“PUTTING OURSELVES IN THEIR SHOES”:
CASE STUDIES OF FOUR TEENAGERS’ READING EXPERIENCES
WITH NONFICTION LITERATURE IN A SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

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“PUTTING OURSELVES IN THEIR SHOES”: CASE STUDIES OF FOUR TEENAGERS’ READING EXPERIENCES WITH NONFICTION LITERATURE IN A SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM (305 pp.)

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine student experiences reading nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom. It examined the transactions that took place between the readers and the nonfiction literature in a social studies setting at Fullerton High School, a suburban school in Northeast, Ohio. Reader responses, including journal entries, online postings, and poems, classroom observations, and interviews informed the findings.

The study found the students’ backgrounds and experiences influenced their reading experiences with the nonfiction literature in their social studies class, and as a result, the students created personal transactions or poems with the text. While each student transacted with the text differently, they all experienced self poems, which were transactions directly related to the reader, text poems, which were transactions directly related to other forms of media, and world poems, which were transactions related to the world. As a result of these poems, students experienced other cultures unlike their own. Due to this cultural experience, the students gained an appreciation and questioned their own culture while demonstrating empathy towards others.

The implications for research and instruction highlight the use of nonfiction literature in high school social studies classes to create self, text, and world poems.
Through the creation of poems, students address some of the themes, such as individual development and awareness of cultures, put forth by the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), the need to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate empathy, and the recommendation for teachers getting to know their students.
DEDICATION

To my grandfather, Pop, who always believed in me . . . You knew this day would come just as you knew you would not be here to see it. I will never forget you calling me Dr. Beach two years prior to your passing just so you could in some way acknowledge and celebrate this accomplishment with me. Even though I brushed you off as being silly then, it is now that I understand the significance of those days with you. Please know that today and every day, you are with me, and it is to you, this is dedicated.
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When I was a young girl, I played school in the basement of my grandparents’ home. My grandparents were concerned with the well-being of my “imaginary students” as they heard my billowing screams regarding the students’ work ethic and progress. Today, as an educator, I refer to those screams as words of encouragement. Nonetheless, at a very young age, I knew I wanted to be a teacher. Most of this intuition came from my grandparents fostering my love for teaching as they would find any school-related trinket at the latest yard sale to make my schoolhouse complete. To my grandparents, who gave me my first glimpse of my future, I am forever grateful.

To my parents, my first teachers, I became what I am today because of your teachings. You have supported my endeavors, cried at my misfortunes, laughed at my quirks, and now may you revel in this moment because it is with you that I have succeeded.

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To my brother Jason, thank you for always being my biggest and loudest cheerleader.

To my friends and colleagues who encouraged and motivated me, thank you. A special thank you to Pam and Bobbie who listened to me during the last five years and have decided to love me anyway.
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To my four participants, thank you for allowing me to enter your lives. I began my journey not knowing you and your stories. I leave this journey forever impacted by your offerings. Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison—you are the reasons I teach.

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And finally, to me. You entered this journey, during a dark and trying time, as an unrecognizable person. You leave this journey as a confident, educated, and fulfilled woman.

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And to those who didn’t believe…how do you like me now?
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CHAPTER I
DEFINING THE STUDY

Louise Rosenblatt (1956) believes “Books do not simply happen to people. People also happen to books” (p. 62). Under this premise, she argues both the text and the person reading the text play instrumental roles in meanings derived from the reading experience. In other words, just as books, with their intended meanings, impact people, people, with their experiences, impact the meanings of the book. Ultimately, the power of the book lies within the individual.

Rosenblatt’s approach to the reading of literature was first introduced in 1938, and while she firmly believed in the power and activeness of the reader, this view was not shared by many of her time. Instead, literary scholars viewed readers as passive. Their sole purpose in reading was to gain knowledge from the book. In other words, meaning resided only in the text without any consideration of the person engaging in the reading (Wellek & Warren, 1956; Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1954). In many ways, readers existed outside the reading, and as a result, “students’ responses play a limited role in the interpretative processes as it is manifest in classroom discussions of literature” (Rogers, 1991, p. 393). Rosenblatt (1978/1994) even acknowledged that the reader “is not given the center stage…the reader is usually cast as a passive recipient” (p. 4).

Work of Louise Rosenblatt

Rosenblatt’s transactional theory (1938) revolutionized reading because it focuses on the role of the reader and how the reader interacts with a particular text at a particular time. Her transactional theory identifies the interaction between the text and the reader as
the literary experience. According to Rosenblatt, the literary experience exists only when the literary work and the reader collide.

Rosenblatt knew the instrumental role books of literature could play in students’ lives. Rosenblatt (1938/1995) speaks of the power and liveliness of literature:

The joys of adventure, the delight in the beauty of the world, the intensities of triumph and defeat, the self-questionings and self realizations, the pangs of love and hate—indeed, as Henry James has said, ‘all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision’—these are the province of literature. (pp. 5-6)

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) also claims that literature is very much alive within the reader as it offers a wide range of vicarious experiences: “We can live different lives; we can anticipate future periods in our own life; we can participate in different social settings; we can try out solutions to personal problems” (p. 190). With the opportunity to carry on a trial-and-error experimentation of life’s problems, Rosenblatt deems it necessary to equip the student with literature, so he/she may encounter diverse images about life “for literature enables the youth to live through—and to reflect on—much that in abstract terms would be meaningless to him” (p. 173).

While she believes in the power of literature, she admits that without active readers, and what they bring to the text through past experiences, the text is “merely ink spots on paper” (p. 24). Rosenblatt (1938/1995) highlights the “two-way, reciprocal relation” between the reader and text where “meaning is not ‘in’ the text or ‘in’ the reader. Both the reader and text are essential to the transactional process of meaning making” (p. 27).
Efferent and Aesthetic Reading

Rosenblatt (1938/1995; 1978/1994; 1991), argues there is a mutual relationship between a text and a reader and acknowledges that there are two different types of reading: efferent and aesthetic. The word, efferent, derived from the Latin for “carry away,” refers to nonliterary reading. Through efferent reading, the reader is concerned with what remains after the reading—“the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 23). Rosenblatt, in an attempt to provide clarity with the efferent stance, uses the example of a hysterical mother whose child has recently swallowed poison. The mother frantically reads the bottle of the life-saving antidote. She reads as quickly as she can searching for information that will save her child’s life. While this example is extreme, it does demonstrate the attention and concentration the reader, in this case, the mother, places on the text. Reading, through the efferent stance, the reader’s “attention is outward, so to speak, toward concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 24). Due to the nature of efferent reading, students are not provided the opportunity to “live through experience;” instead, they are passive readers and learners (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 447).

On the other hand, aesthetic reading refers to what the reader is feeling, thinking, and experiencing during a reading event. The reader, through the aesthetic stance, is active in the process. The reader arouses certain feelings, associations, ideas, and attitudes towards what he/she is reading. Rosenblatt (1978/1994) acknowledges, “In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through
during his relationship with that particular text” (p. 25). Rosenblatt even refers to aesthetic reading as “listening to” oneself synthesizing the reading into more personal and meaningful meanings (p. 25). Rosenblatt (1978/1994) exemplifies aesthetic reading through an adolescent boy. An adolescent boy, she says, who resents certain restraints imposed by authority figures, such as family, school, or an employer, may find *Mutiny on the Bounty* (Nordhoff & Hall, 1932) satisfying as it expresses rebellion. With this particular example, the adolescent boy takes what he is currently living through, a state of rebellion, and connects with the text. As a result, the reader has an opportunity to “live through experience” (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 447).

Rosenblatt (1991) argues that one of the main problems teachers encounter when approaching the teaching of reading is that they look at the process as “the either-or habit of thinking” (p. 445). Too often, educators assume that certain texts require a certain type of reading. For example, they associate content area reading and nonfiction texts to efferent reading, searching for facts while they relate literature to aesthetic reading. Rosenblatt argues that this does not have to be the case. She explains, “We can read aesthetically something written mainly to inform or read efferently something written mainly to communicate experience. Our present purpose and past experiences, as well as the text, are factors in our choice of stance” (p. 445). While Rosenblatt distinguishes between the differences between efferent and aesthetic reading, she never loses sight on the most important part in reading: the active reader.
The Social Studies Tradition

The role of the reader in social studies has traditionally been a passive one. Paxton (1999) describes the passive mode of reading social studies textbooks as “students tend to act as acquiescent assimilators of information, merely scanning the page in search of facts and explanations” (p. 321). As one history teacher commented in Wineburg’s study (1991), “History is the basic facts of what happened. What did happen? You don’t ask how it happened. You just ask, what are the events?” (p. 513).

Because of this lack of interaction with the text, many students believe that the main purpose to read is to answer the questions that follow the reading (Zamel, 1992). Readers seek only essential or factual knowledge (Gabella, 1993; Patrick & Hawke, 1982; Paxton, 1999; Schug, Western, & Enochs, 1997; Stahl, Hynd, Britton, McNish, & Bosquet, 1996). As a result, meaning is believed to be something that exists only in the text (Zamel, 1992) and that it consists of only one correct answer (Wolk, 2009). Due to this regurgitation of facts, students stick to just memorizing the text (McNeil, 1989; Paxton, 2002) and become “parrots and data banks” (Wolk, 2009, p. 665).

The textbook, which is most often read through the efferent stance as students sift for just facts, is heavily used in the content area of social studies (Downey & Levstik, 1988; Eamon, 2006; Smith, Palmer, & Correia, 1995; Warren, 2007). In no other discipline is a textbook used more (Downey and Levstik, 1988). Wineburg (2001) states that many teachers of social studies believe “the textbook is not one way of transmitting the story of the past, but the only way” (p. 17). He further comments on the effects of students reading textbooks as they “contribute to students’ inability to move beyond the
literal” (p. 78). With textbooks, he later discusses that “knowledge is detached from experience” (Wineburg, 2001, p. 79). Contrary to Rosenblatt’s view on the interconnectedness between the text and the reader, Paxton (2002) claims that through textbook reading in a social studies class, the reader is isolated from the text.

Even though there has been a rich history of efferent reading within social studies classrooms, the content of social studies is a “story of human experience” (Frager, 1993, p. 619). Viewing social studies as a human experience reflects the shift from just a retention of facts to a more collective, humanistic approach issued by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS; Adler et al., 2010; National Council for the Social Studies, 1991). The NCSS calls for an examination of the reader, ethics, others, and the global world. In order to meet the calling of NCSS, solely reading the textbook through an efferent stance, sifting for facts, will not suffice.

While much criticism exists with the use of textbooks in social studies’ classrooms, they have been around for years, and many students, throughout the century, who were taught with the textbooks, have grown to be very successful. Textbooks, undoubtedly serve a role in education, but what role do they play in the literacy practices of adolescents? What role could the use of nonfiction literature play in adolescents’ lives in the area of social studies? And in using Rosenblatt’s notion on the power of books, could students “happen” to nonfiction books just as nonfiction books “happen” to students? If so, what would this look like?
Statement and Significance of the Problem

Even though great strides have been made with the use of nonfiction literature in the field of social studies, most research conducted within this field has taken place at the elementary and intermediate levels (Levstik, 1986; Moulton, 1962; Olness, 2007; Rogers, 1960; Seminoff, 1990; Vivian, 1988; Whitin & Wilde, 1992; Young, 1953). Ironically, it is in the high school where students' reading interests significantly diminish (Kamil, 2003). Even though the National Council for the Social Studies addressed the need of “linking literature with life,” they focused on the middle grades predominantly (as cited in Sandmann & Ahern, 1999). While there is a desire to incorporate literature within the primary and middle grades, there is an equal or stronger need or concern in the high school where adolescents show negative attitudes toward reading (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). Students, at the secondary level compared to those at the elementary and middle grade levels, are also less likely to experience aesthetic reading often associated with the reading of literature (Rosenblatt, 1982).

The research that has been conducted at the secondary levels involving reading in social studies classes has mostly come from those who have a background in social studies (Afflerbach & VanSledright, 2001; Bain, 2000; Britt, Perfetti, Van Dyke, & Gabrys, 2000; Wineburg, 2001). While these history scholars have attempted to address the issues of reading and thinking in a social studies’ setting, due to their background, their emphasis falls more on their field of study and less on students’ literacy perspectives and practices. Because of this, a study examining students’ reading experiences in a social studies classroom from a literacy perspective was needed.
Purpose of the Study

When discussing the reading of nonfiction, history scholar Wineburg (2001) states that this type of reading is “the key to unlocking the character of human beings, people with likes and dislikes, biases and foibles, airs and convictions” (p. 74). This unlocking of sorts deserves a closer examination. The purpose of this study was to examine student experiences reading nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom. This study provides an in-depth and vivid description of students’ experiences with nonfiction literature and each other in a high school social studies classroom.

Research Questions

Through observations, interviews, and reader responses, I studied students’ reading experiences with nonfiction literature in a high school history classroom. The word, experience, is commonly used within discourse about the teaching and learning of language arts, and while the word and definition of experience appears simple at first glance, it is quite complex and at times, controversial. According to Oakeshott, “experience, of all words in the philosophic vocabulary is the most difficult to manage” (as cited in Jay, 2005, p. 2). In an attempt to escape the ambiguity that surrounds the word, experience, I will adopt the philosophies of both Dewey and Rosenblatt on experience. They believed experience to include a series of complex transactions between the human being and their environment (Kennedy, 1959). These transactions are considered to be “active, engaged, and ultimately productive” (Faust, 2000, p. 13). More specifically with this study, the word experience encompasses the interaction or
transaction that the reader has with the text and others in shaping their meaning of the written word (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995).

The literary experience is contingent on what “particular readers are able to do at a particular time” (Faust, 2000, p. 15). Whether the readers have opportunities to share insights on their readings with others and reflect on their own thoughts impacts what they are able to “do” or their ability to make meaning of the reading (Beach, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). It is what the reader is able to “do” that will be examined more closely in this study.

This study is guided by one broad research question: How do adolescent students experience the reading of nonfiction literature in social studies class? Included under this broad question are more specific questions:

1. How do students transact with nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom?

2. How does the reading of nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom enable students to understand themselves and society?

**Conclusion**

In this dissertation, Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory is presented in chapter 2. Along with this theory, reading trends and goals of the field of social studies are shared. Chapter 3 includes a detailed description of the qualitative case study that was used to address the research questions and the data collection and analysis procedures. In chapter 4, I analyze students’ reading experiences with nonfiction literature. In chapter 5, I
discuss the implications of this study and offer recommendations for social studies education as it relates to literacy.

**Definition of Terms**

*Aesthetic Reading*: “reader’s attention is centered directly on what he or she is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 25).

*Efferent Reading*: “the reader’s attention is focused primarily on what will remain as the residue after the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 23).

*Experience*: lived through events.

*Literacy*: the reading, writing, thinking, and speaking of print and non-print text.


*Nonfiction literature*: writing that portrays the life of people, places, events, or situations. Nonfiction includes autobiographies, biographies, diaries, letters, memoirs, periodicals, speeches, and trade books.

*Poem*: a personal transaction between the reader and the text

*Textbook Genre*: writing that provides mass information in a logical and sequential order.

*Transaction*: a two-way circuit between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1956).
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this review of literature, I first explore Louise Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory and her emphasis on literature as a way to create a “mode of living” (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. 264). I then discuss research regarding the use of nonfiction literature in the classroom. Finally, I discuss the reading traditions and current goals that exist in the content area of social studies.

Louise Rosenblatt and the Transactional Theory

When Louise Rosenblatt entered the literary scene in 1938, she was surrounded by those who believed and followed a very sanctioned and objective view of reading literature which consisted of prescribed reading materials and passive participants. She quickly discovered her ideas about reading literature were quite different than her colleagues as she opposed restricted readings and passivity. It was her courage to contest the norm, that many believe led to and continues to lead to a “critical and pedagogical revolution” (Booth in Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. vii).

Rosenblatt’s theory revolutionized the teaching of literature because it focuses on the role of the reader and how the reader interacts with a particular text at a particular time. The interaction between the text and the reader is what Rosenblatt refers to as the *literary experience*. The literary work, like the language in which it is derived, is a social product; it only gains its significance when the mind and the emotions of the reader respond to the images and symbols offered by the text (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995). In other words, without the reader, the text is simply words on a page. Because language is
socially evolving with the experiences of the reader, readers draw from their personal and language experiences in order to make meaning from the text. These “reservoir of past experiences with the language and the world” assist with the creation of new meanings produced while reading the text. For instance, an adolescent reader whose parents are divorced takes his feelings of divorce and the difficulty he has in dealing with divorce to the reading of *Hatchet* (Paulsen, 1987/2007) which is a story about divorced parents. As a result of reading the text, the adolescent boy is able to link his feelings of divorce to those found in the book. He may even have a different outlook on divorce as a result of reading the story.

Rosenblatt (1978/1994) argues that both the text and the meanings and associations of life and language of the reader are instrumental in the literary experience. Because of this personal connection to reading, Rosenblatt (1938/1995) theorizes that reading is not linear; instead, she views reading as a “to-and-fro spiral” which constantly moves back and forth between the reader and the text (p. 26). It is neither a “reaction to” nor an “interaction between” the reader and the text. It is instead a transaction, “an ongoing process in which the elements or factors are, one might say, aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other” (p. 17). In other words, the relationship between the reader and the text is both mutual and situational; it is an event occurring at a particular time and place in which the text and the reader condition each other. It is through this transaction that the reader brings his/her past experiences and present personalities to the text making each reading event personal; thus, there is no one correct interpretation of a book. Rosenblatt believes that there should be an emphasis on
the transactions because it highlights the two most important elements of a reading event: the text and the reader. A person becomes a reader when he/she develops a relationship with the text just as the physical text becomes more than words when the reader personally engages it.

This transaction between the reader and the text relies heavily on the stance in which the reader takes to the text. According to Rosenblatt (1978/1994; 1938/1995), there are two different types of reading experiences: efferent and aesthetic. With efferent reading, the reader’s attention is on what will remain after the reading event such as the information to be acquired, the solution to a problem, or actions to be carried out as a result of the reading. On the contrary, aesthetic reading is “centered on what he [the reader] is living through during his relationship with the particular text” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 25).

While Rosenblatt’s work with literature is most associated with the aesthetic stance as it involves the reader, she cautions educators in stressing either the aesthetic stance or the efferent stance with certain texts. Often times, educators assume a certain stance with a certain text, and she argues that readers can aesthetically read a piece of writing in which the main purpose is to inform just as readers can efferently read a piece of writing in which the main purpose is to convey an experience. Rosenblatt elaborates the relationship between efferent and aesthetic reading as she states that there are no “hard-and-fast lines between the efferent and aesthetic stances; they are not mutually exclusive, but rather exist as a series of gradations between the two extremes along a continuum” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 35). Citing the work of John Dewey, wherein he
defined aesthetic experience as “day-to-day experience defined, heightened, complete” (1978/1994, p. 37), Rosenblatt states that while there is an aesthetic element in day-to-day life, there are also purely practical aspects of day-to-day life that must be recognized. Due to this, the reader must shift between the aesthetic and efferent ends of the continuum as the situation deems necessary. Rosenblatt (1978/1994) uses a mathematician to demonstrate the continuum between the efferent and aesthetic stance: “the mathematician turns from his efferent, abstract manipulations of his symbols to focus his attention on, and to aesthetically savor, the ‘elegance’ of his solution” (p. 25). In the mathematician example, he does not choose to either participate in the efferent or aesthetic stance; instead, he participates in both.

The Poem

Highlighting the whole category of aesthetic transactions of any literary work, Rosenblatt uses the word, “poem.” In her opinion, a poem is the “most concentrated form” of all literary works; thus, she defines her transaction between the reader and the text as such as a way to indicate to the level of energy and attention that encompasses aesthetic transactions (1978/1994, p. 12). “The poem,” Rosenblatt cautions, should not be mistaken as an object or entity separate from the reader and the text; instead, it is an involvement of both the reader and the text (1964; 1978/1994). Rosenblatt (1964) further elaborates her notion of “The poem”:

‘The poem’ is what the reader, under the guidance of the text, crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, image, thought, and feeling and what he brings to it. To do this, he does not erase his own past experiences or present personality.
Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources, and from them brings forth the new order, the new experience, which he sees as the poem. (p. 126)

To increase the capability of sensitive and sound literary experiences, “the reader’s creation of a poem out of a text must be self-ordering and self-correcting process” (Rosenblatt, 1964, p. 125). Because there is an emphasis on the self with the creating of the poem, the reader plays an engaging and active role with the text.

Rosenblatt stresses that the event or the “poem” is an active and ever-changing process within each reader: “a specific reader and a specific text at a specific time and place: change any of these, and there occurs a different circuit, a different event—a different poem” (p. 14). Under Rosenblatt’s idea that the poem constantly changes, a reader could read the same text multiple times and gain a different meaning each time. For example, a female student during the summer of her freshmen year of high school reads the book, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2001) by Ann Brashares. During this read, the young teen, who is trying out for the varsity soccer team, instantly connects to the character Bridget Vreeland as both her and Bridget share in the love for the game of soccer. The following year in her high school English class, she is asked to read *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* again. A year has passed since her first read. Unlike last year, when she thought of only soccer, she is now preoccupied with boys. Unfortunately, her first boyfriend has recently broken up with her. As a result of the end of this relationship, when she reads the book, she connects with the character of Lena Karigalis, the girl who distrusts boys in the story. Through this example, the female
reader experienced two different poems with the same book. At first, she brought her experiences to soccer to the text, and then, a year later, she brought her current experiences of losing her first boyfriend to the text.

Through her transactional theory, Rosenblatt spends most of her time discussing how literature plays an instrumental role in experiencing the “poem.” Rosenblatt (1938/1995) says, “Whatever the form—poem, novel, drama, biography, essay—literature makes comprehensible the myriad ways in which human beings meet the infinite possibilities that life offers” (p. 6). The very nature of literature, as it deals with the “experiences of human beings in their diverse personal and social relations,” assists with the creation of a poem: “an event in the life of the reader” (1938/1995, p. xvi).

The Role of Literature

Using literature as a part of language arts instruction has been around for many years. Within the last few decades, there has been an increased interest in using literature as a way to discuss issues within and outside of the reader; as a result, more teachers are using literature as a way to communicate with their students and as a way to inform and engage them in conversations about social and cultural issues (Gibbons, Dail & Stallworth, 2006).

Donelson and Nilsen (2004) believe literature appeals to readers more intimately. First, they believe readers are drawn to many pieces of literature as they can identify with issues such as age, conflicts, and world perceptions. Second, literature, often times, is fast paced similar to the technology, such as Face Book and Twitter, that students use on a daily basis. As a result, literature can hold their attention. And finally, an increasing
amount of literature representing different ethnic, cultural, and social groups is surfacing which reflects the ever-growing diverse society.

In 2010, the authors of the new Common Core State Standards for English and Language Arts and Literacy addressed the ever-growing diverse society. They stress that through the reading of classical and contemporary literature, students are able to “actively seek to understand other perspectives and cultures through reading” (National Governors Association, pp. 3-4). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA; 1996) argue that the purpose of literacy is “to pursue life’s goals and to participate fully as informed, productive members of society” (25). VanDeWeghe (2011) further argues that, with literacy, there should be “a focus on ethical responsibility, human value, and community stewardship” (p. 29). Similar to VanDeWeghe, Wolk (2009), believes that the reading of young adult literature is the best way to achieve what he views as the most essential purpose in school—“shaping human beings with intellectual curiosity, a caring heart, and a belief in the common good” (p. 665).

Glascow and Baer (2011) agree with Daniels (2002) and Tatum (2009) in saying that reading, alone, is not enough to participate in an understanding of others other cultural backgrounds. Instead, literacy involves collaboration where students can “discuss and negotiate meaning from texts” (p. 69). Muldoon (1990) treats literature as “a series of encounters with meaningful problems” and views knowledge as something that is created through the collaboration with others (p. 34). Wolk (2009) even went as far as calling the use of literature within the curriculum as a “living curriculum” (p. 666).
When speaking of literature, it usually encompasses fiction, nonfiction, and poetry (Galda & Liang, 2003); however, it is through the reading of nonfiction literature that students are offered opportunities to encounter authentic and rich reading experiences. According to Glasgow and Baer (2011), nonfiction literature serves as “a window through which our students will learn others’ lives and cultures” (p. 68). Historical nonfiction literature, in particular, teaches students to feel as “history is a story of human experience” (Frager, 1993, p. 619). Lawson (1988) claims that there is a persuasive power that lies within the voice that is heard while reading nonfiction literature as it is a truth-telling that can only exist with an eye witness account. Hirth (2002) simply argues that students “like real people,” and as such, they can gain a better sense of the world through reading literature (p. 21). Having a real person or visible author telling the story can “open the door to a variety of relationships between the reader and author” (Paxton, 2002, p. 200).

Beyond providing simulations of real life, nonfiction literature serves many roles in reading. It provides students with in-depth and up-to-date information that they can connect to and are entertained by. Most importantly, through the reading and studying of nonfiction literature, students better understand the content being studied as well as they have an opportunity to gain self and social understanding.

Connects With Readers

The nonfiction genre, often times, focuses on the experience of the adolescent reader, and as a result, a connection lies within the text and the reader. Vacca and Vacca (1999/2008) identify several works that relate to either the student personally or to the
times in which they live. For instance, stories such as *Colors of Freedom: Immigrant Stories* (Bode, 1999), *Hole in My Life* (Gantos, 2002), and *Girls Think of Everything: Stories of Ingenious Inventions by Women* (Thimmesh, 2000) provide first-person accounts of teens that experience immigration, prison, and invention.

More specifically, a high school English teacher decided to use nonfiction texts while teaching a unit on the Vietnam War. He found, due to the age of the soldiers (nineteen) and the age of his students that his students were able to place themselves in the shoes of the soldiers for a brief moment. The teacher commented, “In many ways this literature [nonfiction] speaks to students from the voice of someone much like themselves, exploring some of the same kinds of struggles they are facing” (Johannessen, 2002, p. 41).

Here, nonfiction literature about Vietnam invited students to share their own experiences in an English class. This invitation to share experiences with nonfiction literature is something that does not have to be limited to just English classes; instead, it can offer many things to other content areas especially social studies. Nonfiction literature can even serve as a “reality check” to students (Hirth, 2002, p. 22). The reading is real, and as such, they can measure their own attitudes and beliefs about a particular topic to the reading (Harvey, 1998; Hirth, 2002). Students also have an opportunity, through the reading of literature, to connect with other people from other time periods (Hansen, 2009; Sandmann & Ahern, 1997; Van Middendorp & Lee, 1994) and “realize that they are not alone, that they’re connected through time with others who felt, hoped, and feared as they do” (Downey, 1986, p. 264). Rosenzweig and Weinland’s (1986)
notion of student relevance and experience for high school students echoes this relationship between nonfiction literature and life:

"History should have a special relevance for adolescents who are developing a sense of their own past as different from the present, struggling with problems of time’s irreversibility in their own lives, searching for meaning and commitment for themselves, and redefining their relationships to society. (p. 25)"

Like Rosenzweig and Weinland (1986), Beckelhimer (2010) and VanDeWeghe (2011) also believe that through the reading of nonfiction literature students understand, question, and appreciate their own culture.

Nonfiction literature can also provide information about people, places, and things that students care about and can be instrumental in bridging the gap between in-and-out of school literacies (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004). While it connects to those things that are familiar to students, it also personalizes unfamiliar events and people making them familiar and memorable (McGowan, Erickson, & Neufeld, 1996).

Engages and Entertains Readers

Nonfiction literature is written with extensive details which captures the interest of the reader. Donelson and Nilsen (1997) refer to nonfiction as the “new journalism” due to the extreme and entertaining detail. This detail, at times, is so vivid it allows the reader to visualize the people and places within the text (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004). Nonfiction literature also provides students an opportunity to revel in the “joy of facts” and the “poetry of prose” (Hirth, 2002, p. 20). With writers like Martin Luther King Jr., Tim O’Brien, and Betty Friedan who incorporate many literary devices associated with
fiction writing into their nonfiction works, it makes the reading experience enjoyable and memorable (Abrahamson & Carter, 1991; Johannessen, 2002).

Because of the vivid imagery often times associated with nonfiction literature, it “bring[s] to life the same content that can be cold and clinical in textbooks” (Young & Vardell, 1993, p. 398). Richgels et al. (1993) study found that nonfiction literature brought content matter to life where the textbook did not. In their study, they analyzed passages from both history textbooks and nonfiction literature and determined that the nonfiction literature was more user friendly, more coherent, and more engaging.

**Promotes Humanity**

Nonfiction literature assists with the unlocking of certain mysteries surrounding the world (Harvey, 1998; Martinez & McGee, 2000; Saul & Dieckman, 2005) and may help students deal with issues that affect them personally or the world around them (Johannessen, 2002). Wilcox (1988) argued that the reading of nonfiction will “empower [students] to take responsibility for issues that affect their lives and the future of the planet” (p. 40).

Nonfiction literature also provides students with an opportunity to read about real things including current events, historical time periods, the human condition, the natural world, and influential people (Harvey, 1998) while giving them a sense of civic awareness (Kaplan, 2003). For example, Glasgow and Baer (2011) used the nonfiction book, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, to discuss how the use of this book can promote a means of personal transformation. According to Glasgow and Baer (2011), powerful literature like *A Long Way Gone*, “can transform the lives of our students from
one in which they may have lived blind to the world or alive to its many difficulties and joys” (p. 74). They later contest, through the reading of a child soldier’s story of struggle and survival, students will be empowered to seek “rewarding and inspiring opportunities to learn even more about their world” (p. 74).

As discussed, through the reading of literature especially that of nonfiction, students are actively connected and engaged to what they are reading. Nonfiction literature also provides students an opportunity to gain both self and social understanding. The reading and studying of nonfiction also promotes human kindness as students question and discuss the dilemmas, tragedies, and lives of the characters they are reading. Even though there has been much discussion of incorporating more literature into other content areas, there has been a long history of using the textbook in the content area of social studies.

**Reading in the Social Studies Classroom**

From the earliest of records, textbook reading and instruction reigned supreme in the area of social studies. In 1858, Peter Parley, author of *History of the World*, stated that the evaluation of a student’s progress in class would be judged by their ability to commit the whole volume to memory during one season of schooling (as cited in Cartwright, 1958, p. 230). Teachers were even criticized “for not using suitable textbooks and for loving too dearly a single subject” (Hamm, 1958, p. 351).

While things have changed considerably in the area of social studies since the 1850s, the dependence on the textbook has changed only slightly. Social studies teachers use the textbook as their only reading material 75% to 90% of the time (Lee & Weiss,
2007; Moss, 1991; Palmer, Stewart & Roger, 1997; Patrick & Hawke, 1982; VanSledright, 2002; Wood & Muth, 1991). To no surprise then, reading practices and methods in the social studies classrooms resemble the efferent stance, which emphasizes the retention of information (Galda & Liang, 2003).

Even though textbooks remain unpopular with students as they merely skim them for information in which they need to complete the task at hand, most social studies teachers continue to use them as the sole medium of learning social studies (Vacca & Vacca, 1999/2008). In a study of high school students, Paxton (2002) discovered that students, through think-aloud statements, repeated words straight from the textbook two thirds of the time when asked questions about content related information. Through this sifting of information, students, often times, view textbooks as absolute truths, never questioning the material or the author (Stahl et al., 1996; Vansledright, 2004; Werner, 2000).

While the style and information found in the textbook hinder the ability to read aesthetically, there are other specific areas of concern when dealing with the reading of the textbook. Students associate negative reading experiences with the reading of textbooks so much so that some students are not reading history texts altogether (Smith & Feathers, 1983). The time that some students do spend on reading their textbook, very little meaning is constructed (Beck, McKeown, & Worthy, 1993). Shaugnessy and Haladyna (1985) claim that “most students in the United States, at all grade levels, found social studies to be one of the least interesting, most irrelevant subjects in the school curriculum” (p. 693). Similarly, Zhao and Hoge’s study (2005), where they interviewed
300 students about their social studies reading experiences with the textbook, found that over 95% “did not think their social studies class was relevant to their personal life” (p. 218). This is in part to students finding history textbooks to be irrelevant, dull and boring (Loewen, 1995; Paxton 1997, 1999; Vacca and Vacca, 1999/2008).

The boredom associated with the textbooks often lies within the text itself as they are “third-hand sources—predigested, chopped up versions of knowledge” (Frager, 1993, p. 619). According to Hirth (2002), students like to read about real people, and through the textbook, students are only provided small pieces of information regarding these people as “they [textbooks] frequently fail to capture the sense of adventure and wonder” that accompany these people’s stories (Frager, 1993, p. 619).

As discussed, textbooks are most often used in social studies classrooms. As a result, students are superficially exposed to historical content and have very little connection to the content as it provides little opportunity for critical thinking or self or world reflection. Despite the past or even current reading practices in the social studies classroom, there is an emphasis on students coming to know themselves and others by relying on the dimensions of “our lived experience” (Wineburg, 2001, p. 23).

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) identified four motifs that they believe “should function throughout the program to personalize academic instruction and increase its relevance to the student and connection to societal imperatives” (National Council for the Social Studies, 1991). They believe readers should have (a) a concern for self, (b) a concern for right and wrong, (c) a concern for others, and (d) a concern for the world.
In a further exploration of these four motifs, which were designed with middle school students in mind, it is evident that the NCSS believes that there is more to the content of social studies than just facts and textbooks. First, with the concern for the self motif, NCSS emphasizes students having a strong sense of identity. By pursuing this motif, they believe students will increase their ability to communicate and think critically, and they believe that this can be best accomplished through journal writing, interest inventories, and independent research. With the concern for right and wrong motif, NCSS stresses the development of ethics. With this motif, they hope to instill a sense of democratic values and ethical standards as well as an ability to critically think and analyze one’s thoughts and decisions. With the concern for others motif, NCSS focuses on students being a part of a group and thinking about others. They believe that through activities, like school/community service and group discussions, students will be able to function as a member of a group, develop a sense of efficacy, and understand the significance of the past to one’s life and to current issues. Finally, with the concern for the world motif, NCSS strives for a development of a global perspective. They believe this can be most successful through community, national, and international programs and projects. NCSS hopes, as a result of this motif, that students will generate a respect for cultural diversity and an understanding of and appreciation for the delicate relationship between humans and the world (National Council for the Social Studies, 1991).

While these four motifs are geared towards the middle school level, NCSS (2010) recently identified “The Ten Themes of Social Studies” as a part of their National
Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. Of these ten themes, NCSS stress two that focus on the learning of oneself and other cultures.

1. Individual Development and Identity: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

2. Culture: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity. (Adler et al., 2010)

These two specific themes, individual development and identity and culture directly relate to some of Rosenblatt’s (1938/1995) benefits of reading literature: broadening knowledge about people and society and exploring “ourselves and the world about us” (p. 37).

While there seems to be a paradigm shift from just learning historical facts in a social studies class to learning about oneself, deciphering right from wrong, caring for others, and showing concern globally, what remains to be seen is how this shift happens. While NCSS identified areas in which they would like to stress regarding the social studies curriculum, they mentioned very few reading materials that could accompany them. While the motifs and themes published by the NCSS are democratic in nature, a question remains: Could these goals be accomplished through the reading of nonfiction literature?

**Summary**

According to Frager (1993), “history is a story of human experience” (p. 619). Unfortunately, as discussed in this chapter, the “human experience” is often times overlooked in the social studies textbook. Instead, the reading of social studies is viewed...
as a series of facts or distilled narratives (Beck, McKeown, & Gromoll, 1989; Downey & Levstik, 1988; Duffy, 1961; McNeil, 1989; Mehlinger, 1988; Paxton, 1999; Wineburg, 1991). With the textbook as the major reading material in the area of social studies, students find themselves gaining only superficial knowledge, and as a result, they have negative reading experiences (Loewen, 1995; Paxton 1997, 1999; Vacca & Vacca, 1999/2008; Zhao & Hoge, 2005).

On the other hand, through the reading of literature, students connect to the content more and are engaged more in their reading (Abrahamson & Carter, 1991; Donelson & Nilsen, 1997; Hirth, 2002; Johannessen, 2002; Richgels et al., 1993; Saul & Dieckman; Vacca & Vacca, 1999/2008). Literature also provides students with opportunities to learn about themselves and others while gaining and understanding and appreciation of others (Downey, 1986; Glasgow & Baer, 2011; Hansen, 2009; Johannessen, 2002, Rosenzweig & Weinland, 1986; Sandmann & Ahern, 1997; Van Middendorp & Lee, 1994). Also, through the reading of literature, students can become more compassionate as they seek opportunities to help others (Glasgow & Baer, 2011; VanDeWeghe, 2011; Wolk, 2009).

According to this review of literature, there has been a long history of reading materials in both English classes and social studies classes. Where social studies classes predominantly use textbooks, English classes most often use literature as their text. As a result of using literature, students have an opportunity to read aesthetically which promotes thinking and feeling while reading. Social studies classes, on the other hand, with the use of the textbook as their main reading source, emphasize efferent reading, the
searching for factual information. What remains to be seen is if students in a social studies class could read nonfiction literature aesthetically.

Rosenblatt spent decades researching and confirming her transactional theory in regards to high school and college literature classes. After a thorough review of literature, I located instances where Rosenblatt’s theory was used in secondary mathematics (Borasi, Siegel, Fonzi, and Smith, 1998), intermediate technology (Albright, Purohir, & Walsh, 2002), and English as a Second Language (Zoreda, 1997), yet I could not locate an instance where Rosenblatt’s theory was used in the content area of social studies at the high school level. Because of this, I explored the use of nonfiction in a social studies classroom through Rosenblatt’s transactional theory. It is through her perspective with reading as a “poem” or interactive event between the reader and the text that I will examine high school students’ experiences reading nonfiction literature in social studies class.
CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Qualitative methods of inquiry were used to address the research questions:

1. How do students transact with nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom?

2. How does the reading of nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom enable students to understand themselves and society?

In this chapter, I describe the theoretical framework that guided my study. I explain the design of the study and discuss how my choice of research methodology is best suited for my study. I discuss the selection process of both the research setting and participants as well as outline my means of collecting and analyzing data. Finally, I address establishing trustworthiness, ethics, subjectivity, and limitations of the study.

Theoretical Framework

This study was influenced from Rosenblatt’s transactional theory. According to Rosenblatt (1938/1995), a literary experience is the “transaction between the reader and the author’s text” (p. 34). She defines text as “a set or series of signs interpretable as linguistic symbols. These symbols become words by virtue of their being potentially recognizable as pointing to something beyond themselves” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 12). It is the reader, Rosenblatt argues, that interprets or “acts on the text” (p.16). This transactional event between the reader and the text, which Rosenblatt metaphorically references as a “poem,” happens when “the reader brings to the text his past experiences and present personality” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 12). Through this theoretical
underpinning, I viewed the reader’s relationship to the text. This provided significant insights as to what the adolescent readers were personally and vicariously thinking during the reading event.

Research Design: Qualitative Case Study

Creswell (2007) defines case study research as the study of a bounded system(s) over the course of time with detailed and in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and rich description. To gain exposure to the classroom and insights into the students’ and teacher activities over an extended period of time, I spent eighteen weeks observing classroom practices, interviewing students, and viewing writing samples. In order to describe the experiences of the students, it was necessary to be immersed into the study to ensure writing with vivid details and descriptions.

Case study researchers seek both what is common and what is particular about the case (Stake, 2000). As such, I did not limit my quest to shocking findings in the study. Instead, I approached the study with an open-mind looking for both idiosyncrasies and commonalities knowing that much can be gained by common findings. Stake (2000) identifies major conceptual responsibilities of case study research; these were used to guide my research design as I attempted to: (a) bound the case by conceptualizing the object of study; (b) select the themes or issues; (c) seek patterns of data to develop the issues; (d) triangulate key observations and bases for interpretations; (e) select alternative interpretations to pursue; and (f) develop assertions about the case (p. 448). These conceptual responsibilities were pursued through the journaling of ideas, thoughts, hunches, and tentative themes, the reading and re-reading of collected data, marking
notes within the margins of the data, and by managing data through the organizational system of file folders and coded by colored markings. I also utilized and evaluated multiple sources of data, developed categories reflecting the purpose of the research as well as pursuing those categories that did not coincide with my research purpose. Finally, as a result of all of this, I was able to make claims regarding my research topic (Merriam, 1998).

According to Patton (2002), a case study approach is beneficial when the study examines a specific situation in depth. Because of this, my case studies focused on the experiences of high school students, all attending the same suburban school and same history class. These students experienced the reading and transacting of nonfiction.

**Setting**

I am a full-time teacher, and because of this, I conducted research at my school, Fullerton High School. I used a pseudonym to provide both protection and privacy of my school district. This site provided me a great opportunity to be immersed in both the school culture and research subjects. Researching at my school allowed me to investigate my research questions more thoroughly as I had direct access to my research subjects. While I originally thought conducting case study research within my school district was going to pose some challenges such as my level of engagement and contact with the participants, this was not the case. At the time of my study, I had taught in the school district for ten years and was acquainted with the school and much of the student population; however, I did not know the participants of the study personally. The study took place in a ninth grade classroom, and I teach predominantly tenth grade English.
Also, by conducting research within my own school district, I now have the potential to make practical and research-based suggestions about literacy instruction in the social studies curriculum as well as other content areas.

Fullerton High School is situated in Fullerton, Ohio. A suburban area in Northeast Ohio area, the Fullerton community consists of approximately 4,000 people. Of these 4,000 people, 83% of them hold a college degree. In Fullerton, 97.5% of the population is White, and they come from middle to upper class families as the average income in 2008 was around $150,000 and the average cost of a home is $234,700 (2010 Census; Ohio Department of Education, 2010).

Not only is wealth plentiful in Fullerton, but the school system itself has a reputation for consistently scoring well on standardized tests resulting in local, state, and national recognition. In 2011, according to Newsweek’s “America’s Best Schools” edition, Fullerton High School ranked 92nd among the top 100 in the United States and 4th in the state of Ohio. This is the sixth time in the last eight years that the school has received such an honor. Fullerton School District has also received the “Excellent with Distinction” rating from the Ohio Department of Education for the past 12 years. Fullerton School District is one of only three districts out of 609 in the state to receive this honor. Along with these accomplishments and accolades, 100% of Fullerton’s students graduated three out of the last four years. In addition, 95% of the student population goes to college (Ohio Department of Education, 2010).

The race of the teaching staff follows that of the community as most are White. The expectations for excellence placed on the students are shared with the staff. As a
result, professional development and continuing education are stressed as 83% of the teaching staff holds a Master’s Degree (Ohio Department of Education, 2010). While there is an educated and committed staff, success with students comes rather easily for teachers as most students are eager to learn and come from educated parents who place high expectations on them. Due to the success and income that most parents at Fullerton experience, their children do not view failure as an option, and as a result, many students strive for success. Because of this and the history of the school scoring well on standardized tests, some teachers feel little, professional pressure and rarely teach strictly for the standardized tests. Instead, they feel fortunate to be in a position to have the freedom and creativity to explore new educational initiatives.

Unlike other school districts who have strict curriculum policies on reading materials and selections, Fullerton has a unique opportunity where teachers are encouraged to use new instructional resources and practices. Because of this, I had the opportunity to study a teacher within my school district that uses nonfiction texts as a part of his social studies curriculum. The male teacher who taught this class was an avid reader in and out of class and incorporated nonfiction reading materials into his classroom instruction on a normal basis. During my study, the teacher used the following books: *Night* by Elie Wiesel (1972/2006), *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah (2007), and *God Grew Tired of Us* by John Bul Dau (2007; for book summaries see Appendix A-C). Through these books and through the environment created by the teacher, I was able to conduct my research.
Participants

The selection of the class, teacher, and participants was purposeful. According to Merriam (1998) purposeful sampling is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Not only was this the only content area classroom within my building to use nonfiction books along with the textbook, but the teacher was also a self-proclaimed reader who encouraged others to read by talking about books and keeping a classroom library. Another factor in choosing this particular class was that most research dealing with the reading of nonfiction literature in content area classrooms is in the elementary and middle grades (Levstik, 1986; Moulton, 1962; Olness, 2007; Rogers, 1960; Seminoff, 1990; Vivian, 1988; Whitin & Wilde, 1992; Young, 1953). While there was some research in the upper grades (Abrahamson & Carter, 1991; Moss & Hendershot, 2002; Palmer et al., 1997), very little research (i.e. Albright et al., 2002; Baer, 2007; Borasi et al., 1998; Zoreda, 1997) has been conducted with Rosenblatt’s transactional theory as its premise. While Rosenblatt’s transactional theory was used in subjects like language arts, mathematics, technology, and English as a Second Language, to my knowledge, no research had been completed with Rosenblatt’s transactional theory in the content area of social studies at the secondary level. Due to lack of research in the upper grades and in the area of social studies, I decided to focus my study on a high school class.

Twelve students out of the class of 17 students agreed to participate in the study. Out of those 12 participants, four were purposefully selected to be included in the final
study. The two male participants and two female participants were selected based on Stake’s (2006) criteria for selecting cases:

1. Do the cases provide diversity across contexts?
2. Do the cases provide good opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts? (p. 23)

Out of the 12 students, I chose the four that provided me the most data and best opportunity “to learn about the complexity and contexts” of my study (Stake, 2006, p. 23). While diversity regarding race or social class was not an option due to the setting in which the study took place, each participant selected had different interests and backgrounds. In order to better understand each of the four literary experiences with their social studies classroom, each participant was viewed as an individual case. In all four participants’ cases, each was a part of the social studies class in which the reading of nonfiction took place.

I secured permission from the participants, the participants’ parents, the school district, and the teacher in order to complete this study. I contacted the participants and then their parents/guardians, and I arranged a time to meet with the participants, the superintendent of the school district, and the teacher before the study began in order to discuss my study, obtain consent forms and answer any questions they had (see Appendix D and E for letter and consent form).

**My Role as the Researcher**

In order to gain a better understanding of the setting and the context of my study, I met with the teacher in the fall of 2009 to informally discuss the use of nonfiction
literature in his social studies class and the accompaniment of written and oral activities. Through this conversation, I discovered that discussions over the books were plentiful; however, these discussions were only taking place in a whole class setting and were for the most part, unstructured. No small group discussions or partner discussions were taking place as well as there were no pre-planned questions posed by the teacher. I also discovered that no technology was used to assist with these books and discussions. Finally, I realized that the assessments of these trade books came only in the shape of objective tests. No writing within the text or as a response to the text was taking place. The teacher had neither used journals in class before nor did he require the students to annotate, mark up, or comment on the text at any time.

Based on my initial contact with the teacher and the nature of my study, I found my experience as a teacher of literature and language to be foundational in the study; therefore, I deemed it necessary to meet with the teacher and participants several times throughout the study to discuss the research goals and questions of the study as well as some literacy practices, such as journal and annotative writing that were used in the study.

At our first formal meeting, which occurred in January 2010, I presented the teacher with a handout that not only highlighted the goals and questions of my study, but it also provided a checklist of things that I would be providing him throughout the course of the study and things that he would need to supply me. Items that I indicated that I would be providing the instructor were journals for their in-class writings, topics/questions for journals and online postings, copies of chapters for annotations,
instructions on annotating, and a sample of the annotation process (see Appendix F for
teacher meeting handout).

Items that I requested from the teacher included a class roster, a seating chart, and
a list of days per week to conduct observations and interviews. After I received the class
roster and seating chart from the instructor, I designed a seating chart on the computer
highlighting the seats of those who were participating in the study. This assisted me with
not only learning the students’ names, but it also provided me a focal point with those
who partook in the study.

After I requested the information from the teacher, I tentatively outlined and
organized my researcher tasks. For each week, I planned on interviewing students and
observing classes. The times in which these things occurred were left up to the teacher as
either a matter of convenience or when certain events were occurring in class such as
class discussions for observations and in class readings for interviews.

For each book, I identified what information I would be collecting from the
participants: journal writings, online postings, poems, and annotations of text. Due to the
teacher’s lack of experience with journal writing, where students write about their topics
of interest and their observations and imaginings connecting them to new information in
the social studies classroom, I met with the teacher to discuss possible approaches and
topics for their writings. As a Language Arts teacher who uses journals on a regular
basis, I provided the social studies teacher with many suggestions. Due to the nature of
the study with literary experiences, I spent time discussing the idea of response journals
which are writings that allow students to feel and think about the text in which they are
reading (Parsons, 2001). The social studies teacher was especially receptive to this idea as he thought this type of writing would strengthen the in-class discussions as it would give all students an opportunity to think and write about the topics before discussing them as a class. An extension of the response journal, the double-entry journal, was another form of writing shared with the teacher. Unlike the response journal, where the teacher had some familiarity with it, the double-entry journal was something that was new. The double-entry journal is a way to juxtapose ideas from the text to those of the student (Vacca & Vacca, 1999/2008) as one side of the entry includes an excerpt from the text and the other side includes the student’s opinions and thoughts on the excerpt. The social studies teacher was not only receptive of this idea, but he was also excited at the opportunity to see both the text and the students’ reactions, interpretations, and/or responses to the text all on one page. Questions I posed for these journal entries stemmed from Rosenblatt’s writings (1938/1995; 1956; 1978/1994; 1982; 1991) as they asked questions pertaining to the experiences of the reader. Prior to disseminating the questions to the students, the social studies teacher and I would discuss several possible questions. He would then make the final decision as to what questions the students would pursue in their journals. Most times, he kept all the questions giving the choice of the topic to the student (see Appendix G-O for journal questions).

Similar to the journal questions, I used the work of Rosenblatt and the works themselves in generating the questions for the online learning site. The online learning site, which was not a school based site, included a space for me to pose discussion questions and spaces for the participants to respond to both the question and each other in
an asynchronous manner. I met with the teacher to gain his input on possible questions as he has read and taught most of the books several times and is knowledgeable when it comes to the historical setting and content of each book. After we met, I combined his knowledge of the historical content and my ability to frame discussion questions and response journal topics and generated topics that I thought would both cover the content of the books as well lead to conversations between the participants. I presented him with my proposed questions, and after gaining his approval, I posted the questions online. While the teacher had some familiarity with the online learning site, he felt more comfortable with me guiding the students through the online process. I assisted the students through a brief online demonstration. Because this was not a graded activity, not all students participated in the online discussions. Also, due to the complexity and timing of this process, *Night*, the first book read in this study, was not used (see Appendix P-Q for online discussion questions).

In addition to their journal writings and online postings, the participants were asked to model Elie Wiesel’s poetic style by constructing a poem of their own using the sentence beginnings of Wiesel as their starting points. Again, because of my experience in Language Arts with poetry and the social studies teacher’s lack of experience with poetry, I explained the writing activity to the class and answered any questions that they had. Due to the fact that they were writing a poem in their social studies class, they had many questions regarding the structure, freedom, and creativity of the assignment. Once their questions were answered, the majority of the class, even those not participating in
the study, completed the poem as a personal story of their lives (see Appendix R-S for poem templates).

While there was guidance in the formation of journal topics and online questions, there was no greater need for assistance than with the annotation of text. The teacher had never required any interaction with the text, and most students, even outside of this class, had never been asked to annotate a text. Annotating the text directly relates to Rosenblatt’s idea of constructing meaning during reading as it is “an interactive process between the learner, text, and context” (Zywica & Gomez, 2008, p. 156). Annotating text, which can include underlining, note taking, summarizing, and questioning the text, provides students an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding and personal connection to what is being read. Because of the teacher’s and students’ unfamiliarity with annotating text, I found it necessary to meet with my participants and explain this process of annotation. First, due to their lack of experience with annotating, I decided to use the words “interacting with the text” in lieu of “annotating the text” as I felt the word “interacting” would resonate with them more than the word “annotating.” Based on my readings of annotating the text (Baer, 2005; Probst, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1985; Simpson & Nist, 1990; Webb, 1982; Zywica & Gomez, 2008), I constructed a handout for the participants that simply defined this process, outlined possible ways to approach the interaction of text such as underlining, highlighting, and using codes and symbols, and things to look for within the text such as feelings, images, questions, and connections to other readings or experiences (see Appendix T for annotation handout). While I tried to simplify the process of annotation through the handout as way for them to retain the
concept, I felt it critical to model an example of this interaction of text; therefore, I placed a copy of a chapter of Night on the overhead and demonstrated the process through my underlining of parts that I found to be interesting, confusing, surprising, or important. I attempted to use a variety of ways to interact (i.e. symbols, questions, thoughts, etc.), so they did not feel confined to only way of interacting with the text. I also provided a copy of my interaction sample, so the participants could have an example to assist them with their first interactions of text (see Appendix U for annotation example).

Data Collection

Data were collected in three ways: (a) interviews, (b) observations, and (c) documents. I collected two individual interviews and one focus group interview, observed eight classes, and obtained a variety of documents including journal writings, online postings, poems, and annotations to the nonfiction literature texts.

Interviews

Stake (1995) identifies interviews as “the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64). It is this very notion of “multiple realities” that I chose interviews as a method of study. Conducting interviews as an essential method for case study research, Rubin and Rubin (2005) maintain the purpose of such methodology is “to find out what happened, why, and what it means more broadly” (p. 6).

Relying heavily on the interpretative constructionist philosophy, responsive interviewing emphasizes the importance of both the interviewer and the interviewee as human beings (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I chose responsive interviewing as one of my research methods because it not only focused on the depth of understanding (Rubin &
Rubin, 2005), but it was also essential in determining the participants’ feelings, thoughts, intentions and interpretations of the researched events (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002).

Individual interviews. Modeling the responsive approach to interviewing, a conversational partnership was established between the participants, the researched, and me, the researcher. Conducting interviews within my school assisted with this partnership. I found that students were willing to talk to me because of my presence in the building and because they were informed about the project (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In order to build trust within this partnership, I observed their class several times prior to interviewing them.

I used semi-structured interviewing as I felt it would assist with the building of this partnership between the participants and me. Even though questions derived from structured thinking through my research questions, the approach with respondents were less structured to ensure a good rapport. As Wengraf (2001) suggests, semi-structured interviews allow participants, in their own words, to illustrate their experiences and interactions, and it also gave me, the researcher, some latitude to modify the interview questions in response to the respondent’s narrative. Even though semi structured interviewing is an open process, allowing for responsiveness and improvisation, it permitted me the ability to obtain data capable of being compared across respondents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

When I met with each interviewee prior to the actual interview, I followed Taylor and Bogdan’s (1984) criteria that they have identified as being a crucial part of the interview process:
1. The investigator’s motives and intentions and the inquiry’s purpose
2. The protection of respondents through the use of pseudonyms
3. Deciding who has final say over the study’s content
4. Logistics with regard to time, place, and number of interviews to be scheduled. (pp. 87-88)

I discussed my central purpose and the procedures used for my data collection and the logistics of the interview. I also reviewed the consent form highlighting issues of confidentiality and anonymity. I discussed in detail what information would remain confidential and what would be shared with others as well as how the information would be recorded, transcribed, and stored. I also explained to the participants that they had the right to remove themselves at any time of the study and that there would be no compensation. After highlighting these important matters of interviewing, I asked the participant to sign the consent form. Along with the participant, I also gained parental permission.

Because each interview was unique and allowed me to “understand experiences and reconstructs past events” in which I was not a part of, such as the reading event, all participants were interviewed (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). By interviewing all participants, it provided me an opportunity for “more information, opinions, and feelings to be revealed” (Merriam, 1998, p. 78). These interviews were strategically planned after the lessons with nonfiction literature.

The interviews occurred with each student two different times during the semester. Each took place during their social studies class and ranged from 30 to 40
minutes in length. By interviewing the students at different points in the study, I was able to gather additional information from each of them in regards to their reading experiences. Also, by speaking with them a second time, it provided me valuable data regarding another reading experience with a different book. I conducted my first interview within the first month of my study in February over the book *Night*, and my second individual interview was conducted after the reading of the final two works, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* and *God Grew Tired of Us*, in May.

Per Creswell’s (2007) suggestion, I began with four open-ended questions. Interview questions included:

1. How would you describe your experience of reading nonfiction literature in your social studies class?
2. What were your conversations/discussions like with your classmates, your teacher, or people outside of class after having read a section/chapter of a nonfiction literature?
3. How has the reading of nonfiction literature encouraged you to think critically about certain topics (Holocaust and war) in your history class?
4. How do the things you have read in the nonfiction literature relate to any experiences that you have went through or are going through?

Other interview questions were more individualized as a response to the participants’ interview comments, writing samples, and textual annotations. These questions were asked for clarification or elaboration of a thought or idea pursued in their writings.
These main questions were combined with follow-up questions and probes to assist with the explanation of themes, concepts, and/or events and to keep the interview on topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For example, on a few occasions, participants’ responses to questions were confusing while on others, their comments were intriguing, so by commenting or questioning the participant differently, I was able to obtain more useful information. According to Merriam (1998), probes are extremely helpful when the interviewer suspects that there is something significant or more to be learned about the matter being discussed. Probes, especially, were used to elicit rich detail and vividness, and they provided a balance between note taking and active listening.

I not only recorded the interviews, but I also took handwritten notes of the participants’ comments. These notes were taken during the interview and assisted me with the formulation of follow-up questions on the present interview. I then transcribed the interviews and typed my corresponding interview notes. After transcribing each interview, I reviewed the interview transcript and generated a few follow-up questions for future interviews. Along with reviewing the transcript, I had a “conversation” with the data through the commenting and asking of questions (Merriam, 1998, p. 181). This “conversation” assisted with future interviews as well as category instruction. At the end of the interviews, I provided the respondents with a copy of the transcript for clarification and accuracy purposes. Each participant reviewed their transcripts. While most of the participants corrected punctuation, misspellings, and misused words (i.e. traumatic for dramatic), there were a few instances, especially with Allison, in which she actually
added onto the original content. So, as a result of providing the participants with their original transcripts, I was able to gain additional information for my study.

**Focus group interviews.** I chose to supplement individual interviews with focus group interviews because the participants where all involved in a similar setting and worked collaboratively with each other in class (Creswell, 2007). Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2006) identify the focus group interview as a follow-up to individual interview as a major design strategy. Focus group interviews verified data collected in individual interviews and examined how individual responses differed in a group a setting. Also, by interviewing multiple respondents simultaneously, I was able to not only have them respond to my questions, but they also had an opportunity to respond to each other adding a dynamic that did not exist in the individual interviews (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

Similar to the individual interviews, I utilized the open-ended design. This provided the participants to speak more freely of their experiences using language that was meaningful to them. The open-ended design permitted the group dynamic to flow more fluidly creating a unique narrative of which they were all co-authors (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Even though the open-ended design was used with the focus group interviews, themes that emerged from the individual interviews were used as the catalyst of conversation.

I facilitated one focus group interview of all four participants in March. During this time, the students were exposed to the reading of nonfiction literature, the annotation of text, and journal and poem writings. The primary purpose of this discussion was to explore their initial reactions and experiences to this reading material and to refine and
expand on trends and themes from the individual interview. They also had an opportunity to interact with and react to each other.

**Observations**

Along with interviews, I conducted observations, which are firsthand encounters with the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 1998). Observations provided me with contextual knowledge that was used as referenced points in my individual interviews (Merriam, 1998). The frame of reference guiding me with my observations came from past researchers who observed students using reading materials other than the textbook in content areas other than English (e.g. Gabella, 1994; Levstik, 1986; Palmer et al., 1997).

Observations were conducted over eighteen weeks during school hours. I conducted a total of eight classroom observations. Observations were made based on classroom discussions over the books. Discussions over the books took place twice a month. By making my presence known once a week in the classroom, I was able to not only build rapport with the class, but my presence also heightened my sensitivity to the understandings underlined in my study. Most importantly, through case study observations, I had the ability to watch instructional practice and view, first hand, how nonfiction is used in the classroom which correlated with the responses from the interviews. Knowing the language, actions, and practice of the classroom were only possible through observations (Schram, 2006), I recorded my observations in handwritten notes, and within 24 hours, I typed up each day’s observations along with my observer’s comments.
I found guidance with my observations in using a checklist of observational elements. Based on Bogdan and Biklen (1992), Merriam (1998), Patton (2002), and Taylor and Bogdan (1984), the following list of characteristics played a part of my observational protocol: (a) the physical setting, (b) the participants, (c) activities and interactions, (d) conversation, (e) subtle factors, and (f) my own behavior. Through the use of this checklist (Figure 1), field notes were developed which provided me with a detailed description of the classroom space, lighting, and arrangement as well as descriptions of the students and the teacher. A rich depiction of instruction and interactions between the entire class was also highlighted (see Appendix V for a completed checklist).

Documents

Alongside my methods of interviews and observations were personal documents. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) define personal documents as “any first-person narrative that describes an individual’s actions, experiences, and beliefs” (p. 132). Personal documents, in my study, appeared as written, online postings, journal writings, poems, and annotations of nonfiction text. The number of personal documents varied from participant to participant as grades were not given for these assignments and participants had no academic obligation to complete them. Also, if students were absent on the day of the assigned personal documents, they had no obligation to make up the work; thus, some participants did not complete all the personal documents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Things to Observe</th>
<th>Observational Notes</th>
<th>My Own Reaction &amp; Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Setting:</strong> What is the physical environment like? What is the context? What kinds of behavior is the setting designed for? How is space allocated? What objects, resources, technologies are in the setting?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The participants:</strong> Describe who is in the scene, and their roles. What brings these people together? Who is allowed here? Who is not here and who is expected to be here? What are the relevant characteristics of the participants?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Activities and Interactions:</strong> What is going on? Is there a definable sequence of activities? How do the people interact with the activity and with one another? How are people and activities connected or interrelated? What norms or rules structure the activities and interactions? When did the activity begin? End? Is it a typical activity, or unusual?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conversation:</strong> What is the content of conversation? Who speaks to whom? Who listens? Quote directly, paraphrase, and summarize conversations. Note silences and nonverbal behavior that add meaning to the exchange.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtle Factors:</strong> --Informal and unplanned activities --Symbolic and connotative meanings of words --Nonverbal communication such as dress and physical space --Unobtrusive measures such as physical clues --“What does not happen?” (Paxton, 1990, p. 235)</td>
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*Figure 1. Observational checklist*
Students reacted to questions and comments posted by the teacher and myself online based on their readings of nonfiction literature. These online documents were collected twice throughout the study: one was collected in the middle of the study while the other was collected towards the end of the study. Other personal documents came in the shape of journal writings. According to Flitterman-King (1988), a response journal is “a repository for wanderings and wonderings, speculations, questionings…a place to explore thoughts, discover reactions, let the mind ramble…a place to make room for the unexpected” (p. 5). Because of this, participants were asked to write weekly in response to the reading assignments of the nonfiction text. Just as the topics for the online postings were generated by the teacher and myself, we met to discuss and decide on the journal topics. Another personal document, a poem, was written by all participants. Finally, students were asked to annotate the nonfiction text on three different occasions: one for each nonfiction book. Zamel (1992) acknowledges that “reading has as much to do with what the reader brings to the text and how the reader interacts with the text as with the text itself” (p. 467). This interaction of the text that Zamel refers to was approached through the annotations of text.

Just as observations provided me with a different but complementing angle to interviews, the use of documents had an equal contribution. According to Selltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch, and Cook (1959), “the rationale for the use of personal documents is similar to that for the observational techniques. What the latter may achieve for overt behavior, the former can do for inner experiences” (p. 325). Such documents provided inner meaning of the everyday classroom events and reflected the participant’s perspective on and
experience with the reading of nonfiction literature. This method assisted greatly with showing the students’ interaction with text and their classmates, how they were creating meaning, and what role their past experiences were having on their reading and understanding of the content area material. The documents that I obtained also assisted with the creation of individual and group interview questions.

Figure 2 outlines how I used the data to approach each nonfiction book through the course of the semester and the time in which I completed it.

**Data Analysis**

Consistent with the naturalist inquiry framework in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I inductively approached my data analysis. I, as the researcher, sought concepts and interpreted emergent themes rather than applying a particular interpretive framework from the onset (Patton, 2002).

I followed Creswell’s approach to analyzing data. Creswell (2007) identifies three analysis strategies: (a) preparing and organizing the data; (b) reducing the data into themes through the coding process; and (c) representing the data through discussion, tables, charts, and/or figures (p. 148).

**Preparing and Organizing Data**

After I collected the data and before I analyzed it, I read the interview transcripts, field notes with observer’s comments, documents, and memos in their entirety several times to get a sense of the whole before engaging in a systematic analysis to identify emergent themes. After working through my transcripts, observational notes, and written
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Nonfiction Book and Author</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 11- February 5, 2010</td>
<td><em>Night</em> by Elie Wiesel</td>
<td>• Poem (see Appendix R for excerpt and see Appendix S for the template from an excerpt over the book, <em>Night</em>).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Journal (see Appendix G for the journal prompt regarding <em>Night</em>)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Annotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 8-March 8-12, 2010</td>
<td><em>Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</em> by Ishmael Beah</td>
<td>• Journals (see Appendix H-K for prompts regarding <em>Long Way Gone</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Interviews (Lisa, Allison, and Kevin)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Online Postings (see Appendix P for prompts).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Annotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 15-April 30, 2010</td>
<td><em>God Grew Tired of Us: A Memoir</em> by John Bul Dau and Michael S. Sweeney</td>
<td>• Journals (see Appendix L-O for prompts regarding <em>God Grew Tired of Us</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Interview (Brian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Online postings (see Appendix Q for prompts).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Annotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Group interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 3-28, 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Interviews (Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Follow-up Interviews (Brian, Lisa, and Allison)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.* Data outline

responses, I grouped and managed my findings in relation to my research questions through the creation and organization of file folders.

**Coding the Data**

After the careful rereading of the data, I developed initial coding categories by using the themes that emerged from the transcripts, field notes, and documents. I highlighted each category a different color. For instance, yellow represented the category
of the participants actively becoming a part of the story they were reading while the color pink represented the category of the participants drawing on personal experiences while reading the nonfiction text. Both the color yellow and the color pink derived from my first research question: How do students transact with nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom? In answering my second research question, how does the reading of nonfiction literature in a social studies class enable students to understand themselves and society?, I developed two categories. First, the color orange reflected the category of nonfiction providing descriptive, relatable, real-life historical perspectives while the color blue represented the category of nonfiction providing the participants opportunities to engage in outside conversations with family, friends, and peers. Once I identified the categories and the colors that represented them, I created a key indicating the color that each category represented to assist with my coding.

After I originally went through my data, I broke the four initial categories down further into sub-categories. Due to the number of categories and sub-categories, I created four charts representing the research question, the initial category, and the sub-categories (see Figure 3 for example; see Appendix W for all data charts). I then placed the data in the appropriate sub-category in order to develop a story about each student’s experience. I also referenced the type of data (i.e. journal entry, interview, etc.), when relevant, the page number or line number in which the data was taken from, and the date the data was collected. In referencing my data collected in both the charts and throughout my study, the following abbreviations, along with the dates in which they took place, were used:

Interviews: I
Group Interviews: GI
Observations: OB
Online Postings: OP
Journals: J
Poem: P
Annotation: A

After I placed the information in the chart, I read over the information to determine similarities and differences among the participants. The students’ reading experiences and comments were organized into the data collection chart to help draw comparisons and conclusions from my findings.

How do students transact with the text through the reading of nonfiction in a social studies classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>Sports and Academics</th>
<th>Family and Religion</th>
<th>Multi-media</th>
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*They compare and contrast experiences in the book to their own by drawing on personal experiences that they have had with*

*Figure 3. Data collection chart*

This data collection chart was modified for the annotations. Wanting to preserve the participants’ annotations, I did not want to summarize their comments in the data collection chart; instead, I wanted their comments and their own handwriting to be visible while analyzing the data. Because of this, I created larger charts out of large sized post-it-notes. Each post-it-note reflected each sub-category. This allowed to me to cut and paste the participants’ annotations where appropriate keeping their authenticity.
Representing the Data

Based on my coding of data and emerging categories, I reported my findings using both particular description, general description, and interpretative commentary (Erickson, 1986). Through particular description, I represented the “sights and sounds of what was being said and done” in the study through vivid description (pp. 150-151). Along with particular description, general description was made between the details being reported and the data as a whole. Finally, interpretative commentary provided the framework for understanding both the particular and general description. All in all, I attempted to represent my data through a balanced approach relying on both description and analysis.

Due to the amount of data collected, it was critical to make assertions periodically throughout the study. This took constant and careful reflection of the organized data. Reviewing the data repeatedly, seeking both confirming and disconfirming evidence, assisted me with testing the validity of the assertions that were generated (Erickson, 1986).

Case and Cross-Case Analysis

Multiple or comparative case studies consist of collecting and analyzing data from more than one case. Merriam (1998) establishes two stages of analysis with multiple cases: “the within the case analysis and the cross-case analysis” (p. 194). First, I studied my four cases individually gaining an in-depth look at each participant’s reading experiences within the social studies classroom. It was through the examination of these individual cases that I was able to learn about each participant’s reading experiences. I
then analyzed the four cases as a collective unit where categories and themes emerged across each case. As a collective case, I was able to view the patterns of all the participants’ reading experiences leading to more detailed descriptions and explanations. It was through the cross-case analysis that I built “a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases even though the cases will vary in their details” (Yin, 1994, p. 112).

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

**Expert and Peer Consultation/Debriefing**

I had colleagues review my findings as they emerged. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), peer debriefing is a “process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer…” (p. 308). Based off of this definition, I worked with people who were knowledgeable either in the dissertation process or education, but not necessarily considered an expert in the field which was being studied, to serve as peer debriefers for my study. My first peer debriefer was a high school teaching colleague who teaches Advanced Placement English. She provided me an outside perspective, often times, bringing attention to things that lacked clarity. My second peer debriefer, with whom I met on a more regular basis, was a doctoral candidate who was immersed in the dissertation process herself. Together, we examined codes established from the interview transcripts, field notes, and documents, analyzed patterns found in the data, and discussed the participants’ responses to the nonfiction literature. Working with peers who were less familiar with my participants and study kept me grounded in my assertions made based on the data collection.
Member Check

The use of member checks was one of the most crucial techniques for establishing credibility, whereby data, analytical categories, interpretations, and conclusions were shared with members from whom the data were originally collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I conducted several member checks throughout my study, and they ranged from participants checking their transcripts for accuracy to more in-depth member checks of participants analyzing their final write-ups in chapter 4 for both accuracies and meanings.

Initially, I conducted informal member checks directly after the individual or focus group interviews. Orally, I would review their comments with them to ensure I heard and understood them correctly. To insure trustworthiness, I conducted more formal member checks by providing the members of the study an opportunity to examine the interview transcripts. It was essential that the documentation of the data collection process be both clear and accurate to enhance the member check process. Through this process, members had the opportunity to clarify intentions, correct interpretations, volunteer additional information, confirm information, summarize findings, or assess the adequacy of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Working with the respondents, member checking took place through both personal and e-mail correspondence. At the beginning of the study when the first interview took place, I provided a copy of the transcripts to the participants in person. We later met for the second interview where they provided me a revised copy of the first interview transcripts. There were very little changes to the content; most changes were grammatical or diction related. For example, participants preferred or meant a different word than one I had
presented. The second member check took place over the summer after I transcribed the second individual interviews and group interviews. I sent these interview transcripts via e-mail as it was the only way to communicate with the participants. Out of the four participants, only one replied with any changes. Similar to the first member check, changes were made with the wording of the participant’s comments. The content itself did not change.

Finally, I conducted a member check with my participants with their write-ups in chapter 4. I provided each participant a copy of their reading experience in their social studies class. While a year had passed, I thought it was critical for them to read their story as I perceived it. I wanted to be certain that I captured their reading experiences in the social studies class accurately. All participants reviewed their write-ups, and like the other member checks, minor grammatical changes were made.

**Triangulation**

Denzin (1978) identifies four different modes of triangulation: sources, methods, investigators, and theories. Of these four, two were used in my study: sources and methods. First, drawing on more than one source or participant, I provided an opportunity for triangulation. By including more than one perspective with each perspective, credibility was established with the data as common patterns were derived from more than one source of data collection. While the perspectives of the participants did not match, common themes did emerge within the participants.

Alongside the triangulation of sources was the triangulation of methods. Using two types of interviews, observations, and documents, I assisted with the believability of

**Subjectivity**

Each researcher has opinions, prejudices, and other biases that could affect the outcomes of data. Stake (1995) argues that “subjectivity [should] not [be] seen as a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element of understanding” (p. 45). The complexity of this personal understanding is often overlooked, and as a result becomes a misunderstanding. These misunderstandings derive from poor methods and a lack of self-awareness (Stake, 1995).

Acknowledging my biases was a critical component for both me and my role as a researcher and for my intended audience. Reflecting on my already known biases through journal writing assisted me in keeping in touch with my subjectivity. Also, prior to my interviews, I answered the interview questions myself. This created an immediate self-examination prior to the actual interview by highlighting my preconceptions. This played a role in the way that I phrased certain questions. Also, through the self-analysis, I was able to make meaning of the experience, which guided my purpose of research. Just as I have a personal experience with my topic that has lead to my inquiry, the students deserved to experience their own reality of this topic.
Transferability

Case studies are pursued as a way to make a case understandable to others. In order to relate to others, conclusions, in the form of naturalistic generalizations, need to be made in such a way that the reader will be personally engaged or will have the opportunity to live through the experience vicariously (Stake, 1995). This was accomplished through the use of “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). By using this rich, thick description of setting and participants, it will enable the reader to transfer the information to other settings and/or situations (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998).

Certain aspects of my research experience can be utilized with high school social studies teachers to support reading practices in the classroom. Given that social studies is a core subject that reaches all students, I believe this study, by demonstrating the typicality of it, will be useful to expose social studies teachers to a variety of reading approaches and materials. Also, through the systematic data collection, analysis, and presentation, certain aspects of this research may be utilized with other content area teachers in other contexts to support reading in their classrooms.

Summary

The main purpose of my study was to determine how students’ experiences influenced their reading of nonfiction literature in a social studies class. I examined the relationships that students have with the text and their peers. Data included transcripts, observation notes, memos, and online postings.
I analyzed my data at three levels: first, I organized my data, then by creating codes or categories, I described my findings through an interpretive commentary including general and particular descriptions. In order for the reader to interpret my assertions, the cases were reported in detail.

In the next chapter, I report my findings to my two research questions:

1. How do students transact with nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom?

2. How does the reading of nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom enable students to understand themselves and society?
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine student experiences reading nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom. My study explored four students’ literary experiences within a ninth grade social studies class through the reading of the following books: Night (1972/2006) by Elie Wiesel, A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier (2007) by Ishmael Beah, and God Grew Tired of Us (2007) by John Bul Dau. I defined literary experiences as the position of the reader in relation to the text (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995). The position the reader has in relation to the text derives from complex transactions between the reader and his/her environment (Kennedy, 1959). This chapter presents findings for the following research questions:

1. How do students transact with nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom?

2. How does the reading of nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom enable students to understand themselves and society?

In response to my research questions, in order to examine the transactions that the participants were having with the reading as well as the influence nonfiction literature had on the understanding of themselves and society, I obtained annotations of the text, online postings, and other forms of writing including poems and journals. I also conducted both individual and group interviews as well as classroom observations. In order to analyze the students’ transactions within each text, I used Rosenblatt’s term, “poem.” Rosenblatt (1978/1994) identified the poem as a “whole category of aesthetic
transactions between readers and texts” (p. 12). Building on Rosenblatt’s notion of the “poem,” I created the following categories to analyze the participants’ transactions: self poem, text poem, and world poem.

First, the self poem occurs when readers build a relationship with the text by relating it to their own experiences. Readers create a text poem when they engage in what has been read, viewed, or listened to in the past to what they are currently reading. Finally, the world poem transpires when readers connect what they are actively reading to concerns of the society or the world. Through the labeling of the self poem, text poem, and the world poem, I was able to precisely categorize the reciprocated relationship between the reader and the text. Neither the reader nor the text should be separated; instead, they are interwoven in the reading process making the reading much more; the reading becomes “an event in time” (Rosenblatt, 1964, p. 126). By conducting these analyses, I was able to draw conclusions about how the participants transacted with the nonfiction books and each other in social studies classroom and how this transaction led participants to a better understanding of themselves and society.

The discussion of my findings will first focus on the four participants as individual cases. Each case begins with a general overview of each participant, followed by an in-depth examination of their literary experiences within the social studies class. Following the individual cases, I will provide a cross-case analysis which will examine the cases as a collective study. This cross-case analysis presents an in-depth examination of both the similarities and differences in the individual cases.
Brian

I met Brian at Fullerton High School on January 19, 2010 during his social studies class. I worked with Brian from January 19 until May 21, 2010. In the following sections, I describe Brian’s school history and background, and then, I provide an in-depth examination of Brian’s literary experiences within a social studies class.

School History and Background

While Brian has lived in Fullerton, Ohio, his entire life, he attended a neighboring, parochial school until eighth grade. His transition from a private school to a public one was “very easy” as he was already acquainted with people through his participation in sports (I, May 21, 2010). Brian classifies Fullerton as “The Bubble.” In defining the “The Bubble,” he identifies Fullerton as “a little town separated from the real world” where “everything seems so easy and good.” As such, “real life situations are unheard of in Fullerton” (I, May 21, 2010). Even though Brian feels there are some downfalls in living in Fullerton such as a disconnect to the real world, for the most part, he loves the smallness of the community because “everyone knows everybody” and feels very safe within the community (I, May 21, 2010). He also feels Fullerton Schools provides him with a “very good” education and opportunities to compete in sports at a high level (I, May 21, 2010).

Brian has a close relationship with his parents and two siblings and is a regular church attendee. At the time of the study, he carried a grade point average of 4.0. He is also active in school as he is a member of the football, basketball, and track teams as well
as a member of Key Club, an international student-led organization which emphasizes community service, leadership, and character.

**The Poem: A “Coming-Together”**

Throughout my 18-week study, I observed Brian in class eight times and conducted two individual interviews and one group interview with him. Brian also wrote eight journal entries and three online postings on the texts involved in the study. I also asked Brian to write a poem based off of an excerpt from the book, *Night* as a way to connect with the character and reflect on his own life. In addition, he annotated two chapters from two of the three books (*Night* and *God Grew Tired of Us*) studied. Through the data collected, Brian engaged in the following poems: self poems, text poems, and world poems. In the following sections, I describe in detail each of these literary experiences.

**Self poems.** Self poems are the most common poem as they happen naturally between the reader’s life and the text. Brian’s self poems were most evident through his annotations with the text, journal entries, and individual interviews. Brian assumed several positions while reading and transacting with the nonfiction literature in his social studies class which reflected his environment and experiences: the athlete, the son and brother, and the teenager.

**The athlete.** The experiences that Brian reflected on during his reading consistently and predominantly came from his background in athletics. Brian related his background in sports to the many rigorous actions that took place in the books. He also
reflected on past memories that involved both his favorite sport, football, and his favorite football coach.

Several times throughout the course of the study, Brian found himself connecting to the strenuous tasks that many of the characters endured. For example, through a journal entry regarding the book *Night*, Brian commented on a particular moment that captured his attention: What captured my attention the most in the book [*Night*] was when they were forced to leave Buna and run very fast for a long period of time. The brutality of the SS officers was awful as well. It meant so much to me because I play sports and run a lot but get tired after 30 minutes. I exert energy 100%, but I am in good condition and I feel dead after a bit. I can’t even imagine how it must have felt to be there. It reminds me of conditioning for sports. After I awhile of exerting myself, my legs burn very bad, and I can’t imagine how it would have felt to do that [run] all night long. (J, February 4, 2010)

Brian commented on this same scene in the book *Night* a second time during a group interview with other participants and even connected it to yet another book read in the class, *A Long Way Gone*:

I mean I have run distance. The farthest I have ever run is five miles in the blossom race, and I am like dying after that. I can’t imagine running at their speed for as long as they did. I don’t know what would be worse: running after you had surgery on your foot [*Night*] or running on hot sand [*A Long Way Gone*]? (GI, April 27, 2010)
Brian, also drew from a quote in the book, *A Long Way Gone*, where the main character, Ishmael spoke his words to live by: “If you are alive, there is hope for a better day and something good can happen. If there is nothing good left in the destiny of a person, he or she will die” (Beah, 2007, p. 54). In a journal entry, he mentioned how this particular quote prompted him to think of his “words to live by” which came from his middle school football coach. His coach once said, “Opportunities are like a sunrise. If you wait too long, you’ll miss it.” (J, March 1, 2010). He later reflected on these words and the motivation he received from them while playing sports and mentioned how it was not until after reading *A Long Way Gone* that he placed his favorite quote in a broader context: “I now feel like if you remember that [“opportunities are like a sunrise. If you wait too long, you’ll miss it”], it will help in life” (J, May, 21, 2010).

Also, after Brian discussed a particular passage in class over the book, *Night*, that resembled a poem with its structure and use of repetition, I provided him with a skeletal copy of the poem from the book that included the exact structure and repeated words, “Never shall I forget” (p. 34). Just as Elie, the main character, relayed his unforgettable emotions and experiences regarding his life and the Holocaust including images such as the “smoke,” “small faces,” “flames,” and “nocturnal silence,” Brian, too, shared his most unforgettable moments to date. Through Brian’s poem, it was clear that the memories between these two teenage boys were extremely different, but both Elie and Brian shared, through poetry, their own experiences. Unlike Elie’s poem that encompassed the tragedies that surrounded his youth, Brian spoke of his youth and his most memorable experiences which mostly involved his love for sports. In four of the seven lines of this
poem, Brian referenced the sport of football, his favorite sport to play. He wrote about his football experiences starting from as earlier as 5th grade: “Never shall I forget winning the championship in 5th grade for football” to his experience with football in 6th grade: “Never shall I forget a Browns game I went to in 6th grade” (P, January 22, 2010). He continued to draw on his football experiences within this poem discussing his most recent involvement in football: his freshman year. With this being his most recent experience, he mentioned it twice including his first trip to the state championship. Brian writes, “Never shall I forget going to the state championships for football my freshmen year.” He also commented on an injury that occurred during his freshmen season: “Never shall I forget breaking my arm, which ended my football season my freshmen year” (P, January 22, 2010; see Appendix X for Brian’s poem). He referenced these memories once again through a journal entry emphasizing both a good memory: “The good thing I’ve experienced has consisted of my football team going to states” and a bad memory: “Some of my bad memories consist of when I broke my arm, and I was out my football season.” Within this same entry, he also mentioned one of his dreams: “One of my unrealistic dreams is to become a professional athlete” (J, February 11, 2010).

As an athlete, Brian transacted with two of the three nonfiction texts studied as each work had some element of athleticism in them such as running and physical determination. According to Rosenblatt (1938/1995), the reader brings to the work being read his past memories (p. 30). In this particular case, Brian drew on his many memories of being an athlete including training for athletic contests, listening to his past coach’s motivational speech, and losing a state championships and related it to those experiences
read about in the books. Clearly, the experiences presented in the books and those presented by Brian were different, but according to Rosenblatt (1938/1995), the reader need not have to share identical experiences; instead, the reader must have experienced some of the emotions or circumstances from which he can construct new emotions or understandings (p. 77). Brian associated with the physical pain that can come from running for long periods of times as seen in Night and A Long Way Gone. He associated with the power words can play on one’s motivation as read in A Long Way Gone, and he associated with a teenage boy’s willingness to never forget in Night. Brian not only shared in some of the same emotions and circumstances in these two books, but he also, as Rosenblatt stated, constructed new emotions and understandings. Three different times when reflecting on his own physical conditioning and comparing it to the boys in the books, Brian said, “I can’t even imagine” (J, February 4, 2010; GI, April 27, 2010). While it may have been difficult for him to imagine this level of endurance and fatigue, it did broaden his understanding of the harshness of the situations as depicted in the books: “I mean I never really knew how harsh some of the things some of these people went through. They [the books] painted a good picture in my mind. Umm, I understood more and kind of thought of it more as a worse thing than before I had read it” (I, May 21, 2010). Brian also acknowledged how the physical toughness that football players must acquire to be great compared little to that physical toughness that Ishmael and other soldiers in A long Way Gone displayed as they ran across hot sand barefooted: “These kids are out on their own and basically get scorched through multiple layers of their skin, and I cannot even believe how bad that could have been. It kind of motivates me to be
tougher” (I, March 26, 2010). Through this comparison, Brian reevaluated his own assumptions of what being tough meant which led to a “fuller participation in what the text offers” (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. 74).

As depicted above, Brian read these books through the eyes of an athlete; eyes that resembled those of the main characters in the books, Night and A Long Way Gone. In addition, Brian read as both a son and a brother.

The son and the brother. Even though he mostly associated his readings to sports, Brian also made several connections to his family. He found himself reflecting both on his relationship with his father and his brother while placing himself and his family in similar situations to those found in the book.

When reading God Grew Tired of Us (2007), Brian related to the main character John by associating with his sense of morals and his commitment to his family and faith as displayed in the book (GI, April 27, 2010). Brian was also drawn to the strong father-son relationship depicted in the book Night. The book Night chronicles the journey of survival for both a son and a father, and despite the many references to this relationship, one particular passage generated emotion for Brian. Trying to keep pace with SS officers, the main character, Elie and his father were running “like automatons” in the bitter cold (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 88). After travelling twenty kilometers, Elie decided to rest. He soon fell asleep. When he awoke, he looked at his father thinking to himself, “How he had aged since last night” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 88). With this particular line, Brian questioned with his own father in mind, “What would that have looked like?” (A, January 29, 2010). A few short paragraphs later Elie’s father stressed, “Don’t let yourself
be overcome with sleep, Eliezer. It’s dangerous to fall asleep in snow. One falls asleep forever. Come, my son, come…Get up” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 88). In response to this particular passage, Brian wrote, “hard for a dad to say and a child to hear” (A, January 29, 2010). Other phrases like “awful thought” and “scary thought” littered the annotated page with emotion (A, January 29, 2010). When asked about this particular annotation, Brian not only commented on the courage displayed by Elie’s father, but he also continued to relate this experience to his own father: “For my dad to say that to me, it would just be weird because he would actually be serious like if you don’t get up, you’re gonna die. It is just scary” (I, May 21, 2010; see Appendix Y for Brian’s annotated page).

Brian also interacted with his classmates through online conversations regarding the nonfiction readings in the social studies classroom which not only highlighted his personal experiences regarding his family to his peers, but he also gained insight from his peers on the topics discussed. For example, when talking to his peers about Elie and his father’s rigorous struggle to keep alive, Brian placed himself in the story questioning what he would have done in Elie’s place under the circumstances with both his brother and his father:

If I was in the position with the running thing, I have always pictured that if I was with my brother and my dad, my brother, not saying anything against him, but he wouldn’t have made it, I don’t think. I probably wouldn’t have either, but I feel that he would have died before me. I always thought about what I would do: would I keep going or if I would have let him go? It is just the worst thing to think about. He is a year younger and I thought about that a couple of times. If it
was just me and my dad, I don’t know if I would want to let him die and I live or if he dies, I die with him. (GI, April 27, 2010)

In response to Brian’s contemplation of whether he would want to die with his father or continue on living, Allison, a classmate of Brian’s, suggested “I think that with Elie, his main reason for survival was his dad for a long time, and I think that the reason that people keep on living is for everyone else” (GI, April 27, 2010). Even though Brian respected Allison’s comment, he was still unsure as to what he would have done in Elie’s position: “to watch your father die before your eyes, and then have life after it, I just don’t know?” (GI, April 27, 2010).

Through the nonfiction texts, God Grew Tired of Us and Night, Brian related his experience as both a son and brother to the family relationships identified in the books. Rosenblatt (1938/1995) suggests that “personal experience will elicit a definite response; it will lead to some kind of reflection” (p. 67). In Brian’s instance, he reflected on the relationship with both his father and brother confirming what he already knew: the seriousness of his father and the weakness of his younger brother and questioning what he didn’t: what it would feel like to lose a parent. Through his reflection, he delved into his personal experiences with his family members. For his younger brother, Brian acknowledged that his brother’s age, size and speed would have impacted his brother’s survival while questioning how his close relationship with his brother would have impacted his decision on leaving his brother behind: “I always thought about what I would do: would I keep going or if I would have let him go” (GI, April 27, 2010). Similarly, Brian’s close relationship with his father weighed heavily on his mind when he
questioned what he would do if he were in Elie’s situation with his dying father: “I don’t know if I would want to let him die and I live or if he dies, I die with him” (GI, April 27, 2010). Rosenblatt (1938/1995) also states that this reflection that takes place between the reading and experience can lead to a desire to communicate with others to whom the boy or girl trusts (p. 67). Brian spoke with his mother about the book Night describing how “graphic it was and how it was hard to read because of the content” (I, May 21, 2010). At the conclusion of their conversation about this book, Brian indicated that his mother showed interest in reading the book, Night.

As mentioned earlier, Brian experienced self poems through the lens of an athlete and as just discussed, through the lens of a son and brother. Along with these two perspectives, Brian also read as a teenager.

The teenager. While Brian related his readings to both his experience as an athlete and his experience as a son and brother, due to his age, the role that came most naturally was his experience as a teenager. Each of the books read within the study were told from a male teenager’s perspective (Elie Wiesel in Night, age 15; Ishmael Beah in A Long Way Gone; age 13; John Bul Dau in God Grew Tired of Us; age 13). Brian even commented on how the age and gender played a role in the impact the books had on him: “I think it interested me because I could put myself in their position” (I, March 26, 2010). As such, Brian easily found himself relating to the main characters in the books, often times, placing himself in the story, empathizing with the boys while at other times, questioning their actions and their environments.
During many annotations, Brian made comments which suggested that he was having a conversation with the actual characters in the story or he placed himself within the story. For instance, in *God Grew Tired of Us* (2007), John commented on his first experience with snow upon arriving in America: “I have seen many snows since that day, but none has ever been a magical” (p. 208). As if Brian was conversing with John, he agreed with John’s testament about the first snow claiming the “first time’s the best” (A, April 19, 2010).

Brian also placed himself in both the apartment and the grocery store that John and his Sudanese friends went to for the first time in America. With the apartment, the American hosts showed John and his friends how things worked within the apartment. These things ranged from flipping on light switches, to opening the oven, to turning on the shower. To this description, Brian wrote, “That would’ve been funny to watch” (A, April 19, 2010). Just as humorous as the scene at the apartment, Susan, the lady helping John at the store, asked if he wanted some lettuce at which she pointed to a “bag of leaves.” Brian laughed (“even funnier to watch”), alongside the main character John, who commented on how these “leaves” resembled those that he fed his farm animals in Duk Payuel (A, April 19, 2010).

Similar to *God Grew Tired of Us*, Brian found himself wondering what he would do if he were Ishmael in *A Long Way Gone*: “When reading, I think about if I was in that position, what would I do? In *A Long Way Gone*, if I was in the middle of the woods by myself going around, what the heck would I do type of thing? I don’t think that I would be able to survive on my own” (I, March 26, 2010).
Not only was Brian actively involved in the story, but he also demonstrated empathy in two of the three books studied. First, in a *God Grew Tired of Us* (2007), the conditions the Lost Boys endured weighed heavily on Brian. One such condition especially affected him. The Lost Boys had to scavenge for food and water many times throughout the book. Sometimes, they were lucky enough to stumble upon both. Other times, they had to resort to desperate and unthinkable measures such as drinking their own urine. To this Brian replied, “I mean if I had to go through some of the things he [John] did like drink pee because he couldn’t find water. I think that is the grossest thing that I have ever read. I wouldn’t be able to take it” (GI, April 27, 2010). Brian also demonstrated empathy with John’s schooling. John experienced school for the first time when he was 18 years old at a Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya. He was placed in first grade. John, regardless of his age, was thankful for even having the opportunity to go to school. Brian, on the other hand, empathized with John’s circumstances regarding school while appreciating his own: “I was shocked to read that John started 1st grade at age 18. If I were 18 and had never been educated, my life would be completely different. In 1st grade, I was still young and innocent. I can’t imagine going through life without being educated. After reading this, I feel extremely lucky that I have been able to go through schooling at a normal age. I will never again take for granted my education” (J, April 14, 2010).

Likewise, in *Night*, Brian empathized with the main characters in the book as well as the Jewish population. For example, within the same page of the book, the Jewish people were referred to as “flea ridden dogs” two different times (p. 85). Both times,
Brian annotated, “This must’ve been hard” and “awful that Jews were referred to as dogs” (A, January, 29, 2010). On the following page, Brian’s empathy continued. He made note of a young boy that was running alongside Elie for survival who suddenly stopped, looked to Elie, and fell to the ground saying, “I can’t go on” (p. 86). Elie recalls this image: “That is the image I have of him” (p. 86). To this passage, Brian stated, “That would be an awful way to lose somebody” (A, January, 29, 2010; see Appendix Y for annotated page).

While Brian empathized with the characters, there were many instances where he questioned the thoughts and actions of them. For instance, in *God Grew Tired of Us* (2007), the main character, John, recalls his first interaction with an American woman. Though the woman spoke to John, he could not understand her and “didn’t want to ask her to repeat herself because that would be rude so [he] kept quiet” (p.188). While annotating the text, Brian blocked of the words “because that would be rude” and commented “not really” (A, April 19, 2010). On the following page, John spoke of what his elders in Kakuma had once told him about America: “Americans preferred to live in tall buildings, as a sign of wealth and power” (p. 189). To this, Brian underlined and wrote, “not true” (A, April 19, 2010).

Brian also questioned John’s idea of America. John happened to be in New York City when the World Trade Center was attacked on September 11, 2001. John, due to his background and exposure with his own violent country of Sudan, wondered what had happened to his vision of America: “I escaped these things [violence against innocent people] and come to America thinking I would find peace and security. Apparently, the
world no longer offered such a perfect sanctuary” (p. 200). To this, Brian underlined and questioned, “When did it ever?” (A, April 19, 2010).

Reading as a teenager, Brian was able to identify with the main characters of all three books. According to Rosenblatt (1938/1995), even though readers may see the characters outside themselves, they still have the ability “to enter into their behavior and emotions” (p. 40). Brian, as a teenaged male, reflected on John’s schooling and his first experiences with America. Through his reflection in a journal entry, he gained a better understanding and appreciation of John’s culture in Sudan while connecting the Dinka culture to his own:

I have learned that the Dinka culture has many traditional beliefs, and they always stick to what they believe. Some examples are that it is required to get an education, and they work very hard at it. They are not lazy people at all, and they have good values like honesty, responsibility, kindness, and they always stick to their childhood morals. They always seem to do the right thing. These compare to my values in kind of the same way. When I read about the Dinka culture, it reminded me a little of what I was taught behavior wise. I think the older I got, maybe I have gone away from these a little. (J, April 10, 2010)

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) also argues that “the ability to understand and sympathize with others reflects the multiple nature of the human being, his potentialities for many more selves and kinds of experience than any one being could express” (p. 40). Through Brian’s ability to empathize with some of the characters in the books, he was able to show greater empathy for those within his own community and school: “I am sure that a
lot of people appear to be bad kids and do not do the right things, but we may not know what goes on in their home life or life outside of school; therefore, we can’t judge” (I, May 21, 2010).

As previously mentioned with his self poems, Brian read as the following: an athlete, a son and brother, and a teenager. While the self poems happen naturally, text poems are more sophisticated as they draw on past reading, viewing, and listening experiences.

**Text poems.** Brian only had two text poems. One occurred while writing in his journal and the other emerged through an online posting. With both connections, he related the text he was reading, *A Long Way Gone* to an earlier book read in his history class, *Night*: For example, in his journal entry he commented, “It [*A Long Way Gone*] reminded me of *Night* because of the harshness of the rebels” (J, February 19, 2010).

Even though Brian only made two text poems, it was evident as to why he went back to the first book he read in class, *Night*, when making these connections. On two separate occasions, he spoke openly about his love for the book, *Night*. He not only found himself relating to this book mostly because of the relationship between the father and son, but the story also resonated with his experience in sports because of the physical endurance the characters exhibited throughout the story. In speaking about his admiration for the book and the main character, Elie, he said, “To say that you survived the holocaust would be admirable, and the fact that it is one of the most horrific things that has ever happened, and you were able to stick through it, take the beatings and harsh
treatments…this is why this is my favorite book that we have read thus far” (GI, April 27, 2010).

Text poems can occur when a comparison takes place between characters, story events, lessons, themes, or writing styles of the author. For Brian, he related the brutality that surrounded the holocaust in *Night* to the brutality that existed with the rebels and war in Sierre Leone in *A Long Way Gone*. He also drew on his personal connection and strong appreciation of the book, *Night*.

As discussed, Brian experienced both self poems and text poems. He also made the most sophisticated poem: world poems. With world poems, readers make connections to bigger issues and concerns surrounding the world and society.

**World poems.** Due to the nature of the content within a World History Class, world poems were frequent for Brian; however, they mostly took place at the end of the study with the book, *God Grew Tired of Us*, and the setting of Sudan. World poems mostly came as a result of annotating texts and through online postings and included the following areas: Sudan and America.

**Sudan.** Through the reading of *God Grew Tired of Us*, Brian experienced a culture quite different from his own. In Sudan, the Dinka culture has no grocery stores, no cars, and no shelter. Even though Brian was shocked to have read about the conditions that John and the Lost Boys lived under, he was shocked even more to have read about how they handled it when they were given things like groceries and shelter: “When the Lost Boys came to America, they were amazed and incredibly appreciative of all these things because they never had the opportunity of having them right in from of
them.” Within in the same online posting, he compared the Sudanese to Americans: “I think the main difference between our culture and the Dinka culture is the resources we have and how we take them for granted. Where the Dinkas barely have anything, but everything they acquire, they cherish and don’t waste anything.” He later commented on the most admirable traits of the Dinka culture: “I admire their unselfishness, responsibility, and ability to be thankful for everything they have” (OP, April 12, 2010). Brian continued to emphasize the responsibility of the Sudanese through a journal entry:

The Lost Boys feel a sense of responsibility towards each other and toward their loved ones in Africa because even since they were little, they had always had to look after one another. They traveled as one, and became family, making sure the person next to them was ok. They are trying to improve their lives and the lives of their family/friends by getting jobs and sending money back home to Africa. (J, April 22, 2010)

According to Rosenblatt (1938/1995), literature may provide experiences to students that would not otherwise be possible (p. 36). In this particular case, Brian was able to experience, even if for a brief moment, the culture of the Sudanese. Due to the reading of God Grew Tired of Us, Brian realized the deep poverty from which John came from. He acknowledged how John had to fight for food on a daily basis and had very little shelter and protection. Despite these things, he also recognized that John and other Sudanese remained both positive and appreciative for the little that they did have. Through John’s story, Brian captured a picture of life in Sudan that he may never have had the opportunity to experience.
Unlike Sudan, the United States of America has more opportunities for shelter, protection, food, and aid from others. Despite this fact, Brian, through the reading of *God Grew Tired of Us*, was able to reflect on the country in which he lived: America.

**America.** Through his reading of Sudan, Brian reflected and referenced America. For instance, in an online posting where he and his classmates where discussing how the definition of the American dream differed from the Sudanese American dream, Brian responded:

The American Dream consists of having a family, owning a house, and having a job that enables you to support your family. The Sudanese American Dream is to get to America, own an apartment or house, and get an education. They are different because from an American’s perspective, there is a lot more pressure to keep doing better, meaning that an apartment is not big enough, or a job isn’t good enough. Americans always want more, but the Sudanese are satisfied with much less. They take whatever they get. They are happy with whatever job they can get and will work endless hours to do what they need to do. (OP, April 22, 2010)

According to Rosenblatt (1999), reading literature offers students an opportunity to value their background, but more importantly, it can transcend their experience to value others’ backgrounds. Brian commented on how he “felt extremely lucky” to be living in America with the many opportunities it has to offer him while valuing the Sudanese culture: “They are not lazy people at all, and they have good values like
honesty, responsibility, kindness, and they always stick to their childhood morals (J, April 10, 2010; J, April 14, 2010).

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) also argues that reading literature provides opportunities for students to feel more generously (p. 37). Brian, while reflecting on the Lost Boys generosity in God Grew Tired of Us, offered how he could make a difference in his community similar to that of the Lost Boys: “After reading this story [God Grew of Tired of Us], I could donate money to the poor and other charities to make a difference in my community” (J, April 22, 2010). By reflecting on John’s generous attitude to his home country even after he was in America, Brian brainstormed possible ways he could help his hometown similar to John. If John, a man who came from very little, could send the little money he did make in America to his family and people in Sudan, Brian, who acknowledges his own blessings, could find a way to give back to his community through charity work.

As mentioned, Brian experienced his world poems in the final book read for the semester, God Grew Tired of Us. Because of this, he connected to things that were happening in Sudan and America. Overall, Brain encountered three types of poems: self poems, text poems, and world poems. With the self poems coming most naturally, Brian experienced the most (17) under this category as he read as an athlete, a son and brother, and as a teenager. On the other hand, text poems were the least made with only 2 interactions between Brian and other forms of media. And finally, Brian experienced 13 world poems; most of which took place at the end of the study (Table 1).
Table 1

*Brian’s Number and Type of Transactions With Each Nonfiction Text Read*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self Poems</th>
<th>Text Poems</th>
<th>World Poems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Night</em></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Long Way Gone</em></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>God Grew Tired of Us</em></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brian, through the reading of nonfiction texts, reflected on his relationship with both his father and brother. He also spent a great deal of time focusing on his favorite pastime: sports. It was through this athletic lens that he related to the physical struggles that existed within the books. Outside of the personal connections, Brian experienced stories from different countries: Germany, Sierra Leone, and Sudan. It was through the nonfiction readings that Brian experienced war and death at the hands of someone his own age.

**Lisa**

Like Brian, I met Lisa at Fullerton High School on January 19, 2010, during her social studies class and worked with her from January 19 to May 21, 2010. In the following sections, I describe Lisa’s school history and background, and then, I provide an in-depth examination of Lisa’s literary experiences within a social studies class.
School History and Background

Lisa has lived in Fullerton, Ohio, and has attended Fullerton Schools her entire life. Similar to Brian, Lisa labels Fullerton as “The Bubble.” Lisa defines “The Bubble” as “a sheltered, time warped area where everyone knows everyone else’s business and dresses similar. In ‘The Bubble,’ nothing actually ‘bad’ happens.” Lisa, an only child, even goes as far as comparing the school district to a “country club” (I, May 21, 2010). In further describing the village of Fullerton and the school district, Lisa believes that the community is both safe and very close while the schools have “distinguished cliques” and the teachers, often times, show favoritism towards students based on past siblings. Besides these attributes, Lisa takes great pride in her school referring to it as “the best in Ohio” with “great teachers,” and while she praises the school for preparing her “well for college,” she admits that the school is both “very competitive and challenging” (I, May 21, 2010).

In school, Lisa, who is the class president, is involved in athletics as she is a part of the cross country and track teams. She also participates in both Key Club and speech and debate. Outside of school, in the summer, she volunteers at a day camp program at a nearby park for under-privileged kids. She participates in all of these extracurricular activities while taking several Advanced Placement classes resulting in her grade point average exceeding the 4.0 scale. During the time of the study, she carried a 4.3.

The Poem: A “Coming-Together”

Throughout my 18-week study, I observed Lisa in class eight times and conducted two individual interviews and one group interview with her. Lisa also wrote seven
journal entries and four online postings on the texts involved in the study. As I did with Brian, I asked Lisa to write a poem based off of an excerpt from the book, *Night* to provide her an opportunity to think more deeply about the main character, Elie, as well as a way to reflect on her own life. In addition, she annotated one chapter from one of the three books studied, *Night*. Through the data collected, Lisa transacted with the text through self poems, text poems, and world poems. In the following sections, I describe in detail each of these literary experiences.

**Self poems.** As noted earlier, self poems are the most common transactions made by students as they link their reading to their own lives. Lisa’s self poems were most evident through her journal entries and individual interviews. Lisa assumed several positions while reading and transacting with the nonfiction text in her social studies class which reflected her environment and experiences: the leader, the daughter and granddaughter, and the teenager.

**The leader.** The experiences that Lisa most reflected upon while reading the nonfiction texts came from the leadership quality she possessed. It was her strong desire to lead and to promote positive change within her school and community that emerged through her transacting with the nonfiction texts in social studies.

One such occasion in which Lisa commented on improving her community was when she wished other students would get involved in a summer program that she participated in. In response to John’s willingness to help and support his country in *God Grew Tired of Us*, Lisa wrote in a journal entry about her experience helping others within her community and urged others to do the same:
What I’d like to do to improve my community is to get more kids involved with a program I do in the summer, only down the road from our beautiful, little “bubble” is a distraught, run down community known as Fullerton Parks. During the summer, the community center there runs a day camp program. There are far too many kids then there are volunteer camp counselors. I can’t figure out why either. It only took me an hour to fall in love with the sweet faces that looked up to me begging for my attention. I think if we could just get a few more kids with this program, we could actually make a difference in these kids’ lives. I know these kids would greatly appreciate it from the smiles and hugs I got on my days as a counselor. What better way is there to give back to your community than making a child smile? (J, April 22, 2010)

Lisa reiterated her willingness and desire to help in her last interview while speaking about what she has learned from reading these books:

I learned that I want to help more people than I guess I probably can. Umm, from those books, like, I wish I could have been there to help those kids [in the books] at the time. That is what I learned about myself. I really want to help people a lot. (J, May 28, 2010)

Lisa’s leadership was noticeable in her annotations as well. In the book Night, there were many instances where she wrote encouraging words to the main character, Elie, in the margins. One such event that generated emotion within Lisa was when the SS officers were screaming at the Jewish men to keep running in the icy wind. While Elie was running, he kept repeating to himself, “Don’t think, don’t stop, run!” (Wiesel,
In the margin, Lisa wrote, “Keep going Elie!” (A, January 29, 2010). Later down the same page, Elie began to show fatigue and frustration:

    The idea of dying, of ceasing to be, began to fascinate me. To no longer exist. To no longer feel the excruciating pain of my foot. To no longer feel anything, neither fatigue nor cold, nothing. To break rank, to let myself slide to the side of the road… (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 86).

To this excerpt, Lisa encouraged, “Don’t give up hope!” (A, January 29, 2010; see Appendix Z for annotated page).

As demonstrated above, there were many times Lisa read as a leader. According to Rosenblatt (1999), “We are selecting for attention what is relevant to our particular needs or interests or purposes at the time.” For Lisa, her presidential role in student council, her membership in Key Club, and her volunteerism with summer camp influenced her reactions to the texts. Through journal writings and interviews, she demonstrated her leadership by personally reflecting on what she does with her spare time to help others, what she hopes others will do, and what she hopes she can do in the future. As she reflected on the underprivileged kids and teenagers that participated in the stories, Lisa was prompted to recall her own work with similar, disadvantaged kids at a summer camp. As she later acknowledged, it was through this reflection that she learned that she wanted to “help people a lot” (J, May 28, 2010). Through her annotations, she showed her leadership personality as she displayed her optimism towards a situation and a character that had very little optimism. While Elie in *Night* had lost all hope, Lisa refused to give up on him as demonstrated with her words of encouragement.
The daughter and granddaughter. Along with reading as a leader, Lisa transacted with the texts as both a daughter and granddaughter. Her transactions were mostly seen through the writing of her poem, “Never,” journal writings, and interviews. Through the writing of her poem, “Never,” Lisa reflected on several memories regarding her family. In five of the seven lines in the poem, Lisa referenced her family. She wrote about happy moments in her life such as family vacations that she shared with her parents in both Hilton Head, North Carolina and Europe: “Never shall I forget the happiness that I felt with my family at Hilton Head” and “Never shall I forget visiting Europe with my parents” (P, January 22, 2010). Along with these vacations, she remembered the way her parents looked at her after receiving a good report card: “Never shall I forget the way my parents looked after I got a good report card” (P, January 22, 2010). She also mentioned some unhappy memories regarding her family including her dad working away from home and her aunt being rushed to the hospital on Halloween Eve: “Never shall I forget the few years my dad wasn’t with us but working somewhere else” and “Never shall I forget how scared I was when my aunt was rushed to the hospital on Halloween Eve” (P, January 22, 2010; see Appendix AA for Lisa’s poem).

Along with writing a poem, Lisa, through a double journal entry (Figure 4), discussed a childhood memory of playing sharks and minnows. She chose a passage from the book, God Grew Tired of Us, which prompted this childhood game connection. Through this journal entry, Lisa made a connection between her childhood experience of playing the game, shark and minnows, to John’s rendition of the game, which is called alueth. It was, as Lisa stated, the first time that she found herself relating
Figure 4. Lisa’s double entry journal

When I wasn’t tending cattle or breaking this passage, it made me up cattle stuff. I played smile. I think I chuckled a lot as a child with a little to myself too. I toy cows made out of clay or ingroup within this passage because it was so happy after reading other children. One of my was finally something I could really relate to. I always in which we remember being little pretended a lion captured and playing marks and sinka boys and turned wild, which is exactly them into lions. We like all this. It’s weird to picked one boy to be the think thousands of miles lion, and instead of away kids were playing end of the field near my the same game. I also boys. The other boys chose this quote because stood at the other it was a good memory, end” (32). I feel like this maybe one of the last too.
to something in the opening book. While she found it “weird” that kids thousands of miles away play a similar game, she found great joy in reading this passage using words like “smile,” “chuckled,” and “happy” to describe her reading experience of this passage (J, March 15, 2010). This particular passage not only prompted a childhood memory, but it also showed a connection between two very different countries: America and Sudan.

While Lisa related her childhood to the Sudanese game of alueth, she found herself questioning both her mother’s and father’s attitude towards people after having read the book, *A Long Way Gone*. This questioning came after Lisa’s careful examination of the main character, Ishmael. While many of Lisa’s classmates showed disdain for Ishmael’s character, due to his brutal and viscous acts of killing people, Lisa defended and showed compassion to him several times. One such time was in her final individual interview:

L: I really just like Ishmael. I really liked him as a person.

S: Even when he was killing all those people?

L: I just thought he was confused. Survival. You have to do what you have to do.

(I, May 28, 2010)

Lisa, during the group interview, even went as far as saying that Ishmael was her favorite character out of all three of the books read:

I like him [Ishmael] the best out of all of them because he repents everything that happened to him, and he has overcome so much with nightmares and the reoccurrences, and he has to get up the next day and tell himself that he is not a bad person which I think is harder than the rest. (GI, April 27, 2010)
Lisa, unlike her classmates who were revolted by Ishmael’s character, opted to find the best in him. According to Lisa, her admiration towards Ishmael’s character would drastically contradict her parents’ attitude towards him:

I guess I just don’t want to believe that people do things on purpose for evil, I guess. My dad always says that half of the world wakes up to screw the other half of the world, and I don’t want to think like that. I know that it is probably true, but I just don’t want to think that way. They [mom and dad] are both a little cynical, so maybe that’s why I try not to be as cynical as them. I don’t know I feel like to have a good story, you need to find the happiness in it or else there is really no point in reading the story. (I, May 28, 2010)

Even though Lisa acknowledges the differences between her and her parents, she remains consistent in who she is as a person as she constantly looks for the good in people even if those people have openly admitted to wrongdoings such as drugs and murder.

As Lisa read as a daughter, she also read as a granddaughter reflecting on the special relationship she has with her grandmother and the great gift they share in books. At the beginning of *A Long Way Gone*, Ishmael speaks of the first time he ever saw a grownup cry. He recalls a man who had tried to escape from the rebels with his family, but the rebels violently attacked his vehicle killing his entire family. The man, overcome with grief, was both vomiting and crying over the brutal murders of his family members. Ishmael remembered, “It was the first time I had seen a grown man cry like a child, and I felt a sting in my heart” (Beah, 2007, p. 12). In response to Ishmaels’ memory, through a journal entry, Lisa commented on the first time she remembered a grownup crying:
I remember the first time I saw my grandma cry as it has always stuck with me. My mom and I had went to visit my grandma to help her clean her home. She leaves in a small white house that is stuck in the 1960s. We were sitting in the kitchen at her old dated table, when all of sudden my grandma took off her glasses and began to cry. ‘Mom, what’s wrong?’ my mother asked. ‘Your father. He’s losing it, Marge. He truly is losing it. He thinks I’m stealing from him. He stopped remembering things, and his yell.’ ‘Oh’ my grandmother said between sobs. I had and have never heard such a piercing sound than my grandmother’s cries. I was so struck by the whole thing I couldn’t help but just sit there without knowing what to do. From that experience, I learned how hard it is for my grandma to handle my grandpa’s retirement and to constantly have him around. This relates to the experience that Ishmael had because both my grandma and the guy were crying over their loved ones. (J, February 11, 2010)

Despite the cultural and personal differences between Lisa and the character Ishmael, they were connected by the human being’s ability to feel. For Ishmael, he became physical ill with the knowledge of his family’s slaying, and for Lisa, she sympathized with the changes her grandmother was experiencing with her grandfather’s retirement.

Lisa mentioned her grandmother a second time; this time she spoke more about their relationship and what makes it so special. When asked if she had any outside conversations about any of the books read in her social studies class, she quickly mentioned how she had conversations with her grandmother about all the books read in class. While Lisa shared all of these books with her grandmother, it was the book, Night,
which got the biggest reaction yet least amount of conversation from her grandmother:  
“Actually, the biggest moment I guess would be when I told my grandma about *Night*, and she said I can’t read it.” Lisa’s grandmother, a woman who lived during the Holocaust, refused to read or talk about the book with her. Lisa recalled that her grandmother claimed that the Holocaust was “too terrible to read and relive.” Lisa also mentioned how her mother read a book about the Holocaust when she was young, and her grandmother said, “I don’t want to go back” (I, May 28, 2010).

Lisa later commented on how books “give me and my grandma something to talk about. I know that she really enjoys talking about books with me and stuff. For Christmas, my cousins will get something else, but I will get a book because that is what my grandma and I share” (I, May 28, 2010).

Rosenblatt (1982) believes that while reading aesthetically, readers “draw on [the] reservoir of past experience with people” (p. 270). Through the reading of nonfiction literature in her social studies class, she drew on memories of those people that she is most close with: her parents and grandmother. For her parents, Lisa reflected on experiences that centered around some happy times such as family vacations and childhood games as well as some trying times such as her father working out of town and her aunt falling ill. She also questioned how her attitude towards others differs from her parents. For her grandmother, on the other hand, Lisa reflected on an emotional moment she experienced with watching her grandmother cry for the very first time. On a more uplifting note, she recalled the special connection that exists between her and her grandmother due to the love of books.
**The compassionate teenager.** Lisa, as displayed in her reading roles as the leader and the daughter and granddaughter, has great compassion. This was also seen in her everyday role as a teenager. On many occasions through the course of her readings, she demonstrated empathy and emotion with the teenaged characters in the books.

One such occasion was in the book, *Night*, when Elie describes the scene in which he, his father, and others faced the bitter cold: “An icy wind blew violently. But we marched without faltering” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 85). To these brutal weather conditions, Lisa wrote,

> The way he describes the cold and how little clothes and light shoes he had really hit home. I couldn’t imagine being outside in Ohio with barely any clothes freezing and almost getting frostbit. Just the thought of it makes me shiver. It made me feel appreciative to have the warm clothes I do. The scene also makes me feel remorse for those people who live like that then and now. (J, February 4, 2010)

Lisa also showed empathy towards Elie and his situation through her annotations. There were three pages of annotation in particular that generated emotion in Lisa. On pages 88 and 89, Lisa underlined nineteen, solemn words or phrases. Some of those words included “tears,” “dance of death,” “cemetery,” “corpses,” “agony,” “silence,” and “death” (A, January 29, 2010). At the bottom of page 89, Lisa wrote, “Death very important to page. Wants to die 😞” (A, January 29, 2010).

Through her use of a frown face, Lisa expresses sadness towards Elie’s situation. In one particular passage, Lisa enters the scene almost reprimanding Elie for thinking
negatively. Elie says, “I saw myself in every stiffened corpse. Soon I wouldn’t even be seeing them anymore; I would be one of them. A matter of hours” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 89). To this, Lisa boxed off “be one of them” and wrote as if speaking to Elie directly, “don’t say things like that Elie” (A, January 29, 2010).

On page 90 of *Night*, Elie continues to recall his experiences in the brick factory, the place where they were resting for the night. While, at first, Elie’s father refused to sleep in fear of what might happen to both him and his son, he eventually succumbed to sleep. Elie, through whispering in his father’s ear, quickly woke him up. Elie describes his father’s reaction:

> He awoke with a start. He sat up, bewildered, stunned, like an orphan. He looked all around him, taking it all in as if he had suddenly decided to make an inventory of his universe, to determine where he was and how and why he was there. Then he smiled. (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 90)

In response to Elie’s father, Lisa questioned, “Why didn’t his father realize where he was? And when he did he smiled?” (A, January 29, 2010). She also showed compassion to Elie’s response to his father, “I shall always remember that smile,” (p. 90) by simply writing, “Awe!” (A, January 29, 2010).

Later on the page, Elie tells the story of an old rabbi who lost his son during the march to the brick factory: “He had searched for him among the dying, to no avail. Then he had dug through the snow to find his body. In vain” (p. 90). Lisa not only underlined these sentences, but she also used another frown face and wrote, “poor guy!” (A, January 29, 2010). Lisa, through her annotations, was able to display her emotion, in this case,
sadness, that she was feeling while reading the passages. She continued to empathize with the rabbi’s story by writing, “so sad!!!” (A, January 29, 2010). At one point, the rabbi recalled the disappearance of his son: “I fell behind a little, at the rear column. I didn’t have the strength to run anymore. And my son didn’t notice. That’s all I know” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 91). Lisa underlined “my son didn’t notice” and drew a sad face with a tear. When asked about her annotations of this page, Lisa commented,

I used a lot of sad faces. I just thought it was upsetting. The parts that he was talking about in this chapter. It seemed like he talked about death a lot. I think I was really upset during this chapter because I really didn’t want him to like give up and leave his dad and stuff, so I was sad. (I, May 28, 2010)

Rosenblatt (1982) believes that “we participate in the story, we identify with the characters, we share their conflicts and their feelings” (p. 270). Through her annotations in particular, Lisa shared in Elie’s struggles and heartaches as she repeatedly used sad faces and heartfelt words demonstrating her compassion to him and his situation. Other times, Lisa offered advice and encouragement to him in the side margins of her readings as a way to be alongside him through his trying time.

As already discussed, with Lisa’s self poems, she read as the leader, the daughter and granddaughter, and as the compassionate teenager. While she partook in many natural self poems, she also experienced a few text poems which draws on past reading, viewing, and listening experiences.

**Text poems.** While Lisa read through the lenses of a leader, a daughter and granddaughter, and a teenager, she only participated in three text poems. As noted
earlier, text poems are not limited to just books; instead, they can include movies or songs. Two of these text connections were to other books while one of the text connections was to music.

Lisa engaged in text poems with two nonfiction books read in her ninth grade history class. Through a journal entry, she connected *God Grew Tired of Us* to a book, which was read during first semester in the very same class, *Three Cups of Tea* (2008) by Greg Mortenson. She wrote,

I think the thing that I found the most shocking about John’s educational experiences is his lack of materials. John talks about writing in the dirt because they do not have chalk. It made me think of *Three Cups of Tea* and how they talked about the lack of materials in that story. (J, April, 14 2010)

Lisa referenced another book which she read in her ninth grade English class during an interview, *Lord of the Flies* (1959), by William Golding. This time she contrasted this fictional book to the nonfictional books she read in history class:

You could reflect on that [a nonfiction book] more than reading a fiction book like *Lord of the Flies*. I mean you can have a conversation about that, but you are talking about fictitious things where as if you are talking about a real life thing. It’s more important, I guess, because it happened, and it could happen again. And history tends to repeat itself a lot. (I, May 28, 2010)

Lisa also connected to a different form of media: music. The musical genre of rap influenced the main character, Ishmael, in the book, *Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. Several times throughout book, Ishmael referenced rap music. For example, when Ishmael was
stopped by a guard earlier in the book, the guard found the rap cassette in his pocket and handed it to the chief. With doubtful looks regarding the content, the chief played it.

With this he heard,

\textit{You down with OPP (Yeah you know me)}

\textit{You down with OPP (Yeah you know me)}

\textit{You down with OPP (Yeah you know me)}

\textit{Who’s down with OPP (Every last homie}; Beah, 2007, p. 38)

What was, at first, a stressful moment with the guard, Ishmael found himself chuckling at the sound of the music and the particular situation he was in. Despite the dangerous situation, the sound of the rap music relaxed him for a brief moment. Just as Ishmael found comfort and inspiration in rap music, Lisa found “easy listening or pop music” as the genre of music that inspired her. Commenting in her journal about this musical influence, she noted,

The type of music that I rely on is probably easy listening or pop music. This music is so meaningful to me because a lot of these types of music talks about teenage problems. An example might be, ‘No such thing,’ by John Mayer. In the song, there’s a line that goes ‘Welcome to the real world she said to me condemningly, take a seat, take your life, plot it out in black and white.’ This sort of relates to my life and how my parents want me to figure out what I want to be.

(J, March 1, 2010)

Even though Lisa’s musical interest of easy listening or pop music is drastically different to that of Ishmael’s musical preference of rap music, they share in the comfort that music
provided them. For Ishmael, rap was an escape from the brutality of war. While being examined by a nurse after years of fighting, Ishmael, who was covered in wounds, left the scene of the hospital for a brief moment: “I didn’t care because the song had taken a hold of me, and I listened closely to every word” (Beah, 2007, p. 154). For Lisa, music provided an outlet to question and reflect on her own life.

According to Rosenblatt (1982), in order to shape the work, readers draw on “past encounters with spoken or written texts” (p. 270). Through the reading of God Grew Tired of Us, she drew on the lack of educational materials mentioned in the text and compared it to a book read first semester in her history class, Three Cups of Tea and the struggles they faced with education. She also commented on what she feels is gained by reading nonfiction such as being able to talk about “a real life thing” by contrasting the nonfiction books read in her history class to a fictional book read a year earlier in her English class, Lord of the Flies. Finally, she drew on the spoken words found in music comparing her musical choice to that of Ishmael’s in Memoirs of a Boy Soldier.

As mentioned, Lisa experienced self poems as well as text poems. She also participated in the most sophisticated connection: world poem. With world poems, readers reflect on what they are reading in relation to the outside world.

**World poems.** Because of the nature of a social studies class, world poems were frequent, but these connections, as they were with Brian, were most often made at the end of the study with the book, God Grew Tired of Us, and the setting of Sudan. World poems mostly came through online postings and journal entries and included the following areas: Sudan and America.
Sudan. Lisa experienced the Dinka culture of Sudan through the reading of God Grew Tired of Us. Through an online posting, Lisa contrasted the Sudanese to the Americans in commenting on everyday necessities: “We [Americans] take for granted showering, having a grocery store be so close, not having to worry about eating and other things such as that, oh, and we have running water and toilets!” (OP, April 27, 2010). She later reiterated this notion in an interview:

I learned that people have it rough out there especially in third world countries. It is not easy living. Umm, it is a lot more work. Not as much hygiene and stuff, and I thought that was kind of gross to be honest. (I, May, 28, 2010)

Lisa also made several remarks on the amount and level of respect the Dinka culture shares. For example, she commented,

I have learned that the Dinka culture values respect. Respect your elders, respect your wife, and respect your culture. All aspects seem to show respect in my opinion. The markers that are representative of Dinka culture are probably their religious beliefs and their dances/songs they perform. Respect, like I said earlier is a major value of the Lost Boys. (J, April 10, 2010)

Just as Lisa admired the Sudanese for their respect, she also respected their views on education. John, who started first grade at the age of 18, contrasted educational practices between American and African students:

In America, students ask their teachers, ‘Will this be on the test?’ and they try to find out what part of the textbook they don’t have to read. Ha! What a piece of cake that is. That is not school. That is not the way to get anywhere in life. In
Africa, the teachers told me, ‘It’s all on the test. You must study everything, cover to cover.’ To this day, when I study a book, I study it all. (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 155)

Lisa commented on the Sudanese desire to learn in school: “One attribute is their will and want for education. I love how dedicated they are and how much they want to better educate themselves, I find this very admirable” (OP, April 27, 2010).

Lisa also commented on what the Sudanese-American Dream looks like:

The Sudanese-American Dream seems to be to bring more awareness of the people in their home town and to bring honor to their homeland in their new home. We judge success as how much a person has where as the Sudanese-American judge it as how much you’ve helped your family and having a family. John references in the book how he is now married and has a daughter and his family is near him and how lucky he feels to have all of this. (OP, April 24, 2010)

While she admired many things about the Sudanese, there was one thing in particular that puzzled her: the relationship between a man and a woman. She wrote, “One thing I question is their mating/marriage ways. Why aren’t they allowed to be friends with the opposite sex? I found this to be strange” (OP, April 27, 2010). Due to the nature of her culture in America where friends exist between opposite sexes, Lisa struggled in understanding the relationship between males and females in Sudan.

America. While learning about the Sudanese culture, Lisa also reflected on and learned about her own culture in America. In an online posting, she wrote, “The
American Dream is more of owning a nice home, having a family, and getting a good job.” Lisa also commented on how Americans perceive success: “We judge success as how much a person has” (OP, April, 24, 2010).

She also, by contrasting the Sudanese and American culture, commented on her opinion of American respect: “I feel that the Dinkan culture values respect so much more than the American culture does” (OP, April 27, 2010). She explored this topic of respect further in a journal entry:

I feel like our values in America lack respect unlike that of the Dinkas. If you were to walk into a school, restaurant, post office, movie theatre, or any public place in America, it would only take a few seconds to realize the lack of respect that is presented here. Though if you were to go to the camp the Lost Boys were in, you would find these people have lots of respect towards their elders. They listen to what they say and follow their directions. What a shock it must have been for these men to come to America and see all this disrespect. (J, April, 10, 2010)

Through Lisa’s world poems, she looked at both America and Sudan by comparing one to the other. Through reading literature, Rosenblatt (1938/1995) believes that students “vicariously shares their [the characters in the stories] struggles and perplexities and achievements. He becomes a part of a strange environment, or he sees with new emotions the conditions and the lives about him” (p. 174). Reading about the country and people of Sudan allowed Lisa to experience many of the daily things she takes for granted and many of the daily things that third world countries live without such
as running water, working toilets, and grocery stores. She was also able to evaluate the conditions and people that surround her in America. She not only realized how much lack of respect surrounds her daily life, but she also questioned how materialism is often the key determiner of success in America.

As stated above, Lisa experienced most of her world poems in the final book read for the semester, *God Grew Tired of Us*. Because of this, she made connections between both Sudan and America. Overall, Lisa transacted with the text in three ways: self poems, text poems, and world poems. With the self poems coming most naturally, Lisa made 12 under this category as she read as the leader, the daughter and granddaughter, and as the compassionate teenager. She also encountered text poems; however, she only made 3 of these connections during the study. And finally, Lisa experienced 8 world poems; most of which took place at the end of the study (Table 2).

Reading the nonfiction literature in her social studies class provided Lisa an opportunity to unravel many things about varying countries that she had not been aware of such as child soldiers fighting a vicious war of savagery in *A Long Way Gone*, neglected and malnourished children surrounded by killings in *God Grew Tired of Us*, and the loss of family and hope in Germany during Hitler’s regime in *Night*. Beyond learning about other countries and cultures, Lisa gained appreciation of her own life especially with her grandmother and refueled her desire to help others.
Table 2

Lisa’s Number and Type of Transactions With Each Nonfiction Text Read

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self Poems</th>
<th>Text Poems</th>
<th>World Poems</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Night</strong></td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>3</td>
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**Kevin**

I met Kevin at Fullerton High School on January 19, 2010, during his social studies class. I worked with Kevin from January 19 until May 28, 2010. In the following sections, I describe Kevin’s school history and background, and then, I provide an in-depth examination of Kevin’s literary experiences within a social studies class.

**School History and Background**

Kevin, who is an only child, has lived in Fullerton, Ohio, his entire life. Like both Brian and Lisa, Kevin labels Fullerton as “The Bubble.” He defines the “The Bubble,” as a place where “there is little diversity and little change from year to year” (I, May 28, 2010). Due to this and the fact that he has lived here his entire life, he believes that the village does not have much to offer him: “I have seen everything and done everything, and the village does not provide me much entertainment” (I, May 28, 2010). Kevin reinforces this sentiment towards the village of Fullerton: “The experiences Fullerton offers run out quickly so one must rely on surrounding areas a lot” (I, May 28,
Kevin’s feelings about the village of Fullerton are also reflected in his feelings towards the school: “My experiences in school have become rather monotonous because I have been in the same place forever” (I, May 28, 2010). Despite the monotony, Kevin takes advantage of all the honors and Advanced Placement courses that are available to him and carries a grade point average of 4.5.

Kevin participates in football, basketball, and lacrosse as well as the school’s art program. He is also a member of the Key Club. In addition, Kevin volunteers his time at the local humane society and has helped coach at both lacrosse and basketball youth camps. He enjoys listening to all genres of music, spending time outdoors, reading realistic fiction, nonfiction, especially biographies, and collecting shoes.

**The Poem: A “Coming-Together”**

Throughout my 18-week study, I observed Kevin in class eight times and conducted two individual interviews and one group interview with him. Kevin also wrote six journal entries, often times writing on multiple prompts, and six online postings on the texts involved in the study. Kevin also wrote a poem based off of an excerpt from the book, *Night* as a way to connect with the character and reflect on his own life. In addition, he annotated three chapters from the three books studied. Through the data collected, Kevin engaged in the following literary experiences in his social studies class: self poems, text poems, and world poems. In the following sections, I describe in detail each of these literary experiences.

**Self poems.** As identified previously, self poems are the most common transactions made by students as they link their reading to their own lives. Kevin’s self
poems were most noticeable through his journal entries, individual interviews, and annotations. Kevin assumed several positions while reading and transacting with the nonfiction text in his social studies class which reflected his environment and experiences: the athlete, the son, the teenager, and the reader.

**The athlete.** As noted earlier, Kevin participates in lacrosse, basketball, and football. It is through his experiences in these sports that lead him to read as an athlete in his social studies class. Kevin made many connections between his life as an athlete to those lives in the books. He not only found subtle things throughout the books that reminded him of the sports he participated in, but he also found strength and determination through the characters’ lives especially when dealing with his own personal struggle of recovering from a devastating leg injury.

Many times, through Kevin’s annotations, he made references to lacrosse, hockey, and football. For example, in the book, *God Grew Tired of Us*, a particular line read, “We passed and got accepted to Onandaga Community College in Syracuse” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 216). Kevin, referring to Syracuse, wrote “great LAX school” (A, April 19, 2010). Also, in the book, *A Long Way Gone*, Ishmael recalls recognizing his childhood friend from a distinguishable feature: “When Gasemu was by the path, he stopped and examined our faces. He smiled, and that was when I became sure that he was the Ngor Gasemu I knew, because he was missing a tooth” (Beah, 2007, p. 91). Responding to this passage, Kevin boxed off “missing a front tooth” and wrote “hockey player 😊” (A, February 25, 2010). Also, in *A long Way Gone*, Ishmael remembers a final soccer game that was full of victory and excitement:
The excitement caused my heart to pound faster and I was sweating profusely. I could taste the salty sweat that ran from my forehead to my lips. Standing there with my family, I felt light, as if I were getting ready to fly. I wanted to hold the moment longer, not only to celebrate our victory, but because the smile on my parents’ faces that evening made me so happy that I felt every nerve in my body had awoken and swayed to the gentlest wind that sailed within me. (Beah, 2007, p. 102)

This excitement reminded Kevin of a football game that he participated in as he wrote “like state championship game” (A, February 25, 2010).

It is the game of football that brought Kevin his leg injury that he mentioned throughout his readings especially in *A Long Way Gone*. While Kevin acknowledged the differences in the painful experiences that he and Ishmael faced, he did draw on something they shared:

Just like trying to overcome what he experienced is kind of like what I have had to go through the last five months. I broke my leg in football in October, so I have been very limited, and on occasion, I think about that too much like Ishmael did. I have flashbacks…you shake a little bit and you try to forget about that. (I, March 10, 2010)

Kevin mentioned his injury earlier in a journal entry over the same book. Ishmael reflects on some of his painful memories: “I was afraid to fall asleep, but staying awake also brought painful memories. Memories I sometimes wish I could wash away, even
though I am aware that they are an important part of what my life is; who I am now” (Beah, 2007, p. 19). In response to reading this, Kevin wrote,

Recently, most of my memories of my past that have been flashing through my mind have involved my injury. It has been the worst experience of my life and I can’t escape it. My life has been limited and I lean on a crutch for about four and half months. I can recall the accident in great detail and I wince every time I think about it. (J, February 11, 2010)

While Kevin shared in some of the physical pain and the memories that come with this pain, it was Ishmael’s strength and determination to get better that really inspired Kevin. For instance, Kevin said “How he had to go through rehabilitation is what I am kind of going through now, and how he got better motivated me” (I, March 10, 2010). He mentioned this one other time as he wrote, “His strength and determination is a great example for others facing adversity to follow” (OP, March 15, 2010).

According to Hansen (2009), connections between historical events and the reader’s life, even those that may be emotional, enable students to understand that they experience similar issues to those people in varying situations and countries. For Kevin, his leg injury, which he referred to as “his worst experience of his life” was an emotional time that he was able to seek comfort in through Ishmael’s story while learning about Sierra Leone. Rosenblatt (1965/1995) also argues that “the capacity to sympathize or to identify with the experience of others is a most precious human attribute” (p. 37.) Kevin not only identified with some of Ishmael’s hardships and the memories they created, but he also sympathized with the severity of Ishmael’s and his fellow friend’s situation
stating that he felt “worse and worse as the boys’ negative experiences add[ed] up” (J, March 1, 2010).

**The son.** Even though Kevin made many associations of his readings to athletics, he also made several observations about his family. Kevin reflected both on his home and the relationship with his parents. He also identified with similar situations regarding his family to those found in the books.

In the poetic passage entitled “Never shall I forget,” Elie describes memories surrounding his family and the holocaust. As mentioned earlier, Elie used words such as the “smoke,” “small faces,” “flames,” and “nocturnal silence” to paint the picture of his painful past (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 34). In contrast to Elie’s horrific memories of the Holocaust, all seven lines of Kevin’s poem reflected his family and his home. In his opening line of the poem, he states, “Never shall I forget the warmth that I felt in my home—both physically and mentally” (P, January 22, 2010). He spends the rest of the poem speaking of this warmth that he finds both in his home and with his family. He writes about the sunlight hitting his windows creating shadows throughout his home as well as the role that nature plays in creating this warmth: “Never shall I forget how green the trees, the grass, and the plants were that surrounded me when I just arrived” (P, January 22, 2010). He also mentions the role his parents play in creating this warmth that surrounds him when home: “Never shall I forget when my parents smile when I walk through the door” (P, January 22, 2010). Kevin even mentions his dog: “Never shall I forget the smile that never faded on my dog’s face” (P, January 22, 2010). He concludes his poem by stating, “Never shall I forget the relief that washed over me every night
when I fall into my bed under a roof I can call home” (P, January 22, 2010; see Appendix BB for Kevin’s poem).

Kevin, through his annotations, also writes about the relationship between a father and son in the book, Night. In the following passage, Kevin acknowledges this relationship: “My father’s presence was the only thing that stopped me. He was running next to me, out of breath, out of strength, desperate” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 86). To this, Kevin wrote, “Father protects son” and “they live off one another” (A, January 29, 2010). In the following sentence, by writing “Son protects father,” he shows the reciprocity of this relationship: “I had no right to let myself die. What would he do without me? I was his sole support” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 87). Kevin commented further on this father-son relationship speaking of his most admirable moment in the book Night: “I like how he [Elie] had that love for his father. He almost became the father in the whole situation. I kind of liked that” (GI, April 27, 2010).

Similar to Night, Kevin read through the lens of a son in the book, A Long Way Gone. For instance, Kevin blocked off and underlined the following passage: “The soldiers never brought back their dead colleagues. Prisoners were lined up and shot in the head” (Beah, 2007, p. 106). Even though there are no words in this passage or words before or after it that would indicate anything about a son or his parents, Kevin wrote, “poor parents” next to the passage indicating he internalized these soldiers and prisoners as someone’s son (A, February, 25, 2010).

Finally, Kevin was able to relate to Ishmael’s split family in A Long Way Gone. In an online posting, he wrote,
His [Ishmael’s] experiences are much more tragic than the adversity I have experienced but in the beginning of the book, it was described how his parents were separated, similar to my parents’ divorce. We both lived between households under two individual parent/guardians. Instead of one happy family, he and I have two. (OP, March 15, 2010)

According to Rosenblatt (1982), a reader draws on past experiences with people and the world. For Kevin, there are no closer people than his parents as demonstrated through his poem, “Never Shall I Forget,” and while he comments on his parent’s divorce, he does so in a positive light explaining that he is in fact fortunate to have two happy families. He further explores this relationship between a son and his parents in his annotations of *Night* and *A Long Way Gone*. With these two books, Kevin assumed more of a father’s role as the teenage boys did in the stories. He admired Elie for acting like a father to his own father when he was in need, and while there was no mention of the parental forces in the lives lost at the hands of Ishmael, Kevin acknowledged these dead boys as someone’s lost sons.

**The teenager.** Whereas Kevin read as both an athlete and a son, he also read as a teenager. As discussed earlier, each of the books read within the study were told from a male teenager’s perspective. Kevin even referred to this obvious connection: “*A Long Way Gone* really put in perspective a kid our age what they are experiencing somewhere else. Same thing with *Night*. The guy from there was younger at the time too” (I, March 10, 2010). He even discussed how the age of the characters played a role in his comprehension of the stories: “I think that it was easier to understand when the narrator
was our age or was closer to our age” (I, March 10, 2010). Due to this connection of age and gender, Kevin easily found himself relating to the main characters in the books, often times, placing himself in the stories demonstrating support while in others, questioning their actions throughout the story. He also drew on one of his favorite hobbies while reading: collecting shoes.

Many times throughout the books, Kevin demonstrated support to the teenaged characters. One such instance was in the book, *Night*. Elie, suffering from severe exhaustion, contemplated whether or not to rest his eyes: “God knows what I would have given to be able to sleep a few moments. But deep inside, I knew to sleep meant to die. And something in me rebelled against the death” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 89). After reading these few lines, Kevin encouraged Elie to “Keep going!” (A, January 29, 2010). He continued to show support towards Elie’s character when Elie struggled with his faith. Elie recalls, “And in spite of myself, a prayer formed inside me, a prayer to this God in whom I no longer believed” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 91). Kevin noted, “Strong, good job Elie” (A, January 29, 2010).

Just as Kevin rooted for Elie in *Night*, he also encouraged Ishmael in *A Long Way Gone*. Ishmael, travelling to the village where he hoped he would be reunited with his parents, recalls being torn in what to do: “Part of me was on the way to the village, the other impatiently waited on the hill” (Beah, 2007, p. 93). Underlining this sentence, Kevin wrote, “Let’s Go!” implying he was on this journey alongside of Ishmael (A, February 25, 2010). Also, when Ishmael finally arrived to the village, he noticed the village was on fire. He saw a young woman and child fleeing the burning house: “They
were on fire, and ran up and down the village, slamming themselves against everything in their way and going back in the other direction to do the same” (Beah, 2007, p. 94). In response to this gruesome scene, Kevin advised, “Stop! Drop! Roll!” (A, February 25, 2010; see Appendix CC for annotated pages).

Even though there were many times that Kevin supported the characters in the stories, there were also times that he questioned the characters and their actions. For example, in Night, after fighting off his heavy eyes, Elie’s father finally succumbed to sleep. When he awoke shortly thereafter, “he looked all around him, taking it all in as if he had suddenly decided to make an inventory of his universe, to determine where he was and how and why he was there. Then he smiled” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 90). Kevin questioned his smile, writing, “huh?” (A, January 29, 2010). Kevin was not the only one questioning the father’s smile as Elie writes, “I shall always remember that smile. What world did it come from?” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 90). Kevin reiterated this question in his own words: “Where did he find that smile?” (A, January 29, 2010). Another time Kevin questioned the actions of a character was when Juliek, a boy from Warsaw who played the violin in the Buna orchestra, pleaded for his violin amidst being “crushed under the weight of bodies” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 93). Juliek pleads, “It’s good to rest, but my violin…” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 93). Even though Juliek was concerned about his violin, Kevin could not understand, under the present circumstances, why the concern for his instrument: “Why would you worry about that?” Kevin even went as far as calling Juliek “crazy” for worrying about such a thing like his violin during a time of chaos (A, January 29, 2010).
Along with supporting and questioning these teenaged characters, Kevin also made connections to one of his favorite collectibles: shoes. As he read these stories, he located many references, some of which were subtle, to shoes and commented on them. For example, in *A Long Way Gone*, soldiers were distributing shoes to the trainees, including Ishmael: “Some people got Adidas and other Nikes. I got a black Reebok pump” (Beah, 2007, p. 110). In adoration, Kevin circled the word “Nikes” while writing the word, “sweet” next to it; he also underlined “black Reebok pump and wrote, “nice old-school kicks” (A, April, 2010). Also, in *God Grew Tired of Us*, there was a picture of the Lost Boys in which one of the Lost Boy’s athletic shoes is visible. To this picture of what appears to be a larger sized shoe, Kevin marked, “What shoe size?” (A, April 19, 2010).

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) argues that, while reading literature, readers are able to participate in situations that would otherwise be impossible. She also believes that readers have the opportunity to look at characters living through their crisis. With Kevin’s annotations, he was able to participate in many of the stories by supporting and encouraging the characters through their adversity as well as questioning their thoughts and actions. Also, with all three stories, he was able to learn and live through Elie, Ishmael, and John’s crises.

*The reader.* One of the biggest roles that Kevin read under was as a reader. His experience with other books and his ability to identify figurative language within his readings came through mostly in his annotations. On fifteen different occasions within
the three books read, Kevin identified literary devices that were used by the authors. The following is a list of the literary devices that Kevin labeled in a chapter of the book *Night*:

**Simile**: “I was outing one foot in front of the other, like a machine” (p. 85).

**Simile**: “It stuck to me like glue” (p. 86)

**Personification and simile**: “These human waves were rolling forward and would have crushed me like an ant” (p. 87).

**Irony**: “’Hold on! We’re almost there!’” (p. 92). (A, January 29, 2010).

Along with *Night*, he identified many literary devices in the book, *A Long Way Gone*. The following is a list of the literary devices Kevin discovered in a chapter of *A Long Way Gone*:

**Personification**: “More branches snapped in the forest and the wailing intensified” (p. 90).

**Suspense**: “But we weren’t yet” (p. 93).

**Simile**: “Bullet shells covered the ground like mango leaves in the morning” (p. 92).

**Personification**: “It [fire] showed its face through the windows and the roof” (p. 94).

**Internal conflict**: “I woke up before it started what I was afraid it was going to do to me. I was sweating and couldn’t sleep for the rest of the night” (p. 103).

**Irony**: “As I began to ponder why this was the case, a cock started crowing, though it was still dark outside” (p. 109).
Foreshadowing: “Paw, Paw, we would go, and whoever did it first would announce to the rest whom he had killed” (p. 111). (A, February 25, 2010).

Finally, in a chapter of *God Grew Tired of Us*, Kevin noticed the following literary devices:

Metaphor: “They looked nothing like the wide, velvet black ribbons that curled and ducked as far as I could see” (p. 188).

Sarcasm: “The reporter suggested I mail them to New York George Pataki and President George W. Bush. That made sense, so I did” (p. 202).

Hyperbole: “‘My God,’ someone said. ‘You are going to die.’” (p. 207)

When asked about his use of literary devices in his annotations, Kevin credited his English class: “In English, you know how we were doing like figures of speech and stuff, I just got use to pointing those out cuz we did that in every single story, so I did that in this” (I, May 28, 2010).

When defending the use of nonfiction literature in the classroom, Hirth (2002) argues that teaching through the use of nonfiction provides an opportunity to learn more than just content; it can teach an additional skill:

Nonfiction gives us an alternative opportunity to teach this additional skill, while helping the students revel in the ‘joy of facts’ and the ‘poetry of prose.’ You may scoff and say they are already versed in reading for the literal, but I’m speaking about reading for the irony, the subtleties of argument, and the application of facts/detail in the development and interpretation of thought, as well. (p. 20)
As an avid reader who analyzes the content beyond basic information, Kevin displayed the very notion that Hirth describes here. He looked beyond the factual information and saw the literary value of the text.

As recently discussed, with self poems, Kevin read as the following: the athlete, the son, the teenager, and the reader. While the self poems happen naturally, text poems include the meanings made by what the reader has read, viewed, or listened to in the past.

**Text poems.** As mentioned in the previous section, Kevin is an avid reader who reads not only for content, but he also reads for the figurative value of books. Because of his vast experience with books, he either wrote about other books in connection to those being read in his social studies class in his journal writings or he referenced them in his annotations sixteen times.

In one particular journal entry on the book, *A Long Way Gone*, Kevin writes about his initial thoughts while reading the book:

The first thought that came to my mind when reading this book was that it is rather similar to *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002). From the beginning you have to have some sympathy for the runaways. They experience a similar situation when escaping as the aboriginal half-castes) girls did in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. You have to feel worse and worse as the boys’ negative experiences add up. (J, March 3, 2010)

Even though Kevin experienced some text poems with books he read outside of school, most references came from either books that he had read in his ninth grade English class or those that he read in his social studies class. For instance, Kevin referred
to a book that he had just read in his English class while blocking off the following passage in the book, *Night*: “I saw myself in every stiffened corpse. Soon I wouldn’t even be seeing them anymore; I would be one of them. A matter of hours” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 89). To this excerpt, he wrote, “Similar to Leper from *A Separate Peace*” (A, January 29, 2010). Along with *A Separate Peace* (1953) by John Knowles, Kevin made reference to another ninth grade English book, *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1898). In *A Long Way Gone*, it reads, “He was a quiet individual, but his quietness had a forceful authority that all his men feared and respected. His face was so dark that it took courage to have any eye contact with him” (Beah, 2007, p. 104). To this, Kevin wrote in the margin, “reminds me of *Cyrano de Bergerac*” (A, February 25, 2010). Also, when Ishmael from *A Long Way Gone* spoke of reciting Shakespearean monologues from the plays of *Macbeth* (1605) and *Julius Caesar* (1599) at the age of seven, Kevin questioned in the margin, “*Mid-Summer Night’s Dream*?” (A, February, 25, 2010). This question stemmed from his reading of the play, *Mid-Summer Night’s Dream* (1595), in his ninth grade English class.

While Kevin participated in many text poems, he most often referred to the first book read in the semester, *Night*, when reading and discussing *A Long Way Gone*. For example, Kevin reflected scenes in the book *Night* where grownups were crying. One such scene was when the Hungarian police ordered the Jewish men outside to march down the street on their way to Germany. Elie remembers, “My father was crying. It was the first time I saw him cry” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 19). Elie also recalls when his mother and sister were sent to the crematorium. With flames in the distance, Elie reflects
on his father’s response to this ghastly sight: “He didn’t answer. He was weeping. His body was shaking. Everybody around us was weeping” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 33). To these memories of grownups crying in the book Night, he connected it to a passage in A Long Way Gone. Kevin underlined the following sentence: “I had learned that grown men cry only when they have no other choice” (Beah, 2007, p. 98). To this, he wrote in the margin, “like Night” (A, February 25, 2010). Kevin made yet another connection between these two books. He related the brutal scene of seeing dead bodies piled upon each other in Night to a similar scene in A Long Way Gone:

Gasemu had wandered away from where I stood. He began screaming from another side of the village. We ran to where he was. More than twenty people lay face down in the earth. They were all lined up, and blood still poured out of their bullet wounds. (2007, p. 94)

To this passage, Kevin wrote, “Similar to Night” (A, February 25, 2010; see Appendix DD for annotated page). When asked about his text-to-text connections in his annotations, Kevin responded,

In a lot of these, they weren’t things that I experienced myself, so I think I just come up with stuff from other books as my own experiences and just kind of take it from there, and that is why I make connections to other books, probably. Cuz it is like another primary source, I guess. I think that is why I do that. (I, May 28, 2010)

Along with his connections made between the Night and A Long Way Gone in his annotations, he also made a comment in class while they were discussing Ishmael’s
character in *A Long Way Gone*: “Silence is unbearable. He [Ishmael] goes crazy. It is kind of like *Night* with the suffering” (OB, February 19, 2010).

Kevin described the connections between the interactions that he has with texts through his annotations to those interactions that he has with his classmates and the teacher: “I talk a lot in class and stuff and make a lot of comments, so usually comments that I make if we were reading out loud, that is what I write down” (I, May 28, 2010).

According to Keene and Zimmerman (1999), good readers “independently and purposefully recall information and experiences relevant to what they are reading” (p. 55). In regards to Kevin, he recalled many of his experiences that revolved around books. Because Kevin is an avid reader who annotates his English books regularly, he pulled from his past reading experiences in English and tied them to the nonfiction books in his social studies class. He also linked his past reading experiences in his social studies class to his most recent reading experiences: *Night, A Long Way Gone*, and *God Grew Tired of Us*.

As discussed, Kevin experienced self poems and text poems. He also made the most sophisticated transaction: world poems. With world poems, readers connect what they are reading to larger issues and concerns in the outside world.

**World poems.** Kevin, through his annotations, journal writings, and interviews, experienced several world poems. The areas around the world that he covered through his world poems include Germany, Sudan, Sierra Leone, and America.

**Germany.** Kevin, on different occasions, spoke of his interest in Germany and its history. He stated, “I have always been interested in the Holocaust. It is a subject that
interests me” (GI, April 27, 2010). Even though he had an interest in the Holocaust and read other books about it, like *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1947), the book *Night*, evoked emotions. Kevin professed, “I have done reports on the terrible things that the Nazi’s did to the Jews behind the barbed wire of the concentration/death camps, but nothing quite affected me as much as this [*Night*]” (J, January 22, 2010). There was one particular moment that left a lasting impression on Kevin. Kevin pulled the following quote from *Night* (1972/2006) to discuss in a journal entry: “Infants were tossed into the air and used as targets for the machine guns” (Wiesel, p.6). Reacting to this quote, Kevin wrote,

> I believe what hit me the hardest was who could possibly have a heart evil enough to kill innocent babies? The cruelty of that action is unbelievable and something that doesn’t seem human. When I first read it I had to stop for a moment and process the words that were in front of me. I was just starting the book and there weren’t any moments prior to it to prepare me for what happened. I had absolutely nothing to relate it to and the only thought that came to mind was that the SS and the Nazis must have gone mad to think an action like that is acceptable. It is unbelievable. (J, January 22, 2010)

Kevin later acknowledged that the book, *Night*, was a great source for German history as it showed “what people had to go through and what people had to experience” (I, May 28, 2010).

*Sudan.* While Kevin recognized that Sudan was a third world country that went through “droughts or not having enough food,” he spent most of his time admiring the
country of Sudan and what it does have to offer such as respect, work ethic, and selflessness and dedication (GI, April 27, 2010).

Kevin identified the Sudanese as those that will help and provide for others before themselves. To exemplify, he wrote, “For example, when harvest came around Dinka families would share food with refugees and neighbors and they would have what is left” (J, April 22, 2010). He mentioned their selflessness in yet another journal entry: “The belief that others come first are still embedded in their minds. For example, John only keeps ten dollars of his first paycheck and sends the rest back to Kakuma despite the warnings his teachers made on the topic” (J, April 22, 2010). Kevin reinforced the Sudanese generosity in an online posting:

The Dinka are very open to providing for others before themselves and are drilled into their minds from birth that neighbors and other humans need the necessities before they do and that they will get all they need in return for doing the favor. (OP, April 23, 2010)

Kevin also mentioned their resourcefulness and responsibility: “They also continue to save for themselves by always staying employed and stowing some money away for the necessities and their own cars” (J, April 22, 2010). Through his observations of Sudan, Kevin realized that the Sudanese value their culture always looking out for one another.

Sierra Leone. Unlike Sudan where Kevin focused mostly on the positive, with Sierra Leone, he saw war and tragedy. Even though Kevin did not make many references
to Sierra Leone, he realized the severity of war within one’s own country through Ishmael’s story. Kevin said,

I think it [A Long Way Gone] was just illustrating the cruelty that one can put on their own people. Just how you can force people to kill their own for no apparent reason or for greed. It [killing] was like an addiction. It might have been the fact that he was willing to go out and just kill without even… it wasn’t no big deal or anything. It is just weird, to put it into perspective that in other places, people are just like that. (GI, April 27, 2010)

America. America was discussed mostly as a contrast to the aforementioned countries. Kevin spent most of his time questioning and frowning upon his homeland. For example, “We [Americans] are just handed everything and we don’t really have to work anything” (GI, April 27, 2010). He even went as far as referring to America and his hometown, in particular, as lazy:

I think a lot of people tend to agree with the stereotype that it is easy to be lazy in America, and I do too. In a lot of areas in the U.S. people do not have to work for anything. Everything is handed to a lot of people in America and because no one has to work for anything, they eventually get into the habit of not doing any work and being lazy. Procrastination is especially evident at school where some students’ lack of work ethic results in poor grades. Often times, laziness is more common in areas like Fullerton because of the higher yearly income rates. When a family has more money, they have less to work for because they can buy all
these necessities. Blue collar areas are dwindling and the number of hard workers is declining with them. (J, April 14, 2010)

According to Gillepsie (1994), “literature offers students diversity that their neighborhoods may not” (p. 17). By contrasting America to the other countries read, Kevin was not only able to experience, even if briefly, other less privileged countries, but he was also able to reflect on his own country. He said, “I am very fortunate. All of these people in these stories are a lot less fortunate than us in Fullerton in the little bubble. We have a lot more things. They have to go through a lot more difficult experiences in everyday life in those third world countries” (I, May 28, 2010). Also, by thinking about the less fortunate, Kevin pondered how he could make a difference in his community: “For the benefit of my own community, I can always take advantage of any service opportunities to lend a hand to those in need or less fortunate. By doing such things, I can meet some new people and make myself a more well-rounded person” (J, April 22, 2010).

As discussed, Kevin experienced world poems in all books read throughout the semester. Due to these experiences, he became a part of cultures unlike his own. With Germany, a country that intrigued him with its rich history, he was exposed to the true horror of the holocaust. His experience with the text Night provided him an image unlike any other that he had read before regarding the brutality of Hitler and his regime. Unlike the brutal nature of Nazi, Germany, Kevin saw Sudan not as a deprived nation; instead, he saw it as a nation full of dedicated and generous people. Finally, with the country of Sierra Leone, Kevin saw cruelty and mass killings. As a result of his readings about the
varying cultures, Kevin realized his fortune for living in America. Overall, Kevin made all three transactions: self poems, text poems, and world poems. Kevin, through his 20 self poems, read as the athlete, the son, the teenager, and the reader. He also encountered 16 text poems and 16 world poems (Table 3).

Kevin, through the reading of nonfiction literature in his social studies class, shared his love of sports, family, and books. While reading, he recognized the hardships he faced with an injury sustained while playing sports. It is through this injury that he sympathized and questioned some of the characters. He also realized his fortune with his loving family, and it was through the reading of these books that he was able to showcase his love for analyzing and comparing literature; this analysis was further extended into an understanding and appreciation for other cultures.

Table 3

*Kevin’s Number and Type of Transactions With Each Nonfiction Text Read*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self Poems</th>
<th>Text Poems</th>
<th>World Poems</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Night</em></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Long Way Gone</em></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>God Grew Tired of Us</em></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
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**Allison**

Similar to Kevin and the other participants, I met Allison at Fullerton High School on January 19, 2010 during her social studies class. I worked with Allison from January
19 until May 20, 2010. In the following sections, I describe Allison’s school history and background, and then, I provide an in-depth examination of Allison’s literary experiences within a social studies class.

School History and Background

Allison has lived in Fullerton, Ohio, for five years. She moved from Dublin, Ohio, during her fourth grade year of school. Allison described her transition from Dublin to Fullerton as “not easy” (I, May 21, 2010). She also recalled crying because she missed her old friends. As time passed, the move became easier: “I’ve made many better friends and am thankful for the move” (I, May 21, 2010). Allison has come to love the village of Fullerton: “I love the town. It’s a great place to hang out and I also love that it’s a small town and everyone knows everything about others in Fullerton.” She also admitted, “There’s a downside to everyone knowing everything—if there’s something going around about you” (I, May 21, 2010).

Like Brian, Lisa, and Kevin, Allison labels Fullerton as “The Bubble.” She wrote, “Face it; Fullerton is a bubble. We don’t know about half the negative stuff going on around the world. Though many may disagree, Fullerton is sort of utopia, where bad news can generally be swept under the rug or plain ignored” (J, March 3, 2010). She later described Fullerton as “a small town full of white, non-devout Catholics, gossip, and football moms” (I, May 21, 2010).

Allison participates in many school programs such as volleyball, Key Club, and the musical. She is also active outside of school as she is a part of a church youth group,
club volleyball, and Girl Scouts. She excels at school as well as she carries a 3.8 grade point average.

The Poem: A “Coming-Together”

Throughout my 18-week study, I observed Allison in class eight times and conducted two individual interviews and one group interview with her. Allison also wrote nine journal entries and one online posting. She also wrote a poem based off of an excerpt from the book, *Night* as a way to connect with the character and reflect on her own life. In addition, she annotated two chapters from two of the three books (Night and *God Grew Tired of Us*) studied. Through the data collected, Allison engaged in the following literary experiences in her social studies class: self poems, text poems, and world poems. In the following sections, I describe in detail each of these literary experiences.

**Self poems.** Self poems, as previously mentioned, are made when students personally connect to events or characters from stories they are reading. Allison’s self poems were most evident through her annotations with the text, journal entries, and individual and group interviews. The majority of the transactions Allison made while reading were self poems. She assumed several positions while reading and transacting with the nonfiction text in her social studies class which reflected her environment and experiences: the believer, the daughter and sister, and the teenager.

**The believer.** The experiences that Allison most reflected on during her reading came from her religious beliefs. Allison engaged in some of the stories due to the strong
and obvious references to God or religion. For instance, with the book *Night*, Allison commented on how the entire book was premised on religion:

*Night* is kind of a religious thing. I saw in the old guy; he came back from the first time he got taken, and he was like trying to tell people what was going on, but they didn’t believe him. It was like God let him stay alive so he could tell them what was going on, like warn them. The holocaust is based on religion. It is just kind of a faith thing. (I, February 27, 2010)

Also, with the book *Night*, Allison questioned, through annotations, the strength and faith of the Jewish community. Elie recalls, “We started to march once more. The dead remained in the yard, under the snow without even a marker, like fallen guards. No one recited the Kaddish over them. Sons abandoned the remains of their fathers without a tear” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 92). To this particular passage, Allison underlined the words, “No one recited Kaddish,” and wrote, “losing faith?” (A, January 29, 2010). Just as Allison questioned the loss of hope and faith with Elie, she also asked herself what she would do in a situation where she lost her family to tragedy: “I think it [*Night*] just makes you think. What would I do if my family was gone? Would I look to God? Or would I just give up?” (I, February 27, 2010).

Allison also wrote about one of her most memorable moments in her life which included a memory about a church service. Modeling Elie’s poetic structure, she wrote, “Never shall I forget mass by the lake at sunset @ SB2W [Summer’s Best Two Weeks Camp]” (P, January 22, 2010).
With the book, *God Grew Tired of Us*, Allison also connected to the book on a religious level through annotations. For example, Bul Dau (2007) writes, “The Dinka literally believe that those who perform such actions for the least of God’s people do so for Christ” (p. 190). To this, Allison wrote, “very Christian” (A, April 19, 2010). Also, John recalls his first visit to an American church by asking the pastor at the Living World Church in Syracuse, “Do you like Jesus Christ?” (p. 204). This question prompted Allison to mark a star by it. She also placed a star and heavily boxed off the following sentence: “They say I am a Lost Boy, but God has found me” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 219). Along with these annotations, she marked up one page in particular. On page 211, John questions some of the Christmas traditions in the United States such as Christmas trees and lights. He asked, “What did such things have to do with the birth of Jesus, I wondered” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 211). Allison not only circled this sentence, but she also supported the following passage by placing a star next to it: “Someone from Living World Church sent a tree to our apartment. I didn’t feel ready to embrace the American Christian customs, so I ignored it” (p. 211). Through the use of a star, Allison stressed the importance of this passage as it showed the differences between how the Sudanese and many Americans celebrate the birth of Jesus (A, April 19, 2010; see Appendix EE for annotated page).

Allison continued to show her connection to the book, *God Grew Tired of Us*, as she said, “In *God Grew Tired of Us*, I thought, oh, that’s cool. He like converted Catholic or Christian, and they thought this was cool because God loves you unconditionally and stuff, and I’m like yea” (I, May 20, 2010).
Out of the three books read during the semester, one book, *A Long Way Gone: Memoir of a Boy Soldier*, had very few religious undertones. Because of this, Allison questioned the main character in the story and his troubles and wondered if religion could have helped his situation:

Yea, with Ishmael, like he wasn’t very religious if I remember correctly, so maybe he would have been stronger if he did have religion. Umm, I just think how it would have been different if they were more in touch with faith. (I, May 20, 2010)

Despite having questioned Ishmael’s faith, Allison admired Ishmael’s strength and his desire to help people through the spreading of his story. In an online posting, she wrote, “Strong people with the will to survive like Ishmael endure such events so that they can spread awareness of what is going on” (OP, March 15, 2010). She also went as far as comparing Ishmael and his journey to a famous biblical story: “I look at it almost in a religious POV [point of view] like Noah and the flood” (OP, March 15, 2010).

Allison also wrote about her religious background in many journal entries. In one such entry, she started off by writing, “As a Christian/Catholic, I live with the thought that our purpose in life is to glorify God” (J, March 1, 2010). She also reflected on how life is not only about bad memories but good ones also, and how the Bible and God’s work are a part of her good memories: “I not only have bad memories and impressions, but also good that help me appreciate life: A Bible verse, one’s luck that could’ve been a miracle” (J, February 11, 2010).
Rosenblatt (1938/1995) suggests “that often in books one comes across people like oneself” (p. 191). Even though both Elie Wiesel and John Bul Dau either grew up in a different time period or under different conditions, Allison’s religious beliefs paralleled with these characters, and as a result, she gained a greater perspective on her own beliefs. In her final individual interview, Allison reflected on her religious references throughout the books read in her social studies class:

I was doing a whole bunch of Christian references in my journal entries. I feel like I have gotten a lot more religious this year. I don’t know if it is necessarily because of this class, but I feel that it was recognized the most in this class though because it is more about life. (I, May 20, 2010)

For Allison, she not only read as a believer, often times questioning characters’ actions from a religious perspective, but she also personally grew in her religion acknowledging that her faith had in fact strengthened in part to the reading of nonfiction literature in her social studies class.

**The daughter and sister.** Besides reading as a believer, Allison read as a daughter and sister. These roles were most evident through her writings and interviews.

Allison, through her writing of a poem inspired by the book, *Night*, wrote about some of her most memorable times. While she mentioned some happy times that included her family, such as swimming in the ocean and hitting a winning homerun in a softball game, she also recalled a trying time that involved her family: “Never shall I forget moving to Fullerton” (P, January 22, 2010). Two other family memories that generated sadness for Allison were when she experienced death for the first time with the
passing of her grandfather and when she realized the cruelty that exists at school through the expense of her brother: “Never shall I forget when my brother cried before bed b/c of what some kid said” (P, January 22, 2010; see Appendix FF for poem).

Allison mentioned her brother one other time. During an interview, she talked about a time where she thought about the ages of the boys in the stories who were fighting wars and experiencing tragedies:

Well, my little brother, I can’t remember what triggered this, but I somehow ended up telling him about the kids who were taught to be soldiers. And he just couldn’t believe it, and he is in 6th grade. And I just told him that kids his age are in other countries fighting, and he couldn’t comprehend that. (I, May 20, 2010)

Along with her brother, she wrote about her father. In a double entry journal (Figure 5), she picked a passage about John and his father that reflected a lesson that resembled one from her own father.

“He liked to work hard, getting up before the sun and heading to the garden outside our hut…My father tended the garden for hours in the morning, before the heat of the midday. ‘When you work, you get what you want,’ he said…One time when his work had bathed him sweat, I told him, ‘father, you have to stop. ‘Yu have to rest a bit.’ He said, ‘The time to rest is when you see is front of you,’ meaning ‘don’t stop until you’ve finished what you’re working on.”’ (Bul Dua, 2007, p. 21).

I picked this passage because I agree with his father. You should stay focused on your goal and don’t stop working towards it until you’ve reached it. His father sounds as respectable as the kid says, and I like him. He reminds me of my father. He sets a good example for the boy (J, March 15, 2010).

Figure 5. Allison’s double entry journal

In her final interview, she recalled a very detailed conversation that she had with her parents about the book Night, religion, and life:
Well, umm, when I was reading *Night*, I just finished it, and I was pumped up and went into the living room, and my parents were sitting there, and these things like these tragedies like the holocaust and stuff, a small amount of people survived, like I used to think God chose specifically them like I thought that was His big plan, and he was like this person will survive this, so they can tell everyone about this, and like educate the world, but then my dad said that it takes away your free will, so ok, and then mom asked, what do you think their drive was to stay alive? And I said, well, Elie’s the only reason he stayed alive; his main drive was his father. Even after he died, he wanted to stay alive in case his sister or mother was still alive somehow, and if they would have ever survived, and he wouldn’t be there that would make them sad. People live for people to make people happy, and we figured just like the reason people keep on living is because of other people. People care about them. People care, so we kind of figured the meaning of life. The purpose is for people to make other people happy. (I, May 20, 2010)

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) argues that “even books that seem to have little to do with the externals of a student’s life may provide vicarious experience and occasion discussion that will lead to increased self-understanding for the student” (p. 196). From the outside, the lives portrayed in the books and the life of Allison and her family appear different, but it was through these works that Allison was able to have conversations with both her brother and her parents as they “figured the meaning of life” (I, May 20, 2010). In light of the literature, Allison generated specific dialogue among her family about God, His purpose, and life.
The teenager. While Allison read as a believer and a daughter and a sister, her most natural reading lens came as a teenager. Again, the teenaged perspectives in which all three books were told greatly contributed to this connection. She spoke frequently on the impact the narrator’s age had on her reading. For example, Allison, at the onset of the study, spoke about the influence the teenaged perspective had on her reading: “It is like someone my age who went through something unbelievable. That they are like telling you about and it is just so real” (I, February 27, 2010). She later recalled how these nonfiction books provided her an opportunity to actively become a part of the story: “Yes, with these books, I guess I would try to put myself in the situation more because it actually happened to real people, and you can say like, if I actually had to do this, what would I do?” (I, May 20, 2010). Even after a year of the original study, she emphasized the importance of the teenaged narrators: “Many of the characters were around our age, and we could easily put ourselves into their shoes” (I, June 7, 2011). Putting herself in the characters’ shoes was most evident in her annotations and journal entries as she shared in some of the characters’ joys while sympathizing with their sorrows.

Despite the tragedies that surrounded these books, there were a few, subtle moments of joy. These were mostly found in the book, *God Grew Tired of Us*, and focused on some teen favorites: soda, pizza, and McDonalds. John recalled a visit to the grocery store where he saw an abundance of soda: “The amazing volume of soda on the shelves, coupled with the variety of flavors and array of brand names, overwhelmed me” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 195). He later mentioned how he was warned, by his American hosts, not to drink too much of the soda due to the nutritional value of it. He commented,
“Later, when they were not around, we bought a lot and drank it anyway” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 195). Allison, sharing in John and his friends liking of soda, wrote, “LOVE the soda” (A, April 19, 2010). Along with John’s experience of soda came his first American encounter with food: pizza. Even though Allison found some humor in John’s wonderment in how to eat the oddly, shaped pizza, she echoed his fondness for it writing, “Got to love pizza” (A, April 19, 2010). And finally, John, who worked many jobs, spent the night shift working at McDonalds. Allison, placed an arrow to the word, McDonalds, and wrote “nice” (A, April 19, 2010).

Even though Allison found herself sharing in some of America’s delicacies, like soda, pizza, and McDonalds with John, she spent most of her time empathizing with him and others from the other books. First, with John in God Grew Tired of Us, he left a country that was full of violence and war only to enter into America during a time of very much the same: 9/11. John, who had not been in America more than a few months, made the connection between the violence of the country he left behind in Sudan to his new country of America: “If only the world had seen what had been done to southern Sudan in the name of Allah, it might have been better prepared for a terrorist organization like al-Qaeda attacking the West” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 202). Allison reflected on John’s statement as one of ownership writing, “sad they think it’s [attacks on America] their fault” (A, April 19, 2010). Two other times where Allison felt compassion for John involved his first vehicle and job. John had saved $1,700 from various jobs to purchase his first vehicle. After only a short time, John was in an accident where his car was slightly damaged, and although it still ran well, the heat did not work properly. In the
middle of a New York winter, John recalled, “It was a cold winter, and I needed heat” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 221). Feeling for John’s situation, Allison wrote, “Oh man” and “Bummer!” (A, April 19, 2010). Similar to John’s misfortune with his car, he fell on some hard times with employment. John remembers hearing the news that he had lost his job: “John, I am sorry, but you are not working with us anymore” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 223). John was not the only one saddened by the news that he had lost his job. Allison too had expressed shock and concern: “Oh no! What will he do?” (A, April 19, 2010).

Similarly, in Night, Allison empathized with the characters. For instance, Elie’s father warned him of falling sleep saying, “It’s dangerous to fall asleep in snow” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 88). To this line, Allison wrote, “That’s too bad that they can’t even sleep” (A, January 29, 2010). She also reacted to the repeated screams from Hitler’s army, “Faster you filthy dogs!” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 85). She wrote, “I hate that they repeat this” (A, January 29, 2010). The horrific journey that the Jewish community faced at the hands of Hitler’s men resonated so much with Allison that she drew a picture of what she thought it looked like based on Wiesel’s vivid descriptions: A man with a gun chasing Jewish men. Allison later commented on why she drew the picture stating that “I was just trying to picture it, so I thought, I might as well draw it” (I, May 20, 2010; see Appendix GG for annotated page).

She also drew many frown faces, some with tears, demonstrating her emotion to particular passages. One example that received a frowning face with a tear streaming from its eye was when Wiesel (1972/2006) describes his aging father: “How he had aged since last night! His body was completely twisted, shriveled up into himself. His eyes
were glazed over, his lips parched, decayed. Everything about him expressed total exhaustion. His voice was damp from tears and snow” (p. 88). On the following page, she drew a squiggly face when Wiesel described having to walk around and sometimes on men that lied on the ground: “Beneath our feet there lay men, crushed, trampled underfoot, dying. No one paid any attention to them” (p. 89). The final tearful face of the annotated chapter was drawn after the description of Juliek’s death. Juliek was the boy with the violin that Elie met in an overcrowded barrack and who played classical Beethoven music throughout the night. When Elie had woken up after being overtaken by sleep, he realized that Juliek was no longer playing the violin. This saddened both him and Allison: “I don’t know how long he played. I was overcome with sleep. When I awoke at daybreak, I saw Juliek facing me, hunched over, dead. Next to him lay his violin, trampled, an eerily poignant little corpse (Wiesel, 1972/2006 p. 95).

Along with sharing moments with the characters, Allison also asked questions of them through her annotations. For example, in Night, Hitler’s men ordered Elie and others to run from their block to somewhere deeper in Germany. Elie remembered the man behind him yelling, “Run faster. If you don’t want to move, let us pass you” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 87). Allison questioned, “What if the person in front of you was slow?” (A, January 29, 2010). She also questioned Elie’s ability to walk on his wounded foot and circled his comment: “I would have to live with only one leg” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 92) and asked, “How is he walking?” (A, January 29, 2010).

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) believes that readers have a tendency to project themselves into a work when they are “concerned with the personalities and joys and
sorrows, with the failures and the achievements, of characters in literature” (p. 38). With the stories being told from a teenaged perspective, Allison was able to share in some of the characters’ simple joys like John’s experience with soda and pizza while she also sympathized in their tragedies like Elie’s loss of his father and friend, Juliek.

As discussed, Allison read as the following: the believer, the daughter and sister, and as the teenager. While self poems happen naturally, text poems compare what was read to past reading, viewing, and listening experiences.

**Text poems.** Allison only had one text poem, and it involved a movie not another book. This movie connection appeared in an online posting and involved the book, *A Long Way Gone* and her reading lens of the believer. As mentioned earlier, Allison compared Ishmael’s tale to that of Noah and the flood. She took this comparison one step further asking her classmates online, “ever seen *Evan Almighty*?” (OP, March 15, 2010).

According to Vacca and Vacca (2008), connecting to other texts while reading are increased when comparative lessons or messages exist between the two (p. 406). For Allison, despite only having one text poem, she found that a similar message, the strong will to survive, was found between two different mediums: the book, *A Long Way Gone* and the movie, *Evan Almighty* (2007).

As identified, Allison experienced both self poems and text poems. She also made the most sophisticated transaction, world poems, which focus on societal and worldly concerns.
**World poems.** Due to the nature of the content within a World History Class, world poems were frequent; however, like the other participants, most of them took place at the end of the study with the book, *God Grew Tired of Us*, and the setting of Sudan and America. World poems predominantly came as a result of journal writings and online postings and included the following areas: Germany, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and America.

**Germany.** Allison only mentioned Germany once in her writings, but through her journal writing, she experienced for a brief moment the brutality of Hitler’s hate. When asked to identify a moment in the book, *Night*, that captured her attention, she reacted to the scene where a young boy was hung:

> The third rope was still moving: the child, too light, was still breathing…And so he remained for more than half an hour, lingering between life and death, writhing before our eyes. And we were forced to look at him at close range. He was still alive when I passed him. His tongue was still red, his eyes not yet extinguished. (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 65)

In response to Wiesel’s horrid account of this young boy’s death, Allison wrote, “When the child was hung. It’s amazing how inhumane that was. He wasn’t even heavy enough to die quickly, he just hung there. It’s awful that they kept him there as a reminder to ‘behave’” (J, February 4, 2010).

Allison also spoke of Germany once during an interview. She discussed how reading *Night* gave her a different perspective on Germany:

> Like with *Night*, it was interesting to see how they [SS] treated the children too. It was kind of weird because it was different that what you hear at a museum like
they [tour guides] didn’t talk about gassing as much and the ways they killed off people. It was about the risks. You appreciate even more like what these people went through and you get more of a feel for that. It’s like the day in the life type of thing. (I, May 20, 2010)

**Sierra Leone.** Similar to Germany in the book, *Night*, Allison mentioned Sierra Leone from the book, *A Long Way Gone*, very little. In an interview, Allison showed appreciation for her upbringing by recognizing the situation that Ishmael and other boys her age were thrown into without a choice: “We [Fullerton teenagers] are so lucky. We wouldn’t even know how to pick up a gun, but those soldier kids shot thousands of people because they were told to” (I, May 20, 2010).

**Sudan.** Unlike the book *Night* and *A Long Way Gone*, Allison mentioned Sudan several times throughout her writings and annotations. For instance, while annotating *God Grew Tired of Us*, Allison circled the following passage: “We had traveled halfway around the world without checking any baggage” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 187). Allison reflected, “They didn’t have much” (A, April 19, 2010). She also heavily annotated a page in which John writes about his first experience with snow and how incredibly excited he was to see it:

> We parked the car and got out. I couldn’t wait to touch it. I grabbed a double handful and held it up to the sky. Water trickled through my fingers. As I watched, and as my hands grew numb, drops ran down my arms to the elbows. I focused my attention on the miracle of frozen flakes of water. (Bul Dua, 2007, p. 207)
Allison analyzes John’s reaction to the snow acknowledging that “they didn’t have water to drink now it’s falling from the sky” (A, April 19, 2010; see Appendix HH for annotated page).

Allison also acknowledged the Sudanese outlook on life by writing “Dinkas seem to have a very religious, appreciative outlook on life. They raise their cows and their life revolves around them in a give and take kind of manner.” In the same journal entry, she wrote about the role of women in the Sudanese culture: “In Dinka, they [women] are the only cooks and may not be ‘friends’ with men” (J, April 10, 2010). Allison also observed the role of Sudanese men: “Men also have more than 1 wife, therefore many children. Holding hands is also a different meaning. It is not so sexual when 2 men hold hands; it is just what they do” (J, April 10, 2010). A few days later in yet another journal entry, Allison mentioned the holding of hands again: “When they [Sudanese men] hold hands it doesn’t mean they are gay” (J, April 14, 2010).

Allison reflected on how Sudanese approached food and education. With food, Allison realized that the people of Sudan have very little food and their means of retrieving food was quite grueling: “They [Sudanese] don’t have a huge surplus of food. They have to farm it themselves. They don’t even have refrigerators, and they have to walk miles to get water in certain cases. It is a means to survive. If he hadn’t [traveled miles to get water], he would probably be dead today” (GI, April 27, 2010). Finally, when asked what shocked her the most about John’s outlook and approach to education, Allison replied, “I find the education very funny because they like it and they get along very well with the people at the school” (J, April 14, 2010). Through the reading of God
Grew Tired of Us, Allison saw the awe of those who had never seen snow before while she herself was in awe of the relationship stipulations between opposite sexes. She continued to show amazement to John and the Lost Boys as they actually enjoyed and appreciated their schooling.

**America.** Through the books in her social studies class, especially with *God Grew Tired of Us*, Allison was able to gain a better perspective with not only the country in which she lives but her own town also.

Reflecting on her life and the lives of Americans, Allison pulled out the following quote from John’s outlook on Americans: “Americans have so much, but they insist on seeing the glass as half empty instead as half full…When I lived in Kakuma, I didn’t even have a glass” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 228). In response to this passage, Allison wrote, “Like the quote above, we Americans take a lot for granted. We are adapted to a whole different life from them” (J, April 10, 2010). One such thing that Allison felt some Americans take for granted is food. She said, “We have more food; I feel like we have a plethora of food, and we have all of these restaurants, and we can go shopping once a week, and we are fine for the rest of the week” (GI, April 27, 2010).

While Allison spoke generally about America, she also spoke specifically about her hometown of Fullerton. She believed that Fullerton lacks diversity which affects their culture. She wrote, “Some younger children from Fullerton—though it may sound terrible—may even be surprised or intimidated when seeing an African American person, simply because it is not common in Fullerton” (J, March 3, 2010). Despite admitting that
Fullerton lacks culture, she proclaims to have a solution for the lack of culture she feels her hometown has:

> We would have to get more diversity in our school. You can count on one hand the number of Asian people and African-American people in our school. It is definitely the majority of white Catholics. A lot of people criticize us for that. That is what I am and a lot of my friends are. (I, May 20, 2010)

After realizing that bringing more diversity into her community would be difficult, she settled on a new plan: “Maybe, if we went to Cleveland and helped out or something that would help. Just getting out there and doing stuff” (I, May 20, 2010).

According to Rosenblatt (1938/1995), through literature, a reader “becomes a part of strange environments, or he sees with new emotion the conditions and the lives about him” (p. 174). Through Wiesel’s horrid description of the hanging young boy in Night, Allison, even if for a brief moment, entered this strange environment that Rosenblatt speaks of. She also participated in yet another foreign environment with the book God Grew Tired of Us as she encountered a country that had no running water and no grocery stores yet one that had compassion for each other. And perhaps more importantly, Allison through the reading of the literature gained a new perspective about the conditions that surround her everyday life: “We have it so easy here. If you are middle class in Fullerton, you are so lucky” (I, May 20, 2010). And while she acknowledges that “misfortune is everywhere,” she believes that in her hometown, “most problems are of a lesser magnitude” (OP, March 15, 2010).
As identified, Allison participated in few world poems from the books *Night* and *A Long Way Gone* while experiencing most of her world poems in the final book read for the semester, *God Grew Tired of Us*. Because of this, she connected to things that were happening in both Sudan and America. Overall, Allison experienced all three transactions: self poems, text poems, and world poems. With the self poems coming most naturally, Allison made most (22) of her connections under this category as she read as the believer, the daughter and sister, and as the teenager. On the other hand, text poems were the least made by her as she only had 1 transaction during the study. And finally, Allison experienced 9 world poems; most of which took place at the end of the study (Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Allison’s Number and Type of Transactions With Each Nonfiction Text Read*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self Poems</th>
<th>Text Poems</th>
<th>World Poems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Night</em></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Long Way Gone</em></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>God Grew Tired of Us</em></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By reading the nonfiction literature in her social studies class, Allison gained insight to who she was especially with her faith. Her religious background and her family were a constant presence throughout each experience with the books. Allison also
gained an understanding of other nations including Germany, Sierra Leone, and Sudan while appreciating and questioning America.

**Cross-Case Analysis**

To provide an understanding of Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison’s experiences with reading nonfiction texts in a social studies class, their cases were examined individually. From the four individual cases, emergent findings were analyzed for both similarities and differences. This cross-case analysis was conducted in order to gain a better understanding in how the use of nonfiction literature in a social studies class affected the students’ reading experiences.

As a result of the cross-case analysis, three major findings emerged. First, Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison’s reading experiences were influenced by their individual experiences. Second, they experienced other cultures while both questioning their culture and gaining an appreciation for it. Third, Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison demonstrated empathy for other people in different countries often times by becoming a part of the story.

**Reading Experiences Influenced by Individual Experiences**

After analyzing each individual case, I found Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison were influenced by their backgrounds and experiences. In each case, they conducted self poems as they read as a teenager and family member.

With each book having been written from a teenage perspective, the connection between the participants and the narrators was natural and effortless. Each participant commented on how the narrator’s age impacted their relatability to the text. For Brian,
he was able to “put himself in their [the characters] position” (I, March 26, 2010). On numerous occasions, through his annotations, he engaged in conversations with the characters and contemplated their predicaments. Lisa also read as a teenager, and she spoke on how the age of the narrators influenced her: “I couldn’t believe that these kids were going through something, and they are the exact same age as me. It just kind of shocked me” (I, March 3, 2010). The shock that Lisa felt as she read the tales of these three boy’s lives quickly turned into compassion as she read more as a teenaged friend to the boys sharing in their sadness and encouraging them during their dark and trying times. Kevin encouraged the characters in the books as well. He demonstrated his support by speaking to the characters through his annotations, and like the other participants, he also questioned the characters’ actions and decisions. Kevin did not just focus on the tragedies that surrounded these books; instead, he also found something that resonated with him beyond the devastation that existed in these books: his love for shoes. Allison also found some happier things to reflect on such as soda, pizza, and McDonalds. Despite these teenaged favorites, she spent most of her time sympathizing with and questioning the characters as she, often, placed herself into the situations of the characters (I, June 7, 2011).

Similar to the reading lens of a teenager, each participant shared in the reading lens of a family member. The family lenses differed based upon relationships with family members and the number of siblings. For instance, both Lisa and Kevin were only children leading them to focus on other family relationships such as those with their parents and grandparents. With Kevin, he only spoke of his parents comparing Ishmael’s
family situation to his parent’s divorce and reflecting on his relationship with his father after reading about Elie’s bond with his father. Lisa spoke of her parents, but she focused mostly on the enjoyable times she shared with them. She also spoke very highly of her grandmother and their relationship. Brian and Allison also read as a son and daughter; however, due to having siblings, Brian and Allison also read as a brother and sister. For Brian, he thought about his younger brother when reading Night wondering if he had enough physical endurance to survive the grueling conditions Elie experienced with his father. Similarly, Allison thought about the child soldiers in A Long Way Gone and questioned her brother’s age and ability to endure such an event as war.

While they all shared in their experiences as a teenager and as a family member, each participant read through a lens that most reflected their interests. For instance, Brian, a three sport athlete, read each book from an athletic stance. Even though the books had no obvious athletic references, Brian sought moments in the books, Night and A Long Way Gone that prompted athletic memories in his past such as physical conditioning for his sport and the determination to succeed.

Being class president, Lisa read as a leader always looking “to make a difference in someone else’s life” (I, June 7, 2011). This was most noticeable when she spoke about her volunteer work during the summer at a local camp for underprivileged kids. Even a year after the original study, when reflecting on the readings of her ninth grade social studies, she said, “I discovered that I wanted to visit some of the places to potentially help the natives” (I, June 7, 2011).
Kevin, who was the most read out of all the participants, read through two lenses in addition to his roles as a teenager and a son. First, like Brian, he read as an athlete. He reflected on the three sports he participated in: lacrosse, hockey, and football. While lacrosse and hockey prompted happier thoughts, with football, he was haunted by the experience of breaking his foot. This particular memory emerged after he read about the physical pain that Ishmael endured in *A Long Way Gone*. Along with reading as an athlete, he read as a reader. Through his annotations, he displayed his ability to analyze texts figuratively; a habit he credits his English class. Kevin acknowledged, “In English, you know how we were doing like figures of speech and stuff, I just got use to pointing those out cuz we did that in every single story, so I did that in this” (I, May 28, 2010). Even as he was explaining his annotation process to me by looking back at his annotated pages, he noticed that he had missed a literary device in his original annotations: “I think that I saw a simile back here” (I, May 28, 2010).

Allison connected with the texts through her religious background and experiences. She spent most of her time viewing what she read in her social studies class through her religious lens as she sought strength in the characters who believed in God like Elie and John while questioning the one character that didn’t: Ishmael. While her faith was the premise of many of her connections, she realized her view may be subjective, but ultimately, she strongly supports her religious stance: “I mean I might be biased like I am Catholic. There is heaven, and there is hell. If you do bad enough things, you are going to go to hell” (I, May 20, 2010).
Finally, all participants, while reading nonfiction books in their social studies, reflected on other medium forms especially other books. This reflection was demonstrated through their text poems and came in varying degrees based upon each participant’s experiences with books, music, and movies. For instance, Kevin, who read through the lens of a reader, had a total of 16 references; all of which came from other books that were either read in his history class or in his ninth grade English class. While the other participants did not experience as many text poems as Kevin, both Lisa and Brian referenced books from earlier in the year in their social studies class. Allison, on the other hand, had only one text poem and it came through the medium form of a movie.

As discussed, each participant’s individual experiences and backgrounds influenced their reading experiences in their social studies class. While each participant read through different lens, they all shared in their reading roles as a teenager and family member.

**Experienced Other Cultures While Questioning and Appreciating Their Own Culture**

Through the world poem, all participants gained an understanding of other cultures while appreciating their own. For instance, with the country of Sudan, all participants commented on the lack of resources, such as grocery stores and transportation, that the country of Sudan had in comparison to the United States; however, their greatest revelation came with the Sudanese positive outlook on life and their compassion for others. For example, Kevin acknowledged that others come first in the Dinka culture while Lisa stressed how their culture values respect and education.
Similarly, Allison commented on their “appreciative outlook on life” (J, April 10, 2010). Echoing these positive attributes, Brian wrote, “I admire their [Sudanese] unselfishness, responsibility, and ability to be thankful for everything they have” (OP, April 12, 2010).

While the participants experienced the positive side of the Sudanese, despite the tragic state of their country, there were times, through the course of their readings, they questioned the Sudanese culture, and this was most seen with the female participants. For instance, Lisa and Allison commented on the relationships that existed between the Sudanese. Lisa was skeptical on the amount of wives the Sudanese men had while questioning the nonexistent relationships between men and women outside of marriage: “Why aren’t they allowed to be friends with the opposite sex?” (OP, April 27, 2010). Allison also commented on the relationships between men and women as well as acknowledging the relationship between men: “Holding hands is also a different meaning. It is not so sexual when 2 men hold hands; it is just what they do” (J, April 10, 2010).

Along with the country of Sudan, the participants experienced Sierra Leone. All participants commented on the war that Ishmael was thrown into as a teenager. For example, Brian recalled the running through hot sand barefoot in an attempt to escape the violence. Allison, on the other hand, remarked on how the “soldier kids shoot thousands of people because they are told to” (I, May 20, 2010). Kevin also commented on the killings that existed within this country and its own people calling it “an addiction” (GI, April 27, 2010). And while most of the participants’ comments regarding Ishmael and his experience focused on his horrific conditions and brutal killings, Lisa saw the good in
him claiming she liked him the best because “he repents everything that happened to him and he has overcome so much with the nightmares and the reocurrences, and he has to get up the next day and tell himself that he is not a bad person” (GI, April 27, 2010).

Even though the setting was not as current as those in *God Grew Tired of Us* and *Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, the book *Night* provided an opportunity for the participants to gain an understanding of the Holocaust. For example, through Wiesel’s description, participants experienced the conditions that surrounded the Holocaust such as the bitter cold weather, the over crowdedness of the camps, and the unthinkable torture. All participants acknowledged how the name calling (i.e. “flea-ridden dogs” and “filthy dogs”) of the Jewish populace caused them angst (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 85). Lisa labeled this act as an act of “dehumanization” and Allison went as far as saying, “I hate when they repeat this” (A, January 29, 2010). Both Brian and Kevin expressed their anger of the name calling referring to it as “awful” and “horrendous” (A, January 29, 2010). The participants mostly identified with the events in the book that involved children. For instance, Kevin found it difficult to read about the living babies being thrown in the air for target practice while Allison struggled with the reading of the young boy who was too light to instantly die by being hung. All participants found the death of the young boy Juliek with his violin especially difficult as he provided both hope and comfort to Elie.

The participants not only experienced other cultures, but they also gained an appreciation for their own culture by reading about other cultures. First, the participants scolded their homeland suggesting the inhabitants were lazy, disrespectful, and
unsatisfied. For example, Brian when defining people in America said, “People are lazy; people never naturally care” (I, May 21, 2010). Kevin argued, “We [Americans] are just handed everything, and we don’t really have to work for anything, so yea, I think we are lazy” (GI, April 27, 2010). Commenting on the level of disrespect in America, Lisa commented, “If you were to walk into a school, restaurant, post office, movie theatre, or any public place in America it would only take a few seconds to realize the lack of respect that is presented here” (J, April 10, 2010). Allison claimed that “Americans take a lot for granted and are never happy with what they have. They always want more!” (J, April 4, 2010). All of the participants even went as far as referring to their own town as “The Bubble.” The phrase, “The Bubble,” is surrounded by negativity suggesting that the town is sheltered from the outside world. Allison described the bubble as a “Utopia” (J, March 3, 2010) while Brian suggested it was “separated from the world” (I, May 21, 2010). Lisa compared “The Bubble” to “a country club” (I, May 21, 2010), and Kevin acknowledged it as having “little diversity and little change” (I, May 28, 2010). While they frowned upon many characteristics of Americans, including their own home town, ultimately, after the reading of these foreign tales, the participants gained an appreciation of their own lives. For example, the participants commented on their good fortune. Kevin felt “very fortunate” (I, May 28, 2010) and Brian “felt extremely lucky” to be living in America (J, April 10, 2010). Allison reinforced this attitude by stating, “We have it so easy here. If you are middle class in Fullerton, you are so lucky” (I, May 20, 2010).
Ultimately, “The Bubble” was exposed for what it was lacking: “‘The Bubble’ we live in does not expose us to real-life situations” (I, Brian, May 21, 2010). And through the reading of the nonfiction literature, the participants felt as if they had a greater understanding of the outside world. Lisa noted, “To sum up my experience with nonfiction, it was truly an eye-opener to the world around me, specifically, outside of the United States in third-world countries” (I, June 7, 2010). In a separate writing, Brian echoed Lisa’s statement by commenting, “It [nonfiction] really opened my eyes as to some of the terrible things that have happened” (I, June 7, 2010).

Finally, as a result of reading nonfiction literature in their social studies class, all participants participated in conversations about the books outside of class. Even though these conversations differed from participant to participant, they provided the participants an opportunity to question the material they were reading while gaining an appreciation for what they have. For Brian, he spoke to his mother about the book *Night* retelling the Holocaust violence as depicted in the book. He also mentioned that he spoke to his family about these books “because it was something that I was surprised to hear about and didn’t know” (I, May 21, 2010). Allison also spoke to her family about the book *Night* and saw it as an opportunity to talk about and question her religion. Lisa, by far, had the most interaction with her family, especially her grandmother, about the books. She recalled how these books gave her and her grandmother “something to talk about always,” and the books were a special way to connect with her grandmother (I, May 21, 2010). Kevin, unlike the others who spoke to their families, had conversations with his friends about
these books stating that the “books sparked conversations and opinions about the characters” (I, May 28, 2010).

As discussed, the participants, even if for a brief moment, engaged in other cultures. Through their experiences with other countries, they learned about the differences that exist between them and the characters they read about in the nonfiction books. Even though they questioned the other cultures and some of their practices, they were exposed to some of the simple things that kept the characters going: friendship, family, and faith. Also, through their interaction with these nonfiction texts, they reflected on their own lives and culture gaining an appreciation for what exists in their lives.

**Demonstrated Empathy for Other People in Different Countries and Felt a Sense of Empowerment Regarding Their Own Country**

Through the reading of these nonfiction books, all participants demonstrated empathy for the characters within the books; most of these examples of empathy came through their annotations. Many emotions were littered through the annotated pages; some were expressed with the drawing of sad faces while others with the writing of empathetic words and phrases: “This [listening to the derogatory name calling in Night] must have been hard” (A, Brian, January 29, 2010); “They [Elie and his father in Night] probably cried too much already” (A, Kevin, January 29, 2010); “That’s too bad that they [Elie and his father] can’t even sleep” (A, Allison, January 29, 2010); “The loneliness that these people [the Jewish men in Auschwitz] felt must have been AWFUL!” (A, Lisa, January 29, 2010).
Beyond the annotations, two of the four participants demonstrated empathy through conversation. For instance, Brian, demonstrated empathy with Ishmael’s character in a *Long Way Gone*: “we can read what he did and judge him saying he did awful things…but none of us actually know what it is like to be in his situation; therefore, we can’t judge” (OP, March 13, 2010). Brian broadened his compassion beyond the book to others: “I am sure a lot of people appear to be bad kids and do not do the right things, but we may not know what goes on in their home life or outside of school; therefore, we can’t judge” (I, May 21, 2010). Lisa also empathized with many of the characters in the books as well as others who may be experiencing some of these same types of problems today: “The scene [the bitter coldness of Auschwitz contrasted against the lack of clothing] made me shiver. It made me feel appreciative to have the warm clothes that I do. The scene also makes me feel remorse for those people who live like that then and now” (J, February 4, 2010).

The participants also felt a sense of efficacy after reading the books seeking opportunities to make a difference within their community. After reading the stories, Brian realized that he could make a difference through donating money to charities within in his own community. Beyond the monetary contribution, Kevin, Allison, and Lisa all felt eager to make a difference after empathizing with the Holocaust tragedies and the wars that surrounded both Sierra Leone and Sudan. Both Kevin and Allison commented on how they could take advantage of service opportunities within in their own community. Lisa, who had already volunteered for underprivileged kids during the summer, made the biggest commitment: “I want to make a difference in someone else’s
Lisa, a year later, during the summer of 2011, did just that visiting Africa as a part of an International travel program.

The participants, through the reading of nonfiction literature, demonstrated empathy for other people in different countries. They shared emotion with the characters while reading their stories about tragedy and survival. They also felt a sense of empowerment regarding their own country as they all identified ways in which they could give back to their own community.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the case study of four participants: Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison as well as a cross analysis between cases. The findings indicated that all participants experienced self poems, text poems, and world poems while reading nonfiction literature in their social studies classroom. For their self poems, they drew on their background and experiences. Each participant shared the roles of a teenager and family member while specializing in a role or roles that reflected their interests and experiences. For their text poem(s), each participant shared in this experience; however, the extent in which they encountered them was drastically different due to the level and number of experiences with other types of text. For their world poems, participants entered a world unlike their own to experience the hardships that existed for boys their own age. Each participant, while at varying degrees, gained new insight on countries with misfortune, but Brian, Lisa, Kevin and Allison all witnessed the strength and compassion of these young men in times of their tragedy.
Through the self poems, text poems, and world poems, Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison experienced other cultures and gained a different, yet appreciative, attitude to their own culture. They also displayed empathy towards the characters and their situations and advocated change within their community as a result of this emotion. Finally, Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison were so impacted by the nonfiction literature that they shared in conversations with their family and friends about their experiences.

Despite the fact that all participants experienced the three types of poems, it was their individual reading lens that was most evident with each type of poem. For Brian, the athlete, he read with his past and current athletic experiences in mind as he questioned each text. For Lisa, the leader, she read the nonfiction texts using her leadership skills that she acquired through student council and summer camp. For Kevin, the athlete and the reader, he used his experience with sports and books as a way to connect with the nonfiction books. For Allison, the believer, she read each nonfiction text with her faith as her reading partner. By reading with a lens that reflected their background and experiences, each participant lived through a unique, reading experience unlike anyone else.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

“It [reading nonfiction] really opened my eyes to some of the terrible things that have happened”—Brian

“To sum up my experience with nonfiction, it was truly an eye-opener to the world around me, specifically outside of the United States in third world countries”—Lisa

“We are learning more about what is going on in real life”—Kevin

“Many of the characters were around our age, and we could easily put ourselves into their shoes”—Allison

Comments like these, from the participants of my study, exemplify the power of reading nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom and highlight what Rosenblatt (1938/1995) believes can happen through reading literature:

In literature he [the reader] meets emotions, situations, people, presented in significant patterns. He is shown a casual relationship between actions, he finds approval given to certain kinds of personalities and behavior rather than others, he finds molds into which to pour his own nebulous emotions. In short, he often finds meaning attached to what otherwise would be for him merely brute facts.

(p. 42)

For Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison, the reading of nonfiction literature in their social studies class was a way to not only learn about the cultural stories of others, but the readings also provided them opportunities to understand, question, and appreciate their
own culture as they demonstrated the interconnected relationship between the reader and the text (Beckelhimer, 2010; VanDeWeghe, 2011).

Rosenblatt’s transactional theory has been examined in the teaching of technology (Albright et al., 2002), language arts (Baer, 2007), mathematics (Borasi et al., 1998), and English as a Second Language (Zoreda, 1997) at the secondary levels. To date, Rosenblatt’s transactional theory has not been applied to the area of social studies. In my study, I used Rosenblatt’s transactional theory in the content area of social studies to investigate the role of nonfiction literature at the high school level. Due to the unique opportunity that the content area of social studies provides with the stories of people and places around the world, it was important to examine Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison’s reading experiences with nonfiction literature in their social studies class.

**Overview of the Study**

I used qualitative case study design to investigate the reading experiences of high school students in a social studies classroom with nonfiction literature. My study explored the literary experiences of four teenagers within this social studies classroom. The following research questions guided my study:

1. How do students transact with nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom?
2. How does the reading of nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom enable students to understand themselves and society?

The setting of my study, Fullerton High School, which has little racial diversity, can be described as a middle to upper class school where the students are provided many
opportunities and possibilities with their education such as the latest technology and resources, a committed teaching staff, and many support services to ensure that all students experience success.

I met each of the participants at Fullerton High School in the winter of 2010. I collected data for eighteen weeks, from January 11, 2010, until May 28, 2010. I also interviewed three of the four participants a year after the original study in June of 2011.

My data analysis revealed that participants experienced self poems, text poems, and world poems. The frequency and variety of the poems related to the experiences and backgrounds of each participant. As a result of my findings, three conclusions can be reached. First, as a result of reading nonfiction literature in their social studies class, Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison’s reading experiences were influenced by their individual experiences, and as a result, they linked literature to their lives creating self poems, text poems, and world poems. Second, due to the reading of nonfiction literature, they experienced other cultures while both questioning their culture and gaining an appreciation for it. Third, Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison, due to the nature of the tragic stories, demonstrated empathy for other people in different countries often times by becoming a part of the story.

In this chapter, I discuss the conclusions drawn from this study that I hope will inform social studies teachers about the use of nonfiction literature in their classrooms and add to the knowledge about how Rosenblatt’s transactional theory contributes to the field’s understanding about the teaching of literature. I also discuss the implications of
this study in hopes that it will guide those who are concerned about the reading materials and practices of students. Finally, I offer suggestions for further research.

**Discussion of Findings**

Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison, through annotating, writing, and discussing the nonfiction literature in their social studies class experienced self, text, and world poems. I concluded that their reading experiences in the social studies class were influenced by their backgrounds and previous experiences, and as a result, each participant gained something different than the other. Although Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison all shared in some experiences, such as a teenager and family member, each participant was unique in their transactions with the nonfiction text. Even though they are unique in their reading role of the nonfiction literature, each participant, as a result of the reading, experienced other cultures unlike their own. As a result of this cultural experience, the participants gained an appreciation and questioned their own culture while demonstrating empathy towards those less fortunate. This section discusses each conclusion and how each conclusion confirms, extends, and/or disputes existing research.

**Creation of Poems**

While reading the nonfiction literature in their social studies class, Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison related the nonfiction literature to previous or current, personal experiences. Reading nonfiction literature in a social studies class provides students an opportunity to “activate prior knowledge, build background knowledge, respond to what they read, and make connections between the text and their lives” (National Geographic,
2003, p. 4). Within this study, my participants made connections between the nonfiction literature and their lives as they experienced self, text, and world poems.

**Self poems.** Self poems are transactions between readers, with their past and current experiences, backgrounds, and personalities, and the text to create personal meanings. The participants in the study, Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison created self poems. Baer (2007) found that students in her study personally connected to things within the texts they were reading. My participants drew on their past experiences. For Brian, he drew on his athletic and familial experiences. For Allison, she drew on her leadership and familial experiences. For Kevin, he drew on his athletic, familial, and reading experiences. And for Allison, she drew on her religious and familial experiences. While they shared in similar experiences, such as they all read as a teenager and both Brian and Kevin read as an athlete, most of their reading roles were unique as each participant was unique in what they brought to the text.

My participants became active participants in the stories they were reading as, at times, they became a character in the story as they either carried on conversations with the characters or asked questions of the characters through their annotations of the text. For instance, Brian found humor in *God Grew Tired of Us* as he chuckled alongside the main character, John, as he encountered America for the first time. He, along with the other participants, also shared in the sorrow of the characters as they all experienced tragedies. Not only did the participants attempt to befriend and comfort the characters, but they also questioned many of the characters’ actions. One character, in particular, prompted questioning: Ishmael from *A Long Way Gone*. While all participants
questioned his killings, Allison, as the believer, questioned his lack of faith and whether or not faith could have saved him.

Not only did each participant personally connect to the readings based on their interest, experiences, and backgrounds, but they were also influenced by the age of the narrators. According to Harvey and Goudvis (2000), students increase their chances of making personal connections to what they are reading when the characters are similar in age. This was evident within my study as all three books read within the study involved teenage boys. Each participant in the study commented on the impact that the age had on their connection to the books. Johannessen (2002) reinforces the importance of the age of the storyteller as he believes stories, like these with teenage narrators, resonate with the adolescent reader. This was evident within my study as each participant indicated that the works they read throughout the study were better than those they read first semester. During their first semester of reading in their social studies class, they read both fiction and nonfiction books told from a variety of ages.

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) emphasizes how the reader “must draw on his past experience with life and language as the raw materials out of which to shape the new experience symbolized on the page” (p. 25). Each participant drew on their experiences when reading the nonfiction texts, and as a result of reading the nonfiction literature, they gained a new experience. For example, Allison, the believer, took her previous experiences with religion to the nonfiction texts, and as a result of reading them, she shaped a new experience with religion: “I feel like I have gotten a lot more religious this
year…I feel that it [religion] was recognized the most in this class because it is more about life” (I, May 20, 2010).

The self poem is critical for readers as it naturally occurs and to deny students opportunities to create self poems is to deny them experience. Through the interactions that take place in self poems, readers reflect on their past and current experiences, backgrounds, and personalities, in order to create personal meanings. As a result, the readers not only reminisce about their past life, but they acknowledge their present conditions while having an opportunity to look into their future.

**Text poems.** Text poems are created when transactions take place between the readers’ past readings, listenings, and viewings and what they are currently reading. Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison experienced text poems. In Baer’s study (2007), she found that students made personal connections with other literature that they have read in the past to those they are currently reading. Three of my participants all drew on past social studies nonfiction literature, such as *Night*, *Memoir of a Boy Soldier*, and *Three Cups of Tea*, when they were reading in their social studies class. My study extends her research as my participants did not limit themselves to just connections to other books; instead, they made connections to other forms of media including movies, music, and video games.

Vacca and Vacca (1999/2008) and Harvey and Goudvis (2000) claim that connections between texts arrive due to comparative lessons and messages within texts. This was evident within my study. For example, the three books used during my study centered on tragedies. For the book, *Night*, the massive amount of lives lost during the
holocaust occupied the pages of text; for the book, *A Long Way Gone*, the recollections of killing innocent people and recruiting children to become monsters littered the pages of text, and for *God Grew Tired of Us*, similar to *A Long Way Gone*, children losing loved ones and being forced to grow up too fast flooded the pages of text. Due to the similarity of these books, most of the participants continued to reflect on past books read in class as they read the others never really leaving either story. For instance, Brian recalled, “It [*A Long Way Gone*] reminded me of *Night* because of the harshness of the rebels” (J, February 19, 2010) while Kevin wrote throughout the margins in *A Long Way Gone*, “like *Night*” (A, February 25, 2010).

While Rosenblatt refers to the relationship between the text and the reader as a spiral relationship where individual meanings emerge as a result of the continuous flow between the reader and the text, she rarely comments on the reader’s experiences being derived from past readings. While she does not directly reference connections from past texts read, listened to, or viewed, the premise of Rosenblatt’s work relies on the reader and his/her “personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and occupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition” (1938/1995, p. 30). With this in mind, an avid reader, such as Kevin, took his many experiences with past books to his new reading experiences in his social studies class. As a result, he experienced this spiral relationship between the text and the reader as he built on his past experiences with books and gained new experiences with other books.

A text poem is an important transaction as it provides readers an opportunity to reflect on past readings, listening, and viewings in relation to what they are currently
reading. The transaction gives readers a chance to share in similarities across texts. In doing so, readers may reinforce certain events, personalities and actions of characters, writing styles, and most important, similar meanings and messages.

**World poems.** World poems are transactions between what is being read and the world within and outside readers. Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison experienced world poems. Baer (2007) discovered that students, through the reading of literature, were able to take their understanding of the texts and apply them to the “world at large” (p. 27). My study, which included nonfiction literature about other parts of the world, such as Germany and Africa, provided students an opportunity to not only learn about these worlds in which they were reading, but they were also able to extend what was going on in these parts of the world to other parts of the world including their hometown. For example, in all three books, the participants were mortified with how the children were treated. Allison recalled the child killings as “inhumane” and how she developed an appreciation for what the young kids went through and what she doesn’t have to go through as a result of where she lives (I, May 20, 2010).

My study extends Baer’s findings as my participants not only were able to apply their reading to the outside world, but they were also able to generate plans of action in helping their world. For instance, each participant reflected on ways they could assist in making their world a better place. While Brian suggested a monetary donation, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison all mentioned service opportunities, such as summer camps, as a way to give back to their community. Glasgow & Baer (2011) discuss how through the reading of literature, such as *A Long Way Gone*, students can be empowered to seek
“rewarding and inspiring opportunities to learn even more about their worlds” (p. 74).

Seeking opportunities to learn and do more was most evident with Lisa, the leader. At the end of the study, Lisa participated in an International Travel Program which took her to the setting of two of the stories within the study: the continent of Africa. Here, she was able to work with less fortunate children assisting them with their education and English.

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) argues that literature is “a means of broadening one’s knowledge of people and society” (p. 37). She also believes that literature can provide readers an opportunity to participate in situations and crises as they “explore [themselves] and the world around [them]” (p. 37). Rosenblatt’s notions on the connection between the reading and the world echo those found in my study. In my study, Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison participated in the situations or crises that took place in the stories. Each participant what the reader, under the guidance of the text, crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, image, thought, and feeling and what he brings to it. For instance, Brian questioned his strength and endurance alongside both Elie from Night and Ishmael from A Long Way Gone as these characters where involved in the crisis of their lives: war. Not only did Brian learn about the situations that these characters found themselves in, but he also questioned, even with his own physical conditioning, if he could have survived similar situations to those found in the books. Brian found motivation through Ishmael’s character in a Long Way Gone: “It [Ishmael’s survival] kind of motivates me to be tougher” (I, March 26, 2010).
A world poem is a significant transaction because it provides readers an opportunity to directly relate what they are reading to the world within and outside the reader. Through these transactions, readers can acquire new information and awareness regarding the world. They can also, based on the readings, look within themselves and the world in which they live. Finally, experiencing world poems is instrumental in promoting change within the readers’ community, state, nation, and beyond as readers learn about the misfortune that exists in the world.

**Exploring and Reexamining Cultures**

As a direct result of experiencing a world poem, participants explored other cultures while reexamining their own culture, my second conclusion. Through the reading of nonfiction literature in their social studies class, my participants were able to read “history as a story of human experience” (Frager, 1993, p. 619). Kevin summed it up best when he spoke of his experiences in his social studies class: “We are learning more about what is going on in real life” (I, May 28, 2010). Due to the nature of these nonfiction books, Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison had opportunities to explore other cultures as well as reflect on their own.

Gillespie (1994) and Rosenblatt (1938/1995) both argue that literature offers students diversity especially in areas where students are limited in scope. My study confirms their statements as Fullerton, which the participants refer to as “The Bubble,” has very little diversity, and through the reading of these nonfiction stories, the participants were able to think beyond their “Bubble.” For instance, even though all participants admitted to an exposure of Hitler and Germany from past social studies
classes, it was not until the reading of *Night* that they actual felt the impact of this tragedy on so many lives. Each participant was especially drawn to the tales of the children. For instance, Kevin recalled, “I have done reports on the terrible things the Nazis did to the Jews behind the barbed wire of the concentration/death camps, but nothing quite affected me as much as this” Earlier in his journal entry he addressed what “this” was: “a heart of evil enough to kill innocent babies” (J, February 4, 2010). Similar to the setting of Germany, Sierra Leone and Sudan, the settings of *A Long Way Gone* and *God Grew Tired of Us*, also exposed the readers to death and destruction. Unlike Fullerton, children of Sierra Leone and Sudan “shoot thousands of people because they are told to” (Allison, I, May 20, 2010).

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) stresses that through the reading of literature, students have the opportunity to “enter, for the time, into a world of strange moral values and responsibilities” (p. 43). As Rosenblatt suggests, Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison entered into three unfamiliar worlds with differing values and responsibilities. With the book *Night*, the moral values exhibited by Hitler and his men, as they called the Jewish population “filthy dogs” and killed innocent people, differed from those of the participants. With the books, *A Long Way Gone* and *God Grew Tired of Us*, each participant commented on the nature in which both Ishmael and John had to obtain food. Unlike the participants, whose food is purchased from the grocery store by their parents, Ishmael and John had to fend for their own food. Often times, they would go days without eating or drinking, and in Ishmael’s case, he became so desperate with thirst that he drank his own urine. Beyond the necessities of food, both Lisa and Allison, through
the reading of *God Grew Tired of Us*, entered a world with differing values on relationships between men and women. In Sudan, men can have many wives, and outside of their marriages, there is very little communication between opposite sexes. Lisa questioned these relationships: “Why aren’t they allowed to be friends with the opposite sex?” (OP, April 27, 2010). Also, it is quite common for male friends to hold hands publicly. Allison recalled, “Holding hands is also a different meaning. It is not so sexual when 2 men hold hands; it is just what they do” (J, April 10, 2010). While the female participants questioned these relationships, they were able to, through the reading of this story, enter into a culture unlike their own where they have friends from the opposite sex.

While Rosenblatt (1938/1995) acknowledges the opportunity for students to enter into a world unlike their own, through the reading of literature, she argues that as a result of this entering into a new world, readers will see “with new emotions the conditions and lives about him” (p. 174). This was evident with each participant as they each referred to Fullerton as “The Bubble.” “The Bubble,” which carries a negative connotation, protects the participants from the outside world providing them few opportunities to reflect on the conditions and lives about them. Through the reading of these nonfiction stories, the participants thought outside their “Bubble,” and as a result, they uncovered that they, and fellow Americans, can be lazy and disrespectful.

Kevin commented on why he thinks Americans and people within his community, in particular, are lazy:
Everything is handed to a lot of people in America and because no one has to work for anything, they eventually get into the habit of not doing any work and being lazy. Often times, laziness is more common in areas like Fullerton because of the higher yearly income rates. When a family has more money, they have to work less because they can buy all of the necessities. (J, April 14, 2010)

Along with laziness in America, Lisa commented on the lack of respect she believes exists in America: “If you were to walk into a school, restaurant, post office, movie theatre, or any public place in America it would only take a few seconds to realize the lack of respect that is presented here” (J, April 10, 2010). Lisa contrasted what she believes exists in America, with a lack of respect for others, to what she witnessed in Sudan, which was a deep respect for others, through reading the book, *God Grew Tired of Us*.

While the participants were critical of America and Fullerton, in particular, after reading about the experiences in the nonfiction texts, they, as Rosenblatt suggests, generated a new emotion of their home: appreciation. As they read the harrowing tales of these young teenagers in *Night, A Long Way Gone*, and *God Grew Tired of Us*, they all realized how truly fortunate they were.

**Evoking Empathy**

The exploring of other cultures and reexamining their own culture led to the demonstration of empathy, my third conclusion. Baer (2007) found that students showed “empathy with a character or situation in a story by sharing and/or understanding the feelings or physical sensations depicted” (p. 27). Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison evoked
empathy towards the characters’ stories. Due to the nature of the tragedies depicted in
the stories, the participants’ emotions were drawn to the stories. My participants mostly
demonstrated their empathy towards the characters though their annotations and
discussions.

Researchers (Bleich, 1986; Flynn, 1986) have found that females are more likely
to empathize with characters’ experiences than males. My study found this not to be the
case; instead, my study confirmed Chi’s (2009) study which found both females and male
participants exhibiting emotional responses to literature. Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison
all exhibited empathy towards the characters’ experiences. Unlike Chi (2009), however,
the gender of the participants did not affect their responses. Chi (2009) concludes that
females demonstrated more empathy towards the characters while the male participants
responded more emphatically toward the situation itself. In my study, both the female
and male participants demonstrated both empathy for the situation and the characters
involved in the situation. For instance, Kevin, displayed empathy for the situation in the
book Night, the holocaust: “It is kind of strange that one group of people can be so cruel
and one person can make someone believe that what they are doing is right even though it
goes against all most everyone else’s beliefs. It is just really scary and sad to think
about” (I, May 28, 2010). Kevin also empathizes with the main character in the book,
Night, Elie. He not only is sympathetic to what Elie has to endure, but he is also
sympathetic to what he has to witness:

Elie used to explain the torture that the Germans had in store for the Jews, and he
recalled ‘Infants were tossed into the air and used as targets for the machine
guns.’ When I first read it, I had to stop for a moment and process the words that were in front of me. I can’t imagine how Elie must have felt witnessing the killing of innocent babies. It is unbelievable. (J, February 4, 2010)

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) believes that reading literature provides readers the “ability to understand and sympathize with others” (p. 40). Rosenblatt (1982) also contests that through the reading of literature, “we participate in the story, we identify with the characters, we share their conflicts and their feelings” (p. 270). The participating in the story and the sharing of feelings with the characters was most evident through annotations. The participants asked questions, displayed emotion through words or drawings, or supported them through words of encouragement within the margins of the text. Brian, who recalled the loss of a boy alongside Elie, sympathetically wrote, “That would be an awful way to lose somebody” (A, January, 29, 2010). Kevin, on the other hand, wrote the words of encouragement, “Let’s Go!” to Ishmael as if he was on the journey alongside him. Allison, through the use of the emotional question “Oh no! What will he do?,” expressed both shock and concern with John’s misfortune of losing his job in America. Finally, Lisa showed the most compassion towards the characters and their situations as she repeatedly drew sad faces when words of heartbreak surfaced on the page (i.e. “tears,” “agony,” “corpses,” and “silence” (A, January, 29, 2010). Lisa, who became empathetic at the mentioning of death, said “It seemed like they talked about death a lot. I think I was really upset during this chapter because I really didn’t want him to give up and leave his dad, and stuff, so I was sad” (I, May 28, 2010).
As discussed, I concluded that Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison’s reading experiences in the social studies class were influenced by their backgrounds and previous experiences, and as a result, each of them gained something different than the other. Although they shared in some experiences, such as a teenager and family member, each participant was unique in their transactions with the nonfiction text. Even though they are unique in their reading role of the nonfiction literature, each participant, as a result of the reading, experienced other cultures unlike their own. As a result of this cultural experience, the participants gained an appreciation and questioned their own culture while demonstrating empathy towards those less fortunate.

While my study is heavily influenced by Rosenblatt’s work, my study extends her theory as her work focused mostly on fictional literature, such as plays, poems, and novels, and she studied the role that literature could play in the teaching discipline of English. My study, on the other hand, focused solely on nonfiction literature and examined the role it could play in a content area other than English: social studies.

Implications

The literary experiences of Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison generate implications relevant to the roles that nonfiction literature can play in the field of social studies and with educators, in general. The two roles for the use of nonfiction literature in the social studies classroom are a) a means of incorporating specific high school themes from the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and b) a means of supporting empathy in students. The one role that nonfiction literature can play more generally with all educators is c) a means of providing a format for teachers to gain an understanding of
their students. The final role that the use of nonfiction literature in this study played on me, the researcher and teacher, was d) a means of reflecting on my current teaching materials and practices.

Implications for a Means of Incorporating Specific High School Themes From the NCSS

Through the reading of nonfiction literature, unlike the efferent reading of the textbook where students search mostly for facts, students are offered opportunities to experience poems, transactions between the readers and texts. These poems directly coincide with the themes put forth by the NCSS. First, the self poem, a transaction between readers and the text to create personal meanings, was effective in supporting the NCSS theme of “Individual Development and Identity.” With this particular theme, NCSS stressed that social studies programs should include opportunities for students to explore their individual development and identity. An example of the self poem in developing identity was Allison’s expression in her change of her religious beliefs. While Allison was very forthcoming about her religious beliefs early in the study, she explored her religious experiences even further at the end of the study. She articulated how, through the reading of nonfiction literature, religion shaped her identity: “I feel like I have gotten a lot more religious this year…I feel that it [religion] was recognized the most in this class because it is more about life” (I, May 20, 2010). Her description of herself in terms of her religious beliefs is an example of how the self poem shaped her identity. Rosenblatt (1938/1995) says, “A great work of art may provide us the opportunity to feel more profoundly” (p. 37). For Allison, the reading of nonfiction
literature allowed her to reflect on her religious beliefs, and in this particular case, her beliefs were strengthened. Lisa’s identity as a leader also strengthened as a result of reading nonfiction literature. Even though Lisa from the beginning of the study exhibited her leadership skills with her role in student council and summer camp, it was not until the end of the study that she professed she wanted “to make a difference in someone else’s life.” Through her reflection, “[she] discovered that [she] wanted to visit some of the places to potentially help the natives” (I, June 7, 2011). During the summer of 2011, Lisa travelled to Africa to work with those similar to the characters found in the nonfiction literature. As demonstrated through Allison and Lisa, using literature in the social studies classroom has the potential to develop and strengthen students’ identities as they experience self poems. Through self poems, students can question and clarify their identities in a non-threatening and productive manner.

As the self poem addressed the theme of “Individual Development and Identity,” the world poem, a transaction between what is being read and the world within and outside readers, supports another theme: “Culture.” NCSS believes that “Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity” (Adler et al., 2010).

Brian commented on what he felt was one of the main purposes of reading nonfiction literature in a social studies class: “We are reading it [nonfiction literature] to learn a lot about Africa and the different cultures they have and traditions” (I, May 21, 2010). He modeled this belief in the group interview when discussing John from God Grew Tired of Us:
It is easier to be lazy in America because where he [John] is from [Sudan], they don’t have anything, and they have to work for everything that they have and they can’t afford to be lazy cuz if they were to be lazy, it would cost them: no food for the night, no food for the day, or no home for the night. (GI, April 27, 2010)

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) suggests, “he [the reader] becomes a part of strange environments, or he sees with new emotions the conditions and lives about him” (p. 174). In Brian’s case, he was able to enter Sudan with John knowing that, if one wants to survive, there is no time for laziness while examining the lives about him: “People [Americans] are lazy; people never naturally care or are pushing themselves to do more whereas in Sudan, I think it is a quality they have” (GI, April 27, 2010). Brain also acknowledged the role that nonfiction literature played in gaining cultural perspectives: “We are reading these [nonfiction literature books] to get a perspective of the culture and see how they live and how it compares to our living” (I, May 28, 2010). The comparison between the cultures read and the cultures in which the participants lived was made by each participant as they each labeled Fullerton as “The Bubble.” Rosenblatt (1938/1995) argues that our lives may be “so monotonous, so limited in scope” that it is only through the reading of literature that we can gain an “understanding of the wide range of human capacities and human problems” (p. 39). It was through the reading of nonfiction literature that the participants were able to move beyond the monotony that they felt Fullerton offered. Kevin acknowledged, “Well, we are in the bubble. I really felt that I have learned more about what is out there and stuff especially because I have not really gone anywhere else than here. Here, it is pretty much the same thing every day; it is just
a routine” (I, March 10, 2010). As demonstrated, using nonfiction literature in the social studies classroom can provide opportunities for students to create world poems as they learn about other cultures.

Beyond the self and world poem, the text poem, which is a transaction between the readers’ past readings, listening, and viewings and what they are currently reading, addressed both social studies themes in a comprehensive way. For instance, Kevin, the reader, applied many of his past readings to his current readings in his social studies class. He related the crying in the book *A Long Way Gone* to the crying in *Night*. In *A Long Way Gone*, Kevin underlined the sentence, “I had learned that grown men cry only when they have no other choice” (Beach, 2007, p. 98). He also wrote in the margin “Like *Night*” (A, February 25, 2010). In the book, *Night*, Wiesel (1972/2006) writes his experiences with people crying: “Some were crying. They used whatever strength they had left to cry” (p. 35). In Kevin’s case, comparing other reading experiences to more current ones provided a deepening understanding of his identity and culture. With his identity and culture, he grappled with the idea of men crying. Kevin said,

I was always led to believe that men do not cry, yet these books have men crying which makes me wonder…I mean, I know that if I lost someone I would probably cry, but I think before, I would have tried to hold it back because that was the manly thing to do. Now, I don’t know. (GI, April 27, 2010)

Through the connections between the sorrow, loss, and tears in both books, Kevin questioned his identity in who he thought he was supposed to be and perhaps who he could be. Also through the many references to crying in these two books, Kevin gained
an understanding of the tragedies that existed within these two stories. Using several works of nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom has the potential for students to experience text poems. As a result, they could learn something about themselves, others, and culture.

**Implications for a Means of Supporting Empathy**

The reading of nonfiction literature was instrumental in the development of student’s empathy. Rosenblatt (1938/1995) suggests, “The capacity to sympathize or to identify with the experience of others is the most precious human attribute” (p. 37). While each participant empathized with the characters and unfortunate situations the characters found themselves in, Lisa, through her annotations, demonstrated the most compassion. In the book, *Night*, Lisa relied on sad faces as a way to express sorrow as well as words (i.e. “tears,” “agony,” “corpses,” and “silence” (A, January, 29, 2010). Lisa also expressed her sadness: “It seemed like they talked about death a lot. I think I was really upset during this chapter because I really didn’t want him to give up and leave his dad, and stuff, so I was sad” (I, May 28, 2010). Rosenblatt (1938/1995) reveals, “Any sensitivity to literature, any warm and enjoyable participation in the literary work will necessarily involve the sensuous and emotional responsiveness, the human sympathies of the reader” (p. 51). In this case with Lisa, it was through the reading of *Night* and the tragic situation that Elie, a boy of her age, found himself in that generated emotion within her. Using nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom has the potential to evoke emotions, such as empathy, in the reader.
Implications for a Means of Providing a Format for Teachers to Gain an Understanding of Their Students

As discussed, nonfiction literature provides students a chance to define and transform their identities. These discoveries of student identities can assist teachers with gaining a deeper understanding of who their students are. At the beginning of my study, I knew nothing of the participants other than they were in ninth grade. As a result of my study, which provided the students an opportunity read, annotate, write, and discuss nonfiction literature, I gained insightful information about the students. For instance, Brian, the athlete, was very close with his family while Lisa, the only child, was determined and passionate about life. Kevin was well-rounded as he carried a high grade point average, participated in many sports, and liked to read. And finally, Allison, the believer, reflected on faith whenever possible. With this information on the students, I was able to appreciate why Brian was drawn to Elie’s survival and his father’s death; I was able to understand why Lisa made a commitment to help people; I was able to recognize why Kevin was drawn to Ishmael’s struggles and recovery; and finally, with Allison, I was able to value her beliefs about religion. Just like the authors had stories to tell their readers, the readers had their own stories to tell, and it was through the reading of nonfiction literature that they were able to tell them. The information that I was able to acquire through the course of eighteen weeks could be gained from other teachers and their students.

This understanding of students allows teachers to make better decisions for their students. Rosenblatt (1938/1995) says, “Choices must reflect a sense of the possible
links between these materials and these student’s past experience and present level of emotional maturity” (pp. 41-42). In order to make better choices for students, teachers must get to know them better. For teachers, using nonfiction literature has the potential to provide many opportunities to learn about their students.

**Implications for Myself, the Researcher and the Teacher**

While I spent most of my time discussing the implications for social studies instruction, I do believe that much of what has been discussed can cross other content areas even the content area in which I teach: language arts. Through my analysis of the data, I discovered many things about my own instructional practice and reading materials. First, 80% of what students will be expected to read throughout their lives is nonfiction, yet 80% of what they read in school is fiction (National Geographic, 2003). Also, the new Common Core Standards that will take effect in 2014 emphasize the use of more nonfiction in English classes. Even though there is a steady progression in the use of nonfiction from the elementary years to the secondary years, it is in the high school where most of the reading should be nonfiction. According to the Common Core Standards, by the time students reach their senior year, 70% of what they are reading should be nonfiction (National Governor’s Association, 2010). While I was shocked by these percentages, I was even more taken aback by the fact that 100% of what I teach is fiction. Due to the drastic differences between what will be expected of me in 2014 and what is currently be taught in my classroom, I realized that I need to make significant changes in my reading selections.
Second, due to my interactions with the participants (interviews) and their work (annotations and writings), I realized the power behind nonfiction literature. I never gave much thought about nonfiction texts, and I am not sure whether it was the fact that I did not want to break the traditional mold that had been set for me at Fullerton by past and current teachers with the strict use of traditional, fictional texts, such as *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Scarlett Letter*, or if I was afraid of teaching something new with nonfiction. Whatever the case was for me not incorporating nonfiction literature into my reading repertoire, it no longer exists as a result of this study. From this study, I discovered, quite unexpectedly, a personal engagement and connection unlike any I have ever seen with fiction. In my English classes with fiction, I encounter a wide range of engagement: from those who are really enthralled in what they are reading to those who are completely disengaged. The participants in this social studies class, despite coming from different backgrounds and experiences, were constantly engaged in the book. From the lively discussions they had in class and online to their journal writings and annotations, the participants never appeared bored; instead, they appeared actively engaged. Kevin, perhaps, said it best: “it [nonfiction literature] keeps us interested” (I, May 28, 2010). Personally, as a result of this study, I plan to incorporate more nonfiction into my curriculum. To begin with, I will work with the school librarian in developing a list of possible nonfiction texts for my students. The librarian and I will then present the books to my classes. After the presentation, the students will choose one of the nonfiction books to read outside of class. Students will then discuss and write about the book with other students who read the same book as them. Once they have finished the book, they
will then present their opinions on the book to the class. Through this presentation, I will gain an understanding about the nonfiction texts, and as a result, I will choose one of the books presented to teach and read as an entire class the following year. Ideally, I would like to add at least one piece of nonfiction literature per semester. As department chair at Fullerton, I also plan on sharing my findings to other teachers within my department urging them to reconsider their reading selections.

Finally, I plan to alter my approach with the annotation process. Typically, being an honors sophomore English teacher, one of my major jobs is to prepare students for Advanced Placement (AP) classes for their junior and senior years. With that, I am expected to instill in my students the proper annotation techniques as identified by the College Board. Because of this, I stress to students, when annotating, to look and read more analytically neglecting any personal connections. While I do not plan to abandon my responsibilities regarding the preparation of AP courses, it is my intent to increase the chances for students to personally connect to literature. While my participants were, at first, hesitant about annotating because of their unfamiliarity with the technique, they quickly realized how engaging it can be. This engagement is not seen with my English students because they are trained to look more figuratively within the text and not personally. Having been exposed to the rich and personal connections of the participants through their annotations, I feel that I have been neglecting a very important instructional piece: “to participate in another’s vision—to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make his own life more comprehensible” (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. 7).
In summary, through Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison’s reading experiences, implications existed that are relevant to the roles that nonfiction literature can play in the field of social studies and with educators, in general. The first role, which addressed the use of nonfiction literature with the NCSS themes, discussed how the self, text, and world poems could assist in opportunities to study identity, people, places, and environments, and culture. The second role emphasized how the use of nonfiction literature in a social studies classroom can provide a means to support empathy in students. The third role discussed how the use of nonfiction literature can assist teachers in getting to know and understand their students. And finally, the forth role examined the use of nonfiction literature in this study placed on me, the researcher and the teacher, as a means of reflecting on my current teaching materials and practices.

**Limitations**

A few limitations existed with this study. I, the researcher in this study, am an English teacher at Fullerton where the study took place. While I had no knowledge or interactions with any of the participants prior to the study and did not instruct any of them during the study, my presence in the building may have affected their willingness to participate in the study. The participants may have also agreed to participate in the study knowing that they may have me as a teacher in the future and were looking to please me as a result.

My research may also be limited in scope as it took place in a suburban, high socioeconomic school. Class size, which reached 17 students, may have also played a role in the interaction between the text and others.
Future Research

Despite discovering that the reading of nonfiction literature in a social studies class can provide opportunities for students to connect their lives to the text, to experience other cultures, and to empathize with others, the reading experiences of Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison in their social studies class raise many questions. As a result, several topics for further research can be explored.

Although Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison were exposed to nonfiction in their social studies class, many of their peers were not as they had another teacher who uses only the textbook. What are the differences between these two classes? How are their attitudes towards reading in social studies different or the same? How would each class perform on a standardized test? How would each class compare in their views of themselves, others, and the world? Future research is warranted to conduct a comparative analysis between the two classes: one that teaches with the textbook and the other that instructs with nonfiction literature.

While Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison gained an understanding of themselves and others as well as gained in-depth information regarding Germany during the Holocaust and Africa during war, during an era of high stakes testing, could the reading of nonfiction literature strengthen the student’s understanding of both the material (tests) and themselves (poems)? Future research could explore the possibilities that the reading of nonfiction literature might have in the preparation of standardized testing.

Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison utilized a variety of strategies, such as annotating the text, writing poetry, discussing with their peers both online and in a classroom setting,
and writing in their journals, while reading the nonfiction literature in their social studies. What impact did these strategies have on their reading experience? Further investigation of the use of literacy strategies in the content area of social studies to either confirm or deny the extent in which these modes played a role in the reading experience is needed.

Beyond the participants, the teacher of social studies within this study brings up the question regarding content area teachers: how would teachers benefit from professional development opportunities regarding content area reading strategies? Future research is needed to explore the role that professional development can play on content area teachers and their approaches to reading.

Conclusions

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) rhetorically asks, “But may not literary materials contribute to the student’s images of the world, himself, and the human condition?” (p.7). Based on Brian, Lisa, Kevin, and Allison’s experiences in their social studies class, I would argue that the use of nonfiction literature did in fact provide them opportunities to explore themselves and the world around them while gathering a sense of human compassion.

Through the reading of nonfiction literature, each participant related their personal experiences and backgrounds to their readings. The transactions that took place between the readers and their texts led them to very unique and specific poems which gave them opportunities to learn about other people, countries, and cultures, to think about themselves and to demonstrate empathy. Just as unique as these poems were, it is essential to know that the participants’ readings of these texts today would create
different poems. Rosenblatt (1938/1995) argues that “the same text will have a different meaning and value to us at different times or under different circumstances. Some state of mind, a worry, a temperamental bias, or a contemporary social crisis may make us either especially receptive or especially impervious to what the work offers” (p. 35). This difference in meaning was most noticeable through, Allison, the participant with the strongest conviction of the study, her faith. Allison, from the very beginning of the study, spoke of her faith and how it actually grew as a result of reading the nonfiction literature in her social studies class. Despite her strong stance towards religion during the study, when I spoke with her about her religious beliefs a year after the study, she responded, “I guess I related to religion most. That is what was on my mind the most. My opinions have changed since then. Going to church frustrates me now” (I, June 7, 2011). While Allison did not want to discuss why her feelings towards religion changed, she did reinforce the notion of the give-and-take relationship between the reader and the text that Rosenblatt’s (1938/1995) stresses: “The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine the interfusion with the peculiar contribution of the text” (p. 30). It is this “never-to-be-duplicated combination” that makes both the reader and text important.

Allison spoke of one of the benefits of reading nonfiction literature in her social studies class. According to her, it was the “putting ourselves in their shoes” that resonated with her reading experience. The shoes the participants walked in through the
reading of nonfiction were quite different than those found in Fullerton. They walked in the shoes of a holocaust survivor who lost his mother, father, and sister. They walked in the shoes of child soldier in Africa that not only lost his entire family, but he also became a boy who killed as a means of survival. They walked in the shoes of an African boy who lost loved ones, fought for his country, and most importantly, never lost hope or faith in people. It was through the reading of the nonfiction literature in their social studies class that provided the participants opportunities to experience other people and cultures as they were able to “walk in their shoes.”
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF *NIGHT* BY ELIE WIESEL
Appendix A

Summary of *Night* by Elie Wiesel

The story *Night* begins in the year 1941 in small town called Sighet in Transylvania. Elie Wiesel, the narrator of the story, is only 12 years old. Elie has a loving family consisting of father, a mother, and three sisters. At a young age, he finds great comfort and curiosity with religion. He wants to know more. He studies Kabbalah with Moshe the Beadle, a Jew from Sighet. It is from Moshe the Beadle that he is warned about impending dangers. Most people, including the Wiesel family, dismiss these warnings. Years pass by with Moshe the Beadle’s prophecy all but a distant memory.

The year is 1944; the prophecy becomes a reality, and the German army has moved into Sighet. While the German takeover is imminent, it is slow moving, and at times, deceptively “peaceful and reassuring” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 12). Weeks pass by. And then one day, Jews are savagely deported to the concentration camps in Auschwitz.

The Germans force 80 Jews per cattle wagon. They are warned that if one person is to go missing, they “will all be shot, like dogs” (Wiesel, 2006, p. 24). Hysterics grow throughout the ride with one particular woman insistently crying, “I see fire! I see flames, huge flames!” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 25). With emotions filling the wagon, the Jews try everything to quiet the woman. After all attempts fall short, they result in striking her which silences her temporarily. It is only when the wagon stops at its permanent location, Birkenau, the reception center for Auschwitz, that the Jews acknowledge that the woman’s cries were warranted; there are visible flames and smells of burning flesh.
It is at Birkenau that Elie and his father are separated from his mother and sisters. Elie only realizes later that he will never see his mother and sisters again. Realizing the importance of staying together, Elie and his father lie about their ages. As they walk towards the camp, Elie is haunted by the vision of babies thrown into a fire. He cannot help but think of his mother and sisters. Elie and his father are sent with other male Jews to shave, shower, and dress in work clothes. Upon entering Auschwitz, Elie becomes only a number: A-7713.

Within a few weeks, Elie and his father are moved to Buna. It is here that they endure multiple beatings. One such beating of his father, Elie recalls, “He [German soldier] began beating him with an iron bar. At first, my father simply doubled over under the blows, but then he seemed to break in two like an old tree struck by lightning” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 54). Beatings like these and even killings are all too common for Elie to personally witness or experience. A public display of hatred and evil for one small child makes Elie question a faith that he had recently had so much passion for. A small child, who is accused of possessing firearms, has a noose placed around his neck. With a thousand onlookers forced to watch the death of a child, the child does not die instantly for he weighs too little; instead, he remains hanging there for more than half an hour lingering between life and death. At this moment, an onlooker behind Elie asks, “For God’s sake, where is God?” and Elie replies, “Where He is? This is where—hanging there from this gallows…” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 65).

Elie and his father continued to show their strength and determination as they trekked through the blistery conditions to Buchenwald. With Elie growing increasingly
tired, he stops wanting to rest. His father encourages him to keep moving: “It’s
dangerous to fall asleep in snow. One falls asleep forever. Come, my son, come…Get
up” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 88). Despite the inspiring words, his father begins to lose
strength, and upon arrival to Buchenwald, he grows quite ill. Even though Elie knows
depth down that his father is dying and is instructed
by others to leave his side, he continues to sit with him and even gives him his ration of
food. It is only days later that his father dies, and to Elie’s surprise he does not cry: “I did
not weep, and it pained me that I could not weep. But I was out of tears” (Wiesel,

After his father’s death in January of 1945, he is transferred to a children’s block
for three months. He remained there until April 11 when the help that Elie had dreamed
of finally arrives, and while Elie is placed in a hospital to recuperate, he looks in the
mirror for the first time since this ordeal occurred. Elie explains his reflection, “From the
depths of the mirror, a corpse was contemplating me. The look in his eyes as he gazed at
me has never left me” (Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 115).
APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF A LONG WAY GONE:

MEMOIRS OF A BOY SOLDIER BY ISHMAEL BEAH
Appendix B

Summary of A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier by Ishmael Beah

In A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier, Ishmael Beah provides a raw yet mesmerizing account of life for a thirteen-year-old in Sierra Leone, on the west coast of Africa in 1993. While most thirteen-year-old boys in America are concerned with sports, friends, and video games, Ishmael faces many other concerns; the biggest is war.

Ishmael and his friends, who share a passion for American hip-hop, decide to showcase their singing and dancing talents in a nearby town at a talent show. Walking back to their village, they are filled with excitement and energy from their performances. Little do they know that the music that filled their hearts this day would for most of them, never be experienced again.

Entering a neighborhood town, the boys are notified that their village, which holds their families has been brutally attacked by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and are now headed in their direction. Being young men, Ishmael and his friends are even in greater jeopardy because both the rebels and the Sierra Leone Armed Forces, the government army, are known to force boys to join them. Ultimately, they have no choice. If the boys choose resistance to the armed forces, they are faced with death.

With death as an extreme possibility, the boys flee into the forest with the families they left behind not far from their minds. While running, they encounter grotesque scenes of brutality. Ishmael instantly realizes the inevitable consequences of war when he approaches a man who he believes to be just sitting on his porch: “On one verandah we saw an old man sitting in a chair as if asleep. There was a bucket in his forehead, and
underneath the stoop lay the bodies of two men whose genitals, limbs, and hands had been chopped off by a machete that was on the ground next to their piled body parts” (Beah, 2007, p. 27).

Through the boys struggle to survive, they are faced with exhaustion and starvation. Finding little time to sleep and little to eat, the boys find hope from a villager who notifies him that his family is well in a nearby village. Just as Ishmael and his friends approach the village, they are welcomed with exploding gunshots and bellowing screams. The rebels reach the village first.

The captured village is painted in red and black. Huts are burnt to the ground and bodies are riddled with bullets. The soil of the town is stained a crimson red from the overflowing of blood. While Ishmael runs from body to body, searching for familiar bodies, he quickly realizes that there is no chance that his family has survived. Ishmael is haunted by these visions of the village: "In my mind's eye I would see sparks of flame, flashes of scenes I had witnessed, and the agonizing voices of children and women would come alive in my head. I cried quietly while my head beat like the clapper of a bell” (Beah, 2007, p. 103).

With the families lost, the boys find what they believe to be a safe haven in the government. Lieutenant Jabati announces that revenge is near. With that, he hands each boy, ranging in age from 7 to 17, an AK-47, and their training as soldiers begins.

Ishmael is a quick learner with the gun, and with flooded images of his lost family, he begins his own killing spree resembling that of the rebels: “Whenever I looked at rebels during raids, I got angrier, because they looked liked the rebels playing cards in
the ruins of the village where I had lost my family. So, when the lieutenant gave orders, I shot as many as I could, but I didn’t feel better” (Beah, 2007, p. 122).

Over the next two years, Ishmael, alongside the other boys who survived, spend their time sniffing brown brown (cocaine mixed with gunpowder) and watching Rambo movies for slaughter inspiration. The drugs, the boys, and the ammunition became all Ishmael knows: "My squad was my family, my gun was my provider and protector, and my rule was to kill or be killed” (Beah, 2007, p. 126).

One day, the help that Ishmael desperately waited for two years ago comes. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) takes the boys to a rehabilitation center near the capital of Sierra Leone. Under the influence of drugs and violence, the boys rebel the help they so desperately sought years ago.

Over the course of several months of solitary confinement, Ishmael makes progress and is reunited with a long, lost uncle where he lives upon his departure for the United States. Being a long way from home, he finds relief in an unknown land, and while his memory will not allow him to forget the atrocities that he both encountered and took part in, he will never be a soldier again.
APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF GOD GREW TIRED OF US

BY JOHN BUL DAU AND MICHAEL S. SWEENEY
Appendix C

Summary of *God Grew Tired of Us* by John Bul Dau and Michael S. Sweeney

With the assistance of Michael S. Sweeney, John Bul Dau, a very tall and charming, Sudanese, young man, describes his experience as one of the 25,000 “Lost Boys.” When the Sudanese army, as a part of Sudan’s 20-year civil war, attacks John’s village in a nighttime raid, he does what any 13 years old boy would do, he runs.

While on the run, John never loses sight of his family and faith. Despite these two powerful forces in John’s life, he questions God during his quest for food and his family: “I thought about my family, and I prayed to God. ‘Where are you?’ I asked God. ‘In my village, they said you are everywhere. If you can hear me, please find me something to eat. And please let me find my mother and father’” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 52). John’s prayers were answered as he later finds food and is reunited with his mother and father many years later in America.

John, alongside other boys (ages 3 to 13), travel for five years, through Sudan to Ethiopia to Kenya, fighting off famine, disease, wild animals, and rebel soldiers. John, being one of the oldest boys, quickly becomes the father-figure. He doctors them when they are ill, he cooks for them when they are hunger, he disciplines them when they act inappropriately, and he teaches them the Dinka traditions through storytelling and re-enactments. While not all survive, John, along with 3,800 other boys, miraculously cross into the United Nation’s refugee camp in Kakuma, Kenya. Here, John, as well as some of his close friends, is selected to relocate to the United States.
While in the United States, John, who is placed in Syracuse, New York, experiences many new concepts such as electricity, running water, and grocery stores. All of these novelties create curiosities and questions about the American culture. One such question comes to John while he is in the bathroom at LaGuardia airport attempting to wash his hands. He looks for handles or anything that resembles them to turn the water on. After finding nothing, he begins to touch everything on the sink in hopes to turn the water on. Shockingly for John, as he moves his hand under the sink, the water shoots out. John is perplexed by this and later thinks, “This is a magic country, I thought, and white people—that’s how I thought of Americans—are so cunning. They make things work for them. I wondered if that made it tempting to be lazy” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 181).

While John is startled by so many things in the American culture, his biggest shock comes with the iconic status that is placed on Santa Claus and the gift giving of Christmas. John explains, “it [Christmas] seems greedy. Americans ask each other what they want for Christmas. That doesn’t seem to be in harmony with the spirit of free gifts we get but do not deserve from God—such as the gift of his son, Jesus” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 211).

The experiences, like the tradition of Christmas in America, greatly contrast those John experienced as a part of the Dinka tribe in his native homeland. He never attended a formal school; he tended cattle and broke up cattle dung as a chore and played with clay cows and hung out by his “special tree” for fun. Despite not having the luxuries that he found in America, John loves his homeland and childhood: “It was an ideal childhood. I would not trade our homeland for any other place on Earth” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 33).
It is John’s deep love and devotion to his family, friends, and culture that motivates him to work two and three jobs while attending college in America. With the money that he makes, he sends to his homeland in hopes of making it a better place. It is not only Sudan that he hopes to help flourish, but it is also his new homeland, America: “One people, sharing one circle of hope. That is my prayer not only for the scattered children of southern Sudan but also for the extended family I hope to make bloom, the latest in a long line of immigrants, in this magnificent land of second chances” (Bul Dau, 2007, p. 281).
APPENDIX D

SAMPLE PARTICIPANT LETTER
Appendix D

Sample Participant Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Shannon Beach, and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum Studies at Kent State University. I would like to conduct research for my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to examine how students experience reading in a social studies classroom through the use of nonfiction texts.

For this study, I will collaborate with Mr. Matt Brown, your child’s world history teacher. I would like your child to take part in this project. If you decide to have your child participate, he/she may be asked to participate in interviews. These interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Your child will be given pseudonyms to protect his/her identity. I will also observe several classes in which your child engages in nonfiction texts. Finally, I will obtain written documents and artifacts in the form of online postings, written reflections, and textual markings.

Your child’s participation in this research project is completely voluntarily and will not affect his/her classroom grade in any way. If, at any time, your child chooses not to participate, you or your child may consult me, and I will remove him/her from the research study.

If you would like to know more about this research project, please feel free to contact me at 440-247-2072 ext. 4469 or Shannon.beach@chagrinschools.org. You may also contact one of my advisors: Dr. Alicia Crowe at 330.672.2580 or acrowe@kent.edu or Dr. Denise Morgan at 330.672.2850 or dmorgan2@kent.edu. This project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have any questions about the rules of research, please contact Dr. John L. West at the division of Research and Graduate Studies at 330.672.2851.

You will receive a copy of this consent form.

Thank you very much for your support with this research project.

Sincerely,
Shannon Beach, Doctoral Candidate
APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT’S AUDIO CONSENT FORM
Appendix E

Participant’s Audio Consent Form

Exploring Literacy Experiences in a Social Studies Classroom

AUDIO AND WORK CONSENT STATEMENT

I agree to allow Shannon Beach to use my child’s comments and course work in her study. I understand that my child’s name will not be used. The information gathered from the work samples, interviews, and observations may be used as a part of the dissertation as well as may be used to present at professional conferences, educational meetings, or published in professional journals.

By signing below, I give consent for my child’s materials to be used.

Child’s Name (please print) ______________________________________________

Parent/Guardian’s Name (please print) _____________________________________

Parent/Guardian’s Signature ______________________________________________

Date ___________________________
APPENDIX F

TEACHER MEETING HANDOUT
Appendix F

Teacher Meeting Handout

Dissertation Goals:
- To determine how the use of nonfiction promotes literary experiences in a social studies classroom
- To identify how past reading and social experiences influence reading and historical experiences with nonfiction in a social studies class

Dissertation Questions:
- How do students transact with the text through the reading of nonfiction in a social studies classroom?
- How does the reading of nonfiction in a social studies classroom enable students to understand themselves and society?

What I will supply:
- Notebooks for journaling
- Copies of chapter(s) for annotation
- Instructions on how to annotate
- Samples of annotations
- Questions for journals/online postings

What I need from you:
- Class roster
- Seating chart
- A list of days per week to conduct observations and interviews

<table>
<thead>
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<th>WHEN:</th>
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<td>(class/group work/discussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview students</td>
<td>(in-class reading)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EACH BOOK:</th>
<th>WHEN:</th>
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</tr>
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<td>Annotated text</td>
<td>When convenient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Journal Writings</td>
<td>When convenient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

JOURNAL ENTRY #1: NIGHT
Appendix G

Journal Entry #1: Night

1. Identify a moment in the book that captured your attention the most.

2. Explain why it meant so much to you. How did it make you feel?

3. What if, anything did it remind you of?
APPENDIX H

JOURNAL ENTRY #2: A LONG WAY GONE: MEMOIR OF A BOY SOLDIER
Appendix H

Journal Entry #2: *A Long Way Gone: Memoir of a Boy Soldier*

Choose one topic to write a journal entry about.

1. **Chapter 1:** Ishmael speaks about the first time that he saw a grownup cry on page 12. When do you recall the first time that you saw a grownup cry? What were the circumstances behind this event? What did you do as a result of the crying? Did you learn anything from this experience? How does this relate to the experience of Ishmael?

2. **Chapter 2:** Memories I sometimes wish I could wash away, even though I am aware that they are an important part of what my life is; who I am now” (19). In this quote, Ishmael reflects on some painful memories in his life, but he realizes that these memories have shaped him as a person. Speak of a painful memory that when you look back on it, it has truly shaped who you are today. Describe this memory and experience and how it has impacted you today.

3. **Chapter 2:** “These days I live in three worlds: my dreams, and the experiences of my new life, which trigger memories from the past” (20). Write about your three worlds: Dreams, Experiences, and Memories of the past.
APPENDIX I

JOURNAL ENTRY #3: A LONG WAY GONE: MEMOIR OF A BOY SOLDIER
Appendix I

Journal Entry #3: A Long Way Gone: Memoir of a Boy Soldier

1. What was your first impression upon reading this memoir? In what ways did your first impression about the book change, as you continued to read the story? Why did it change? If your first impressions did not change, why is this the case?

2. What made reading this memoir an unusual, engaging, and sometimes challenging experience?
APPENDIX J

JOURNAL ENTRY #4: A LONG WAY GONE: MEMOIR OF A BOY SOLDIER
Appendix J

Journal Entry #4: A Long Way Gone: Memoir of a Boy Soldier

Choose one of the following to write about:

1. Ishmael reflected on the words of his father: “If you are alive, there is hope for a better day and something good to happen. If there is nothing good left in the destiny of a person, he or she will die” as ones he lived by.

   Do you have words that you live by? If so, please identify those words and the speaker of them. Also, explain a time in which these words were used in your life.

2. Ishmael spent a great deal of time alone. He said, “The most difficult part of being in the forest was the loneliness. It became unbearable each day. On the thing about being lonesome is that you think too much, especially when there isn’t much else you can do” (52).

   Was there ever a time where you spent so much time alone that you thought too much? If so, please describe the situation and the thoughts that you encountered as a result of the situation.

3. Ishmael makes many references to rap music, and it is this music that truly moves and impacts his life. What music do you rely on during times of difficulty? Why is it meaningful to you? Please provide specific lines of songs if remembered.
APPENDIX K

JOURNAL ENTRY #5: A LONG WAY GONE: MEMOIR OF A BOY SOLDIER
Appendix K

Journal Entry #5: A Long Way Gone: Memoir of a Boy Soldier

Please choose one of the following prompts:

1. In the short "New York City, 1998" prologue that begins the memoir, Ishmael's friend find some things about his past to be "cool." If they had read this book, do you think they would still feel that way? Why or why not? How much does what has happened in our pasts affect the here and now? What are you bringing with you to high school? What will you leave behind? Based on Ishmael’s experience, what is your capacity to make changes in who you are and what direction will you take?

2. From the cold temperatures to the busy city life to having a room to himself for the first time to the extravagant foods, Ishmael goes into great detail about his 1st experience in America in chapter 20. Do you have an experience similar to Ishmael’s experience in New York City in which you found yourself as an outsider confused with the things around you? If so, please describe this experience. Also, how is it similar and different to that of Ishmael’s experience? Finally, what did you learn most from this experience?
APPENDIX L

JOURNAL WRITING #6: *GOD GREW TIRED OF US*
Appendix L

Journal Writing #6: *God Grew Tired of Us*

Write a double-entry journal on your first reading of *God Grew Tired of Us*. A double-entry journal is where on one side of your paper, you copy a passage that has particular significance to you. Please provide the page number from which the passage came from. On the other side, you react to the passage. Your may organize your entry like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Reactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Copy your passage here word for word and provide the page number.</em></td>
<td><em>Write your feelings and reactions to your passage, and explain why you picked this particular passage.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX M

JOURNAL WRITING #7: GOD GREW TIRED OF US
Appendix M

Journal Writing #7: God Grew Tired of Us

What have you learned about Dinka culture? What markers are representative of Dinka culture? Of American culture? What values do the Lost Boys hold? How do those values compare with your own?
APPENDIX N

JOURNAL WRITING #8: GOD GREW TIRED OF US
Appendix N

Journal Writing #8: *God Grew Tired of Us*

Choose one of the following prompts to write about:

1. “If someone told me a story about the United Nations or a foreign country or the djellabas, I tended to accept it” (110).

   Have you ever been a told a story about a certain part of the world or group of people and accepted it as a truth? If so, please explain. Also, did you ever read something or witness first-hand through traveling about this place or these people that either verified or denied your original impression? Please discuss.

2. Waiting in line to go to the library to starting 1st grade at the age of 18, education for John is quite different than your experiences with education.

   What did you find most shocking about his educational experiences? What did you gain with your own educational experiences in reading about John’s experience with education?

3. “It’s easy to be lazy in America” (167). One of the Dinka elders made this comment to the refugees prior to them leaving for America. Later on at the airport at LaGuardia, John was stunned by the automatic sinks in the bathroom. He commented, “They [Americans] make things easy for themselves; they make things work for them, I wondered if that made it tempting to be lazy” (181).

   Do you agree or disagree with this statement that it is easy to be lazy in America? Speak of personal experiences whether in school or outside of school to support your opinion.
APPENDIX O

JOURNAL WRITING #9: GOD GREW TIRED OF US
Appendix O

Journal Writing #9: *God Grew Tired of Us*

Choose one of the following prompts to write about:

1. What sense of responsibility do the Lost Boys feel toward each other and toward their families and friends still in Africa? In what ways are they trying to improve their own lives and those of their families and friends? Based on what you read in this story, what can you do or want to do to improve or make a difference in your own community or other communities?

2. What questions and fears do the Lost Boys have about life in the U.S.? What questions and fears would you have if you were moving to a new country? Or if you have been to another country, please share a story in which you experienced another culture. What did this experience teach you about yourself and/or other people/other cultures?
APPENDIX P

ONLINE POSTING #1: A LONG WAY GONE: MEMOIR OF A BOY SOLDIER
Online Posting #1: *A Long Way Gone: Memoir of a Boy Soldier*

Question 1: Ishmael’s memoir is a testament to hope, perseverance, and spirit. What universal truths does Ishmael teach us about surviving loss and overcoming isolation? What does he teach us about our own humanity? How can we take his lessons and apply them – as individuals, in our own community, and in the world “out there”?

Question 2: In what ways did Ishmael's harrowing tale connect with you in your everyday life? How does reading a story like his make the challenges you face more manageable? What actions or personality traits do you find in his story that you would attribute to his ability to overcome the challenges he faced? How might you develop similar traits or skills to help you through difficult times you face?

Question 3: “My squad was my family, my gun was my provider and protector, and my rule was to kill or be killed. . . . and it seemed as if my heart had frozen” (p. 126). Discuss the ways in which the idea of “family” is configured, re-configured, challenged, and re-affirmed in this book. Also, how are the experiences with or memories of his family and the tragedies of his family similar and/or different than those that you have faced with your family?
APPENDIX Q

ONLINE POSTING #2: GOD GREW TIRED OF US
Appendix Q

Online Posting #2: *God Grew Tired of Us*

A benefit of this memoir lies in the opportunity to view your own (American) culture through the eyes of a Dinka. What aspects of our culture, which may or may not take for granted, are highlighted by this different perspective? What differences do you see between the Dinka culture and the American culture? What attributes of the Dinka culture do you admire? Question?

Compare and contrast the “American Dream” with the Sudanese-American Dream.” How do we judge success and how does this differ from Sudanese-Americans? Use specific references from the novel, the film, and your life.
APPENDIX R

WIESEL’S EXCERPT FOR POEM
NEVER SHALL I FORGET that night, the first night in camp, that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed.

Never shall I forget that smoke.
Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky.
Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.
Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.
Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes.
Never shall I forget those things, even were I condemned to live as long as God himself.
Never.

(Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 34)
APPENDIX S

STUDENT HANDOUT: “NEVER” POEM OVER THE BOOK, NIGHT
Appendix S

Student Handout: “Never” Poem over the Book, Night

NEVER SHALL I FORGET _________________________

Never shall I forget _________________________

Never shall I forget _________________________

Never shall I forget _________________________

Never shall I forget _________________________

Never shall I forget _________________________

Never shall I forget _________________________

Never shall I forget _________________________

Never.

(adapted from Wiesel, 1972/2006, p. 34)
Appendix T

Annotation Handout

For the following chapter of *Night*, please take time to do one or more of the following things:
- Circle, underline, highlight or use post-it notes to identify important ideas and explain their significance.
- Feel free to use codes or symbols to reflect thoughts or feelings.

What should I mark?
- First reactions and associations to the page
- Feelings and/or perceptions
- Visual images
- Questions
- Relation to other readings or experiences: making connections
- Literary associations (similes, metaphors, etc.)

There is NO wrong way to do this other than just not doing it.
Please see the back of this sheet for my example.
APPENDIX U

EXAMPLE OF ANNOTATION
Appendix U

Example of Annotation

Behind me, an old man fell to the ground. Nearby, an SS man replaced his revolver in its holster.

My hand tightened its grip on my father. All I could think of was not to lose him. Not to remain alone.

The SS officers gave the order.

“Form ranks of fives!”

There was a tumult. It was imperative to stay together.

“Hey, kid, how old are you?”

The man interrogating me was an inmate. I could not see his face, but his voice was weary and warm.

“Fifteen.”

“No. You’re eighteen.”

“But I’m not,” I said. “I’m fifteen.”

“Fool. Listen to what I say.”

Then he asked my father, who answered:

“I’m fifty.”


Do you hear? Eighteen and forty.”

He disappeared into the darkness. Another inmate appeared, unleashing a stream of invectives:

“Sons of bitches, why have you come here? Tell me, why?” Someone dared to reply:

“What do you think? That we came here of our own free will?

That we asked to come here?”

The other seemed ready to kill him:

“Shut up, you moron, or I’ll tear you to pieces! You should have hanged yourselves rather than come here. Didn’t you know what was in store for you here in Auschwitz? You didn’t know? In 1944?”

True. We didn’t know. Nobody had told us. He couldn’t believe his ears. His tone became even harsher:

“Over there. Do you see the chimney over there? Do you see
APPENDIX V

OBSERVATIONAL CHECKLIST: MARCH 5, 2010
## Appendix V

### Observational Checklist: March 5, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Things to Observe</th>
<th>Observational Notes</th>
<th>My own Reaction &amp; Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Setting:</strong> What is the physical environment like? What is the context? What kinds of behavior is the setting designed for? How is space allocated? What objects, resources, technologies are in the setting?</td>
<td>The desks are not in the traditional rows. Instead, they are shaped in a U formation. The setting of the room is more conducive for discussions; it is less rigid. There are two rather large bookshelves that are filled with classroom sets of books as well as other books. There are three computers placed throughout the room. One is for the LCD projector/SmartBoard, one is for the teacher, and the other one is for student use.</td>
<td>I wonder how often students use the books that are not being read in class. Are there students who check those books out? Also, what types of activities does the teacher have the students do on the computer (current events, research)? How did the teacher decide on whom was sitting where? It is not in alphabetical order, so I wonder if there was a thought process behind the placement of students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The participants:</strong> Describe who is in the scene, and their roles. What brings these people together? Who is allowed here? Who is not here and who is expected to be here? What are the relevant characteristics of the participants?</td>
<td>The participants were all ninth grade students. They are all a part of the World History class. There are some dominant talkers (Kevin in particular participates a lot).</td>
<td>While the participants are relatively the same age, there is a disparity between the levels of maturity that exists between the participants. It does not seem to be based on gender, so I wonder why some participants seem more mature and engaged than others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities and Interactions:</strong> What is going on? Is there a definable sequence of activities? How do the people interact with the activity and with one another? How are people and activities connected or interrelated? What norms or rules structure the activities and interactions? When did the activity begin? End? Is it a typical activity, or unusual?</td>
<td>A big part of today’s lesson was discussion over the book, <em>A Long Way Gone</em>. While the whole class seemed involved in this discussion, a few students did not talk more than others (Brian, Kevin, Lisa). The discussion was very informal and free from structure and rules. Students talked openly without raising their hands. While discussions happen frequently in this class, the length of this discussion was not typical; it took the entire period.</td>
<td>It really seemed as if the students were enjoying their discussion. It also appeared as if they were use to informal structure of the class discussions. While they entire class seemed engaged, only a handful of students participated verbally. I wonder what the teacher could have done differently to ensure more participation. Perhaps, writing responses down before a class discussion or discussing in small groups first?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conversation:</strong> What is the content of conversation? Who speaks to whom? Who listens? Quote directly, paraphrase, and summarize conversations. Note silences and nonverbal</td>
<td>Teacher: Is Ishmaels a good or bad person? <strong>Student 1:</strong> He is just a person. People are not just good or evil. He is kind of good because once he is reformed.</td>
<td>This was by far the best discussion. It generated the most discussion by varied students. With the teacher playing the devil advocate, the students reacted to the text intensely.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
behavior that add meaning to the exchange.

Teacher: What about when he shoots people in the feet to torture them?
Student 1: After that, Mr. Brown, he….
Teacher: Is he any different than the Nazis? We condemn the Nazis but not him.
Teacher: Are there Nazis that felt remorse? Some Nazis were forced into as Ishmaels was.
Kevin: It was all about survival.
Lisa: He’s (Ishmael) good. Nazis are older.
Teacher: Age 13: so you think they should know the difference between right and wrong?
Class: yes
Teacher: He first tortures them and looks them straight in the eye and executes them.
Teacher: Why does he kill them?
Teacher: So they would stop crying.
Student 1: It is apparent you don’t like him (Ishmael)?
Student 1: I think that if your life is destroyed like that—you have someone who will acre for you (army), what would you do? When your life is that messed up, you do all sorts of things. He finally had a place to live.
Teacher: Didn’t he enjoy what he was doing (killing)? He smiled.
Brian: U.S. soldiers in Iraq: they volunteer, they are shooting people. How is that any different?
Mike: Well, the soldiers in Iraq—it’s their job and they do it out of self-preservation.
Student 1: Yes, that it is the way war is.
Teacher: Is he any better than the rebels?
Teacher: In Night, the Nazis would throw babies in the air and shoot them. Why is Ishmael any different? Better?
Teacher: We condemn the

Ask a group interview question: do kids/teenagers get a “he’s/she’s just a kid” pass? (Make reference to Ishmael). When does this pass no longer work?
Nazis but is it any different?

**Teacher:** Does Ishmael have a moral obligation to do the right thing?

**Student 1:** “he’s just a kid”

**Student 2:** I don’t disagree that he was wrong, but he did realize what he did; he felt guilt and he changed.

**Teacher:** Esther kept saying: “It’s not your fault.”

**Lisa:** The whole point of the story is that he felt remorse. He wrote the book to show his remorse.

**Student 3:** Do you think he is bad person.

**Teacher:** The book made a lot of money. If he was truly remorseful then wouldn’t the proceeds go to the children of Sierra Leone? Don’t tell me you feel bad then go and make a profit.

**Teacher:** I am the devil’s advocate. That is what this is called?

**Student 1:** If someone killed your family, wouldn’t you hate them?

**Teacher:** That question is a good one. He feels like the rebels have taken everything from him—he feels they need to pay.

**Teacher:** Revenge quote (199): Revenge never stops. He realizes it after the fact.

**Teacher:** Can Ishmael or kid soldiers ever be rehabilitated?

**Teacher:** Last part about Ishmael

**Teacher:** Reality of his new life when he goes to NYC: TV, microwave, temperature…) things we take for granted

**Teacher:** Cultures are different—doesn’t make it wrong; it’s just different.

**Teacher:** He did a lot of bad things—he shouldn’t get a free pass.

**Student 4:** A lot of people—
good person blames actions on drugs—he let people control him and he wanted to kill those people.

**Lisa:** How can we condemn him?

**Kevin:** I thought he was like Hitler. He let his sergeant …

Teacher made 5 different book references in one period.

Ask Kevin about the Hitler comparison with Ishmael?

**Subtle Factors:**
--Informal and unplanned activities
--Symbolic and connotative meanings of words
--Nonverbal communication such as dress and physical space
--Unobtrusive measures such as physical clues
--“What does not happen?” (Paxton, 1990, p. 235)

Nonverbal communication was visible through this discussion as it was very apparent that some of the students were angry at the teacher’s comments. It was not until the teacher told them that he was playing devil’s advocate, that their faces became more relaxed.

What did not happen was that the discussion never died. It was only when the bell rang, terminating the class that the discussion was over. The class was very active and loud in the discussion.

I though the teacher played off the nonverbal gestures nicely as he constantly “poked the bear” forcing them think of the character’s actions differently—from a different perspective.
Appendix W

Data Collection Charts

How do students interact or “transact” with the text and each other through the reading of nonfiction in a social studies classroom?

They compare and contrast experiences in the book to their own and their classmates by drawing on personal experiences that they have had with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>Sports and Academics</th>
<th>Family and Religion</th>
<th>Multi-media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Brian)</td>
<td><strong>Sports</strong>: Writing about favorite quotes after reading <em>Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</em>: “First of all, Coach Natalie will probably go down as one of my favorite coaches ever. He is really inspiration. He is a different type of guy that you have to adapt to. He has different quotes. I don’t know, I just thought that was a good one (“opportunities are like a sunrise if you wait too long you’ll miss it”). It kind of stuck with me, and I feel like if you remember that, it will in life, overall, because he would not only talk about football and if we were doing something wrong, but he would compare it to life and how you have to… I don’t know, he taught us a lot of lessons about life in general, I don’t know, I just feel like that quote will always stick. I thought it was a good quote” (I2, p. 4).</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>BOOK</strong>: It [<em>Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</em>] reminded me of <em>Night</em> because of the harshness of the rebels (J2/19).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
well. It meant so much to me because I play sports and run a lot but get tired after about 30 minutes. I exert my energy 100% but I am in good condition and I feel dead after a little bit. I can’t even imagine how it must have felt to be the, especially since they were skinny and almost dying as it was. It reminds me of conditioning for sports. After awhile of exerting myself, my legs burn very bad and I can’t imagine how it would have felt to do it that all night long (J2/4).

**Mike:** Didn’t he enjoy what he was doing (killing)? He smiled.

**Bradley:** U.S. soldiers in Iraq: they volunteer, they are shooting people. How is that any different?

**Educational:** “I think he was just providing a primary source of what they experienced. Sorta survival. It [Night] kind of reminded me, I heard Mr. P say this when we were in 8th grade when we went to the holocaust museum in Washington, DC, it was one that no one should have to see but everybody should. I think that he was just providing another resource that people should read to get the feeling of what he had to experience and some of those people had to experience” (GI, p. 3).

**Sports:** “Just like trying to overcome what they have experienced is kind of like what I have had to go through the last five months. I broke my leg in football in October, so I

**Books:** “In a lot of these, they weren’t things that I experienced myself, so I think I just come up with stuff from other books as my own experiences and just kind of take it from there, and that is why I make connections to other books, probably. Cuz it is like another primary source, I guess. I think that is why I do that” (I2, p. 3).

**Music:** “I liked that Ishmael related to hip hop music and dance… I kind of like that. It’s just a similar style that I listen to” (I2, p. 2).

**Books:** The first thought that came to my mind when reading this book was that it is rather similar to Rabbit-Proof Fence. From the beginning, you have to have some sympathy for the runaways.
have been very limited, and on occasion, I think about that too much like Ishmael did. I have flashbacks...you shake a little and you try to forget about that. It was more physical than emotional. It’s kind of difficult to relate to. How he had to go through rehabilitation is what I am kind of going through now, but...and how he got better motivated me” (I2, p. 3).

The experience is similar situation when escaping as the aboriginal (half-casters) did in Rabbit-Proof Fence. You have to feel worse and worse as the boys’ negative experiences add up (J2/19).

Books: “Silence is unbearable.” He [Ishmael] goes crazy “It’s kind of like Night with the suffering” (OB3).

Family: “I guess I just don’t want to believe that people do things on purpose for evil, I guess. My dad always says that half the world wakes up to screw the other half of the world, and I don’t want to think like that. I know that it is probably true, but I just don’t want to think that way. They [mom and dad] are both a little cynical, so maybe that’s way I try not to be as cynical as them. I don’t know I feel like to have a good story; you need to find the happiness in it or else there is really no point in reading the story. And I felt that all three of the books ended up pretty well for all of them” (I2, pp. 4-5).

Family (games): Double Entry Journal Passage- When I wasn’t tending cattle or breaking up cattle dung, I played a lot as a child with toy cows made out of clay or in groups with the other children. One of my favorite games was called alueth, in which we pretended a lion captured Dinka boys and turned

Music: Comparing to the rap music in Ishmael’s life: The type of music that I rely on is probably easy listening or pop music. This music is so meaningful to me because a lot of these types of music talks about teenage problems. A lot of songs like songs by Jason Mraz or John Mayer. An example might be, “No Such Thing” by John Mayer. In the song, there’s a line that goes, “Welcome to the real world she said to me condescendingly, take a seat, take your life, plot it out in black and white.” This sort of relates to my life and how my parents want me to figure out what I want to be (J3/1).

Book: I think the thing that I found most shocking about John’s educational experiences is his lack of materials. He talks about writing in the dirt because they do not have chalk. It made me think of Three Cups of Tea and how they talked about the lack of materials in that story even though it wasn’t as drastic as I feel Sudan was (J4/14).
them into lions. We picked one boy to be a lion, and he stood at one end of a field near his base. The other boys stood at the other end” (32).

Response-The first time I read this passage it made me smile. I think I chuckled a little to myself too. I was so happy after reading this passage because it was finally something that I could really relate to. I remember being little and playing sharks and minos, which is exactly like alueth. It’s weird to think thousands of miles away kids were playing the same game. (J3/15)

Family (Relating to when Ishmael first saw a grown-up cry): I don’t remember the first time I saw a grown up cry, but I remember the first time that I saw my grandma cry and it has always stuck with me. My mom and I had went to visit my grandma to help her clean her home. She leaves in a small white house that was stuck in the 1960s. We were sitting in the kitchen at her old-dated table, when all of a sudden my grandma took off her glasses and my mother asked, “your father; he is losing it, Marge. He is truly losing it. He thinks that I am stealing from him. He stopped remembering things and his yell Oh” my grandmother said in between sobs. I had a never heard such a piercing sound as my
grandma’s cries. I was so struck by the whole thing I couldn’t help but just sit there without knowing what to do. From the experience, I had learned how hard it was for my grandma to handle my grandpa’s retirement and to consistently have him around. This relates to the experience that Ishmael because both my grandma and the guy were crying over the loved ones (I2/11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>Sports and Academics</th>
<th>Family and Religion</th>
<th>Multi-Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Allison)</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Religion:</strong> “Yea, with Ishmael like he wasn’t very religious if I remember correctly, so maybe he would have been stronger if he did have religion. Umm, I just think how it would have been different if they were more in touch with faith. It’s that kind of stuff. In <em>God Grew Tired of Us</em>, I thought, oh, that’s cool. He liked converted Catholic or Christianity, and they thought this was cool because God loves you unconditionally and stuff, and I’m like yea” (I2, p. 4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How do students interact or “transact” with the text and each other through the reading of nonfiction in a social studies classroom?

They actively become a part of the story by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>Supporting/encouraging the character in the story or offering solutions to acts made by the characters that they did not support</th>
<th>Questioning the characters’ actions</th>
<th>Placing themselves in the story (i.e. evoking emotion with the character)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Brian)</td>
<td>- “I admired Elie. This is a stupid reason, but to say that you survived the holocaust would be admirable, and the fact that it is one of the most horrific things that has ever happened, and you were able to stick through it, and not really do anything bad and take the beatings and harsh treatments, and watch your father die before your eyes, and then have a life after it” (GI, p. 7).</td>
<td>- “We can read what he did and judge him saying he did awful things, and the awful things aren’t going to change, but none of us actually know what it is like to be in his situation therefore we can’t judge” (OP1). “I am sure that a lot of people may appear to be bad kids and not do right things, but we may not know what goes on in their home life or life outside of school” (I2, p. 2). - “Oh yea, I underlined this and wrote a comment about it. It was something that Elie’s dad said to him. I just thought to myself if I was in that position that would be so hard to say. He said, “Don’t let yourself be overcome by sleep, Eliezer. It’s dangerous to fall asleep in snow. One falls asleep forever. Come, my son, come…Get up” (p. 88). Basically, he was telling him that if you fall asleep in the sleep, you are going to die. And that took a lot of courage to say, I don’t know it kind of stuck out to me. For my dad to say that to me, it would just be weird because he would actually be serious like if you don’t get up, you’re gonna die. It is just scary. (I2, p. 3).</td>
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"Yea, I was just going to say like the thing that they all have in common, no matter what they do, it is whether it would be good or bad, they don’t really care. It is all about survival. I think I would have probably done the same thing. I don’t know. Ishmael did some bad stuff. I don’t know” (GI, p. 3).

"I mean if you had to go through some of the things he did like drink pee because he couldn’t find water. I think that is the grossest thing that I have ever read, I think. I wouldn’t be able to take it” (Gl, p. 4).

- “When I was reading that part [Night], I thought that if I was in that position like it would be the worse if you had to…If I was in the position with the running thing, I have always pictured that if I was with my brother and my dad, my brother, I mean saying anything against him, but he wouldn’t have made it, I don’t think. I probably wouldn’t have either, but I feel that he would have died before me. I always thought about what I would do: would I keep going or if I would have let him go. It is just the worse thing to think about. He is a year younger and I thought about that a couple of times. If it was just me and my dad….so basically, I don’t know if I would want to let him die and I live or if he dies, I die with him. That seemed like the worse thing to
read, I mean I have run distance. The farthest I have ever run is five miles in the Blossom race, and I am like dying after that. I can’t imagine running at their speed for as long as they did. I don’t know what would be worse: running after you had surgery on your foot [Night] or running on hot sand [Memoirs of a Boy Soldier]? (GI, p. 6).

| (Kevin) | - “They all have qualities that make them more admirable, but for Night, that one was just...I like dhow he had that love for his father. He almost became the father in the whole situation. I kind of liked that. In A Long Way Gone, the strength to finally return to his normal self, and in John’s story, it was just the strength and kind of luck to come here and like choose to avoid getting involved in battle and stuff like that” (GI, p. 4).  
- “More like a fan or somebody that was just watching the whole thing and I was just proud or excited that he accomplished or got through something like that” (I2, p. 3). |
| (Lisa) | - “Whenever I am reading anything, it just kind of triggers other things in my mind kind of like key words and stuff, and I just usually write that down or I talk a lot in class and stuff and make a lot of comments, so usually comments that I make if we were reading out loud that is what I write down” (I2, p. 2).  
- “And for some reason, I have always been interested in the holocaust. I read The Diary of Anne Frank and some other oboes. It is just a subject that interests me. It is kind of strange that one group of people can be so cruel and one person can make someone believe that what they are doing is right even though it goes against all most everyone else’s beliefs” (GI, p. |

| (Kevin) | “I think I chose a lot of words [through annotation] with weapons and stuff and explosions because it brought up the whole fact that what was going on. I know the dogs thing, I just thought it was just dehumanizing them more than before. Again, I did the gun shots, weapons, thing. And I felt the praying thing was interesting and even though all this was happening, he still believed in his faith which I thought was pretty iconic of him. I think that was the right word to use. To still believe after these people have |
| (Lisa) | “I was annoyed the first thing they tell him [John] in his session is don’t send the money home. I was annoyed because you are in America now. I think that it was good that he was still believing in his culture, but he needed to have that money to survive here. I thought maybe he should wait to send the money, but he started right away, and that so annoyed |

| (Kevin) | “Here it is talking about thinking about giving up and dying, and I think I was upset because I didn't want him to give up before then. I did not want him to die. I felt that he could do it; that he was strong enough and I just wanted him to like keep going” (I2, p. 3).  
- “And I used a lot of sad faces. I just thought that it was upsetting. The parts that he was talking about in this chapter. It seemed like he talked about death a lot. I think I was really |
dehumanized you so much for what you have faith in and stuff” (I2, p. 3).
- “Here it is talking about thinking about giving up and dying, and I think I was upset because I didn’t want him to give up before then. I did not want him to die. I felt that he could do it; that he was strong enough and I just wanted him to like keep going” (I2, p. 3).
- “And I used a lot of sad faces. I just thought that it was upsetting. The parts that he was talking about in this chapter. It seemed like he talked about death a lot. I think I was really upset during this chapter because I really didn’t want him to like give up and leave his dad and stuff, so I was sad” (I2, p. 3).
- “I really just like Ishmael. I really liked him as a person” I: Even when he was killing those people? “I just thought he was confused. Survival. You have to do what you have to do” (I2, p. 8).
- “I like him [Ishmael] the best out of all of them because he repents everything that happened to him and he has overcome so much with the nightmares and the reoccurrences and he has to get up the next day and tell himself that he is not a bad a person which I think is harder than the rest” (GI, p. 7).
- “Is he good or is he bad? Like, he can’t figure it all out: is he the guy who was in the war or is he the guy who is trying to make things better for people?” (GI, p. 3).
- “Umm, whenever I find a theme or a repeating theme…something like, here I said, “used to it-obeying/doing things you don’t want to do without thinking” (p. 88) and that is kind of a theme in Night. And like, I just wrote the main ideas that I
- "Yes, and with the history books, I guess I would try to put myself in the situation more because it actually happened to real people, and you can say like, if I actually had to do this, what would I do?" (I2, p. 7)
- "I really like this icy, windy thing, and I can somehow feel that. I suppose I do try to at least picture it, umm, and out myself into that and like use the description like to really try to get a picture of it. I think that I am generally good with imagery and taking that in" (I2, p. 8)

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<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>Acknowledging and examining who they are and where they live</th>
<th>Understanding different and appreciating different people/cultures while acknowledging societal and self strengths and weaknesses</th>
<th>Demonstrating empathy and emotion towards others; promoting change</th>
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<td>(Brian)</td>
<td>&quot;In social studies/history, you are reading it to learn the culture of that time period. I learned a lot about Africa and the different cultures they have and traditions, and umm, customs and stuff. So, I feel like that helps…it contributes to a history class more&quot; (I2, p. 4).</td>
<td>- &quot;One thing I have learned</td>
<td>- I was shocked to read that John started 1st grade at age 18. If I were 18 and had never been educated, my life would be completely different. In 1st grade, I was still young and innocent. I can’t imagine going through life without being educated. After reading this, I felt</td>
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that things have changed over time considerably and not only that but the different cultures all around the world and how different somebody in Asia compared to somebody in Africa may be. Wherever you are basically you have different traditions and customs and ways of living because of resources. You have to adapt to wherever you are and have different ways of surviving because it is never easy to survive for a lot of people” (I2, p. 5).

- “It is easier to be lazy in America because where he [John] is from [Sudan], they don’t have anything and they have to work for everything that they have and they can’t afford being lazy cuz if they were to be lazy, it would cost them: no food for the night, or no food for the day, or no home for the night or something like that because they are always on the move and they don’t have things, they don’t have grocery stores or stuff like at their leisure” (GI, p. 2).

- “I also think that the image of America is…you are either like…how do I say this. If you look at the image of somebody in America versus somebody in Sudan, it is just the trait that our country has I feel like…people are lazy; people never naturally care or are pushing themselves to do more whereas in Sudan, I think it is a quality that they have. In all those African countries, they have to push themselves in order to keep going” (GI, p. 2).

( Kevin)

-“I am very fortunate. All of the people in the

-“Well, in history class, we are reading these more to get

- The Lost Boys continue to follow the Dinka ways
stories are a lot less fortunate than us in Chagrin Falls in the little bubble. We have a lot more things. They have to go through a lot more difficult experiences in everyday life in those third world countries” (I2, p. 3).
- “Well, we are in the bubble. I really felt that I have learned more about what is out there and stuff especially because I have not really gone anywhere else than here. Here, it is pretty much the same thing every day; it is just a routine, plus because the government and the lack of involvement in places like that, you just do not hear much about that kind of stuff. I liked learning about other places” (I1, p. 4).
--I think a lot of people tend to agree with the stereotype that it is easy to be lazy in America, and I do too. In a lot of areas in the U.S. people do not have to work for anything. Everything is handed to a lot of people in America and because no one has to work for anything, they eventually get into the habit of not doing any work and being lazy. Procrastination is especially evident at school where some students’ lack of work ethic results in poor grades. Often times, laziness is more common in areas like Chagrin because of the higher yearly income rates. When a family has more money, they have less to
a perspective of the culture and see how they live and how it compares to our own living. I like being able to learn about different places. This more giving primary sources into the other cultures around the world and third world cultures mainly. That is what we read about” (I2, p. 3).
- “I think America has a big influence in other areas, and I think it was in A Long Way Gone, they talked about raps and stuff. They talk about rap music, and I kind of related to a bunch of that stuff, and I like the music that he was listening to. I learned about other people that people are similar in other areas like to us and what they do, it’s like they are all about having a good time and stuff but it is just in some places especially in third world countries, they are way behind in times like just, I think…I can’t remember what Mr. Brown was telling us…like South Africa is 100 years behind us and they are still having the civil wars and stuff that we had similar to the Civil War in the 1800s” (I2, p. 4).
- “It [Night] just gives a really like a good source of what people had to go through and what people had to experience” (I2, p. 4).
-- “We [Americans] are just handed everything and we don’t really have to work for anything. There are not that many lower class, really lower class, poor people that have to work every single day for just enough money to just eat and stuff. Everybody has the necessities and in God Grew and beliefs when they come to the U.S. As they are taught when maturing in Sudan, the boys never forget where they came from. The belief that others come first is still embedded in their minds. For example, John only keeps ten dollars of his first paycheck and sends the rest back to Kakuma despite the warnings his teachers made on that topic. They also continue to save for themselves by always staying employed and stowing some money away for the necessities and their own cars. For the benefit of my own community, I can always take advantage of any service opportunities to lend a hand to those in need or less fortunate. By doing such things, I can meet some new people and make myself a more well-rounded person (J4/22).
work for because they can buy all of these necessities. Blue collar areas are dwindling and the number of hard workers is declining with them (J4/14).

**Tired of Us**, the Dinka tribe was not really use to that. They had to go through the droughts or where they did not have food or they had to eat a piece of bread for only so long, so yea, I think we are lazy” (GI, p. 1).

- “I think he was just providing a primary source of what they experienced. Sorta survival. It [*Night*] kind of reminded me, I heard Mr. Cutler say this when we were in 8th grade when we went to the holocaust museum in Washington, DC, it was one that no one should have to see but everybody should. I think that he was just providing another resource that people should read to get the feeling of what he had to experience and some of those people had to experience” (GI, p. 3).

- “I think it [*Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*] was just illustrating the cruelty that one can put on their own people. Just how you can force people to kill their own for no apparent reason or for greed. It [killing] was like an addiction. It might have been the fact that he was so willing to go out and just kill without even…it wasn’t no big deal or anything. It is just weird, to put it into perspective that in other places, people are just like that, and you never really get that feeling around here in the U.S.” (GI, p. 3).

- “I kind of like it [reading nonfiction trade books] because it gives us that …it really illustrates what/how everything else is going on in the world like in the present time instead of just
reading information from the past” (I2, p. 1).
- “We are learning more about what is going on in real life” (I2, pp. 1-2).
- "A Long Way Gone really put in perspective a kid our age what they are experiencing somewhere else. Same thing with Night. The guy from there was younger at the time too, so I guess we kind of relate maybe. It is just a more exciting topic; it keeps us interested” (I2, p. 2).
- The moment in Night that affected me the most was at the beginning of the book, before the concentration camps had come into play. “Babies were tossed into the air and used as targets for the machine guns” (6) is one of the many horrible moments Elie used to explain the torture the Germans had in store for the Jews. I probably had the same thought pop into my mind as the people who heard his story in first person: insanity. I have done reports on the terrible things the Nazis did to the Jews behind the barbed wire of the concentration/death camps, but nothing quite affected me as much as this. I believe what hit me the hardest was who could possibly have a heart of evil enough to kill innocent babies? The cruelty of that action is unbelievable and something that doesn’t seem human. When I first read it, I had to stop for a moment and process the words that were in front of me. I was just starting the book and there weren’t any moments prior to it to prepare me for what
happened. I had absolutely nothing to relate it to and the only thought that came to my mind was that the SS and Nazis must have gone mad to think an action like that is acceptable. It is unbelievable (J2/4).

-I think a lot of people tend to agree with the stereotype that it is easy to be lazy in America, and I do too. In a lot of areas in the U.S. people do not have to work for anything. Everything is handed to a lot of people in America and because no one has to work for anything, they eventually get into the habit of not doing any work and being lazy. Procrastination is especially evident at school where some students’ lack of work ethic results in poor grades. Often times, laziness is more common in areas like Chagrin because of the higher yearly income rates. When a family has more money, they have less to work for because they can buy all of these necessities. Blue collar areas are dwindling and the number of hard workers is declining with them (J4/14).

(Lisa) -“I mean I guess I learned that I want to help more people than I guess I probably can. I guess that is what I learned about myself. I really want to help people a lot” (I2, p. 6).
-“I guess our laziness goes with convenience since everything here is so conveniently placed. There, it would be harder to find things” (GI, p. 2).
-“I learned that people have it rough out there especially in third world countries. It is not easy living. Umm, it is a lot more work. Not as much hygiene and stuff, and I thought that was kind of gross to be honest” (I2, p. 7).
-“I have learned that in Dinka culture values respect. Respect your elders, respect your wife, and respect your culture. Respect is a major of the Lost Boys. I feel like our values in America lack respect unlike that of the

-A moment in the book that captured my attention the most would be when Elie describes the conditions of working outside in the cold. I understand this is not a very significant part, but the way he describes the cold and how little clothes and light shoes he had really hit home. I couldn’t imagine being outside in Ohio with barely any clothes freezing and
Dinkas. If you were to walk into a school, restaurant, post office, movie theatre, or any public place in America it would only take a few seconds to realize the lack of respect that is presented here. Though if you were to go to the camp of the Lost Boys were you would find these people have lots of respect towards their elders. They listen to what they say and follow their directions. What a shock it must have been for these men to come to America and see all this disrespect” (J4/10).

-I think I gained a better understanding of John’s lack of education resources and his thirst for knowledge that he was deprived of as a child. I wonder how my peers can be so ungrateful for our educational system here and have no desire to learn when kids who really don’t have the option, dream about it. I guess it just goes back to that old saying— “You want what you can’t have.” (J4/14).

almost getting frostbite. Just the thought of it makes me shiver. It made me feel appreciative to have the warm clothes that I do. The scene also makes me feel remorse for those people who live like that then and now (J2/4).

-The Lost Boys feel a sense of responsibility to their family and friends back home in a means to support them by sending money back to the camp in Africa. In John’s case, a way he was trying to improve his life and his family’s life is by going to college, setting aside money for his daughter each week, and by finding a better job and working hard at what he does. What I’d like to do to improve my community is to get more kids involved with a program I do in the summer. Only down the road from our beautiful, little “bubble” is a distraught, run-down community known had Chagrin Parks. During the summer, the community center there runs a day camp program. There are far too many kids then there are volunteer camp counselors. I can’t figure out why either. It only took me an hour to fall in love with the sweet faces that looked up to me begging for my attention. On my first day volunteering the kids had a meeting that we sat on with them. In this
meeting, I heard the most shocking things come out of 1st and 2nd graders' mouths. It was language that shocked me. I think if we could just get a few more kids involved with this program we could actually make a difference in these kids’ lives. I know these kids would greatly appreciate it from the smiles and hugs I got on my days as a counselor. What better way is there to give back to our community than making a child smile? (J4/22)

-“I think that there is a set map throughout life that everybody just follows and it is a simple path like you can go to college, but you can always have your parents pay for that. You really don’t have to do…you can always choose not to use the college experience for educational purposes just for more fun. Then you can get of college and just have whatever job just because of the college you were in. I think it is just a simple path that is repeated throughout everybody and while the Dinka had something new every single day and they did not have such a set path as that because they had to experience where they did not have necessities that they needed at all times” (GI, p. 1-2).

-“Some people would be born into poverty and stuff, and they don’t have a chance. I guess it is really hard to be wealthy when you are starting with nothing. I don’t know. I guess I was thinking like the people who are addicted to drugs may seem lazy because they are not motivated to really do anything but smoke or do whatever they do. I guess that is what I was thinking of as lazy” (I2, p. 2).

-“We would have to get more diversity in our school. You can count on one hand, the number of Asian people and African-American people in our school. It is definitely the majority of white, Catholic. A lot of people criticize us because of that. That is what I am and a lot of my friend are” (I2, p. 8).

-“We have it so easy here. If you are middle class in Chagrin, we are so lucky. There has never been any huge genocide or anything in America at least as long as we have been a live or none” (J2/4).

-“And maybe, if we went to Cleveland and helped out or something. That would help a little or something. Just getting out there and doing stuff” (I2, p. 9)

-When the child—the Kapo was hung; it’s amazing how inhumane that was. He wasn’t even heavy enough to die quickly, he just hung there. It’s awful that they kept him there as a reminder to “behave.” Public executions don’t happen in the U.S. these days, but when people are arrested it will be shown on the news. If people didn’t see that the cops actually do take bad guys to jail, then maybe less people would obey the law, similar to the German’s idea; showing people the consequences (J2/4).
that has affected us. There is all of this stuff going on in other places, and we are such more developed than other countries, like all those third world countries and stuff. They are very third-worldish. We are so lucky that we don’t…we wouldn’t even know how to pick up a gun, but those soldier kids shoot thousands of people because they are told to” (J2, p. 10).

- “I feel like it is actually harder for Americans to be lazy because there is so much stuff here like expensive stuff like houses are more expensive, and you have to have a job. When I think of lazy, I think of homeless people. Like that might be bad but like you have to have a job which is hard to get and you have to make money. I think non-American people would think that it is easy to be lazy because there is all this auto-technology like we don’t have to do stuff. It’s like people who can’t afford all that luxury and stuff, it is easy to see that America is a lazy country” (GI, p. 1).

- “We have a lot more to work with. We have all these restaurants. We have a lot more to work with. We have more food; our climate is different probably, and then, they [Sudanese] have to farm it themselves. I feel like we have a plethora of food, and they don’t have a huge surplus of food” (GI, p. 2).

- “They don’t even have refrigerators, and we can go shopping once a week, and we are fine for the rest of the week, but they have to walk...
miles to get water in certain cases and it is the convenience thing which is a huge part. I think so, it is a means of how to survive. If he hadn’t, he would probably be dead today. I don’t know, I just felt that it was more of a survival thing that he had to do. (GI, p. 3).

-“Americans have so much, but they insist on seeing the glass half empty instead of half full…when I lived in Kakuma, I didn’t even have a glass” (228). Dinkas seem to have a very religious, appreciative outlook on life. Like this quote above, we, Americans, take a lot for granted. We are adapted to a whole different life from them. They raise their cows and their life revolves around them in a give and take kind of manner, while we just go to the store and think nothing of our bottled (jugged) milk. Another difference between our cultures is the role of women. In Dinka, they are only cooks and may not have “friends” with men. Men also have more than one wife, therefore, many children as well. Holding hands is also a different meaning. It is not so sexual when two men hold hands. It is just what they do (J4/10).

How does the study of history through nonfiction enable students to understand themselves, their peers, and society better?

Provides them opportunities to engage in outside conversations with family, friends, and peers where they are able to

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<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
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<th>Recall/Question historical events: Demonstrate knowledge</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Brian)</td>
<td>-“With my family, I talk more about history books just because it was something that surprised to hear</td>
<td>“The more I talk about it, the more I remember it because I obviously have read lots of books before, and I don’t remember</td>
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about or didn’t know. It’s like a bigger topic I guess where it actually happened in history class” (I2, p. 1).
- “She [mom] asked me how I was liking it so far, and I basically told her it was graphic and it was hard to read but that it was a good book and keeps me reading, and she said that she heard about that same thing, and she wants to read it, and that is basically what that was about” (I2, p. 2).

(Kevin) - “We would ask each other what was going on if we didn’t really understand. So, I think we asked others for their opinions or what was actually going and it sparked other conversations and opinions about the characters and you relate that stuff” (I2, p.1).

- “I have learned that a lot of things occur in the same place or like in different places in the world same things occur like civil wars, genocide, and stuff, and that history repeats itself, and that the government has a big influence as well as religion on thoughts of people like propaganda and stuff” (I2, p. 3).

(Lisa) - “I really think it is because it kind of impresses them almost like I know that it isn’t sly to say. It makes you sound more intelligent that you can talk about these different things with them, and it gives me and my grandma something to talk about a basis always. I know that she really enjoys talking about books with me and stuff. For Christmas, my cousins will get something else, but I will get a book because that is what my grandma and I share. I feel like the books kind of almost give a like a way for you to connect better with people and stuff, and if they read them or if they don’t know about them; it’s like an interesting conversation to start with them because not many people know about Ethiopia and places like that” (I2, p. 1).

- We just talk about how extraordinary it is like what these people do and like, I know…actually, one of the biggest moments I guess would be when I told my grandma about Night and she said I can’t read it. I refuse to read that book. It is the only one that she wouldn’t read, but she pushed herself to read it just because she had lived through the holocaust and I can’t do this. It is too terrible to read and relive stuff about that. I guess my mom read one in grade school, and my grandma was like…I don’t want to go back. (I2, pp. 1-2).

- “We don’t ever cover certain things in textbooks. What I thought Africa was before this was completely wrong, so I guess it’s good that we covered it. I know more about Afghanistan…again, we already knew about like the other stuff we covered like England, France, WWI, WWII, and stuff we already covered. I guess we learned about what happened in other countries after WWII which was a little interesting, and then, we learned about Ethiopia, South Africa, and Australia…who knew they were like…there was all those people there” (I2, p. 5).
more important I guess because it happened, and it could happen again. And history tends to repeat itself a lot. I guess, the whole fact that these are true stories make it a little bit more conversational (I2, p. 2).
- “You learn more about things that we might actually get to use as conversation starters and stuff, I guess” (I2, p. 6).

(Allison)
- “Well, umm, when I was reading Night, I just finished it and I was all pumped up, and went into the living room, and my parents were sitting there, and these things like these tragedies like the holocaust and stuff, a small amount of people survived, like I use to think God chose specifically them like I thought he had this big plan, and he was like this person will survive this, so he can tell everyone about this, and like educate the world, but then my dad said that takes away your free will, so ok, and then mom asked, what do you think their drive was to stay alive? And I said, well, Elie's the only reason he stayed alive, his main drive was his father. And even after he died, he wanted to stay alive in case his sister or mother was still alive somehow, and if they were ever have survived and he wouldn’t be there that would make him sad. People live for people to make people happy and we figured just like the reason people keep living is because of other people because people who are suicidal will say that no one cares about them and people who aren’t obviously do it. People care about them. People care, so we kind of figured the meaning of life. The purpose is for people to make other people happy” (I2, p. 3)
APPENDIX X

BRIAN’S POEM
Appendix X

Brian’s Poem

“Never”

NEVER SHALL I FORGET being at the top of the Washington Monument seeing the whole city from that high up.

Never shall I forget winning the championship in 5th grade for football.

Never shall I forget breaking my arm which ended my football season freshman year.

Never shall I forget going to the state championships for football my freshman year.

Never shall I forget when I was in 7th grade I dented a car during recess.

Never shall I forget a Browns game I went to in 6th grade and including the wind chill it was at least.

Never shall I forget going to Colorado to go skiing for two weeks.

Never.
APPENDIX Y

BRIAN’S ANNOTATED PAGE OF NIGHT
Appendix Y

Brian’s Annotated Page of Night
APPENDIX Z

LISA’S ANNOTATED PAGE OF *NIGHT*
"Don't think, don't stop, run!" Near me, men were collapsing into the dirty snow. Guns horses.

A young boy from Poland was marching beside me. His name was Zalman. He worked in the electrical materials depot in Buna. People mocked him because he was forever praying or meditating on some Talmudic question. For him, it was an escape from reality, from feeling the blows...

All of sudden, he had terrible stomach cramps.

"My stomach aches," he whispered to me. He couldn't go on.

He had to stop a moment. I begged him: "Wait a little, Zalman. Soon, we will all come to a halt. We cannot run like this to the end of the world."

But, while running, he began to undo his buttons and yelled to me: "I can't go on. My stomach is bursting..."

"Make an effort, Zalman... Try..."

"I can't go on," he groaned.

He lowered his pants and fell to the ground.

That is the image I have of him.

I don't believe that he was finished off by an SS, for nobody had noticed. He must have died, trampled under the feet of the thousands of men who followed us.

I soon forgot him. I began to think of myself again. My foot was aching. I shivered with every step. Just a few more meters and it will be over. I'll fall. A small red flame... A shot... Death enveloped me, it suffocated me. It stuck to me like glue. I felt I could touch it. The idea of dying, of ceasing to be, began to fascinate me. To no longer exist. To no longer feel the exhausting pain of my foot. To no longer feel anything, neither fatigue nor cold, nothing. To break rank, to let myself slide to the side of the road... Don't give up hope!

My father's presence was the only thing that stopped me. He was running next to me, out of breath, out of strength, desperate.

I had no right to let myself die. What would he do without me? I was his sole support.
APPENDIX AA

LISA’S POEM
Appendix AA

Lisa’s Poem

“Never”

Never shall I forget the few years my dad wasn’t with us but working somewhere else.

Never shall I forget how scared I was when my aunt was rushed to the hospital one night.

Never shall I forget the happiness of being with my family in Hilton Head.

Never shall I forget the shock and haunting memories of seeing a hospital for the first time.

Never shall I forget visiting Europe with my parents.

Never shall I forget how sick I was in 2003.

Never shall I forget the way my parents looked after I got a good report card.

Never.
APPENDIX BB

KEVIN’S POEM
Appendix BB

Kevin’s Poem

"Never"

NEVER SHALL I FORGET the warmth that I felt in my home, both physically and mentally.

Never shall I forget how the sunbeams came through the windows and casted shadows throughout my home.

Never shall I forget how green the trees, the grass, and the plants were that surrounded me when I just arrived home.

Never shall I forget when my parents smile when stuck through the door.

Never shall I forget the smile that never faded on my dog’s face.

Never shall I forget how I played in the backyard in solitude when I imagined there were thousands watching.

Never shall I forget the relief that washed over me every night when I fell into my bed under a roof I no longer have.

Never.
to the village. My eyelids were twiching, and I felt as if the breeze was passing through my brain. It made me feel light-headed. Excitement and sadness made me feel as if my heart would explode; if I waited any longer, but on such a narrow path I couldn't walk past all those in front of me.

After a few minutes we came to a river and I was happy, because at the edge of most villages there was a river, so I thought we should be there any minute now. But we weren't yet.

"The village is just over the hill," Gserenu said. It was a long hill, with rocks on either side of the path and some unmovable ones the road makers had left in the middle. The path zigzagged up to the top, where, when we finally made it, everyone had to rest for a few minutes. I became angry that we had to rest, and I sat on a big rock away from the group. My eyes followed the brown dusty path that continued down the hill to the thick forest, through which I caught a glimpse of the thatched and tin roofs of the village. Part of me was on the way to the village, the other impatiently waited on the hill. Gserenu passed around his jug of water, which I refused. When it got back to him, we picked up the banana hands and started down the hill. I started before everyone else, so that I could walk fast and be in front.

As I was going down the hill, I heard gunshots and people screaming and crying. We dropped the bananas and began running in order to avoid the open hillside. A thick smoke started rising from the village. At the top of it, sparks of flames leapt into the air.

We hid in the nearby bushes and listened to gunshots and the screams of men, women, and children. The children wailed, men screamed at high pitches that pierced through the forest and covered the shrieks of women. The gunshots finally ceased, and the world was very quiet, as if listening. I told Gserenu that I wanted to go to the village. He told me back, but I shoved him into the bushes and ran down the hill as fast as I could. I didn't feel my legs. When I got to the village, it was completely on fire and bullet shells covered the ground like mango leaves in the morning. I did not know where to begin looking.
APPENDIX DD

KEVIN’S ANNOTATED PAGE OF A LONG WAY GONE
Appendix DD

Kevin’s Annotated Page of A Long Way Gone
APPENDIX EE

ALLISON’S ANNOTATED PAGE OF GOD GREW TIRED OF US
Appendix EE

Allison’s Annotated Page of *God Grew Tired of Us*

...
Appendix FF

Allison’s Poem

“Never”

NEVER SHALL I FORGET the events that have made me who I am.

Never shall I forget when my brother cried before bed because of what some kid said
Never shall I forget mass by the lake at sunset (2:30 PM)
Never shall I forget when my grandmother died—first time I lost someone
Never shall I forget how amazing swimming in the ocean was
Never shall I forget hitting a winning home run in a softball game
Never shall I forget moving to Chicago

Never.
APPENDIX GG

ALLISON’S ANNOTATED PAGE OF NIGHT
"Don't think, don't stop, run!"
Near me, men were collapsing into the dirty snow. Gunshots.
A young boy from Poland was marching beside me. His name was Zalman. He had worked in the electrical material depot in Burn. People mocked him because he was forever praying or meditating on some Talmudic question. For him, it was an escape from reality, from feeling the blows ...

All of a sudden, he had terrible stomach cramps.
"My stomach aches," he whispered to me. He couldn't go on.
He had to stop a moment. I begged him: "Wait a little, Zalman. Soon, we will all come to a halt. We cannot run like this to the end of the world."

But, while running, he began to undo his buttons and yelled to me: "I can't go on. My stomach is bursting ..."
"Make an effort, Zalman ... Try ..."
"I can't go on," he groaned.
He lowered his pants and fell to the ground.
That is the image I have of him.

I don't believe that he was finished off by an SS, for nobody had noticed. He must have died, trampled under the feet of the thousands of men who followed us.

I soon forgot him. I began to think of myself again. My foot was aching. I shivered with every step. Just a few more meters and it will be over. I'll fall. A small red flame... A shot... Death enveloped me, it suffocated me. It stuck to me like glue. I felt I could touch it. The idea of dying, of ceasing to be, began to fascinate me. To no longer exist. To no longer feel the excruciating pain of my foot. To no longer feel anything, neither fatigue nor cold, nothing. To break rank, to let myself slide to the side of the road ...

My father's presence was the only thing that stopped me. He was running next to me, out of breath, out of strength, desperate.
APPENDIX HH

ALLISON’S ANNOTATED PAGE OF GOD GREW TIRED OF US
is dark and difficult. I have come to believe America will best be served by strength and resolve, just as those tools have served the peoples of southern Sudan in their long struggle. The terrorist attacks of 2001 have worked, in time, to renew my faith, just as they have done for many native-born Americans.

Many things happened quickly that fall. I learned how to drive. I got the first in a series of jobs. I saw snow for the first time. With each new experience, I embraced my new life in America.

I knew I had to learn to drive in order to have the same freedom as other Americans. In this country, you cannot go where you want to go, unless you drive a car. Until I gained control over my ability to travel, I knew I would be at a disadvantage competing for jobs and a better education. Public transportation and the generosity of church friends who offered me a lift only went so far, and I had to budget hours of extra time whenever I wanted to go anywhere. My own car, and the license to operate it, spelled independence.

A lot of people took turns teaching me to drive. Church volunteers from Skaneateles drove to Syracuse to give me lessons. Susan Meyer, who had taught me about grocery stores, helped. So did Jack Howard, my “grandfather” at the Presbyterian church. I called him that because he was like a Dinka elder, in his 80s and wise. I turned to him for advice.

Cynthia Dietz from the Skaneateles church sometimes drove me around Syracuse and let me handle her car. I circled many empty parking lots and drove along many two-lane highways. The pavement seemed to get narrower whenever another car approached from up ahead. I also hired a professional driving teacher, a Vietnamese immigrant named Mr. Nguyen, to prepare me for the road test exam. He hardly ever said anything as he sat beside me in the front seat. All he did was point. Point left. I turned. Point right. I turned. Point left again. My driving improved with Mr. Nguyen, but I never learned any Vietnamese, and he never learned any Dinka.

My friends at the refugee center kept asking me, “How long have you been in America?” I told them I had arrived in August. This was the middle of September. They said, “Do you know snow?” I replied that I did not. “Why?” they asked.

“My God,” someone said. “You are going to die.”

Syracuse lies east of the Great Lakes, they said, and the city gets hammered every winter with huge amounts of snow. My church friends from Skaneateles First Presbyterian and Living Word started donating blankets, gloves, and coats, and they took me and my roommates to the store to buy heavy socks. I finally had to say, “Please stop.”

When I heard snow had fallen east of town on October 21, I had to see it. Cynthia came to my apartment that day to give me another driving lesson. We drove out of the city along the highway until the buildings fell away on both sides and we came to the edge of a quiet cemetery in East Syracuse. An inch of white powder blanketed the trees, the grass, and the sides of the road.

“Everything is so white,” I said. “Is this snow?”

“Yes,” she said. “This is snow.”

We parked the car and got out. I couldn’t wait to touch it. I grabbed a double handful and held it up to the sky. Water trickled through my fingers. As I watched, and as my hands grew numb, drops ran down my arms to the elbows. I focused my attention on the miracle of frozen flakes of water.
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