to develop understanding. Experiential reader response theorists pay attention to readers’ engagement and experiences with texts. Cultural response theorists focus on how readers’ responses are shaped by their cultural attitudes and values, in other words, “how they are situated in terms of ethnicity, social groups, or culture” (Brooks, 2006, p.376). This study found that African American textual features, such as recurring themes - forging family and friend relationships, confronting and overcoming racism, and surviving city life - linguistic patterns, and ethnic group practices, were identified in the texts, and the students used their cultural knowledge, experiences, and the culturally influenced textual features to understand the texts. The findings suggested that the culturally influenced textual features could be valuable sources for African American students to develop literary understanding, and students’ cultural knowledge and experiences could contribute to development of literary understandings.

Brooks and Hampton (2005) also examined students’ responses to an African American historical fiction in an urban adolescent classroom, *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*. The culturally influenced literary theme of the novel, experiencing, confronting, and overcoming racism, was discussed. The participants showed four aspects of thematic understandings: gaining historical knowledge, seeking or giving rationale, venting anger, and appreciating revenge. Their
interpretations were influenced by four elements: “text’s depiction of racism, the students, the socio-historical legacy of racism in U.S., and cultural meanings inherited, shaped, and passed on among ethnic groups” (p.98). The findings suggested that even though the participants’ individual experiences and background knowledge about racism were somewhat different, they could share an Afro-American history and develop understanding of the complexity of racism’s impact on the past through this kind of historical fiction before they might encounter racism in field of their daily lives.

Bishop (1983) examined a 10 year old African-American girl’s responses to Afro-American children’s literature. The girl preferred characters like herself and was interested in works which contain experiences related to her personal experiences and Afro-American cultural experiences. She responded favorably when she saw and read about people like herself; she also enjoyed the lyrical language and aesthetically pleasing illustrations. However, when she found books with easily predictable plots and books in which black characters were portrayed with distortion, she showed negative responses. Some cultural elements especially emphasized in Afro-American children’s literature might be appealing to young Black readers. Bishop suggested the unique themes that black authors tend to pay attention to: “Afro-American heritage and history; pride in one’s blackness; a strong sense of community; warm human relationships, especially within the family; a sense of continuity; and the will and strength to survive oppression and other hardship” (p.27).

Research on response to culturally conscious books indicates that culturally influenced textual features could empower students to develop literary understanding, and students use their cultural background, personal experiences, and culturally influenced textual features for the development of literary understanding. Struggling readers can find their strengths for literary
learning by using their cultural knowledge and experiences when reading culturally conscious books. Cultural insiders’ responses to culturally conscious literature are shaped by the interplay of various dimensions: the textual power of culturally conscious books, readers’ cultural values and attitudes in relation to ethnicity, race, class, gender, and other influences, personal experiences and prior knowledge, and interpretive communities.

Teachers and researchers have conducted response studies in relation to enhancement of students’ critical perspectives on multicultural literature by providing students with various instructional methods and materials. Boyd (2003) conducted with a high school teacher a research project with using a multicultural literature, Shabanu, and other multiple sources in a ninth-grade English language arts classroom. The majority of students and the teacher were European Americans. In this study, Boyd and the teacher designed a curriculum to create envisionment building classroom context in order to support students’ thoughtful literary experiences. The teacher viewed multicultural literature for social and political implications as well as its literary merit. The study was to help students to explore social justice issues, broaden perspectives, and use intertextual links and diverse skills in order to understand the literary world and reflect on their own cultural model. The students developed understanding by making a dialogue with themselves, the texts, their peers, and a larger cultural text. The classroom could be an interactive literary community, and diverse points of view provoked thoughtful discourses (Langer, 1998). The students could examine their own positions in society and learn diverse perspectives regarding family roles and gender equity.

Boyd and Howe (2006) also conducted a research project on literature and film adaptations in order to teach the seventh-grade African American students in Howe’s class. They designed curriculum by using multiple text types, such as photographs, memoir, nonfiction, and
film, as well as the main book, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, in order to enhance the students’ thinking about desegregation of public schools during the civil rights movement. The multiple text types allowed the students and the teacher not only to engage in multiple perspectives, but also to develop critical interpretations about the acts of segregation and racism in a different time. Finally, students could connect the social justice issues in the book with obstacles they were facing in their daily lives with critical perspectives.

In order to help students to explore readings with social-justice themes from a critical literacy perspective, Moller (2001) discussed the conceptualization of “a response development zone.” If meanings are socially constructed, dialogic nature of response to literature can affect students’ response development zone through “individual conceptual development, discourse patterns, peer interactions, and other personal, social, and contextual factors.” (Moller & Allen, 2000, p.148) Moller and Allen studied four fifth-grade girls’ responses to *The Friendship* by Mildred Taylor in a book discussion group. Three of the students were African Americans and one Hispanic and all of them were struggling readers. The data were collected from reading, writing, and discussion. Meaning construction was affected by texts, the participants’ experiences and knowledge, and emotions which are consensual and/or resistant. Moller, the participant observer, provided scaffolding in various ways including gesture, tone, questions and statements, and writing prompts to help create for critical dialogue. The results indicate that the participants created a critical dialogue within a response development zone which could support shifting and growth mediated by text, peers, and the participant observer. The authors suggested that finding a safe place with innocence is not idealistic resolution for children, but there is a need to recognize the harsh realities and have hope of changing society for justice and compassion.
Currently, approximately 4.6 percent of the school age children in America are Asian Pacific Americans, and the population has continuously been increasing (Yokota & Bates, 2005). Despite the changing demographics, the number of books representing Asian/Asian Pacific Americans is relatively small. According to Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) statistics, between 1994 and 2001, an average of less than two percent of children’s books which are published approximately 5,000 books each year in the US focused on Asian Pacific Americans. Between 2002 and 2008, two to three percent of 3,000 children’s books published were stories about and by APA.

Asians and Asian Pacific American children’s literature includes a variety of genres and formats: bilingual texts, picture books, folktales, adolescent literature, fantasy, autobiography, and poetry. However, folktales abound in most of the multicultural publishing with limited numbers of books which depict contemporary realistic experiences of Asian Pacific American children. If folktales are the only experiences with literature featuring Chinese and Chinese culture for children, they may perpetuate stereotypes (Cai, 1994). Currently, small multicultural presses and some major companies seek to publish contemporary and historical stories (Gangi, 2005). Recently, more Korean American writers have created works which depict contemporary realistic experiences of Korean/Korean Americans.

The issues of stereotypical depictions and culturally inauthentic representation are still problems in children’s books by and about Asian/Asian Pacific Americans. The problematic trends remain entrenched. According to the study conducted by researchers at the Council on Interracial Books for Children in 1770s, a total of 66 APA children’s books published between 1945 and 1976 except for several books were written with non-APA Americans with a racist,
sexist, and elitist point of view and contained stereotypical images of Asian Pacific Americans.

By the late 1980s, more Asian Pacific American writers and illustrators were writing stories from their perspectives (Yokota & Bates, 2005). Two Asian Pacific American writers, Yoshiko Uchida and Laurence Yep, presented significant portrayals of Asian Pacific American lives from insider perspectives and captured the frustration and hardships of Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans realistically (Leu, 2002).

Harada (1995) explored the issues of authenticity versus stereotyping, the outsider versus the insider point of view, and literary quality in Asian Pacific American picture books from 1983 through 1993. Findings of this study suggest that the majority of the works involve authentic rather than stereotyped portrayals in text and illustrations. Harada argues that non-Asian Pacific writers can also depict cultural details and portray authentic characters, and more Asian Pacific writers are creating books of higher literary and visual quality.

Mo and Shen (1997) studied the findings of Harada’s research with a question of what is authenticity. They pointed out that the authenticity of picture books is not just a matter of accuracy or the avoidance of stereotyping, but a multidimensional issue. They explained the difference between the concepts of authenticity and nonstereotyping: whereas accuracy is related to a culture’s social practices, authenticity is concerned with whether or not the cultural practice reflects its central code involving cultural values, facts, and attitudes of that time period. Yokota and Bates (2005) reported that many inauthentic representations and stereotypical depictions featuring Asian Pacific Americans have been created by those who are outside the group. They also pointed out that many culturally authentic books were created by cultural insiders and outsiders who have done extensive research and critical scrutiny, such as Erik Haugaard and Katherine Paterson.
Leu (2002) studied children’s and young adult fiction books about Asian Pacific Americans between 1945 and 1999. Leu adopted three typologies developed by Bishop (1982) for analyses: melting pot, social conscience, and culturally conscious. Two hundred and seventy books were analyzed and evaluated. According to this study, a major theme in the 38 social conscious books is that Asian Pacific Americans (APA) are the same as other Americans. The 142 melting pot books concern the universality of human experiences and assimilation of APA children into the American society. The 90 culturally conscious books deal with details of the lives of APA children and their families and communities. There were also the emergence of Pan-Asian Pacific American books, interracial family stories, and adoption stories. Lee pointed out that stereotypical and culturally inauthentic representations were major problems, and there were few authors of Asian Pacific American backgrounds.

Children’s books containing Korean/Korean American cultures and experiences provide child readers with chances to learn and develop appreciation of Koreans/Korean Americans and their cultures. The literature is also able to empower Korean/Korean American children to take pride in their cultural heritage and have a positive self-image and identity. For the pedagogical purpose of the literature, thorough investigation about the literature is required to identify culturally authentic and accurate literature about Korean/Korean American children prior to its inclusion in curricula. Culturally authentic portrayal is important because multicultural children’s and young adult books have potential of influencing child readers’ attitudes toward the people of different cultures (Bishop, 1997; Harris, 1993).

Before 1990, relatively few children’s books about Korean/Korean Americans were brought to press. Only two fiction books were available between 1960 and 1969, one fiction between 1970 and 1979, and six books between 1980 and 1989 (Leu, 2002). Many Korean
American viewpoints were represented through the lens of the dominant culture in this society. For example, in *Chinese Eyes* (Waybill, 1974), the issue of teasing a Korean American girl’s eyes is resolved by her adoptive mother. She said that Chinese children have the eyes like hers. In *Karen and Vicki* (McHugh, 1984), Karen, an adopted Korean American girl, feels inferior to her sister, Vicki, because of her Korean appearance. These books and others provided a superficial presentation of the complexities of being Korean/Korean Americans.

In the 1990s, children’s books about Korean/Korean Americans began to emerge significantly. Twenty nine children’s and young adult fiction books about Korean American including picture storybooks, transitional books, and young adult novels were available (Leu, 2002). From 2000 to 2006, around twenty five books were found through professional references. The majority of the books have been written by Korean American female writers, such as Linda Sue Park, An Na, Marie, G. Lee, and Sook Nyul Choi. Several books written by Korean American female writers received awards: Linda Sue Park’s Newbery Medal-winning *A Single Shard* (Park, 2001), An Na’s Printz award-winning *A Step from Heaven* (An Na, 2001), and Frances Park and Ginger Park’s International Reading Association award-winning *My Freedom Trip* (Park & Park, 1998). Marie G. Lee and Sook Nyul Choi are also important contributors in gaining the acceptance of Korean/Korean American children’s books into American children’s literature.

Images and representation about K/KA people and culture were often distorted in some books written by outsiders and some insiders. For example, the model minority stereotype, inaccuracy of language use, yellow skinned and slant-eyed illustration, short, straight cereal bowl haircuts, and other inauthentic representations are still found in children’s books about and by K/KAs. Those examples provide the evidence of the inaccurate assumption that cultural insiders
do not stereotype. In addition, qualities in the writing range from mediocre to well-constructed.

The majority of the books are mediocre in quality (Leu, 2002). Quality literature involving wider representation of diverse K/KAs is needed in children’s books.

Today’s children also engage with mass media in various ways – films and videos, computers, electronic games, music, communicative networks, and so forth. The impact of media is quite influential on students’ literacy learning, and literacy development and learning is formed through the interconnection of school-based and real life literacy learning (Pailliotet, 2001). Empowering students and teachers to inquire media content and process with critical eyes will help develop their literacy learning and values because media messages are also texts which are constructed in the economic, social, political, historical, and aesthetic contexts (Pailliotet, 2001).

Asian American portrayals in media have been homogenized even though there are increasing diversities and heterogeneity in Asian Americans in US mass media, such as television, movies, advertisements, newspapers, or magazine articles (Mok, 1998). In the historical overview of Asian American media images, there have been prevalent stereotypical images of Asians and Asian Americans. For example, Hollywood stereotypes about Asian Americans include Yellow peril (treacherous, sneaky, lecherous male), Charlie Chan (fortune-cookie dialog, mysterious, deferential male), Dragon Lady (sexual, unattainable, treacherous female), and Lotus Blossom (submissive, nurturing, meek female) (Shah, 2003). Shah (2003) examined contemporary U.S. film and TV to see how Asians/Asian Americans are portrayed. In Martial Law, Ally McBeal, and All American Girl, all Asians were treated interchangeably, and a family with Korean heritage was portrayed as an assimilated, well adjusted family.
Asian/Asian American filmmakers have attempted to create films to fight against Hollywood stereotypical depictions of Asian/Asian Americans. In the wake of civil right movement, Asian/Asian Americans attempted to make films outside of the Hollywood film industry between the 1970s and 1990s. Documentaries and a number of experimental films contained liberating images in order to facilitate Asian American community building and political mobilization (Xing, 1998). For example, Loni Ding’s *Color of Honor* (Ding, 1989) depicts Japanese Americans’ struggles of choosing between to serve in the military during World War II and to refuse to consent loyalty oaths. Beginning in the 1980s, a group of Asian American filmmakers were more concerned with creating films which depict realistic experiences of Asian Americans and their communities, and incorporate various Asian cultures into the representations (Shah, 2003). For example, Wayne Wang’s earliest film *Chan is Missing* (Wang, 1982) is a story of two Chinese American taxi drivers who are looking for a man who has disappeared with their money and one of the first major films which portray Chinese Americans realistically. In the 1990s, the majority of Asian American films were documentaries and experimental works, and very few of the Asian American feature films have had theatrical release, such as *The Joy Luck Club* (1993) and *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) (Feng, 1999).

In addition to Asian American filmmakers’ effort to facilitate Asian American community building, ethnic newspapers have been a pivotal vehicle for ethnic socialization and communication in the immigrant communities (Viswanath & Arora, 2000). The first two newspapers created by early Korean immigrants in the United States were *Korean Times* published in Honolulu from 1905 to 1906 (Kim, 1986, as cited from Mansfield-Richardson, 2000) and *Korean News* in San Francisco in 1905 (Hundley, 1976, as cited from Mansfield-Richardson, 2000). Today, one of the largest Korean ethnic newspapers is *The Korea Times* which started in
1969 and is now circulated daily in nine big cities in America with the head office in L.A. Another successful newspaper is *The Korea Daily* which was started in 1974 in L.A. and has been circulated in ten big cities in U.S. Both companies also hold its own radio broadcasting system as well, *RadioSeoul* and *Joongang Radio*. Another largest radio broadcasting company is *RadioKorea* which started in 1989.

**Overview About Korean/Korean American Adolescents**

Within the White/Other racial discourse framework, Other has been represented primarily focusing on African American experiences and perspectives, and experiences and voices of Asian Pacific Americans (APA) have been excluded from or given limited attention to discussions about race (Lei, 2006). Lee (1996) pointed out three reasons for the exclusion of APA experiences and voices. First, Asian Pacific Americans are a numerical minority and only consist of around 4% of the national population. Second, they are perceived as unassimilable foreigners. Third, based on the model minority stereotype, they are considered as not having any problems. Therefore, many APA students’ needs have been ignored or neglected by teachers or counselors.

However, various factors can contribute to significant psychological distress in APA adolescents: pressure from teachers and parents, feeling of guilt, shame, and anxiety resulted from academic performance, the awareness of perceived discrimination and marginality in school contexts, and identity conflict between two cultures (Shrake & Rhee, 2004). Among Korean American adolescents, indecisive feelings of identity between Korean ethnic group and mainstream society, and the feelings of marginality within mainstream society are potential sources of their psychological distress and dysfunction.
Lew (2006) compared experiences of high school dropouts with the ones of high achieving Korean American high school students to examine factors that affected their academic achievement and negotiation of racial and ethnic identities. She conducted a case study on Korean American students (1.5 and second generation) in a competitive elite high school and a community-based GED program in New York City: second generation Korean American students who were born and educated in America; 1.5 generation of immigrant families who were born in Korea and educated in America. Culture and race were interplayed with social class, peer relations, and school context, and their interplay played an integral role in Korean American students’ academic achievement and their negotiation of racial and ethnic identities. The high-achieving students attended a competitive elite high school in New York City, which consisted of predominantly middle-class White (37%) and Asian students (46.5%). The school and ethnic community which the students are surrounded by provided them with educational resources and social capital which could benefit the students’ academic achievement. On the other hand, the Korean high school dropouts came from various public high schools which consisted of working class poor minorities and recent immigrants. Their schools had a record of high school dropout rates and lack of educational resources and networks which affect academic achievement. The two groups negotiated and interpreted their racial minority status and accompanying marginalization differently depending on socioeconomic backgrounds, contexts of school, home, and community. The contexts of school, home, and Korean community played an important role in helping the high achieving students reinforce their bicultural backgrounds and bilingual ability. On the other hand, the working-class high school dropouts had financial difficulties at home and were more likely to feel alienation and dissociate themselves from the wealthy and studious
Koreans in the Korean community. They identified their racial and socioeconomic status with those of minority working-class, poor Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics.

However, it should also be noted that for some APA students, academic performance is not an accurate indicator of their psychological well-being (Kim, 2007). Parents’ pressure and the application of the model minority myth toward some Korean/Korean American students can cause psychological distress. They might be afraid of telling parents the truth when their grades do not meet parents’ expectation. Even though their academic achievement is high, they might internalize their problems, such as depression, anxiety, and inferiority. According to Shrake and Rhee (2004), many Korean Americans tend to internalize problems rather than externalize them. One of the reasons may be the influence of Confucian values, emphasizing obedience, respect, and tolerance. Another reason may be their marginalized, powerless status in this society. To survive in the society, they have to tolerate discrimination rather than confronting it.

The seminal example may be reflected in Cho’s case in the Virginia Tech incident. Kim (2007) examined salient cultural factors through a multicultural lens which may have triggered the incident. According to Kim, acculturative stress resulting from racism and perceived discrimination may have contributed to Cho’s reclusivity and invisibility. His parents’ pressure on him to meet high academic achievement may also have caused feelings of shame, guilt, and anxiety about potential failure. In addition, many Asians are taught to repress feelings for the family and society, and Korean Americans do not readily seek mental health services (Kim, 2005, as cited in Kim, 2007). Mr. Cho’s mental illness and U.S. gun culture might be also triggers for the incident. Kim (2007) proposed that what Mr. Cho needed and many other students need is more caring imposition above passive tolerance as means of preventive interventions. In other words, educators, communities, families must begin to have increased rapport and dialogue and
spend time with youth to produce empowered individuals, instead of passive tolerance or apathy. Caring and informed teachers, counselors, parents, and Korean communities are needed who display acceptance, understanding, support, and education with culturally-centered eyes.

Many studies revealed various, complex identities of Asian/Asian American students and called for consideration of varied needs of the students (Lee, 2006; Lew, 2006; Louie, 2004). There has been racist discourse implying that students of Asian descent are all alike and high achieving model minorities as a homogeneous group (Lowe, 1996; Lee, 2006). The stereotype accompanies the assumption that Asian Americans have had educational success and been economically successful, and they don’t necessarily need varied needs, for example, accommodations, assistance from legislation such as Affirmative action. However, there is no single Asian American experience.

Lee (2006) examined the ways various identities and the intersections of identities, such as social class, ethnicity, generation, and gender, shaped Asian American experiences. She pointed out that differences in the aspects of identity are related to different opportunities and circumstances that influenced Asian Americans’ experiences. Louie (2004) and Lew (2006) found that differences in educational outcomes among Asian Americans were related to differences in social class.

Asher (2008) discussed how Indian youth from immigrant families negotiated identities between different cultures and aspirations at home and school. Their parents expected them to achieve academically and to choose high paying jobs, such as lawyer and doctor. Between home and school, the students felt cultural conflicts. Some of the students struggled to assert their American selves at home and their Indian selves at school. The study revealed how the
intersection of class, race, and ethnicity shaped their perceptions of themselves as a model minority.

Generation and language also affect Asian American experiences. Since 1965 Immigration Act, people of Asian descent have consisted of recent newcomers and population who have a long history in the U.S. According to 2000 U.S. Census, 69% of the Asian population was foreign born, and 31% of them was born in the U.S. Language barrier is another important factor Asian immigrants face. Asian populations often experience a generation gap and internal cultural differences between first generation parents and second generation children. There also have been generation gaps between relatively recent newcomers and longer-term Asian Americans. Generational gaps among Asian youth are related to language, tradition, and assimilation patterns (Rong & Jo, 2002, cited from Rong & Ritchett, 2008). The generation disparities often engender intra-group tension, such as segregation between a group of newly arrived Korean immigrants and a group of second generation Korean Americans at Korean ethnic church.

Religious identity and background are also salient to Asian American students’ experiences. Especially, many contemporary Korean immigrants and their children have stronger attachments to ethnic churches than other Asian ethnic groups (Kim, 2004).

Across social class, ethnicity, religion, and generation, gender among Asian population is a significant category which influences the lives of Asian/Asian American children (Lee, 2006). Asian immigrant groups regard education important for sons and daughters, but they often make girls take more household responsibilities. Many Asian immigrants have traditional rigid ideas about gender roles. Many Asian immigrant girls feel that they have restrictions on their time and independence (Lee, 2001). They feel that there is greater gender equality in America
than in their home country. Asian Americans made up six percent of all undergraduates, approximately five percent of graduate enrollment, and 22 percent of professional school enrollment in 1997 (Wilds, 2000, cited from Hune, 2002). College enrollment of Asian American women has increased significantly. Of all Asian American college degrees in 1997, Asian American women earned more than 50 percent of degrees including associate degrees, bachelor’s degrees, and master’s degrees. Asian American men proceed to obtain more professional and doctoral degrees than women.

**Reading Habits and Attitudes**

Many studies have examined reading habits and attitudes (Hollis, 2002; Clark & Foster, 2005; Creel, 2007; Strauss, 2008). Hollis (2002) identified five aspects about reading which encouraged or discouraged their reading attitudes and habits through survey study. The young adolescents in the study read for their own pleasure; adolescent readers viewed reading as a way to relax; series books and magazines topped the list of favorite reading material; reading affected the way they felt and thought about personal and social issues; and reading played an important role in their lives. In general, the young adolescents, both boys and girls, read out of school and held positive attitudes toward reading.

Clark and Foster (2005) also conducted a national survey study to examine English children’s and young people’s reading preferences and reading behaviors with the question of why some children chose to read and others did not. The participants were members of diverse racial and ethnic groups. This study aimed at providing information to parents, teachers, others in order to promote extensive reading. The survey data was analyzed by gender, age, free school meals, and difference between reluctant and enthusiastic students. The findings revealed that the participants generally held positive reading attitudes, and they disagreed that reading was
difficult and boring. They read a diverse range of materials. The enthusiastic readers held more positive attitudes about reading than reluctant readers and reported that their parents encouraged them to read a lot. The young readers also reported that their purpose for reading was mainly for personal enjoyment and life skills. In regard to findings by gender, girls reported more enjoyment of reading than boys and tended to read more frequently. Boys tended to hold more negative attitudes about reading than girls. More girls than boys talked about reading with their mother, siblings, friends, teachers, or teaching assistants. Mothers spent more time reading with them, followed by their teacher and father.

Strauss (2008) studied English and Thai reading habits and attitudes of Thai college students in diverse genres of reading such as newspaper, magazines, fiction, non fiction, and online resources. Strauss examined the reasons of differences between reluctant and enthusiastic readers. The four areas to be considered included attitudes toward reading in their first language, reading ability, feelings about reading, and home and educational background. The attitudes toward reading in Thai positively influenced the reading attitudes about L2 reading. Circumstances at school and home where reading for pleasure was encouraged created positive influences on reading habits and attitudes both in English and Thai. Reading in English seemed to be more difficult because of vocabulary, and magazines were more popular than books.

There have been popular misconceptions about the reading habits of teenagers: teens do not read at all; teens have limited time to read (Creel, 2007). Many reasons explaining their not reading were reported in the 2001 and 2002 “Teen Read Week Survey”: lack of time, boring/not fun, preference for computers or games, preference for TV or movies, and other reasons. However, Creel (2007) pointed out that teenagers might not be considering media literacy when they think of reading. According to Creel (2007), teen participants in his study could spend time
browsing online resources such as emails, MySpace, blogs, online articles and newspapers, and others. The internet could be a beneficial resource of printed texts. Creel’s findings of the study demonstrated some of the misconceptions about the reading habits of teenagers.

The studies of reading habits and experiences provide background information for understanding K/KA adolescents’ reading habits and attitudes. Various factors which influence young people’s literary experiences need to be considered: gender, assistance from family and teachers, circumstances at home and school, electronic media, attitudes toward reading in their first language, reading ability, preference for genre, and availability of libraries and/or bookstores.

**Summary**

This chapter explicated theoretical foundations and studies of related-research employed in this study: critical multiculturalism, theories of response to literature, and literary and media analysis, and brief overview of Korean/Korean adolescents’ experiences. In the section on critical multiculturalism, the development and major tenets of American multiculturalism as espoused by major proponents was discussed, and the critiques of multiculturalism offered by individuals who advocate for critical multiculturalism were discussed. The major proponents proposed multicultural education as an educational reform movement for educational equality and diversity within unity with democratic ideals, so that students experience equal opportunity to learn in schools regardless of students’ gender, class, racial, ethnic, and other cultural characteristics. For successful implementation of multicultural education, the multiculturalists have addressed broad issues including curriculum, student learning, teacher learning, the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and administrators, and the goals and culture of the school. However, many schools have attempted to implement multicultural education just by celebrating...
different cultures. Current pluralist multiculturalism has avoided the discussions of racism and other controversial issues in its applications, and voices and experiences of marginalized groups were trivialized in the curriculum. In addition, uncritical acceptance of multiple viewpoints implies accepting all perspectives regardless of how outrageous they are. Critics of multiculturalism proposed enhancing the achievement of all students and providing them with the opportunities to become critical and productive members of a democratic society.

In the section on studies of response to literature, the evolution of literary response studies, various perspectives on reader response theories and research on literary response, and overview of research on adolescents’ responses to multicultural literature were discussed. Adolescents bring their own attitudes, beliefs, values, experiences to reading, and their responses to the same text are unique, depending on “purposes of reading, instructional guidance, feelings, background knowledge and experiences, and preferences.” (Boyd, 2002, p.61) The ideological discourses of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and other factors affect reader’s response to literature. Teachers’ practice, interpretive community, and other contextual variables guide students’ interpretation of literature. The three factors, reader, text, and context are not separate aspects, but components for meaning-making. Text, reader, and context each cannot be separated from socio-cultural perspectives.

Many European American students and some African Americans students tend to show resistance to elements of multicultural literature whereas many African American students tend to connect their personal and cultural lives with the literature. Students’ socio-cultural frames, such as ethnicity, race, gender, and other influences affect students’ responses, and very often students are not aware of the cultural models they bring to reading. Research on response to culturally conscious books indicates that culturally influenced textual features can empower
students to develop literary understanding, and students use their cultural background, personal experiences, and culturally influenced textual features for the development of literary understanding. Struggling readers can find their strengths for literary learning by using their cultural knowledge and experiences when reading culturally conscious books. Cultural insiders’ responses to culturally conscious literature are shaped by the interplay of various dimensions: the textual power of culturally conscious books, readers’ cultural values and attitudes in relation to ethnicity, race, class, gender, and other influences, personal experiences and prior knowledge, and interpretive communities.

In the section on Korean/Korean American children’s and young adult literature and media analysis, current trends in the literature and media and the role of them were discussed. K/KA children’s literature began to emerge dramatically in 1990s. However, despite the changing demographics, a relatively small number of books representing Korean/Korean Americans were brought to press. Deeply entrenched stereotypical depictions and culturally inauthentic representation were still prevalent in books written by cultural outsiders and cultural insiders. Recently, Asian/Asian American filmmakers have attempted to create films to fight against Hollywood stereotypical depictions of Asian/Asian Americans. Several documentaries and a number of experimental films seek to bring liberating images for ethnic socialization and political mobilization. Ethnic newspapers have been a pivotal vehicle for ethnic socialization and communication in the immigrant communities.

In the section on overview of Korean/Korean adolescents’ experiences, various factors can contribute to significant psychological distress in Korean/Korean American adolescents: pressure from teachers and parents, feeling of guilt, shame, and anxiety resulted from academic performance, the awareness of perceived discrimination and marginality in school contexts, and
identity conflict between two cultures. In addition, many studies revealed various, complex identities of K/KA students in relation to race/ethnicity, social class, ethnicity, generation, gender, and religion.

Regarding children’s reading habits and experiences, studies found out various factors which influenced young people’s literary experiences: gender, assistance from family and teachers, circumstances at home and school, electronic media, attitudes toward reading in their first language, reading ability, preference for genre, and availability of libraries and/or bookstores.
Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Research Methods

This study employs qualitative and interpretive methodologies which can provide an enriched understanding of life, literary experiences, interpersonal interactions, and complex socio-cultural contexts. Qualitative research methodology is appropriate for this study because it is suitable for uncovering complexities of meaning or the nature of experience (Patton, 2002). Bogden and Biklen (1998) point out several characteristics of qualitative researchers: qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes; they are interested in capturing the informants’ meaning, such as what they are experiencing and how different people make sense of their lives; and they believe that theory emerges from the data inductively.

This study attempts to discover how Korean/Korean American adolescent participants interpret and respond to literature and media. It also explores how the participants make sense of their lives, what they are experiencing, and how they interpret their social world. Therefore, the qualitative approach is appropriate in trying to capture the participants’ perspectives and complexity of meanings.

A multiple case study design is employed in order to understand “the complex interrelationships among all that exist” in participants’ experiences and perspectives (Stake, 1995, p.37). A case is represented as an object having a boundary and working parts. Stake (1995) wrote,

….the cases of interest in education and social service are people and programs. Each one is similar to other persons and programs in many ways and unique in many ways. We are interested in them for both their uniqueness and commonality. (p.1)
Stake (1995) also compared qualitative researchers’ concern with quantitative researchers’ in terms of cases.

Quantitative researchers regularly treat uniqueness of cases as “error,” outside the system of explained science. Qualitative researchers treat the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts as important to understanding. Particularization is an important aim, coming to know the particularity of the case. (p. 39)

Case study can be sorted into three categories: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case study (Stake, 1995). Intrinsic case study is to learn about the particular case whether it is a particular agency or program, not to learn about other cases or some general problem by learning it. Instrumental case study is used when there is a need for understanding something else by studying a particular case, such as studying a teacher who is adopting a system in order to learn about the effect of the system. Collective case study, which refers to a multiple case study design, is chosen to study coordinated cases more than just one case. For example, several teachers can be chosen in order to learn about the effects of the new system. A research is called as a multiple case study “when researchers study two or more subjects, settings, or depositories of data.” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.62)

In order to conduct a multiple case study design, I adopted a purposeful non-random sampling. Qualitative purposeful sampling focuses on relatively small samples for the purpose of understanding a phenomenon in depth, so that information-rich cases are selected to learn a great deal about issues related to the reason for the research (Patton, 2002). This study focuses on listening to the voices of Korean/Korean American adolescents one-on-one and in smaller groups ranging in size from five to six participants. A space for a small group was created in a non-classroom setting. Data were collected through oral and written responses, interviews, and surveys.
I chose interpretive methodology for this study. Not all qualitative researchers use this approach. Researchers adopt this approach when they attempt to investigate the interrelationships between personal troubles and the public policies and institutions which are related to those troubles (Denzin, 2001). Interpretive researchers examine the interrelationships for a shared public consciousness of the troubles. They make their value positions clear and begin research with the biography of themselves containing meaningful descriptions of what they experienced or witnessed. They speak from the position of taking sides with a more democratic vision. While connecting personal problems to social issues or institutional structures, they situate themselves so that the voices of individuals can be heard. While providing descriptions and interpretations of social processes, the researchers offer explanations of how certain situations occur and why they continue.

While capturing the core meanings and contradictions, interpretive researchers are concerned with the social construction of gender, power, knowledge, history, and emotion, and they attempt to connect the subjects’ problematic life experiences to larger social, public issues (Denzin, 2001). A thick description of how the phenomenon occurs in subjects’ worlds creates the conditions for deep, authentic understanding. Understanding the individual’s perspective can help us to see how the meaning is culturally constructed through social practices.

A range of interdisciplinary perspectives and theoretical considerations are captured by interpretive research. The interpretive approach is widely used in a variety of disciplines, such as communication, education, history, anthropology, psychology, sociology, English and comparative literature, social work, and other areas. Though there are many differing interpretive perspectives in the social sciences, “the focus of interpretive research is on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their life projects”
(Denzin, 2001, p.34). How the problematic acts or events give meanings to the persons studied rather than causal why questions is a major concern in interpretive research.

This study captures the core meanings and contradictions of Korean/Korean American adolescent participants’ problematic and troubled life experiences. Thick descriptions of how their experiences are organized, perceived, and constructed through social processes help uncover deep, authentic understanding of the individual’s perspective. Through meaningful interpretations and descriptions of the social processes, interpretive research can explain how certain situations occur and persist. Interpretive evaluation research, another type of interpretive research, proposes realistic recommendations for improvement of fundamental social problems (Denzin, 2001). This research is conducted from the point of view of the person studied “in order to provide policymakers with pragmatic, action-oriented recommendations for alleviating the problem” (Majchrzak, 1984, p.12). The following research questions drive this research:

1. What are the attitudes participants hold about reading, and how do their families assist their reading habits and attitudes?

2. What happens when K/KA youth read and interpret literature, a film, and newspapers created by K/KAs?

3. What types of responses are elicited when they discuss the narratives?

4. What do their responses reveal about identity (gender, class, race, ethnicity, age, religion, and other differences)?

In the present study, participants were selected on the basis of diverse criteria: ethnic background, gender, age, language, reading level, and interest. Second generation and early study abroad (ESA) K/KA high school students were selected. Three boys and three girls who were capable of reading materials and willing to participate in the study were recruited. Contemporary young adult novels, a film, and newspapers created by Korean/Korean Americans
were selected which portray Korean American adolescents’ lives in relation to culture, experiences, families, schools, and community. To help determine quality works, I examined professional reviews through The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) of American Library Association, Kirkus Review, Hone Book, Booklist, School Library Journal, San Francisco Chronicle, and The Village Voice.

Selection of Participants

Several factors were taken into account in selecting participants for this study. A key criterion was youth participants of Korean background. After the Immigration Act of 1965, many Koreans immigrated to U.S. with the reasons for pursuing better education and better opportunities (Hurh, 1998). The majority of Korean/Korean American youth might be classified into several categories: 1.5 generation of immigrant families who were born in Korea and educated in the U.S.; second generation who were born and educated in America; ESA students who were born in Korea and educated in America and plan to continue to study in America or return to Korea after a period of time. Currently, some Korean children born in America are raised in Korea for a period of time and then return to America for educational purposes. These groups might be willing to identify themselves flexibly as Korean, Korean American, or American according to various reasons such as the geographic origin of their parents or themselves, languages they speak, citizenship, and others.

Several other criteria were identified for selecting participants – age, gender, language, reading level, and interest. The age of the participants is an important criterion for this study. The target age group for youth is high school Korean/Korean American students, ranging from 15 to 17 years old. Zhou and Lee (2004) explain the importance of the stage of adolescence and youth as follows.
These young people are at the stage in their life cycles where they strive to find their own spaces, make their own choices, and form their own identities, while at the same time deterred by certain norms, rules, regulations, and social forces from accepting the myriad responsibilities that accompany full adulthood (p.2).

During this period, Korean/Korean American youth may strive to negotiate and/or be overwhelmed between different cultural expectations, the parental influence and his/her own choices, and ultimately adolescence and adulthood. Korean/Korean American young adult literature and media may appeal to Korean/Korean American youth because the diverse contents reflect those potential experiences the youth might encounter in their lives. Because participants’ gender might affect responses and reading experiences, male and female participants were selected. Participants were recruited from a youth group of a Korean church because the number of participants was appropriate for a small group discussion.

Students who could read novels without much difficulty in English were selected because reading comprehension ability in English was a prerequisite for responses. I gave out a sample of an English reading passage to examine their comprehension reading comprehension ability. They read the passage and told me the content of the passage in English or in Korean. The students’ performance on this informal assessment helped determine their participation.

Their willingness to participate was also important in that this research required spending time reading, writing, and discussing literature and media for a period of time. Students examined the novels and newspapers in advance in order to decide their participation in the research.

Selection of Site

A Christian Korean ethnic church was selected as the site from which to recruit participants in this study. Over 70 percent of Korean immigrants are affiliated with Protestant congregations, others are Catholic, Buddhist, or have no affiliation (Hurh & Kim, 1990; Yoo,
They are affiliated with churches for religious and/or social motives. Korean churches serve social functions of preserving Korean culture and identity for Korean immigrants, such as speaking and teaching Korean language, celebrating Korean holidays and eating Korean food, and honoring cultural traditions (Lee, Chang & Miller, 2006). Children of Korean immigrants and migrant families closely tied to the ethnic churches are more likely to reinforce their ethnic community (Lew, 2006; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995).

The ethnic Korean church consists of more than 500 members who came to America with different immigrant status. It is composed of various groups: first generation immigrant group; migrant families for academic purpose; a graduate singles group which mostly consists of unmarried graduate students; an undergraduate group which consists of undergraduate students; youth group; a group of elementary students; and a group of kindergarteners and preschoolers. Social class varies, including working class immigrants and middle class professionals. Therefore, the background of adolescents in this church also varies according to their immigrant status, social class, gender, and other dimensions. They might be from 1.5, second generation, or early study abroad students from working class families or middle class professionals. In the next section, the participants are identified, and their biographical information is provided.

The Participants

The six participants included three girls and three boys. Sarang, Jiyoun, and Junsu were ESA students, and Mathew, James, and Julie were second generation Korean American students. Mathew identified himself as belonging to between working and middle class. Jiyoun grew up in an upper middle class family. The other members described themselves as coming from a middle class family.
Julie is a Korean American youngster of 16 who was born in a small town, Hockton, in the midwest. Her family included her grandparents, parents, and younger brother. Her father worked as a head chef for a college dormitory. She described her father as being more Americanized than her mother, who was more Koreanized.

Jiyoung was born in Seoul, Korea. This 15 year old girl came to America for a better education one and a half years ago. But this was not her first time studying in America. She visited America when she was in the fifth and seventh grades during summer vacations. In this town, she lived with her mother and siblings. She was the oldest daughter and had one younger brother and one younger sister. Her father stayed behind in Korea to support the family. Her father was a famous graphic designer who worked for many companies. He designed the covers of textbooks in Korea, and his name was printed on the cover of textbooks at Jiyoung’s school. She was very proud of her father. Meanwhile, her mother loved art and was a talented cook. She ran a café in Korea which was very popular and expensive. Currently in the U.S., she runs a café on campus which was not so expensive, but is a lucrative small business. Her whole family loved art and traveling during the summer. They gained artistic insights from traveling and visiting museums. Her family lives in a town, Mayberry, which is located miles away from this town. They chose the particular high school in that town because she and her family wanted to avoid Korean people in order to improve English proficiency. Before she came to America, she had been homeschooled for two years and took the school qualification examination to gain a certificate of qualification to enter a high school. She passed the test and got grades proficient enough to prove that she could enter a high school.

Similar to the case of Jiyoung, Sarang came to Hockton for early study abroad. She was 17 years old and a junior in a private Christian high school which consisted of people of diverse
cultural backgrounds. She took a flight which headed for America four years ago. She was living with a guardian family in Hockton. Her parents and her older brother stayed behind in Korea. Her father ran a small company. Her parents decided to send her to America instead of her older brother because they knew that she could control her life. Her mother’s friend lived in this town, so her mother decided to send her there. She did not prepare at all for studying abroad because the decision was made very quickly. When she heard from her mother that she would go to America alone, she had ambivalent feelings: fear and hope of the new world. When she imagined living and studying alone in America, she felt scared because of her lack of English language proficiency. On the other hand, she looked forward to meeting new people and learning about the new world. She was firmly determined to study very diligently if she could go to America. Her firm resolution at that time drastically influenced her life change. She spoke in both English and Korean at home because her guardians spoke in Korean, and their children spoke in English. The major reason why she came to America was that her mother thought that she might not go to a good Korean college because she had very low grades at high school in Korea. She stated that if she were in Korea, she might have to study one more year to enter a college.

Junsu was born in Los Angeles. When he was five years old, he went back to Korea when his father earned a doctoral degree at a university. His father was a professor in Korea. His family came to this town three years ago because his father was on sabbatical. Junsu lived with his parents and his older sister during that year. Afterwards, his family went back to Korea, and he remained in this town to study alone. Now, he was living with guardians. He was a sophomore in a public high school.

James was a biracial child. He was born in Hockton. He was a senior in a public high school. His father is white, and his mother is Korean. His mother worked at church as a secretary.
His father was a mechanic fixing retirement houses. He considered himself to be a busy, nice, quiet, and good student even though sometimes he was lazy. He stated that he was well behaved in class, and he worked carefully and deliberately to gain good grades. He obtained a very good ACT score. Now, he received an early admission from a university in Hockton. He wanted to major in kinesiology at college. He wanted to help injured players to be stronger and faster. His predilection for sports and his black friend’s recommendation helped him to choose the area of study. His parents respected his decision.

Mathew saw himself as a loving, caring, and nice person. He was charismatic and bossy, mature for his age. He was a very loud person who loved talking in class. He always answered questions and deluged teachers with questions. Many teachers loved him. He was also very funny and smart, making many teachers laugh a lot. When he had lots of work to do, he tried to work as hard as he could. He was eager to do more work. Even though he felt tired, he took delight in hard work. His English teacher told him that he was very unique because he was not only socially gregarious, but also worked hard when there were a lot of works in front of him.

Mathew was born in Pusan in South Korea. His father was a pastor, and his mother was a missionary. He was the first-born son in his family that included two sisters and two brothers. When he was one year old, his family was called to America by God. They did not have enough money to come to America when they were called. They prayed to God and decided to obey God’s will. Even though they were rejected several times from the U.S. embassy in Korea, they kept persevering and finally gained U.S. entry visas. Since their arrival in the U.S., they had settled down in a small town in Illinois and lived there for 10 years. Then, when they were called to this town again by God, they finally settled there. Now, he was a sophomore in a public high school who had lived in Hockton for four years.
Selection of Narratives

Contemporary young adult novels, a film, and newspapers created by Korean/Korean Americans were selected by the researcher with specific perspectives. Culturally conscious books and media were selected in this study. Books that would fit Bishop’s (1982) idea of culturally conscious books are written from African American perspectives as cultural insiders, contain rich details of their lives, families, and communities, and present their heritage and cultural traditions in authentic fashions. Reading culturally conscious books can influence European American students’ attitudes toward African American people more positively. Bishop’s (1982) typology is also applicable for analyzing Korean/Korean American young adult fiction and media when considering both groups’ marginalized status and development of children’s literature written by group members. The novels, a film, and newspapers are categorized as culturally conscious literature and media and may more readily and powerfully engage Korean American adolescents in stories about their own culture, experiences, families, school, and communities. This research will help to determine whether this assumption is correct.

Media resources such as a film and newspapers were selected because current teenagers tend to be as engaged with media and online resources as with print sources. Newspapers written by Korean/Korean American youth reporters were selected because many students who are racial minorities seek out diverse stories including ethnically and racially related issues. For example, in Smith’s (2008) study, many African American student reporters were more likely to connect individual stories to diverse issues impacting the Black community than Caucasian student reporters and local professional television reporters.

Three books, Finding My Voice (Lee, 1992), Necessary Roughness (Lee, 1996), and A Step From Heaven (An Na, 2001), a film, In Between Days (Kim, 2006), and three articles from
an online newspaper, *LA Youth*, were selected to elicit data for the study. The narratives were selected because they were created by Korean/Korean Americans and portrayed the lives of Korean/Korean American youth in detail from cultural insiders’ perspectives. Also, a Korean/Korean American teen girl or boy was a main character in the novels and media. The works contained various critical issues Korean/Korean American youth might encounter, such as family relationships, racial discrimination, loneliness, romantic relationship, cross-cultural experiences, identity development, and other experiences. The depictions also more accurately and vividly reflect language, behavior, values, and others of Korean/Korean American immigrants. Literary analysis was conducted by examining genre, character development, plot, theme, setting, point of view, perspective, imagery, and other elements. I examined professional reviews to help determine literary quality through The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) of American Library Association, Kirkus Review, Hone Book, Booklist, and School Library Journal. Korean/Korean American children’s and young adult literature emerged more noticeably in the 1990s and continued to grow in the 2000s, but there is still a dearth of works. Many novels in K/KA literature are categorized as mediocre in quality (Leu, 2002). Therefore, from a literary standpoint, I had to select among books which are categorized as mediocre in quality as well as well-written books.

The media sources selected were created from K/KA students’ perspectives and addressed critical issues contemporary K/KA adolescents might have. The narratives have a K/KA adolescent as a main character and portray K/KA lives in America from the perspectives of the youth. Qualities of the works were also considered. The film received many awards and impressive evaluation as an experimental/independent film by movie reviews such as San Francisco Chronicle and The Village Voice. LA Youth on-line newspapers have been written
from K/KA news reporters who are working for the newspaper. The articles reveal deep feelings and unique perspectives of Korean/Korean American adolescents who are struggling in this society (http://layouth.com/). Descriptions of each resource follows.

The film, *In Between Days* (Kim, 2006), was written by Bradley Rust Gray and So Yong Kim and directed by So Yong Kim. It received four prizes for its excellence as an independent and experimental film: Fipresci prize in Berlin International Film Festival in 2006, Best film award in Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Cinema in 2007, Independent/Experimental Film and Video Award in Los Angeles film critics association in 2006, and Special Jury Prize in Sundance Film Festival in 2006 (The Internet Movie Database, 2009).

The film explores what happens to a Korean immigrant teen girl and how she adjusts to a North American city. Amie is a very lonely girl who lives with her single mother and is bored at school. Sometimes, she waits for her father’s call from Korea. She does not have any meaningful relationships, except with her male friend, Tran. Amie struggles to find a place between love and friendship. However, Tran makes her feel unstable in their relationship, and she feels pain from her first love. At the end of the film, she seems to move on to another relationship in order to fill in her emptiness.

Three newspaper articles were selected from *LA Youth* online resources. The newspaper by and about teens was created in 1988 in response to a U.S. Supreme Court decision which empowered school administrators to control the content of school newspapers (LA Youth, 2009). The newspaper has been in pursuit of supporting a free press where young people can raise their own voices and enhance their critical thinking, literacy skills, and civic education. It is a non-profit organization with five adult staff and more than eighty teen staff members. The newspaper
is published every two months and distributed in most L.A. area public and private middle
schools and high schools. The newspaper’s website has a readership of 500,000.

Three articles which depict racially and ethnically related issues Korean/Korean
American teens face in their lives, were chosen for this study: “Talk about Pressure to Succeed”
(Hwang, 2000), “Fighting for Respect” (Kwon, 2001), and “Stuck Between Two Worlds” (Kwon,
2008). The K/KA teen journalists, who wrote the selected articles, expressed their viewpoints
about various issues with which they have struggled, such as racial/ethnic identity, parents’
pressure and academic achievement, and racial prejudices and discrimination.

The book, *Necessary Roughness* (Lee, 1996), received Skipping Stones Honor Award in
1997 and was on the list of 2005 popular paperbacks for young adults and. The YALSA popular
paperbacks committee creates this booklist in order to encourage teenagers to read popular books
with teen appeal (American Library Association, 2009).

In the novel, the main character, Chan, and his family are Korean immigrants. They
moved from L.A. to a small town in Minnesota where his family is the only Asian one in town.
Chan does not know why his parents stick to Korean traditions and customs. He begins to adjust
to the new high school and town, but faces many obstacles. He joins a football team, but the
practices are hard for him. He is raped by his football teammates, but accepts a humiliating crime
and endures the pain of the crime to fit in with the team. There were no legal consequences for
the violent actions. At the end of the story, Chan and his family are shocked when the tragic
accident happens to his sister. After a period of time, Chan becomes closer to his father, and he
and his family move on with their lives. The story captures familial values and expectations,
societal pressure, racial discrimination, violence, and the identity struggle a Korean American
teen boy encounters.
The book, *A Step from Heaven* (An Na, 2001), was chosen as the best young adult book and received the Printz Award in 2002, Children’s Book Award in 2002, and National Book Award in 2001 for its literary excellence and was listed on School Library Journal Best books, Hone Book Fanfare, and Notable Children’s Books in the Language Art of NCTE. The criteria for literary excellence applied to the award includes story, setting, theme, voice, accuracy, illustration, style, characters, design (format, organization, etc.) in a novel written for young adult (American Library Association, 2009).

This novel tells a story of a Korean immigrant family. The female protagonist’s family immigrates to America with the belief that America is heaven. YoungJu and her family members realize that America is a step far from heaven. Her parents struggle with low-paying jobs and English language difficulties. Her father, who struggles in adjusting to the new country, becomes abusive to his wife and children. The oppressive force of her father makes her feel fear, which leads to her low self-esteem and makes it difficult for her to find and raise her voice. Finally, she stands up and speaks after witnessing the spousal abuse of her mother. At the novel’s end, YoungJu’s father decides to leave for Korea, and her mother decides to stay and raise two teenagers alone in America in order to do what she thinks is the right thing for her children.

This novel, *Finding My Voice* (Lee, 1992), was chosen as a popular paperback on the list of multicultural fiction for young adults in 1997 by YALSA (American Library Association, 2009) and received impressive evaluations from professional reviews such as Kirkus Review and Booklist. In the novel, Ellen, a Korean American girl, experiences racial discrimination from some Caucasian girls because of her romantic relationship with a Caucasian boy. Ellen’s reaction to the oppressive power is to try to confront it and find her voice. She finally realizes that she is powerless to change the social system and has to capitulate to overwhelming power of the
current social system which forces her to tolerate racial discrimination. Even though the ending of Lee’s novel shows perpetuation of the current system, this novel reveals a reaction of a teen girl who is in a disadvantaged position in fighting against the overwhelming power of society.

In summary, the film depicts a Korean immigrant teen girl’s life, addressing the issues of struggles with family and romantic relationships, loneliness, and difficulties in adjusting to the new country. The newspaper articles written by K/KA teen reporters contain the issues of racial/ethnic identity, parental pressure and academic achievement, and racial prejudices and discrimination. The three novels portray Korean American teens’ lives within the contexts of home, school, community, and society and address diverse issues such as racial violence, generation gap, struggle with finding ethnic identity, and immigrant hardships.

**Data Collection Design and Procedures**

I collected data over a period of five months. My research design incorporated four methods of collecting data, interviews, participant-observation, response journals, and surveys to help triangulate the data sources. Interview questions included those that allowed students to identify themselves on the basis of race, ethnicity, national identity, or some other factors, personal backgrounds, perceptions about other racial groups, relationships with friends, future plan, and post reading questions about the book club. In the observations, I looked for their relationships, engagement in the discussions, and their attitudes toward the interpretive community. Free journal writings displayed their focus on distinct themes, perspectives about various issues, and types of responses. Survey questions included reading habits and preferences, such as how often they read outside class, genres of books, languages they read, topics of interests, and family assistance to their readings.
I introduced this book club to the youth group of a Korean church, invited youth participants to join the club, and distributed flyers. After I recruited the participants, in the first week, I introduced this study and reiterated what they have to do to participate in this study, such as reading, writing, and participation in a discussion group. I introduced books, film, and newspapers to be read. The participants decided the sequence of using the narratives for this study. During the first two sessions, they read and discussed the three newspaper articles. Then, during next nine sessions, they talked about the three novels. Finally, during two sessions, they watched and discussed the story of the film. Group discussion for each session continued for approximately one hour.

Table 1

*Time Spent in Group Discussions for Each Material*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MATERIALS</th>
<th>SESSIONS</th>
<th>LENGTH OF TIME</th>
<th>DATE RANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Talk about Pressure to Succeed”/“Fighting for Respect”</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>59 min.</td>
<td>08/29/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Stuck Between Two Worlds”</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>65 min.</td>
<td>09/05/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Finding My Voice</em></td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>172 min.</td>
<td>09/12/09 – 10/03/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Step from Heaven</em></td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>175 min.</td>
<td>10/10/09 – 10/24/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Necessary Roughness</em></td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>165 min.</td>
<td>10/31/09 – 11/14/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In Between Days</em></td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>135 min.</td>
<td>11/21/09 – 12/05/09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were allowed to use whatever language they were comfortable with because language development or use was not the focus of this study. However, they used mostly English during discussions and wrote response journals in English. Sometimes, when ESA
students talked in Korean, the other students and I responded in Korean. But this happened very rarely.

**Participant-observation**

Youth participants discussed the books, a film, and newspapers in a small group for a four-month period. The primary site of preference was a private study room at a public library or at an engineering library of a university. They met once a week or every two weeks for written and oral responses. They decided how much they would read and watch for each discussion session. When they watched the movie, they had two breaks during the film at several intervals and then discussed about the segment of the storyline because the breaking story line into segments was effective to stimulate immediate response. Each discussion was voluntarily led by a discussion leader who was one of the participants. I encouraged all participants to take the role of a discussion leader by taking turns. A discussion leader developed discussion questions in advance and led a whole discussion session. All participants took the role by taking turns. In case of the film, I served as the discussion leader. All discussion sessions were tape-recorded, and I also took handwritten notes in case the tapes were not very clear.

I was a participant observer in the student-led discussion group. My role as a researcher was to help the participants to engage with the stories and participate actively in responding to the stories for their successful exploration rather than to teach or lecture them. Through the study, I hoped that participants experienced deep exploration of the stories while connecting its relevance to their own experiences. During discussion, I tried to maintain objective stance and encourage and respect for the participants. I stepped into their discussion to provide encouragement for participant contribution, to clarify unfamiliar events, or to comfort the participants.
Written documents

In terms of response journal, the participants were asked to record their comments as they read a novel before they participated in each book-sharing session. To participate in a small group discussion, they needed to know issues to talk and how to present on argument about an interpretation. Writing response journals was a good way to initiate readers’ responses and stimulate discussion (Purves, Rogers & Soter, 1995). They mostly wrote the journal at home before they participated in each discussion session, but several times, some of the participants handed out the journal writing tasks after they discussed the segment they were supposed to read. In those cases, their written responses must have been influenced by other members’ perspectives. They responded freely as they thought about their reading and wrote about the things that concerned or interested them. Their response journals were copied with the participants' consent.

Interviews and surveys

During the first discussion session, I asked about their prior background knowledge about K/KA literature and narratives. Then, each student was interviewed once or twice during a point over the study. They were all interviewed after the book club. Individual interview questions included their personal and family background, major challenges in their lives at home and school, and reasons to stay in America, peer relationships, benefits and challenges in the discussion group, and influences of the stories and group discussions on their perspectives. Interviews were conducted at the students' residence. All interviews were estimated to take around one hour. Their interviews were audio-taped with the participants' consent.

Survey questions were given out to fill out the questionnaire. The protocol was designed to help understand the participants’ attitudes toward reading, preferences, and habits in English
and/or in Korean. The survey provided basic background knowledge about their reading habits and experiences. The survey was administered in a group setting. Survey I including thirty one questions was distributed to them at the beginning of the research and survey II including twenty questions at the end of the research.

**Data Analysis**

Once I collected the data through interviews or participant-observations, I transcribed audiotapes. During this early stage, all the data was organized per each participant and each discussion session. The data was analyzed inductively. The raw data was coded to make the categorization of emergent themes and topics across the individual interviews, observations, written documents, and surveys. Each thematic category was accompanied by assertions. Each thematic category and the assertions were supported by thick description of data vignettes.

Three kinds of triangulation were adopted to verify and validate my data analysis: triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, and member check (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). Triangulation of data sources means “comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods.” (Patton, 2002, p.559) In this study, observations and interviews were compared. What the participants said during the discussions was also compared with what they said during their individual interviews. In addition, the consistency between their oral responses and written responses was checked. Triangulation of data sources did not always produce consistency of the data. In that case, the analysis focused on understanding when and why the inconsistency occurred. Analyst triangulation employs multiple investigators to independently analyze the same data obtained and compare findings (Patton, 2002). It helps reduce the potential bias of a single analyst. One of my colleagues examined the obtained data, reviewed and questioned my
analysis, and provided alternative interpretations. Sometimes, I undermined my original interpretations or added more data to support my interpretations. We examined and discussed data cooperatively and reached consensus to make a conclusion or synthesis. Member checking also helped triangulate my interpretations of the data sources. One of my study participants reviewed the transcripts, interpretations, and writings. Sometimes, she suggested alternative interpretations, and her feedback was well reflected in my analysis. For example, she mentioned that Mathew’s perception that some Korean students were cocky and boasted about Korea compared to America might be personally biased. As she thought, the Korean students told like it was. She also pointed out that there were noticeable differences between second generation Korean American students and ESA students in the group. She stated that the second generation students only acquired knowledge about Korea from their family, peers, and Korean community and they did not have much knowledge about their heritage compared to the ESA students.

**Researcher’s Role in the Study**

The researcher brings his or her own value positions or interpretations to the case or the problem being studied (Denzin, 2001; Stake, 1995). The researcher is always part of what is being studied in interpretive research (Denzin, 2001). There is no value-free interpretive and qualitative research.

My personal backgrounds and experiences have impacted this research. My values affected my data collection and analysis. I focused on various issues K/KA students might have and examined the interconnection between their experiences and social issues. My main approach was to situate this study to challenge the idea of conventional Eurocentric understanding that Asian people are understood stereotypically as a homogeneous group and one’s narrative or experience is interpreted with lack of careful consideration of socio-cultural
contexts. I analyzed data as a researcher who identified herself as a person of Korean descent and a critical multicultural educator. My Korean background and various experiences in America benefitted in understanding some of participants’ experiences and perspectives. Shared experience may be a basis for deep and authentic understanding. However, it should also be noted that there are diversities among members of within the same ethnic group according to ability, class, gender, generation, religion, and other factors.

Personally, I have undergone the process involved in the transformation from a foreign/international student to a multicultural democratic global citizen. My identity has been constructed through diverse experiences as a member of majority in Korea and a member of minority in the U.S. Especially, my imposed status as a minority in the U.S. has significantly affected my views as a researcher and an educator. The conception of minority which describes Asian/Asian Americans as numerical minority and perpetual foreigners/aliens conveyed through mass media and books has affected my views of myself in America. My personal experience of alienation, discrimination, and cultural and linguistic barriers in this society reinforced the image of my status as a minority. The first-hand encounter with the issues without expectation or preparation made me feel agony and pain more severely which ensued with the experiences. I thought many times about what I was pursuing for my life, its value, and reason for being here. My first immediate reaction to the new status was denying the status. I felt anxiety and antagonism against this society, especially members of the majority group. I could not accept the new status and denied being categorized as a member of a minority group. As time went by, I realized how and why those conceptions have been constructed and perpetuated and how minority people have been treated differentially historically in this society because of cultural diversity. I realized that rather than focusing on my personal acceptance or unacceptance of the
new status, a more important issue is how to avoid and subvert those stereotypes and discrimination in order to help this world pursue more democratic values.

What I would like to point out in my life journey is that through my painful experiences, I have gained many things even though I also lost many things. I came to realize what it was like living as a minority and foreigner in a new country. How I have felt and experienced may be a small part of many lives, but my painful experiences and perspective changes are invaluable assets to understand and help other people who might struggle with similar experiences even though there exist some limitations.

Those assets are my power rather than my weakness. This power is manifested and used as a researcher and educator. My experiences inculcated in me a keen interest in cultural diversity, oppression, and social justice issues. The experiences from different positions helped me open my eyes to issues of positive or negative stereotypes and discrimination against marginalized groups on those people and lives. I have become more interested in diverse cultures beyond my national and cultural boundary seeking to foster multicultural global citizenship based on democratic ideals. I argue that rather than turning eyes on national or cultural boundaries, our eyes should be turned on helping to dissolve attitudes of rejection toward the minorities while pursuing global solidarity by extending human rights to oppressed people focusing on human rights of marginalized populations. The cultural approach should be accompanied by critical attitudes toward our culture and other cultures on the basis of awareness of democratic values, as Rosenblatt (1946) pointed out.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced research methodologies used for this study including qualitative case study and interpretive research used to collect the data, such as interviews,
participant-observation, written documents, and surveys. Then, I detailed how I proceeded with my data analysis. Through inductive analysis, themes and topics were identified, and assertions were accompanied. Three kinds of triangulation were adopted to verify and validate my data analysis: triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, and member check. Finally, the researcher’s role as a cultural insider and diversities within the same ethnic group were noted.

The next chapters present analyses of the data that were collected.
Chapter Four

Biographical Portraits of Participants/ Reading Habits and Attitudes

Biographical Portraits of Participants

The biographical portraits of the participants drawn from individual interviews provide a glimpse into their experiences and lives within their family, in Korean community, and at school.

Julie

Julie, a second generation Korean American, felt a cultural gap in her family. She said that her father understood her because he had lived in America since his adolescence, but sometimes, her mother did not understand her because she had come to America after she married. She sometimes felt a cultural gap from her mother. For example, when she and her father watched movies late Friday night, her mother scolded her, while her father understood about having fun on weekends. She interpreted the conflict arising between her and her mother as originating from their different views about education. She, especially, felt much pressure from her mother about her own academic achievement. She explained that her mother’s high expectation about academic achievement was influenced by Korean education because she grew up in that culture. When she got a B in Spanish at school, her father acknowledged that she was learning and encouraged her to continue to improve her Spanish skills. Her mother, however, scolded her about the grade. She interpreted that there were cultural differences between her father and mother.

Julie felt much pressure from both her parents, especially her mother. They were angry at her when she was a freshman because they thought her grades were unsatisfactory, and she felt very stressed. She had an especially difficult time struggling with English. Her parents could not understand this because they believed English was her first language. Their pressure affected her
negatively. She warned them that if they pressured her too much, she might falter because of the stress. She disclosed these stressful past experiences and said that nowadays, she still felt pressure about grades and ACT scores.

At school, Julie’s teachers also expected her to get good grades because they believed that Asians achieved well at school. She commented that expectations at school mirrored that of the home, as Asian kids were expected to do well in academic achievement. Even though she did not like homework, test scores, grades, and the ACT, she liked writing papers, which was her strength. She enjoyed not only expressing her opinions, taking a side with using reasoning, and providing substantial evidences, but also building her thinking processes and using her imagination. She did well in science-related subjects such as biology and chemistry. She especially loved chemistry. In general, she maintained a good academic standing. She said she would like to major in pharmacy at college. She spoke fluent English, broken Korean, and a little Spanish. Depending on the person whom she was talking to, she switched the languages. Her father and brother were comfortable with speaking in English, and her mother and grandparents usually conversed in Korean to her.

Julie thought that her parents would describe her as well-mannered, respectful, nice, and thoughtful of others. At school, she was shy, quiet, independent, respectful, and thoughtful of others. When she was with her friends and feeling comfortable, she was funny, kind, caring, talkative, and outspoken.

The most important life experience occurred when Julie went on a church retreat. She met God, and the experience changed her perspectives about her life. In other words, she realized how to live with and serve God. It really changed her path of life. She tried to put God in her everyday life.
Julie’s significant challenge in her life was to live as a Korean American. She did not associate with many American kids because they did not understand her Korean cultural background. For example, they did not understand why her parents expected her to be successful, intelligent, and have a great life, when their parents did not expect so much from them. Julie obeyed her parents because she believed that it was a way of showing them respect. It was not easy for her to make American kids understand her parents’ expectation and her obedience to them. American kids also displayed reluctant feelings about Korean food and did not understand why she listened to Korean popular music. Due to their reaction, she felt ashamed about expressing her Korean culture. However, her Asian American friends understood her, and she felt comfortable associating with them.

Julie had many friends with diverse racial backgrounds including whites, African Americans, Asian Americans, and biracial friends. However, most of her close friends were Asian Americans including Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean Americans. She stated that she could relate to them and share many things, such as Asian parents, grades, test scores, and so forth. Since they were going through very similar issues, they could understand each other, and they were not quick to easily judge her. Friendships were a very important part of her life. She commented that she would make any sacrifices necessary for her close friends.

Julie participated in the youth organization of a Korean church to which James, Junsu, and Sarang also belonged. At church activities, she was involved in a church praise team. She also liked dancing and playing the violin. She was involved in youth orchestra and in the cheerleading team at school which consisted of majority of whites, a few African Americans. She was the only Asian girl in the cheerleading team. It was really hard for her to fit in the team.
**Jiyoung**

Jiyoung, an ESA student, came to America because she and her parents did not like Korean educational system. They chose homeschooling after she graduated from elementary school in Korea. She went to a middle school for one month in Korea where she was surprised to find that all the students had gone to private academy everyday and done preliminary study in every subject. They already knew concepts and gained knowledge during their winter vacation. She had never gone to a private academy because her parents believed that students should learn from teachers at school. She could not catch up with school work. Even school teachers expected students to gain knowledge through previous learning at the academy. Jiyoung and her parents were shocked. Finally, they decided that she should stop going to the school and receive homeschooling. She began to receive tutoring and went to academy in order to prepare for the test for school qualification examination. She passed the exam with good grades. Afterwards, they decided to provide their children with opportunities to study in America for better education.

Jiyoung was very quiet at school, but talkative at home. She thought that her teachers and classmates might think she was quiet and a nerd because she just studied, took notes, and asked questions related to class. She loved art and attended art club. She learned to play the cello and to dance. She was interested in drawing and painting. She enjoyed art, music, movie, and reading books. She was also interested in philosophy and sociology.

In America, Jiyoung’s life was difficult, especially regarding social relationships. In Korea, she made friends easily. She frequently took initiative to make friends, but it was hard for her to make new friends and build relationships at school. Her school consisted of a majority of whites, a few African Americans, and a few Asian/Asian Americans. She was the only Korean student. She explained that they did not open their minds easily to her because they were not
interested in a girl who was different from them. She felt alienated at school. No one said anything to her during the first day. She realized that people were all so very different.

Jiyoung knew a white girl who lived across the street from her house. She visited a few times to help with homework when the girl was sick. She and the girl did not know each other really well. They just said hello to each other and did not talk much. But in class, the girl told the other students that Jiyoung was her best friend. She did not understand what it meant to be the best friend of the girl. She liked to hang out with people, but she did not particularly get along with people who were not really nice. Some of the kids in drama club were nice to her, but they were not close friends. She attended a church where most of the congregations were old white people. She met one student at the church who was Chinese Korean American. Sometimes she spoke with her at school or at church. She usually associated with people who worked at her café. She felt comfortable with those who were white or Asian Americans. The only environment in which she could meet Korean students was this book club. She enjoyed participating in the club and associating with the members. She was the most experienced English speaker in her family. Her mother needed help from her. Even though she did not know about the American education system or her school work, her mother was very supportive and gave her many ideas.

Even though Jiyoung did not feel much pressure from her parents, she knew that her mother expected her to be a good student who went to a good school. She was also eager to study and work as hard as she could. Until now, she had straight As at high school. She was conducting a survey to find out the best college she could attend. She wanted to major in fine art in college. Recently, her mother and siblings were preparing to leave America. She was expected to stay alone in Mayberry. Her mother was looking for a homestay for her. Her parents did not
wish her to live with Korean people, but rather with American people. Their priority was that she be immersed in English language learning.

**Sarang**

In Korea, Sarang, another ESA student, attended a famous art middle school. Teachers at the school did not give homework because students were busy doing art-related works. The students had to take exams twice a semester, and their final grades were determined on the basis of results of the two exams. In order to prepare for the exams, they had to cover a large amount of material within a short period. She felt overwhelmed by the pressure.

Sarang was very satisfied with studying in America. She was especially happy with her school grades. She said that her grades in Korea were lower than C, but now she had only a few Bs and the others were As. She stated that even though math and English literature were the most difficult subjects, it was easier to study and get good grades in America. She was surprised at her academic achievement. For example, history in America was simpler than the one in Korea. In addition, assignments were given frequently and accumulated for final grades. Through completing homework assignments, she could learn many things. The study guides teachers handed out to students included a lot of information for preparing exams. In other words, the study content and preparation for exams was much easier in America than the ones in Korea. She commented that American teachers spoon fed their students.

In addition to the educational system at her school, Sarang’s strong motivation to succeed had driven her to focus on her work. One of the reasons was her parents’ sacrifices. For several years after they sent her to America, her father’s business experienced some difficulties, and it was not easy to financially support her. During those times, she studied very hard because she knew how much her family had sacrificed for her. Another reason was her ethnic pride in
Korea. She stated that her patriotism had been strengthened in America, especially when her classmates did not know much about Korea. They did not know that Samsung was a Korean company, and some of them asked her if people in Korea rode cows. She thought that studying hard to become a famous person was a way to inform people of Korea. In her eyes, Korean people looked much smaller than American people. The major reasons included lack of English proficiency and sense of belongings in this country. She provided the example of her friend at school. Her friend was a Korean ESA student. She had developed a good relationship with a white girl, but in Sarang’s eyes, their relationship was not based on equal treatment of each other. The white girl seemed to look down on her friend. Her Korean friend always said ‘yes’ to the white girl. One another day, the white girl requested that Sarang tie her shoes. Sarang was very angry at that time and said to her, “You should tie your shoes. Don’t you have your hands?” After that, the white girl did not ask Sarang and her friend to tie her shoes. Sarang stated that Korean students at her school did not tend to confront other students who looked down on them. She continued that if they said ‘no’ to those kinds of people, they would not do it. She wondered why some Korean students did not confront those who provoked feelings of humiliation in them.

Sarang hung out with students of diverse cultural backgrounds. According to her, many American kids had lots of parties. In order to hang out with them, she also had to participate in their parties. However, she felt that she had to study hard because she knew that there were not many opportunities for internationals to get admissions into good American colleges. Many of her American friends did not understand why Korean kids studied so hard. She decided to hang out with them only twice a month and announced to them her decision. She also discovered that American people tended to express themselves with exactness whereas Korean people were not
used to expressing themselves. She learned that expressing herself to other people was a way of adjusting in America.

Sarang’s friends included whites, Korean ESA students, and African American students. She had particularly built up a friendship with a white girl. Her white friend was very open-minded and not a racist. The personality of the girl was very similar to hers. She also added that it was natural to associate with Korean ESA students because they could share many things and experiences. She met them every week in a church youth group.

Sarang stated that her school was really special because it was a Christian school. Many students tended to hang out with each other and cross racial boundaries. She had participated in a basketball team at school. The teammates hung out with her. She emphasized again that her school was really special. At other schools, Korean ESA students felt invisible and alienated. In addition, teachers at her school tended to look after the students with love more than teachers at other schools. However, there were times when Sarang felt baffled at school. For example, one day, when her teacher asked her a question, other students next to her answered for her, saying that she did not care. She could not understand how they could easily judge and know her thoughts and answer for her. She pointed out that the people who behaved in such a manner tended to assume that she did not understand what the teacher said. Another day, some people next to her also assumed that she did not understand what they were saying, and they openly talked about her within earshot. When she told them that she could understand what they were saying, they looked embarrassed. Those experiences made her feel embarrassed at school.

Sarang was eager to prepare for tests and grades, and recently, she was receiving tutoring from her friend for SAT scores. She said that all other Koreans at her school gained straight As, but she had some Bs. She was worried about entering college because she knew that
there was a designated quota which was allotted to Asians in a college. She acquired the information from her guardian’s family member. She wanted to study business and management in a college.

**Junsu**

Junsu, an ESA student, earned good grades in Korea. He did not prepare much for studying abroad in Korea because his parents told him that he could learn English in America and did not have to prepare English; besides, he had good grades in English while he was in Korea.

Early in the first year in this town, nobody helped Junsu, and every minute was painful at school. He struggled with English proficiency and the culture gap in America. He felt frustrated in expressing himself in English. Since he did not know about American culture, he sometimes made many mistakes, which made people laugh. In addition, whenever he visited Korea, he often felt discomfort. He stated that he was becoming more familiar with American culture.

Over the school years in America, Junsu had little sense of the development of his English-language skills. Recently, he realized that while he has lived in America, he has never been comfortable with speaking English. He stated that he did not spend much time in studying English, but other Korean students must have studied English grammar and pronunciation. He decided to study English and began to learn to read, write, listen, and speak recently. He emphasized the special importance of improving English pronunciation. He believed that if someone was fluent in English pronunciation, teachers thought the person spoke well and looked smart. His friends’ teasing about his pronunciation motivated him to focus on English pronunciation.
While living with a guardian family, Junsu felt that he seemed to be stuck in his room. He could not stay in a living room freely in the guardian’s house. Nor could he ask his guardian to give him a ride whenever he wanted. He was expected to manage his time, money, and school work by himself, and this was not easy for him. He was especially tempted to surf the internet. He mentioned that internet addiction among Korean ESA teenagers was serious.

Junsu had few friends. Nowadays, he associated with a Chinese American and a Vietnamese American student. They often helped him, and he could relate to them because of their Asian backgrounds. Sometimes, he was annoyed by them because they teased him about English pronunciation. Generally, they were good natured people who studied hard. He seemed to be satisfied with his relationship with them. Even though he participated in a church youth group, he did not have close Korean friends. He would have liked to make more Korean friends. He stated that because of his competitive spirit in sports, it was hard to make Korean friends. He liked to win when playing sports. He said that in order to build up good relationship with Korean students, he could not show his high competitive spirit to them before their friendship was fully developed. He stated that while he was playing sports, his competitive spirit was displayed, but he was not really competitive when studying. He also had an African American friend with whom he played basketball. Presently, he participated in soccer team at school. Often, he felt alienation on the team because the majority of the players were whites. Still, he mentioned that he was fine because he focused on only games rather than relationships with other players.

Nowadays, Junsu regretted his resolution to stay in America alone. He said that he should have gone back to Korea with his family. He was homesick and missed his family. When he decided to stay in America, he considered two things. He wanted to have free time by escaping from his parents’ authority. In addition, he wanted to avoid the excessive competition
for college entrance in Korea. He explained that middle and upper class families in Korea sent their children to study abroad in order to avoid the severely competitive Korean educational system. Therefore, even in Hockton, the competition among Korean students for university entrance was becoming intense. He stressed that even though it was much harder to study in Korea, he preferred to live with his family. He felt lonely at home and school. He knew that it was too late for him to go back to Korea. Nowadays, he was receiving tutoring for ACT scores from a Korean teacher and English writing from an American teacher. In general, he had good grades at school. He had one B and all As among seven subjects in the last semester.

Mathew

Mathew, a second generation Korean American, came to Hockton from a small town in Midwest in America. The town which he came from was a very nice one. He grew up with people who were very pleasant and nice. When he was a child, he hung out with pastors’ children. He could connect with them because they were all pastors’ children. However, in this town, Hockton, even though he had a lot of friends including whites, African Americans, Koreans, and Korean Americans, he felt lonely. He sought friends with whom he could share his emotions and thoughts. He did not have a specific group with whom he could connect. He stated that not all pastors’ children were so loving, and they were even more confused than regular children and could lose their identity even more. For those who are pastors’ children and Korean, fitting into America was tough. Even more, church families expected them to love and meet God, but as kids, they did not know what that meant yet. School also expected them to give good influences to other people as pastors’ children. He felt much pressure from their expectations. He believed that if they did have support from their family, it was very hard to grow powerfully as
pastor’s children. He felt very lonely because he had not found other pastors’ children’s friends yet in Hockton.

Mathew was also saddened by the fact that churches were competitive. He stated that all churches serve for the one purpose of God, but other pastors’ children were so competitive. They bragged about how their churches were bigger. He heard that this kind of competition happened even amongst pastors. Because there were no youth groups at his church, he went to a youth group in another church.

In Hockton, Mathew experienced a huge revelation in his life. When he had grown up in the previous small town, he was always surrounded by Korean families, and he got a lot of attention from them. He confessed that he was an arrogant child. He always loved the attention bestowed on him and wanted to do the right thing for people to see. He did not discover himself before he came to this town. While meeting a lot of people in this town, he realized that he was all for God. The revelation changed his perspective about his life.

In Hockton, Mathew also had radical experiences. When he came to the middle school, the students were horrible to him. He was so innocent and loved talking and other kids thought that he was very feminine. They attacked him for being kind to the teacher and they called him nerd. It was a huge struggle for him. He regretted moving to Hockton. He wished to go to bigger cities. He thought that bigger cities had more mature people because people in those cities were culturally diverse and more open-minded and embraced so many different ideas and aspects of lives. He was emotionally hurt a lot in sixth grade.

The kids’ bullying negatively influenced Mathew. He preferred to be somebody in the seventh grade. He chose to be a gangster. He acted like a gangster and cursed a lot because he
was so lonely and had a problem with his self-esteem. He loved God, but he did not know God’s love well at that time. In eighth grade, he realized he was doing something wrong.

In high school, Mathew had excellent grades. His father expected him to go to an elite school. His mother wanted him to go to a good university, but did not push him as much as his father did. He did not feel much pressure or burden from his parents’ expectation. He stated that the smarter he was, the more people he could connect with. He said that nobody wanted to listen to someone who was not really that smart. He hoped to be a charismatic, smart, and humble leader.

Even though Mathew’s father did not graduate from a prestigious university, Mathew acknowledged that he was a very smart man. He read a lot of books and newspapers and talked with many smart people. His mother graduated from a good university. Both of them were very intelligent even though they did not have more advanced degrees to prove it. So, he too felt that he must be smart. Since he knew that people looked up to his parents, and he was in his parents’ image, he felt a little pressure as a pastor’s son as well as a first-born son in his family. He stated that he might feel bad if he did not go to an elite school, even though his parents did not feel the same way. He preferred to go to an Ivy League University.

James

Sometimes, James, a second generation biracial student, felt a cultural gap within his family. For example, when his mother spoke in Korean, he and his sister understood it, but his father did not understand it. In addition, whereas he and his sister ate lots of Korean food, his father did not like it as much as they did. All the family members except for his father had been involved in a Korean church.
James did not have significant challenges and struggles in his life. He described his life as not being difficult for him. He said that last year, getting good grades was just a challenge for him. That was the only difficult problem in his life. The years of freshmen and sophomore were pretty easy, but junior and senior years had been more difficult for him because of grades.

James’ close friends included one African American and several Korean Americans. He associated with them without many difficulties. He had grown up with Korean/Korean American church families. He was a member of praise team at a Korean ethnic church. He enjoyed participating in every event of the church. He associated well with Korean/Korean American people.

**Reading Habits and Attitudes**

The participants completed surveys and individual interviews that were developed to ascertain their reading habits and experiences with literature. Individual portraits provide a glimpse into their literate lives.

**Jiyoung**

Jiyoung identified herself as a proficient reader and enjoyed reading very much. She articulated that reading was important and was not too hard or easy for her. She read outside of school everyday or almost everyday and enjoyed going to a library.

For Jiyoung, reading was fun, providing her with an understanding of how other people lived and felt and helping her understand more of the world and find out what she wanted to know. It also gave her a break and helped her understand more about herself. She added that through reading, she could gain information and have emotional experiences. She strongly disagreed that reading is more for girls than for boys.
Jiyoung spent time in reading diverse genres of stories in both languages, Korean and English, including websites, newspapers, magazines, fiction, catalogs, travel books, text messages, and non-fiction. She read fiction, non-fiction, short stories, informational books, and magazines in English and novels, poetry, and non-fiction in Korean. She read fiction in Korean sometimes and in English for three hours almost everyday. She liked diverse types of fiction including adventure, science-fiction/fantasy, comedy, realistic teen fiction, and war/spy-related books. Sometimes, she read non-fiction in Korean or English. She read newspapers in Korean for thirty minutes once a week and ones in English for one hour twice a week. She read newspapers about the subjects of politics, social interest, art, and music in English and political and celebrity in Korean. She also read magazines in Korean for three hours per week for three times a week and in English for four hours a week for six times a week. She read magazines about the subjects of fashion, culture, world news, and social events in English and fashion in Korean. Through the internet, she read entertainment news in English and general news, politics, and entertainment in Korean.

Jiyoung read in the living room, garden, classroom, school library, café, town library, and other areas. She would like to have read more if she had more time and found out about subjects she was interested in, and if libraries were better and closer. She suggested that activities, such as participating in a book club, writing book reviews, designing displays for the library, and designing websites/magazines, be incorporated for her and others so as to be more engaged in readings.

Jiyoung’s family influenced her reading habits and experiences in a positive way. Her parents spent a lot of time reading everyday. They read books about philosophy, living, and religion. They encouraged her to read and arranged time to talk with her about what she read.
She started reading herself when she was three. They often read to her when she was a child. Her parents often took her to a library or bookshop and bought her books. Jiyoung’s brothers and sisters, friends, teachers, and teaching assistants helped her to talk with them and sometimes read with her. Many books (around 251-500) were shelved at her home. From the libraries, she borrowed books about artists sometimes because art was of her special interest. However, she felt that some of the readings in English were boring. What she found the most difficult was English words that contained philosophical ideas. She loved to read fiction and English was one of her favorite subjects.

Her parents’ attitude toward reading influenced her reading habits and experiences. However, their positive attitude toward reading did not have the same effect on all her family members. According to her, her sister did not like reading books, especially classic literature. Jiyoung found out that the book was not interesting to her sister and recommended that she read the same book Jiyoung read in the book club.

I try to read a lot because I think reading is really really important. It gives you so many things like informational and emotional like experiences. And, sometimes I really want to study English literature, then I don’t know, but there are so many things I want to do, like English is one of my favorite subject even though it’s kind of hard for me. But, like my family in general, my parents, they are really good readers. They have like huge book shelf filled with books, all kinds of books. We have like a library. And my sister, she didn’t like reading, because she thought like the book she read in school was kind of boring for her, I guess. It was kind of classic books, classic books, so she didn’t like it. But, like I recommended her this book (A Step from Heaven). I was really amazed because she really finished this book in one week. Yeah. That’s why I thought I should give her this book, because like it’s Korean. It’s, that’s Korean. I think she really liked it. (Interview, 11/21/09)

Overall, Jiyoung had a rich and complex literary life in two languages. She was a very enthusiastic and proficient reader and enjoyed diverse genres of readings. Her parents influenced her attitude toward reading in a positive way.
Mathew enjoyed reading quite a lot. He identified himself as a very good reader and rated himself as 9 out of 10. Reading was not hard for him, and he found books that interested him. He read fiction and non fiction written in English. He read outside of school once or twice a week, such as websites, newspapers, magazines, factual books, graphic novels, manuals, emails, song lyrics, posters/signs, and text messages.

Mathew enjoyed newspaper articles which contained subjects of politics, economic news or world news. He read general news and politics on the internet. He watched TV news for five hours a week. He read fiction for four hours a month and non-fiction for three hours a month. He liked adventure and romance/relationship stories among fiction. He read non fiction books about religion. At school, he enjoyed reading about ancient civilizations such as *The Iliad* by Homer. He found difficulties in understanding the characters’ intentions.

Mathew read because it was fun and helped him to get a skill for life, to understand how other people lived and felt, to understand more of the world, and to find out what he wanted to know. He was more likely to read if he had more time to read, he knew what to read, or his friends read more. He thought activities like reading groups with friends and talking about his favorite reading helped him and others read more. He strongly disagreed that reading is more for girls than for boys.

Many books (around 251-500) were shelved in Mathew’s home. He talked with his parents about what he read once or twice a week. His mother read with him. His parents spent a lot of time in reading books about Christian doctrines and newspapers and encouraged him to read. They often took him to a library or bookshop and bought him books. He occasionally
borrowed novels from a library and seldom bought novels. He confided that even though his parents stressed the importance of reading, he did not read many books. Now he regrets it:

Both my parents all throughout my life told me to read a lot of books. Throughout my life, I didn’t. You know. I put it off. I didn’t think that it’s important to me. But now… It’s huge. I didn’t realize it has such huge impact on our vocabulary and our English. But, I regret that. (Interview, 01/31/10)

Overall, Mathew enjoyed reading and identified himself as a very good reader. Especially, he enjoyed reading newspaper articles which dealt with the topics of politics, economics, and world news. However, he did not read often outside of school and now he regrets it.

Junsu

Junsu did not enjoy reading much and rated himself as 3 out of 10 in identifying himself as a reader. He read outside of school almost everyday, especially comics. He did not consider that he read enough, but he did not want to read more. He could not find books in which he was interested. He would be more likely to read if it was a subject in which he was interested. Reading was not much hard, easy, or boring for him. He read when he felt obligated. He liked adventure stories among fiction books. He did not like going to library. He thought reading groups with friends would motivate him and others to read more. He strongly disagreed that reading is more for girls than for boys. He read non-fiction in Korean for 10 minutes per week. He read magazines in English once a week for thirty minutes. He almost never read newspapers, fiction, or non fiction in English. What he found the most difficult was to understand ideas in texts in English and reading fast enough in English and in Korean.

Many books, around 251-500, were shelved in Junsu’s home in Korea. He talked with his family almost everyday about what he was reading when he was in Korea. His parents
encouraged him to read a lot whereas his guardians did sometimes. His parents spent a lot of
time reading, and his guardian did not read at all. His mom, especially, taught him to read and
emphasized the importance of reading. His parents often took him to a library or bookshop and
bought him books. They read books almost everyday and his sibling often read books.
Sometimes, he bought comic books written in Korean and borrowed fantasy books in English.
Some of the readings in English were boring for him.

Overall, Junsu appeared to be a reluctant reader. He almost never read fiction and non
fiction in English outside of school and sometimes, he read non fiction in Korean. Even though
his parents influenced his attitude toward reading in a positive way, he still struggled with active
involvement with readings. He appeared to have some limitations in reading in English.

Sarang

Sarang did not like reading much. She identified herself as a reluctant reader and rated
herself as 2 out of 10. Reading was hard for her. She was not very interested in reading outside
of class. She almost never read outside of class. However, she felt that she had to read more with
the belief that reading was important in her life. She believed that reading taught life skills. If
anything, she read websites, magazines, graphic novels, comics, emails, text messages, and
books and magazines about TV programs outside of school. She liked stories of
romance/relationships, science-fiction/fantasy, comedy, and poetry. She would be more likely to
read if she had more time or found subjects she was interested in. She would also find reading
easier, and enjoy it more if books were cheaper and had more pictures, and libraries were closer.
Activities she thought helpful for her and others included reading groups with friends, reading
for charity/sponsorship, and reading for a competition or prizes. She strongly disagreed with the
statement that reading is more for girls than for boys.
Not many books (around 1 to 10) were kept at her room in the U.S. There were more than 500 books in her home in Korea. Her parents encouraged her to read, especially her mom. Her mom spent a lot of time in reading, and her guardian sometimes encouraged her to read. Her parents seldom took her to a library or bookshop and sometimes bought her books related to music and famous novels.

Sarang seldom bought books and borrowed books from a library. She never read books for pleasure. Some of the readings written in English were boring for her. Sometimes, she read magazines written in Korean or in English. Sometimes, she read fiction in English for one hour a week. She liked to read magazines about social events, movie stars, and fashion. She liked romance novels and read materials about entertainment on the internet. She mostly read books as a class assignment. She considered herself to be a very slow reader, especially when she read details of readings.

Overall, Sarang was a reluctant reader and almost never read outside of class. She felt difficulties with staying focused on reading in general and appeared to have some limitations in reading in English. However, since she knew the importance of reading in her life, she would like to read more. She was seeking activities which could help her feel obligation to read.

Julie

Julie gave 5 out of 10 in identifying herself as a reader. She felt bored when she read books. Reading was fun only if she got to find a book that she liked to read about. Reading was important to her because she believed that reading was a skill for life, and helped her find out what she needed to know and understand about herself and others. She thought she did not read enough, and she wanted to read more. However, she could not find books that interested her. She
would be more likely to read books only if it was about subjects of her interest. She strongly disagreed that reading is more for girls than for boys.

Julie read outside of school everyday or almost everyday including websites, newspapers, magazines, manuals, emails, catalogues, song lyrics, and text messages. She liked to read adventure, romance/relationship, crime/detective, and realistic teen fiction. The activities she would like to do to help her and others read more included discussion group talking about her favorite reads and rating books for her peers.

Julie read newspapers, magazines, and fiction written in English whenever she saw or was made to read for 5 to 10 minutes through maximum 30 minutes a week, but it depended. She did not read non fiction books. She read anything that looked interesting, such as newspaper articles and magazines about pop and movie stars. She liked novels that would draw her into the book. Usually, the books that the school assigned were not what she liked to read about, especially the works of William Shakespeare. She hated reading when her teachers made her read things that she was not interested in and it made her stop reading. She made appreciative comments about a teacher who let her choose any books she wanted and write a book report about it. She found difficulties in understanding words and sometimes struggled with understanding readings.

Julie’s parents encouraged her to read a lot, but they never or almost never talked with her about what she was reading. Sometimes, her brother read and talked with her about what they were reading. In her home, there were not many books (only around 1 to 10 books). Her parents often read to her Korean fable stories when she was a child and bought her books, usually biographies of famous people. Sometimes, she bought summer reading books or books that
people recommended to her. Occasionally, she borrowed books from a library that people recommended to her.

Julie did not read at all in Korean and would not speak in Korean even though she could speak some Korean. She was using Korean at home, but would not use the language outside home. She appeared to feel ashamed because of her lack of Korean language proficiency.

Overall, Julie was not an enthusiastic reader. She enjoyed reading for pleasure only if she could find books in which she was interested. She read books, articles, and magazines only in English. Even though her parents emphasized the importance of reading and influenced her attitude toward reading positively, she still struggled with engagement in reading.

**James**

James enjoyed reading quite a lot and identified himself as a good reader. As a reader, he rated himself as 7 out of 10. He read outside of school once or twice a week, such as websites, magazines, fiction, graphic novels, comics, manuals, emails, posters/signs, text messages, and books & magazines in a language other than English. She strongly disagreed that reading is more for girls than for boys.

Reading was not difficult for James. He could find books that were interesting to him. He read because it was fun or he had to. He liked to read adventure, horror/ghost, science-fiction/fantasy, comedy, crime/detective, and sports-related books. He would like to read more if he had more time or enjoyed it more. He thought that the activities such as reading groups with friends, reading for a competition or prizes, and meeting authors/celebrity readers would help him and others read more. He read fiction and nonfiction written in English when he had time or nothing else to do for pleasure for one or two hours a week. He read novels, short stories, poetry,
and drama. On the internet, he read sport and general news. He found difficulties in reading fast
and understanding some words.

His home was equipped with between 101 to 250 books. Interestingly, even though his
parents spent time in reading, they did not encourage him to read. Sometimes, they took him to a
library or bookshop and bought him fiction. However, he never or almost never talked with his
family about what he was reading. Overall, James was a very good reader and enjoyed diverse
genres of reading in English.

Summary

The three ESA students and the three second generation Korean American students have
experienced diverse challenges and struggles through peer relationships, cultural gap within the
family, cultural conflicts between home and school, and diverse circumstances surrounding their
lives.

The participants all agreed that reading is important for their lives. Their parents’
positive attitudes toward reading influenced positively their attitudes toward reading. However,
Junsu, Sarang, and Julie identified themselves as being reluctant readers or having struggles with
being engaged in reading. They read books when they felt an obligation or discovered really
interesting books for them. Jiyoung, James, and Mathew identified themselves as very good or
proficient reader. Especially, Jiyoung was a very enthusiastic reader and enjoyed diverse genres
of readings in both languages.
Chapter Five

Distinct Themes and Responses

In this chapter, major recurring themes the students focused on across all materials/media will be explicated briefly, then specific analysis of selected distinct themes identified for each material/media will be presented, and finally other themes of importance will be examined. The participants more often focused their responses to the narratives around those themes rather than others.

General Themes

This section will focus on recurring themes that represent the interpretations of individuals of similar ethnic backgrounds to seven specific materials. Eight recurring themes were identified and these are viewed as cultural access points for the students to enter the storyworld. They include (a) pressure to succeed/academic achievement, (b) knowledge about heritage, (c) ethnic/racial identity, (d) racial stereotypes/prejudice/discrimination, (e) language barrier, (f) dating relationship, (g) immigrant hardship, and (h) cultural differences. The following table exhibits the recurring themes applied for each category:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>“Talk about Pressure to Succeed”</th>
<th>“Fighting for Respect”</th>
<th>“Stuck Between Two Worlds”</th>
<th>Finding My Voice</th>
<th>A Step From Heaven</th>
<th>Necessary Roughness</th>
<th>In Between Days</th>
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<td>Pressure to succeed/Academic achievement</td>
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**Figure 1.** Recurring themes for each category

The theme, pressure to succeed/academic achievement, deals with how K/KA children situate the influence of the family in their academic achievement. This category illustrates the interpretive process through which the students make sense of their parents’ influence in their schooling. While discussing the theme, knowledge about heritage, the students have a chance to recover distant memories about Korea through their parents, personal experiences, and other resources. The participants bring knowledge about Korea, including the celebration of cultural traditions, education, people, history, and culture. Ethnic/racial identity is an important theme in K/KA youth literature. Sometimes, K/KA children feel they are caught in between two worlds. The participants in my study expressed their views about growing up and finding themselves from individual and cultural perspectives. Racial stereotypes/prejudice/discrimination is one of the recurring themes found in their responses to the stories. The participants’ thematic understanding of racial barriers is revealed mainly through the participants’ responses to characterization in the stories. Language barrier, another theme, is discussed. Children who are not fluent in English face many difficulties in this society. Sometimes, K/KA students struggle
with English or Korean language. K/KA teenagers also experience struggles with romantic relationships which is another distinct theme in K/KA teen literature and media. Immigrant hardships and family relationships is another theme in K/KA literature. First generation Korean Americans often have a hard time economically and struggle with working long hours. Very often, their hard work and financial difficulties inflict lots of pain and trouble on family members. The participants talked about the American dream and the reality of immigrant lives. Cultural differences between the two worlds often make K/KA students experience cultural conflicts in a family, at school, and in a society. The theme of cultural differences was actively discussed among the participants.

**Specific Analysis of Selected Themes/Distinct Themes Identified for Each Category**

This analysis reveals the complexities of the students’ interpretations for each category: print media/newspapers, novels, and cinematic images. Selected themes identified for each category are discussed.

**Responses to print media/newspapers**

The newspaper articles were selected from *LA Youth* online resources. The newspaper is published every two months and distributed in most Los Angeles area public and private middle schools and high schools. It provides a space for teenagers to share their voices through the press and enhance their critical thinking, literacy skills, and civic education. K/KA teen journalists, who wrote the selected articles, expressed their viewpoints about various issues with which they had struggled through this outlet.

**Talk about Pressure to Succeed - Academic achievement**

Asian Pacific American (APA) families are influential in encouraging their children to seek high academic achievement. Many APA parents expect their children to earn straight As
and go to and graduate from elite school in order to aid their family’s economic status. Many APA students struggle with the parental demands and societal pressure based on the myth of a “model minority” (Hune, 1998).

The participants discussed the issue of Korean parents’ expectations and pressure for considerable amounts of time in response to the newspaper article, “Talk about Pressure to Succeed.” In this article, a K/KA high school boy, Howard, expresses his feelings about parental pressure. His parents expect him to get straight A’s, excel in an Eagle Boy Scout team and in Tae Kwon Do, and be first cello. His father stressed that all the hard work would pay off later in his life and expected that Howard must be able to follow his footsteps to succeed. Howard pointed out that Asian parents, especially his parents, gave a lot of pressure to their children, but the children need time to relax and enjoy their lives. The issue is a recurring cultural theme embedded in K/KA young adult novels. The five participants except for Jiyoung attended in the book club which was held in a public library and gave their viewpoints about parental pressure and expectations in response to the article.

Julie searched for the rationale on the basis of her family background. She stated that Korean education had higher expectations than American system had, and the different expectations led to conflicts between Korean parents and their children who grew up in America. She stressed that Korean parents’ expectation and pressure were rooted in the Korean education which they received. In response to the article, she wrote,

In Korea, they expect the students to achieve in school and do well, if they don’t then, they will get spanked. In America where Howard goes to school, the expectations are not as high as Korea. The students are responsible to achieve and keep up with school. I feel like that his parents and some parents don’t understand that they are in a different setting and that the expectations are different. I also feel like that his parents brought their expectations from Korea. (Written response, 8/29/09)
The participants shared their experiences at home regarding the issue. They all agreed with the high expectations of their parents. Julie especially shared her stressful experiences in the relationship with her mother. In the following excerpt, James asked a question about how they felt and responded when their parents pushed them to seek for high academic achievement.

James: How does that make you feel?
Julie: Being pressured?
James: Yeah. How do you deal with that?
Julie: I don’t know. I kind of, fight with my parents about that a lot. Because it’s like, I tried [my] best. But my parents don’t think I’m trying my best. So then they gave nagging, you should get better grades than A.
Sarang: So you got an A?
Julie: Yeah. I’ve got As, but then if I had one B, they get so mad. I’m sick. I’m trying my best. That’s all I can do. You should be happy. I’m not like skipping school works and classes. You know. It makes me very stressed out, a lot. I don’t know about you.
Mathew: My parents would be pretty disappointed with Bs. I’ve never gotten Bs. But, they’d be very disappointed about it.
Julie: So you have straight As?
Mathew: Yeah. (spoken response, 08/29/09)
Junsu shared his experiences of feeling pressure from his parents in Korea. He explained that his mom in Korea pushed him to get straight As, and if he did not meet his parents’ expectation, he should go back to Korea.

James: Junsu, why don’t you say something?
Junsu: 저도 비슷해요. 똑같에도요. (My case is similar. The same)
Sarang: 똑같에도 (The same)
Eunhyun: 한국에 있는 부모님? (parents in Korea?)
Junsu: 예? (Yeah)

Eunhyun: Your parents?

Junsu: 가끔 뭐 전화가 와요. 지금 영화 보고 있는데, 핸드폰으로 전화가 와요. 엄마지요. 전짜 받기 싫은데, 영화보고 있는데 전화가 오네요. (Sometimes, they call me while I am watching movies. It is my mom. I don’t want to pick up the phone when I am watching movies)
(All are laughing)

Junsu: 하필 항상 영화보고 있을 때만 전화가 와가지고. (Why do they call me when I am watching movies?)

Sarang: That’s true. That’s true. When I am watching movies, they call me like three times.

Junsu: 그렇다고 학교 숙제 다 했어? 나 하나도 안 했는데.. 어, 나 다했어. 그래서 B가 조금 있었어요. 엄마한테, 그 grade 리포트가, 우리 제가 배장로님 집에 갔어요. 제가, 거기로 가는거예요. 우리집으로 안 오고, 우리집으로 오면 빨리 내가 메일 박스 열고 해 가지고 어떻게 하는데, 다른데로 가니까 우리 집사님한테 주잖아요. 그래가지고 나 알아봤어요. 우리엄마한테 점수 보내가지고 그때 잡짜 혼났어요. 그래서 이번에 straight A 안 받으면 잡짜 지 한국가야 돼요. 지금 죽어라고 하고 있어요. (At that time, did I do homework? I didn’t do it at all. I said I did it. I had a few Bs in my school report. The grade report was sent to my mom in Korea when I was living in elder Park’s house. It was sent there, not to my current house. If it were sent to our current house, I could pick it up in the mailbox and deal with it. But it was sent there, it was given to our deacon. Therefore, my mom came to know it. She sent the report to my mom, and I really got scolded. Therefore, at this time, if I don’t get straight As, I really have to go back to Korea. I am working hard right now.” (Spoken response, 08/29/09)

By providing counter examples, Sarang attempted to subvert the generalization that

Korean parents had high expectations and gave pressure to their children. The examples were
drawn from her background and experiences in Korea. The cases of her parents and her friend
could be the supporting examples for her argument.

My friend, Kathy studies hard especially when the finals come because her parents don’t
let her hang out with her friends if she gets lower than B+ for the semester grade. Plus,
when I was in Korea, I didn’t study at all. But my parents didn’t say much about that.
After I came here, US, I got to know how important to study and prepare for future. I
naturally studied more and more. Now, my parents expect me to go to fine college. So I
believe it is just any parents’ thing. (Written response, 8/29/09)
James pointed out the underlying intention strict parents had. He mentioned that hard work had some benefits, as opposed to being lazy. On the other hand, he gave a poignant comment that too much strictness could have a detrimental effect on children, such as lack of sleep and unhealthiness.

His parents want him to do this so that he will be prepared later on when he has a job, but it is not necessary to make him work so hard. He doesn’t have time to enjoy his life or do any of the things that he wants to do. But studying all day really does prepare you well. It gets you in the habit of not being lazy. Strict parents are good, but if they make you work that hard and force you to work that hard, then it might be a little too strict. It can actually be bad for kids to be worked so hard. They don’t get enough sleep and are not as healthy as they should be. (Written response, 8/29/09)

Mathew also provided an analysis of strict Korean parents. He pointed out that many Korean parents might not give their children genuine unconditional love if they too much focus on their children’s academic achievement rather than love. The children might have to work hard in order to earn their parents’ acceptance. This is not genuine love of parents.

I think many Korean parents forget the most important thing when raising a child. This is love. The mind and heart are two very different things. Having great knowledge does not make you a good strong-hearted person. You could be both very smart and very childish. If kids aren’t taught love and care, then the only thing growing is their brain. Their kids shouldn’t have to earn their parents’ love. The parents should love them unconditionally. This is what Howard’s parents might lack. (Written response, 8/29/09)

In response to the article, “Pressure to Succeed,” the students shared their experiences of feeling parental pressure and provided rationale for the pressure. They also analyzed the underlying intention strict parents had and mentioned the negative result ensued. The article, “Fighting for Respect,” allowed students to discuss their responses to and understanding about racial prejudice and discrimination.
Fighting for Respect – Language barrier and racial prejudice/discrimination

Racial prejudices/discrimination is a distinct theme identified in the newspaper article. Often, Asians are portrayed as having slanted eyes, and some people use the stereotype to make derisive racist jokes about children of Asian descent. The five students except for Jiyoung attended this discussion group in a public library. They discussed their interpretations and understanding in response to the newspaper article, “Fighting for Respect.” In this article, the subject, Richard, revealed his painful experiences as a new immigrant in America. His schoolmates ridiculed him because of his lack of English proficiency and made racist remarks. Even school teachers nonchalantly made racist jokes. Those continued embarrassing moments engendered serious consequences. He felt like an outsider. He had attempted to accept those racist stereotypes and derisive jokes, but finally transformed into a boy who was full of anger and bitterness and out of control. He got into serious trouble for fighting.

The participants’ explanation and examples below demonstrated that the stereotypes about Asians were partly based on real examples in their lives, but on the other hand, they felt hurt when they heard about them. Mathew expressed his painful feelings when he heard such racist jokes. Julie and Sarang imitated those who enacted the racist jokes. Sarang explained what the gesture meant, and Junsu provided an example of a classmate who teased him about his eyes.

Mathew: I heard a lot of racist jokes. But they were more likely to really hurt me. They are just, kids are funny and stuff.

Julie: Like this (making slanted eyes with hands)

Sarang: Yeah. This? (making slanted eyes with hands) not to me.

Mathew: This? (making slanted eyes with hands) everything, man.

Eunhyun: This? (making slanted eyes with hands)

Julie: Everything
Mathew: This and everything

Junsug: 제 친구가 이렇게 중국애가 옆에 있더군가 이렇게 있더라고요. (When my friend did this (making slanted eyes in a different direction), a Chinese man next to him was doing this.) (everyone is laughing)

Eunhyun: 왜 이렇게거야? 이거? 눈이. (Why do they do this?)

Sarang: 눈이 작고 막, 안 보일 것 같다고. (My eyes are very small, so that I might not be able to see with eyes)

Mathew: Could you notice all Asian eyes are generally a little wider?

Eunhyun: Yeah.

Junsu: 파키ستان에서 온 애가 있는데요. 저보고, 너 어떻게 렌즈 같은 거 걸 수나 않아, 이렇게 묻는 거예요. (There is a guy who came from Pakistan. He asked me if I could wear contact lens.) (Spoken response, 08/29/09)

The participants also brought up another stereotype about Asians in the following excerpt. Mathew pointed out that the stereotypical image of ‘bad drivers’ was not true. James promptly agreed with Mathew’s opinion. However, Junsu and Sarang provided examples which reinforced the stereotypical image. Finally, when James asked about the authenticity of the stereotype, everyone was laughing.

Mathew: The thing about bad drivers does not true.

James: I hate that.

Eunhyun: Asians are bad driver?

Mathew: That’s what they said.

Eunhyun: Really?

Junsu: 보험에서도 더 비싸요. (In terms of insurance, it is more expensive.)

Sarang: Yeah. Insurance is really expensive for internationals.
Junsu: 근데, 한국 갔는데, 완전히 개판이에요. (By the way, I went to Korea. It was horrible.)

Sarang: 근데(By the way), I don’t know. They suck. I mean, in Korea, I was scared. For example, bus drivers.

Mathew: In Korea, bus drivers are crazy.

Sarang: I was scared.

Junsu: 길에서 나올때 있잖아요, 밖으로. 그냥 보지도 않고 그냥 꽤 나와요. (They drive into the street without looking around.)

Sarang: They just drive, without considering anything.

Junsu: 근데, 진짜. 그건 true있겠죠. 운전 못하는거. (By the way, it seemed true that Korean people don’t drive well.)

James: So you think that’s a true stereotype? (everyone is laughing)

Mathew: He didn’t answer. (Spoken response, 08/29/09)

The participants focused on Richard, the subject in this newspaper article. Julie displayed her empathy with Richard and analyzed his psychological stages. She finally pointed out that the people who made fun of him could not dodge the question of who should be responsible for having a negative psychological effect on Richard. She took the side of Richard, a victim of the story. Her analysis of subject and personal empathetic response were interconnected. She analyzed the development of his stages, proceeding from an angry and lonely stage to a stage of a typical loner. She pointed out that because of being made fun of, Richard could not do well in school, and argued that if his school friends had not made fun of him, then he would have been a different person.

Richard was just not welcomed at school. Later on during his school years he became more angry and became not a very happy person to be around. If someone bothered him about something he would push the person down and would just hurt them. Afterwards his angry stage, he had his lonely stage. His lonely state he would play by himself and be a typical loner. I feel that maybe if his school friends didn’t make fun of him he would have been a different person. (Written response, 8/29/09)
James’ main focus was on the reaction of Richard to the surroundings. He interpreted Richard’s reaction on the basis of his personal experiences and personality. He stated that he did not feel the same feeling of disrespect when his friends made racist jokes. According to him, the reason why Richard reacted in the way he did was because he was new and did not know how to react. Based on his personal experiences, James questioned why Richard could feel disrespect. He could not understand Richard because he did not feel disrespect and ignored people when they made racist jokes about him. He seemed to assume that similar racial incidents or jokes had the same impact on people without consideration of their backgrounds, experiences, and contexts.

Richard has a big problem. People pick on him and he just builds up the anger inside him. He feels really disrespected when people joke around, even though they are not trying to be mean. And he explodes because he wants people to stop messing with him and he doesn’t know what else to do. Even though I am only half Asian and don’t even look Asian, my friends still say racist jokes to me. It doesn’t bother me like it does Richard. I don’t feel disrespected because they joke around that with everyone and with every race. The way Richard reacts to the way people treat him is a bad way. But he is new to America and is in a completely new place. He does not know how to react and does not know that they just joke around a lot. Building up anger is a very bad thing, but he is treated badly. (Written response, 8/29/09)

During the discussion about the issues emerged in this article, such as language barrier and racial prejudices/discrimination, Junsu, an ESA student, shared that when he was teased by schoolmates because of his lack of English proficiency, he just ignored those people. The article brought forth a deep empathy for Richard’s situation in Junsu. He added a comment with a sign that immigrant life was very hard. On the other hand, Sarang, another ESA student, stated that she could not understand Richard because she was different from him. She expressed that if Richard could not handle or tolerate the embarrassing moments, he should go back to Korea because he was a perpetual foreigner. She provided her experience in Korea to support her argument. In Korea, she was a member of majority group and when new international students
came to her school, she also teased them like those who made racist jokes on Richard. Mathew added that because of those kinds of experiences, newly arrived Korean students prefer hanging out with Koreans to other racial groups of students.

In summary, in response to the newspaper article, “Fighting for Respect,” the participants shared painful feelings when they heard ridiculing racist jokes, expressed feelings of empathy for the subject, or evaluated the subject’s reaction. Even though both Julie and James are second generation students, their attitudes toward the immigrant student subject, Richard in the article, were not the same. Junsu and Sarang, ESA students, also had different attitudes regarding the subject’s reaction in the article. Personal experiences and personality might be important elements which were conducive to their interpretations and perspectives. The next section presents the participants’ responses to another newspaper article, “Stuck Between Two Worlds.”

**Stuck Between Two Worlds - Ethnic/racial identity**

As Cai (1992) notes, many Asian American children feel isolated because they are treated as Oriental and face racial prejudice and discrimination. To be assimilated into mainstream culture, the children have to accept its dominant ideology, which very often makes them silent, and accept racial discrimination and prejudices. However, the children who cannot fit in the mainstream culture do not belong to their parents’ culture because they are raised in America (Harada, 1998). They are caught between two cultures.

In this newspaper article, Elliot, a Korean American high school student, struggled to find his identity in between two cultures. He described himself as 1.5 generation Korean American because he was raised in Korea as a kid and moved to the U.S. Since he wanted to embrace new culture, he tried hard to associate with American friends, but he noticed that there
were barriers to fit in the group. For example, he grew frustrated because of American slang he did not know and Korean accent when he spoke in English. On the other hand, he felt cultural gap from Korea when he visited Korea. He came to struggle with finding his identity. Finally, he found a group in which he felt belongings. The group consisted of 1.5 generation Korean American students. They were encompassing both Korean and American identities and provided a chance to allow Elliot to redefine his identity.

Six students participated in the group discussion which was held in a public library. In response to the newspaper article, “Stuck Between Two Worlds,” the participants discussed language barrier which influences their ethnic/racial identity development. Junsu pointed out that English language barrier, especially in relation to American slang and Korean accents, made it difficult for him to make friends. Mathew also mentioned that the hardest part of being stuck between two cultures was a language barrier. Lack of the proficiency of Korean language made it difficult for him to socialize with Koreans deeply and to indulge in real serious conversation.

Mathew wrote that there were differences between Elliot, the subject in the article, and him even though they were not great. He expressed his experiences of racial segregation, but he acknowledged that racial segregation existed, and Elliot experienced much serious segregation:

> I don’t have that much segregation at my school as much as Elliot does, but it’s still there. I believe everyone’s experienced racism in one form or another wherever you may be. I like socializing with every generation of Koreans but my only problem is with those Koreans who make a mess of their own self and our Korean reputation as a whole. (Written response, 09/05/09)

Mathew revealed identity struggles between the two cultures. He confided that there were times when he struggled with his Korean identity. But, now he enjoyed bicultural identity and pointed out the benefits of having both cultures:
I enjoy balancing both worlds. I love having a double life because not only do you have more knowledge of both cultures you also have an open mind to this world. (Written response, 09/05/09)

James also stressed the benefits of bicultural identity and gave suggestions to Elliot. When his friends made racist jokes about him, he neither really cared much, nor did he feel disrespect. He pointed out the benefit of cultural hybridity rather than sticking between the two cultures and advised Elliot that he could live with mixed cultures in normal lives.

Elliot struggles because he feels like he is losing a part of his self. He is losing some of his Korean culture, but he is also gaining an American culture. He is changing and he shouldn’t be so worried and feeling like he no longer has an identity. He thinks that if he is a part of a culture he must understand everything about it and be that culture 100%. But a lot of people have mixed cultures and still live perfectly normal lives….The 1.5s still talked about the American culture and lived it, but did not change as much as Elliot did. (Written response, 09/05/09)

James also mentioned that there were times when he wished he was more fluent in speaking Korean, but it did not bother him much. He wrote that he definitely wasn’t stuck between two worlds, but he switched between both cultures.

In response to the newspaper article, “Stuck Between Two Worlds,” the participants shared their experiences of racial segregation, pointed out positive views about bicultural identity and advised the subject in the article that he could live a normal life with mixed cultures. The next section presents the students’ responses and understanding of the three novels, Finding My Voice (Lee, 1992), A Step from Heaven (An Na, 2001), and Necessary Roughness (Lee, 1996).

Responses to novels

The two novels, Finding My Voice and Necessary Roughness, were recommended as popular paperbacks for young adult on the list of multicultural fiction by American Library Association. A Step from Heaven was chosen as the best young adult book and received the Printz Award in 2002 for its literary excellence. The novels also received impressive evaluation
form professional reviewers, such as Kirkus Review, Hone Book, Booklist, and/or School Library Journal. They depict K/KA children’s lives vividly from the perspectives of cultural insiders and contain diverse issues of Korean American teens including immigrant families, dating relationships, racism, academic achievement, and so forth.

**Finding My Voice - Racial discrimination**

The participants’ responses to examples of racial incidents identified in the novel exhibited not only acknowledgement of the existence of racial segregation, but also diverse reactions and interpretations. Descriptions of vivid accounts of racism could engender readers’ feeling of anger, create empathy with the victim, and give rationale for racism (Books & Hampton, 2005). The process of sharing diverse viewpoints revealed how the intersection of readers’ cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and personal characters can transact with the texts. The participants examined the character’s intentions and actions through individual and cultural perspectives.

Junsu could relate to the main character’s struggles. His responses revealed his feeling of empathy with the victim who encountered racial injustices. He stated that he could understand how hard Ellen’s high school life was. He pointed out that she was silent and did not talk to principal when she encountered a racist remark from her teacher for fear of getting a bad grade.

I can understand how hard was high school years for her……She is one of people who (was) hurt by racism. As she broke the bottle in science room, she was very in trouble. In a second, her chemistry teacher accidently saw her trying to fix it. Therefore (the) teacher was having conversation with her. When the teacher just realized that she is a Korean, he just walked away.

She is also one of Asians who can give up everything to get a good grade. After the teacher walked away from science room, she could just go to principal and say what happened. But she did not do it, because she is scared that he is going to give her bad grades. As I said above, she has so many problems. I assert so many people have struggled like her. I wish this book is happy ending. (Written response, 09/19/09)
Jiyoung connected her life to Ellen’s life. She could relate Ellen’s experience of racism to her own school experiences. She stated,

Racism was one of the biggest roles in the story. I can say most of her conflicts were from racism. I’ve never been called by a name but I can understand how she felt when she was called by a name. Since 99% of the town population is all white people, sometimes I feel I’m in a wrong place. The first day of school, everyone was staring at me. I was a new girl and an Asian. I don’t care what other people think about me anymore and people are more open minded to me because they know me more than last year. I think racism comes from ignorance. If you don’t know about someone, you don’t want to talk about him/her. If people get to know you and if they realize you are just a person like themselves, there will be no racism. I think it’s important to be open-minded. (Written response, 09/12/09)

Jiyoung’s view about racism was constructed on the basis of her school experiences. She found that racism stemmed from people’s ignorance. She pointed out people discriminate against others by race without knowing about them. She felt alienation at school and the experience helped her understand how Ellen felt.

Julie displayed expressions of her resentment against the people making fun of Ellen, the main character in the novel. She pointed out the importance of support of her friends. She hypothesized that if Ellen’s friends were not there, she might be angry and fall into depression. She related the story of her friend’s case at school. She mentioned that many people made fun of some people about things they could not change because it made them feel happy. Those people did not consider how they felt about who they made fun of. She took the side of the victim and concluded that those who made fun of people were very rude.

People make fun of other people because it makes them feel happy and comfortable. It makes them feel great. I think in the book Marsha is being mean to Ellen because maybe she is just jealous of something that Ellen might have that she doesn’t have, maybe like Tomper. Does Marsha feel happy when she makes other people in pain? At school there are so many people that do that. Over this week, my Asian friend was made fun of because of how she looked like. Since she has small squinty eyes, they said that she looked like that she smoked and stuff. I thought that was very rude. Honestly, she can’t help how she looks like. Afterwards, she was very hurt. She told me that she didn’t want
to be at this school and that she hates this school. I think this is how Ellen feels sometimes, but her friends are here to support. Without her friends I think that she wouldn’t be where she is right now. (Written response, 09/12/09)

Some participants in this study focused on Ellen’s reactions to racially discriminating moments. Sarang’s focus was on criticism of Ellen rather than those who enacted injustice. In response to this novel, she compared the story character’s reaction with her hypothetical reaction to the similar situation. She stated,

I personally didn’t like Ellen. I think it’s because I’m totally different compared to Ellen. If I was called, “Chink,” I would do something to that person or talk with him/her. (Written response, 10/03/09)

Sarang stressed that she would confront the person if she were in the same situation. Her different personality from Ellen’s could make her criticize the story character.

The participants questioned that Ellen really found her voice at the end of the story. When I asked about Ellen’s changed attitude toward Marsha, both Sarang and Jiyoung agreed that Ellen’s action was based on her emotional response rather than her inner voice. As evidence, Sarang provided Ellen’s unchanged attitude toward other people at the graduation ceremony. She mentioned that Ellen did not do anything to those who called her names and just internalized the racist remarks as before.

Eunhyun: What about her confrontation? She punched Marsha first, and then Marsha hit Ellen with a bottle. However, before that, she hated confrontations. What do you think of that kind of change?

Sarang: Because she is drunk.

Jiyoung: Yeah. I don’t think she really tries to do, like speak up. She was just emotional.

Sarang: Even at the graduation, she tolerated “Chung”?

Jiyoung: “Chink”

Sarang: Ah, “Chink.” She didn’t even do anything about it, even at the end. (Spoken response, 10/03/09)
In response to *Finding My Voice*, regarding the issue of racism, the participants displayed acknowledgment of the existence of racial segregation and diverse reactions and interpretations about the issue. The students exhibited expressions of resentment and empathy with the victim, examined reason for racism, and criticized the main character’s reaction. The next section discusses the students’ responses to the novel, *A Step from Heaven* (An Na, 2001).

**A Step from Heaven - Immigrant hardships and family relationships**

The participants enjoyed the novel. Generally, they evaluated the novel as good. One of the noticeable thing is that ESA students could relate more easily to the story than second generation students because they have undergone similar experiences through the process of adjustment to the new country. For example, whereas Mathew and Julie expressed they had never learned how newcomers felt before they read this novel, Junsu could relate to the story.

> It’s hard to relate to the story, but I learned how people feel when they first came here. They don’t know what to do, how to speak the language, how society works. I learned how they feel, how they deal with this. It was very emotional. It was pretty good. I liked it a lot. (Julie, Spoken response, 10/24/09)

> It’s interesting. I never think about it because I was born here. I’ve never thought “Oh, America, America.” I never experienced that. (Mathew, Spoken response, 10/24/09)

> In my case, when I was in middle school, my father told me that you gonna go to America once or later. I was so surprised because I got so many friends there and fun things there. I didn’t want to go to America….. Heaven means America. And she (YoungJu) thought America was heaven. But when she came here, she realized that it’s not true. It’s actually far away from heaven. (Junsu, Spoken response, 10/24/09)

The participants focused on immigrant hardships of YoungJu’s family in the novel. They especially focused on analyzing the abusive father character for a considerable time during the discussions. They pointed out that he was angry at everything including himself and his society. Mathew pointed out the patriarchal characteristics of the abusive father.
He (Young Ju’s father) wants them to be inferior. Hitting them shows his power over the household or everywhere else. It seems YoungJu and her mother growing unhappiness about it. Her father can’t do much about it. At home, he wants to be the man of the household. (Mathew, Spoken response, 10/24/09)

Julie and Sarang thought the reason for his abuse and attitude was the family economic crisis:

I think he became what he is right now because maybe economy, money situation. (Julie, 10/24/09)

I realized how much money is important. The father is the center of his family. He has to take responsibility for his family. (Sarang, Spoken response, 10/24/09)

However, Jiyoung expressed a different point of view about people in poverty. She pointed out that happiness did not reside in money, but the value they pursued. Her analysis focused on the problem of the father character rather than the context he encountered.

Many people don’t have time to think about what life is for. What can make their life happier? But earning money, buying new house, buying new car, sending his children to good school will make him happy because his family is happy. But what makes him alive is not like earning money everyday, and going to clean other people’s offices. He just doesn’t know how to enjoy. Even if he is in bad situation like this, he can be happier if he can have other values, other characteristics, point of views in life. But it is because of his character. He is very stubborn. (Spoken response, 10/24/09)

When Jiyoung asked if he had to go back to Korea or wanted to go there, Junsu pointed out the difficulties of the father’s adjustment to the new country. He figured out the father’s intentions and provided explanations.

I think he wanted to go back to Korea because he was so mad all the time at the family. He didn’t fit in American society. (Spoken response, 11/14/09)

During the discussions of the novel A Step from Heaven, the students focused on immigrant hardships, especially on the abusive father’s character. They discussed the patriarchal characteristics of the abusive father, new environment and culture, language barrier, personality,
and economic crisis. The next section presents the students’ responses to the novel *Necessary Roughness* (Lee, 1996)

**Necessary Roughness - Cultural differences and racial discrimination**

The main themes discussed by the students as a result of reading the novel, *Necessary Roughness*, in response to this novel included racism, academic achievement, and cultural differences. The discussion leaders brought up the issues of racism and relationship between sports and study because they were related to the story content. Regarding the incident of rape in this novel, the participants stated that the football teammates raped Chan, the main character, on purpose. They pointed out the intentions of the players and Chan’s silence. The teammates did not want to play with Asians in the team and since Chan did not want to make the case worse, he did not tell the coach about the incident.

One of the distinct topics was cultural differences between the two worlds which often made K/KA students experience cultural conflicts within the family or in society. In the following excerpt, the students discussed the cultural gap between the father and the son in the novel. They pointed out that the cultural differences between Chan’s father, the first generation Korean immigrant, and Chan, who had grown up in America, created the cultural conflicts in the novel. Mathew provided an example of his relationship with his father. Other students expressed feelings about their parents’ authoritative attitude toward them.

Eunhyun: What’s wrong between Chan and his father?

Julie: They don’t get along.

Mathew: They talked about how like, my Abogee would say, “If you are in Korea, I would do this. You wouldn’t be able to do that. You wouldn’t be able to talk to me like that if you are in Korea.” So, probably that cultural difference.

Jiyoung: Do you guys have any parents talking like that? Like father?
Mathew: Maybe, once, my dad would be like, “that’s not respect. You have to talk in a way you do respect.”

Sarang: Something like, because I said so.

Jiyoung: Because I said so.

Sarang: Oh, I hate that. (Spoken response, 10/31/09)

The issue of cultural differences was extended to the discussion of a social issue in Korea. Last fall, a leader of popular dance group 2 PM was kicked out from the group or quit being a member and returned to America. Jaebum, the leader, is a second generation Korean American. He posted very negative words about Korea on his homepage a few years ago when he was not popular. But, recently, Korean people found out the slanderous verbal abuse about Korea from his homepage and became infuriated. The participants actively displayed their opinions about the issue. Mathew initially mentioned:

참 불쌍한 것 같애요. 참 철이 없는것 같애요. (I took pity on him. He doesn’t seem to be mature.) Like the more famous you get though, definitely, the more careful you must be. (Spoken response, 10/31/09)

Julie and Mathew did not know that Jaebum’s writing was written four years ago. They thought he wrote it recently after Jaebum became popular. James knew the story, but Junsu did not know about it. Jiyoung provided them with correct information. Julie also added her opinion. Mathew added that Korean people acted like they made a mistake in their lives.

Sarang: “It was four years ago.”

Jiyoung: “Yeah. He was a singer. He was practicing.”

Julie: If it started five years or four years ago, it doesn’t really matter…. 

Jiyoung: People can change a lot.
Julie: They gonna be understanding too because it’s new society, it’s new environment. He’s adapting to new thing, trying to learn Korean stuff. (Spoken response, 10/31/09)

The participants finally had a growing consensus of their opinions on this issue. They concluded that even though Jaebum made a big mistake, it took awhile for him to adjust to the new culture because it was written four years ago when he was practicing. He was not mature, and they took pity on him. They tried to place themselves in Jaebum’s shoes while they acknowledged that he had made major mistakes about it because they knew how hard it was to adjust to new culture even though it was the country of their heritage.

In another session, Junsu brought up the issue again. Mathew also said that he was invited to go back to Korea. All members said, “it’s good.” Junsu pointed out that Jaebum admitted his fault and added, “If I were Jaebum, I might explain why I did thing[s] or like that. But Jaebum didn’t fight, but said that it’s his fault.” (Spoken response, 11/14/09)

Overall, the participants gave a good evaluation on this book while comparing the book with Finding My Voice written by the same author. They displayed strong interest in the novel.

I think it has huge climax in the book. I think it made the book a lot more interesting. (Mathew, Spoken response, 11/14/09)

I think this book is more related to what we actually go through at high school. If you move to different school, how you actually feel. But Finding My Voice is very cheesy, like you know what’s gonna happen and next. This one is gonna like question. (Julie, Spoken response, 11/14/09)

I think the author did a good job in writing as a perspective of teenager boy, like it wasn’t anything girly about the story (compared to Finding My Voice). (Jiyoung, Spoken response, 10/31/09)

One of the distinct topics during the discussions about Necessary Roughness was the cultural differences, which often made K/KA students experience cultural conflicts within the family or in society. They discussed the intergenerational cultural differences within the family
and adjustment to new country, the country of their heritage. The students talked about the film, *In Between Days* (Kim, 2006) in the next section.

**Responses to cinematic images**

Some Asian American documentaries and experimental films contain liberating images in order to facilitate Asian American community in building and political mobilization (Xing, 1998). This film, *In Between Days*, is one of the standouts of the 2006 Sundance Film Festival for its excellence as an independent and experimental film. It portrays intensified feelings of a Korean immigrant girl in a North American city.

**In Between Days - Dating relationships**

Of the two discussion sessions, one session consisted of the five students except for Sarang and was held in a public library. The other session was held in a university library and all of the members participated in the discussion group. Overall, all of the members except for Jiyoung indicated that they did not like the movie. They expressed that it was a depressing story. They did not like the ending because there was no change. They agreed that the movie was a kind of documentary rather than a traditional movie with a narrative structure. Mathew said that it was a documentary portraying the life of a miserable Korean American teen girl. James added that the movie was pointless. Particularly, the different point of views about the movie between Mathew and Jiyoung were noticeable. Mathew made a grimace after he watched parts of the movie. He explained why it made him felt disappointed:

> Such dangerous thing about this movie. Let’s say American kids watch this movie, they’re gonna believe almost every Asian is like that. That’s why I was so disappointed. This is one Asian girl. (Spoken response, 11/21/09)

However, Jiyoung opposed Mathew’s argument. And Mathew shared his experiences to support his argument.
Jiyoung: It’s realistic…. Some people like movies because they have meanings. Not every movie can show every characteristic of one race.

Mathew: You know when I watch movie, there is a new angle of life I can look at. But not everyone watches movies like that.

Jiyoung: But like for Sundance critics, I don’t think they would have thought like “Oh, Korean’s like this.” I don’t think so. (Spoken response, 11/21/09)

Mathew was very cautious about the influence of the movie whereas for Jiyoung it was about the story of a Korean girl in North America. They did not find consensus about their viewpoints.

Mathew and Jiyoung expanded their discussion on the main character of the movie, Amie. The lonely, immigrant girl has a romantic relationship with a Korean American boy and he is the only friend she has. The two participants actively talked about Amie’s intention and decision, especially about her life attitude. Mathew viewed Amie as a selfish girl:

She is so selfish. She doesn’t try to change it, just follow her own desire. She even doesn’t realize what she is doing. She is so immature. (Spoken response, 11/21/09)

By contrast, Jiyoung attempted to understand the girl’s situation in her shoes.

Jiyoung: You feel something, but you cannot do anything. You can’t change anything. You feel helpless. You don’t have any interest in your life. It’s really possible.

Mathew: But she doesn’t seem to have any interest in different answer. Even though she does seem helpless and stuff, people like that there are those who really want to seek happiness, and those who really could care less. I think she is one of those who doesn’t seem to care.

Jiyoung: She seems like she is younger.

Mathew: Immature

Jiyoung: I think maybe she might have that way for a long time, back in Korea maybe. I don’t know there are people who really care about their life. It’s not something for us to say that that’s bad. I don’t know.

Mathew: Yeah. I really want to understand her.
Jiyoung: It’s hard.

Mathew: It’s really hard. But I really try to understand her. But what really bugs me the most is that she doesn’t want to try. She’s not looking for an answer. That bugs me.

Eunhyun: But, she is interested in the guy.

Mathew: For her own happiness. That’s why I said that she is so selfish.

Eunhyun: In her case, what advice will you give to her?

Jiyoung: She should have someone to talk to. Her mother figure and father figure seem like she doesn’t talk a lot, only lying that related to her study. She needs conversation.

Mathew: With a friend of her age. I don’t think she wants to listen to any authority figure……I don’t think she really realize what she is doing. I think there are people who purposely make wrong bad decisions because they just get away from everything. I don’t think she herself know what she is doing…. I think she needs a friend and experience… She needs to start thinking herself.” (Spoken response, 11/21/09)

While Jiyoung pointed out that Amie might continue to live in the same way, she added her comment:

Maybe she was kind of really childish from the start. But then after divorce and they got separated, maybe that made her more like miserable, thoughtless.
(Spoken response, 12/05/09)

The conversation was largely dominated by Jiyoung and Mathew. The two had different opinions in interpreting Amie’s life attitude and the influence of the movie. Mathew took the position of an adviser whereas Jiyoung tried to understand and be less judgmental. Julie also mentioned that she didn’t understand Amie’s actions such as quitting a class, buying a bracelet for her boyfriend, liking him, smoking, and going to a party. As their conversation flowed, they finally agreed that they tried to understand her even though it was hard. Their approaches had been resolved. They pointed out that what she needed was a friend of her age to get some help and chances to reflect on herself and to seek to change her current life attitude. James
commented that what they could do for Amie was to be a friend of her and show her friendship rather than giving advice to her.

**Other Literary Themes**

This section describes all the participants’ identities, their perceptions of other groups (Korean community, Whites, Blacks, Latino/a, Asian/Asian Americans, class, religion), Korean educational system, and cultural differences between Korea and America. The presentations are based on their responses to books, articles, and film and individual interviews.

**Self-identity**

The participants were in the process of forming unique cultural hybridity by mixing elements of American and Korean cultures. The process involved diverse cultural practices and forms created by their parents, peers, and society. The process of creating each person’s hybrid identity might not be the same. Each participant had his or her own predilection for a group he/she could fit depending on diverse surroundings. One’s presence in a group is that one’s identity is often shared with other members of the group (Tatum, 2003). For example, those who have the same racial and ethnic background are more likely to understand them. It is hard to share with others who have different cultural backgrounds. Aspects of identity involve race/ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, age, and other elements. This section examines salient aspects of individual student’s identity within the context of their family, school, and society.

The six students attended the group discussion. Jiyoung first came to this book club. She was rather quiet in the first day of this book club for her. The five students were talking about the article, “Stuck Between Two Worlds.” They had diverse opinions about finding racial/ethnic identity. In the excerpt below, Sarang asked a question about finding ethnic identity. She made
an example of Elliot, the subject in the article. Elliot struggled in between the two cultures and with fitting in.

Sarang: Do you think Korean Americans need to find their own identities or just being like that. For example, he doesn’t want to belong to Korean, I guess, do you think it is important to find their own identities, because they are Korean, you know?

Junsu: Yes.

Sarang: Why?

Junsu: He was born in Korea, and he should know that he is a Korean.

Julie: I never thought about myself.

Mathew: I struggled. I didn’t want to be Korean.

James: I think that it really doesn’t matter that much because I just in between.

Eunhyun: So then, how do you identify yourself?

James: Half person

Mathew: I don’t know. I think mixed being is awesome.

James: Yeah. It’s fun.

Sarang: Yeah. I don’t know. I wanna be.

Eunhyun: Why are you jealous?

Mathew: Other people would not care [about] race as much if I were.

Eunhyun: What do you think?

James: Yes. I can fit in with both. It’s not like him. He is trying to fit in 1.5s and trying to fit in white kids. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

The participants’ diverse opinions about the question of finding ethnic/racial identity reflected their diverse cultural backgrounds. Junsu had a strong Korean identity and believed that Korean Americans should find their own ethnic identities. In other words, he implied that Korean
Americans should accept their Korean identity positively. He described himself as Korean. When he talked in the group, he very often spoke in Korean while looking at me. At that time, I also responded to him in Korean. When we talked about the article, “Talk about Pressure to Succeed,” he talked a lot in Korean and tried to eagerly participate in the discussion. The Korean language was a part of his identity. His response to the article “Fighting for Respect” also reflected his Korean identity. The story was about a Korean boy who struggled with racial discrimination at school. When the participants talked about the story, Junsu did not look at other people and was looking at the floor. He did not seem to be interested in the discussion. He was very quiet for a while, and I asked him, “What do you think, Junsu?” He said aggressively, “About what?” I said, “About the whole story.” He said in Korean, “같은 동양인이니까, 우리가 이해해 줘야죠.” (Since he is also an Asian, we should understand him). He looked at the table with his head down. I nodded. I added to his comment, “Sometimes, there is a need to understand in his shoes in this story.” Mathew nodded. However, Junsu participated when he talked about Korea, such as Korean education and Korean people’s daily lives. His Korean background and identity empowered him to be involved in discussion actively. But on the other hand, racial discrimination and other difficult experiences seemed to make him reluctant to share his ideas. When the members talked about racial discrimination, he looked at the floor, and his face was flushed. Discussion about the issue of racism made him uncomfortable because it might provoke his painful experiences. Some evidence was found in the individual interview with him. He confided that he struggled with derisive racist jokes at school.

Mathew, in the excerpt above, said that there were times when he struggled and did not want to be Korean. Prior to becoming comfortable with his bicultural identity, he struggled with the issue of bicultural identity. Some evidence that struggle might be found in the manner in
which he copes with racist statements from his friend. According to him, many of his friends considered him white. He said, “Somebody said to me that I am twinky or cracker. But, I belong to two cultures. I went to Korean Karaoke, and hung out with white guys.” (Spoken response, 08/29/09) He described how he interpreted his Korean background with a perspective of Christianity. His religious belief helped him reinterpret his Korean identity and accept it as a part of himself. His belief in God instilled pride and confidence as a Korean American into him:

> During the first year in the middle school, I really had hard time with my identity. I hated being Korean. It’s just so hard because despite my personality, my caring personality, charismatic personality, there always was a fact that I was Korean. And that made me so hard for me to socialize with other people, for different people get used to me. So first, I hated being Korean. I even asked God, you know. Why? Why? But, of course, my mom was there and encouraged me. My mom did tell me to know that God chose me to be Korean for a very specific reason. I chose to have faith. But eventually I learned to love me as Korean. (Interview, 01/31/10)

> He stated that he would like to choose his current ethnic background if he were born again.

> I like where I am right now. Why? I don’t know. God placed to me as a Korean for a reason. Since God does consider all things and God does know every little bits of my lives. I think he has a plan when I grew up….. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

Mathew had positive views about bicultural identity and adjustment to two different cultures even though there were some difficulties and limitations. He rejected the dichotomy of being either Korean or American. He explicated how to switch between the two cultures.

> I enjoy balancing both worlds. I love having a double life because not only you have more knowledge of both cultures, you also have an open mind to this world. (Written response, 09/05/09)

> I grew up in a very Christian family. But, I strongly believe that being Christian is a choice to make yourself and salvation is through your family. I am Korean, but many times I feel like I’m stuck in the middle between the Korean community at my school and the American community at my school. So many times, I feel like I have two identities. One Korean where when I am hanging out with Korean kids, like to go to Norebang
[Korean karaoke], and American kids like different sources like airsoft war [guns for gamers]…. It’s very different, hanging out with different groups… (Interview, 01/31/10)

Mathew attempted to associate with groups as well as Koreans and whites. His flexibility in stretching identity accommodated diverse groups of people as friends. While he associated with diverse groups of people, he tried to be his own, not changing himself to fit in the group.

Eunhyun: If we don’t have chances to get to know other group, how do we communicate [with] other people and understand them?

Mathew: From my experience, it just starts with Hello. Don’t try to make yourself be noticed. That doesn’t make you try to be noticed. Like Julie said, don’t change yourself to try to fit in other people. I don’t think everyone wants to be hanging out with their own clothes. I don’t think. They want different personalities. They want to hang out with different varieties. If everyone tries to be the same, it bores me, I think. I keep trying too hard to fit in. It makes me want to less fit in.

Eunhyun: Who are you hanging out with?

Mathew: Whoever.

Eunhyun: Diverse groups?

Mathew: I’ll be a Mexican for a second. Black kid for instance, I’m all different. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

Mathew also felt that speaking the Korean language was important because he was an image of Korea. He highlighted the necessity of learning his heritage language. In addition, his responsibility as a first-born son was salient in defining his identity. In his family, often, he took care of his siblings and took the risk of confronting his parents, which were the benefits as a first-born son. He also attempted to be a humble leader as a pastor’s son.

Being first-born son, I wouldn’t say it’s harder than second-born son because I think everyone has their own cross to carry. Everyone has his own individual struggles. It has most responsibility. I have, more than the other kids, confrontation with my parents, I have confrontations with my parents rather than the other kids because I am older, question first. I try to be independent first, so. But, uh, even though it may sound hard, it’s so beneficial being first-born son, so beneficial. If you don’t take it a right way, if you
want to be a first-born child, you don’t learn properly, grew up properly, I think you can be arrogant and bossy. But if you do take all the benefits of that being first child has, I think you can be both a great leader and a very humble leader. I’m striving for that. Yeah. But hardship for me, to be honest, is arrogance of being a first-born son. It was the hardest thing for me. (Interview, 01/31/10)

James had a biracial background. His mother is Korean, and his father is white. He was well adjusted in this society as a biracial child. He identified himself as biracial child, but most people considered him as white because of his appearance. He seemed to be proud of his biracial identity, and the other participants seemed to envy his racial hybridity. His view about biracial identity was well reflected in his writing. He wrote that Elliot in the article, “Stuck Between Two Worlds,” was different than he in that he did not worry about whether or not he was too Korean or too American:

Elliot’s life is not very similar to mine. His is torn between two cultures. Even though I am half Korean and half American, I don’t think about being split in half. I live my life as comfortably as I can. I don’t worry about whether or not I am too Korean or too American. I hang out with both Koreans and Americans. I don’t limit myself to just hang out with the people who are just like me. I live a mostly American lifestyle, but I don’t doubt that I am Korean at all. If people don’t see me as a Korean, I don’t let that bother me because it really doesn’t matter what others think of me. There are times when I wish I knew a little bit more about my Korean culture, or when I wish I was more fluent in speaking Korean, but it is not that big of a deal. I am definitely not stuck between two worlds. (Written response, 09/05/09)

James also described himself as having a middle class background and being a Christian. He hoped to be a stronger Christian in the future.

Sarang was an ESA student and had been raised in Korea. She identified herself as Korean and was of a middle class background. While maintaining her Korean identity, she often associated with other racial groups. However, her parents would not allow her to hang out with anyone except for Koreans because they worried about her assimilation into American culture and rejection of her Korean culture. She displayed resistance to her parents’ view. She might be
in the process of forming bicultural identity, but her parents wished her to preserve her Korean identity without much influence of American culture. She shared her idea in the group discussion:

To me, when I hang out with people, like black and white, they (her parents) don’t like that. They don’t like for me to be friends with them for relax [free time] because they are worried about me. I mean, why? You sent me here, and I am hanging out with people I know, but they don’t like it. I really don’t understand that. Whenever I upset with that, they said that you are Korean…..Yeah. That’s kind of hard to me….. They can allow me to hang out with Korean people. They don’t want me to lose the culture. I don’t understand. I don’t lose it, Korean. How can I lose it?.... Whenever I said I am gonna marry black or Indian, they are crazy about it. Don’t be. Never. Just marry Korean guy. They are nice. They are nice I guess. Well, I don’t know. They are too ignorant. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

Sarang also identified herself as a youth. She pointed out the immaturity of youth and acknowledged that she did not know about the world yet. She seemed to be expecting what would come in her future. During individual interview, she spoke in Korean which she was comfortable with.

Jiyoung described herself as a Korean immigrant and explained why she focused on Korean things a lot in America. She had been raised in Korea for more than 10 years.

I focus on Korean things a lot because I grew up in Korea. And I know of other cultures. America is my new culture. I feel more comfortable with Korean cultures. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)
Jiyoung expressed how hard it was to be part of American culture because of lack of understanding the new culture and lack of English proficiency. She said that many American kids did not and were not willing to understand immigrants.

Jiyoung: What I hate about living in America is that I can’t understand some of the culture, so I can’t be part of it. When people are talking about something, I can’t be part of it when I am talking, I don’t know what I should say because how they understand and what I am saying is different. And what I like about being Korean here is something that, I can speak two languages, and I learned many things living here because there are so many different stuff.

Eunhyun: For example?

Jiyoung: Like making friends. It was very hard to make friends for the first year when I went to high school. But you get to understand and get to know other people, how other people think when you do this, how other people understand when you do this. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

Jiyoung associated with a few Asians at school. In her school, there were only three Asian girls including her, and the majority of the students were whites. She tried to fit in many groups, but finally she realized that it was very hard to find a group with whom she could fit. Her experience told how the label, pan-Asian identity, was in part affected by how Asians were seen by outsiders (Feng, 1999):

Eunhyun: Who are you hanging out?

Mathew: Whoever.

Eunhyun: OK. Diverse groups of people?

Mathew: Yeah. I’ll be a Mexican like for a second, and be a black for another second. I’m all different.

Eunhyun: What do you think?

Jiyoung: Mostly white people since many white people in the school.

Eunhyun: Ah.
Jiyoung: Three Asian girls, you know. We are really close since we are Asian. But we can’t speak in Korean because we are from all different countries. I tried to fit in many kinds of groups. But I think I found the good group after that, after one year of figuring out people. And I try to be myself. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

Jiyoung’s identity was in the process of shifting between the two cultures. She said that she had more opportunities to become more Americanized than her parents.

Jiyoung: I can’t think about good things. Since I go to school and meet many Americans everyday, and talk to them. I am more into American culture than my parents do. So they, I think it’s hard for them to live here because I can’t see similar things in Korea in here.

Sarang: Are they here?

Jiyoung: Yeah. I think it’s hard for them, but like my mom and dad are, they’re both liberal. So, it’s kind of cool. And, since I’m Korean, I’m more related to Korean culture. So I feel comfortable at my house. That thing is that they can’t really speak English, so that I have to help with them. I think it’s really hard for them to live here when they can’t speak and communicate with others. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

Jiyoung’s family had an upper-middle class background in Korea. But she did not want to boast about the opulence of her Korean lifestyle or American lifestyle to other people:

Back in Korea, we were pretty rich. We used to be. We used to have really really huge house. But, we never thought we were rich. That’s kind of weird because every friend of mine thought I was rich, but I was never aware of that because my parents, my mom and dad, never told us, like they told us that we were richer than other people, but they didn’t teach us the way, like, you have to look rich, you know. (Interview, 02/12/10)

Now, Jiyoung considers herself as having a middle-class background in America. She also identified as a teenager. She explained the benefits and challenges of teenage life. She pointed out many opportunities to choose as well as issues related to identity, friendships, and future plans.

You learn so many things in that age. There are so many possibilities for you. You can choose. But when you grow up in 30s, I guess you have many possibilities then, too. But, you already have something you chose, too. So I think teenager is a good age…. The challenges, like, for friendships like fitting in, finding an identity, and figuring out what you want to do. And when you think about it, sometimes what you want to do collides with a society. (Interview, 02/12/10)
Julie was a second generation Korean American like Mathew. However, her view about ethnic identity was different from Mathew’s. In the following conversation, she identified herself as more Korean than American. Her home culture influenced her ethnic identity development. She had very positive views about Korean culture.

Julie: Same with James. I don’t have I don’t like about Korean culture because I raised up in the Korean culture. I just like everything about it, like their family, style of family, style of caring and loving each other. I don’t know. American culture is weird. (everyone is laughing)

Junsu: 미국사람이 지나가다가 이상하게 생각하겠다. (American people might think strangely while they are passing by)

Mathew: American culture is weird. What?

Julie: I don’t mean they are insane. But, just saying, I am not familiar with this, it’s kind of awkward, like Hey, go away, I am American.

Eunhyun: How do you identify yourself?

Julie: I think I am more Korean than American. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

Even though Julie thought that she was more Korean than American, she felt a cultural gap with her mother. Her Korean identity was not the same as her mother’s Korean identity. She described her mother as more Koreanized.

My parents are like Mathew’s parents except my dad is more Americanized and my mom is more Koreanized. And so it’s like, they don’t, oh, my dad understands me all like the school stuff and everything. But my mom doesn’t understand why I don’t do well in school work, this and that and that. My dad understands because he was raised here for his teen years. He understands what I am going through and everything. My mom has just Korean culture all over her. So it’s kind of hard, to “understand” her and hard for her to understand me, too. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

Julie stated that her biggest challenge was to be Korean in the U.S. She explained what it meant to be Korean in the U.S. on the basis of her personal experiences. She explained the difficulties in being Korean - cultural conflicts between school and home. She hung out with
other Asian American friends rather than American people because they could understand each other.

Yeah. It’s really hard because they don’t understand my cultural background. Like, what my parents expect me to do, other things, how to go to school, going to school with different meaning with other people. Like Korean parents want you to be successful and be very intelligent. And, you know, have a great life. Then, Americans just like not like that. They don’t understand why trying best at school, why I do this and that. I am trying hard to explain because they don’t understand the meaning of it. It’s kind of hard to explain. Uh.. because of my parents. Why is it for your parents? I wanna respect them and they want me to do this. Then, just listen to your own heart and own mind when you just do your own way. So it’s kind of hard being Korean, especially when you eat. Like if my mom makes me a lunch, she can’t make me a Kimchi. You know that something that smells or like, if I bring sushi, they freak out. Oh, what is that? Oh, my goodness. I feel ashamed almost to like bring Korean food, and like express my Korean culture a lot. Like especially when I listen to Korean music, they are like, why are you listening to this? You know. You are in America. You should listen to American song, like. But my Asian friends understand me because they are Asian too easily. So then, that’s why I have Asian friends and I don’t hang out with a lot of American people a lot. (Interview, 11/01/09)

Julie had many Asian American friends. She said that her Asian friends understood each other and she could fit in the group. She mostly associated with second generation Asian/Korean Americans rather than early study abroad Korean students. She explained how hard it was to fit in a group of people who were different from her. Fitting in the group provoked feelings of discomfort and demanded changes of identity.

Eunhyun: Why do you think Koreans only associate with Koreans and second generation only associate with second generation?

Sarang: Because they understand each other.

Eunhyun: Do you think that they have to change or it’s better to stay?

Julie: I mean, whatever they feel comfortable because it’s better than changing yourself to fit one group, like I’ll use this. If you are a circle person, and then you go to a triangle, like job, how would you fit into triangle job. It’s exactly. You try to change yourself.

Mathew: Math connection

Sarang: So Korean now.
Julie: It’s like the same thing. You’re gonna change yourself, you have to try to fit that door. (09/05/09)

Julie also had a strong Christian identity. According to her, she met Jesus when she went to Mexico on a missionary trip. For her, Christian faith was an important part of her life.

I think the most important one would be my faith. Like, when I went to a retreat and stuff, it gave me a different perspective in life. And then, a week after, I really accepted God. It’s kind of changed my whole life, like how I should be living in, how I should be trying to serve Him. So I think that it really kind of changed my path of my life a lot. (Interview, 11/01/09)

Julie identified herself as a middle class person because she was neither rich, nor poor. She also described her youth life. She felt a lot of pressure for academic achievement and was confused about her path of life.

I think our age of youth people struggle with family and stressful school. I think the most because this stressful school is just like to be prepare for college.....We have to study really hard for ACT, pressure from your parents, like to do well and get good grades. At the same time, your parents are stressing you out. You want to do this college. You want to do this. You want to be a doctor. All these things get stressed out. I feel like high schoolers get more stress out than college students for some reason because college students know what they are gonna do, studying to become a doctor or dentist or something like that. But high schoolers are confused and don’t know what to do with their life. (Interview, 02/12/10)

In this section, the six students’ self identity was explored. Junsu described himself as a Korean and having middle class background. His Korean identity and cultural background empowered him to speak when he talked about Korean education and Korean people’s daily lives. Mathew had struggled with accepting his Korean identity, but his Christian belief helped him reinterprett his Korean identity and accept it as a part of himself. His identity had also been influenced by being the first-born son in a family and a pastor’s son. James had a biracial identity and appeared to be proud of his racial hybridity. He also described himself as having a middle class background and being a Christian. Sarang identified herself as a Korean and came from a
middle class family. She was in the process of reformulating her ethnic identity. She also identified herself as a youth and pointed out the immaturity of youth. Jiyoung described herself as a Korean and was in the process of embracing the two cultures. Her family had an upper-middle class background in Korea. She explained the benefits and challenges of a teenager’s life. Julie was a second generation Korean American and identified herself as more Korean than American. She also had a strong Christian identity.

**Perceptions of other groups**

**Korean community in the U.S.**

The following conversation exhibited what the participants thought about Korean people in the U.S. Sarang asked the question because she was curious about what other people thought about Korean students who felt homesick for Korea.

Sarang: Jiyoung, what do you think about homesick people?

Jiyoung: I had homesick. But I still have it. I really want to go back to Korea sometimes, sometimes because people actually can’t understand you. You don’t need to worry about what people would think because you know how they will understand it. Yeah. They don’t really understand the immigrants, how they feel. They are not really interested in understanding other culture, like how it’s different, how you should do something to immigrants. I feel that many American kids are ignorant about it.

Sarang: How about you?

Mathew: What was the question?

Sarang: Do you think they have to go back to Korea?

Mathew: I think they have to go back? No. I don’t think they have to go back. It depends. It really depends on character. I don’t think you can just say “Oh, they are homesick, they go back” It really depends on who they are. If you are humble and open-minded, I think you are all right staying here. If you gonna be cocky.

Sarang: Racists
Mathew: Racists and dislike Americans, if you already have prejudiced against Americans.

Sarang: What I am saying Korean racists, why are you here if you are racists.

Mathew: Yeah.

Sarang: They talk about all bad things about America, and then wanna belong to America. I mean what the hack is. I mean I don’t like it.

Mathew: You guys know David. He is a very humble guy, kind guy. He was sitting alone in lunch. I invited him to hang out with my American friends because. Why not. I don’t think at all. I don’t think my American friends mind. I don’t think. I don’t care if they mind it. I would invite him in many ways. Sometimes, they are along with him at lunch. We talked in Korean. Though, we can’t get into the deep conversation because I am limited with my Korean, but we have fun. But it’s hard though.

Junsu: He is in my history class.

Julie: He’s so lonely at school though. Like, I and my friends tried to go to him, like “David, why are you sitting here?” we are like, our whole table was gonna move to his table, because we are like, He is like, “No, Mathew was just here. He has to go somewhere.” It’s like, that’s our excuse. So we just not there. He seems, he has no friends at school. So it’s kind of heartbreaking. Um this isn’t his first start at Grant. He used to go to Hamilton.

Mathew: But, he is a real humble guy. Because of that, I really get to know him. Like I really did. If you are humble, you are open to people. If you are arrogant, nobody wants to deal with you. But David is really cool about that, right? Nobody wants to get to know you. But, David is really cool.

Sarang: I’m not a racist. What about you? James?

James: If they just gonna be racists and hate everything, they should just be they wanna be. People who are willing to accept culture and try to learn about something, then don’t just give up and hate everything, then they should stay.

Sarang: What about you?

Junsu: Same. (in a small voice)

Sarang: Same. Um. (09/05/09)

In the excerpt above, Jiyoung explained why she felt homesick. At her school, American students were not interested in different cultures and people. She felt alienation from other
students. About the same question, Mathew’s focus was on some Korean students he met at school. He said that some Korean students looked cocky and had prejudices against Americans. He questioned why ‘the Korean racists’ stayed here while complaining about America. On the other hand, he proposed that humble Korean people who were willing to accept the new culture stay in America. In the excerpt above, especially, he was very strongly opinionated and his assertion reflected his strong national identity. Sarang supported his argument. She called the Korean students Mathew was referring to as ‘Korean racists.’ In her responses, she tended to criticize Korean people who she thought were to be blamed. Mathew’s and Sarang’s definition of racist is viewed as referring to those who have prejudices against other groups of people and have negative attitudes toward them. On the other hand, Jiyoung had courage to express her painful feelings. They talked about different cases of people who felt homesick.

During the discussion, Junsu seemed to consent reluctantly to Mathew’s argument. When he was listening to other people’s opinions, he looked gloomy. During the conversation, he seemed to find out what they thought about Korean people and realize how he should behave in the new country as a foreigner in order to be accepted by people in the host country. He was silent. It seemed that he would not reveal his painful feelings or experiences because he did not want to show it to other people. In addition, he seemed to understand his position in this society, a powerless foreigner. He could not say anything, but could only be acquiescent to people in the host country, like Mathew and James.

In a personal interview, James described Korean people who were really smart and their fathers as having good jobs, such as professors. The Korean people he was referring to were mostly ESA students he met in Korean ethnic church or at school.
Mathew provides another example of Korean students at his school in order to explain what he liked and did not like about being Korean. He liked to have fun with Korean students, but hated Korean students who looked cocky.

What I like being Korean is that I love their excitement, hanging out with Koreans. They are always looking for fun. Americans say, “you might do this. Call me. Call me when you wanna do this.” What I don’t like being Korean is that I am not talking about all Koreans. What I am saying, A lot of Koreans I met. They are little like cocky? Just a little bit. Just like, I am something. I wanna be something. They want all the attention. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

Sarang talked about Korean people who attempted to assimilate into American culture.

She displayed strong resistance to their attitude.

Sarang: I hate Korean people being nice because they wanna fit in. One of my friends.

Mathew: Tons, thirty?

Sarang: Just be yourself.

Mathew: I wanna know you.

Sarang: They are so nice to them. They bought gifts, like other Korean things from Korea. It’s kind of heavy to carry it. I don’t buy for them. I hated it. Then, their attitudes are very different, to me and them, so annoying. To me, they know I am the same. They don’t do something like that. It’s kind of annoying. I am kind of nice to American. It’s kind of true. But, way too much.

Eunhyun: You have American friends, even though you are not too nice to them. Right?

Sarang: Yeah. I am nice. (09/05/09)

In this section, the six participants exhibited what they thought about Korean people in their community. They produced diverse viewpoints about them: looking cocky and having prejudices against Americans; feeling alienation from other students; attempting to assimilate into American culture; being smart; and having upper or middle class backgrounds.
During discussion sessions and post-reading individual interview, the students revealed their perceptions of different racial groups. During discussion sessions, they talked about their views of black people and extended their discussion to talk about where their stereotypical views came from. During post-reading individual interview, I asked the students how they perceived Blacks, Whites, Latino/a, and Asian/Asian Americans. They tended to be hesitant about answering the questions. For example, before answering to the question, Sarang stressed that she did not want to generalize by race. Junsu denied answering those questions. Their reluctance to talk about race might be based on several reasons: since the book club discussions provided a space for discussing how racial/ethnic stereotypes and discrimination could produce negative effect on people, they might feel uncomfortable with answering those questions because it might reveal their distorted or stereotypical views of diverse racial/ethnic groups; they were reading my perspectives throughout the book club. So, I explained them that I knew that we discussed avoiding stereotypical or prejudiced views of racial groups, but I would like to know about what kinds of stereotypes and prejudices could be produced through your personal experiences or other people’s experiences.

During a discussion session, the students acquired the views of blacks from their school environment, media sources, and/or personal experiences. Sarang asked if they were born again and if they had to choose white or black, what they would like to choose. In the following excerpt, Mathew explained why he would choose to be black if he were born again because he loved their strong Christian spirit.

Mathew: If you have to be something?

Junsu: 왜 하필이면 black or white? (why only black or white?)
Sarang: 그녀, I’m curious about it. (I’m just curious about it)

Mathew: I’m thinking about black.

Sarang: Their culture is more like Korean. They gather a lot. They stick together.

Mathew: Like, they originated in Africa. In Africa, they sing for Jesus and stuff. Oh my God, tears for hours. They won’t get tired. I just love their soul about them. That spirit. If you go to black church, choir’s standing. Oh, my God. I wanna be part of them. Sometimes, it’s not too good.

Julie: It depends on what church you go to.

Mathew: Right. Not Obama’s reverend, but black people have soul. (oral response, 09/05/09)

James wanted to be black if he were born again because he envied black people’s physical strength. He said, “I choose black because they are so good at sports.” (09/05/09) The other participants agreed with the comment that black people were good at sports.

During an individual interview, James expressed his view about white and black people based on his school experiences. He said that black people were not as rich as white people and their grades were not as good as white people. He stated that white people had a more stable and financially secure life than other racial groups:

In America, white people are most comfortable, they usually have stable life and don’t have to worry about money and stuff. Also, a lot of them are partiers. They drink a lot and stuff. But most of them get good grades, but maybe half of them. (Interview, 02/06/10)

During the personal interview, Sarang described how she perceived whites and blacks. While avoiding generalization by race, she pointed out that they tended to be different. She stressed that black kids were more likely to share small things with other people like Korean people whereas many white people tended to have superiority because of their whiteness:

I don’t want to generalize by race…. I think blacks are cool. They are very similar to Korean people. White kids tend to measure even small things, for example, food. Black kids share food with other people without hesitation. I can feel many things even when I
see the small things. White kids say, “Will you have it?” whereas black kids say, “Have it.” They are different. Blacks have “Chung” which Korean people have…. Of course, there are many types of white kids or black kids. We can’t generalize people by one category. But in general, white kids tend to think that they are superior. Of course, there are some white people who don’t think that they are superior…. I saw one black person who is very passive, but many of them are outgoing and noisy. (Interview, 02/06/10)

In another session, the participants discussed Korean people’s prejudices against black people. Jiyoung explained that Korean people had been influenced by stereotypical views of black people, and the views occurred in their mind when they thought of black people.

Well, like if you, I guess, if you don’t really believe you have prejudice and stereotype, you know regular stereotypes. I know that some Korean people think black people are poor, and they don’t care about their lives. It’s just their stereotype. I don’t think that. But, like you know them. So when you look at black person, you just think about the stereotype. It just comes up in your mind. Like, Yeah. (Spoken response, 10/17/09)

In the following excerpt, Sarang pointed out that even though her father in Korea had never met black people, he did not like them. The participants used their reasoning to search why Korean people had held those kinds of stereotypes. They found the reason from Korean textbooks, and I suggested the influence of media to their reasoning in the conversation.

Sarang: My dad doesn’t like black people because their history is massed up.

Eunhyun: Slavery history?

Sarang: And I guess like, he think like, blacks are not taking care of kids, their kids.

Eunhyun: Are you talking about your father?

Sarang: Yeah.

Eunhyun: Your father is in Korea.

Sarang: He never really met them. He has stereotype because, you know, 교감선생(vice principal), textbook.

Eunhyun: Or media.

Sarang: Yeah. Media.
Mathew: Textbook. Korean textbooks?

Jiyoung: Korean textbooks are really bad.

Mathew: They say black people are poor? What?

Jiyoung: No, no.

Mathew: They say they are bad?

Jiyoung: No, no, no. It’s not like that.

Mathew: Oh, my God.

Jiyoung: But there is some of racism in the textbook, so like history textbook.

Sarang: It’s made by Japanese. It’s like, it’s like against Korean.

Jiyoung: Yeah.(Spoken response, 10/17/09)

However, historically, Korean textbooks have been produced with the influence of not only Japan, but also western countries. Many textbooks have been influenced by imperialism and portrayed Occidentalism as superior to Orientalism. Especially, Whites have often been represented as superior to other racial groups.

Jiyoung elaborates on Sarang’s viewpoint and adds that Korean people are homogeneous people, and they do not have chance to know about other races directly, but only through the information from other resources.

In Korea, there are not many other races, you know. There are not many black people, Islamic or others. And they are almost all Koreans. And they get all information about other races, but they understand it in their way. And they don’t have chance to like, talk to other races if you, if they don’t come out of their country. Like, so people who stayed in Korea, like old Korean people, like middle age people, just have that stereotype, what they just know about other races, it’s so little information. But they just keep it into themselves, they just think that’s all about it. Yeah. (Spoken response, 10/17/09)

Julie indicated that countries in the world acquired information about American people from America, and American textbooks portrayed different cultures as inferior or abnormal.
Korean textbooks were also influenced by the cursory information that described only distorted images of black people rather than positive images of them. She suggested that the revision of American textbooks be the first step to change people’s perspectives in the world.

“I feel like around the world everybody get some different message about America, like their sources about different message from every country, like in history here, history is always about, different things are bad things, like China. We are like everything is badly. I feel like in Korea they are having them wrong concept because they don’t know what actually happen for slavery. They don’t know what actually happen after, like what’s going on right now, what it led to who they are right now…. whatever. That kind of changed whole black societies. I don’t think they have that in the textbook. They just have like all the sufferings and pains, and like. I just feel like they need to like, updated….Something like all the countries have to do that. (Spoken response, 10/17/09)

During individual interview, Sarang described the Asian students, especially ESA students, seemed to look invisible whereas Asian American students did not. On the one hand, she could understand the Asian students because she had similar experiences when she first came. However, on the other hand, she felt stuffy because her character was different from theirs. She pointed out the major reasons for the existence of these conditions included language barrier and lack of sense of belongings.

I think that Asians look small. The appearance they have is small and height is small. In addition, their characters are passive. That’s why. Relatively, I am associating with other kids well. I like to be kidding with other people, so that I am not invisible. However, there are many people who look invisible. Other kids don’t know that they exist or they are sick or not. They are mostly Asians, not Asian Americans. Until now, I’ve never seen Asian American people who look invisible. Especially, ESA students are like that. They look invisible, and I feel stuffy. Of course, I was also invisible at the first time because I couldn’t speak language. Even though I wanted to express what I would like to say, I couldn’t because of lack of English proficiency. I used my body language at that time to express. But, now I have gotten better, and I can fight in English. (Interview, 02/06/10)

Julie also expressed how Asians from countries including Koreans are treated undesirably at school whereas Asian Americans are treated better than them. She noticed different treatment about Asians at school. Major reasons included language barriers, different school systems, and
adjustments to the new culture. She pointed out that people made fun of them with various reasons, but they do not treat Asian Americans as the same as Asians. So she felt that Korean Americans should help Asians adjust well at school. She seemed to have a pan-Asian identity as an Asian American. She said that other Asian Americans are treated the same as Korean Americans. She did not draw the line of demarcation between Korean American and other Asian Americans.

Are you talking about Asians from a country?... Koreans when they come here don’t know how to react to this society because this society is totally different from Korea. Like school, that’s totally different from the one in Korea. Like we can wear whatever we want. We don’t have uniform. We move to different classes. They just stay in their class, you know. So I think, school is stressful for them for some reasons. I think it’s because like verbally and mentally. Verbally, they can’t talk to people. They need help. They need to find a class. And mentally, because I feel like at school, because they are Asian and they can’t speak English that well, they are looked down upon again. I feel like people make fun of them, not like personally to them, but like when they are there, people say, “Oh my Gosh, did you see that new Asian? Oh I can’t believe how they dress.” I feel like, they treat them differently because they can’t speak our language….Since we are Korean American, we can speak English and people like us better than Asians. And they treat us better. That’s why Korean American should help them…. About other Asian Americans, I think they are the same as us. We are just Asians and we’re just Americans. So, we’re like the same thing, I guess. (Interview, 02/12/10)

Regarding Latino/a people, James mentioned that Latino/a people looked the same as black people at school. Latino/a people were not as rich as white people and their grades were not as good as white people. Sarang and Junsu stated that they had no idea about Latino/a people and did not have any friends who have Latino/a background. They did not seem to associate with Latino/as. Julie described how she viewed Latino/as. She pointed out that they looked happy and did not seem to worry about anything. She seemed to have somewhat positive stereotype of those people.

They are cool and funny. They have so much excitement at school. If you go around campus and anywhere, they always smile for some reason. I feel like, they are happy with what they have. I don’t know, just me. But at school, they are not mean, but some can be
mean. Some of them are not mean if you get to know them… There is not something bad about them. (Interview, 02/12/10)

The participants held positive or negative stereotypes of diverse racial groups. The participants acquired those views through mass media, their school environments, books, and other resources. Those stereotypes whether they are positive or negative can engender harmful effects on people because it can be used for judging people through those lenses.

For example, they were not aware that among black people, denominations of adherents are diverse, such as Assemblies of God, Evangelical Lutheran Church in American, Roman Catholic Church, The United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church, and so forth. The churches have their own methods of worshiping God. The view that black people are strong physically and good at sports and the comment that blacks are noisy and outgoing are also stereotypical views. There are many black people who are not physically strong and not good at sports. These stereotypes also tended to ignore diverse and complex characteristics of black people.

Regarding white people, the number of white people below the poverty level has been reported as interesting. According to U.S. Census (2010), high school dropouts for whites are 2.8 percent of white population in 2007. Regarding other groups, 4.3 percent of black population and 5.5 percent of Hispanic population were classified into high school dropouts. When considering the total population, the number of high school dropouts of white people is more than twice the number of dropouts of blacks or Hispanics. In addition, the report of people below poverty level by race in 2007 revealed that 10.5 percent of white population was categorized into people below poverty level. Regarding other racial groups, 24.5 percent of blacks, 21.5 percent of Hispanics, 10.2 percent of APA population were reported as people below poverty level in 2007. Even though the percentage of white people below poverty level is lower than those of blacks and Hispanics, the number of white people of poverty is more than 27,000, which is more than twice
the number of blacks or Hispanics of poverty. Regarding Hispanic people, as statistical results show, there are many Hispanics who dropped out of high school and the poverty level of Hispanics is significant. Latino/as are not always happy and excited at school. Cursory perceptions of a racial group without deep exploration of individuals of the group can engender distorted views of those people. Those statistical results showed how the participants’ perceptions of different racial groups have been distorted or stereotyped.

As a participant observer, my attitude was passive during the participants’ discussions about diverse racial groups. I hoped that they could create self-sustaining dialogue, which was not overtly dependent on my intervention, in order to be aware that their perceptions of diverse racial groups are stereotypical or distorted by themselves through the interpretive community. However, after their discussions, I realized that there were teachable moments where I needed to intervene in order to assist the group participants in being engaged in discussions that could create a space for enhancing critical awareness. There is a moment for informed adults or teachers to intervene in student-led dialogue in order to help students break out of socialized patterns such as racist beliefs and discriminatory stereotypes (Moller, 2001). The intervention will support student growth in relation to social justice and equity issues.

**Biracial identity**

In the following dialogue, the participants had very positive views about biracial identity. Mathew considered people with biracial identity as not struggling with race issue as much as he did. James said that it was fun to live as a biracial kid because he could fit in with both cultures. Sarang also supported Mathew’s point of view. They might not have realized that biracial people also struggled a lot because they did not have many chances to meet the people and to hear about their stories.
James: I think that it really doesn’t matter that much. Because I just in between.

Eunhyun: So then, how do you identify yourself?

James: Half person

Mathew: I don’t know. I think mixed being is awesome.

James: Yeah. It’s fun.

Sarang: Yeah. I don’t know. I wanna be.

Eunhyun: Why are you jealous?

Mathew: Other people would not care race as much if I were.

Eunhyun: What do you think?

James: Yes. I can fit in with both. It’s not like him. He is trying to fit in 1.5s and trying to fit in white kids. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

James’ benefits of living as a biracial child reflect his white privilege. His appearance, looking white, and white American parentage might give him an advantage of being accepted as a member of whites. In addition, his Korean background might give him a benefit of adjusting to the Korean community. However, James did not seem to be aware of the privilege he possessed.

The participants’ perception of biracial identity in the excerpt above ignored difficulties of being biracial. One of examples which show the difficulties of being a biracial child is reflected in a Korean/Korean American children’s book *Cooper’s Lesson* (Shin, 2004). In the story, the main character, an interracial child of mixed Korean and white American parentage, encounters estrangement and discomfort from both Koreans and Americans and feels a deep anxiety about his biracial identity.

Another example of biracial identity was found in their discussion of Hines Ward, a popular football player in the U.S. He is a biracial person of black and Korean descent. After he became popular, he was invited to Korea and Korean people gave him an enthusiastic welcome.
He established Helping Hand foundation for Korean orphans and biracial children in Korea in 2008 (Christian Today, May, 2008). The group discussed about him while they were talking about famous people having Korean heritage. Sarang pointed out that Korean people’s enthusiastic welcome would be cooled down soon. She did not believe the attitude of Korean people toward him because she often noticed that popularity was gone shortly.

**Class**

In response to *A Step from Heaven*, Mathew brought up the issue of classism. He retold how YoungJu, the main character in the story, attempted to hide her house in front of her friend’s parents and then asked the other participants’ view about materialism. Julie pointed out that people who attempted to brag about what they possessed were dependent on what they had rather than on themselves. She proposed that we stop judging people by how they looked.

Mathew: In the book, YoungJu asked her friends’ parents to jump off at a big house, big nice fancy house. Why, because she wanted them to think she was high class. So uh, would, do you know friends kind of do that? I mean, do you know people around kinds of do that? Not to the point where they changed their house, but you know, I mean, your friends. I know some my friends. They look at someone and they judge them by their clothing, materials. Like the first impression is what they wear. And uh, what do you guys think about the word today materialism?

Julie: I think it’s come too far honestly.

Sarang: Yeah.

Julie: I feel like people expressing themselves with clothing so how they actually feel about things. I think they are depending not on themselves, depending on other things, like, they can’t stand up for this house, Uhm…(everyone is laughing)

Julie: Sorry, stand up for this house, like they have to lean on something….. So, I think we should stop judging people by how they look, what they wear. (Spoken response, 10/17/09)

Later on, they discussed the real examples they could find in their environment. Mathew provided examples of many Korean college students who attempted to boast of what they had.
Jiyoung criticized the people who tried to be boastful. Julie also pointed out that true friendship was not built on what they possessed. Mathew added the comment that their intention of being boastful to people was problematic rather than what they had was.

Mathew: I know, what about some your examples? Because I know, I know a lot of Korean students at the big University have to have a nice car.

Sarang: Oh, yeah.

Mathew: They have to have a nice car.

Jiyoung: Why do they have to have really really expensive car? In their campus, they are, drive like really loud. I don’t understand, they are students, they just came here to study, not like show off their car and money.

Sarang: Yes. Mommy. (everyone is laughing)

Julie: I don’t like all Asians do that, though. Everytime like people are new and come fresh from Korea. I feel like they are trying to show off, like show them nice presentations on people, like I have this, I have this, let’s be friends, just because of their money. OK. That’s not I mean friends. I just feel like Koreans just like, try to show money.

Sarang: But, one good thing is.

Mathew: They have nice car. That’s the good thing.

Sarang: One more good thing is, Americans don’t think us poor. You know. I think that’s good at least.

Mathew: A lot of white, my friends think Asians are rich.

Sarang: That’s why they, they got like expensive car.

Julie: I mean, really matter though? Because I mean it’s a car.

Mathew: Me, personally, I would like a nice car. I don’t think there is something wrong with wanting a nice car. But I think the intention of trying to show off to others such as a nice car, that’s where from there. I don’t think it’s nothing, something wrong with wanting a nice car. (Spoken response, 10/17/09)
Jiyoung connected the issue to cliques of students at school. At her school, white middle or high class students made cliques and created their own boundaries which had their own membership. She interpreted that they were neither open-minded nor really interested in people of diverse cultural backgrounds.

There are many rich kids at our school. There are really many…. Most of them are professors’ daughter or son. And farmers’ kid, and there is this Imo (aunt in Korean) kid, and stuff…. I was really shocked because there are so many rich kids in our school and they all have their car…. My school is so like clique, kind of, they are like groups of people, not like individuals. So they just hang around with like their group, not with other people’s group. So, it’s, so, once popular kids hang around with popular kids, it’s like that…. And I can see like they are trying to act really nice to people, like new people. Like when I first went there, I thought they are really, I was going to be really good friends with them, then they just, I don’t even say hi to them any more because they are not, I don’t think that they are really interested in making me a friend, but just to know me like “Oh, I know her.” Something like that. (Spoken response, 10/17/09)

Regarding different social class, the students provided the examples of those who were boastful about what they had. They discussed those people’s intention. Through the discussion and sharing, they came to the conclusion that they should stop judging people by how they looked. The interpretive community provided a space for the participants to develop critical thinking regarding classism.

**Gender**

During discussions, the gender issue was not their focal topic. In order to examine their perceptions of gender, I asked them during individual interviews. The three boys stated that they did not feel differential treatment at home or school, and men and women should be treated equal. James stated that in the future, job opportunities might not be equal for men and women in this society, but it should be equal opportunity.

On the other hand, the three girls shared their experiences as girls and expressed their opinions about gender equality in detail. Sarang described differential treatment of gender in her
family. Her mother did not allow her to go to camp whereas her brother was allowed to go. She was angry at that time, but now she understands what her mother meant. She did not understand those who advocate equality between men and women. She recognized the existence of differences between men and women and insisted that because of the differences, women could gain many benefits. She emphasized the different roles of men and women.

(My mother didn’t allow me to go to camp for one night and two days because I am a girl. But my mother allowed my brother to go. So, I was very angry. But now, I understand it. At that time, I couldn’t understand it. Except for it, honestly, I like the idea that because of women, they should be protected. Women and men are different. They are different, but how are they regarded as the same? I can’t understand it. In case of Korea, it’s good that men go to army and women gave birth to baby. Why do some people insist gender equality? Even the people who assert the argument, they receive many benefits. Honestly, women have many benefits, for example, opening doors, lady first, and those kinds of minor things. There are a lot of things like that. I can’t understand why some people insist gender equality because I like it. There is a saying that women win over men. Why do those people emphasize equality between men and women? Even those who insist it don’t treat equally men and women. They must have experienced discrimination against women several times. Of course, in job market, they can experience discrimination because of gender. But I am not a worker yet.)

여자라고 어디 못 놀러가고. 여자라고 1박 2일로 못 놀러가고, 엄마가 항상. 오빠는 바로 보내주는 거예요. 그래가지고 완전 화났어요. 지금은 당연히 이해하죠. 그때는 이해가 안 갔어요. 근데, 그런거 말고는. 근데, 저는 술직히. 여자라고 보호해 주어야 되고, 이런 개념 너무 좋아요. 아니요. 술직히. 다르잖아요. 여자랑 남자랑 다른데, 근데 어떻게 그걸 똑같이 봐요. 나는 그렇게 더 이해가 안 가. 남자는 군대가고, 물론 한국으로 따지면, 남자는 군대를 가고, 여자는 애기를 낳고. 맘 좋은 건데. 사람들이 편히, 아니 평등주의 해 가지고 어째지는 거야. 그래놓고, 자기들이 더 많이 받고, 술직히 여자라서 받는 것 더 많이 잡아요. 문도 열어주고, 그런 사소한 것들. Lady first. 그런 거 엄청 많은데, 뭐하러 그걸 평등하자고 하는지 난 그걸 전혀 이해를 못 해봤어요. 왜나면 전 그렇게 좋으니까. 아무리 그래도 남자가 하는 말 있잖아요. 여자가 이건다. 남자들. 아니 그런말도 있고 그런데. 왜 군이 평등하자는 거다. 그리고 군이 그렇게 말하는 사람들도. 평등하게 안 해요. 따지고 보면, 자기네들 분명히 원이 있음을 거란 말이에요. 근데 편히 내세우고 싶어했고. 몇번 차별받았다고. 물론 직장 뒤 이런대는 차별 많이 받을 수 있을 것 같애요. 제가 보기엔. 여자면. 근데, 전 아직 직장인이 아니니까.” (Interview, 02/06/10)
Jiyoung stated that she did not experience differential treatment in her family, but she shared her opinion about the roles of men and women, her notion of equality between men and women, and patriarchal society’s problem in relation to gender. At the end of the following interview excerpt, she stressed the priority of human rights in relation to the issue of gender.

I think that they should be equal. I think Korean culture is still patriarchal in many ways. Of course, I think it’s unfair. What I think is, I know that there is a huge difference like power, not like physical power, I understand that there could be some job for women and job for men, like a work. I don’t think women should rely on men like when they are dating, in their marriage, because some women do. Like you are man, and you have to do this. I think mothers have most responsibility for their son to grow up such way, because many mothers do that. Oh, you are son and you have to do this. They treat them better. I think that’s why they grow up, so. And, I think men should cook and do all the stuff even though men work outside. Of course, it’s really tiring. But they shouldn’t take advantage of working. Because they just work outside, that doesn’t mean that they don’t have to consider what’s in their house. But, it’s kind of complicated. I don’t think women should give up their job just because you get married. But then, how are they gonna raise a child if they work together? It’s another problem, too. So I don’t know about that…. If there is a really trouble case like rape, it was like a girl’s appearance who is a victim of the crime. Many people say, “Oh, she is a slutty girl. And she’s excusable.” I don’t think that makes any sense. It’s like, human’s right comes first, then their appearance. So I think that is not a reason. That’s not logical, I guess. I think, what I hate about Korean law is that they are very tolerant about rape. I think it should change. (Interview, 02/12/10)

Julie also stated differential treatment existed between her younger brother and herself in the family. Her grandmother prefers boys to girls. She explained that her grandmother’s preference was rooted in the Korean environment in which she grew up. She also expressed her opinion about the issue of gender equality in this society. She felt that men have had more benefits than women, especially job markets.

Sometimes, but not all times, my Halmoni (grandmother in Korean) likes guys better than girls because she was raised with two boys instead of girls. She loves boys, and she admires my brother more than me. I told my Halmoni, “Halmoni, why do you like my brother more than me?” She’s like, “I don’t know.” My dad said that because she was raised with two boys and doesn’t know how to treat a girl and understand the girl. That’s why she admires my brother more. That’s the only treatment I think…. In this society, I feel like women are not treated equally, not enough rights than men. I feel like men have more power, more abilities to do things. I think women are looked down upon because
they are women. So like, if they go to army, they are looked down upon because they are not strong enough for, they are not courageous enough for something. Because news always talks about, like how in the army women are treated badly and stuff. Guys treat them worst than other people and stuff. Guys have power to do things. Even when guys go to college and get a job, they always think guys are better, like, to be a doctor. They always think guys are better to be a doctor instead of women. That’s why you barely see a doctor as a woman…. Main part is that I feel like males have more attention and more power in this society. (Interview, 02/12/10)

Gender equality might not be salient issue for the boys because differential treatment of gender is more critical issue for females than men. Jiyong stressed the importance of human right in relation to the issue of gender. Julie felt that men have gained more benefits than women, especially in job markets. Sarang emphasized differences between men and women and could not understand why some people advocated gender equality. She was not aware that there have been deeply rooted gender issues related to oppression historically and socio-culturally.

Religion

The novel _Necessary Roughness_ contained the author’s attitude toward different religions. So I asked the students their attitudes toward people who had different religions. Sarang stated that she conceded that they had their own religion. Julie defined their religion as a component of their culture.

Eunhyun: My question is how do you respond to people who have different religions?

Sarang: I can understand because it is their religion, I mean.

Julie: It’s like culture they bought up with them. So then, if they came like, especially their clubs, they’re like uhm, let’s say, Vietnams and some other, usually they like worship Budda, they come here and bring their religion with them. That’s how they worship and stuff. (Spoken response, 11/14/09)

Mathew talked about high school students’ attitudes toward their own religion and indicated who he could approach in order to introduce Christianity. Julie brought up the question of different attitudes of people who seemed to be Christian. Mathew explicated why they did not
take their religion, Christianity, significantly. He stated that their attitude arose from the negotiation between the relationship with God and their own happiness. In other words, those who had different attitudes did not give priority to the relationship with God.

Mathew: Most of the high schoolers I know, when it comes to religion, they are not very serious about their religion. They just say I’m Buddhist or I’m Muslim, you know. And you can tell once they are really really really interested in their own religion. But I think once people want to seek, they really want to know I know very open-minded to other religions, then it’s OK to approach that person. If the person doesn’t, even aren’t interested in their own religion, then I don’t think it’s right to try out the approach because I don’t, I don’t think at, they could care less. And definitely you can’t push someone to be.

Julie: Why do you think high schoolers don’t take Christian[s] seriously?

Sarang: Because they are high schoolers.

Julie: I understand that I know, some Christians are like, take really seriously about their religion, straight up, like I worship him, I, she like reads Bible at school, dadadada. Like that’s strong Christian at there. But I don’t understand other high schoolers only, other people can’t do that.

Sarang: They wanna know about life other than just being religion, that’s what I think.

Julie: It’s like two people began, they are like worship their religion, like their God. And when they come to school, it’s like they really like, no God.

Mathew: Because they’re distracted at school. What they really wanna do is not relationship with God, what they want is just to be happy. They’re distracting by their friends socializing all that stuff. You know, they don’t have even room for God. So they don’t take that seriously. (Spoken response, 11/14/09)

Jiyoung talked about the conflicts between students who were Christian and a teacher who was an atheist because of their religious prejudice. Many Christian students hated the teacher because she was an atheist. Jiyoung expressed that their behavior was not desirable.

There is a crazy lady in our school. She is biology teacher. She is like strong opinion person. So like first day of school, she say, “Oh, I am an atheist.” She just say that to class…..So like since there are many like Christian kids at our school, there are kind of conflicts between teacher and students. Well, like, the funny thing is, there are kids who hate her because she is just an atheist. And I think it’s stupid, but like there are kids who don’t like her because she was crazy, and there are bunch of kids who don’t like her
because of her look, she’s like strong opinion, she’s like really different from other teachers. (Spoken response, 10/17/09)

Overall, the participants have open-mindedness about people of different religions. They conceded that religion was a culture and one should understand the diversity in culture. They suggested that it was not a desirable to discriminate against people based on religious prejudice or force people who have different religion or no religion to accept their religion. On the other hand, since they were all Christian, they seemed to be interested in how to approach people who had different religion and why some people who seemed to be Christian had different attitudes toward their religion at different settings. The next section describes the students’ interpretations of Korean educational system and cultural differences between Korea and America.

Knowledge about heritage

Students acquired knowledge about their heritage in several ways. Among the sources of knowledge are their families, peers, and educational institutions.

Criticizing Korean educational system

The participants all agreed that Korean education was very demanding, and kids should study hard in high school. They added layers of meaning. Junsu and Sarang shared their own experiences in Korea. Junsu told about his experience in Korea. He went to ‘Hakwon’ (private academy) and studied until late at night. He told how hard it was to study in Korea. Sarang agreed with the competitive reality of Korean education and compared it to the American system. She concluded that American education was much easier than the Korean system. Mathew also described how different the lives were of Korean kids in their high school and colleges. Finally, Julie explained how the American educational system and the Korean system were different.

Mathew: It’s insane, like heard all of different stories Korean kids study in Korea. It’s crazy. Like they get home like.
Sarang: Yeah.

Mathew: Really late.

Sarang: 2AM

Mathew: Right.

Julie: And they get ready at 6 o’clock or five.

Junsu: 저는 시험기간에 학원에서 4AM까지 했어요. 근데, (I studied until 4PM during the period of tests, but..)

Sarang: But, they don’t study. They just hang around, and then,

Junsu: 막 집에 가면서 친구한테 야 3시간 후에 다시보자. 하면서. (I said to my friend when I went to home, “See you three hours later.”)

Sarang: After three hours, they go to school.

Junsu: 근데 시험 다 망쳤어요. (But, I messed up the test)

Mathew: I heard though, like they study really hard. Once they passed the test, they are like party, like crazy. And then they study insanely hard in high school. But when they get to university, they are just party in college too in Korea.

Eunhyun: Where did you get it?

Mathew: My dad.

Junsu: 여기서 graduate 하기 힘들지만, 한국은 쉽거든요. 4년만 빠기면, 그냥 왔다갔다하면 취요. (It’s hard to graduate here, but in Korea it’s easy. If you stay just for four years, you can get college degree)

Eunhyun: 대학교? (college?)

Junsu: 점수 살짝만. (caring about grades a little bit)

Eunhyun: What about American system? American system is also very harsh for you?

Jiyoung: No.

Eunhyun: Not really?

Julie: Pretty easy.

Eunhyun: Really? Pretty easy?
Sarang: Yes. (everyone is laughing) So easy. Compared to Korean system.

Julie: I feel like the Korean system is more like, it depends on someone for you to study. I feel like America, you’re responsible to do, some sorts of things, like homework, like studying by yourself. Your parents not gonna be like bugging you about studying, it’s your choice to study, it’s your choice to pass and stuff. Like Korea your parents want you to pass. It’s different. (Spoken response, 08/29/09)

The three ESA students all agreed that no one wanted to study in Korea. Junsu stated that there was no time to relax. He referred to the competitive situation in Korea. Jiyoung referred to the teaching methods and quality of Korean teachers. Topics included the traditional ways of teaching methods, lack of qualified teachers, and the punishment method. However, Sarang disagreed with Jiyoung’s opinion regarding punishment and interpreted it as a way of expressing their love. She also explained why Korean teachers punished students and how much they cared about their students as compared to American teachers. Sarang and Jiyoung held different opinions about the way of punishment and Korean teachers.

Sarang: How about you?

Jiyoung: I wanna go there for like three months.

Sarang: Maybe summer vacation

Jiyoung: And my friends. But I don’t wanna live there since there is no way I can study there. I don’t wanna go to school there.

Junsu: Nobody wants to.

Sarang: Nobody wants to.

Junsu: There is no vacation.

Jiyoung: No, like when you study, I don’t think they are really deep enough about subjects. They just memorize it. They don’t really study, but memorize. And teachers, it’s hard to find good teachers there like since there are so many old teachers. I don’t mean old teachers are bad. I am not saying old people are bad. I mean they teach in old ways. Um. They teach the way they were taught by their teachers. Now time’s different.
Sarang: To me, teachers may (be) better than here, I think.

Jiyoung: Really?

Sarang: Yeah. In here they are sick, then they don’t come. But in Korea, they try to come everyday.

Jiyoung: Yeah.

Sarang: In Korea, they punish students because they love them. They care about (them) much more than here, I mean, to Green is kind of like Korea. That’s one thing I like about. But, in public, they don’t care about you guys. They just consider themselves.

Mathew: They want the paycheck.

Sarang: Yeah. They just want their paycheck. They just cost a lot. I don’t like them.

Mathew: I heard that there are some rare cases of high school kids. They married their teachers. When I first heard that, can I imagine myself marry one of my teachers? Oh my God. I heard that’s true. Teachers are really close to kids in Korea.

Junsu: When I was in elementary school, my teacher was in army for fifteen years. And he taught us in army way. He doesn’t use weapon. He just throws something.

Jiyoung: Violence is one of the reasons I didn’t like. I don’t know.

Sarang: Many teachers like me, so…. (everyone is laughing) Even though I got D or like that, they liked me. I don’t know.

Julie: I think because they care about you. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

Junsu shared his experiences of middle school and elementary school life in Korea. He went to a private academy to acquire knowledge of school subjects. He described the physical punishment which he received in the academy and how hard Korean students’ lives were in the following excerpt.

정말 이해가 안돼요. 그린식으로 가르치는게요. 세계에서 최고인거 같아요. 한국이. 그. 정말 많이 맞았어요. 늦었다고 맞고. 늦은게 왜 늦었냐면, 학교에서 할 게 있어서 늦은건데요. 그런데도 맞고. 심하게 때렸어요. 한국에서. 요전 학교에선 안 때러요. 근데 학원에서 너무 심하게. 선생님마다 강목하나씩 들고 다니요. 정말 이렇게 영딩이 강목으로 때러요….학교에선 안 때러요. 학교에서 때리면 인터넷에 올리고 막 그린는데요. 학원은 돈 주고
자기가 하겠다고 하는거 같아요. 그림니까 마음놓고 그때 때리는것 같아요. 근데 지금은 모르죠. 그림니까 삼년 전 이야기네요.... 6시에 가서요. 시험기간 아니라도 11시는 보통 오는 것 같구요. 그 거의 중학교 때 계속 그래요. 학교, 학원에서 저녁먹고. 그래서 저녁시간도 30분 주는게 너무 하는게. 애들 제하게 먹는게 더 들창해 보이더라구요. 아. 근데 중학교 되기 전에는요. 학원에서 독같은 종합반이었거든요. 3시간 정도 했던것, 아니 3시간도 아니라. 2시간 정도 했던 것 같아요. 그러면 8시에 그냥 오는데요. (Interview, 02/02/10)

(I don’t understand the way of teaching in Korea. It is the worst in the world. In Korea, I was beaten many times (at private academy). I was beaten because I was late. I was late because I had something to do at school. But they hit me severely in Korea. Teachers were bringing a big club. They beat students with it... At school, teachers don’t hit students because if they do it, students put the video clip on the internet. However, students pay money to go to private academy with their own choice. Therefore, the teachers in the academy hit students without hesitation. It was three years ago. I don’t know about current situation.... When I was going to middle school, normally, I went to school at six in the morning and back home at 11PM even though it was not the period of mid or final term. I had lunch and dinner at school or at private academy. They gave us only 30 minutes for dinner. I felt so sorry for students when they were eating in a hurry. Before I went to middle school, I went to private academy too. I took comprehensive course and spent around two hours there. I went back home at eight at night)

The experiences Jiyoung had in Korea and how her view about Korean educational system had been constructed have been revealed in the interview with her. In Korea, she never went to a private academy, so she was left behind in class. Even the teachers did not understand her. Korea’s preliminary learning trend drove her to choose home schooling, and she ultimately decided to study abroad for a better education in the U.S. Those experiences made her have negative images about the Korean educational system and its teachers.

The reason why homeschooled is, my parents and I didn’t like Korean education system because the school especially junior high. I just went to junior high for one month to just to see what is like, wouldn’t even plan to go more than one month. So, I just went there because of my friends. And I, it was like school’s approach was like we learn, many Korean kids go to academy after school like everyday. But I’ve never been to any academy. So what I learn in my school is what I learn. So, I don’t know nothing after that. That’s like, I have to learn it from my school. Teachers where there like kind of, um, they were like, they said, my math teachers said, he taught this first lesson. And it was really weird. It was really like hard for me because it was new concept, then all the other kids knew it before they even come to junior high because they’ve into academy. They started during winter break. And he was like, “you guys know all this, right?” because you guys learn it from academy.” I’ve never, I’ve never go to academy. And that day, my father
was at that school in math class. He was shocked because teacher should never say that kind of things because school is the first place to students who learn. It’s not really good thing to go to academy like for three hours after school. So we decided to stop going to school and so I did homeschool. And I had a tutor who taught me overall, especially math. And I started on the math in three, four, and three years, like in one year. So I studied a lot. And I took a test after I started homeschool one year after. (Interview, 11/21/09)

Jiyoung liked the teachers at her school in the U.S. According to her, the teachers knew how to teach and looked very intelligent. For example, her history teacher knew all the things and how to teach well. She was surprised that he was also the head coach of a football team. She had a preconception that the football coach was dumb, harsh, and just masculine. But she realized that he was really intelligent.

She disliked that her school had no diversity. She even felt like she was becoming a racist because she never had chances to meet people of color. There were not many opportunities to get to know people of color and their culture and how they thought and lived. She mentioned that if people did not have chances to get to know other people of different cultural backgrounds, they could easily have prejudices or stereotypes about other races.

She was shocked by the school counselors. She thought that they were supposed to assist students in achieving good goals. However, if she showed her plan to study during the summer, the counselor thought that she tried to study hard and said that she did not need to study so hard. She felt that she needed to study. She thought that they treated all the students equally and did have regular standards. They did not push students to go to good schools and recommended her to go to schools nearby such as a local community college or a major state University. However, she wished to go to an elite school which was located in the eastern area.

In summary, the students criticized the competitive situation in Korean educational system. They pointed out the traditional ways of teaching methods, lack of qualified teachers, and the punishment method. They acquired this knowledge from personal experiences, peers,
families, community, and other resources. Especially, ESA students utilized their cultural
knowledge and background and personal experiences as a powerful tool to display their opinions
about Korean educational system.

**Cultural differences between Korea and America**

The theme, cultural differences, is another distinct theme in their responses to stories.

During the discussion of the novel, *A Step from Heaven*, the six students participated in the issue
of cultural differences between Korea and America.

Jiyoung stated that American people tended to need their personal boundaries more than
Korean people. She explained how different Korean people’s close relationships were compared
to American people. The meaning of close relationships among Korean people was very similar
to the relationship amongst family members. Then, Mathew questioned the generalization of
Korean culture and people. He emphasized individual differences among Koreans.

Jiyoung: I guess, white people, American people, I guess they have personal space, so
more than other Korean people do. So they try to keep their boundary. And I guess they
could look selfish kind of because, Uhm, they don’t easily allow people to come into
their space, really closely….Not like to open. When you start to get to know each other, if
you really like somebody, then you will get really close.

Eunhyun: Like family.

Jiyoung: Yeah. Like family. So your best friend is like your family. Yeah.

Eunhyun: That is the point sometimes, uh, Americans and traditional Koreans feel
cultural gaps. So in that case, we need to think about, um, we cannot easily say that
what’s good or what’s bad. That is a little bit, the kind of differences.

Jiyoung: Uhm.

Eunhyun: Yeah. But some, very often differences produce conflicts between people. So
we need to understand different cultures.
Mathew: Yeah. When I meet people, if I have a thought in the back of my head, all Koreans are become family. That’s so broad, so general. There are so many different personalities in Koreans and different personalities in blacks.

Sarang: It depends on.

Mathew: Yeah. Really depends to their individual. So when we say that Koreans are like this one, I don’t like. Me personally, I can’t say that because there are so many. (Spoken response, 10/17/09)

Then, Julie pointed out another difference between Korea and America. She stated that Korean people tended to easily judge other people by their appearances. She gave examples of her experience in Korea and her cousins’ judgment of other people. Jiyoung and Sarang agreed with the statement. They had the stereotype of Korean people.

Julie: I think we like it depends on how they look and their first looking….They do this that this that. That’s how like, that’s how I’m doing in Korea. When I am going Korea, people I don’t know the environment. That person looks like this kind of person. Oh that person looks like this kind of person. Then, America, I don’t see that. Then my cousins came over and they are just like judging everybody. It’s just like. It’s really weird. I don’t judge people. But then my cousins judge, you know.

Sarang: Korean people judge a lot.

Jiyoung: Yeah.

Sarang: Some one like walking down the street, they are just like (pointing with a hand). That one is gonna be weird.

Mathew: I don’t know about all of them. But.

Sarang: Some of them.

Jiyoung: Mostly.

Mathew: It depends on person, I say. When I walk. I had examples when I’m walking somewhere. Korean Ajumma’s (lady in Korean) staring at me. They were keeping their eyes on me. They were staring at me. (Spoken response, 10/17/09)

Jiyoung gave a rationale for the tendency of Korean people’s judgment. She explained that as Korean people cared much about other people, they tended to be more involved in other
people’s lives rather than delimiting personal boundaries. Sarang attempted to elaborate on Jiyoung’s idea and brought up the concept of “Chung” which was a word reflecting predominant values Korean people have. Sarang and Jiyoung strove to help Mathew understand the cultural concept by providing various examples.

Jiyoung: I guess many people just care much what other people think about you than what you think about yourself.

Sarang: But, traditionally, we have “Chung.” You know “Chung”?

Jiyoung: Uhm.

Eunhyun: Uhm.

Sarang: Then, it doesn’t have English word.

Eunhyun: Do you know “Chung”?

Jiyoung: What “Chung” means,

Jiyoung: Something between love and friendship

Mathew: Between love and friendship. Uh. What are you guys talking about? I don’t know.

Sarang: If you wanna like translate it, it says friendship, but it’s more than that.

Mathew: But less than romantic love, but more than friendship.

Jiyoung: No, no, no. It’s not like, it’s not like, you love somebody, woman and man. It’s not like that, loving somebody like you.

Julie: It’s like a best friend.

Jiyoung: Yeah. Like your family.

Mathew: So then, in between love and friend is “Chung”? (everyone is laughing)

Mathew: I love my friends.

Julie: It’s like a second brother you are not related to. Then, it’s like, you care for them. But then.
Sarang: Not quite

Mathew: As family. OK. (Spoken response, 10/17/09)

Finally, Mathew suggested that as global people, we should give equal treatment to all countries and put emphasis on the strength of a certain country rather than the weaknesses of it. He seemed to think that their conversation about differences between Korea and America focused on each country’s weakness rather than strength. He often pointed out the importance of focusing on positive things and strengths, which reflected his personality.

We really have a global mind. It’s not pick one or the other. It really shouldn’t have to be that way. It really shouldn’t. We are global people. We should treat all races as equal definitely. Even though there are some negative things witnesses about a certain country, even though there are existing reality, I don’t think we should, if we think about it, if focus on that, it can’t. Then the strength of the country can benefit us. If we always think about how lame America is, I don’t think we really get the benefits America really has. I think we should just uh, think the gains of benefits of both countries. (Spoken response, 10/17/09)

Through the cultural knowledge the Korean ESA students brought with them, they could explain the central values of Korean culture. Through those excerpts above, it could be manifested that the two groups of students had grown up in different cultures in their past, even though they were now staying under the umbrella of American culture. Their cultural experiences were really embedded in their thoughts and values inevitably. They could not delete it with their own effort. They supported their argument which was based on their cultural backgrounds, like America and Korea.

Summary

In summary, the participants more often focused on recurring themes: (a) pressure to succeed/academic achievement, (b) knowledge about heritage, (c) ethnic/racial identity, (d) racial stereotypes/prejudice/discrimination, (e) language barrier, (f) dating relationship, (g)
immigrant hardship, and (h) cultural differences. They used the texts, their reasoning, cultural knowledge and background, personal experiences, and the context of interpretive community in order to make sense of the print materials/media, cinematic images, and novels. This analysis revealed the complexities of the students’ interpretations for each category. 

In response to the newspaper article, “Talk about Pressure to Succeed,” the participants shared their experiences of parental pressure and their viewpoints on the issue. They searched for the rationale for the pressure, expressed their thoughts and feelings, and attempted to subvert the generalization by providing counter examples. They tended to agree that they faced parental pressure to achieve. In response to another article, “Fighting for Respect,” they shared painful experiences of language barrier and racial prejudices and discrimination. They also expressed feelings of empathy with the main character or criticized his reaction to those who enacted teasing and racial discrimination against him. In response to “Stuck Between Two Worlds,” they focused on the issue of ethnic identity formulation by emphasizing positive views of bicultural identity and advising the main character to live a normal life with mixed cultures.

While discussing the novels, the participants often focused on the issues of racism, immigrant hardships and family relationships, and cultural differences. In response to the vivid accounts of racism in *Finding My Voice*, they expressed feeling of resentment and empathy with the main character, searched for reason for racism, or criticized the main character’s reaction. Different personalities, diverse personal experiences, and cultural backgrounds were conducive to the readers’ interpretations and reactions. In response to *A Step from Heaven*, they discussed the abusive father character within the context of immigrant hardship. They discussed the patriarchal characteristics of the abusive father, adjustment to new environment, language barrier, personality, and economic crisis. The novel, *Necessary Roughness*, contained the theme of
intergenerational cultural differences within the family. The participants made personal connections to the issue and pointed out the difficulties in adjusting to different culture.

During the discussion of the film, *In Between Days*, the participants focused on the main character’s intentions and actions in dating relationships and adjustments to the new culture. They took the position as an advisor or attempted to put themselves in her shoes while being less judgmental.

In the section of other themes, each student’s self identity in relation to race/ethnicity, gender, class, religion, generation, and age was examined. In addition, their perceptions of other groups were presented: Korean community, blacks, whites, Latino/a, other Asian/Asian Americans, biracial people, social-class, and religion. Their discussions about the themes of Korean educational system and cultural differences between Korea and America were also displayed. The three ESA students identified themselves as Korean, but were in the process of reformulating their identity with the influence of American culture. Among second generation Korean Americans, James and Mathew identified themselves as having bicultural identity, but Julie identified herself as being more Korean than American. Christianity influenced their perspectives and experiences. In the case of Mathew, his Christian identity was placed above his ethnic identity. They also expressed the benefits and challenge of adolescence.

With regard to the issue of gender, especially, the girls expressed their opinions about gender equality in this society. Jiyoung emphasized the importance of human rights in relation to the issue of gender. Julie felt that men have gained more benefits than women, especially in job markets.

Regarding different racial groups, the students produced diverse viewpoints. They viewed Korean people in their community as looking cocky, feeling alienation, attempting to
assimilate into American culture, being smart, and/or having middle or upper class backgrounds. While comparing blacks and whites, they described that whites have more stable and financially secure lives compared to blacks, and school grades of black people were not as good as whites. But, black people have strong Christian souls and physical strength. Latino/a appeared to be similar to blacks in relation to social class and school grades. But the participants did not have much information to share their perceptions of the racial group. Asians in their schools appeared to be treated undesirably whereas Asian Americans are treated better than them. The main reasons include language barrier, new culture, and school environment. They had very positive views of biracial people.

Regarding different social class groups, the participants discussed the intentions of those who were boastful of what they had and concluded that we should stop judging people by how they looked. They also discussed about people of different religions. They pointed out that it was not desirable to discriminate against people based on religious prejudices or force people who have different religion or no religion to accept their religion.

Korean educational system and cultural differences between Korea and America were distinct topics in their discussions. The participants criticized the competitive situation in the Korean educational system, the traditional ways of teaching methods, lack of qualified teachers, and the punishment method. They also pointed out that American people tended to need more personal boundaries than Korean people and Korean people easily judged other people. Especially, ESA students utilized their cultural knowledge and background and personal experiences as a powerful tool to display their opinions in various issues about cultural heritage.
Chapter Six

Types of Responses

The analysis of the responses was adopted from five major conceptual aspects of literary understanding suggested by Sipe (2008) and Lehr and Thompson (2000). Sipe (2008) offers five major conceptual categories of responses which constitute literary understanding for children: analytical, personal, intertextual, transparent, and performative. Among them, the performative response where the text is manipulated as a platform for children’s creativity or imagination was not adopted in this analysis because the participants did not produce this type of playful performance. Instead, the social/dialogic response suggested by Lehr and Thompson (2000) was employed. Those five types were utilized in this analysis in order to examine the participants’ literary understanding. All participants constructed the five categories of responses as the way of displaying their literary competence. The analysis illustrates how the participants use text messages, their reasoning, cultural knowledge and background and personal experiences, and the interpretive community in order to make sense of the print materials/media, cinematic images, and novels.

Analytical Response

This category includes all responses which use the text as an opportunity to construct meaning: characters’ feelings, thoughts, and actions interconnected with plot, literary evaluation and critique, relationships between fiction and reality, peritextual analysis, and summarizing and thematic statements. This category of responses comprises a large portion of the participants’ responses in this study.

Analysis of characters focusing on characters’ actions, feelings, ideas, intentions, and appearances is an important aspect of literary understanding (Sipe, 2008). For example, in
response to the article, “Stuck Between Two Worlds”, James analyzed the main character’s thought and feelings which were more striking to him. Regarding the issue of the process of forming cultural hybridity, he gave advice to Elliot, the main character, that he could live a normal life with mixed cultures.

Elliot struggles because he feels like he is losing a part of his self. He is losing some of his Korean culture, but he is also gaining an American culture. He is changing and he shouldn’t be so worried and feeling like he no longer has an identity. He thinks that if he is a part of a culture he must understand everything about it and be that culture 100%. But a lot of people have mixed cultures and still live perfectly normal lives. He feels that 1.5 generation people are shielding themselves. They just didn’t change like he did. People are all different and maybe Elliot is more adaptive or he likes the American culture and wants to live it. Maybe he just really wants to fit in and the 1.5 generation people are fine just the way they are. Elliot really changed and even hung out with American people. The 1.5s still talked about the American culture and lived it, but did not change as much as Elliot did. (Written response, 09/05/09)

Often, interpretations of characters are connected to the plot of a story. In response to the book, A Step from Heaven, James provided a more elaborated analysis of characters in the family. He interpreted the father’s character as a typical Korean male who wanted respect and did not want to depend on anyone and the mother as a loving mother. He interpreted the son, Joon Ho, as following the footsteps of his father as a role model. He also mentioned how YoungJu felt and acted when she received differential treatment from her father.

Young Ju is a young girl who must learn to adapt to a new culture at a very early age. Her family is moving to America when she is only an elementary kid. She has to go to school and learn all the new words. Young Ju’s father and mother want to go to America to have a new future. They argue a lot, but not at all when they talk about America. Young Ju’s father is mildly abusive. He is sort of like the typical Korean male in the way that he wants respect above all else. When he is not respected, then he can be abusive. He is also a smoker like many in Korea. The mother is a loving mother. She wants to live a better life and be more patient when it comes to buying a house. Apa does not want to stay with Uncle Tim anymore. He does not want to have to rely on anyone, maybe because of his respect. When they are in America, they have a son. Joon Ho is a bit like Apa. He is not very obedient and mostly does what he wants.

Apa treats Joon Ho with a lot more freedom and love than he does to Young Ju. This makes her feel like she is not wanted as much. It makes her want to grow up so she
won’t want to be treated like a baby. It is all because Young Ju is a girl and Joon Ho is a boy. A lot of cultures view boy and girl this way. Most fathers probably want a son to carry the family name. But Apa is very obvious about it and it really hurts Young Ju. It even makes her not love Joon Ho as much as she should. At school she lies to her class saying that Joon Ho died. Everyone is sorry for her and they give her many gifts. She cannot enjoy them, but instead she must bury her lies because her parents would be very angry if they found out how she lied. (Written response, 10/10/09)

In the excerpt above, James analyzed the characters’ actions and feelings in depth. He focused on what value the father considered important and what influence the father’s different treatment had on Young Ju. His interpretations of the characters were connected to plot of the story.

The readers’ character analysis was often inextricably linked to their cultural background and experiences. For example, Julie made use of her cultural background and experiences in order to analyze characters. In response to the article, “Talk about Pressure to Succeed,” she focused on why Howard and his parents had different expectations which could lead to the conflicts among them. She found the main reason from the two different cultures in which each of them has grown up. In a written response, she contended that Korean parents who had grown up in Korea had different expectations for their children who were growing up in America regarding academic outcome:

In Korea, they expect the students to achieve in school and do well, if they don’t then, they will get spanked. In America where Howard goes to school, the expectations are not as high as Korea. The students are responsible to achieve and keep up with school. I feel like that his parents and some parents don’t understand that they are in a different setting and that the expectations are different. I also feel like that his parents brought their expectations from Korea. His parents make him take all these extra classes during the week and even over the weekends. All that is doing to him is that, it is stressing him out on his school work and also in his life. (Written response, 08/29/09)

Julie was a second generation Korean American who heard about Korea mostly from her parents and friends. Her mother was a first generation Korean immigrant, and her father was a 1.5 generation Korean American. Her views about Korean parents were mostly based on her
experience with her parents. She must have had experiences similar to that of the main character in the article. She tended to define the two cultures as two distinct ones regarding educational aspirations. This distinctive definition was based on her cultural backgrounds and experiences.

As another type of analytical response, the participants made evaluative comments on characters’ actions and thoughts. Regarding the article, “Talk about Pressure to Succeed,” James provided evaluative comments on strict Korean parents and gave suggestions. He also speculated on Howard’s feelings and thoughts and pointed out that he needed time to relax.

His parents want him to do this so that he will be prepared later on when he has a job, but it is not necessary to make him work so hard. He doesn’t have time to enjoy his life or do any of the things that he wants to do. But studying all day really does prepare you well. It gets you in the habit of not being lazy. Strict parents are good, but if they make you work that hard and force you to work that hard, then it might be a little too strict. It can actually be bad for kids to be worked so hard. They don’t get enough sleep and are not as healthy as they should be. (Written response, 8/29/09)

In the excerpt of James’s response above, he pointed out two sides of the same coin. He gave a poignant comment that hard work had some benefits, such as the habit of not being lazy, whereas too much strictness could have harmful effects on children, including lack of sleep and unhealthiness.

Mathew also gave advice to the main character and his strict parents. He stated that Howard should learn to find out the reasons of conflicts between him and his parents, as well as consider the advantages and disadvantages he could attain from each of the cultures. He pointed out that strict Korean parents are demanding and they might not be able to give their children genuine unconditional love; therefore, Howard might have to work harder to get his parents’ love and acceptance. Mathew provided evaluative comments on Howard and his parents and gave strong opinionated remarks to them.
Let me start by saying, Howard is not the only Asian-American to be expected of so much. I don’t want to be taking anyone’s side because I feel both Howard and his parents have something to learn. Howard can learn to understand reasoning and try to look at the advantages and disadvantages of the American culture and Korean culture. Howard’s parents on the other hand have to love and accept their son even if he fails because if Howard’s parents are demanding without genuine love then Howard has to work and succeed to get his parent’s love and acceptance. This is wrong. (Written response, 8/29/09)

Children analytically evaluate stories with their own criteria as they deepen literary exploration (Sipe, 2008). They develop their own idea of evaluating and critiquing authors’ crafts and give reasons for their evaluation. In this study, Sarang questioned message, theme, structure, and the match between title and message of the story, Finding My Voice. She asked the question, “What was her voice in this novel?” and continued to write,

Honestly, this book was not attractive even in the first place. It was boring and I didn’t get the point and theme in this book still now. I figured out that the writer is not that good at writing. The whole story in the book was not completed; and the flow was little bit awkward. Unlike the title, she didn’t even find her voice. She liked gymnastics, but then because of her parents she went for medical major. That’s not her voice. The question is what was her voice in this novel? She didn’t really speak up.(Written response, 10/03/09)

On the other hand, in response to the book, A Step from Heaven, Mathew gave appreciative comments as an evaluation on the story. He offered reasons for the laudatory comments on the book, such as emphasizing the likelihood of reality of the story and enriched descriptions of characters’ emotion.

The book Anna was written fairly well. It wasn’t exaggerated at times that were serious and it didn’t lack any emotion either. This book portrayed well every bit of detail in YoungJu’s life. I enjoyed this book because of these very reasons. (Written response, 10/31/09)

Junsu also evaluated the novel with critical eyes:

Every chapter has really good sentence in the end. Every sentence has inside meaning. The Korean words the writer used made me understand easier. That’s why I gave 4.5. And I learned that moving to new country made people so happy, but later they realized it’s not easy thing to do. (Spoken response, 10/24/09)
Sarang explained why the book received her good evaluation after the group discussions. She emphasized the message and meaning the author attempted to convey to readers:

*A Step from Heaven* is really good book. I really liked it. It wasn’t really happy and humorous but it had meaning and message that the author really wanted to say……. What I realized from this story was that I don’t want to get a child who speaks different language that I don’t perfectly understand. In this book, one of the reasons why the father got angry was that he didn’t really understand English; and the daughter tried to make him understand. It would probably make him sad since Korean culture is really focused on respect elders. If I were the father, I would get mad too, not only at his daughter, possibly at himself. (Written response, 11/14/09)

Mathew resisted the depictions of Korean Americans in the story, *Necessary Roughness*, and discussed portrayal of Korean Americans in the book. He pointed out that this book brought up many issues about Korean Americans, but was written from one Korean American author’s perspective. He suggested avoiding generalization about Korean Americans and their culture:

Don’t get me wrong. This book does point out many issues Korean-Americans have but not strongly. The author is just one Korean-American who does have her own experiences. To say you can understand fully how a Korean-American feels by reading this book is a bit biased. (Written response, 11/07/09)

As another type of analytical response, readers exhibit an inability to willingly suspend disbelief or an ability to draw parallels between fiction and reality (Sipe, 2008). They resist stories when they notice the distinction between the world of the story and readers’ understanding of the reality. The conflict between reality and fiction was discussed in Matthew’s responses. He grappled with the relationship between the story and the reality while finding flaws in the two teen fictions, *Finding My Voice* and *Necessary Roughness*. Regarding *Finding My Voice*, Matthew stated reasons why the story was not realistic in some aspects. He found flaws in the description of the story, such as lack of detailed descriptions of characters’ emotional experiences.
Overall this book, to me, was too simple of a story. This book didn’t demonstrate strong emotional realistic examples that define people’s virtues. The book was more of an ordinary typical sitcom you would see on television. If you read real life true stories or romantic novels by famous authors, then this is incomparable. (Written response, 10/3/09)

Mathew also questioned the depiction of Asian Americans in the story, Finding My Voice. He pointed out that the stereotype of the dating relationship was not true.

I’ve heard of the saying that white guys like Asian girls but white girls don’t like Asian guys. This book could be an example of that, but I think the saying is too general and therefore prosperous [preposterous]. It’s just a novel, not a true story. (Written response, 10/3/09)

Mathew pointed out flaws in the flow of the story Necessary Roughness. He found contradictions between his understanding of reality and the depictions of the story character.

The reason why I feel this book is unrealistic is again because of the way everything flows. After a struggle Chan has, it seems the next day the memory of it is somehow wiped out. As people endure struggles, if it’s not properly taken care of, it will progress inside someone. Chan, however, always seems to retain normal emotions on the outside and the way he feels on the inside I felt, needed to be elaborated. (Written response, 11/7/09)

The participants made use of the peritextual features of a book as a source of potential meaning of the story. Physical aspects of the book other than the words of the text, such as its size and shape, the illustrations on the front and back covers, and title page, are categorized as peritextual features of a book (Sipe, 2008). Peritextual analysis allows children to make comparisons between literary elements such as plot, characters, setting, tone, and theme of a book and illustrations of a book. During the discussion about Finding My Voice, the participants discussed the illustration in the front cover of the book. They pointed out the mismatch between the illustration and the story character. They were not aware that author does not have control over the cover illustrations.

Julie: What do you guys think about the cover of the book?

Sarang: Look old.
Julie: Does it tell you about the story?
Jiyoung: No.
Sarang: No. Not at all.
Jiyoung: I thought it was about an old lady.
Julie: Junsu, what do you think?
Junsu: She looks so old. I thought she was a parent.
Jiyoung: Is this one old book?
Jiyoung: One year before I was born.
Sarang: But it looks so weird. What does it mean, this one? (indicating the design of small patterns on the front cover)
Julie: I don’t know. I am trying to figure it out this morning. Maybe, it was like different things she went through. What about you, Mathew? That will keep you awake. What do you think about the cover?
Mathew: As a cover, it doesn’t seem to be very interesting to me. As a cover! Like flowers, glasses. (Spoken response, 09/12/09)

In his writing after the session, James doubted the authenticity of the portrayal of the Korean American girl and background image on the front cover of the book. He critiqued the illustrations of the character and other designs on the cover.

The cover is not very interesting. Ellen looks like an old Chinese lady. The buttons seem random. I have no idea what they might be. (Written response, 10/03/09)

The participants also made responses that involved thematic and summarizing statements. This type of response is concerned with message of the author, plot, and much of the narrative events (Sipe, 2008). For example, Julie offered thematic statements about what the author attempted to convey in the article “Talk about Pressure to Succeed.”
He was talking about how much pressure his parents gave him for studying. Howard wished that his parents would stop pressuring him about it. (Written response, 8/29/09)

In *A Step from Heaven*, Sarang made summarizing statements after the discussion in the journal writing. She was concerned with the storyline as a whole rather than details of narrative events.

It was about one family that had chance to come to USA. The parents wanted to move for their child’s education. They wanted the child be successful because they think their lives were not good since they didn’t have enough money. But then the father started to act weird due to money problem, stress from work, and low self-esteem. He started to beat his children, and got angry so easily. Eventually they got separated by law – the father had to go to Korea while the others could just stay in the United States. (Written response, 11/14/09)

Summarizing was a specialty of James. Mostly in his writings, he tended to make summary statements. For example, his writing below included more detailed summary statements about the narrative events of the story. He retold the story in chronological order of narrative events in the book, *A Step from Heaven*. He used the words, ‘later, then, in the end,’ to indicate what happened in the narrative.

Apa gets pulled over for drunk driving. He gets punished by Gomo. On Sunday morning, Gomo calls and says she is coming over, but Apa says not to because he is going to go to church. He goes, but he does not change at all. Going to church that one time did almost nothing in his life.

Later, Young Ju must go to school for some award ceremony. She gets the number one rank in the freshmen class with the highest GPA. She is so proud and shows her mom. Apa is always gone these days drinking and other things, but she leaves it on the table for Apa to see when he comes home. The next morning, Young Ju wakes up to see that it is covered by newspapers carelessly. She gets mad and starts to crumble it up. Then she sees Apa’s smudge on it. Maybe that is the first time she feels that he cares or maybe is a little proud of her instead of only being proud of Joon.

Then one Sunday, Young Ju wakes up and smells something weird. She finds out that it was an air freshener to cover up about ten beer cans. She goes to Uhmma and sees her back bare and it is full of bruises from Apa. Apa is getting worse with the beatings after Halmoni died. Uhmma says he does it because he is a proud man. Young Ju tells Uhmma that she has choices. She might be saying that she has the choice to leave.

The school calls and says that Joon is always skipping class these days. Young Ju confronts him about it but he seems not to care. He is becoming sort of like a rebel.
Young Ju is starting to study with Amanda more while keeping it a secret from her parents. Apa finds out and is furious. He beats Young Ju really badly. Uhmma says to stop, so then he starts to beat her. Young Ju is afraid and she feels she must do something. She calls the police and says that Apa is killing Uhmma. They come and arrest Apa and take Uhmma to the hospital for stitches and bruises.

Later Gomo calls and says that Apa is going to go back to Korea. Uhmma and Young Ju decide to stay in America with Joon. They made a choice finally. In the end of the book, Apa really got bad with drinking and beating. After Young Ju called the police and had him arrested, their lives got much better. He left for Korea, and they supported themselves. They bought a nice little house and were doing fine even though they were still poor. They made a choice and had a better life afterwards. (Written response, 10/24/09)

Sometimes, he included a speculative hypothesis which assumed characters’ thought in a paragraph. For example, when Young Ju tells Uhmma (mother in Korean) that she has choices in the story, he wrote, “She might be saying that she has the choice to leave.” (Written response, 10/24/09) However, mostly in this writing, he enumerated major events in the chapters of the story.

Another example of James’ writings exhibited a paragraph which began with a thematic statement of the story and then expanded the description of character analysis.

The themes of this story are high school romance, girl issues, and also racism. Ellen is trying to fit in with the cool kids, but they are not very accepting of her. Except for Tomper, who is being kind to Ellen. He is still a little mysterious. Marsha is a cool kid, and she is being very mean to Ellen. Jessie is a good friend, but she sort of feeds Ellen’s desire to be popular by taking her to the parties and by constantly talking about the cool kids. (Written response, 10/03/09)

Personal Response

Children reflect on their lives and make meaningful connections to texts. This type of category comprises a large portion of the participants’ responses. The participants could relate to the story contents in various ways: making life-to-text connections and vice versa, questioning stories from personal experiences, telling stories “on” the story, assuming agency in stories, and providing engaged resistance.
In response to *Necessary Roughness*, Mathew used his personal experiences which were similar to the story character’s experiences. When he went to a town where there were few Asians, he was stared at by some Caucasians, and he felt like an alien. His feeling of empathy with Chan was based on his experiences as a Korean American in this society.

I had a similar example to what Chan had experienced. When I go into towns like Mayberry or any other town in [this state], I’m stared at. Wherever I go, there are eyes following me. Chan has moved into this “hick” town with the population ratio, whites to others of 7,735 to 4. This ratio is crazy, but not surprising. There are a lot of cities/towns/villages with a dominance of Caucasians. We’re like aliens when we move into these small towns. (Written response, 10/31/09)

James expressed how he felt like a biracial person compared to Richard in response to the article, “Fighting for Respect.” He stated that he accepted the behavior of saying racist jokes between friends because it did not bother him much. He thought that those who said racist jokes behaved in the same way to other people, so that he did not need to care about what they did.

Even though I am only half Asian and don’t even look Asian, my friends still say racist jokes to me. It doesn’t bother me like it does Richard. I don’t feel disrespected because they joke around that with everyone and with every race. (Written response, 8/29/09)

Jiyoung could connect her life to Ellen’s life in *Finding My Voice*. She stated, “*Finding My Voice* is a truly realistic story. As I read chapter one through six, it was really easy to relate to. I understand everything she was thinking about.” (Written response, 09/12/09) She related Ellen’s experience of racism to her school experiences. She explained after the group discussions of this book,

Racism was one of the most big role in the story. I can say most of her conflicts were from racism. I’ve never been called by a name but I can understand how she felt when she was called by a name. Since 99% of the town’s population is all white people, sometimes I feel I’m in a wrong place. The first day of school, everyone was staring at me. I was a new girl and an Asian. I don’t care what other people think about me anymore and people are more open minded to me because they know me more than last year. I think racism comes from ignorance. If you don’t know about someone, you don’t want to talk about him/her. If people get to know you and if they realize you are just a
person like themselves, there will be no racism. I think it’s important to be open-minded. (Written response, 09/12/09)

Her view about racism was constructed on the basis of her school experiences. She found the origin of racism in ignorance. She pointed out that people racially discriminate against others without really knowing about them. She felt alienation at school, and the feeling of isolation helped her understand how Ellen felt when she was called by names. Her understanding of Ellen’s feelings was rooted in her personal experiences which were similar in some ways.

While connecting life to text, the participants raised questions about the stories. They used personal experiences to question the stories. In response to the article “Talk about Pressure to Succeed,” Sarang stated that she had never seen those situations, and Howard’s case was a little bit extreme. Sarang made personal connections to her experiences about the issue of parental pressure and Korean/Korean American children’s struggle, making use of the examples of her parents and American friends. She explained that the pressure to succeed was applied to not only Korean parents, but also American parents; in other words, it was applied to any parents. She added that a lot of Korean parents had high aspirations, and if their children did not study a lot or obey them, then the parents would not let them continue to do it. She attempted to avoid generalizing the portrayal of Korean parents. She gave some examples of an American friend of hers to support his argument.

From my point of view, it’s just his thing. I mean a lot of Korean parents do have high expectation but if he were like a person who doesn’t study a lot and do whatever he wants then his parents wouldn’t let him to do that much. I believe several American parents would do that too if their children are smart and all that. My friend, Kathy studies hard especially when the finals come because her parents don’t let her hang out with her friends if she gets lower than B+ for the semester grade. Plus, when I was in Korea, I didn’t study at all. But my parents didn’t say much about that. After I came here, US, I got to know how important to study and prepare for future. I naturally studied more and more. Now, my parents expect me to go to fine college. So I believe it is just any parents’ thing. (Written response, 8/29/09)
The examples of her parents and her American friend supported the assumption that not all Korean parents gave extreme pressure to their children like Howard’s case, and some American parents gave pressure to their children like any parents would. Her viewpoint was powerful because she made use of personal experiences, such as cases of her American friends and her Korean parents.

In response to *Necessary Roughness*, questioning the story from his personal experiences about playing football and soccer, Mathew pointed out the oddness in the story, which referred to the huge difference between playing football and soccer. Mathew doubted the assumption that Chan, who was good at playing soccer, would be proficient at playing football.

Chan’s former experience of playing soccer is what caught Mikko’s attention but in my experience, playing soccer and playing football is extremely different because of the balls. Kicking a football needs a different style than kicking a soccer ball. Besides these odds however, I hope for Chan. Even though I’m the reader and not the author, I feel Chan has much potential. Chan’s been given a fresh opportunity that’ll help him to settle in and make friends in this country’s life style. (Written response, 10/31/09)

Sometimes, children tell stories about the story they are reading. They exhibit a predilection for telling stories which are based on personal experiences and fanciful ideas (Sipe, 2008). For example, a story was sparked by one of the participants when I asked a question which could connect to their personal experiences. During the discussion about a traumatic incident in the book, *Necessary Roughness*, Junsu told a traumatic story about his friend. While he was giving an account of the incident, the other students were listening very quietly and concentrating on his account.

Eunhyun: Have you had this kind of traumatic experience?

Junsu: I have.

Eunhyun: You have?
Junsu: When I had really good 형 (older brother), he was like my brother to me.

Eunhyun: Uhm.

Junsu: One day, he became crazy. He became special, I don’t know, 장애인이 됐어요. 갑자기. (Suddenly, he became a person with disability) 머리가 어떻게 되어가지고. (Something was wrong with his brain). 그래서 (therefore), he was crazy. I visited him so many times.

Eunhyun: In hospital?

Junsu: No, his house. His parents are taking care of him.

Sarang: Is he here?

Junsu: No. He died.

Eunhyun: He died?

Junsu: Yeah.

Eunhyun: Sorry.

Junsu: OK. This is what happened. I don’t know. When I was there, he got so mad at his mom. I was there. He just went to his room and locked the door. Then I heard the sound, bump. I thought he threw chair out of window. But when his mom opened the door, he was gone. He killed himself. (Spoken response, 11/14/09)

After Junsu finished telling the story, the other students also told stories of traumatic incidents they knew. Sarang talked about her brother’s friend who died in a car accident, and Jiyoung told a tragic story of a subway arson incident occurred in Korea several years ago. The students were eagerly talking about and listening to the traumatic incidents carefully.

Text-to-life connection is another type of personal response. The connection informs and potentially transforms children’s lives by provoking deeply meaningful experiences for the children (Sipe, 2008). The focus is on utilizing stories in order to better understand their life experiences. In this study, while the participants talked about the article, “Stuck Between Two Worlds,” the issues of fitting-in and loneliness were sparked during the discussion. The article
the participants read and discussed formed a basis for better understanding a lonely student’s (David’s) life at school. Mathew brought up the case of David, who was a newly arrived Korean student at school. Julie added her experiences with David. The deep, meaningful exploration of the main character’s loneliness and painful feelings provided the participants with opportunities to try to understand David more deeply and possibly feel empathy for him:

Sarang: They talk about all bad things about America and then want to belong to America. I mean what the heck is. I mean I don’t like it.

Mathew: You guys know David. He is a very humble guy, a kind guy. He was sitting alone at lunch. I invited him to hang out with my American friends. Why not? I don’t think my American friends mind. I don’t think. I don’t care if they mind it. I would invite him in many ways. We talked in Korean. Though, we can’t get into the deep conversation because I am limited with my Korean, but we have fun. But it’s hard, though.

Junsu: He is in my history class.

Julie: He’s so lonely at school, though. I and my friends tried to go to him and said, “David, why are you sitting here?” We tried to move our whole table to his table, but he said, “No, Mathew was just here. He has to go somewhere.” That’s our excuse. So, we just were not there. It seems that he has no friends at school. So, it’s kind of heartbreaking.

Mathew: But, he is a real humble guy. Because of that, I really get to know him. Like I really did. If you are humble, you are open to people. If you are arrogant, nobody wants to deal with you. But David is really cool about that, right? Nobody wants to get to know you. But, David is really cool. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

Another example of text-to-life connection is found in Junsu’s response. In the final session of this study, each participant had a chance to give a thought about this book club. Junsu expressed, “This book club was very good. Please call me at the next time if there is this kind of book club…..At school, we don’t learn about racism.” (Spoken response, 12/05/09) He implied his troubling and struggling life experiences beneath his statement, “At school, we don’t learn about racism.” The stories about racism he read and discussed in this book club could form a basis for understanding and interpreting his struggles in America.

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As another type of personal response, readers personalize stories by giving themselves a role of agency in stories. They often use the “I would” statement to insert themselves in a story (Sipe, 2008). In this study, Sarang utilized the “I would” statement to insert herself in the story, *A Step from Heaven*. She said that YoungJu’s father experienced difficulties of English which could negatively affect family relationship and his self-esteem. She focused on reasons why his father got angry with himself and his family. She analyzed YoungJu’s father’s actions and the reasons for his abuse. She assumed that lack of English proficiency made Young Ju’s father sad because Korean culture was focused on respecting elders. The assumption she provided was from the position as a cultural insider and on the basis of her experiences as well. Then, she took the position as an agent in the story.

What I realized from this story was that I don’t want to get a child who speaks different language that I don’t perfectly understand. In this book, one of the reasons why the father got angry was that he didn’t really understand English; and the daughter tried to make him understand. It would probably make him sad since Korean culture is really focused on respect elders. If I were the father, I would get mad too, not only at his daughter, possibly at himself. (Written response, 11/04/09)

In response to *Finding My Voice*, Sarang compared the character’s characteristics with her own character in terms of Ellen’s reaction to the racist in the story. She used the “I would” statement to insert herself in the story. She wrote,

I personally didn’t like Ellen. I think it’s because I’m totally different compared to Ellen. If I was called, “Chink,” I would do something to that person or talk with him/her. (Written response, 10/03/09)

Her response reflected her personality. She wrote that she would confront the person if she were in the same situation as Ellen. Different personalities could make her think the issue of racism trivial, and only blame the victim without really understanding their pain.
Another interesting personal response was the participants’ engaged resistance. In this type of response, readers identify with characters in stories, but resist the unjust events since reading the story events evokes readers’ emotionally painful and draining experiences (Moller and Allen, 2000; Sipe, 2008). Children attempt to avoid the painful effects and do not want to hear about it. At the final session of the book club, some participants displayed resistance to the stories which portrayed negative experiences of Korean Americans. Mathew especially exhibited strong resistance to the stories which contained the suffering experiences of Korean/Korean Americans. Mathew exhibited resistance to hearing about the suffering of Korean/Korean Americans. He said, “I would like to read successful stories.” (Spoken response, 12/07/09) It can be assumed that he identified with the Korean American characters in the stories and did not want to be categorized as a suffering Korean American, because they are portrayed as powerless victims in this society.

Intertextual Response

Three types of intertextual connections are forged by children: associative links, analytical links, and synthesizing links (Sipe, 2008). These three levels of connections tend to build on one another. Associative links are characterized by making a simple connection of likeness. Then, children can make analytical links by identifying similarities or differences between texts. Finally, they use synthesizing links in order to make generalizations or conclusions about stories. The participants employed this type of response category while making connections among the stories they read in this book club. All participants built up meanings together in order to identify similarities or differences among the stories in the interpretive community.
James made an associative link, a simple connection of likeness between the main character in the previous article, “Fighting for Respect,” and the main character in the article he was discussing, “Stuck Between Two Worlds.”

Sarang: How about James?

James: I think that if they are friends, it doesn’t matter. They just joke around. They do. If you are at school, it can make some problems, like the guy last week.

Mathew: Oh. How come don’t I know about this? What’s going on? Don’t you know we all are going to different schools? Or are you guys talking about something else?

Junsu: 아니 이거 지금 아티클 얘기하는 거 아니에요? (Is he talking about the previous article?)

Mathew: Oh. You guys are talking about the article?

Sarang: Hey. Pay attention. (Spoken response, 09/05/09)

Mathew took an in-depth analytical approach to the two main characters of the two novels, A Step from Heaven and Necessary Roughness. He argued that YoungJu in A Step from Heaven tried to change the current situation as a child protagonist whereas Chan in Necessary Roughness just tried to avoid the situation. He emphasized that the two child characters showed different attitudes toward the reality they encountered.

I see a huge difference….YoungJu wanted to approach that. She wanted to break it up. But in this book, when his parents started bickering and talking about money and stuff like that, the kids were like that, Oh, we need to stay away from the situation. That’s how the kids are also different. (Spoken response, 10/31/09)

James also compared two books he read in this book club. He provided better comment on A Step from Heaven which was compared to Finding My Voice.

It was an interesting story. It was pretty realistic. It wasn’t like that last book. I learn that you can make a choice. To do your life and stuff, if you are having problems she has, you can make a choice. For example, they decided not to go to Korea with the father. (Spoken response, 10/24/09)
The participants made more analytical links between the two books written by Marie G. Lee. Julie stated that *Necessary Roughness* was more realistic than *Finding My Voice* because it reflects how a new high schooler felt at school.

I think this book is more related to what we actually go through at high school. If you move to different school, how you actually feel. But *Finding My Voice* is very cheesy, and you know what’s going to happen and next. But, this one is going to be like question. (Spoken response, 11/14/09)

In the following excerpt, the participants finally made a conclusion by using a synthesizing link that the quality of writing in *Necessary Roughness* was much better than the one of *Finding My Voice*. Jiyoung mentioned that the quality of the writing was better than that of *Finding My Voice*. Both Sarang and Junsu agreed with Jiyoung’s comment.

Jiyoung: I think the author did a good job in writing as a perspective of teenager boy. It wasn’t anything girly about the story like *Finding My Voice*.

Eunhyun: So then, is it better than *Finding My Voice* in terms of writing?

Jiyoung: Yeah. Much better.

Sarang: It is much better than *Finding My Voice*.

Eunhyun: OK. What do you think, Junsu?

Junsu: It’s better. (Spoken response, 10/31/09)

The participants used the three types of intertextual connections by comparing the newspaper articles or the novels. They produced this type of response individually or cooperatively.

**Transparent Response**

Children are capable of developing this type of literary understanding when they position themselves in the story and when the story and their own lives are transparent to each other (Sipe, 2008). This type of deep engagement in the story renders readers the ability to enter
the storyworld and have a “lived-through experience.” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) Children talk to story characters directly as they become immersed in the story world. They give advice to or encourage the story characters to do right thing as if they were in the storyworld. They often give warning, greeting, or converse with the story characters.

The participants in this study displayed deep engagement in a story by placing themselves in the world of the story where the story and their own lives are transparent to each other. They were deeply engaged in the story contents, such as academic achievement and parental pressure. The ESA students, Junsu, Jiyoung, and Sarang, were especially immersed in the story contents addressing the difficulties of immigration process. James, Junsu, and Mathew were more engaged in bicultural identity. They had entered in the storyworld even though it could be an evanescent moment.

For example, in the response to “Talk about Pressure to Succeed,” Mathew pointed out that Howard’s American friend was not the symbol of America. He suggested that rather than complaining about his situation, Howard should figure out where his struggles came from, forgive his parents, and appreciate what he has. He used the form of address “you” in his written response as if he were immersed in the story world with the main character.

Even if most Americans are less expected of, this doesn’t justify Howard to be lazy. If everyone jumped off a cliff, does this give you a right to jump also? And yes many Korean parents are strict but you have to learn to forgive them for that’s how they were raised. There are 6 billion people in the world, don’t yourself an only victim. Appreciate what you do have and focus less on what you don’t have. Have a broad mind. (Written response, 8/29/09)

Another example was found in Junsu’s written response. He wished the story character in the article “Stuck Between Two Worlds” would find himself. He thought that being oneself
was the best way the character could overcome his struggles. He strongly raised his voice to the main character.

As I wrote above, he struggles with identifying who he really is. My advice would be “Be your own.” Many 1.5 generation individual people are bicultural like him. He shouldn’t be worrying just because he is different from others. (Written response, 09/05/09)

While watching the film, Julie showed her propensity to address the story character. When the main character in the film entered the store to buy a gift for her boyfriend, she shouted, “No. No. No. Don’t do it!” (Spoken response, 11/21/09) This audience participation response occurred when Julie placed herself in the storyworld with the story character as a girl.

**Social/Dialogic Response**

Participants in the interpretive community build up meanings interactively. They often scaffold each other by adding layers of meanings or explicating with words or phrases. Sometimes, they offer conflicting or competing perspectives and undergo the process of synthesis or generalization (Lehr & Thompson, 2000).

The following excerpt shows how meaning evolves as a joint exploration of the participants in the interpretive community. James asked questions to be explored, and Sarang offered incomplete thoughts. Junsu provided scaffolding by adding a comment to Sarang’s opinion. Then, Julie offered a chance to facilitate their reasoning by giving her parents’ example. She stated that since her parents loved her and wished her to live a better life than theirs, they pushed her. She attempted to understand her parents because she knew their sacrifice and love while talking about the pressure that she was struggling with.

**James:** Why do you think it is so important? Why do you think they push us to get straight As?

**Sarang:** Korean parents expect too much. (laugh)
Sarang: I don’t know. They want to, they want you to be successful. I mean really.

Junsu: Because they love us

Sarang: Yeah, from the heart. (laugh)

Sarang: Yeah. I don’t know.

Julie: I think they push us because they know our limits. So, if we are not doing well enough, they push us because they know we can do better than what we are doing. It might be like, our parents, like, my personal experiences. Because my parents did not go to college, so then they want me to do well, so that I don’t fall into their shoes, not go to college, and not get a good job, and live a horrible life. So I think they are doing because they love us and want to push us.

Junsu: OK

Julie: Yeah. (Spoken response, 08/29/09)

Then, Mathew added a keen comment to Julie’s opinion about the issue during the discussion. He pointed out that parental pressure was derived from the assumption that children are their parents’ image. All participants agreed with his opinion with either nods or affirmative responses. Through the multiple layers of reasoning, they reached a higher level of reasoning.

Mathew: And also, we are their, our parents’ image, you know. Like if someone else sees us for the first time, they think we are dumb. They’re going to think our parents are dumb.

Sarang, Julie: Oh yeah.

Mathew: We are our parents’ image.

Julie: Um. It’s good. (Spoken response, 08/29/09)

The following example displayed the process of synthesizing the two participants’ competing or different perspectives. One of the distinct topics during the discussions about Finding My Voice was Ellen’s reaction when she encountered the racial injustice. Mathew and Julie’s different point of views reflected how they would react and interpret the racially discriminated encounters.
Mathew expressed his opinion that people do not know how other people felt when they made fun of them. He argued that he should let them know about how other people felt about it.

I will confront her (Marsha) first. If she continues, then I will go to authority. I will not get really angry at her. I think angry doesn’t do anything. If you confront her, let her know what she is doing does hurt and should be stopped. If she continues, I’ll go to authority. I’ll confront her first. (Spoken response, 10/03/09)

However, Julie addressed another point of view. She mentioned that it depended on a person.

But I feel like it depends on a person. For me, I can’t confront a person. I really like, don’t like to express myself to people. So like, I just kind of leave it. I don’t care. OK, whatever you call me that name, so maybe, Ellen, she tried to do, trying to, the emotions on her, trying to release all her emotions on her… It’s just a high school. That’s how high school is. It’s only four years. It’s not life. (Spoken response, 10/03/09)

Julie also talked about her friend’s case at school. She coached her friend not to show her feelings to people because if she did, they would keep doing whatever they want. Her assumption was different from Mathew’s. She assumed that those who made fun of other people wanted to hurt the people and make them show their painful feelings. Julie said the best way to stop their teasing was not to show any feelings.

My friend did kind of the same thing at school. She was a freshman, I guess, upper classmates were like, making fun of her. So then, I just told her not like to show that she cares, like stop bothering her, because if you show them you care about how you feel about it, they are going to keep doing because it’s entertainment, and they like it. They feel good about themselves. If you ignore them, so then, it would stop, and they will get bored of. (Spoken response, 10/03/09)

After listening to Julie’s viewpoint, Mathew synthesized the two different viewpoints while pointing out the necessity of another important notion, “discernment.”

I think it takes wisdom. Yeah. Discernment. I think both are right. Whether it does depend on the person whether you should ignore it, and that person eventually stop because she will get bored of that, eventually too, or you should confront it. I think discernment of which one. (Spoken response, 10/03/09)
During the discussion sessions, the participants reached a higher level of reasoning through adding layers of meaning, offering competing perspectives, and/or undergoing the process of synthesis. Through the processes, they had opportunities to stretch their repertoire of interpretations and perspectives.

**Summary**

In summary, the students produced five types of literary responses as the ways to exhibit their literary understanding: analytical, personal, intertextual, transparent, and social/dialogic responses. They utilized the texts to construct meaning in various ways: analyzing and evaluating characters; evaluating and critiquing authors’ crafts; making the distinction between the story and readers’ world; summarizing; questioning the meaning of a word; and using peritextual analysis. They also made meaningful connections between text and their life. Their personal experiences and cultural background were used as powerful capitals for constructing meaningful literary understanding. On the other hand, the narratives helped them to enhance their understanding of their life experiences. Through deep engagement in the literature, they could also position themselves in the storyworld and had lived-through experiences. Sometimes, they displayed engaged resistance to the unjust story events. By making intertextual connections, they compared and contrasted the texts they read. The interpretive community provided a space for broadening their perspectives through the process of scaffolding, competing, and synthesizing.
Chapter Seven

Impact of the Narratives and the Interpretive Community

The study had an effect on the participants. The students discussed the impact of the narratives and the influence of the interpretive community on them during the final discussion session and post-reading interviews. This chapter describes how this study influenced their perspectives, lives, attitude toward reading, and peer relationships. The students also point out both benefits and limitations of the study while reflecting on themselves and other members.

Empowerment and Transformation

The stories presented scenes of conflict with white supremacists and informed the discussion group of racial injustice in the present day. The students who struggled with issues of racism began to understand their lives as meaningful by connecting the knowledge to their lives. Over time, gradually, the participants developed the awareness of understanding the present day issue of racial injustice. In the group discussion, some participants explicitly shared their painful experiences in their personal lives. Jiyoung revealed herself as having a heightened self-awareness of injustice after she shared her painful experiences. She empowered herself by this process.

In case of Junsu, he initially withdrew from the discussion group in self-protective silence. The discussion group and the story contents provided a catalyst that opened his eyes to racial injustice. He revealed his painful experiences and feelings during the individual interview. He noted that he was not alone in his struggle. He remarked that when he first came to Hockton, a group of students at school made derisive jokes about him. Because of his lack of awareness, he was dubious about their teasing. More surprisingly, the students did not regard their behavior as strange, and other students condoned their behavior. Junsu, at that time, was uncertain whether
the behavior of the students was right or wrong because he had no student or peer with whom to confer. He interpreted their behavior as childish, and he internalized this painful feeling. His silent reaction was typical of a powerless person in this society.

Junsu connected his struggles with the fictional characters’ struggles with issues of racism in the stories. His response was similar to the main character’s interpretation and reaction in *Necessary Roughness*. He shared his painful experiences in his own life.

Junsu: I realized that there are many students who are struggling like me. Racism is everywhere, racial discrimination. (sic)

Eunhyun: What kinds of things in the stories are similar to your struggles?

Junsu: In the middle, *Necessary Roughness*, kids at school teased the person when he first came. I think that they are very childish, but all the students at school have no regard with teasing. Do you think that it is really childish behavior? I was surprised that the group didn’t think it was strange. I thought it strange at first that people condoned it. When I first came here, some people teased me about my black hair and black eyes. The people thoughtlessly teased me. I thought that it was strange for them to tease me like that, but they thought in a reverse way. They didn’t care at all.

Eunhyun: At the middle school?

Junsu: Yeah. At the middle school. If they did it, I tolerated it. In *Necessary Roughness*, the person also tolerated it when people teased him at first. He didn’t fight. I also thought that it was childish, and I would tolerate it. In the book also, I thought the person seemed to think that it was childish so that he would tolerate it even though it was not said manifestly. (Interview, 02/02/10)

The stories offered spaces for Junsu to understand and release his own painful feelings. He spent more of his effort in understanding his struggles against injustices. He was developing an awareness of the issue of injustices and white supremacist viewpoints. Through the transaction with story contents, he faced the pain of struggling to develop increased awareness of injustice. He began to comprehend his experiences as meaningful. The other participants supported him as they extended their spheres of understanding. The peer group dialogue and
story contents provided a social space to support Junsu’s growth in relation to issues of justice and equity.

Junsu appeared to experience a release of personal painful feelings. He realized he was not abnormal, and the behavior of the students was inappropriate. In the post-reading interview, he extended his remarks to explain how the stories impacted him.

The world looks a little bit brighter. And, my mind became much more calm. I think that my mind was always anxious, but that was since disappeared. (Interview, 02/02/10)

Junsu’s face revealed the beneficial impact of the stories. At the beginning of the discussion group, his face looked very gloomy, and he avoided eye contact with group members. He often looked at the floor. As the discussion group was progressed, his face grew brighter. Junsu felt relief when understanding that his painful feelings were not abnormal and that racism was ubiquitous. The stories transformed his thought by expanding his socio-cultural consciousness. One might argue that the healing process was invoked.

**Building Peer Relationship**

James, Junsu, Sarang, and Julie all attended the same Korean church while Mathew attended another Korean church and Jiyoung went to an American church. Junsu, Julie, and Mathew knew each other from going to the same high school. James, Mathew, and Junsu also attended the same tennis club. Junsu stopped participating in the tennis club, and James and Mathew were still active club members. Jiyoung knew only Mathew among the participants in the discussion group because their mothers were acquainted with each other.

Building relationships among the participants is an important accomplishment of the group discussion. There were noticeable changes in the relationships amongst the participants.
James stated that his relationship with the members has grown throughout the book club during post-reading interview:

I have learned about different cultures and stuff. My perspective was broadened. The relationship is still growing. I am getting better at discussing and sharing my opinions. (Interview, 02/06/10)

James actually maintained a good relationship with Junsu, but he was not close to Mathew. James explained how the relationship between Mathew and himself developed throughout the book club. He and Mathew participated in the same tennis team, but they did not have many chances to have a deep conversation with each other. James appeared to be satisfied with his developing relationship with Mathew.

Their tennis teacher informed me that Junsu and Mathew did not socialize well before they began to participate the book club. During the early sessions of the group discussion, I noticed that they did not associate well together. Junsu and Mathew rarely communicated. Junsu always sat next to James and played tricks on him. James often smiled and accepted Junsu’s tricks. However, Junsu did not play tricks on Mathew. James sat in the middle of them. He played the mediating role between Mathew and Junsu. He did not take either side. As the discussion group progressed, Junsu began to talk more to Mathew. Mathew, sometimes, responded to Junsu by saying, “Sit here,” while indicating a seat next to him. At this moment, whatever was impeding their relationship seemed to have broken down. Mathew became more open minded and tended to accept Junsu as himself. Junsu lightened up his mood and smiled. By the final session, the three boys looked close like old friends. After the club ended, I heard that Mathew, James, and Junsu played basketball together.

Usually, in a Korean community, second generation Korean Americans and ESA students tend to associate with people of the same cultural backgrounds. Throughout the book
club, the segregation between the two groups was broken. Julie recognized her relationship with Sarang and Junsu, who are Korean ESA students, had been reformulated during the discussion sessions. Julie stated that before she participated in the book club, she politely said, “hello” to Junsu. But after the book club, she had a friendly conversation with him at church. The three girls, Julie, Sarang, and Jiyoung, exchanged text messages with one another and maintained close relationships even after the book club ended. They are also Facebook friends. Julie described the development of their relationships during the post-reading interview.

Me and James, we always talked. But with Junsu, I only said “Hi.” Now I start a conversation with him. I always feel comfortable. Jiyoung, sometimes, texts me, and we always talk. Once I used to be scared of Sarang for some reason, but now we laugh and talk about stuff a lot. I feel comfortable around them now. I remember the first day I came in, I was really shy. I was like, I don’t know what to say, I don’t wanna talk, I don’t wanna pay attention, and dadadadada. After a while, I liked going there, I liked talking to you guys. That was good opportunity. (Interview, 02/12/10)

Jiyoung was a new acquaintance to members of the book club. The book club was the only place she could meet K/KA friends, hang out with them, and share their concerns and troubles as teenagers. She built friendships with other K/KAs through the book club, and she longed for it.

I think the other people already knew each other before they met. But I was new. So, I don’t know how they change their relationship. But for me, I met new people. I met Sarang unni (sister) and Julie. We kind of became friends. I think we’ve become closer since we talked. Because our talk was so opinion-based, we got to know what each other thought and what they were like. I think it really helped. (Interview, 02/12/10)

When I asked Julie how the relationship with other participants could have been developed, she opined that sharing commonalities as Korean/Korean American highschoolers contributed in deepening their relationships and helped solidify the cohesiveness of the group. The participants’ attitude toward other people’s opinions and viewpoints, their open-mindedness, was also an important component in providing comfortable environment in the group discussion.
An open mind is an important aspect of being an effective participant in a group discussion. Julie shared her thoughts without hesitation, and she did not need to worry about being judged by other participants. She expressed her thoughts:

I think that sharing our thoughts would make me feel comfortable. Sometimes, you feel like you’re the only person who thinks about that topic. But then, you find that someone else thinks the same thing. You build off that topic, and you guys get closer. I remember how we once talked about 2PM [a Korean boy band] for some reason. I feel like we can relate to each other because we are not separated by a far gap, that we are all highschoolers. We know what’s going on with each other, so we talked about how we understand each other. Since they’re all Christians, they didn’t judge each other by what people thought, and they gave each other time to finish a thought. When they agreed, they said, “Oh, I understand that,” or “That’s totally agreeable,” When they disagreed, they wouldn’t get mad and said, “Oh, I don’t agree that.” That’s why I liked it. They wouldn’t get upset about it. So, I feel comfortable to share. I can share my thoughts without being judged. (Interview, 02/12/10)

**Broadening Perspectives**

The stories and group discussions provided the participants with opportunities to reveal the complexity of K/KA lives. The participants reconfigured the windows through which they perceived others and the mirrors through which they reflected upon themselves. They strove to connect what they knew, based on their life experiences, to outside world views. This heterogeneous, student-led and researcher guided literature discussion group helped to extend their understandings. As Moller (2001) mentioned, “Knowing how to read is more than knowing shapes and sounds of letters on a page. Knowing how to read involves making meaning for ourselves and finding ways to connect across our meanings to those of others in our social world.” (p. 216)

Mathew had learned about K/KA students from his surroundings, but had never read and watched cultural products about them such as books, newspapers, and films before he participated in the book club.
In my experiences, I’ve just visually learned about the experiences of K/KA. I’ve watched my K/KA friends grow and endure the school experience here in America. (Written response, 08/22/09)

Mathew had earlier thought that Koreans all looked alike. He added that the worldview he held must have been affected by other people. The stories and dialogue in the group allowed him to perceive the complexity of Korean American lives beyond his own world view. He mentioned the complexity of characters and situations in the stories and in life. He realized that Asians, especially Koreans, had different personalities and experiences. The stereotype he held about K/KA was subverted, and his realization displayed a more expanded view of K/KAs. Through his own reflection, he decided that he should not judge other people easily.

I realize that a lot of kids at my school think that all Koreans are the same. They think we all look alike. They think we all behave alike. And because I grew up where everyone thinks that way, maybe I’ve got a little affected by that. Maybe I also thought that Koreans are more generally similar. But I realized that just like all of different types of Caucasians, they are also different personalities of African Americans, there are all sort of different personalities in Caucasians, and it is the same with Asians. There are different types of Asians. We are so complicated. Our lives are very different. I should be less judgmental. People should be more open-minded about Asians having different personalities. They should be less judgmental about Asians. (Interview, 01/31/10)

Sarang, another student, stated that the stories opened pathways to new perspectives. She confessed that she lived a very difficult and challenging life. But she found that her view was very narrow-minded, and many people lived much harder life than hers. She mentioned the example of YoungJu’s life in A Step from Heaven, which seemed to broaden her repertoire of understanding other poor and disenfranchised people.

The stories remind me that there are families like that. In other words, my life doesn’t tell all. People live many lives. And even though they look the same, they are different. I have lived a life of ups and downs even though I am still young. I have gone through many difficult things. Therefore, I always thought many people went through difficult things, but I had already gone through those things. But, I have not been hit by my father. I had thought like that, but when I read the books, I found that there were people whose life was much worse than mine. I realized that my life was not as hard as theirs, but I just went through many things. (Interview, 02/06/10)
James, a fellow student, also stated that his viewpoints about K/KAs were broadened. He previously thought that K/KAs were academic achievers and came from middle or high socioeconomic backgrounds. Before he participated in the book club, the only book he had read was a Korean historical children’s novel, *A Single Shard*. He had not had chances to explore the deep feelings and thoughts of K/KA kids. Through the story contents in this book club, he realized that they struggled with their lives in various and unexpected ways.

I used to think that they were all alike and pretty much the same. They all have pretty stable lives, and they like to study hard and get grades. But now I see that they also struggle. Sometimes, not everything is easy for them. (Interview, 02/06/10)

Another student, Julie, declared that she had never read any K/KA children’s and young adult stories before she participated in the book club. She stated that she could realize how much K/KA kids were struggling with a variety of issues and how much their parents were pushing them to achieve academically. The stories in the discussion group were more engaging for her because she could understand what the characters in the stories were undergoing. The stories also subverted her preconception that only rich Koreans come to the United States. When she met many Korean kids, especially ESA kids, at church and at school, they looked rich because they gained financial support from their parents in Korea. Her conception was broken down when she read the book, *A Step from Heaven*. She noticed that not all Korean kids were rich, and there were diversities in Korean families.

I feel that since I was Korean American, I already knew what they are going through. So sometimes when I read it, I understand what they are going through. Sometimes, I never knew what they went through, like the stories from *A Step from Heaven*. That was really touching because they were Koreans, and they were trying to get money. And then, when they came here, it was totally different from what they thought. I thought it was really touching that they lived in the basement of a house because it really happens to families. I never thought it would be that bad because everybody who comes from Korea was always rich, you know. But, that part really opened my eyes that not everybody is rich when they come here. So, that was the only main thing I remember. (Interview, 02/12/10)
Jiyoung realized that Korean Americans as well as ESA Koreans have difficult times in America. She had thought that only ESA Koreans had difficult times in this new world.

I thought that since I was born in Korea and moved here, I had much more difficulties finding myself in here. But, then I realized that even Korean Americans have real difficulties. I figured that there are many different people who live here because I’ve never met any other Korean students who live here just for studying. (Interview, 02/12/10)

**Engaged Reading**

The stories engaged the participants, thereby developing and igniting their interest in reading. The students did not have much difficulty reading and interpreting the stories. The story contents and group discussions particularly provided an increased desire to read for those who struggled with staying focused in reading. Sarang explained how difficult it was to read by herself without outside pressure. She had difficulties in staying focused in reading even though she already knew the benefits of reading. She pointed out that the discussion group helped her to read more.

I don’t like to do something while sitting for a long time. That’s why I quit playing the piano. I had to practice it for six to seven hours. I don’t think that I can do it. (Interview, 02/06/10)

It was very exciting. What I especially appreciate is that the book club helped me read books even though I don’t like reading. So I felt good. I know that reading books are good, nevertheless, I don’t read books. I read only when someone forces me to read. (Interview, 02/06/10)

Julie’s parents encouraged her to read books. Their positive attitude toward reading influenced her to read more.

When I was younger, my parents usually bought me books. But, I never read those books. They just sat on my bookshelf. My parents asked why I didn’t read a lot like my brothers JP. I usually have the bad habit of act waiting to read, so when my family sees me reading, they are very surprised. (Interview, 11/01/09)
Julie, however, does not understand why she is disinterested in reading books. She expressed her difficulties with understanding the language of the classic literature, such as *Scarlet Letter*.

I like reading magazines, but I don’t like reading books. It’s kind of weird. But, I like to read about what’s going on in the world on the internet. I don’t know why I don’t like books. We had to read *The Scarlet Letter* in English class. I really didn’t like the novel for some reason. I think it’s because of the language the author wrote it in. It’s kind of complicated with so many big words. I was lost and it was hard for me to click with the language. My attitude toward reading is really bad. (Interview, 11/01/09)

While Julie identified herself as a member of Korean ethnic group, she overcame her dislike for reading when she read the K/KA stories. This catharsis occurred as she engaged and immersed herself in the texts in the literature discussion group. She connected herself to the texts by relating the stories to her own personal life as well as her family and community. She expressed that the discussion group helped her to read more books. She could also enjoy the books while reading slowly.

I think that the book club has helped me like to read more. I am encouraged to read more and enjoy reading slowly. I think about the end of *Necessary Roughness*. I’ve been able to be appreciative of what I am reading more likely. (Interview, 11/01/09)

A similar experience about personal engagement with the stories is also found in Jiyoung’s interview. The stories resonated with her because they reflected her cultural background.

I think it’s much easier to read because they are basically about Korean families. I also have a Korean family. So I know what it’s like. Our culture is the same. The content itself is really related to Korean culture. It’s much easier to read. I know what they mean. (Interview, 02/12/10)

**Engaged Resistance**

Some of the participants struggled with engaging in themes describing and pertaining to negative experiences about Korean Americans in this country. The stories challenged their
preconceived notions about self and the world. Consequently, they noted incongruence between their own lives and the fictional lives of the characters.

Several times, while grappling with painful images, Mathew and Sarang resisted in responding to racially provocative stories. Their resistance implied that the stories did not completely mirror the lives of the readers. Mathew and Sarang were compelled to confront complex events and the provoked feelings of discomfort, anger, and indignation.

Readers who explore culturally conscious literature are not always invulnerable to the possibility that they will become painfully connected to the problems and people found in the texts. Some participants responded in resistant ways to the pain, violence, and social injustices in the stories. Moller and Allen (2000) showed that the story contents provoke feelings of resistance in physical and emotional selves because of the fears of violence and hatred some students harbor when facing injustices.

In my study, Mathew and Sarang were resistant to the issues which connected to their actions and beliefs. Sarang stated that she would like to read more positive stories, and Mathew strongly concurred with her comment.

Sarang: If I could write well, I would not write this way. I would write happier stories.

Mathew: Successful stories.

Sarang: Why is this so depressing? Since I have not lived that way, I don’t understand it. (Spoken response, 12/05/09)

Jiyoung acknowledged that racial discrimination was a focused topic, but she pointed out the possibility of other noticeable topics about Korean immigrants’ lives in America. She displayed her curiosity about reading more diverse stories portraying the lives of Korean immigrants.
I don’t like that the stories are always about racial discrimination. This can be really a focused topic for Korean immigrant people, but I think there should be more books about how Korean immigrants really feel and think about their lives. (Written response, 12/05/09)

Benefits of the Interpretive Community

During the group readings, the participants grappled with alternative viewpoints and shared multi-dimensional experiences. They discussed conflicting opinions in a thoughtful way, allowing them access to the multiple viewpoints of the other members. This open dialogue enhanced their awareness of various issues. By employing student-centered modes of response to literature, they engaged in group discussions and created learning spaces where they examined their own responses and alternative interpretations. They collaborated to interpret the stories, succeeding far beyond that of single, independent reader.

Throughout the group discussion, chances arose for the participants to become more self-reflective. They had opportunities to develop interpretive responses to the books and to their lives. Junsu was not fluent in English, but the other students did not belittle him for his discrepancies in English language skills. The group reacted in caring and thoughtful ways when Jiyoung or Julie openly expressed their thoughts and opinions. They patiently waited for them to finish sharing their thoughts and difficult emotions before responding reflectively to them. Despite some of the talk overlapping, they generally responded to the other participants with reflective comments, thereby offering them encouragement.

Mathew expressed that the discussion group created a space to share his feelings and thoughts as a Korean American with other Korean or Korean Americans. He did not have such an opportunity to communicate with other Americans.

Mathew: I love this book club.

Jiyoung: Me too.
Mathew: I had great time having fellowship. I feel like I needed it. It was really fun. I don’t get to share how I feel about Korean Americans with other people.

Jiyoung: It’s not a usual subject.

Julie: Yeah.

Mathew: Yeah, I can’t go to white kids and say what I feel like. (everyone is laughing)

Mathew: It’s really weird. I really enjoyed it a lot. I really felt love.

Eunhyun: Junsu?

Junsu: I enjoyed it too. It was good.

Jiyoung: It was good. (Spoken response, 12/05/09)

Mathew applauded the benefits of the interpretive community. He was able to place himself in other students’ shoes, allowing him access into understanding diverse perspectives.

You get insight into what other people think. We don’t all have the same opinions. We also have different types of angles, viewpoints, and experiences. I had a lot of fun learning about different viewpoints, feelings, and expressions. It was fun and I benefitted. Again, I had a meager outlook to begin with. But once I placed myself in their shoes, I was able to see how they thought about certain things. (Interview, 01/31/10)

Jiyoung stated that she felt a fellowship and kinship when sharing her opinions with other members. She believed the others understood her and helped broaden her perspectives. She was satisfied with the meetings and proposed to continue the discussion group. In such an environment conducive to communication, she could raise her voice about K/KA people and culture.

I really liked it. It was, first of all, the only time I could be with like Korean kids who understand me really well. I really like talking. I’m really talkative, but it depends on what kind of people I can talk to. But I think it’s really good idea to continue this discussion group, just to know other ideas that come from other people’s head. I think it’s really fun. (Interview, 11/21/09)
Julie said that she was very quiet at school. She was usually shy and introspective as a student. But the environment of the interpretive community made her feel comfortable to speak up and allowed her to find her voice. She already knew the other participants because they attended the same high school or the same church except for Jiyoung. Julie could talk much more freely in the discussion group than at school.

This discussion group is actually the first discussion group I feel comfortable being around. I know the people well enough, except for Jiyoung. I am now getting to know her. I think the group is very comfortable. That’s why I like talking a lot. I just like talking because. (Interview, 11/01/09)

**Challenges in the Interpretive Community**

All the participants, suffice to say, did not struggle with efficiently decoding and comprehending the stories. Some of the participants periodically experienced difficulty in the student-led literature discussion group. During most of the discussion, the three girls and Mathew spoke openly whereas James and Junsu were relatively silent. James, especially, struggled with verbal skills and productive participation. He stated that he felt difficulties in speaking and sharing a lot and leading the discussion group. When James was a discussion leader and everybody was silent, he confided, “Guys, it’s really hard.” In addition, he confessed in the interview, “I know everybody…. Nothing is uncomfortable… I’m just not a good talker, that’s all.” (Interview, 02/06/10)

Mathew revealed the tendency of gender silencing in the group. He and the three girls talked dominantly while the other two boys tended to be quiet. He was conscious of the way the other members were looking at him. He seemed to think that girls are more talkative and emotional than boys and was conscious of how he looked in the other members’ eyes.

The girls talked a lot. The guys didn’t talk so much. That made me uncomfortable because I felt like a girl because I kept talking too much. And I feel like maybe what the
guys think, you know, I’m a little weird or something maybe too emotional like talking a lot. It was OK, but it still made me a little uncomfortable. (Interview, 01/31/10)

When I asked Sarang about what made her feel uncomfortable, she said that generally, the conversation flowed well, and she did not feel discomfort. The only thing she thought worth mentioning was that the other participants were slightly different from her. What she meant was that she had more difficult challenge in her life than them. Although Sarang did not openly share all her thoughts with them as she could with her best friends, she still shared many things with them.

The other participants appear to all have seen raised and brought up well. One thing I would say is that since they are different from me, I could not bring up other stories. In other words, if I talked with really close friends of mine, I might have more honest talk with them. That’s the only thing. (Interview, 02/06/10)

Junsu offered criticism, stating that the interpretive community should have done more in-depth analysis of the authors’ intention, and the participants should have created more debatable questions and explored them deeply. This could make better the reading group and enrich the experience.

It’s not your fault. We could go more deeply and detailed into the contents of the books, dig and find out what were the authors’ feelings. While discussing, I couldn’t properly figure out the authors’ feelings about the books. I hope that the students could be better, asking questions which have no answers rather than well-known questions. We could discuss one question for one hour without the need for ten questions. It’s better for a discussion leader to make those kinds of questions. (Interview, 02/02/10)

Jiyoung said she felt some limitation of expressing herself in English. Junsu likewise said that expressing his feelings in English was his biggest challenge. Mathew, on the other hand, was challenged to understand some of Korean words spoken by his fellow participants. Mostly, the discussion was proceeded in English, but very rarely, some of the participants spoke in Korean.
Summary

The discussion group and the story contents provided a catalyst in heightening the participants’ self-awareness of racial injustice. Through discussing the issue of racial injustice and sharing their personal experiences related to it, the participants could be empowered in speaking up and healing process might be invoked. They also had opportunities to broaden their perspectives and recognize the complexities of K/KA lives. Their relationships were built up by sharing their commonalities as K/KA adolescents and embracing different points of views with open mindedness, respect, and encouragement. The stories and the interpretive community engaged the participants, and provoked an increased desire to read even for the reluctant readers who struggled with staying focused in reading. However, some participants displayed engaged resistance to the intensified emotional literary experiences. They also pointed out other challenges in the interpretive community, such as lack of preparation, struggles with productive participation, language barrier, and sharing with more open mindedness.
Chapter Eight

Summary, Conclusion, and Implication

Summary

Very often, K/KA youth may be overwhelmed by cultural expectations, outsider perspectives, and the general angst that accompanies adolescent youth. Departing from the question of how K/KA youth might cope with everyday life as a minority or a model minority if they had early and consistent exposure to literature depicting the mirrored experiences of K/KAs, this study aimed to provide ways to understand and gain insights about how K/KA adolescents read, interpret, and respond to literature, a film, and newspapers about K/KA youth created by K/KAs. Theoretical foundations and studies of related-research employed in this study included critical multiculturalism, theories of response to literature, and K/KA children’s and young adult literature and media analysis, reading habits and experiences, and brief overviews of Korean/Korean adolescents’ experiences and aspect of identity.

In the section on critical multiculturalism, the development and major tenets of American multiculturalism as espoused by major proponents was discussed, and the critiques of multiculturalism offered by individuals who advocate critical multiculturalism were discussed. Current pluralist multiculturalism has avoided the discussions of racism and other controversial issues in its applications, and voices and experiences of marginalized groups have been trivialized in the curriculum. In addition, uncritical acceptance of multiple viewpoints implies accepting all perspectives regardless of how outrageous they are. Critics of multiculturalism propose enhancing the achievement of all students and providing them with the opportunities to become critical and productive members of a democratic society.
In the section on theories of response to literature, the evolution of literary response studies, various perspectives on reader response theories and research on literary response, and an overview of research on adolescents’ responses to multicultural literature were discussed. Adolescents bring their own attitudes, beliefs, values, experiences to reading, and their responses to the same text are unique, depending on “purposes of reading, instructional guidance, feelings, background knowledge and experiences, and preferences.” (Boyd, 2002, p.61) The ideological discourses of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and other cultural elements affect reader’s response to literature. Teachers’ practices, interpretive communities, and other contextual variables guide students’ interpretation of literature. The three factors, reader, text, and context are not separate aspects, but components for meaning-making. Text, reader, and context each cannot be separated from socio-cultural perspectives. Therefore, cultural insiders’ responses to culturally conscious literature are shaped by the interplay of various dimensions: the textual power of culturally conscious books, readers’ cultural values and attitudes in relation to ethnicity, race, class, gender, age, and religion, personal experiences and prior knowledge, and interpretive communities.

In the section on Korean/Korean American children’s and young adult literature and media analysis, current trends in the literature and media and the role of them were discussed. K/KA children’s literature began to emerge dramatically in 1990s. However, despite the changing demographics, a relatively small number of books representing Korean/Korean Americans were brought to press. Deeply entrenched stereotypical depictions and culturally inauthentic representation were still prevalent in books written by cultural outsiders and cultural insiders. Recently, Asian/Asian American filmmakers have attempted to create films to fight against Hollywood stereotypical depictions of Asian/Asian Americans. Several documentaries and a number of experimental films seek to bring liberating images for ethnic socialization and
political mobilization. Ethnic newspapers have been a pivotal vehicle for ethnic socialization and communication in the immigrant communities.

Regarding children’s reading habits and attitudes, studies found that various factors influenced young people’s literary experiences: gender, assistance from family and teachers, circumstances at home and school, attitudes toward reading in their first language, reading ability, and preference for genre. For example, the enthusiastic readers held more positive attitudes about reading than reluctant readers and reported that their parents encouraged them to read a lot. More girls than boys reported more enjoyment of reading and tended to read more frequently.

In the section on overview of Korean/Korean adolescents’ experiences, various factors which can contribute to significant psychological distress in Korean/Korean American adolescents were discussed: pressure from teachers and parents, feeling of guilt, shame, and anxiety resulted from academic performance, the awareness of perceived discrimination and marginality in school contexts, and identity conflict between two cultures. Various aspects of identity such as gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion, age, and generation affect Asian/Asian American students’ experiences. There is no single Asian/Asian American experience. Many studies revealed various, complex identities of the students and called for developing services and programs which were more responsive to varied needs of them.

In chapter three, I introduced research methodologies used for this study: mixed methodology combining qualitative case study and interpretive research. For triangulation of data, I adopted various methods: interviews, participant-observation, written documents, and surveys. Analyst triangulation and member checking were also employed to verify and validate the data analysis. I detailed how I proceeded with my data analysis. Through inductive analysis, themes and topics were identified, accompanied by assertions. Finally, the researcher’s role as a
cultural insider and diversities within the same ethnic group were noted. The data analysis and presentation was displayed in chapter four through seven.

In chapter four, the students’ biographical portraits were explored. The six students have experienced diverse challenges and struggles through diverse circumstances surrounding them at school, within family, and in society. In addition, regarding their reading habits and attitudes, they all agreed that reading was important and all disagreed with the statement that reading is more for girls than for boys. The second generation students tended to read mostly in English whereas ESA students read in both languages. They all had very positive attitudes toward reading. Their parents’ positive attitude toward readings influenced their consensus of opinions that reading is important in their lives. However, three of the participants, Jiyoung, James, and Mathew identified themselves as very good or proficient reader whereas the other three, Junsu, Sarang, and Julie as being a reluctant reader or having difficulties with engagement in reading. Especially, Jiyoung was a very enthusiastic reader and read various genres of readings with pleasure. The three reluctant readers described that they had struggled with being engaged in readings. They read books when they felt obligation or discovered really interesting books for them.

In chapter five, distinct themes selected from the participants’ responses to each category and their interpretations to the issues were presented. The participants more often focused their responses to the narratives around issues of distinct themes rather than others. The eight recurring themes are to be viewed as cultural access points for the students to enter the storyworld: (a) pressure to succeed/academic achievement, (b) knowledge about heritage, (c) ethnic/racial identity, (d) racial stereotypes/prejudice/discrimination, (e) language barrier, (f) dating relationship, (g) immigrant hardship, and (h) cultural differences. This analysis revealed
the complexities of the students’ interpretations for each category: print media/newspapers, novels, and cinematic images.

The participants provided interpretations for the theme, parental pressure and expectations, in response to the newspaper article, “Talk about Pressure to Succeed.” They searched for the rationale for parental pressure, shared their experiences of feeling pressure, and attempted to subvert the generalization that Korean parents had high expectations and pressured their children by providing counter examples. They also analyzed the underlying intentions strict parents had and pointed out the negative result when many Korean parents did not give their children genuine unconditional love in pursuit of their academic achievement.

Language barrier and racial prejudices/discrimination is another distinct theme identified in their responses to the narratives. In response to the newspaper article, “Fighting for Respect,” the participants discussed the impact of racial prejudices/discrimination on them and their interpretations about the main character’s reaction to teasing and derisive racist jokes. They shared the painful feelings they had when they heard such racist jokes; expressed feelings of empathy for the character; or evaluated the character’s reaction.

Often, K/KA students feel that they are stuck between two worlds. To be assimilated into mainstream culture, the children have to accept its dominant ideology, which very often makes them silent accepting of racial discrimination and prejudices. The children who cannot fit into mainstream culture do not belong to their parents’ culture because they are raised in America. In response to “Stuck Between Two Worlds,” the participants shared their experiences of racial segregation, emphasized positive views about bicultural identity and adjustment to two different cultures, and advised the main character that he could live a normal life with mixed cultures.
The three novels depict K/KA young people’s lives vividly from the perspectives of cultural insiders and contain diverse issues about Korean American teens. In response to *Finding My Voice*, the participants’ reading of and discussions about racism exhibited not only acknowledgment of the existence of racial segregation, but also diverse reactions and interpretations about the issue. The descriptions of vivid accounts of racism could potentially provoke the readers’ expressions of resentment, create empathy with the victim, examine reason for racism and criticize the main character’s reaction. Different personalities, diverse personal experiences, and cultural backgrounds were conducive to the readers’ interpretations and reactions.

The participants during the discussion of *A Step from Heaven* analyzed the abusive father character for a considerable amount of time. Immigrant hardships and the abusive father character were major focuses during the discussions. They pointed out the patriarchal characteristics of the abusive father, new environment and culture, language barrier, personality, and economic crisis. ESA students could relate more easily to the story than second generation students in this study.

One of the distinct topics during the discussions about *Necessary Roughness* was the cultural differences, which often made K/KA students experience cultural conflicts within the family or in society. They pointed out that the intergenerational cultural differences between Chan’s father, the first generation Korean immigrant, and Chan, who had grown up in America, created the cultural conflicts in the novel. They extended the cultural differences to the discussion of a social issue in Korea. They pointed out how hard it was to adjust to another country, even the country of their heritage. They also discussed the racial violence of teammates and Chan’s silence as a powerless minority person in society.
In response to the film, *In Between Days*, the discussion focused on the intentions and actions of the main character, a Korean immigrant girl, who struggled with dating relationship and adjustment to the new country. Different opinions of the participants in interpreting her situation were noticeable: the position as advising as opposed to the one as understanding and being less judgmental. The two different approaches were reconciled by making a conclusion that she needed to reflect on herself and seek to change her life attitude.

The other two distinguishable themes were presented in this chapter: identity and knowledge about heritage. This section presented the participants’ descriptions about self-identity and their perceptions about other groups: Korean community, blacks, whites, Latino/a, other Asian/Asian Americans, biracial people, class, and religion. In addition, it presented the participants’ discussion about Korean educational system and cultural differences between Korea and America.

Junsu described himself as a Korean. His Korean identity and cultural background empowered him to speak when he talked about Korean education and Korean people’s daily lives. He had strong Korean identity and contended that Korean Americans should find their own ethnic identities. Mathew had struggled with accepting his Korean identity, but his Christian belief helped him reinterpret his Korean identity and accept it as a part of himself. His belief in God instilled in him pride and confidence as a Korean American. While he associated with diverse groups of people, he tried to be his own, not changing himself to fit in the group. His identity had also been influenced by being the first-born son in a family and a pastor’s son. James had a biracial background, but most people considered him as white because of his appearance. He appeared to be proud of his racial hybridity. He also described himself as having a middle class background and being a Christian. He hoped to be a stronger Christian in the
future. Sarang was an ESA student and identified herself as a Korean of a middle class background. She was in the process of reformulating her ethnic identity. Her parents wished her to preserve her Korean identity without much influence of American culture. She also identified herself as a youth. She pointed out the immaturity of youth and acknowledged that adolescents need to learn many things. She also recognized the existence of differences between men and women and highlighted the different roles of men and women. Jiyoung described herself as a Korean and explained that she focused on Korean things a lot in America. She was in the process of embracing the two cultures. Her family had an upper-middle class background in Korea. She explained the benefits and challenges of a teenager’s life. She did not experience differential treatment in a family, but she shared her opinion about the roles of men and women, her notion of gender equality, and patriarchal society’s problem. She stressed the importance of human right in relation to the issue of gender. Julie was a second generation Korean American. She identified herself as more Korean than American. Her home culture influenced her ethnic identity development. She hung out with other Asian friends rather than American people because they could understand each other. She also had a strong Christian identity. She expressed her opinion about the issue of gender equality in this society. She felt that men have gained more benefits than women, especially in job markets.

The participants exhibited what they thought about Korean people in their community. They produced diverse viewpoints about them: looking cocky and having prejudices against Americans; feeling alienation from other students; attempting to assimilate into American culture; being smart; having upper or middle class backgrounds.

With regard to different racial groups, they held positive or negative stereotypical views about them. Regarding blacks, they described that many blacks had strong Christian spirit
beyond different races and strong physical strength. In addition, black kids were more likely to share small things with other people like Korean people whereas many white people tended to have superiority because of their whiteness. White people had a more stable and financially secure life than other racial groups. Black people were not as rich as white people and their grades were not as good as white people. Latinos appeared to be the same as black people. Julie also described that Latinos looked happy and did not seem to worry about anything. They stated that Asian students, especially ESA students, appeared to look invisible at school whereas Asian American students did not. Julie expressed how Asians from countries were treated undesirably at school whereas Asian Americans were treated better than them. She noticed different treatment of Asians at school. Major reasons included language barrier, different school system, and adjustment to the new culture. The participants had stereotypical views about biracial people. They believed that it was fun to live as a biracial kid because he/she could fit in with both cultures. They ignored the difficulties associated with being biracial.

Regarding gender, the girls stressed the importance of human right in relation to the issue of gender equality and men have gained more benefits than women, especially in job markets. Overall, the boys and girls agreed that women and men should be treated equally, especially in job market.

Regarding different social class, they provided the examples of those who were boastful about what they had. They discussed those people’s intention and proposed that they stop judging people by how they looked. The participants also conceded that religion was an important component of people’s culture and one should understand the diversity. They suggested that it was not desirable to discriminate against people based on religious prejudice or force people who have different religion or no religion to accept their religion. Since they were
all Christian, they were interested in discussing different attitudes of those who appeared to be Christian.

The participants discussed Korean educational system. The three ESA students all agreed that no one wanted to study in Korea. They discussed the competitive situation in Korea, the traditional ways of teaching methods, lack of qualified teachers, and the punishment method. Generally, what they experienced in Korea engendered within them negative images about the Korean educational system.

Based on knowledge about heritage, the students also brought with the issue of cultural differences between Korea and America. For example, ESA students noted that American people tended to need more personal boundaries than Korean people. Second generation students pointed out that Korean people easily judged other people. The two groups produced their perspectives based on cultural background and experiences within the contexts of home, school, and community. Especially, ESA students used their cultural knowledge and background as a powerful tool to display their opinions in various issues about cultural heritage.

In chapter six, different types of responses the students produced were analyzed. All participants created five types of responses as the way to display their literary understanding: analytical, personal, intertextual, transparent, and social/dialogic responses. The analysis illustrates how the participants used text messages, their reasoning, cultural knowledge and background, personal experiences, and the context of interpretive community in order to make sense of the print materials/media, cinematic images, and novels.

Analytical response includes all responses which use the text as an opportunity to construct meaning. This category of responses comprises a large portion of the participants’ responses in this study. The participants produced the category of responses in various ways:
analyzing characters’ actions, feelings, ideas, and intentions; making evaluative comments on characters’ actions and thoughts; developing their own idea of evaluating and critiquing authors’ crafts and giving reasons for their evaluation; discussing the distinction between the world of the story and readers’ understanding of the reality; making use of the peritextual features of a book as a source of potential meaning of the story; creating responses that involved thematic and summarizing statements.

Personal response, which also comprises another large portion of their responses, was produced by making meaningful connections between text and their life. While connecting life to texts, the participants used their experiences with their parents and friends in order to make meaningful connections to story characters. Sometimes, they raised questions about stories on the basis of their personal experiences or told their own story which was based on personal experiences. Through text-to-life connection, they utilized the stories in order to better understand their friend’s case or their life experiences. They also personalized stories by giving themselves a role of agency in stories. They often used the “I would” statement by inserting themselves in a story. Another noticeable personal response is engaged resistance. Some of the respondents exhibited resistance to the unjust events and painful stories. They attempted to avoid emotionally painful experiences with the stories.

Three types of intertextual connections were forged by the respondents: associative links, analytical links, and synthesizing links. The participants used intertextual links by making a simple connection of likeness, identifying similarities or differences between texts, and making generalizations or conclusions about stories.

The participants gave advice to or encouraged story characters as if they were in a storyworld. They were capable of producing this type of transparent response by deeply
positioning themselves in the story when the story and their own lives are transparent to each other. This type of deep engagement in stories rendered the readers the ability to enter the storyworld and have a “lived-through experience.”

Finally, the participants in the interpretive community built up meanings interactively. Through this dialogic/social response, they scaffolded each other by adding layers of meanings or offering competing perspectives and underwent the process of synthesis or generalization.

Chapter seven explored how the narratives and the interpretive community influenced their perspectives and attitudes. During the final discussion session and post-reading interviews, the students discussed the impact of the narratives and the influence of the interpretive community. This study influenced their perspectives, lives, attitude toward the readings, and peer relationships. The students also pointed out both benefits and limitations of the study.

The discussion group and the story contents provided a catalyst that opened the students’ eyes to racial injustice. The students revealed themselves as having a heightened self-awareness of racial injustice by sharing their experiences. They empowered themselves by this process. Those who struggled with issues of racism began to understand their lives as meaningful by connecting the knowledge to their lives. The story contents informed the participants’ viewpoints. One might argue that the healing process was invoked.

Building relationships among the participants is another important accomplishment in this study. Relationships among the participants grew throughout the meetings and were maintained even after the end of the book club. Commonalities as K/KA highschoolers and their open-mindedness embracing different viewpoints contributed in deepening their relationships and helped solidify the cohesiveness of the group.
Through the book club, the participants also had opportunities to broaden their perspectives. They realized that they had held narrow-minded, stereotypical views. Their views were expanded to recognize the complexities of K/KA lives and different personalities of K/KAs. They became aware that they should be less judgmental.

The stories engaged the participants, thereby developing and igniting their interest in the readings. The story contents and group discussions particularly provided an increased desire to read for those who struggled with staying focused in reading. The group discussion helped them to read the books, and the story contents resonated with them, thereby engaging them with the readings. On the other hand, the story contents provoked feelings of resistance for some of the participants. Incongruence between their own lives and the fictional lives of the characters and fears of violence and hatred some students harbor when facing injustices were conducive to their engaged resistance.

This interpretive community employed student-centered modes of response and allowed them access to the multiple viewpoints of other members. Despite some of the talk overlapping, they generally responded to the other participants with active and reflective comments, thereby offering them encouragement. The comfortable and supportive environment of the group created learning spaces where they examined their own responses and alternative interpretations with open-mindedness.

However, the participants also pointed out the challenges in the interpretive community, such as struggling with verbal skills and productive participation, lack of language proficiency, and challenges in sharing with open-mindedness. One of the participants also pointed out the lack of preparation of the members for more in-depth analysis of the stories and the authors’
intentions. He stressed the need for creating more debatable questions in order to have more enriched experiences.

**Conclusion**

The analysis/presentation of data in this study illustrated how the participants used the texts, their reasoning, cultural knowledge and background, personal experiences, and the context of interpretive community in order to make sense of the print materials/media, cinematic images, and novels. The present study reveals that even interpretations of individuals from similar racial/ethnic backgrounds can be presumed to be different.

Korean/Korean American youth literature has diverse themes which are featured in the literature. To deepen literary understanding of the narratives which contain these diverse themes, the participants used their cultural capital, which was based on their cultural knowledge and backgrounds, personal experiences, and knowledge about heritage, as the stepping stones to their interpretations and engagement in the literature. Their personal experiences and cultural knowledge and backgrounds were helpful for gaining an understanding of the texts and the complexities of lives portrayed in the texts.

There were recurring themes expressed by most students in their responses to the narratives: (a) pressure to succeed/academic achievement, (b) knowledge about heritage, (c) ethnic/racial identity, (d) racial stereotypes/prejudice/discrimination, (e) language barrier, (f) dating relationship, (g) immigrant hardship, and (h) cultural differences. My study participants articulated their viewpoints on the various issues of K/KA teen lives.

Regarding aspects of identity, the study revealed that there was not single Korean American experience. Differences in and intersections of aspects of identity such as gender,
religion, class, race/ethnicity, age, and generation affected the K/KA students’ social, educational experiences, and they were creating hybrid, complex, dynamic identities.

Regarding different racial groups, the students produced diverse viewpoints. They viewed Korean people in their community as looking cocky, feeling alienation, attempting to assimilate into American culture, being smart, and/or having middle or upper class backgrounds. Asians in their schools appeared to be treated undesirably whereas Asian Americans are treated better than they are. The main reasons included language barrier, new culture, and school environment. They had very positive views of biracial people. Whites appeared to have more stable and financially secure lives than blacks, and school grades of black people were not as good as whites. But, black people appeared to have strong Christian soul and physical strength. Latino/a people appeared to be similar to blacks in relation to social class and school grades. But the participants did not have much information to share their perceptions of the group.

The participants pointed out that men and women should be treated equally. Especially, Jiyoung pointed out the priority of human rights issues with regard to gender equality. They also discussed cultural group in relation to social class. They pointed out the intentions of those who were boastful of what they had and concluded that we should stop judging people by how they look. Regarding different religious groups, they stressed that religion was part of their culture and pointed out that it was not desirable to discriminate against people based on religious prejudices or force people who have different religion or no religion to accept their religion.

Korean educational system and cultural differences between Korea and America were distinct topics in their discussions. The participants criticized the Korean educational system and compared the two cultures based on their cultural knowledge and background and personal experiences as a powerful tool to display their opinions in various issues about cultural heritage.
In this present study, all the participants produced five types of responses: analytical, personal, intertextual, transparent, and social/dialogic responses. They made use of the five types of responses which were identifiable in their responses to the narratives as the ways to display their literary understanding. The types of responses they developed revealed how they were connecting to the texts and making connections beyond themselves.

Within the interpretive community, the students learned to embrace multiple ways of knowing, interpreting, and responding to the narratives. Their literacy learning had been socially constructed within the community. I noted that the students’ viewpoints changed over the course of the study even though they were still undergoing gradual processes. The narratives and the interpretive community had significant influence on the students’ developing views. For example, the discussion group and the story contents provided a catalyst that opened the students’ eyes to racial injustice. Those who struggled with issues of racism began to understand their lives as meaningful by connecting the knowledge to their lives. Building relationships among the participants was another important accomplishment in this study. Commonalities as Korean/Korean American highschoolers and their open-mindedness about different viewpoints contributed in deepening their relationships and helped solidify the cohesiveness of the group. Throughout the study, their viewpoints were expanded to embrace the complexities of K/KA lives and recognize different personalities of K/KAs.

The survey study found that all the participants had a positive attitude toward reading, and three of the participants identified themselves as very good or proficient readers whereas the others as reluctant readers. However, the post-reading interview revealed that the narratives as well as the interpretive community engaged all the participants, even the reluctant readers, thereby developing and igniting their interest in reading. For example, Julie had a positive
attitude toward readings, but it was not easy to find books that were interesting to her. However, she enjoyed the readings in our book club and gave laudatory comments about the opportunity. The comfortable and supportive environment of the group created learning spaces where they examined their own responses and alternative interpretations with open-mindedness.

There were some challenges in this study. The narratives provoked feelings of resistance for some students. Some students struggled with verbal skills and productive participation and lack of language proficiency. There were also challenges in sharing with open-mindedness, and the lack of preparation of the members for more in-depth analysis.

**Implications**

This research advances what has been articulated by Lehr and Thompson (2000), Sipe (2008), and other scholars in several aspects. It reveals a different view of engagement that parallels some current ideas, introducing the idea that engagement can lead to critical thinking, personal transformation, and building peer relationships. The literary activities provided a space for developing the students’ critical awareness of racial injustice. Especially, those who grappled with the issue began to understand their lives as meaningful by connecting the knowledge to their lives, and the empowerment process might engender an emotional response of healing among the participants. Peer relationships have also developed and been maintained after the research ended in more complex fashion.

This research also examines how ideas about white privilege are accepted or rejected by K/KAs as they are involved in the process of creating self identities. The participants tended to accept the ideas about white privilege, such as positive or negative stereotypical views of diverse racial groups. On the other hand, they resisted the ideas about white privilege, such as
homogeneous portrayal of people of Korean descent, discriminatory views of Korean cultural heritage, and differential treatment provoking feeling of humiliation.

I hope that the present study informs educators, counselors, parents, and students of K/KA adolescents’ voices and perspectives on various issues such as pressure to succeed, racial discrimination, language barriers, cultural differences and conflicts, identity formation, and others. Especially, it will help understand K/KA adolescents’ struggles and problems through their lenses. Better informed decisions will help K/KA adolescents grow up with being healthy beliefs. In addition, this research examines how the students accept or reject the ideas about white privilege at school. Especially, teachers’ role is very important in classrooms. Are certain students called upon more? Does a teacher react negatively to students of a particular race? Teachers and students would need to develop an awareness of how white privilege is played out in classrooms.

Korean parents need to be aware of what their children experience at school and in this society and how they think, feel, interpret dynamics of diverse experiences. They need to listen to their children’s voices and should be concerned with what they are struggling with and how they interpret and react to those issues. Many Korean parents give priority to academic achievement and English language development rather than other issues. For example, in Jiyoung’s case, her parents considered English language development as being the most important, overlooking other crucial components of her life. In Junsu’s case, living alone in America without parents was not easy. Adjustment to the new culture without parents is very challenging for Korean adolescents. Their parents need to know about the impact of racial alienation on their psychological and mental health. The second generation Korean American students in this study also have encountered diverse issues in their lives such as struggles with
parental pressure, cultural conflicts between home and school, identity struggle, and other issues. Korean parents need to make informed, deliberate decisions for their children.

One of the important findings to be noted in this study is that K/KA youth are not homogeneous. There are commonalities K/KA adolescents can share. On the other hand, they have their own understandings, experiences, personalities, and knowledge. In this society, many people have a preconception of the model minority myth implying that Asians don’t have any problems. K/KA students have experienced diverse challenges and struggles.

Currently, many teachers in America might not have many opportunities to gain information about K/KA students. The students need safe and healthy school environments where they can learn and achieve. To create those surroundings, educators and students need to be informed of cultural insiders’ perspectives and be aware of social justice issues. One of the effective ways is to implement quality multicultural children’s literature in the classroom. Through quality literature under the supervision of teachers, students will have chances to reflect on themselves and others and learn to respect different culture and people who have diverse cultural background.

It is important that cultural insiders’ perspectives on the works provide cultural information and perspectives (Willis & Johnson, 2000). Literacy teachers who are limited by how they use multicultural children’s literature pedagogically may select recurring themes tied to students’ social and cultural realities (Brooks, 2006). They can use the recurring themes identified in K/KA youth literature and media and rely on the cultural knowledge and experiences of the students for their instruction. This study demonstrated specific ways of engaging of K/KA students with the texts even though the group represents only one group of the K/KA youth. The student informants produced their viewpoints on the basis of their own
experiences and understandings. More information about the ways K/KA students respond to texts will provide educators with better resources for their instruction.

Some people have asked me why I focused on the negative experiences of K/KA students rather than a positive view of life. Avoiding bringing up the critical issues and problems beneath the model minority stereotype might be considered as a way to protect K/KA students, but it’s an only temporary remedy. If the situation is persistent, there might be the eruption of festering inner conflicts someday. I am not saying that there are always negative sides among K/KA experiences. But, I argue that taking a positive view of life does not mean avoiding or ignoring the critical issues and problems K/KA people have encountered. Rather, taking a truly positive view of life involves facing the issues, pouring out all the troubles with courage, and finding solutions actively together to change the problematic situations. Those cooperative efforts will ultimately be conducive to a more democratic vision of this society.
References


Appendix A

Children’s Literature and Media

Children’s and young adult literature


Media


Appendix B

Interview Questions

**Some questions might not be applicable to you. For those questions, you don’t need to answer.**

**Biographical**
1. How you identify yourself regarding race, gender, age, youth, class, religion, language, and others?
2. What languages do you speak?
3. What languages are spoken at home?
4. Where were you born?
5. When and why did you come to the U.S.? To Urbana-Champaign?
6. What preparation did you do before you come to America?
7. Have you gone back to Korea? If so, how many times have you been back?
8. How do you think your parents would describe you?
9. How do you think your teacher would describe you?
10. How would your best friends describe you?
11. Do you have life experiences that radically alter the meanings of your life?
12. What was/is the most significant challenge you have experienced/have in your life in the U.S. or in Korea? What was your response to the challenge?
13. What are your hobbies and interests?

**Family**
1. Do you have other family members at Urbana-Champaign? In the U.S.?
2. Tell me about your family. What kinds of work do your parents do?
3. What kinds of things do you do as a family?
4. What, if any, is the parents’ role in language learning? Or academic learning?
5. Do you think parental and/or family pressure could affect you? If then, in what ways?

**School**
1. Are there other Korean students at your school? About how many?
2. Are there other Asian students at your school? About how many?
3. Do you feel that the expectations at home and school are different? How?
4. Did someone at your school (e.g., student or teacher) ever make you feel uncomfortable or unwelcome? Tell me about it.
5. What kinds of difficulties have you had in adjusting to school in America? How have you handled the difficulties?
6. Tell me what you like about school.
7. Tell me what you don’t like about school

**Friends**
1. Who are your close friends? Tell me about your three closest friends.
2. Do you have any Korean friends?
3. Do you have any Asian friends?
4. Do you have any non-Asian friends?
5. What do you think of Blacks, White, Latino/a, other Asian/Asian Americans?
6. Why are you hanging out with those friends?
7. Are you hanging out with people like you? Why?
8. Are you hanging out with people who are different from you? If not, why aren’t you hanging out with them?
9. What are the main activities you share with your friends?
10. Do you think you have enough friends? Why? Why not?
11. Are you satisfied with the relationship with your friends? Are there any difficulties? Why?

Organization
1. Please specify organizations that you are involved in.
2. Why and how did you decide to be involved in the organizations?
3. What is your role in the organizations?
4. If any, what difficulties do you encounter while being involved in the organizations?
   How have you handled them?

Future
1. What college do you want to go? What major? Why?
2. What would you like to do after graduating college?
3. What/who influences you most to make a decision for your future plan?

Readings
1. What are the attitudes you hold about reading in general, and how do your family assist your reading habits and experiences?
2. Do you have any problems in understanding the books, newspapers, and film in this book club? (English language, content, no time to read, lack of interest, etc.)
3. What stories do you like best or worst?
4. How do you feel about the discussion group? Is there anything makes you uncomfortable? Is there any difficulty? What are they?
5. What impact did those stories have on you? What did you learn from those stories? What did those stories make you think of?
Appendix C

Survey Questions

*Survey Questionnaire I (adopted from Strauss, 2008)*

We want to know what **you** think about reading

Name:_____________________

Male________ Female ________

Age:___________

**Section A: Reading habits**

First fill in the table about how often and for how long you read. Then answer the questions below the table.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Korean</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</table>

**Questions:**

1. What types of newspaper articles do you read: political, sport, social interest? If you read other types of article, please specify.
   - In English:
   - In Korean:

2. What kinds of magazines do you read? Are they about sport, politics, social events, pop and movie stars, travel, fashion? If other, please specify.
   - In English:
   - In Korean:

3. What kinds of books do you read – novels, short stories, poetry, drama?
   - In English:
   - In Korean:

4. What kinds of fiction do you read – adventure, action, family drama, romance, science fiction, horror? If other, please specify.
5. What kinds of material do you read on the internet – general news, politics, sport, entertainment? If other, please specify.
In English:
In Korean:

6. What do you take with you or buy to read when you go on holiday, or travel anywhere?
   If you take or buy nothing, leave blank.
In English:
In Korean:

7. What kind of reading did you do when you were at school?
In English:
In Korean:

8. What reading did you enjoy at school?
In English:
In Korean:

9. When you are reading, what do you find the most difficult – understanding the ideas in the text, understanding words, or reading fast enough?
In English:
In Korean:

Section B: Reading habits and experiences (in Korean and/or in English)

In this set of questions, first check one of the five alternatives, and then write an answer to any questions below it.

1. I take a book (English or Korean) with me when I go on holiday.
   Always……. Usually……. Often……. Sometimes……. Never…….
   a) What kind of book do you take?
   b) How much of the book do you read?

2. My parents read to me when I was a child.
   Everyday……. Often……. Sometimes……. Never…….
   a) What did they read to you?
   b) When did you start reading yourself?

3. My parents took me to a library or bookshop.
   Often……. Sometimes……. Seldom……. Never…….

4. My parents bought me books.
   Often……. Sometimes……. Seldom……. Never…….
If they bought you books, what kinds of books did they buy?

5. My parents read books (now and in the past). 
Everyday……… Often……… Sometimes……… Never………
What kinds of books do they read?

6. My brothers and sisters read books. (Leave black if you have no brothers or sisters). 
Often………Sometimes………Occasionally………Seldom………Never………

7. I buy books. 
Often………Sometimes………Occasionally………Seldom………Never………
a) What kinds of books do you buy? 
b) What language are they in?

7. I borrow books from a library. 
Often………Sometimes………Occasionally………Seldom………Never………
a) What kinds of books do you borrow? 
b) What language are they in?

9. I read a book when I want to go to sleep because reading relaxes me and makes me feel sleepy. 
Often………Sometimes………Occasionally………Seldom………Never………

10. My language teachers at school loved reading. 
All of them…… Many of them…… Some of them…… Few of them…… None of them…… I never noticed……
If you noticed, what kinds of books did they read?

11. I read books for pleasure, for fun. 
Often………Sometimes………Occasionally………Seldom………Never………

12. I had teachers/a teacher at school who made me hate reading. 
Yes…… No……
If yes, what did he/she/they do?

13. I had teachers/a teacher at school who made me love reading. 
Yes…… No……
If yes, what did he/she/they do?
14. At school, we discussed in class books that we had read. 
Regularly……. Often……. Sometimes…….. Seldom…….. Never……. 
What kinds of books did you discuss?

15. At school, I was so interested in my subject that I wanted to read more. 
Often……. Sometimes…….. Seldom…….. Never…….

All of them…..Many of them…..Some of them…..Few of them…..None of them…. 
  a) What kinds of books do they read? 
  b) What languages are the books in?

17. My friends enjoy reading comic books 
All of them…..Many of them…..Some of them…..Few of them…..None of them…. 

18. My friends prefer reading comics to reading books. 
All of them…..Many of them…..Some of them…..Few of them…..None of them…. 

19. What I’ve read in English has been boring  
All of it…….. Most of it……..Some of it……..None of it…….

20. I read to escape an unpleasant or unhappy situation.  
Often……. Sometimes…... Seldom…….. Never…….

21. Education is important in my life.  
Very…….. Quite…….. Not very…….  
Give a reason for your answer.

*Survey Questionnaire II (adopted from Clark & Foster, 2005)*

**What you think about reading in English and reading with other people.**

1. How much do you enjoy reading? (Check one only)  
Not at all……. A bit…….. Quite a lot…….. Very much ………

2. On a scale of 1-10, how good a reader do you think you are? (Check one only)  
1….2….3….4….5….6….7….8….9….10….

3. How often do you read outside of school? (Check one only)  
Everyday or almost everyday…….. Once or twice a week………..  
Once or twice a month……….. Never or almost never……..

4. Do you think you read enough? (Check one only)  
Yes…….. No, but I would like to read more…….  
No, and I don’t want to read more…….
5. How many books do you think there are in your home? (Check one only)
None….. 1-10…… 11-50…… 51-100…… 101-250…… 251-500…… More than 500……

6. How often do you talk with your family about what you are reading? (Check one only)
Everyday or almost everyday…… Once or twice a week…………
Once or twice a month………… Never or almost never…………

7. What do you think about reading? (Check one only)

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<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Reading is boring</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can’t find books that interest me</td>
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<tr>
<td>I read outside of school</td>
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<td>I like going to the library</td>
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<td>I would be happy if someone gave me a book as a present</td>
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<tr>
<td>I do not read in my class</td>
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8. I read because: (Check as many as you like)
It is a skill for life……. It will help me get a job……. It is fun…….
It teaches me how other people live and feel……. I have to…….
It helps me understand more of the world………..
It helps me find out what I want/need to know……. It give me a break………..
It helps me understand more about myself………….

9. Which of the following do you read outside of class? (Check as many as you like)
Websites……. Newspapers……. Magazines…… Jokes……. Factual books……. Fiction……. Graphic novels……. Comics……. Annuals……. Manuals…….
Emails….. Poetry……. Plays….. Catalogues……. Sony lyrics…….
Posters/signs…….Cookbooks……. Encyclopedias……. Travel books…….
Audiobooks……. Text messages…….
Books & magazines in a language other than English……………
Books & magazines about TV programs……………

10. What types of fiction do you like reading? (Check as many as you like)
Adventure……. Horror/ghost……. Romance/relationships…….
Animal-related……. Science-fiction/fantasy……. Comedy…….
Crime/detective……. Sports-related……. Realistic teen fiction…….
War/spy-related……. Poetry……. I don’t read fiction……. 

11. Where do you like reading? (Check as many as you like)
Home: Lounge/Living room……. Bedroom…….
Bath……. Toilet……. Garden…….
School: Classroom……. School library…….
Playground…….
Community: Traveling (bus, train, car etc)……. Cafè…….
Town library……. Outside, e.g. park…….
Friend’s house…….

12. I would be more likely to read if: (Check as many as you like)
I had more time……. Books were cheaper……. It was about subjects I am interested in…….
I enjoyed it more……. Libraries were better…….
Books had more pictures……. I knew what to read…….
Someone read aloud to me……. The stories were shorter……. Libraries were closer……. I found reading easier……. My friends read more……. My school encouraged me more……. My parents/guardians encouraged me more……. I had better eyesight ……….

13. Which activities would you like to do to help yourself and others read more? (Check as many as you like)
Reading groups with friends……. Talking about my favorite reads…….
Reading games……. Helping choose stock for the library…….
Writing book reviews……. Helping younger children with their reading…….
Designing displays for the library……. Reading for charity/sponsorship…….
Designing websites/magazines……. Rating books for your peers…….
Reading for a competition or prizes……. Meeting authors/celebrity readers…….
14. Who taught you to read? (Check as many as you like)
Mom……… Dad……… Guardian……… Grandparent……… Brother/sister……
Friend……… Teacher……… Other………

15. Who do you read with? And who do you talk about reading with? (Check as many as you like)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Read with</th>
<th>Talk with</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mom</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brother/sister</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. Does your mom, dad, or guardian encourage you to read?
Mom          Yes, a lot ……… Sometimes……..  No, not at all………
Dad          Yes, a lot ……… Sometimes……..  No, not at all………
Guardian     Yes, a lot ……… Sometimes……..  No, not at all………

17. Does your mom, dad, or guardian spend time reading?
Mom          Yes, a lot ……… Sometimes……..  No, not at all………
Dad          Yes, a lot ……… Sometimes……..  No, not at all………
Guardian     Yes, a lot ……… Sometimes……..  No, not at all………

18. Who should encourage you to enjoy reading? (Check one only)
School…… Home………Both………Neither……… Don’t know………

19. Who should teach you to read? (Check one only)
School…… Home………Both………Neither……… Don’t know………

20. How many of the following do you have at home? (Check as many as you like)
A computer…… A desk of your own……… Books of your own………
Access to a daily newspaper……… Access to magazines………

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Appendix D

Response Guides for Discussion or Journal Writing

1. How did you feel about what you read today?
2. How did you feel about what happened?
3. How do you feel about a certain character?
4. How would you describe character?
5. Did anything in this story surprise you?
6. Do you think the events in this story could really happen?
7. Why do you think people are mean to each other when they look different from them?
8. What would you have done if you were in a similar situation?
9. Would you have changed the ending?
10. What did you learn from what you’ve read? What did you learn that was new to you? Is there a message to the story?
11. Can you tell me what the whole story was about, in a few words or in short form?
12. Are these stories similar to any other stories you have read? How?
13. What were the authors trying to tell you when they wrote these stories?
14. What are the most important ideas in these stories?
15. Why did it end like it did?
16. Is there anything you would have changed?
17. Did you like the story? Why or why not?
18. What kind of person is the character?
19. Do you think you have any of the same personality characteristics as the character? Do you know anyone like the character?
20. What are your favorite parts of the book? How would you change the story to make it better?
Appendix E

Parental Consent Letter/ Youth Assent Letter

Parental Consent Letter

Dr. Harris, a professor in education at UIUC and Eunhyun Kim, a graduate student at UIUC are conducting a study on Korean/Korean American youth. We are particularly interested in 15-17 years old Korean/Korean American youths who are from migrating or immigrant family. We write to ask for your permission to interview your children, allow them to participate in a small group literature discussion once a week for four to five months, and allow them to respond to survey questions. We are interested in learning about their responses through reading, writing, and group discussion to three young adult novels, a film, and newspapers which portray Korean American adolescents’ lives in U.S.

Each interview might be conducted at each student’s residence for approximately one hour. Discussions about books, a film, and newspapers will be conducted at Grainger engineering library or Champaign public library and take around 30 to 60 minutes. Discussions will be held weekly or bi-weekly over the course of the study. Survey will be administered in group setting and conducted at the beginning of the search and the end of the research.

In these interviews and discussions, which will be audio-taped with your permission, your child will be asked to discuss her or his experiences and point of views. What the child talks about is shared as part of research dissemination, but their responses are not connected to their names. The audiotapes and all other information obtained during this research project will be kept secure. The audiotapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will be accessible only to me and transcribed. The audiotapes and writing samples will be coded to remove your child’s name and will be erased after the project is completed. There are not anticipated to be any risks to your son or daughter’s participation beyond those that exist in daily life.

Your child’s participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you would rather not have your child to speak with me or participate in literature discussion, we will respect your wishes. If your child does talk to me, she or he also has the right to not answer certain questions we ask that would generate any feelings of discomfort, and your child can also end the interview at any time.

You may have concerns about how your child’ information will be disclosed, but we will never use her or his name or any other identifying information. Since there is no known research on Korean/Korean American adolescents’ responses to books about their lives, this research will provide K-12 educators with new perspective about the experiences of Korean/Korean American adolescents in U.S. Your child will be paid $5 for each session. The prorated amount of remuneration is a maximum of $100.

If you have any questions, you may call Eunhyun Kim at 217-721-5392 or e-mail her at ekim1@illinois.edu You may also contact Eunhyun’s adviser Dr. Violet Harris through e-mail: vjharris@illinois.edu or phone 217-244-4572. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.
If you have any questions about your rights as a parent or guardian of a child research participant, please contact Anne Robertson at Bureau of Educational Research: 217-333-3023 or arobrtsn@illinois.edu; or the University of Illinois’ Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or irb@illinois.edu. You are welcome to call the above numbers; please be sure to identify yourself as a parent or guardian of a child research participant. This research will be disseminated in Eunhyun Kim’s Ph.D. dissertation, an academic paper to be presented in class, with the potential to be presented at an academic conference, as part of a book chapter, and/or journal article.

Sincerely yours,

Eunhyun Kim, Ph.D. Student, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Dr. Violet Harris, Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

I give consent for the child in my care to participate:

I will allow my child’s research activities to be audio recorded ___ YES ___ NO

Signature of Guardian/Parents ______________________________________________________

Date____________________________________
Print Name________________________________________

Youth Assent Letter

Dr. Harris, a professor in education at UIUC and Eunhyun Kim, a graduate student at UIUC are conducting a study on Korean/Korean American youth’s response to literature and media. We are particularly interested in 15-17 years old Korean/Korean American youth who are from Korea or children of Korean immigrants. We are interested in learning about your responses to three young adult novels, a film, newspapers which portray Korean/Korean American adolescents’ lives in America through reading, writing, survey, and discussion.

Discussions about books, a film, and newspapers will be conducted at Grainger engineering library or Champaign public library and take around 30 to 60 minutes. The discussions will be held weekly or bi-weekly over the course of the study. Surveys will be conducted at the beginning of the research and the end of the research. Interview might be done once for each participant at his/her residence for approximately one hour.

In the interviews and discussions, you will be asked to discuss your life experiences and point of views about the novels and media. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you want to stop participating in this project, you may let me know anytime, and you can also end the participation at any time. Our interview will be kept private. I will not share what you talk about to anybody, including your parents. When we write up our project, we will not use your real name or any other identifying information. If you would like, we can come up with a
pretend name together. The audiotapes and all other information will be kept secure and erased after this project is completed. There are not any risks to your participation beyond those that exist in daily life. You will be paid $5 for each session. The prorated amount of remuneration is a maximum of $100.

If you have any questions, you may call Eunhyun Kim at 217-721-5392 or e-mail her at ekim1@illinois.edu You may also contact Eunhyun’s adviser Dr. Violet Harris through e-mail: vjharris@illinois.edu or phone 217-244-4572. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Anne Robertson at Bureau of Educational Research: 217-333-3023 or arobrtsn@illinois.edu; or the University of Illinois’ Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or irb@illinois.edu. You are welcome to call the above numbers collect; please be sure to identify yourself as a research participant if you do so. This research will be disseminated in Eunhyun Kim’s Ph.D. dissertation, an academic paper to be presented in class, with the potential to be presented at an academic conference, as part of a book chapter, and/or journal article.

Sincerely yours,

Eunhyun Kim, Ph.D. Student, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Dr. Violet Harris, Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

I will allow my research activities to be audio recorded ___ YES ___ NO

Signature of a student ________________________

______________________________

Date____________________________________

Print Name________________________________________