THE RESPONSES OF TAIWANESE ADOLESCENT GIRLS TO SELECTED AMERICAN SHORT STORIES FOR YOUNG ADULTS

DISSEPTION

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to explore the experience of six Taiwanese 11th-grade English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in reading six realistic American short stories as they participated in an after-school American Young Adult Literature (YAL) Study Club for a period of six weeks. Informed by reader response theories and research, second language reading and learning theories, and multicultural young adult literature, this study examined the students’ literary responses and their cultural awareness when reading across cultures. For literary responses, I tried to answer the questions: What were the students’ response patterns? and What did they draw on in order to make sense of the story? For cultural awareness, the two sub-questions guiding the study were: To what extent was the students’ cross-cultural awareness demonstrated in their literary responses? and What were their reading stances when reading across cultures? Data sources included questionnaires, response journals, group discussions, and individual interviews.

The findings indicated three levels of literary response: interacting, interpreting, and evaluating, with the latter tending to be built upon the former levels. The students’ frames of reference encompassed linguistic, personal, intertextual, and sociocultural dimensions. At the level of interacting, the different frames of reference were drawn
upon equally. The sociocultural frame was especially prominent at the level of interpreting while the personal and intertextual frames were more important at the level of evaluating. The primary mode of the students’ literary responses was characterized by didactic interpretation of characters, which was greatly influenced by their sociocultural frames of reference. The participants’ cultural awareness initially seemed to be limited and needed to be probed to become known. The participants adopted a predominantly aesthetic stance when reading the literature from another culture. Such a stance enabled them to enjoy the literary experience despite cultural differences but also held the promise of potentially broadening the students’ cultural perspectives.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a high-school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher in Taiwan for six years, I observed some problems among my students. First, many students seldom showed engagement while reading in English. As Simensen (1987) found among many foreign language learners, my students tended to regard a text as “an object for language studies and not as an object for factual information, literary experience or simply pleasure, joy and delight” (p. 42). For my students, reading in a foreign language was equated with analyzing the surface structure of language. Their focus was on vocabulary, syntax, and grammar. In other words, these students were not reading for the overall meaning of the text, and reading for them was far from a “pleasant, imaginative activity” (Elley, 1992, p. 77). Second, my EFL students tended to see reading in terms of “schoolwork,” and they seldom voluntarily read materials in English, except for their English textbooks. Such a phenomenon fits Day and Bamford’s (1998) description of students in most second-language reading classrooms that, in general, students who learn to read in a second language do not read anything in the second language apart from their assignments. A third problem among my students was that their English reading experiences were quite
limited, not only because they only read textbooks, but also because the reading materials
in the English curriculum in Taiwan were predominantly non-fiction. For these students,
reading in English was seldom associated with the lived-through experience of reading
literature which they might enjoy in their native language, such as being engrossed in a
story, identifying with the characters, and having vicarious experiences. In a word,
reading English meant drills and was hardly fun for these EFL students.

Although my major duty as a teacher in Taiwan is to help students pass exams
and meet the requirements of classes, I would achieve greater satisfaction if I could see
my students actively engaged in reading and enjoying the reading process. Reading is
more than recognizing and analyzing discrete elements of language form (Goodman,
2005; Smith, 2006). More importantly, reading is construction of meaning in the
transaction of the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1994). Psycholinguists Kenneth
Goodman (2005) and Frank Smith (2006) asserted that meaning is primary in reading,
and that reading for meaning is the best strategy for learning to read. Similarly, Krashen
(2003) emphasized that people acquire language only by understanding messages. Based
on research evidence, Krashen (2004) also recommended that one of the best ways for
second language students to move beyond the beginning level to truly advanced levels of
proficiency is through voluntary pleasure reading, not through mechanical drills and
exercises. Unfortunately, many of my EFL students regarded reading English as skill
drills. They seldom did voluntary reading in English, nor did they view reading English
as a pleasurable activity.
The problems I found with Taiwanese EFL students are actually not uncommon among EFL students in general (Day & Bamford, 1998; Simensen, 1987; Takagaki, 2002). To engage EFL students in reading, to introduce them to the pleasure of reading, and to foster their love of reading in English, some educators have advocated using the reader response approach to reading literature in the EFL class, especially with intermediate and upward level learners (e.g., Ali, 1994; Amer, 2003; Carlisle, 2000; Custodio & Sutton, 1998; Elliot, 1990; Gajdusek, 1988).

Such arguments are supported mainly by Krashen’s (1982, 1985) Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory. According to Krashen (1982), a second language (L2) is best acquired under conditions similar to those present in first language (L1) acquisition: the focus should be on meaning rather than on form. Therefore, it is important that teachers give students authentic texts to read and engage them in authentic tasks in a relatively anxiety-free environment. Krashen (1985) also advocated using extended texts, for example, novels, with English as a Second Language (ESL) readers to give them comprehensible input that builds schema and background knowledge. Seen in this light, authentic literature has much more potential for meaningful learning than structured basal readers can allow.

The reader response approach to literature, which is focused on meaning-making and the enjoyment of reading literature itself rather than linguistic analysis of the text, has been found to be useful for generating enthusiasm and interest in literacy learning for L1 learners at different levels (e.g., Karolides, 1997, 2000). If Krashen’s theory is right, the
reader response approach to literature should be applicable to L2 learners when they are given literary works appropriate to their age and language level.

There has been much discussion about the value of using literature with English language learners. Custodio and Sutton (1998) discussed the advantages of using literature-based instruction with secondary-level second-language learners. The advantages include the promotion of literacy development, the availability of language models, and the integration of language skills. Similarly, Ghosn (2002) advocated using authentic children’s literature as an alternative to the traditional structured texts in primary school EFL classes for the following reasons. First, authentic literature provides a motivating, meaningful context for language learning. Second, literature facilitates the integration of language skills. Third, literature fosters the development of the thinking skills necessary for L2 academic literacy. And fourth, “literature can also function as a change agent by developing students’ intercultural awareness while at the same time nurturing empathy, a tolerance for diversity, and emotional intelligence” (p. 172). Ronnqvist and Sell (1994) also regarded the target language literature as a valuable resource because “it is ‘authentic’ material; it offers linguistic and socio-cultural enrichment, and fosters personal involvement” (p. 126). For Watts (1999), the positive experience of reading literature is not only a built-in motivator for learning but also helps to “bridge” the social distance between the learners’ home culture and that of the language they are learning. Finally, Ali (1993) maintained that the reading of literature in a second language can promote enjoyment in reading and an appreciation of literature.
The benefits of using literature with English language learners, therefore, generally involve four dimensions: affective, linguistic, cultural, and literary. In other words, literature can not only serve as a motivating medium that facilitates English language learners’ language learning, but also develop their cross-cultural awareness and nourish their literary appreciation.

Language learning inevitably involves the issue of cultural awareness. In addition to the traditional four language skills, culture has been considered a necessary component in second language teaching and learning (Kramsch, 1993). It is important that the second language learner acquire cross-cultural awareness because, as Atkinson (1999) put it, “knowledge of language . . . cannot be developed without at the same time developing knowledge of the sociocultural contexts in which that language occurs and for action in which it exists” (p. 647). In fact, increased awareness of the features of the target language culture has been found to facilitate language learning (Kramsch, 1993). Moreover, one of the fundamental goals of second or foreign language education is to develop understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and broaden cultural perspectives. To cultivate cultural understanding and sensitivity in the English language learner, Shanahan (1997) suggested using literature because literature can best demonstrate the affective side of the target language in its cultural contexts. According to Shanahan, by offering the opportunity to explore cross-cultural values, literature facilitates the learner’s travel across cultures and languages. All in all, the use of literature helps to develop cultural awareness, and both literature and cultural awareness contribute to the learning of the target language.
Among the values associated with the use of literature with English language learners, using literature as a motivating medium for developing language skills in ESL/EFL students has been well documented. For example, in the United States, Cho and Krashen’s (1994) case study on four adult second language learners found that, as a result of reading the *Sweet Valley Kids* series by Molly Mia Stewart for pleasure in their free time for several months, the subjects made significant gains in vocabulary, motivation, and competence in speaking and listening. In Hong Kong, Lao and Krashen (2000) also reported that university EFL students who were participating in a popular literature class that emphasized reading for content and enjoyment made more gains on measures of vocabulary and reading rate, than did students in a traditional academic skills class.

Finally, in Taiwan, Chou (1999) reported that high school EFL students made considerable progress in speaking and writing English after participating in a literature-based reading program for six weeks. These studies focusing on the effects of reading literature on linguistic performance make it clear that using literature with English language learners can promote their language learning.

Beyond the linguistic aspects, few studies have examined other dimensions of ESL/EFL students’ experience of reading literature. We know little about how reading literature can foster ESL/EFL readers’ personal involvement in the reading process, how it develops their intercultural awareness, or how it enhances their literary appreciation. Few studies have been conducted to lay bare the hidden nature of English language learners’ experience of reading literature, let alone to provide insights into the mechanisms associated with the various benefits that educators claim reading literature
can bring about. If we want to use literature with ESL/EFL students or implement a literature-based ESL/EFL reading program, it is essential that we understand the nature of their reading experience with the target language literature. Specifically, we need to know how these students respond to the target language literature, how they construct meaning from texts, and what role cultural differences play in their literary experience. In a word, we need to gain insights into English language learners’ actual responses to literature and discover how the teacher can employ literature with ESL/EFL readers.

Another area of scholarship focuses on what kinds of literature are appropriate for adolescent learners of English. According to Day and Bamford (1998) and Williams (1986), the use of interesting reading material is considered the most important variable that motivates a student’s decision to read in a second language. Ronnqvist and Sell (1994) recommended using target language teenage books when teaching adolescent learners of foreign languages. They found that their Swedish EFL students preferred English teenage books for three reasons. First, teenage books give access to the colloquial language used by native-speaker teenagers. Second, they meet teenagers’ requirements in matters of genre, theme, and plot. And third, they offer a broader and deeper understanding of the target culture, than do traditional textbooks. In line with Ronnqvist and Sell (1994), Day and Bamford (1998) claimed that “there is nothing quite like young adult literature for familiarizing teenage students with another culture” (p. 104). In her argument for using young adult literature (YAL) with adolescent English learners, Watts (1999) likewise stated that young adult literature helps to bridge the “social distance”
between students’ home culture and the target culture because such literature often reflects their age and the concerns that hold their interest.

In general, young adult literature is more accessible to adolescent English language learners not only because of its simple language and literary characteristics, but also because of the common concerns to which adolescents can feel connected. Through young adult literature, adolescent English learners can see the “differences” of another culture, while at the same time recognizing the universal themes among adolescents of different cultures. Young adult literature can, to borrow Galda’s (1998) words, be both a “window” through which adolescent English learners see the lives of another culture and a “mirror” that reflects the common adolescent problems and concerns they share.

Although the proponents of young adult literature in ESL/EFL classes present cogent and persuasive arguments, again, relevant studies on adolescent English language learners’ responses to young adult literature are few in number. I wonder whether the theoretical arguments for using literary texts with English language learners are just lofty academic dreams, impractical and unexamined. If we want to recognize the significance of using literature, particularly young adult literature, with adolescent learners of English, more research is needed to explore how these learners respond to young adult literature and what their responses mean for instruction.

Problem Statement

Reader response research in first language readers is well-developed and informs the literature-based reading program at different levels (e.g., Karolides, 1997, 2000). However, similar research on English language learners’ responses to literature has been
scarce. Although there are passionate proponents for using literature, particularly young adult literature, with adolescent ESL/EFL readers, they make mainly theoretical arguments. Moreover, although existing studies have recognized the contribution of reading literature to literacy learning, little research has been conducted to examine the hidden nature of ESL/EFL students’ literary experience, nor to provide implications for a literature-based reading program for English language learners. If we want to legitimize using literature with English language learners, more research is needed to investigate the nature of their literary response to the target language literature they read.

Purpose Statement

To remedy the lack of research mentioned above, this study attempted to explore the responses of Taiwanese EFL adolescents to selected American young adult short stories. The purpose of this study was (1) to describe the Taiwanese EFL students’ experience of reading American young adult literature and identify the characteristics of their literary response, (2) to explore the potential relationship of literary response to cultural awareness, and (3) to use the insights gained to offer recommendations for an EFL literature-based reading program in Taiwan.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. How did Taiwanese adolescents make meaning from selected American short stories for young adults?
   - What were the elements/patterns of their responses?
   - What did they draw on in order to make sense of the text?
2. What were the characteristics of the adolescents’ cross-cultural awareness?
   • To what extent was the adolescents’ cross-cultural awareness demonstrated in their literary responses?
   • What were the adolescents’ reading stances when reading across cultures?

Significance of the Study

Many high school EFL students in Taiwan associate reading in English with mechanical drills. They do not enjoy reading, nor do they do voluntary reading in English. To engage them in reading and to introduce them to the joy of reading, scholars and educators have made numerous theoretical arguments advocating the use of real literature, particularly young adult literature, with adolescent English learners. However, few empirical studies have been conducted to examine adolescent EFL students’ actual responses when reading young adult literature.

This study was a first attempt to examine how Taiwanese adolescents respond to American young adult literature using the reader response approach. The results of this study will offer instructional implications for (1) Taiwanese EFL teachers who have an interest in including American young adult literature in their classrooms or who want to implement a literature-based EFL reading program; and for (2) curriculum development designers and textbook writers for the EFL classroom in Taiwan.

Definition of Terms

The followings terms are used in this study and their definitions are given below:

EFL/ESL students. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students are those who learn English in their native country, where English is not used in daily life, for example,
English in Taiwan, Korea, or Japan. The language minority students, for example, in the U.S. learning English as a Second Language, are ESL students. Second language acquisition theories apply to both ESL and EFL students. In this study the term “English language learners” refers to both EFL and ESL students.

**Literary response.** This is the response to a literary work of art which results from a dynamic transaction between the reader and the text. Transactional theorists characterize the act of reading literature as a meaning-making process that involves the reader’s active participation under the guidance of the text (Benton, 1992a; Iser, 1980; Langer, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1994).

**Reader stance.** Stance determines how a reader approaches a text and thus makes meaning of the text. Stance is the reader’s focus of attention in the reading process, “a readiness to respond in a particular way” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 43).

**Young adult literature (YAL).** Donelson and Nilsen (2005) defined young adult literature as “anything that readers between the approximate ages of 12 and 18 choose to read” (p.1). Young adult literature usually portrays teenage characters with plots and themes that appeal to adolescent readers. Some terms used interchangeably with young adult literature are “teenage books,” “adolescent literature,” or “popular literature.” However, in academic circles, “young adult” is a term now firmly established.

**Method**

This study explored the responses of six 11th-grade Taiwanese students to selected American young adult short stories and analyzed their responses, using qualitative methods. The study was undertaken not to test hypotheses, but to provide a
comprehensive description of Taiwanese adolescents’ literary responses in reading American young adult literature and to generate hypotheses about the relationship of literary response to cross-cultural awareness. Since the focus of this study was on the meaning-making process of literary experience, the qualitative approach adopted was within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, which is considered appropriate for portraying the changing, complex constructed realities or qualities (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002).

Data sources consisted of questionnaires, response journals, audio-taped interviews, audio-taped group discussions, and field notes. The employment of multiple data-collection methods contributed to the trustworthiness of the study. The constant comparative method was used for data analysis in order to identify and refine the emerging themes, patterns, and categories in the students’ responses (Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 1997; Strauss & Gorbin, 1998).

Limitations

The scope of the study was restricted to the responses of six 11th graders to selected realistic American young adult short stories during their participation in the American YAL Study Club for six weeks. The boundaries of this study are as follows:

1. The study was conducted in a fairly restricted timeframe, from October 2005 to January 2006. A longer period of study might reveal more comprehensive insights into the nature of students’ responses.
2. Six 11th-grade female students from a college-bound high school were chosen for this study. Students of different genders and from other tracks of the educational system in Taiwan were not considered in this study.

3. The participants chosen met the selection criteria of intermediate or upper-level reading ability and the willingness to attend to the tasks required for this study. The issue of reluctant readers was excluded from this study.

4. The literature read by the students was limited to realistic short stories for young adults. Different genres, such as fantasy and poetry, which may elicit different kinds of responses from the reader were not included in this study (Galda, 1990; Zaharias, 1986).

5. The literature chosen was limited to short stories due to convenience of implementation, although novels might elicit richer responses from students with their fuller characterization and plot development.

6. American young adult literature, instead of young adult literature from other English-speaking countries, was chosen for this study since students in Taiwan are taught American English instead of other English varieties.

Assumptions

The underlying assumptions in this study were grounded in the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm that meanings are constructed and multiple. In this perspective, there is no single right way to respond to literature. Every individual reader’s response is unique because everyone has a different experience and a different cultural background.
This study also assumed that the participants in the study were capable of actively contributing to the meaning-making process when reading literature if they were given reading materials appropriate to their age and language level. Moreover, the study assumed that the participants were honest about and willing to express their responses during the study. Finally, this study assumed that students’ responses expressed in written and oral tasks in this study could approximately represent their actual responses to the selected American young adult short stories.

Organization of the Study

Although theoretical arguments for using authentic literature, especially young adult literature, with adolescent English learners have been proposed, there are few relevant studies on ESL/EFL students’ literary responses. This qualitative study was designed to explore the responses of six Taiwanese 11th graders to selected American young adult short stories while participating in an after-school American YAL Study Club for six weeks.

The remainder of the study is organized in the following manner. A critical review of related literature about reader response theories and research, second language reading and learning theories, multicultural young adult literature and adolescent readers is presented in Chapter Two. Chapter Three delineates the methods and procedures used for this study. Chapter Four analyzes the data and presents the results. Chapter Five contains the summary and discussion and makes suggestions for educational practice and for future research. The study concludes with a bibliography and appendices.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explored six Taiwanese adolescents’ experience in reading American young adult literature. The two major concerns of this study were to examine the students’ literary responses and their cultural awareness when reading across cultures. This study was informed by reader response theories, second language reading and learning theories, multicultural literature, research on response to literature of other cultures, and young adult literature, all of which provide varied perspectives on adolescents’ literary responses when reading across cultures. The following review of each field and discipline is necessarily selective.

Reader Response Theories

Unlike New Critics, who emphasize the primacy of the text in the meaning-making process of reading literature, reader response theorists emphasize the role of the reader. For reader response critics, the meaning of the text cannot be understood apart from its effect on the reader; the meaning is not found in the text but is constructed by the reader in transaction with the text. Given this common assumption, reader response theorists, however, characterize the meaning-making process from different perspectives.
Some focus on the dynamic, two-way process of the transaction between the reader and the text. These theorists include Rosenblatt (1994), Iser (1980), Benton (1992a, 1992b), and Langer (1995), who are usually referred to as transactional theorists (e.g., Galda & Liang, 2003). Others emphasize factors in the meaning-making process, such as the reader’s knowledge of literary conventions (Culler, 1980), personality or identity (Bleich, 1978; Holland, 1980), and reading strategies learned in an interpretive community (Fish, 1980).

*Transaction between the Reader and the Text*

Transactional theory provides insights into the process of literary response. Although different theorists use different terms to describe the temporal reader/text transaction process, they have more similarities than differences. Among transactional theorists, Rosenblatt (1994) defined the act of reading literature as an event which “happens during a coming-together, a compensation, of a reader and a text” (p. 12). The poem, which stands for any work from the whole range of literary works, is embodied in the actual reading process, resulting from the confluence of the text and the reader. Reading literature is a lived-through experience “shaped by the reader under the guidance of the text” (p. 12). The reading event thus requires the reader’s active participation.

In Rosenblatt’s (1994) words, “the reader’s creation of a poem out of a text must be an active, self-ordering and self-correcting process” (p. 11). Drawing upon his or her past experience of the language and the world, the reader fuses the images, feelings, and ideas stirred up by the words of the text, selects and organizes responses and expectations, and adjusts and readjusts the meaning to achieve a coherent synthesis. Rosenblatt called
this organizing function the process of “selective attention.” The reader’s “selective attention” to what is aroused in the mind through the encounter with the words of the text is, therefore, influenced not only by the text, but also by what the reader brings to the text, that is, the reader’s whole past experience of life and literature.

Each reading event is unique. Even the transaction by the same reader with the same text will change as the reading occasion changes. In Rosenblatt’s (1985) words, we “need to see the reading act as an event involving a particular individual and a particular text, happening at a particular time, under particular circumstances, in a particular social and cultural setting, and as part of the ongoing life of the individual and the group” (p. 100). Therefore, the reading event should be seen in its total matrix—personal, social and cultural (Rosenblatt, 1995).

Rosenblatt’s “selective attention” is similar to Iser’s (1980) “filling in the gaps.” For Iser, the literary text can be perceived in such a way that its unwritten parts (gaps) stimulate the reader’s active participation while the written text imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications. Reading is a “consistency-building” process, during which the reader oscillates between anticipation and retrospection, making decisions to fill in gaps, establish connections, and exclude other possibilities. However, the polysemantic nature of a text opposes the illusion-making of the reader. Thus, the reader always oscillates between consistency and “alien association,” between illusion-making and illusion-breaking. The realization of the text is by no means independent of the disposition of the individual reader, but “arises from the meeting between the written text and the
individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook” (Iser, 1980, p. 50).

Rosenblatt’s “lived-through” experience of reading literature is also similar to Benton’s (1992a) “realization of the secondary world.” For Benton, reading a story is the realization of the secondary world, which exists in the limbo between the reader and the text. This virtual world “draws its idiosyncratic nature from [the reader] and is shaped by [the text]” (Benton & Fox, 1985, p. 5). Benton (1992a) postulated a three-dimensional structure for the secondary world: psychic level, psychic distance, and psychic process. Psychic level refers to the varying mixtures of conscious and unconscious activity in the act of reading. Psychic distance describes the degree of involvement in and detachment from the story world. Psychic process is the temporal dimension and refers to the oscillation between retrospection and anticipation as readers journey through the story world. Each dimension operates on a continuum. The axes of the three dimensions interlock, and the junction is the shifting viewpoint at any moment during the process of recreating the text. Accordingly, there are four elements in the response process: picturing, anticipating and retrospecting, interacting, and evaluating.

Benton (1992b) borrowed Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of “dialogism” to explain the dynamic nature of the secondary world created in the act of reading. According to Bakhtin (1981), dialogism is the fundamental principle of language. Whatever we speak or write implies some real or hypothetical audience. In a sense, the reader’s response is inscribed in the text. There are always multiple voices, stated or implied, for example, the discourses of characters and the author and other discourses outside the text that are
referred to. These voices are embedded in each text; thus each text expresses multiple meanings despite its author’s intention. During reading, the reader needs to exercise “responsive understanding” in relation to the multiple voices. Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism helps Benton to define the relationship between the reader and the text as well as the secondary world in dynamic terms. The mode of the secondary world is therefore described as “dialogic” since its realization by the reader during the reading process is activated by the voices embedded in the text. When the reader begins the reading process, a living secondary world is created, which is “dialogic in origin and impetus and experienced as a sensuous phenomenon whose nature, coherence and point relate intimately to the primary world and, intertextually, to other secondary worlds created in the past and yet to come” (Benton, 1992b, p. 33). In other words, the realization of the secondary world draws on connections to the real world and to other texts; it is a dialogue among the reader’s experiences of the world and of literature, past, present, and future.

A pertinent idea here that Benton and other transactional theorists have not explicated is “intertextuality.” The term intertextuality “has come to have almost as many meanings as users” since poststructuralist Julia Kristeva first coined it in the 1960s (Irwin, 2004, p. 227). Kristeva’s “intertextuality” actually incorporated Bakhtin’s notion of “dialogism” (Harris, 1992). According to Kristeva (1980), “each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts). . . . Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (p. 66). Therefore, the meaning of any text is shaped by its relation to other texts. According to Harris’ (1992) interpretation, Kristeva’s intertextuality, in its broadest sense, is “the mode of existence of all thought,
language, and discourse” (p. 175). That is to say, there is nothing outside the text. For example, the social and cultural environment can be regarded as a system of texts, and the individual mind, “a complex of assimilated concepts or texts” (Harris, 1992, p. 175). Seen in this light, there is no separation between the literary text and other kinds of texts because the social and cultural phenomena and the personal experience are unavoidably brought to bear in a reader’s interpretation and are thus woven into the textual system. Perhaps more important in the intertextual view of literature is that the meaning of the text lies in the reader. As Lenski (2001) captured Kristeva’s point, the location of intertextuality is in the reader “engaging in the active formation of intertextual links by building a mosaic of intersecting texts” (p. 316). Simply put, each text is informed by other texts the reader has read, be they literary or otherwise.

Another transactional theorist, Judith Langer (1990, 1995), characterized the reading activity as an “envisionment building” process. In Langer’s definition, “envisionment” represents “the total understanding a reader has at any point in time, resulting from the ongoing transaction between self and text,” and “the particular meaning that is created represents a unique meeting of the two” (Langer, 1995, p. 14). Readers’ “envisionments are affected by their differing experiences, their purposes for reading, their assumptions about what the teacher wants, and their perceptions of what is politically or socially correct” (p. 36). This process of envisionment building is subject to change and modification “with additional thought, reading, discussion, writing and living” (p. 15). There are four recursive stances that the reader moves along during the envisionment building process:
(1) “Being out and stepping into an envisionment”—The reader searches for as many clues as possible to make sense of the text. This occurs whenever ideas are new.

(2) “Being in and moving through an envisionment”—The reader uses personal knowledge, the text, and the context to furnish ideas. This happens when the reader is immersed in the text-world.

(3) “Stepping out and rethinking what one knows”—The reader uses developing understandings to add to his or her own knowledge and experience. The reader gains insights from the envisionment to reflect upon his or her own life and imagines alternative values, beliefs and emotions.

(4) “Stepping out and objectifying the experience”—The reader objectifies his or her envisionment and reflects on what it means, how it works, and why. The reader may analyze the writer’s craft, the literary elements, and the place of the work in intellectual traditions.

The process of formulating a literary response is a continuous process which occurs before, during, and after a literary experience. For Langer (1995), the “envisionment-building” process is influenced not only by the text and the reader, but also by the context in and beyond the classroom. In other words, reader response is a process of reader/text/context transaction.

Obviously, all these transactional theorists focus on the dynamic reading process and reinforce the notion of an active reader constructing meaning within the guidelines of the text. In addition, they are all aware that the reader’s transaction with the text is inevitably influenced by the personal, social, and cultural contexts in which the reading
event occurs, although they do not elaborate on these factors. In order to see the reading event in its total matrix, we need to turn to still other reader response theorists.

Factors in the Meaning-Making Process

What do readers bring to bear as they make meaning in conjunction with the text? What are the factors that influence the transaction between the reader and the text? Researchers have often discussed reader response theories and research from three perspectives: focus on the text, focus on the reader, and focus on the context (e.g., Benton, 2005; Galda & Beach, 2001; Sipe, 1999). In this vein, I will provide an overview of reader response theories with the relative stress on the text, the reader, or the context. The sequence of texts, readers, and contexts corresponds to a trend toward increasing attention to the various contexts in which responses are generated (Sipe, 1999). It should be noted that factors related to the text, the reader, and the context actually interact with each other. Since the 1990s, literary response researchers have tended to define response in sociocultural terms, and texts, readers, and contexts have been studied through sociocultural lenses (Galda & Beach, 2001; Rogers & Soter, 1997).

Textual factors. Theorists focusing on textual factors are interested in how readers draw on their knowledge of text or genre conventions to make sense of texts. According to Culler (1980), “to read a text as literature is not to make one’s mind a tabula rasa and approach it without preconceptions; one must bring it an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for” (p. 102). For Culler, the meaning and structure of a literary work can only be actualized through the reader’s internalized grammar of literature applied in the act of reading. The
grammar of literature is what Culler (1980) called the “literary conventions.” Without
the knowledge of literary conventions, or “literary competence,” one would not be able to
read a literary work as literature. The experience and mastery of the conventions enable
one to achieve different levels of coherence and thematic synthesis.

Readers acquire the grammar of literature through educational institutions (Culler,
1980). During the process of literary education, students assimilate the grammar of
literature or literary competence, but they may not be consciously aware of their
knowledge. Literary meaning becomes the function of conventions that are publicly
accepted as plausible and justifiable. That is, literary meaning becomes an institutional
matter. Readers apply different conventions to different genres. Further, because of the
institutional nature of literary understanding, the conventions readers apply change from
age to age. Since literary conventions are learned, the meaning the reader makes from the
text is never neutral but is conditioned by sociocultural contexts.

**Reader factors.** Some reader response theorists focus on the reader’s psychology.
Two of the most important psychological theorists of reader response are David Bleich
and Norman Holland (Mailloux, 1990). For Bleich (1975), the source of meaning is
located in the individual reader, not in the text, and the individual reader’s subjective
response is emphasized. Bleich’s (1975) model of reading consists of three kinds of
responses: perception, affect, and association. “Perception” is a subjective reconstruction
of a poem, activated by the individual reader’s particular bias. A reader’s response
statement of perception tells what the reader sees in the poem or what the reader thinks a
poet says. Affective response refers to the actual affect (fear, indignation, satisfaction,
etc.) the reader feels while reading a poem. The affect may further stimulate the associative response that reminds the reader of some previous experiences. Bleich’s (1978) assumption is that “each person’s most urgent motivations are to understand himself” (p. 297). Bleich’s theory of reading involves a three-step process: the first level is subjective response; the second, the level of criticism; and the third, critical exchange. According to Bleich, readers can only view literature objectively by beginning with their subjective response.

Bleich’s theory provides a rationale for using young adult literature in a student-centered classroom. As Monseau (1992) suggested, since “adolescents are intensely preoccupied with themselves—physically, psychologically, and socially” (p. 91), young adult books, by reflecting the interests and needs of adolescents, can stimulate their engagement, which is the first step toward literary appreciation.

Similarly, Holland (1980) defined reading as a function of personality, or identity. There are differences in the interpretation of a text because each reader creates a unity of the text in a way that is characteristic of his or her identity theme. In Holland’s words, “the unity we find in literary texts is impregnated with the identity that finds that unity” (p. 123). Therefore, each reader “will seek out the particular themes that concern him. Each will have different ways of making the text into an experience with a coherence and significance that satisfies” (p. 123). Recurrent responses can thus be attributed to readers’ similar identity themes.

Psychological reader response theorists offer strong arguments for a student/response-centered approach to literature instruction. However, they do not
consider the influence of the sociocultural context on reader response. As Culler (1981) observed, students’ free association responses in Holland’s case studies actually reflect more of their cultural attitudes and socialization than their unique identities. The personal response is inevitably related to the social and cultural context.

*Contextual factors.* Fish’s (1980) theory focuses on the influence of the social context on the reader/text transaction. For Fish, interpretation is the result of interpretive strategies. “Interpretive communities” are made up of those who share interpretive strategies, and the interpretive strategies are not natural but learned. The content of readers’ experience of a text is a succession of acts they perform in search of an author’s intention or formal realization. However, formal units or intentions do not inhere “in” the text, but are “verified by an interpretive act” (p. 176). It is the readers’ interpretive strategies that permit them to create intentions and formal features. Meaning is thus constrained by the interpretive strategies shared by communities of readers.

Fish’s notion of “interpretive communities” explains the stability of interpretation among readers (they belong to the same community) and the variety of interpretation in the career of a single reader (the reader belongs to different communities). Fish’s theory can also provide insights into students’ differing responses to the same text in the same classroom community. As Beach (1993) suggested, this is because a student may be “not only a member of the classroom community but may also import perspectives as a member of a family, social club, a neighborhood, etc.” (p. 107). That is, the students are responding as persons belonging to different cultural communities at the same time.
A performative view of subjectivity and context can also help explain the relationship between literary response and context (Broughton, 2002; Lewis, 2001; Sutherland, 2005). Literary response reflects a reader’s allegiance to certain cultural groups. Through literary practices, the reader claims his/her membership among these groups. In poststructuralist terms, readers respond according to certain “subject positions” which they acquire through socialization by cultural institutions, and which they act out in various cultural practices (Beach, 1993). Readers’ subject positions or desired ways of responding are acquired through institutions such as family, schools, and the media. Response to literature is regarded as a cultural practice. From a performative perspective, when readers respond, they perform subject positions appropriate to their gender, class, race, and other social roles, and thus define and construct their subjectivities through such practices. The performance of subjectivities (in modernist terms, “identity” or “self”) is an on-going process influenced by the given context. A performative view of literary response, as Broughton (2002) explicated, involves two dimensions. On the one hand, readers repeat certain subject positions in recognizably consistent ways that reveal their membership to certain social groups. On the other hand, readers concurrently make shifts among available positions and engage in ongoing construction of their subjectivities in relation to the social, cultural, and political contexts.

To summarize, the review in this section shows that factors from the reader, the text, and the context intersect in the reader’s weaving of response. Although, for the sake of convenience, I discuss them as separate categories, the boundaries between them seem blurred. Readers’ knowledge of literary grammar and reading strategies are actually
learned and therefore institutional. In addition, readers’ subjective or personal responses are always impregnated with their cultural identity within certain cultural groups. Moreover, response is a cultural practice that reflects and defines the reader’s cultural identity.

*Reader Stance*

Reader response theorists give various characterizations of the reader’s stance. According to Galda and Liang (2003), “stance has to do with expectations for reading, with the way in which a reader approaches a text,” and “stance influences the act of reading before, during, and after a book is opened” (p. 269).

For Rosenblatt (1994), “stance” is the reader’s focus of attention in the reading event, “a readiness to respond in a particular way” (p. 43). Stance determines how a reader organizes the reading experience and, thus, makes meaning of the text. According to Rosenblatt, the most effective way to read a literary work is to adopt an aesthetic stance. Aesthetic reading focuses on the sensations, images, feelings and thoughts evoked from the text. This aesthetic stance allows the reader to have a virtual experience, living in the story world, identifying with characters, and getting emotionally involved. On the other hand, an efferent stance is most effective in reading nonfiction since the reader’s attention is focused on the information or facts to be “carried away” from the reading for use in the real world. While “the efferent reader focuses attention on public meaning, abstracting what is to be retained after reading—to be recalled, paraphrased, acted on, analyzed,” the aesthetic reader’s “selective attention is focused primarily on what is
personally lived through” (Rosenblatt, 1985b, pp. 101-102). In a word, aesthetic reading focuses on experience while efferent reading, information.

According to Rosenblatt (1995), the stance that a reader adopts in relation to a text actually hovers on a continuum between aesthetic and efferent reading: “No matter how the author intended the text to be read, the same text can be read either efferently or aesthetically” and the readings can fall on “a continuum of ‘mixes’ of different proportions” (p. 350) that range from predominantly efferent to predominantly aesthetic.

In the transaction with the text, the adoption of an aesthetic or efferent stance is demonstrated as the reader’s consciousness is constantly engaged in a process of “selective attention,” on the basis of the textual clues and the reader’s purpose in reading (Rosenblatt, 1980).

Similarly, Langer (1990, 1995) distinguished two approaches to a text: reading for literary purposes and reading for informative purposes. When readers are engaged in literary experience, they are oriented toward a “horizon of possibilities.” Exploring the horizon of possibilities involves “a melding of life in literature and literature in life” (Langer, 1995, p. 29). On the basis of our previous knowledge of life and literature, we explore “emotions, relationships, motives, and reactions, calling on what we know or imagine how it is to be (or not to be) human. . . . We also think beyond the particular situation, using our envisionments to reflect on our own lives, the lives of others, and the conditions of the world in general” (Langer, 1995, pp. 29-30). On the other hand, when we are reading informational texts, we are engaged in discursive experience with a purpose of gaining ideas or information. The topic or the point of argument becomes our
sense of the whole. As we read on, we try to clarify the envisionments and narrow the possibilities of meaning in relation to “the point of reference.” While literary experience is essentially subjective, discursive experience is primarily objective.

Britton (1984) suggested that Rosenblatt’s aesthetic-efferent continuum is compatible with his own spectator-participant continuum, although Rosenblatt (1985b) insisted that her categories cut across both of Britton’s concepts. According to Britton (1984), the reader of a literary text should take a spectator stance. A spectator stance allows the reader to contemplate the reconstruction of imagined events without thought of real-world outcomes. The spectator’s response to literature is described as a “detached evaluative response,” which does not mean a “lack of involvement or concern” (Britton, 1984, p. 325). Rather, it means that the reader-as-spectator is able to evaluate and reflect upon the fictional world without the demands of real-world action. Taking up the spectator stance allows the reader to test out, generate, and refine his/her value system (Britton, 1984). This opportunity to develop values is what Galda (1998) called the inherent power of literature. By contrast, the reader-as-participant reads efferently in order to get things done, to participate in the events of the real world.

Some scholars maintain that Rosenblatt’s aesthetic reading seems to highlight the lived-through experience or personal response and to neglect the more distant aesthetic judgment that Britton’s reader-as-spectator can make about the artistry of a text (e.g., Cai & Traw, 1997). For Lewis (2000), Rosenblatt’s conflating of the personal and the aesthetic is also problematic. She asserted that engagement with literary texts involves

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1 Some scholars, such as Corcoran (1992) and Galda and Liang (2003), consider Rosenblatt’s aesthetic stance equivalent to Britton’s spectator stance.
more than a personal and pleasurable response; it encompasses the critical response as well. Lewis (2000) suggested a broader view of aesthetic reading, “one that addresses the social and political dimensions of texts and invites students to take pleasure in both the personal and the critical” (p. 253). It is not the intention of this literature review to split the theoretical distinction. It should suffice to make the brief comment that, although Rosenblatt limits “aesthetic response” to the personal and pleasurable, some theorists and scholars tend to see “aesthetic response” as a broader term denoting a general literary response that happens in the transaction between the reader and the text (e.g., Iser, 1978). For this study, I assumed that literary response can involve not only the reader’s virtual experience of the story world but also his/her critical interpretation and artistic evaluation of the story world. I also regarded Rosenblatt’s “aesthetic stance” as equivalent to Britton’s “spectator stance.” Sometimes, I used “aesthetic stance” as a differentiated term from “efferent stance” in this study as the context demanded.

From the social constructivist perspective, Beach (1997) defined “stance as the ideological orientations or ‘subject positions’ readers bring to their response to literature” (p. 69). Hence, stances reflect the beliefs and attitudes readers apply to texts. Readers judge characters’ actions and infer thematic meanings according to their own beliefs and attitudes. Stances are constituted by discourses of gender, class, and racial differences.

In short, while Rosenblatt, Langer, and Britton all suggest that an appropriate stance toward literary texts will ensure a rich literary experience, Beach acknowledges the social, cultural, and political dimensions that are associated with the way the reader approaches a text.
ESL Readers, Literature, and Reader Response

The ESL reading research community has largely appropriated English L1 reading theories and models (Lally, 1998; Shen, 2005), and most ESL reading instruction has been derived from the teaching practices of English L1 reading (Garcia, 2003). According to Lally (1998), of the three main models of English L1 reading comprehension (bottom-up, top-down, and interactive), ESL researchers have recently favored the transfer of top-down and interactive models to the realm of the ESL reading process. Accordingly they have emphasized the role of the reader and the prior knowledge that the reader brings to the interactive reading process, instead of the bottom-up linguistic accuracy. This recent development, as Lally (1998) observed, is reflected in second language acquisition theories, which stress language performance as a result of the learner’s total knowledge, rather than merely the mastery of discrete language subskills. Schema theory is also used by ESL reading researchers to account for the background and cultural knowledge, or schemata, that the reader brings to the interactive process with the text (Lally, 1998).

As far as reading instruction is concerned, top-down models in English L1 reading usher in the whole language approach and justify the use of authentic literature in place of traditional basal readers (e.g., Goodman, 2005; Smith, 2006). Advocates of literature-based ESL assert that the recommended use of authentic literature should apply

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2 As Lally (1998) explained, bottom-up reading models are text-driven and view reading “as a decoding process where the reader reconstruits meaning from the smallest textual units” (para. 3). “Top-down processes are reader-driven and concentrate on what the reader brings to the text in terms of world knowledge” (para. 4). “The interactive model of reading comprehension involves both bottom-up and top-down processing, or an interactive process between the reader and the text” (para. 5). Bottom-up models are more concerned about linguistic accuracy while top-down models emphasize the reader’s use of context and prior knowledge.
to ESL learners as strongly as it does to native English speakers (Cox & Boyd-Batstone, 1997; Custodio & Sutton, 1998; Watts, 1999). They draw on second language acquisition (SLA) theories, especially the work of Stephen Krashen, to support their argument for using children’s or young adult literature with English language learners.

Of the five basic hypotheses in Krashen’s (1982, 1985) Monitor Model, the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis, the Input hypothesis, and the Affective-Filter hypothesis are most often cited.³ Krashen (1985) distinguished acquisition from learning: language acquisition is spontaneous and unconscious with its focus on messages while language learning focuses on conscious memorization of language forms. Krashen suggested that L2 is best acquired in situations similar to those in L1, in which the focus is on meaning rather than on form. Thus, Krashen emphasized the importance of authentic texts and meaningful tasks.

According to Krashen (1985), acquisition occurs when the student is exposed to comprehensible input, which is defined as second language input which is just a bit beyond the student’s current level of competence. In addition to language factors, the characteristics of comprehensible input also include contextual clues, topics the student has prior knowledge about, or topics that are interesting and meaningful to the student. Thus, Krashen (1985) suggested using extended texts, such as novels, because such texts

³ The other two are the Monitor hypothesis and the Natural Order hypothesis. The Monitor operates when the learner checks before or after an utterance against the conscious knowledge of rules. The Natural Order hypothesis suggests that “we acquire the rules of language in a predictable order, some rules tending to come early and others late” (Krashen, 1985, p. 1). The five hypotheses can be summarized with a single claim: “people acquire second language only if they obtain comprehensible input and if their affective filters are low enough to allow the input in” (Krashen, 1985, p. 4).
can provide more contextual clues or familiarity for comprehensible input as well as meaningful topics that engage students’ interest.

Finally, the affective filter determines how comprehensible input is going to be processed. According to Krashen (1982), “those whose attitudes are not optimal for second language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input, but they will also have a higher or stronger affective filter” (p.31). For example, the affective filter is high when the student is nervous, not strongly motivated, or lacking in self-esteem. On the contrary, students with a lower affective filter will obtain more input and be more open to input. Thus, Krashen emphasized the importance of a low-anxiety environment.

In light of Krashen’s theory, using young adult literature with adolescent English learners should be appropriate because (1) it is authentic literature, (2) it is extended texts with interesting and meaningful topics, and (3) the response-centered approach to reading young adult literature can help create a low-anxiety environment that lowers the student’s affective filter. Further discussion about the theoretical crossroads of reader response and second language acquisition in the following will illuminate this third point.

In addition to their social constructivist underpinnings, reader response and second language acquisition (SLA) theories actually share a lot of common ground. Cox and Boyd-Batstone (1997) tried to map the intersections of reader response and SLA theories. They systematically compared how both theories describe the roles of students, language, the teacher, and the classroom in student- and response-centered instruction. Cox and Boyd-Batstone’s ideas can be briefly summarized as follows. First, in terms of the role of students, reader response theories emphasize the role of the reader/student in
active construction of meaning from a text. Similarly, SLA theorists James Cummins (1981, 1984) and Stephen Krashen (1982, 1985) put great emphasis on students’ prior knowledge and life experience. A response-centered approach to literature also helps to build Krashen’s low-anxiety environment, in which students are more likely to be motivated to express their ideas or opinions. Second, as to the role of language, reader response theories maintain that the reader needs to activate his or her linguistic and experiential repertoire to construct meaning during reading. Admittedly, both the first and second languages are funds of knowledge, and so are reading experiences with texts in other languages and from other cultures. Similarly, SLA theories emphasize that the acquisition of a target language emerges from one’s own experience, and that the role of the primary language is essential for learning the target language. Third, as far as the role of the teacher is concerned, the teacher with a reader-response orientation will listen to students and encourage students’ personal responses to texts, and the teacher believes that students’ construction of meaning is embedded within the social and cultural context. Parallel ideas in SLA theories include Cummins’ context-embedded instruction and Krashen’s comprehensible input. For Cummins, students’ lives, cultures, and language experiences are the necessary context for second-language learning, and Krashen’s idea of comprehensible input asks the teacher to tap into students’ background knowledge. Fourth, in a response-centered classroom, multiple and varied responses to a text are encouraged and expected. In second language instruction, student voice is the goal, and “cultural and linguistic and personal diversity is expected and celebrated” (Cox & Boyd-Batstone, 1997, p. 41).
It should now be obvious that using literature, especially young adult literature, with adolescent English language learners, aligns well with SLA theories. Both reader response theories and SLA theories emphasize the role of the reader/student and acknowledge the reader/student’s prior knowledge and experience. Young adult literature can serve as comprehensible input, and the reader-response approach to reading literature can help create a low-anxiety environment conducive to second language acquisition. In the following section, I will try to provide a framework for reading literature other than the literature of one’s own culture in which the reader’s cultural background plays a role.

Reading Literature of Other Cultures

The assumptions concerning response to literature from other countries are grounded within a broad frame of multicultural literature. Different scholars define and classify multicultural literature differently: by content and intended audience (Sims, 1982), by cultural specificity (Bishop, 1992), or by geographical and cultural boundaries (Cai & Bishop, 1994). According to Bishop (1997), multicultural literature includes “books that reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world” (p. 3). Literature from other countries, or world or international literature, can surely be considered a subcategory of multicultural literature.

In general, there are three major aspects of multicultural literature—literary, educational, and sociopolitical (Cai, 2002). The literary aspect refers to the issues involved in literary creation and reception, such as authenticity/stereotyping and an

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4 Focusing on content and intended audience, Sims (1982) classified multicultural literature into three categories: “Social conscience,” “melting pot,” and “culturally conscious.” Based on cultural specificity, Bishop (1992) classified three types of multicultural literature: “culturally specific,” “generally American,” and “culturally neutral.” If classified by geographical and cultural boundaries, multicultural literature includes world literature, cross-cultural literature, and parallel cultural literature (Cai & Bishop, 1994).
insider/outsider perspective; the educational function of multicultural literature assists students in seeing the similarities and differences among different cultures; and the sociopolitical goal of multicultural literature is concerned with transforming the existing social order in order to achieve justice and equality among all cultures. Given its specific social and historical context, multicultural literature in America has tended to focus on the political aim. However, the sociopolitical goal of transforming the existing social order has not been the concern of this study. This study is more concerned about the literary and educational aspects: how readers perceive the commonalities and peculiarities between their own culture and the culture represented in a literary work from another country. Anchored in multicultural literature, this study has assumed that reading literature from other countries or cultures can promote an understanding and appreciation of cultural differences.

The educational function of literature, especially multicultural literature, to foster understanding of self and the world has been presumed to be self-evident (Dressel, 2003; Landt, 2006; Purves, 1993; Rogers, 1999). For example, Landt (2006) pointed out three purposes for using multicultural literature with adolescents. First, multicultural literature exposes students to “a broader view of the world” (p. 691). Multicultural literature serves as a bridge to awareness and understanding and helps students to “discern the similarities among cultures while learning to appreciate the differences” (p. 692). Second, once students can cross cultural boundaries and appreciate differences, they are then able to “interrupt prejudice and misunderstanding” (p. 692). Multicultural literature promotes mutual understanding and appreciation among cultures, so that ethnocentricity and
prejudice will not be reinforced. Third, multicultural literature helps students “see themselves in their reading” (p. 694). Though Landt’s third point is mainly concerned with the need for providing literature that reflects the readers’ cultural selves, I believe reading literature other than the literature of one’s own culture can provide opportunities for self-reflection in varying degrees as well due to some common ground of all humanity.

Using multicultural young adult literature with adolescents is especially appropriate because adolescents are in the process of developing their identities as they are becoming independent participants in the society (Landt, 2006; Watts, 1999; Zitlow & Stover, 1998). Landt (2006) suggested that “providing a multitude of perspectives through literature at this point in students’ development is an effective way to help facilitate their engagement in self and social understanding” (p. 691). In addition, many adolescent concerns are common among different cultures (Stover, 2000; Zitlow & Stover, 1998). Through the lenses of familiar issues, students can make intercultural connections and thus better understand different cultures.

The aspects of literary creation and reception in multicultural literature are also important for understanding students’ literary responses when reading across cultures. Regarding the reading of literature from other cultures, Soter (1997) pointed out two important issues of literary response that need to be considered. They are the “aesthetic restriction” the reader may encounter in the face of the unfamiliar and the “imaginative dimension” characteristic of all good literature. According to Soter, when reading across cultures, the reader, especially the inexperienced reader, may experience “aesthetic restriction” in the face of the unfamiliar. The reader may reject the work
because of elements in the text that the reader finds unacceptable, and it is often as much because of content as of form that the rejection occurs. Thus the literary text cannot ‘work on the reader’—it is at the level of personal response related to values, tastes, life experience, predilections, openness to possibilities of other lives and values that the work is untenable for the reader. (Soter, 1997, pp. 217-218).

In other words, the aesthetic restriction may come from the content or the literary form, both of which could be culturally specific. Accordingly, the aesthetic restriction may block the personal response. However, lack of cultural background knowledge does not necessarily preclude both enjoyment and critical interpretation of such literature. We can still have a rich and powerful experience of a literary work as art, even though our starting point is different from that of “insiders.” This is possible due to the “artistry” and “the imaginative dimension” that are characteristic of all good literature. That is, good literature has the power to transport readers into other worlds, inviting them to put aside disbelief and resistance and to “imagine outside their present or immediate realms and experiences” (Soter, 1997, p. 226). This is why cross-cultural literary experience can provide us with opportunities for widening our narrow cultural horizons.

Cai (2002) proposed a multidimensional model for the study of reader response to multicultural literature, including cognitive-developmental, affective-attitudinal, and social-communal dimensions. The cognitive-developmental dimension considers the reader’s prior knowledge of the world and literature, especially (1) knowledge of a specific culture and (2) knowledge of the literary forms, conventions, and features of that culture. “The affective, or emotional aspects of reader response include the readers’ preferences for various books, like or dislike of characters, identification with characters, and involvement” (Cai, 2002, pp. 159-160). The affective aspect of response is associated
with a reader’s subject position toward the text, which, according to cultural theories of response, reflects the reader’s own cultural beliefs, attitudes, and values. Finally, in addition to cognitive and affective aspects, reading is also a social process, a communal event. The social context in which a reading event occurs conditions readers’ construction of meaning, and the meaning of the text is negotiated through interaction among a community of readers. According to Cai (2002), “perhaps nowhere is intersubjective interaction more intense than in group discussion of multicultural literature” (p. 167). The three dimensions of response are not independent, but are actually interrelated in a dynamic meaning-making process.

In summary, the multicultural perspective on literature and literature teaching sheds some light on the relationship between culture and response to literature. The educational transformative power of multicultural literature would be impossible if the artistry of the work did not work its magic on the reader. Cai’s (2002) model of response to multicultural literature helps us to understand the complex act of responding to multicultural literature. However, his model tends to focus on cultural and social factors. In contrast, Soter’s (1997) suggestion and argument remind us of the potential “imaginative dimension” of a literary work as art in bringing readers across the cultural boundaries.

Research on Response to Literature

This section reviews the research on response to literature, especially literature from other cultures. Some recent research on response to literature conducted within a single culture or with L1 students is first briefly discussed to offer insights into
sociocultural perspectives on reader response. The research findings point to the need to define reader response in sociocultural terms, which should be especially applicable in reading across cultures. However, the following review of research will focus on cases of reading across cultures that reflect the questions addressed in this study—literary response, cultural awareness, and the possible relationship between them.

**Sociocultural Perspectives on Reader Response**

Earlier reader response studies tended to focus on some isolated elements of the text or factors associated with the reader. For example, texts of different genres may evoke different types of response (Galda, 1990; Zaharias, 1986). Reader factors such as age and cognitive development also influence response (Applebee, 1978; Thomson, 1996). However, more recent studies have found that factors in the reader, such as the reader’s stance and identity (Beach, 1997) and expectations for characters’ actions (Mellor & Patterson, 2000), are actually conditioned by the broader social and cultural context. For example, in Beach’s (1997) study, suburban high school students tended to adopt a stance of resistance to multicultural literature and were reluctant to explore issues of racism and white privilege within their suburban culture. The students’ stance revealed their resistance to questioning their own cultural identities. Mellor and Patterson (2000) found that readers held expectations for characters’ behavior the same way as they did for people in the real world, and that their expectations were determined by historical and cultural conventions.

More and more reader response studies have examined the contexts in which response is generated (Galda & Beach, 2001; Sipe, 1999). Contexts can range from the
immediate classroom context (e.g., Hickman, 1981; Eeds & Wells, 1989) to the wider sociocultural context beyond the classroom (e.g., Beach, 1995; Cherland, 1992; Enciso, 1994; Hemphill, 1999). As to the immediate context, for example, Hickman (1981) documented children’s responses in the classroom context and found that teachers’ manipulation was the most powerful feature of classroom context. In a study by Eeds and Wells (1989), members of discussion groups were able to participate in “grand conversations” about literature through group interaction. The students and the teacher supported and encouraged each other so that group members could arrive at richer responses to literature.

The wider sociocultural context refers to cultural identity, class, and gender. For example, Enciso (1994) found that in classroom discussions students drew on many cultural references to explain their ideas and impressions about the characters and events in the multicultural novel *Maniac Magee*. Students tended to refer to mainstream culture as a source of explanation. Meanwhile, their cultural references also revealed their cultural identities. Enciso concluded that literature discussions could become a context in which students could explore and reform their cultural identities. Hemphill (1999) found that the differences in style of responding to poetry between working and middle-class students paralleled their contrasting styles of narrating stories of personal experience. Cherland’s (1992) study revealed that female students tended to employ a “discourse of feeling,” focusing on characters’ motivation and human relationships while male readers tended to speak in a “discourse of action” and were thus concerned with a clear and logical expression of the plot. Finally, Beach (1995) examined how students applied their
cultural models to their reading. Cultural models consist of categories for judging or labeling others according to one’s cultural attitudes. Beach found that students from different ability groups (i.e., regular and advanced English classes) and students of different genders applied different cultural models of schooling and gender roles in their responses.

The studies reviewed above suggest that it is impossible to separate personal response from cultural forces. Thus, the role of culture in response to the literature of other cultures should become more prominent, as the following studies show.

*Studies on Response to Literature of Other Cultures*

Various researchers have tried to examine whether and to what extent culture restricts or interferes with readers’ engagement. Among them, Mangat and Johnston (2000), Baker (1990), Altieri (1995), and Ho (1990) confirmed that students were capable of aesthetic involvement despite the portrayed culture different from their own.

Mangat and Johnston (2000) examined how the way the unfamiliar culture was represented influenced students’ story preferences. They conducted a study on Canadian adolescents’ response to three African novels, and they found that their students preferred texts in which the unfamiliar culture was represented as “normal” to those in which culture was explained in a didactic manner. They seemed to prefer the texts in which “cultural differences are made peripheral to the central interests of the literary work” (p. 32). The study also suggested that, even though the students were not the intended audience of the selected novels, they were not necessarily dislocated when reading across cultures.
Baker (1990) conducted an ethnographic study of how the culture of the reader and the culture depicted in a text were associated with the responses of first-semester college freshmen to six contemporary Appalachian short stories. The findings revealed that culture could be both a resource and a constraint in influencing how the reader interacted with a text. In addition, “various components of individual cultural backgrounds appear to have a greater influence on the ways readers take meanings from text and the kinds of responses that result than do the cultural elements of the text itself” (p. 1534A). Readers might show more initial interest in a selection when they were familiar with the culture depicted in the text. However, as they continued interacting with the text, their own cultural backgrounds became the dominant influence on what meanings they made from the text.

Altieri (1995) also tried to determine the cultural influence on aesthetic involvement or story preference. In his study, data were collected from the written responses of 84 fifth-grade and seventh-grade students to six multicultural short stories over a six-week period. The results revealed that the level of aesthetic involvement was not significantly influenced by the culture of the reader or the text. Although the students preferred stories reflecting their own culture, they were capable of complex aesthetic transactions regardless of the culture portrayed.

Ho’s (1990) study was another example showing that readers can enjoy the reading process even though the cultural and societal/familial rules depicted are different from their own. Ho interviewed 103 ESL students aged 13-17 in Singapore and asked for their responses to American young adult fiction. Their responses revealed that they
regarded morals as the most important factor in the novels. For example, they deplored some American values portrayed in the YA fiction, such as individuality, egocentrism, and freedom of expression, and they disapproved of characters who were rebellious, irresponsible, or indifferent to the needs of the weak and the elderly. In contrast, they appreciated characters who exhibited the virtues they respected, such as academic ability and courage. Their responses suggested the influence of the moral education that has always been emphasized in Singapore. Regardless of this fact, their unfavorable criticism of American YA fiction did not interfere with the pleasure they experienced when reading the books. Like their Western counterparts, these teenagers liked YA fiction for some obvious reasons: “escapism, bibliotherapy, wish fulfillment, identification with characters, empathy, and gratification that teenagers can solve problems, no matter how daunting or complicated, and emerge as better people” (p. 257). This suggests that their emphasis on the moral issues of the text might be a learned way of responding to texts, a learned cultural practice.

Literary response can be seen as a cultural practice that reflects and defines readers’ identities. For example, Lvovich (2003) explored the impact of reading literature on ESL readers’ affectivity and cultural identity. In their responses to a novel about an immigration experience, these ESL students created personal connections to the literary text and made sense of their own stories in relation to the protagonist’s experience. Discussion and writing became the tools for their meaning making as they examined their cultural identities in different social and cultural contexts. Literature and responding to literature thus gave them personal, social, and cultural meanings.
Similarly, in her study on six 16-year-old Black girls’ responses to *The Bluest Eye*, Sutherland (2005) found that the girls used literary practices to negotiate the boundaries of their ascribed identities that the society imposed on them. As Black females, the participants were expected to “hold particular values” and to “exhibit particular behaviors” (p. 366). Thus, the ascribed identities served as boundaries for the black girls to think about themselves and their place in the world. However, the participants also used literary discussions as tools to reflect upon their own life experience and to co-construct their identities in the process. That is, literary practices enabled negotiation of the boundaries of ascribed identities.

Although culture plays a role in literary response, it may not be the dominant factor in reading across cultures. Studies by Webster (2001) and Leung (2003) revealed that there were other factors, such as personality and personal experience, that influenced response to the literature of other cultures to some extent.

Webster (2001) investigated the effects of ninth graders’ culture-specific schemata in their responses to multicultural literature. The participants were 76 students in four ninth-grade English honors classes. He found that there was no uniform response between the responses of two individuals representing the same culture. Students’ awareness of their own cultural background did not always aid them in entering a literary text. Cultural forces conditioned their responses, but were not a predominant influence. Participants’ unique personality and experiences emerged as important factors in their responses. Despite the cultural forces, each individual’s response remained unique. Webster speculated that the cultural influence might have been more prevalent in this
study if the participants had not been familiar with the dominant American culture and other subcultures.

Leung (2003) explored the literary responses of four bicultural girls to one cross-cultural text. She found that cultural knowledge, the stage of ethnic identity development, personality traits, and knowledge of narrative conventions all contributed to differences in responses. All these factors related in multiple ways to literary responses.

Another line of research endeavors to develop a framework to categorize students’ responses and to describe their meaning-making process in reading the literary texts of other cultures as, for example, in the studies of Jordan and Purves (1993), Jordan (1997), Lehr and Thompson (2000), and Enriquez (2001).

In a preliminary study, Jordan and Purves (1993) interviewed 89 tenth and eleventh grade students and twelve teachers in order to investigate the problems that students face when approaching texts from outside their own culture. The results from the students’ responses revealed that the students tended to respond to literature on a personal basis, rather than look at the text as a cultural artifact. That is, they reacted to the story or characters and viewed the text in terms of personal response. Basically, the students had few problems reading the text as long as they did not raise cultural issues concerning the text. Moreover, they viewed their problems in understanding what they read as problems with the writer or with themselves as readers, not as problems associated with their cultural knowledge.

Based on the findings of this study by Jordan and Purves (1993), Jordan (1997) conducted a national survey to see whether or not a larger sample would yield significant
patterns in students’ responses to the literature of other cultures. Students were asked to read several texts and then to choose from a list of questions those that they considered most important regarding the text selections they had read. The results indicated that, when reading across cultures, the students were most concerned with simply understanding the text, and cultural insight was far down on their list of priorities. The students needed to make connections to a text before they could understand it. The connections to a text, such as finding common experiences and identifying with a character’s feelings, were often made on a personal level. Jordan regarded this tendency to read for similarities and universals to be a result of thematic teaching, an approach to teaching literature, since students tend to respond according to how they are taught. Although cultural issues in the text or in the reader interacted with the reading to some extent, the readers were actually individuals, judging a text from a variety of reader stances.

Lehr and Thompson (2000) created a framework to analyze fifth-grade children’s responses to the themes and topics in two multicultural novels *Maniac Magee* and *The Friendship*. The response categories included literal response, inferring, moral response, personal response/connecting, building meaning interactively (in a group context), background knowledge, and dialogic response (internal conflict). The categories were listed by order of frequency, with literal response being the most frequent and dialogic response the least frequent. It was also found that children tended to have literal and inference responses earlier on, and that interpretation was a later development in interactive contexts.
Enriquez’s (2001) study on ESL students’ responses to Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* found that, as they read, adolescent students used a common framework for learning the depicted culture. Upon encountering the new culture, the students initially grappled with the unfamiliar aspects, then used knowledge from the text itself or from other cultures to construct an understanding of the fictitious culture. Next, they compared and contrasted their own cultures with the one depicted. Finally, they came to examine their own cultures and reflected on the different culture with new appreciation. Basically, “the process of understanding different cultures seemed to undergo a progression of making sense and reflecting” (p. 20).

In addition to increased understanding of the complexity of literary response, some studies on reading across cultures can also offer insights helpful for book selection. Machet (1992) investigated whether readers’ responses varied with the values inherent in a text, and whether these differences could be attributed to differences in the value systems of the respondents’ subcultures. Adolescents aged 16 to 18 from three subcultures in South Africa were asked to read three texts, one representing their own subculture and two representative of the other two cultural groups. In interviews, they were asked to identify the values of their own cultural group and the values they saw in the story. The results revealed that “readers are more likely to respond positively to books in which there are characters from their ethnic group or culture, especially if these characters are perceived as accurately representing personality traits or values found in the culture” (p. 362). The study also found that a value central to one group might not be equally important to another group. However, although not all cultural groups would
enjoy the same books, certain books might express “universal values” and appeal to
different ethnic groups. The implications of this study can be summarized as follows: it is
important to choose books that represent cultures accurately, provide positive role models,
and express universal values.

A study by Stover and Karr (1990) also suggested that young adult literature
could be an ideal book choice for introducing adolescents to other cultures. Stover and
Karr reported how the use of one Russian YA novel helped American adolescents to
better understand the Russian culture. In a teaching unit of the English program, they
asked American 7th and 8th graders to read a Russian YA novel, *Shadows across the Sun.*
Through the use of reading logs, structured writing assignments, surveys, and small-
group discussions, they monitored the students’ changes in perspective on the Russian
culture and people. Stover and Karr learned several lessons from their teaching project.
They found that, first, reading the Russian book caused students to examine their own
values in contrast with those of the characters and helped them to reflect upon how their
own values and experiences shaped their responses. Second, Stover and Karr learned that
the teacher needed to choose reading materials that appealed to all students; otherwise,
the students would associate forced reading with the culture about which they were
reading. Third, the study confirmed the value of using young adult literature from other
countries in broadening students’ understanding of foreign cultures. The young adult
literature helped students to appreciate the similarities between their own lives and those
of the adolescents in other countries. Many of the developmental problems or concerns
that American adolescents faced seemed equally important to adolescents from another land.

Davis (2000) examined the connections that adolescent African-American females made while reading multicultural literature. Davis found that these students did not necessarily self-select books with characters of their own ethnicity. Instead, these adolescents self-selected texts with characters who “had situations and problems similar to the ones that they were facing” and characters who “were successful in finding solutions” (p. 266). What mattered most for the students was whether these books allowed them to make connections with the experiences occurring in their own lives.

Thus far, giving students multicultural literature that represents universal themes or experiences seems warranted. However, Rice’s (2005) research reminds teachers of (1) the importance of students’ sociocultural frame in response to multicultural literature with universal themes, and (2) the aesthetic restriction, to use Soter’s (1997) term, that students might encounter. Rice asked eight sixth graders (4 boys and 4 girls) to read four Hispanic-American multicultural short stories. The students were Euro-Americans, coming from the middle to upper middle class. The background of the characters in the stories was characterized by low socioeconomic status (SES). Rice found that the universal experiences the protagonists in the stories were undergoing were not as accessible to the students as she had anticipated. Data analysis of the students’ peer-led discussions showed that the students’ interpretations of the characters’ actions tended to reflect their own SES, race, and gender, and that SES played a major role in their interpretations. Additionally, cultural differences in terms of ethnicity, such as the
students’ cultural norms for physical appearance, language, and food customs, influenced their interpretations and to some extent distanced the students from the stories.

In conclusion, evidence shows that readers are basically capable of literary engagement when reading across cultures, regardless of the cultural differences they may encounter. Culture does play a role in literary response, but it is not a dominant factor. Although familiarity with the culture depicted may ease entry into the text initially, readers tend to rely on personal experience to make connections in making meaning from the text. Literary response can be seen as a kind of cultural practice that reflects and defines readers’ identities. Studies also show that the best books to use to introduce adolescent students to other cultures include those which deal with some common problems or concerns shared by adolescents of different cultures. The last point leads me to the following discussion as to why multicultural young adult literature is especially appropriate for adolescent readers.

Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Readers

Usually the terms “young adults,” “adolescents” and “teenagers” are used interchangeably to identify “that stretching out of the transition between childhood and adulthood” (Cart, 1996, p. 4). In 1991, a division of the American Library Association, Young Adult Services Division (now known as the Young Adult Library Services Association, or YALSA), officially defined young adults as “those individuals from twelve to eighteen years old” (Cart, 1996, p. 4).

In accordance with the above definition, Donelson and Nilsen (2005) referred to “young adult literature” as “anything that readers between the approximate ages of 12
and 18 choose to read” (p. 1). However, Mertz and England (1983) limited young adult literature to “that realistic and contemporary American fiction which young adults as well as more mature and critical readers can find aesthetically and thematically satisfying and which is, implicitly and explicitly, written for adolescents” (p. 119).

Mertz and England’s definition has two implications. First, good young adult literature reflects the adolescent world and concerns and deals with themes that matter not just to teens struggling through the perilous period of adolescence but to all readers pondering the human condition. Young adult literature can offer adolescents the opportunity to learn about themselves and others. Second, from a literary perspective, young adult literature, though not as complex as adult literature, should also be “aesthetically satisfying.” Young adult literature may employ craftsmanship similar to the craftsmanship found in all good literature, but it is more accessible than classic works and can thus correspond to adolescents’ reading abilities and stages of literary appreciation.

**Characteristics of the Best Young Adult Literature**

The characteristics of young adult literature can explain why young adult literature is more accessible to adolescents than classic works in terms of either its content or form. Mertz and England (1983) listed ten characteristics that are especially applicable to realistic young adult fiction:

1. Adolescent fiction will involve a youthful protagonist.
2. Adolescent fiction often employs a point of view which presents the adolescent’s interpretation of the events of the story.
3. Adolescent fiction is characterized by directness of exposition, dialogue, and direct confrontation between principal characters.
4. Adolescent fiction is characterized by structural conventions.
5. Main characters in adolescent fiction are highly independent in thought, action, and conflict resolution.
6. Adolescents are depicted as reaping the consequences of their actions and decisions.
7. Adolescent fiction will draw upon the author’s sense of adolescent development and the concomitant attention to the legitimate concerns of adolescents.
8. Adolescent fiction strives for relevance by attempting to mirror current societal attitudes and issues.
9. Adolescent fiction most often includes gradual, incremental, and ultimately incomplete “growth awareness” on the part of the central character.
10. Adolescent fiction is, finally, hopeful.

Nilsen and Donelson (2001) identified similar characteristics of the best young adult literature. Moreover, they reminded us of the diversity of genres, subjects, and cultures that young adult literature features to mirror changing social attitudes:

1. Young adult authors write from the viewpoints of young people.
2. The main characters in young adult literature are young people who are forced to come to terms with their problems without the help of their parents.
3. Young adult literature is fast-paced.
4. Young adult literature includes a variety of genres and subjects.
5. The body of work includes stories about characters from many different ethnic and cultural groups.
6. Young adult books are basically optimistic, with characters making worthy accomplishments.
7. Successful young adult novels deal with emotions that are important to young adults.

According to the research on adolescents’ reading preferences, what adolescents like to read actually corresponds to many of the aforementioned characteristics of young adult literature. Reading preference studies confirm that adolescents prefer characters who are like themselves and who share their problems (e.g., Brautigam, Hart, & Swindle, 2002; Hopper, 2005; Runyon, 1996). Studies also indicate that adolescents prefer a positive, problem-solution theme and a just world ending (i.e., positive ending for good characters and negative endings for bad people) (Beyard-Tyler & Sullivan, 1980; Jose & Brewer, 1984). Other preferred elements include humor, action, suspense and surprise
(Huck, Hepler, Hickman, & Kiefer, 2001). It is obvious that young adult literature appeals to teenagers because of its content and literary elements.

However, young adult literature may have some limitations. As Beach and Marshall (1991) pointed out, the most serious limitation of many adolescent novels may be that “they portray the here-and-now adolescent cultural world as a given. By simply mirroring that world back to the adolescent, these novels fail to transport the adolescent reader out of their cultural cocoon so that they may critically examine their own self and culture” (p. 342). To remedy this limitation, Beach and Marshall suggested giving students stories about “adolescent characters in different historical or cultural worlds” so that “[they] may begin to recognize the limitations of their age-segregated perspective” (p. 342).

Given its topics or subjects and literary conventions, good young adult literature is indeed more accessible and readable for adolescents. In addition, good young adult literature has the potential to help adolescents to broaden their perspectives of other people and themselves.

*Characteristics of Adolescent Readers*

To determine the criteria for choosing young adult literature for students, it is also important that teachers are familiar with some characteristics of adolescent readers.

*Developmental tasks.* Psychologist Robert G. Havighurst’s theory of developmental tasks has been recognized as the most important concept of development influencing young adult literature and its interpretation. According to Havighurst, if a person is to mature from teenager to adult, s/he must accomplish the following tasks: “1.
achieve new and more mature relationships with age-mates of both sexes; 2. achieve masculine or feminine social role; 3. accept their physique and use their bodies effectively; 4. achieve emotional independence of parents and other adults; 5. prepare for marriage and family life; 6. prepare for economic careers; 7. acquire a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior—develop an ideology that leads to socially responsible behavior” (Cart, 1996, p. 28). Nevertheless, for Havighurst, the experience of adolescence is greatly influenced by the society in which the adolescent is growing up. Since each era has particular problems that affect the growing adolescents, the problems of youth in one generation or one society may differ from those of other generations or societies.

Robert Carlsen (1980), who proposed the application of developmental tasks to book selection for adolescents, similarly listed eight basic tasks that a teenager must undergo to become an independent adult: 1. discovering his/her sex role in our culture; 2. developing new relationships with people his/her own age; 3. achieving an easy relationship with members of the opposite sex; 4. accepting his/her physical body; 5. changing his/her relationship with his/her parents; 6. working for pay; 7. finding a vocation; 8. becoming aware of his/her value patterns. Carlsen (1980) argued, “If books are to have any meaning, they must relate to a young person’s personal and social needs” (p. 10).

By the 1990s, developmental tasks had evolved into developmental needs. The Center for Early Adolescence of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offered the Seven Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents: “1. physical activity; 2.
developmental tasks or needs are actually “under the umbrella heading of achieving an identity,” which is the only task of adolescence (Nilsen & Donelson, 2001, p. 33). The problems of youth may differ in some aspects depending on the social contexts, but in essence adolescent problems are all related to the issue of self-identity.

*Developmental stages of literary understanding.* Adolescence covers a tremendous span in development. One- or two-year age difference may result in a great difference in the readers’ intellectual and emotional response to the books they read (Applebee, 1978). Moreover, different types (or categories) of literary works may appeal to readers at different reading stages (Carlsen, 1980; Galda, 1990).

Nilsen and Donelson (2001) identified seven stages of literary appreciation that an individual may develop from birth through adulthood: Level 1 (birth to kindergarten)--Understanding that pleasure and profit come from literature; Level 2 (primary grades)--Learning to read; Level 3 (late elementary)--Losing oneself in literature; Level 4 (junior high)--Finding oneself in literature; Level 5 (high school)--Venturing beyond oneself; Levels 6 & 7 (college and adulthood to death)--Aesthetic appreciation. As readers enter Level 4 at about the beginning of their teen years, they begin developing a critical sense in literature. When readers go beyond their egocentrism and look at their psychological needs in relation to society, they have reached Level 5. Reaching this level is not merely
a matter of the reader’s language ability; it is “closely tied to intellectual, physical and emotional development” (p. 40). At this level readers can bring their experiences into the story and make different interpretations.

Studies on the response of adolescents to literature evidence a shift toward more interpretive and evaluative responses and fewer engagement-involvement responses (Probst, 2003). Based upon his research on readers from age 2 to 17, Applebee (1978) presented a model of the developmental stages in the formulation of response. In this model, when adolescents enter Piaget’s formal operational stage I (ages 12-15), their response tends to be formulated as analysis. The adolescents analyze the structural features of the work, trying to explain the relationship between the structural characteristics and their subjective reaction to the work. As readers enter the second stage of formal operation (age 16-adult), they begin to generalize about the meaning of a work, to formulate abstract statements about its theme or message. They are concerned with “what might be,” the implications that go beyond the information given. They also use their subjective, personal response in justifying their evaluation of the work. It is worth noting that this is a cumulative model of developmental stages. That is, readers do not grow out of the former stage but integrate the new mode of response with the former ones.

In his research, Thomson (1996) also tried to identify the stages in teenage students’ literary development as well as the strategies they use at each stage. He found that the kinds of satisfaction readers experience and the strategies they use at each stage are progressive and cumulative. That is, “a good reader who reads at the highest level also experiences enjoyment at earlier levels” (p. 585). In order of increasing complexity,
the kinds of satisfaction Thomson identified are as follows: Level 1--Unreflective interest in action; Level 2--Empathizing with characters; Level 3--Analogizing: deriving insights from fiction for understanding oneself; Level 4--Reflecting on the significance of events (theme) and behavior (distanced evaluation of the characters); Level 5--Reviewing the whole work as a construct or fabrication; Level 6--Consciously considered relationship with the text, recognition of textual ideology, and understanding of self (identity theme) and of one’s own reading processes.

To summarize, young adult literature appeals to adolescents not only because its content reflects adolescents’ developmental problems and concerns, but also because its characteristic literary conventions match young readers’ preferences. As adolescents develop more sophisticated abilities in literary appreciation, their response patterns also become more interpretive and evaluative.

Summary

In this study, response to the literature of other cultures is viewed through several perspectives. Reader response theories emphasize the importance of the reader’s active participation in the construction of meaning by bringing to the text his or her past experience of life and literature. Such a social constructivist view of reading applies to second language readers as well. The multicultural perspective of reader response provides further insights into the multiple dimensions of literary experience with literature from a culture other than that of one’s own. Existing research on reader response confirms that culture does play a role, though not necessarily a dominant one, in literary response when reading across cultures. Finally, using multicultural young adult
literature with adolescent English language learners seems appropriate because it is accessible and readable in terms of content and form.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is composed of nine sections, which detail the methodology used in this study. The first section states the rationale for choosing a qualitative research design for this study. The next three sections explain site selection, participant selection, and literature selection, respectively. The selection criteria and procedures are described in detail. The relationship between the researcher and participants is then clarified in the fifth section. The sixth section describes the methods employed for data collection. The seventh section delineates the process of data analysis. The issue of trustworthiness is dealt with in the eighth section. Finally, a timetable for the study is included at the end of this chapter.

The purpose of this study was to explore the responses of six 11th-grade Taiwanese students to selected American short stories for young adults and to examine their cultural awareness when reading the literature from another culture. The study asked the following questions:

1. How did Taiwanese adolescents make meaning from selected American short stories for young adults?
• What were the elements/patterns of their responses?
• What did they draw on in order to make sense of the text?

2. What were the characteristics of the adolescents’ cross-cultural awareness?
• To what extent was the adolescents’ cross-cultural awareness demonstrated in their literary responses?
• What were the adolescents’ reading stances when reading across cultures?

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design because qualitative research methods are generally deemed suitable for uncovering complexities of meaning or the nature of experience (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative research approach is grounded in the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, which assumes “a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent cocreate understanding), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21). In other words, the qualitative researcher assumes that there are multiple realities constructed according to a set of subjective principles peculiar to the knowers. The qualitative researcher therefore attempts to understand the constructions from the point of view of those who experience them (insider’s perspective) and seeks to obtain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the nature or characteristics of the changing, complex realities by collecting data from multiple sources in real world settings.

Since the focus of this study was on the dynamic meaning-making process of adolescents’ literary experience and their cultural understanding while reading across
cultures, a qualitative research methodology was considered an appropriate approach to understanding their responses. This study assumed that there is no single right way to approach a text, and that each individual reader’s reading experience is unique, depending on the transaction between the reader and the text within a particular socio-cultural context. The research was conducted in real world settings; no attempt was made to manipulate the environment. The multiple data sources collected when the students were engaged in reading, writing, and talking about literature allowed me the freedom to seek a holistic picture of the Taiwanese adolescents’ literary experience when reading across cultures.

Site Selection

The site selected was a public junior-senior high school in a big city in southern Taiwan. This was a large-sized school with an enrollment of about 2,400 junior high students and 1,000 senior high students. Junior high school education is mandatory in Taiwan. However, students have to take the Basic Competence Test for Junior High School Students and apply for admission to the senior high. The senior high students in this school therefore might come from different districts in the entire city or even from nearby counties. Most of them were from middle and lower-middle class families. In terms of academic performance, this school was ranked among the top five in the city. Like most senior high schools in Taiwan, the designated purpose of this school was to prepare students for college education. The primary goal of the school was academic excellence. In Taiwan, nearly 100% of senior high graduates can go to university or college if they want to or if they can afford to. National universities are generally

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considered better than private ones. In 2005, 75% of the senior high graduates in this school were admitted to national universities.

Site selection was heavily influenced by the fact that I used to teach in this school. In other words, the site was chosen out of convenience. Moreover, I chose a city school because schools in cities put more emphasis on EFL education than schools in the country, and because students in urban environments were not so unfamiliar with cultural diversity. This was a typical public school. Because the school curriculum was strictly oriented toward preparing students for the College Entrance Exam, there was no way for the research to fit into the established curriculum. The main part of the study was conducted in an after-school American Young Adult Literature (YAL) Study Club, so that it would not interfere with the students’ daily schedule.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was used in this study, and the selection criteria were the students’ English reading ability and their willingness to express their responses honestly in writing and verbally. Such purposeful sampling was necessary for this exploratory study. Since comprehension is a prerequisite for response, I needed to choose students who had at least intermediate English reading ability and who could read the selected short stories without much difficulty. According to my past teaching experience, the English of freshman students was probably not good enough to enable them to read the selected short stories while seniors were generally preoccupied with preparing for the College Entrance Exam and would not want to spare time for any distraction. Therefore, I chose sophomores (11th graders) as my participants. They were 16 years of age.
Moreover, the students’ willingness to attend to the tasks was also essential. The students needed to be willing to take the time to read and respond to the stories they read in writing and discussion. Without their willingness to express their responses honestly, it would have been impossible to obtain the rich information necessary for an in-depth study.

Researchers suggest that a minimum of six participants is necessary for a study to understand the nature of experience (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Considering the possibility of some attrition in a long-term study and in accordance with the IRB committee’s suggestion, I had intended to begin with ten participants, but in the end only seven volunteered to participate in the study and only six remained throughout the study.

All participants were from the 11th-grade honors Language Class, which ensured that their English reading ability met the criterion for this study. In this class, Chinese and English were the focus of study. In addition, they all needed to take Japanese as an elective course. Several weeks before the study, I set up a time to talk to the whole class and invited the students to join the American YAL Study Club for my study. A script of my introduction appears in Appendix A.

To demonstrate the reader response approach to literature, I used a short story that the students had already read for their English class and asked them questions regarding their responses to the story. Since these students were used to the prevailing transmission model of instruction, I tried to give them an impression of what a response approach to literature was like by asking open-ended questions. My questions stressed opinions, rather than information, and I gave encouraging and nonjudgmental comments so as to
elicit the free expression of their responses. The goal of this demo was to let students
know that each individual’s response was unique, valued, and respected. Then I passed
out an American short story (“The All-American Slurp”), gave them a brief introduction,
and asked them if they would like to read it at home and write down their responses
following the guidelines for response journal writing (see Appendix B). I explained those
guidelines in detail and made sure that the students knew how to keep a response journal.
I told them that of those who could successfully accomplish the tasks the first ten to
submit forms indicating interest would be chosen for this study.

It turned out that I did not have to worry about turning down some who might be
interested in participating in the study. There were only seven students who returned their
response journals and indicated that they were willing to participate in the study. It is
interesting to note that none of the male students expressed interest, so all the participants
were girls. Since there was no way to fit the study into the established curriculum, we
scheduled meetings after school once a week for fifty minutes to talk about a story they
would have read at home that week.

Meeting after school would necessitate parental transportation. I was aware that
the students knew this study was important to me and that they were helping me out. I
was also conscious that I wanted the participation in this study to benefit the students as
well. Six of the participants remained throughout the course of the study. One student
transferred to another school unexpectedly because of a sudden change in her father’s job,
so she did not participate in the last group discussion and the exit interview.
Before our first meeting in late October, 2005, I asked the participants to fill out and return an open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix C), which was designed to help me understand their reading experience, reading preferences, travel experience, and present knowledge of American culture. Generally speaking, though these participants might have previously read some classics of children’s literature, such as *The Secret Garden* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, they, like other students in Taiwan, were not familiar with young adult literature in either Chinese or English. Perhaps this is because young adult literature has never been included in the curriculum in Taiwan. In addition, under the heavy pressure of preparation for the College Entrance Exam, students probably do not have much time for independent free reading, not to mention young adult literature. The participants’ English learning experience varied. Some of their parents might have sent them to a cram school to learn English since elementary school, but English as a foreign language is included in the curriculum officially only in junior and senior high school in Taiwan. Most of the students studied English only with the aim of passing the College Entrance Exam.

The following descriptions of the six remaining participants are based on the background information they provided in the questionnaire and on the information gained in my interactions with them. All names are pseudonyms.

*Jane.* Jane was a diligent student. She began learning English in the fourth grade. She had tried hard to improve her English for she regarded English as an important tool for getting to know things around the world. She liked reading English magazines such as *Studio Classroom* and *Reader’s Digest*. An English novel that impressed her very much
was *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, but she indicated that she had never read American young adult literature. Obviously, she thought *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* was for children, not for adolescents. She once took a trip to Europe with her family, but had never been to America. She loved to watch American television programs, especially the *Lizzie McGuire* series on the Disney Channel. She also loved to watch American movies about adolescents’ school life. American television programs and movies had given her the impression that American students seemed to have an easier school life and were allowed much more freedom than students in Taiwan. She looked forward to reading some American young adult literature about boy-girl relationships and family relationships.

**Vivian.** Vivian was a smiling girl, easy to get along with. She was always willing to help. Vivian was tolerant of ideas or opinions that differed from her own. She was a member of the Volunteer Club and took part in many community services. She had also been elected “Ambassador of Virtues” for the school that semester. Vivian began learning English in the third grade just for fun. She stated that she was not really interested in English until junior high since it was a required subject then. She seldom read English books on her own, except for the textbooks. She liked to read novels in Chinese for pleasure in her free time. Vivian said she had never heard the term “young adult literature,” but she liked to read such books as J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series and Eleanor Coerr’s *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, both in Chinese translation. Vivian had never traveled abroad. The impressions that she had of Americans were
mainly from American movies. As far as American young adult literature was concerned, she expected to read about American teenagers’ school life and what they do in daily life.

Anne. Anne had been learning English for about 9 years. She had been surrounded by a literate environment since childhood. Her mother read stories to her every day in her childhood, and there were all kinds of books everywhere in her house. Anne’s exposure to TV was comparatively limited because her father would not allow her to watch TV regularly. Anne was an avid reader, and she spent most of her spare time reading. She had read all kinds of books but preferred historical fiction and adventures. She had also read many children’s books, English or Chinese, such as L. M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* (Chinese translation), Johann Wyss’ *The Swiss Family Robinson* (Chinese translation), and J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series (English version). Anne had not traveled much, and she had never been to America. Her limited understanding of American culture was mainly from English textbooks and her American teacher at the English cram school that she went to on the weekend. When asked what she knew about American culture, her reply was “holidays such as Thanksgiving, Halloween, and Easter.” Anne did not think she had ever read any young adult literature. At first, Anne’s father was hesitant about her participation in the study because he tended to believe that young adult literature was not quality literature. However, Anne’s father also preferred that Anne read authentic literature rather than adapted or simplified English readers. Her father finally agreed to her participation in the study since it was a good opportunity to read real literature and since the literary quality was ensured.
Lindsey. Lindsey had been learning English since the third grade. She liked to read fantasy and adventures, such as J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series and J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, both Chinese and English versions. She wondered if young adult literature even existed in Taiwan, not to mention American young adult literature. She said if it did, no one had ever introduced it to her. She did not like traveling and had never been abroad. She did not have much time to watch TV because of the heavy pressure of the College Entrance Exam. Her understanding of American culture was mainly from television programs and movies. When asked what she knew about American culture, she wrote, “hamburger, federal government, serial murderer, a big country, an arrogant people, high-tech, anti-communism, etc.” Lindsey expected to read American young adult literature about adolescent psychological development.

Melanie. Melanie was a quiet girl. Wearing a heavy pair of glasses, she studied very hard in preparation for the College Entrance Exam. She wanted to major in literature or languages after she entered the university. Melanie loved reading, and she often went to the library to check out “whatever books were on the shelf.” She liked to read Chinese literary works in her free time, for example, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (a Chinese classic) and the works of some modern writers. Melanie began to learn English when she entered elementary school. In addition to textbooks, her English reading materials were limited to English learning magazines. She did not travel often and had never been to America. Her impression of American culture was mainly from television programs. When asked what she knew about American culture, she answered, “American youths are more independent and they seem to care more about life experience than academic
performance alone. Besides, they are articulate and like to express themselves.” Melanie said she had never heard of the term “young adult literature.” She guessed that American young adult literature would probably be about American adolescents’ life experience and their thoughts. The main reason she joined the study group was that she wanted to read more English.

Kelly. Kelly was a bright and sincere girl. She was quite articulate. She was a member of the Debate Club and took part in the national debate contest for senior high school students, where she was awarded the Best Debater. She liked to read novels, especially humorous stories, in her free time, but she seldom did outside reading in English. She seldom traveled and had never been abroad. She liked to watch Chinese movies and television programs, especially melodramas. Although she did not have a preference for American movies, her limited understanding of American culture still came mainly from movies and television programs. When asked what she knew about American culture, she answered simply, “Trick-or-treat on Halloween.” She expected to read about adolescents’ daily life in American young adult literature.

All these students identified themselves as avid readers. Though these students had studied English as a foreign language for several years, their English reading experience was limited to textbooks and language learning magazines. It was American movies and television programs that provided them with a window to American culture. Overall, their understanding of American culture seemed quite shallow and limited to the holidays.
Literature Selection

In addition to the story used in the test run in the recruitment procedure, six more realistic American short stories for young adults were used in this study. I chose realistic American short stories for young adults for several reasons. First, students in Taiwan are taught American English instead of other English varieties. Second, American culture is a dominant culture in the world and fascinates Taiwanese students very much. American culture is a foreign culture that students in Taiwan will very probably be constantly exposed to through mass media. Third, realistic short stories were chosen over other genres because realistic fiction can better represent the culture and the people living in the contemporary world. Finally, given the students’ limited attention span, short stories, instead of novels, were chosen for the sake of manageability.

To find appropriate texts for the 11th graders, I set predetermined criteria as follows: readability, age appropriateness, and literary quality. Readability was important because, without comprehension, students could not respond. The texts chosen should not be too complex in terms of the language for the 11th-grade Taiwanese EFL students. As far as age appropriateness was concerned, existing research on adolescent reading preferences (e.g., Brautigam, Hart, & Swindle, 2002; Hopper, 2005; Runyon, 1996) guided me to find stories portraying a mix of male and female characters who were about the reader’s age and dealing with the problems that adolescents often face. These problems may include family relationships, peer pressure, boy-girl relationships, and so on (Hipple, 2000; Nilsen & Donelson, 2001). It was also important to offer the students quality young adult literature because the best literary works can not only intrigue readers
with content but also reinforce their engagement with formal elements. Quality young adult literature promises a better chance of getting rich information about adolescents’ literary responses.

With these criteria in mind, I set out to find some suitable works before the actual study began. I went to the YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) website to search for some titles from the ALA (American Library Association) Best Books for Young Adults Lists of the past twenty years. The books on the ALA Best Book list are chosen each year by a committee of the American Library Association, and their literary quality and appeal to adolescent readers are thus ensured. I located all the best books of short stories of the past 20 twenty years and read all of them. Based on my past teaching experience, I selected some stories that I thought would match the 11th graders’ language level and interests. This selection process was therefore inevitably influenced by my personal biases. Then I asked another senior high school English teacher to read the stories I had chosen and she concurred with me about the readability of the texts.

Accordingly, I chose an original list of six short stories for the study. However, as the study progressed and as I got to know the participants better, I found that the students were particularly interested in boy-girl relationships. I thought it would be interesting to know their responses in terms of this topic, so I replaced one title from the original list.

The six stories were used in order of increasing language difficulty. The easier ones were used first so as to ease the students’ initial entry and to hook them up to the excitement of reading. Difficult stories were used last. The six stories used in this study are as follows: “I’ve Got Gloria” by M. E. Kerr portrays Scott’s reaction when he learns
of the fact that Mrs. Whitman flunked him in math; “May I Have Your Autograph?” by Marjorie Sharmat is about Wendy’s craze for a rock star and her friendship with Rosalind; “She” by Rosa Guy deals with Gogi’s relationship with her stepmother; “Dead End” by Rudolfo Anaya delineates the protagonist Maria’s dilemma of being caught between her own ideals and peer pressure, and between her promise to her mother and irresistible temptation from the opposite sex; “Lessons” by Marilyn Sachs describes Charlotte’s work experience and her relationship with her father and stepmother; and “My Sweet Sixteenth” by Brenda Wilkinson presents the experience of teenage pregnancy in a humorous but thoughtful way. All the stories are set in Mainland America, and all the characters are American teenagers dealing with their problems and concerns. “Dead End” is narrated in the omniscient third person point of view. Dialogue comprises the narrative form of “My Sweet Sixteenth.” All four of the other stories are narrated in first person from the perspective of the teenage protagonist. See Appendix E for detailed story summaries.

The Relationship between the Researcher and the Participants

From the moment I entered the field and throughout the course of the study, I endeavored to establish rapport with the students since in qualitative research rapport is a necessary condition to gaining good data (Glesne, 1999). I tried to become a part of the setting, join in the students’ activities, and offer free tutoring services if possible. I tried to establish my image as friendly, patient, nonjudgmental, and trustworthy.

I assumed the role of researcher as learner. I tried not to appear to be an expert or an authority figure; instead, I came as a curious student to learn with and from the
participants. This image was established first through my introduction of the study and the demo of the response approach to literature as mentioned above and then in my interactions with the participants throughout the course of the study. Whenever I met with the group or with individual participants, I showed genuine interest in listening to their responses. I was not an authority figure who would grade their responses or judge whether their answers were “right” or “wrong.” Although, during discussions with the group or individuals, my role was similar to that of a teacher who controlled the situation and initiated the discussion, I was a discussion facilitator rather than an authority figure in these sessions. My role was to create a risk-taking environment in which the participants felt comfortable enough to express their feelings and thoughts honestly. Although the focus of the questions was based on my personal responses to the stories, the discussions themselves did not include my personal responses to the stories. I avoided implying any desired direction of response by asking open-ended, response-centered questions. In this way, I also became a participant observer of the discussions in a natural setting.

Methods of Data Collection

In order to capture the reading experience of these 11th-grade Taiwanese students with American young adult literature, I collected data from a number of sources, namely, open-ended questionnaires, response journals, group discussions, semi-structured individual interviews, and field notes. Response journals and group discussions were the major tools used to capture students’ responses while the other sources served to triangulate the data.
Although expressed responses can only supposedly approximate what really happens in the head of the reader (Rosenblatt, 1994), the review of literature and my study of qualitative research warranted the use of such viable qualitative research methods. According to Vygotsky (1978), language (or semiotic mediators) bridges the internal and external, and the external devices such as writing and talk give us access to the internal cognitive constructs. The connection between thought and language thus provides theoretical support for the use of oral and written responses as means of disclosing the mind’s journey during reading. In fact, studies on reader response have widely used tools such as group discussions or literature journals to mediate students’ literary responses (Galda & Beach, 2001). For example, Carlisle (2000) and Hancock (1993) used response journals to capture students’ responses during or after reading. Other studies, such as Eeds and Wells (1989) and McMahon and Raphael (1997), used group discussions to facilitate and encourage students’ literary responses.

Once the participants had been chosen and one week before they began to read the short stories, they were asked to complete a questionnaire. Then every week they read one short story at home and kept a response journal. They brought the response journals to our weekly meeting to talk about their responses to the story they had read that week. The participants read six short stories in total for the study. After they had read four stories, the course of the study was interrupted for two weeks by their Monthly Exam. Individual interviews with each participant were conducted at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the study.
Response journals, group discussions, and individual interviews were all conducted in Chinese, the participants’ native language, in order to diminish the interference of language barriers in the free, spontaneous expression of response. As Bernhardt (2003) pointed out, one issue in ESL reading research is the language of assessment. Bernhardt asserted that measuring students’ reading comprehension in their stronger language, rather than in English, will prevent the interference of their impoverished second-language skills and thus provide more valid data. Bernhardt’s suggestion provides support for the use of the participants’ native language, Chinese, for the tasks in this study in order to obtain trustworthy data. All of the data sources are discussed in the following.

Open-Ended Questionnaire

Once the participants had been recruited, I asked them to complete an open-ended questionnaire regarding their English learning experience, reading preferences, literary experience, travel experience, and their preconceptions about American culture (see Appendix C). The purpose of this questionnaire was to probe the baseline of their relevant experiences. This was done before the week the first story was read. The responses solicited provided information to facilitate the interview schedules for individual participants later during the course of the study and offered insights into their later literary responses in terms of what they drew on in order to make sense of the texts they read.
Response Journals

The participants read one story each week. Before every weekend, a short story was distributed to the participants to be read at home. Everyone read the same story that week. In order to avoid the interference of new vocabulary, a list of vocabulary along with Chinese translations was provided for the students. I decided the new vocabulary according to my past teaching experience. However, the participants were free to decide whether or not to use it, or when to use it. Along with the vocabulary list, I also provided a brief written introduction to the short story, usually two or three sentences, so as to give the participants some anticipation of the excitement of reading. Participants were asked to read and jot down during or right after reading all the things that were going on in their minds as they were reading. Written guidelines for writing response journals were given to the participants with the suggestion that they should be kept for reference throughout the study (See Appendix B). In the guidelines, I emphasized openness, honesty, and trust in responding. I reminded the participants that free expression of thoughts was the greatest consideration in this study and that I wouldn’t grade their journals, but only write encouraging and nonjudgmental comments in response to their entries.

The participants were asked to devote a block of time, during which they would not be interrupted, to the reading. They were encouraged to finish the short story at one sitting. However, if time didn’t allow this, they were advised to write down their responses so far before they took a break. There was no word limit for the journal entry. The reading and writing were to be finished by the time the group met for discussion every Thursday afternoon after school.
The guidelines for keeping a response journal were adapted from Kooy and Wells (1996) and Benton (1992a). I adopted Kooy and Wells’ guidelines in terms of the technical aspects of journal writing, while Benton’s guidelines were used as prompts for the content of responses. Benton (1992a) developed the following guidelines for use with fifteen- to sixteen-year-old students to encourage them to generate their “mental maps” of the unfolding action as they realized the secondary world of a story. According to Benton, a journal is a record of the reader’s thoughts and feelings, which will contain the following:

- **QUESTIONS** that you ask yourself about characters and events as you read.
- **MEMORIES** from your own experience, provoked by the reading.
- **GUESSES** about how you think the story will develop, and why.
- **REFLECTIONS** on striking moments and ideas in the book.
- **COMPARISONS** between how you behave and how the characters in the novel are behaving.
- **THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS** about characters and events.
- **COMMENTS** on how the story is being told—for example, words or phrases or even whole passage which make an impression on you.

(Benton, 1992a, p. 35)

The students brought their response journals to group discussions, and they were told that they might want to share their response journals during the discussions. At the end of our meeting, I collected their journals, read them, wrote encouraging comments, made copies, and returned them the next week when we met for another story.

*Audio-Taped Discussions*

Every Thursday afternoon after school, all the members of the American YAL Study Club and I met in a schoolroom for fifty minutes to talk about the story we had read that week. Participants could read from their journals or refer to the text for
verification as the situation warranted. There were six group discussions in total. All the
discussion sessions were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed.

I led the group discussions by asking response-centered, open-ended questions. I
adopted Aidan Chambers’ (1996) “Tell me” approach as the framework for group
discussions, starting with “basic questions” and “general questions” which could be asked
of any text. Then I moved on to “special questions.” The questions were not shown to the
students. Not all the questions were covered in one discussion, nor were they asked in a
particular order. I judged, as the discussion developed, which questions were worth
asking or pursuing on each occasion. Some of the questions I chose to ask in group
discussions are as follows:

Basic questions

- Was there anything you liked about this story?
- Was there anything you disliked?
- Was there anything that puzzled you?
- Were there any patterns—any connections—that you noticed?

General questions

- When you first saw the book, even before you read it, what kind of story did
  you think it was going to be?
- Did anything that happened in the story ever happen to you?
- Does anything in the story remind you of something from your own
  experience, a TV program, a movie, or another book you have read?
- When you were reading, did you “see” the story happening in your
  imagination?
- If the writer asked you what could be improved in the story, what would you
  say?
- How many different stories can you find in this story?
- What will you tell your friends about this book?

(Adapted from Chambers, 1996, pp. 80-85)
Following Chamber’s (1996) guidelines, I prepared the following “specific questions” for each story. These specific questions were intended to move discussions toward the peculiar features of each text:

“May I Have Your Autograph?”

- In your opinion, who seems to be the more typical teenager, Wendy or Rosalind?
- Rosalind is the person telling the story. What is the difference between Rosalind’s perspective and the perspective Wendy might have given?
- Whom would you choose to be your friend, Wendy or Rosalind?

“I’ve Got Gloria”

- What does Scott think of or feel about his math teacher, Mrs. Whitman? How do you know?
- Did you feel as if everything was happening to you, as if you were one of the characters? Or did you feel as if you were an observer, watching what was happening but not part of the action?
- What if the story were set in Taiwan? What if you were Scott?

“She”

- The events are described from Gogi’s point of view. How likely is it that Dorine is as nasty as Gogi thinks she is? What specific evidence does Gogi present to justify her negative feelings?
- At the end it seems that Dorine won the skirmish. How will the outcome of the event affect the future relationship between Gogi and her stepmother?
- What would you change in the story if the story were set in Taiwan, instead of in America?

“Dead End”

- Is the story told in the first person or third person? Does the narrator approve or disapprove of the things that happen and of what that the characters do? Do you approve or disapprove of them?
- How would you react to Frankie’s behavior if you were Maria?
- Who seems to be the more typical teenager? Frankie or Maria?
“Lessons”

- What does Charlotte think of or feel about Mr. and Mrs. Alexander, her father, and stepmother? Does she like or dislike them? How do you know?
- Whose “lessons” does the title refer to?
- Compare Charlotte with Maria in “She.” What are the similarities and differences between their problems?

“My Sweet Sixteenth”

- Do you think the story is realistic or not?
- Why is Carla so surprised by Monique’s experience? If you were Carla, how would you react to Monique’s experience?
- What would you change in the story if the story were set in Taiwan, instead of in America?

Although I prepared these questions, I respected the students’ responses, and their interests determined the focus of our discussion. At the end of the group meeting, I distributed the story to be read for the next week.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted three individual interviews with each of the participants. Repeated interviews during the course of the study allowed them to think more deeply about their experience and thus helped me to understand their literary responses and cultural awareness more fully. By inviting interviewees to clarify the meanings they made from the reading, I hoped to obtain an “insider perspective” of their meaning-making process. To avoid interference with their classes, all the interviews were conducted during lunch recesses (The lunch recess was 85 minutes.). Each individual interview lasted about ten to fifteen minutes. Although I prepared a preliminary list of interview questions (see
appendix D), questions might emerge in the course of interviewing and might be added or replace the pre-established ones. All the interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed.

*Interview 1.* The first interview was conducted after the first story was read and discussed. The purposes of the first interview were several. I asked for clarification on the questionnaire, especially regarding their reading experience and preferences and their preconceptions about American culture. I sought to understand the students as readers in terms of their prior knowledge. In addition, because the students were not used to the response-centered approach to literature, I wanted to make sure that they fully understood the tasks they were doing for the study and to find out if they had any problems. I also talked about their first response journal and the first group discussion, reminded them again of the response-centered approach to reading literature, and emphasized open and honest expression of responses. I assured them that their individual responses were unique and valued.

*Interview 2.* The second interview was conducted after the students had read four short stories. The purpose of this interview was to ask students for clarification on their previous responses, written or oral, to the stories they had read. In addition, because the students did not show much response to the cultural aspect of the stories in their response journals, I turned to interviews to understand what was going on and what role culture actually played in their reading experience.

*Interview 3.* The exit interview was conducted after the last story was read and discussed. In addition to asking for clarification on their written or oral responses, I
wanted to know the students’ comments on their experiences with American YAL, whether they were literary or cultural. I also asked questions to probe their development in terms of cultural awareness.

Field Notes

I kept reflective and analytic field notes. The reflective notes included my personal feelings, ideas, problems, and notations as to how to conduct the research. The analytic notes included my developing insights and hypotheses. My analytic notes helped me to sort out the patterns of the data throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began by reviewing the research questions and proceeded concurrently with data collection. To analyze the participants’ literary responses, part of the coding scheme was adapted from Benton and Fox (1985). With regard to cultural awareness, the coding scheme was adapted from Jordan (1997) and was greatly informed by Enriquez (2001). However, the organizing concepts adapted from these researchers served in so far as to help bring data together and make sense of them, rather than to be imposed upon data. Fundamentally, the data were analyzed inductively so as to allow categories and themes to emerge instead of being approached through a predetermined categorical framework.

The constant comparative method was employed throughout the process of data analysis in order to define and refine the coded concepts or categories. That is, emerging categories were compared with additional data and with each other to modify, extend, and ascertain the definition of the category or concept (Schwandt, 1997). The re-defined
and refined codes were then applied to the same data to see whether they fit. The coding process was both recursive and iterative (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Gorbin, 1998).

The unit of analysis, or the length of the coded sections, in this study was a message unit. By a message unit, I meant a focused thought regarding the reader’s response to the text read. Message units varied in length, ranging from one sentence or several sentences to one paragraph.

There were two phases in the data analysis, roughly following Glesne’s (1999) guidelines. For early data analysis, I read the data, identified preliminary trends in the scanned data, organized the data into meaningful clumps, and thus developed a preliminary coding scheme. Then, when most of the data were collected, I began the process of analytic coding. I classified and categorized data and searched for themes that were applicable to the research questions. The process of data analysis proceeded in the following way:

Phase 1: Preliminary Coding

Data analysis was on-going with data collection. I scanned newly collected data and used a pencil to write down descriptive notes in the margins. Through this process of naming and coding, I gradually came up with dozens of conceptual labels and thus developed a preliminary list of codes. As more data was collected, more codes were added up to the code list. In time, certain patterns and themes gradually emerged.

One concession I had to make in this phase was that I approached other sources of data before I was able to wrestle with the transcriptions of the group discussions. For the
first few audio-taped discussions, I found myself having difficulty in identifying the
speakers, and I could not hear the recordings clearly. It was not until about halfway
through the study that I could identify the speakers and hear the recordings more
accurately. At this point, I was able to go through the audio-taped discussions over again
and finish the transcriptions.

*Phase 2: Analytic Coding*

The process of analytic coding began when most of the data had been collected
and coded. In this phase, I focused on classifying and categorizing. If codes were
different aspects of the same thing, they were grouped into a major code. If a major code
was too broad, it was then broken down into subcodes. Codes might be renamed and
relocated under other major headings. The same subcode might appear under different
major codes and thus suggest certain themes. I kept a coding book for the evolution of
this coding process. All the data were reviewed again whenever a tentative coding
scheme was achieved. This analytic coding process was undertaken several times before
the coding scheme was finalized. Finally, I arranged the major codes into a logical order
in order to answer the research questions. The major codes thus became the
organizational framework for the report of findings.

*Trustworthiness*

To maintain the quality of qualitative research, researchers seek to establish
trustworthiness criteria and associated procedures to augment trustworthiness (Creswell,
1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the trustworthiness, or the credibility of the
findings and interpretations, in this study, I followed some procedures that are often used
in qualitative research: prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation of
data, negative cases, member-checking, and peer review and debriefing (Creswell, 1998;
Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). I spent a large amount of time at the
research site and tried to build rapport with the participants from the time I entered the
spent with the participants increased their trust in me and thus contributed to the
trustworthiness of the data collected. Additionally, triangulation of data was achieved by
using various forms of data sources: questionnaires, response journals, group discussions,
and interviews. The combined multiple sources helped to capture the participants’
experience more fully. I also searched for negative cases and unconfirming evidence in
order to refine the categories I developed during the process of data analysis. Moreover,
as a form of member checking, I gave participants copies of the transcribed texts, so that
they could make comments and clarifications. Finally, I shared my interpretive process
with a fellow doctoral student, who was familiar with qualitative research but not
knowledgeable about my data and asked for his opinions of the soundness of my analysis.
I also asked him to work with one third of my data. I explained my codes and asked him
to read the data and apply the codes. Interrater reliability was 89%. Such a process of
multiple analyses helped to reduce the potential bias I had toward data analysis. All the
methodological procedures mentioned above contributed to the trustworthiness of this
study.
In September, 2005, when the school began, I entered the field and began observation of the students as they attended their English classes. At the end of September, I talked to the class about my study, gave them a demonstration of the reader response approach to reading literature, and invited some of the students to participate in the American YAL Study Club. The recruitment procedure was finished by mid-October. After their first Monthly Exam, the students began to read the first story in late October, and the first group discussion was held on October 27. After the students had read four stories, the study was interrupted for two weeks by their second Monthly Exam. The study resumed in December. Two more stories were read and discussed in December, and the last group discussion was held on December 15. The study extended to early January, 2006, when I conducted the exit interviews just before the students’ winter vacation. After winter vacation, I continued doing member checking with the participants in February and March. The interrater reliability was finally determined in September 2006.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

As stated in Chapter One, this study was designed to examine Taiwanese adolescent EFL students’ reading experience with American young adult literature. The presentation of the findings below is structured in terms of the two research questions posed in Chapter One, that is, students’ literary responses and their cross-cultural awareness when reading across cultures. For their literary responses, I tried to answer the questions: What were their response patterns? and What did they draw on in order to make sense of the story? For their cultural awareness, two sub-questions guided my data analysis: To what extent was the adolescents’ cross-cultural awareness demonstrated in their literary responses? and What were the adolescents’ reading stances when reading across cultures?

Categories of Literary Responses

Three major categories emerged from data analysis of the students’ literary responses to the six selected realistic stories. They were interacting, interpreting, and evaluating, with the latter building upon the former ones. Each major category encompassed several subcategories. The response categories were not absolutely
Table 4.1: Frequency and Percentages of Categories of Literary Responses in Response Journals and Group Discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Response Journals</th>
<th>Group Discussions</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interacting</td>
<td>42 (32.3)</td>
<td>33 (19.8)</td>
<td>75 (25.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting</td>
<td>66 (50.8)</td>
<td>115 (68.9)</td>
<td>181 (60.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>22 (16.9)</td>
<td>19 (11.4)</td>
<td>41 (13.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>130 (43.8)</strong></td>
<td><strong>167 (56.2)</strong></td>
<td><strong>297 (100.0)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

exclusive to each other. I decided on the classification of each message unit according to the major mental activity it suggested. Several themes ran through the subcategories, suggesting certain patterns. Table 4.1 displays the frequency and percentages of the conceptual categories of the literary responses in response journals and group discussions.

*Category 1: Interacting*

This category included all the responses that demonstrated students’ attempts to build up the world of the story, or the secondary world (Benton, 1992a). By bringing to the text whatever resources they had, the students interacted with the text, engaging in various response activities: *picturing, associating, predicting and speculating, and becoming emotionally involved.*
Picturing. The students often described their reading experience as pictures in their minds. This could be a reference to a local image or a broader setting. Descriptive words or expressions easily invited students to see the images in their mind’s eye. For example, Jane wrote in her journal that she couldn’t help laughing when she read the description of Mrs. Whitman in “I’ve Got Gloria”: “That mean, freckled face, with the glasses over those hard little green eyes, the small, pursed lips, the mop of frizzy red hair topping it all” (p. 68). She even drew a picture of Mrs. Whitman in her journal to show what she saw in her imagination. In the same journal entry, Jane also stated that a simple sentence like “Gloria will be back drooling on your lap” could trigger a vivid image in her mind because of the immediacy of the phrase “drooling on your lap.”

Similarly, two other students made responses to a descriptive passage about a hotel lobby as the setting in “May I Have Your Autograph.” Lindsey indicated that it was the “adjectives,” or the sensory details the writer used to describe the scene that helped her in her picturing.

First page’s adjectives I like (e.g., chairs, decor) …… using many adjectives, so it looks especially生动, I feel as if I sit on that overstuffed chair, covered by overgrown ferns, and watching all this happen. (Lindsey, Journal 2)

For Vivian, it was not only the language but also her prior knowledge that helped her conjure up a picture of the setting in her head. When the students were asked what impressed them most in “May I Have Your Autograph,” Vivian answered that it was the description of the hotel lobby:
Vivian: 飯店的擺設。
Researcher: 飭店的擺設怎麼樣？
Vivian: 很好想像，在美國的卡通或影集裏面，飯店的場景，好像都是
那樣子，就是有那種吊飾，還有大型的地毯，沙發這樣。
Researcher: 所以你看到那個畫面......
Vivian: 很容易想出來。

Vivian: It’s the description about the interior design and décor of the hotel’s lobby.
Researcher: What about it?
Vivian: It’s easy to imagine. Like those in American cartoons or television programs, the hotel scenes always seem like that. The chandeliers, expensive carpeting, sofas, and so on.
Researcher: So you mean you can see the picture...
Vivian: It’s so easy to imagine what it looks like. (Group Discussion 2)

Although Vivian here relied on previous information about hotel lobbies that she had gained from watching television to imagine the scene where the story was set, her construction of the story setting was basically guided by the text. In other words, though built upon her prior knowledge, Vivian’s picturing of the setting was basically text-bound. However, sometimes it was not easy to tell whether the picturing in the reader’s mind was text-bound or text-free. In the following example, Lindsey imagined the appearances of characters by drawing on her past experience. Her picturing was mingled with memories, but her major mental activity was basically picturing.

During the reading process, I could clearly imagine the appearance of those girls who were dressed like peacocks, for I have seen too many girls like those characters in my junior high school. As I read, I could almost smell their cigarettes and perfume from the paper. I could also see those super short mini-skirts. (Lindsey, Journal 3)
The foregoing examples show that, guided by textual clues, the students drew on their prior knowledge of language and life to reconstruct the story world.

**Associating the text with personal life experience and other texts.** This type of response included the associations that the students made with their personal life experience, literary experience, and experience with other social and cultural texts, such as news, television programs, and movies. The students made connections between the current story and their past experience of other texts as they tried to build up the story world. The following example reflects the reader’s association of events in the story with her personal experience in her interaction with the text. In “Dead End,” Maria secretly wishes to be like the other girls, who are “tough” and “sharp dressers,” but she does not want to let go of her dream of getting a good education. Her inner conflict exacerbates when she is teased by other students who say something like, “School isn’t everything” or “You don’t smoke, you don’t dress like other girls. You think you’re too good?” (p. 108). Maria’s situation reminded Jane of her similar experience in junior high school when she was preparing for the senior high school entrance exam. Being one of the “diligent group,” Jane understood what it felt like to be teased by the so-called “popular group”:

這個故事的一些情節也讓我想到國中的一些事，班上一些比較愛玩的男生或女生，總覺得班上那些比較會讀書的礙眼似的，看到他們讀書就在旁邊說一些很令人不高興的話，像是「讀、讀、讀、整天就只會讀書而已」（台語）感覺真得很不好受。

Some of the story plot reminded me of what happened in my junior high school life. At that time, those playful boys and girls in my class always regarded the diligent students as an eyesore. Seeing the diligent students studying, they would say something that made you feel bad, something like, “Study, study, and study.
All you know to do every day is study, and nothing else.” (In Taiwanese) It really made me feel bad. (Jane, Journal 3)

Association of the text with personal experience helped Jane to put herself in Maria’s situation. Jane’s similar experience helped her to understand Maria’s pressures, wishes, and dilemma.

The students also associated the story with social events that they were familiar with from television news or newspapers. For example, in “My Sweet Sixteenth,” the heroine, Monique, gave birth to a baby on her sixteenth birthday and didn’t know what to do with the baby. As Jane was speculating on what would happen, she recalled some news about babies deserted by unmarried teenage mothers.

I was wondering how Monique was going to deal with the baby. Reading this scene made me think of those poor babies deserted by their parents in the park. When I knew that Monique wasn’t going to throw the baby away, I was so happy. (Jane, Journal 6)

The association with the sad news suggested Jane’s emotional engagement in the story. She felt anxious about the result, and the tension was resolved as she learned of the final resolution.

Another kind of association that the students made was intertextual links to other literary texts. For example, the students made intertextual connections to the Cinderella story as they responded to the two stories “She” and “Lessons.” They made comparisons between these two stories by applying the Cinderella story scheme. The students pointed out that the stepmothers in both “She” and “Lessons” were mean and that both fathers
were estranged from their daughters. Moreover, the endings of the stories differed. Cinderella’s stepmother was punished at the end. However, in “She,” the war between the stepmother and Gogi was expected to continue, while in “Lessons,” Charlotte’s relationship with her father would probably become better.

However, many more connections were made to television programs or movies than to literary texts. The following list includes some of the television programs and movies that students made specific reference to in their journals and group discussions:

- 莉琪的異想世界 (The Lizzie McGuire series on the Disney channel)
- 101 忠狗 (101 Dalmatians series, Disney movies)
- 櫻桃小丸子 (Yanagida Mizuho, a Japanese cartoon series)
- 天國的階梯 (A Ladder to Heaven, a Korean television series, a Cinderella variant)
- 大愛 (A local TV channel with a strong Buddhist ideological orientation)

Among these, the first two were the most often mentioned. In fact, when students were comparing the characters in “She” with those in the American movie A Cinderella Story, it was the most heated discussion during the whole study period.

\textit{Predicting and speculating on the plot development.} This kind of response indicated students’ anticipation of what would happen next. They made inferences about the plot by filling in textual gaps (Iser, 1980). The students’ reasoning was found to draw on textual clues, their personal wishes, past literary experiences, and so on. In the following, the first example shows that the reader used the story title as a clue for prediction, while the second reader speculated about plot development mainly on the basis of her own wishes, or romantic fantasies.

在看這篇篇名的時候還以爲是什麼恐怖血腥的故事，好結局還算圓滿。
When I read the title, I thought this would probably be a horror, or a violent story. Fortunately, the ending was not too bad. (Vivian, Journal 5)

剛開始的時候，不是 Paul 幫她開門嗎？我以為後來他們會發展出感情。其實內心小小期望 Mr. Alexander 的小兒子會和主角在一起的說 . . .

At the beginning, when Paul opened the door for her, I thought they might develop a relationship. In fact I had a secret wish in my heart that Mr. Alexander’s youngest son (Paul) and the heroine would fall in love with each other. (Lindsey, Journal 5)

Another example of predicting and speculating occurred when Vivian tried to understand the plot development with the help of knowledge of literary conventions that she had assimilated from past reading experience. While other group members wondered about the significance of Mr. Alexander’s sudden death in the story “Lessons,” Vivian considered this question in terms of story grammar. For Vivian, Mr. Alexander’s death provided a situation in which Charlotte and her parents could confront each other. The tension of their conflict reached a climax at this point. After this turning point, the tension was resolved and the problem was solved. Vivian’s intertextual knowledge enabled her to arrive at structural statements.

Researcher: 故事發展到這裏，你會覺得怎樣？有人說為什麼要讓 Mr. Alexander 死 掉啊！
Vivian: 那就是一個轉折啊，她和她爸爸的關係才會比較好。
Researcher: 嗯，有道理。
Vivian: 故事都是這樣子的，有一個轉折，整個都爆發出來之後才結局才會變成圓滿的。

Researcher: What do you think of the plot development so far? Some of you asked why the author makes Mr. Alexander die at this point.
Vivian: That is a turning point. It is after the turning point that she (Charlotte) and her father could possibly develop a better relationship.
Researcher: Hmm, that makes sense.
Vivian: Stories always develop following this pattern. There is a turning point when the characters reveal their emotions. After that, the problem will be solved and the ending will be complete. (Group Discussion 5)

As the students were trying to fill in the textual gaps in order to speculate on the plot development, they tended to romanticize the situation and tune in for a happy ending. In the following example, Anne tried to justify Frankie’s behavior in “Dead End” without textual evidence, and she also provided an idealized alternative ending. Actually, little can be known about Frankie’s past and future from the text. All we know from the text is that he was “the baddest dude in the barrio” (p. 103), smoked dope, and had a crush on Maria. As Anne indicated at the end of her journal, all the inferences were purely her own speculations. Nevertheless, she still yearned for a sequel to the story to make it more “complete.”

Inferring from the story plot, normally speaking, he should have been a good boy before. His former girlfriend’s death might have deeply affected him, but he was not bad by nature. So, he liked Maria. Maybe he wanted to rediscover his old self. Maybe a relationship with Maria could help him to become the good boy he used to be. (All the above is purely my own speculation.) But, I think the story is not yet complete and should have a sequel to it. (Anne, Journal 3)

Here Anne romanticized the character Frankie and his future relationship with the heroine, Maria. Anne wished that Frankie would be transformed by Maria’s positive influence.
The fact that the students were able to state whether the ending confirmed or
deviated from their expectations suggested that they did predict and speculate as they
read along, as the following examples show:

大致上故事發展和我想的一樣，只是我以爲那個老師會 “邪惡”一點，例
如：跟 Scott 說： 「下學期的數學準備被當掉吧！」 或者是在 Scott 家等他
回來。（哈哈！我太邪惡了！）

In general, the story developed just as I expected, except that I thought the teacher
might be more “wicked.” For example, she might tell Scott, “Don’t be surprised if
you flunk math next semester.” Or the teacher might be waiting for Scott at his
house. (Ha! Ha! Am I wicked or what!) (Vivian, Journal 1)

這個結局和我想像的不太一樣，我沒想到他們會變成 “朋友”，我一直以
為 Wendy 會用 “纏”著 Craig the Cat 的方法得到他的簽名，沒想到她還蠻 “理
性”的。

The ending was different from what I had imagined. I didn’t expect that they
would become “friends.” I always thought that Wendy might use every means
possible to get Craig the Cat’s signature. It was surprising that she should be so
“sensible.” (Vivian, Journal 2)

**Becoming emotionally involved.** The students indicated their emotional reactions
to the plot and characters as they reconstructed the story world. They revealed their
emotions when they were drawn in by the plot development, when they were assessing
the situation the character was in, or when they were examining the consequence of an
event. Emotional responses did not come alone; instead, they usually accompanied other
categories of responses. In the following, Jane described her emotional reaction to the
unfolding plot in “Dead End.” Her anxiety increased as the plot developed until it
reached the climax. Then she felt relieved once the problem was resolved. Jane was
assessing the character’s situation and the anticipated critical decision the character was
going to make. The fact that Jane’s emotions were evoked suggested that she was deeply engaged in the world of the story.

During my reading process, especially when Maria got into Frankie’s car, I felt nervous. I felt that Maria was about to become degenerate. My feelings fluctuated as the plot unfolded. Fortunately, Maria finally remembered her promise to her mother and turned back just in time. (Jane, Journal 3)

The students expressed various kinds of emotional responses to characters and events, such as sadness, sympathy, satisfaction, and surprise. Sometimes the feelings were so strong that they did not know how to describe them in words. To some extent, the students’ feelings also revealed their attitudes towards characters’ behavior. The following offer some examples:

- When I read the passage about Mr. Alexander’s death, I really felt sad. (Jane, Journal 5)
- At the point when I knew that Monique did not plan to get rid of the baby, I was so happy. (Jane, Journal 6)
- This is a sad story to me . . . (Lindsey, Journal 2)
- Maria is such a pitiful girl. Everyone will feel sympathy for her. How deep my feelings are! I don’t know how to put them in words. (Anne, Journal 3)
- But, isn’t this too shocking? Delivering a baby on one’s sixteenth birthday? . . . I really don’t know how to describe my feelings. (Anne, Journal 6)
The students’ responses showed that they were engaged in various mental activities as they built up the story world. Some students tried to imagine and picture the story world in their mind by drawing on their linguistic and experiential repertoire. To build up the story world, they also needed to make associations with their personal lives as well as other literary and cultural texts. Moreover, the process of building up the story world involved the students in predicting and speculating on the plot development. The students were not only cognitively but also emotionally involved in interacting with the text. The students’ emotional reactions to the story world being built up often accompanied other mental activities or responses.

Category 2: Interpreting

This category of responses involved students’ interpretations of the story world as they assessed characters’ behavior, defined thematic meanings, or drew a lesson from a story for their own lives. The students’ interpreting responses tended to be judgmental and didactic. There were two subcategories in Category 2.

Describing, explaining, and judging characters’ behavior. The students made responses that indicated their understanding and interpretation of characters’ behavior. At times their responses described and explained characters’ behavior in terms of the characters’ motives and feelings, and the students tended to adopt a character’s perspective in such responses. However, at other times students made responses to the characters, stating whether they liked or disliked, approved or disapproved of their behavior, by drawing on their own moral or cultural values as judgmental criteria. The interpretive responses to story characters were therefore classified into two major modes:
one tended to be *descriptive*, and the other, *judgmental*. In the students’ response journals, the former comprised approximately 15% of all interpretive responses concerning characters, while the latter comprised 85%.

An example of a *descriptive* response to characters’ behavior was made by Anne when she tried to understand why Monique in “My Sweet Sixteenth” would tell a stranger her secret when they had just met for a few minutes before. In the story Monique and Carla were attending a summer church camp, and they were roommates. When Carla saw the picture of Monique’s “goddaughter,” she blurted out, “Your goddaughter looks something like you” (p. 128). Monique thought she could not possibly fool Carla, so she just told Carla the truth that Maya was actually her own daughter. Anne tried to see things through Monique’s perspective and provided possible reasons for Monique’s seemingly strange behavior of confiding her secret to a stranger.

But when Carla told Monique that Maya looked like her, she might have been too nervous, and was afraid that Carla would go blabbing. Besides, Monique would probably like to have someone to talk to. So Monique admitted that Maya was her daughter, and meanwhile asked Carla to keep the secret for her. (Anne, Journal 6)

When the students made *judgmental* responses to characters, they expressed their likes or dislikes, approval or disapproval, about certain behaviors of the characters according to their own cultural or moral values. They liked positive characters and approved of decent, ethical, and moral behavior; they disliked negative people and disapproved of illegal and immoral behavior. Interestingly, among the judgmental
responses expressed in the response journals, their likes and approvals were found to be outnumbered by their dislikes and disapprovals in the proportion of one to three. The following list provides some examples of students’ likes and approvals, and dislikes and disapprovals.

Likes and Approvals:

- 我还滿喜歡 Mr. Alexander，因爲他感覺很和善。
- 而 Monique 好友處理事情的冷靜，也令我相當佩服。
- 我覺得 Scott 的爸爸勇於承認自己不對的地方，很值得許多家長學習，而且也為 Scott 做了一個好榜樣。
- 而且令我最開心的是，Charlotte 的父親終於站出來替女兒說話了。
- I like Mr. Alexander because he seemed quite friendly. (Melanie, Journal 5)
- I admired the way Monique’s friend handled the situation because she always stayed calm. (Jane, Journal 6)
- I think Scott’s father set a good example for other parents and for Scott as well because he had the courage to admit mistakes. (Jane, Journal 1)
- To my satisfaction, Charlotte’s father finally stuck up for her. (Jane, Journal 5)

Dislikes and Disapprovals:

- Lorna 這個人，還挺自私，什麼都要占人便宜，真令人討厭。
- 那個男的居然只說“如果必要的話”他會照顧小孩子，怎麼那麼不負責任啊。
- 雖然是要展現青春與活力，但也不是那樣表現吧。
- . . . 我大概會很害怕這種人吧，感覺她有點“變態”。
- Lorna was so selfish, always trying to take advantage of others. What a detestable person! (Anne, Journal 6)
- How could the man say “if necessary,” he would take care of the baby? He was such an irresponsible man! (Kelly, Journal 6)
- This certainly should not be the way to exhibit your youth and energy. (Anne, Journal 3)
- . . . I would probably be scared of this kind of person. I think she is kind of a “pervert.” (Kelly, Journal 2)

The students’ disapprovals were sometimes so strong that they sounded like accusations. In the following example, Kelly’s quasi-questions about the character’s
mottoes demonstrated her strong disapproval of the heroine’s choice to lead a corrupt life because it was illegal and immoral. Kelly seems to have imposed a predetermined standard (i.e., moral values) on the character’s behavior, and her one-dimensional perspective prevented her from putting herself in the character’s place or considering the character’s behavior from a psychological perspective:

為什麼那位女主角想要變成和那些會吸毒的女生一樣呢？這明明就是一件不好的事啊...我覺得Maria好像很痛苦，她一直在掙扎要不要跟別人一樣，過著那種“靡爛”的生活，這到底有什麼好考慮的啊？真的很奇怪吶！

Why did the heroine want to be like the other girls who smoked dope? Smoking dope is obviously a wrong thing... I felt that Maria seemed to suffer a lot, and that she was struggling as to whether she wanted to go with the crowd, leading a corrupt life just like others. But what was there to consider after all? It is strange (to even consider such a choice)! (Kelly, Journal 3)

*Determining thematic meanings and making generalizations.* The responses reflected the students’ willingness to make thematic statements about the story. The students’ responses in this subcategory tended to be moralistic or didactic. For example, when talking about the title “Lessons,” students pointed out that “lessons” had two meanings: it could refer to the English lessons that Charlotte gave to Mr. Alexander, but more importantly, it meant the life lessons that Mr. Alexander gave to Charlotte. During their interactions, Charlotte learned how to deal with her parents and other life problems from Mr. Alexander. Therefore, the “lessons” were two-way and mutually beneficial for both Charlotte and Mr. Alexander. Another example is found in comments made by Anne about “My Sweet Sixteenth.” Anne identified the ironic tone in the title and reflected on the meanings of Monique’s sixteenth birthday. For Anne, Monique’s birthday was certainly anything but sweet. As Anne wrote in her journal,
Monique’s sixteenth birthday seemed like a rite of passage, on which relatives and friends would give her some presents. This meant that she now became an adult, one who should take full responsibility for herself. But on just the same day, what a messy situation she caused, which she could hardly manage. It was really an unforgettable memory. What an experience! (Anne, Journal 6)

Sometimes the students also indicated what lessons they had learned from reading a story and in what ways a story helped them understand life better. For example, Jane stated in her journal that she learned two things from the story “Lessons”: one was “do not hate others,” and the other was “life’s meaning lies in how you live, not how long you live.” Here Jane tried to apply the messages she got from the story to life in general. Her generalizations seemed didactic, telling her what she should and should not do in life.

I think he (Mr. Alexander) taught Charlotte one important lesson, that is, “do not hate.” I think hatred will make a person suffer, turn him into a terrible person, lead him to go to extremes, and blind him to all the beauties of this world. In addition, I also learned from Mr. Alexander that, though we cannot decide the length of life, we can control its breadth to make ourselves happier. Just like Mr. Alexander, even in the last phase of his life, he still knew how to live fully and happily and made use of his time to learn to speak standard English. (Jane, Journal 5)

The above examples show that the students made meanings from the story world. They first tried to understand a character’s behavior and what the behavior meant. Then
they figured out the thematic messages suggested by the series of events in which the character got involved. Meanwhile, they also applied the messages gained to life in general. While the students brought to the text what they had acquired from the real world in order to make sense of the story world, they also drew meanings from the story to help them understand life better. The students’ responses to characters were predominantly judgmental, and their thematic statements sounded like moral platitudes. The major mode of these Taiwanese students’ interpretive responses was found to be mainly judgmental and didactic.

Category 3: Evaluating

The students evaluated their literary experience with the text. They commented on the whole or parts of the text, identifying what they liked or disliked about the text and how various literary elements influenced their responses as such. They usually started such responses with statements like, “I like/don’t like the story because. . . .” Responses in this category also suggested the students’ metacognition about their own reading experience. They stated their responses and gave reasons. Category 3 was found to have two subcategories: one was based on the subject matter and the other on the literary elements.

*Evaluating the story on the basis of its subject matter*. The students evaluated the story in terms of whether the subject matter was dealt with in a way that reflected their concerns or needs. They tended to express favorable responses if they could feel connected to the story, or if the story represented a problem that they also faced. Otherwise, the students might feel resistant to reading it. In the following excerpt, Anne
remarks that the story content itself was the major factor that influenced her responses to a story. She did not like the story “She” because the subject matter (i.e., the endless war between stepmother and stepdaughter) was too far removed from her own daily life and concerns. Similarly, Jane also emphasizes that she prefers stories which are connected to her daily life.

Anne: Let me put it this way. It is the content of the story (“She”) that makes me not want to read it in the first place.
Researcher: You mean this topic did not appeal to you? Next time, I will try to give you something more interesting to read.
Jane: Please find us something more common in life, something that we feel is related to our daily life.  (Group Discussion 4)

Correspondingly, in Anne’s journal, she also wrote, “I don’t know why, but somehow this story couldn’t arouse my interest. . . . I just don’t have many responses to write about.” (“不知怎樣，就是沒有很多的感受 . . . 寫不出來”; Anne, Journal 4). It stands to reason that Anne did not have a favorable response to “She” because the story could not engage her.

Evaluating the story as a literary work of art. The students measured the text against some literary criteria, though they might not have used literary vocabulary. Their responses indicated praise or criticism for parts or the whole of the text as a literary work of art. Data analysis revealed that the students’ criteria included humor, a satisfactory ending, plausibility, and other narrative techniques.
The students liked stories with humor, for example, “I’ve Got Gloria.” As Vivian wrote, “I like stories of this kind because it is fun, not too serious, which maintains my interest in reading on” (“我喜歡這類故事，因爲很有趣，不會有太嚴肅的感覺，而且會讓我一直往下看”; Journal 1). The students also liked happy and/or positive endings, and they did not like a problem without a solution. For example, some students did not like the ending in “She” because the main character’s problem was not resolved and the “game” between the stepmother and the stepdaughter was expected to go on forever. To clarify her dissatisfaction about the ending in “She,” Vivian remarked, “Stories for children should write to children’s psychology; stories for children should not make them feel sad” (“是給小孩看，要符合小孩子的心，不能讓他們感到太悲情”; Group Discussion 4). While some students liked the ending in “Dead End” because the main character eventually made the right choice for life (Melanie, Journal 3), some complained that the ending was not truly perfect. For Lindsey, the ending in “Dead End” seemed incomplete. In the following excerpt, Lindsey expresses her idea of a perfect ending:

我想說(男生)打電話給她至少還有一種結局，至少應該送她回家之類的，感覺結局應該是那個男生要有點突然頓悟，被她感化了⋯⋯（結局）怎麼講，應該說有好有壞吧，好的地方是主角已經有把她的心緒已經弄清楚，就是說她未來到底要幹嗎，或說她心裏真正想要的，她已經弄清楚了，但我覺得⋯⋯我覺得應該要再寫下去，給我們一個交代，雖然現在斷掉，給了我們一些想像空間，不過我還是希望有一個圓滿結局。

I thought the ending should be that the boy (Frankie) called her (Maria) or at least gave her a ride home, or something like that. I thought the ending should be that the boy was transformed by the heroine and then turned over a new leaf. . . . But the ending, so to speak, was both good and bad. The good thing was that the heroine had cleared her mind. She finally knew what she wanted for her future. She had figured out what she really wanted. But still, I think . . . the story should not stop here. It should give us an answer (to what will become of Frankie and
Maria hereafter). Although the ending leaves us some room for imagination, I still wish for a perfect ending. (Lindsey, Group Discussion 3)

Here Lindsey seems to define a perfect ending as “they live happily ever after.” Although there was a positive solution to the story problem, Lindsey was still looking for the idealized ending that often occurs in fairy tales and romance novels.

The students’ responses also evaluated the plausibility of the plot development. For example, Kelly criticized the death of Mr. Alexander in “Lessons” as too “dramatic” because there was no preparation for the incident. Moreover, it was coincidental that his death should happen on the very day when Charlotte intended to explain her stepmother’s behavior to him. For Kelly, it seemed that a realistic story should not lack plausibility.

I wasn’t prepared for Alexander to die at this point. Moreover, there was no foreshadowing at all, and it happened on the day when Charlotte was about to make an explanation to him. Isn’t it too “dramatic”? (Isn’t this supposed to be a realistic story?) (Kelly, Journal 5)

Similarly, Kelly also had a hard time accepting the plausibility of the events in “My Sweet Sixteenth.” In her judgment, it was incredible that Monique should hide her pregnancy from her family for nine months. It was equally incredible that the family did not become suspicious over the months (Kelly, Journal 6). Kelly’s preoccupation with the story’s plausibility demonstrated that she held expectations for characters’ actions in the same way she did for people in the real world.

Students also made comments on narrative techniques and how these techniques influenced their responses. For example, dialogue is the major narrative form in “My
Sweet Sixteenth.” For Jane, “the dialogue between characters was so dynamic and intriguing that I felt as if I was watching a movie” (“人物之間的對話生動、引人入勝，讓我覺得就像在看電影一樣”; Group Discussion 6). Sometimes the students’ comments were general, not referring to any specific narrative elements. For example, Lindsey commented that “the author of ‘Dead End’ did a good job in representing the heroine’s inner conflict because, whenever the heroine was struggling, I felt nervous” (“我覺得它把主角內心天人交戰的感覺寫得很好，每次她在猶豫是否要追隨那些女孩的時候，我都覺得很緊張”; Lindsey, Journal 3). Actually, the author used an omniscient third person point of view to represent the character’s inner conflict. Similarly, Vivian commented that in “My Sweet Sixteenth,”

> 我覺得這篇給我的感覺有點「冗長」，而且也不太有趣，（前面幾頁），可是到後面幾頁的時候（開始說到 Monique 生日的時候）才變得比較「刺激」。

the narrative was somewhat tedious and uninteresting, especially for the first few pages. It did not become “exciting” until the last few pages when it came to the description of Monique’s birthday. (Vivian, Journal 6).

Here Vivian was probably referring to the element of “action,” which she said was her preferred literary element for a story (Vivian, Interview 1). Some students criticized the narrative of “She” as chaotic and confusing, though they were not able to specify that it was the use of “flashbacks” that caused their confusion.

The examples above show that responses in the evaluating category were greatly influenced by the students’ literary experience and prior knowledge of literary conventions. Though the subject matter of the story determined students’ first impressions, their evaluation of the text as a literary work of art depended mainly on the
way in which the author manipulated his or her craft. The students expressed preferences for stories that dealt with their problems and concerns in a humorous and positive way and had happy endings. Though the students’ knowledge of literary vocabulary was somewhat limited, this did not prevent them from evaluating their literary experience critically in a way that was characteristic of their teenage perspectives and their past reading experience.

In summary, the three main categories of literary responses can be seen as three levels of literary response. The students started with interacting with the text in order to build up the fictional world. Then they examined the literary world, interpreted the characters’ behavior and motives, and drew meanings from the story world for life in general. Finally they tended to detach themselves from the story world and evaluate their reading experience with the text as a literary work of art. The three levels of mental activity were not discrete and mutually exclusive. They were fluid and symbiotic, and the later levels of response tended to build upon the former. During the students’ reading process, different mental activities intertwined and proceeded in a dynamic way.

Frames of Reference

In the previous section of data analysis, I focused on the categorization of response. In this section, I will focus on analyzing the various resources that the students made use of as they engaged in different categories of response. Data analysis revealed that certain themes ran through the different categories of response. These themes suggested the different resources the students drew on or references they made in order to
build up, interpret, and evaluate the story world. The four themes emerging from data analysis were linguistic, personal, intertextual, and sociocultural.

The students drew on their prior knowledge of language in order to respond to the clues, such as diction or syntax, in the text. The students’ linguistic reservoir was found to be activated especially when they were engaged in the mental activity of picturing, as illustrated earlier in the previous section. However, compared with the other themes, instances of this kind were relatively limited. A major theme that appeared in all levels of response was students’ personal life experience. The students also used intertextual connections to other literary texts and cultural texts (e.g., television programs and movies) to foster their understanding of the current text. Although the intertextual theme also occurred in all three levels of response, it appeared more prominently in the response categories of interacting and evaluating. In contrast, the sociocultural theme seemed to be generally limited to the response category of interpreting, as the students tried to judge the characters and determine the meanings of the story world according to some of the sociocultural values, beliefs, and attitudes that they had internalized.

Different themes appeared in the three levels of response with relative emphasis. At the first level, interacting, the personal and the intertextual were the major themes and seemed to be given equal importance in the interacting process. At the second level, interpreting, the sociocultural theme appeared to be predominant. At the third level, evaluating, the intertextual theme seemed to be more dominant than the personal theme. The four themes formed the students’ frames of reference as they built up the story world, interpreted the story world, and evaluated the story world, as Table 4.2 displays.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Frames of Reference</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Linguistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting (Building up the story world)</td>
<td>Picturing</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associating</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Predicting &amp; speculating</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Becoming emotionally involved</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting (Interpreting the story world)</td>
<td>Describing, explaining, &amp; judging the character</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determining thematic meanings &amp; making generalizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating (Detached judgment of the story world)</td>
<td>Evaluating the story on the basis of its subject matter</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluating the story as a literary work of art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Conceptual Categories of Literary Responses in Relation to Response Activities and Frames of Reference
Data analysis in the previous section on the *interacting* category has provided some examples of how students drew on different references in *picturing*, *associating*, and *predicting and speculating*. Briefly speaking, the examples illustrate that the students’ *picturing* was built upon their prior linguistic knowledge, connections to other texts, and memories of personal experience. The examples also demonstrate that the students associated the current text with personal life experience and other literary and cultural texts. Finally, the examples show that the students’ *predicting and speculating* was not only guided by textual clues but also determined by their personal, psychological needs and past textual experiences. Simply put, the students tried to build up the story world by drawing on their linguistic, personal, and intertextual repertoires as references. Since examples in the previous section have illustrated how students used different references in the response category of *interacting*, there should be no need for repetition of such examples in this section. The following analysis will focus on how the personal, intertextual, and sociocultural frames of reference were employed in the response categories of *interpreting* and *evaluating*.

One thing I should note before going further is that I divide readers’ associations into two themes: personal and intertextual. Although some theorists tend to use intertextuality as a broad term for connections to all personal, literary, or social experiences (e.g., Kristeva, 1980), I agree with the researchers Sipe (2000) and Many and Anderson (1992) in their distinction between “autobiographical responses” and “intertextual responses” because of the qualitative difference between connections to personal life and connections to other types of text. In this study, the term “intertextual”
has been limited to connections to literary texts and cultural texts such as television programs, news, and movies.

The Personal Theme

The students used their personal life experience to understand story characters’ feelings, motivations, and actions. They also evaluated a story by making connections to their own lives.

The personal theme in interpreting. The students brought their personal experience to the text to describe, explain, and judge characters. For example, when discussing whether Wendy in “May I Have Your Autograph” represented a typical teenager, some students insisted that Wendy was too crazy to be a typical teenager, while others tried to understand Wendy’s behavior by comparing it to behavior they had seen in their friends. For the latter, Wendy’s and her friend Rosalind’s behavior was understandable because this was what they and their friends might and did do in their real lives.

Researcher: Kelly and Melanie, would you like to share your thoughts? I heard you chuckling.
Kelly: Because they are so much like our friends.
Melanie: I have seen this kind of behavior before. I think there are people like Wendy.
Researcher: Tell me more, Melanie.
Melanie: There are, really, though people may not be as crazy as Wendy. Moreover, her friend (Rosalind) might just be following Wendy. (This was not Rosalind’s plan.)
Researcher: So you think that Rosalind went along simply because of their friendship?
Melanie: Because, if they are good friends, if her friend goes, she will go. (Group Discussion 2)

In this example, Kelly and Melanie did not consider Wendy crazy because what Wendy did had actually happened among their friends too. Then, Melanie also justified Rosalind’s involvement in Wendy’s plan on the basis of friendship, despite the fact that Rosalind did not have any ideas about the rock star in the first place. From her own experience, Melanie knew well what friends were willing to do for each other. Melanie’s understanding of the characters Wendy and Rosalind was based on her personal experience.

*The personal theme in evaluating.* The students indicated that they liked or disliked a particular story depending on whether the subject matter was dealt with in a way that reflected their personal problems or concerns. The students tended to make more positive comments on stories they could feel connected to. For example, Lindsey evaluated the story “Dead End” positively because she could identify with the main character, Maria, who was faced with the dilemma of choosing between “being yourself” and “going with the crowd.” Lindsey saw connections to her personal life in the story.

哦~我愛這個故事，它讓我很感動，尤其是主角在想著要和其他女孩子一樣的地方，我也曾經想要和她們一樣，穿美美、去逛街，但我最後仍沒有如此，並不是像主角，有那麼崇高的理由，我只是單純地覺得自己不適合。最後主角沒有和那些女生一樣是我最喜歡的，大體來說是個很正面的故事，我超愛的～。
Oh—how I love this story. It touched me deeply, especially when the main character was thinking about whether she wanted to be like other girls. I once wanted to be like them, wearing beautiful clothes and going shopping. But finally I didn’t, not because I had some noble reasons, but simply because I didn’t think I fit their style after all. Finally, the main character did not choose to follow the other girls, and this is the part that I like most about the story. On the whole, this is a very positive story. I love it very much.  (Lindsey, Journal 3)

Here, Lindsey provides two reasons why she loved the story so much. First, the main character’s inner conflict reflected Lindsey’s problem so well that she seemed to see herself in the main character. Thus, she became deeply involved in the story emotionally. Second, the main character’s final decision of not going with the crowd inspired Lindsey greatly. Lindsey found in the story some reassurance about her own decision in life. The heroine showed Lindsey that she was not alone. While Lindsey was expressing her positive responses to the story, she also became positive about her own decision in life. On the whole, Lindsey’s evaluation of the story was made through the connections to her own life.

Lindsey’s evaluation of “Dead End” here also provides a good example to show that the evaluating response tends to be built upon the earlier response categories. Lindsey justified her positive evaluation with the help of personal associations (“I once wanted to be like them”), picturing (“wearing beautiful clothes and going shopping”) and emotional involvement (“It touched me deeply”).

The Intertextual Theme

The students used intertextual connections to understand the characters and their actions. Moreover, their evaluation of the story as a literary work of art also rested mainly on their intertextual knowledge.
The intertextual theme in interpreting. The students judged and critiqued the story characters in relation to characters in other texts that they had read in Chinese or in English. For example, in Group Discussion 4 on the story “She,” at first most of the students tended to view the stepmother as “a bad guy” because she was determined to have the stepdaughter Gogi do the dishes and would not let Gogi get away with excuses anymore. Later, after the students had had some discussion and heard different points of view, they finally arrived at a more balanced view of the stepmother. They also understood that the stepdaughter was not entirely an innocent “victim” but should also be held partly responsible for the problem between her and her stepmother. When probed as to why they had had a dichotomous perspective of the stepdaughter and stepmother (i.e., good versus evil) in the first place, the students voiced the following reflections.

Researcher:  所以你有沒有覺得一開始，我們都把繼母想成是個壞人。
Vivian:  因為童話故事裡面，都把繼母想得很壞。
Lindsey:  像白雪公主。
Unidentified voice:  像灰姑娘。
Researcher:  灰姑娘 Cinderella 是繼母的典型故事，你們覺得這故事有沒有符合 Cinderella 的典型？
Vivian:  不太像吧，Cinderella 是默默承受，而且還幫她後母講好話。

Researcher:  Did you find that you had tended to think of the stepmother as a bad person at first?
Vivian:  This is because in fairy tales the stepmother is always very bad.
Lindsey:  Like “Snow White.”
Unidentified voice:  Like “Cinderella.”
Researcher:  Yes, the stepmother in “Cinderella” is a prototype. But, do you think this story (“She”) fits the story pattern of “Cinderella”? 
Vivian:  Not really. Cinderella is obedient and submissive. Besides, Cinderella even says nice words about her stepmother. (Group Discussion 4)
In this example, the students used intertextual connections to judge and critique the stepmother and stepdaughter. At first, the students thought of the stepmother in “She” as wicked, cruel, and mean because they approached the text with a stereotypical perception of the stepmother that they had internalized from reading different variants of *Cinderella*. However, through further comparison of the stepdaughter, Gogi, with Cinderella, the students gained the new understanding that Gogi’s character (e.g., lazy and willful) was also one of the reasons for her bad relationship with her stepmother. This example shows that, while intertextual connections seemed to limit students to a stereotyped conception of the stepmother in the first place, paradoxically, the intertextual connections could also help students reach an alternative perspective on the characters. Intertextual connections could both constrain and enrich the students’ understanding.

*The intertextual theme in evaluating.* The students used intertextual knowledge to evaluate the story as a literary work of art. They viewed the current text in relation to other texts in the history of their reading experience. One example occurred when the students were talking about the story structure of “I’ve Got Gloria.” Kelly thought that the story was somewhat “formulaic” according to her reading experience. Some other students concurred that the story pattern was common, and that the ending seemed predictable.

**Researcher:** (還有沒有人要補充的，關於喜歡的部份，好，)再來我們來討論不喜歡的部份，我記得 Kelly 妳提到故事有點老套，我不太懂？

**Kelly:** 不是，就是感覺上，好像譬如我們常會看到那種類型的故事。

**Researcher:** 哦，就是你們會看到的類型，大概就是這樣。

**Kelly:** 就跟輔導室提供的文章很像吧。

**Researcher:** 那你是覺得說教嗎？
In this example, Kelly used her intertextual knowledge of literary conventions to evaluate the story structure. She grouped the current story with the stories that the Student Counseling Office had given them because such stories usually presented a problem-solution theme with the aim to give adolescent readers some guidance in life. Kelly’s intertextual reference reminded other students of the similarities between “I’ve Got Gloria” and other stories they had read. For one thing, the ending would probably be that the adolescent protagonist learns and grows. For another, such stories were meant to give readers “great inspiration,” as Anne finally commented. In other words, intertextual connections enabled the students to predict the ending. However, the predictability did not seem to undermine their enjoyment in reading the story since the current story was
not “didactic,” as Kelly commented. Thus the intertextual connections served as references against which students evaluated the story elements. The example above also revealed students’ metacognition about their evaluation of the story. They indicated the frames of reference behind their responses.

The Sociocultural Theme

The sociocultural theme was especially prominent in the response category of interpreting. The students made judgmental responses to story characters and their actions according to the values, beliefs, and attitudes that they had acquired through socialization. The students also made thematic statements that reflected not only their own cultural background but also what they perceived as an accepted way of responding to literature.

The sociocultural theme in interpreting characters. The students interpreted characters and their actions according to their own values, beliefs, and attitudes. For example, in their responses to “Lessons,” the students unanimously disapproved of the stepmother Lorna’s behavior. In the story, Lorna suggests that Charlotte ask Mr. Alexander for a raise since Mr. Alexander has benefited from Charlotte’s tutoring. In addition, Lorna tries to take advantage of Mr. Alexander by asking him to make a cake for her for free. Charlotte refuses Lorna’s request. In the following discussion, Kelly labels the stepmother as a “bad guy,” who is always thinking of taking advantage of others. Melanie and Jane provide further evidence to support Kelly’s argument that the stepmother Lorna is a “bad guy,” greedy, selfish, and exploitative of other people’s good will.
Kelly: In my opinion, if the stepmother were a good person, she would not insist on her request when the daughter tries to talk her out of it. But she still insists.

Unidentified voice: She is very insisting, like, I am determined and nobody can stop me from . . . (interrupted)

Kelly: I just feel, how could there exist such a person? (Multiple voices: Yes!)

Researcher: Does anybody concur?

Melanie: Charlotte’s pay is already higher than average, so the stepmother should not take advantage of Mr. Alexander anymore.

Jane: Plus, it’s ten dollars an hour . . . (interrupted)

Melanie: And, he always sends some of his cakes home with Charlotte, so the stepmother should be content.

Researcher: So you do not approve of the stepmother’s taking advantage of others. (Group Discussion 5)

Here, students’ labeling of characters was based on their social categories, which divided people into two kinds: good people and bad people. Positive values were associated with the former and negative values, the latter. The social categories and their associated values provided students a lens through which to view characters in the fictional world as they did in their lived world. The students drew on their expectations for appropriate social behavior to interpret the characters’ behavior.
Some values seem to be common among different cultures, like those mentioned in the foregoing example. However, some values tend to be culturally specific. The data analysis in section three on cultural awareness will provide some examples of students’ use of culturally specific references in interpreting characters.

*The sociocultural theme in determining thematic meanings and making generalizations.* How the students derived thematic meanings provides another example to show the sociocultural forces in response. The students’ interpretation of story themes revealed that their way of responding to literature was not innate but shaped by their past literary experience. As illustrated earlier in the first section of data analysis, these Taiwanese students tended to infer that the theme was a moral platitude. However, the story “My Sweet Sixteenth” seemed to challenge their habitual way of responding to literature. Specifically, their didactic orientation in interpretation was laid bare and challenged by the story. To some students, although there was no censored content in the story, “My Sweet Sixteenth” was still a “special” (Kelly, Journal 6) or even “shocking” experience (Anne, Journal 6) because teenage unmarried pregnancy was not approved by their social norms. The students seemed to have a hard time determining how to express their responses to this story. On the one hand, they criticized Monique’s ignorance, the irresponsibility of Rob, the baby’s father, and Monique’s parents’ neglect of their daughter. They disapproved of the characters’ behavior and felt inclined to draw a moral lesson from the story. As Jane wrote in her journal, “I think the moral lesson of this story should be: being too liberal in attitudes toward sex will bring about terrible consequences” (“我覺得這應該就是性觀念過度開放所造成的後果”; Jane, Journal 6;
emphasis mine). Following her habitual mode of responding, Jane assumed that this would be the designated thematic message she was expected to express. On the other hand, other students felt that the author seemed to invite them to see the problem through an alternative perspective that was deviant from their sociocultural frame. They perceived that the way the author dealt with such a controversial topic seemed quite different from what they had read in Chinese stories. Vivian compared this story with what she had read in Chinese, as follows:

中文的小說都是讓你嚇得不敢去做，可是故事裏 Monique的人生沒有什麼改變，比較不像中文的小說。

Chinese stories always present this topic in a scary way so that you would not dare to try something morally wrong. But in this story, Monique’s life was not changed drastically by the incident. The result is quite different from those in Chinese stories. (Vivian, Group Discussion 6)

Vivian’s response revealed that her inclination to use didactic and moral references in responding was actually conditioned by her past experience of reading Chinese stories on similar topics. Finally, somehow Lindsey was able to infer a theme without a moral preoccupation:

她沒有會給人家歧視的感覺，如果有人跟她的家庭背景類似，看了之後可能會覺得生一個小孩，也沒什麼大不了的，她還是在過她的人生，只是多了一個小孩。

The story did not make us feel that she (Monique) was discriminated against by the society. If someone with a background similar to Monique’s reads this story, she might feel that it is no big deal to have a baby. It is not the end of the world after all. She can still have a life, except that she has a baby to take care of. (Lindsey, Group Discussion 6)

To some extent, Vivian’s and Lindsey’s responses demonstrated their reflection upon the sociocultural values behind their responses. They found that they had been
conditioned to respond in a certain way. However, their learned way of responding was challenged by the story. The way the story was presented invited them to explore the problem beyond the persistent didactic perspective that they had been used to.

To summarize, data analysis in this section shows that the students drew on personal experience to interpret the characters and that they evaluated the story world based on personal responses. In addition, intertextual connections helped the students understand characters and evaluated a story as a literary work of art. Finally, how the students responded to the characters and derived thematic meanings also reflected their sociocultural frames of reference.

Cultural Awareness

The same pool of data of the students’ responses to the selected realistic short stories was further analyzed for their cultural awareness when reading across cultures. Four categories of cultural awareness emerged from data analysis: *background information, stereotyped conceptions, comparing and contrasting, and reflective understanding.*

*Categories of Cultural Awareness*

*Background information.* This category was reflected in the questions the students asked about the background information of the culture represented in the text. Questions they asked included:

- 在外國是不是只要是繼父（母），就不會稱呼爸媽而直接叫他（她）的名字？
- 是不是外國都是要敲門才能進去？外國小孩不是聽說很愛有自己的隱私嗎？
• In foreign countries, do people call their step-parents by their first names, instead of “Dad” or “Mom”? (Vivian, Journal 4)
• In foreign countries, are you supposed to knock on the door before entering somebody’s room? People say that foreign kids really care about their privacy. (Vivian, Group Discussion 4)
• How serious is the drug problem among high school students in foreign countries? Is this problem common or is it just a special case that the story happens to deal with? (Melanie, Journal 3)
• Do people put as much emphasis on diplomas as we do in Taiwan? (Vivian, Group Discussion 3)
• If the barrio is the district where Mexican Americans live, how about the immigrants from other countries? Do they also tend to live with people of the same ethnicity in a certain area? (Jane, Group Discussion 4)
• Is racial discrimination (against colored people) still a problem in Western countries? (Jane, Group Discussion 4)

These questions were not actually related to the major issues the stories dealt with, but they constituted some aspects of the background settings, which might look very natural to the people living in the culture and not bother them. However, for these Taiwanese students, who were not familiar with the social and cultural background, these things they wondered about seemed to be legitimate questions.

Judging from the phrasing of their questions, the students tended to generalize in their thinking about American culture, although they did not necessarily reveal certain predetermined conceptions when asking such questions. For example, they equated “foreign countries” with “Western countries,” and “America” seemed to be an umbrella
term that represented all “Western countries.” This is probably because American culture is considered the dominant culture around the world so that students would think of it as representative of all Western countries.

Stereotyped conceptions. This category included the stereotypes that the students revealed in their responses to the selected realistic short stories. The stereotypes might be positive or negative. The students had already acquired some stereotyped conceptions through different sources before they approached the texts. Some of these stereotypes were easy to discern and corresponded to what had been revealed in the probe of their baseline knowledge of American culture in the questionnaires, as discussed in Chapter Three. Most of the students commented that the culture represented in the text confirmed their previous impressions that American people are more liberal and open-minded than Taiwanese, and that American teenagers are more independent and more mature emotionally and intellectually. For example, Lindsey remarked that she used to have the impression that American children are capable of independent thinking about a lot of things even when they are quite young. She said further that, in reading the stories, her previous impressions were reconfirmed.

They American kids at the age of 14 are already thinking about the problems that I, going on 17, will be thinking about. Then I think to myself, what mature children they are! (Lindsey, Interview 3)

Another example occurred in Kelly’s reflection on the story “Dead End.” In the story, the heroine, Maria, is struggling between peer pressure and her dream of getting a good education. Maria is eager to be like the other girls, wearing make-up, doing drugs,
and hanging out with boys. Kelly commented on the high school students’ behavior in the story:

I used to have the impression that America is quite an open society. When I read about teenagers using drugs, I thought they are really open. It seems that nobody cares if you take drugs or what. I feel the description here really fits my past impression. (Kelly, Interview 2)

However, there were also some subtle stereotypes that even the students themselves were not aware of. The following discussion on “She” provides an example that suggests the students had such preconceived stereotypes but were largely unconscious of them.

Jane: 他們一家子的人都是印第安人哦？
Unidentified voice: 繼母是美國人。
Researcher: 在 149 頁的第二段最後兩個字 “West Indian” 我覺得應該翻譯成西印度群島的人，他們是中南美洲的移民者。然後在 148 頁有一句 “the shock of her American accent went through me” 所以可見她的 American accent，這個繼母絕對是美國人沒錯。
Jane: 可是為什麼她的膚色不是白的？
Researcher: 但是美國人並不是膚色都是白的。
Jane: 她還是有混到啊？
Researcher: 噢，妳這樣會激怒到很多人，他們通常不管你的祖先來自那邊，你都還算是美國人啦。
Jane: 噢，只要在那邊出生，土生土長就是美國人哦？
Jane: (talking about Gogi and her stepmother) Are their family all Indians?
Unidentified source: The stepmother is an American.
Researcher: The last two words in the second paragraph on page 149, “West Indians.” Here we know they are immigrants from the West Indies. Then, on page 148, there is another sentence, “the shock of her American accent went through me.” So from her “American accent” we know that the stepmother is an American.
Jane: But why isn’t her skin color white?
Researcher: Not all Americans are white.
Jane: But still she is interracial?
Researcher: Oh, you might offend many people by saying so. No matter where your ancestors came from, you can count as an American.
Jane: Oh, you mean, as long as you were born there and live there, you are American? (Group Discussion 4)

Obviously, Jane assumed that “Americans” are equated with white people and that people of color are not really Americans. Later in the same discussion, when talking about Gogi’s reaction to her father’s relationship with an American woman (whose skin color is brown), Jane once again revealed her assumption that the term “pure Americans” seems limited to white people; people of color are less “pure Americans” and (or because) they do not have the same social status as white people do.

Jane: Gogi 是不是頗討厭她爸爸去接觸一個 American woman？
Researcher: 哦？
Jane: 中南美洲不是通常都很喜歡美國人嗎？
Researcher: 女為什麼會這麼說呢？能不能從文本中找到那個地方讓你覺得這樣呢？
Jane: 前面好像有一段提到他居然跟美國人交往...
Researcher: 你們有人知道她在說什麼嗎？
Melanie: “What was Daddy doing with an American woman?” 就是有一種感覺她不喜歡他跟美國女人來往。
Researcher: 嗯，an American woman 幹嘛這樣子呢？
Jane: 而且她不是只講 woman 而是 American woman，如果她只是討厭他帶一個女人的話，可是她有講 American，這是不是跟種族有一點關係？
Researcher: 這我不是很確定，看你們的看法如何，不過我想有一點鄙視的味道是有的。
Jane: 而且我看後面這邊 (pointing to author’s background)，所以感覺... 它後面也有提到是要 write about class differences in American society，所以應該是在講美國的社會裡，還是有所謂階級的，就像黑人的社會地位就比較不好，還有就是你如果不是純正的美國人，你的社會地位就比較不好。
Jane: It seems that Gogi did not like her father to have a relationship with an “American woman.”
Researcher: Really?
Jane: Normally *people from central America like Americans*, don’t they?
Researcher: What makes you think so? Is there any evidence in the text that makes you think so?
Jane: There was a paragraph earlier about his relationship with Americans . . .
Researcher: Does anyone know what she is talking about?
Melanie: The sentence, “What was Daddy doing with an American woman?” suggests that she does not like him to be with American women.
Researcher: Mm-Hmm, so why an American woman?
Jane: She didn’t use “a woman” but “an American woman” instead. So it isn’t about the fact that he had another woman. But she said “American woman.” Doesn’t it have something to do with ethnicity?
Researcher: I am not quite sure. What do you all think? It seems to me that Gogi’s remarks smack of “contempt” or something.
Jane: And I read about the author’s background, so I kind of feel that . . . Here (pointing to the author’s background at the end of the story), it mentions that the author is devoted to writing about class differences in American society. So I think this is about the social class difference in American society. Like black people, they don’t have high social status. Moreover, if you are not *pure Americans*, you won’t have high social status. (Group Discussion 4; emphasis mine)

There was conflict in Jane’s reasoning. When Jane tried to figure out why Gogi did not like “an American woman,” she first assumed that people with a background like Gogi’s family should like Americans. However, in the story Gogi does not like her new American stepmother, and this did not make much sense to Jane. Then Jane tried to justify Gogi’s feelings by resorting to the racial discrimination that immigrants and colored people might feel living in the American society. Jane seemed to imply that immigrants and colored people do not like hanging around with “pure Americans” because they do not want to feel discriminated against or inferior. Nevertheless, the deep-
seated stereotype embedded in Jane’s thinking remained the same: “pure Americans” are whites, who enjoy the highest social status.

Comparing and Contrasting. The students also made comparisons and contrasts between their own culture and American culture, especially when they tried to make sense of the characters and their actions. The students felt that there were more commonalities than differences between the adolescents in Taiwan and in America. They had some similar developmental problems or psychological needs, such as peer pressure, communication problems between parents and children, boy-girl relationships, teenage sex, etc. For example, in the story “I’ve Got Gloria,” when Scott fails his math and plans to “kidnap” the teacher’s dog for revenge, the students indicated that Scott’s feelings and thoughts reflected their own quite well, except that “Americans dare to act out the thoughts that we always have kept to ourselves” (Kelly, Interview 3). “Dead End” also represented a dilemma that these students were often faced with: “to make a choice between studying and having fun with friends” (“就是看要繼續讀書，還是跟朋友一起墮落那種”; Anne, Interview 3). Like Maria in the story “Dead End,” the students found it difficult for them to decide whether “to insist on one’s own ideals” or “to go with the crowd” (Anne, Interview 3).

Although some adolescent problems and concerns are common to both American and Taiwanese adolescents, the students found that people might react to the same problem differently on the basis of their cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes. One recurrent topic in students’ responses was parent-child relationships. The students found that American parents were less authoritative figures and gave children more respect and
freedom than parents in Taiwan. For example, after they had read “I’ve Got Gloria,” they admired Scott’s father, who is willing to apologize to Scott for his earlier bad attitude.

Lindsey: 就是 Scott 的爸爸不是承認自己的態度不好嗎？我在想如果是我們中國人根本就不會承認自己的態度不好這種事，中國人就是這個樣子。

Multiple voices: 對啊，沒錯！
Vivian: 父母怎樣都不會承認自己的錯誤。
Lindsey: 因為中國都是比較權威的，外國就是說小孩子是平等的，比較會討論。
Researcher: 比較民主？
Lindsey: 對啊。
Jane: 嗯。
Anne: 就是比較像朋友這樣子，他們比較願意去聽小孩子到底覺得怎麼樣。

Lindsey: Isn’t it true that Scott’s father admitted his attitude toward Scott was bad? I was thinking, if they were Chinese people, nobody would admit his own mistake. Chinese people are just like that.

Multiple voices: Yeah, that’s right.
Vivian: (Chinese) parents would never admit their mistakes.
Lindsey: Because Chinese (parents) are more authoritative. In foreign countries, kids are treated as equals and people are more willing to talk to kids.
Researcher: You mean more democratic?
Lindsey: That’s right.
Anne: It feels more like friends. They are more willing to listen to kids about what they really think. (Group Discussion 1)

Another example of this contrast in parent-child relations occurred in their responses to Charlotte’s work experience in “Lessons.” The students felt that, while American adolescents are given more freedom, they also need to take more responsibility. On the contrary, “in Taiwan parents generally do not encourage you to take a part-time job” (“在台灣父母比較不會鼓勵你去打工”; Melanie, Interview 3), because “Taiwanese parents always ask their children since childhood to study and study, and nothing else” (“因爲父
母從小就要小孩子讀書讀書”；Anne, Interview 3). For parents in Taiwan, the most important task for every child is to study hard and get into a good university, and parents will do anything for their children to make this happen.

About teenage sexual relationships, the students tended to be conservative and strict in their judgmental responses to what was presented in “Dead End” and “My Sweet Sixteenth.” Their strong disapproval of the characters’ behavior suggested the differences between their own culture and the culture represented by the American teenager characters in the stories.

Other kinds of examples show the students’ awareness of cultural differences. About the story “I’ve Got Gloria,” students commented that, compared with Chinese people, Americans were not so afraid of “losing face” and that Americans “cared so much about their pets” (Lindsey, Journal 1).

*Reflective understanding of cultures.* This category of response is composed of students’ reflections upon their own culture and the culture portrayed. The students confirmed or modified their initial impressions of American culture, but either way, they also gained a new understanding and learned to adopt a broader view of cultures. As Lindsey reflected,

我覺得東西方文化的差異，差在我們比較保守他們比較開放，雖然兩邊都沒什麼不好，可是我看了之後，就知道他們在想什麼、他們的生活方式，然後他們開放是開放在那邊。

I knew that one cultural difference between Western and Oriental cultures is that we are more conservative and they are more liberal. There’s nothing wrong with either side. But now that I have read these stories, I understand better the way they think and live, and in what ways they are more liberal. (Lindsey, Interview 3).
The following example reveals that Anne modified the impression of American culture that she had acquired from American movies.

Researcher: 這些故事有改變你以前對美國文化的印象嗎？
Anne: 我知道文化有好有壞，可是只是美國文化讓我看到的是它比較好的的一面。
Researcher: Hmm, 所以你平常接觸到的都是比較好的那一面？
Anne: (附和) 比較好的那一面。
Researcher: 現在你知道... 
Anne: 就是另外比較不一樣的地方，因為就像看電影，它也是演比較好的那一面。

Researcher: Does the reading of these stories change your previous impression of American culture?
Anne: I knew that every culture has both a bright side and a dark side, but somehow I could only see the bright side of American culture.
Researcher: Hmm, so you mean you are usually exposed to the bright side only?
Anne: Right, only the bright side.
Researcher: But now you know... (interrupted)
Anne: Something different. Because, like watching movies, their movies present only the bright side. (Anne, Interview 2)

The students found that the problems or issues dealt with in the selected realistic short stories also often appeared in the American movies they had watched. However, what the movies represented seemed to be a more idealized version of reality. After reading the short stories, the students found that there are realities that differ from the always-positive, feel-good, and pleasant reality that they had seen in American movies. One example was articulated when the students discovered some unpleasant realities of American education.

As Vivian pointed out in the following dialogue,

Vivian: 就是美國青少年，他們的電影有拍嘛，也有拍這種故事，會覺得有一點，你會看得到，你會了解，可是看了小說之後，你會發現有很多不一樣的地方。
Researcher: 可以舉例說明一下嗎？
Vivian: 对啊，然後像他們的人際關係會比較獨立一點，還有他們的教育也是有一點現實，不像我們所想的理想教育，像之前的Maria她也是很有才能，可是她就是讀不起，就覺得也是有點現實。

Vivian: There are some American movies about teenagers. You watch them and you learn something. However, after reading these stories, you find there are many differences between the movies and these short stories.

Researcher: Can you give me an example?

Vivian: Yeah, they are more independent in human relationships. And their education is snobbish. It’s not the “ideal American education” that we used to imagine. For example, Maria (in “Dead End”) is very smart and capable, but she can’t afford to go to a better school. I think their education system is a little snobbish. (Vivian, Interview 3)

The students brought to their reading an idealized image of America, mostly acquired from movies. However, the experience of reading realistic American young adult literature provided them an opportunity to see different aspects of the society and invited them to reach a more balanced view of the culture. That is, there are multiple realities, pleasant and unpleasant. The following response of Lindsey provides an example of such a broadened view of reality.

其實我小時候會覺得美國很好，去美國大家都很自由，因為西方世界我覺得是比較開放的，可能一些不公平的現象比較不會出現，然後在這社會上許多不公平的現象是沒有的。因爲就是看了這些小說以後，覺得白人有點歧視其他人種，以後要移民的話，可能就會多考慮一下。

As a child, I used to think everything is good that is American. In America, everyone has freedom because Western countries are more open, I think. And things like inequality or injustice won’t happen as often (as in our society). But after reading the stories, I feel that white people still now discriminate against people not of their kind. If I should need to emigrate to another country in the future, I think I’ll need to think twice. (Lindsey, Interview 2)
Responses like this indicated the students’ reflection upon their earlier perceptions of the ideal image of America. As Lindsey expressed it, she found that she needed to “redefine reality” and “learned to look at the American society from different perspectives” (Lindsey, Interview 2).

The Extent of Cultural Awareness

The students’ cultural awareness as demonstrated in their response journals was quite limited. Table 4.1 in the first section displays 130 coded units of literary responses in the response journals and 167 in the group discussions. However, as Table 4.3 and Table 4.4 show, there were only seven instances of cultural awareness demonstrated in the students’ response journals, four of which were about cultural background information, and three of which compared and contrasted the readers’ own culture and the culture represented in the story. Comparatively, the students seemed to reveal more cultural awareness in group discussions. However, given that there were 167 units of literary responses in group discussions, 18 instances of cultural awareness did not really show a significant increase in proportion. Again, in group discussions, the students asked more questions about the cultural background, and they showed greater awareness of the similarities and differences between their own culture and the culture represented in the texts. The students’ cultural awareness was especially evident when they were trying to make sense of story characters and their actions.

The results here seem to contradict the assumption behind this study that cultural differences play a role in students’ literary responses when they are reading across cultures because the students’ response journals and group discussions did not provide
Table 4.3: Frequency of Cultural Awareness in Response Journals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of cultural awareness</th>
<th>I’ve Got Gloria</th>
<th>May I Have Your Autograph</th>
<th>Dead End</th>
<th>She</th>
<th>Lessons</th>
<th>My Sweet Sixteenth</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background information</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyped conceptions</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing &amp; contrasting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective understanding</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

rich data about their cultural awareness. Therefore, I turned to interviews to find out what actually happened. When the issue was probed further during individual interviews, every student, without exception, revealed varying degrees of cultural awareness as a result of reading the selected short stories. As the responses in interviews were elicited by the interviewer, they were not as spontaneous as those in response journals or group discussions. However, the students revealed more critical and sophisticated responses to the short stories in terms of cultural awareness. Most of the cultural awareness the students divulged in the interviews tended to focus on the categories of “comparing and
Table 4.4: Frequency of Cultural Awareness in Group Discussions

contrast ing” and “reflective understanding.” Judging from the students’ responses and reflections in the interviews, as some examples in the previous section demonstrate, the selected short stories seemed to heighten their cultural awareness to a much greater extent than their response journals and group discussions suggested. The students' cultural awareness did increase as a result of their reading experience; however, it had to be tapped to become known.

The students showed different degrees of cultural awareness in relation to different stories. The students did not show any evidence of cultural awareness in their
responses to “May I Have Your Autograph,” either in the response journals or in group discussions, when the topic was about the popular youth culture. In contrast, the students made more culturally specific responses to “I’ve Got Gloria,” “Dead End,” “She,” and “My Sweet Sixteenth.” Two recurrent topics that invited culturally specific responses were child-parent relationships (as dealt with in “I’ve Got Gloria” and “She”) and sexual relationships (as dealt with in “Dead End” and “My Sweet Sixteenth”). The students found that the characters in these stories reacted to child-parent relationships and sexual relationships in ways that differed from their expectations. Unlike their own culture, which emphasizes obedience to authority and respect for elders, the students observed democracy and equality in the interactions between parents and children in the stories. Consistent with their own cultural background, the students also displayed more conservative and strict attitudes toward sexual relationships when they were judging the characters in “Dead End” and “My Sweet Sixteenth.” The students held the characters to their expectations for appropriate social behavior, but the characters did not live up to their expectations. No wonder the students expressed strong disapproval of the characters’ behavior in “My Sweet Sixteenth.” The discrepancy between the students’ cultural responses to different stories might be attributable to the fact that some values, beliefs, and attitudes tend to be common among different cultures, while others are not. The students showed more cultural awareness when the issues involved culturally specific values, beliefs, and attitudes.
Reader Stance

Data analysis in the previous section show that the students made rich literary responses to the stories but revealed limited cultural awareness in their response journals and group discussions. It seemed that the students were reading primarily for experiencing the story world rather than reading for gaining cultural information. The reading stance that their response journals and group discussions suggested corresponded to their self-identified stance. The students described their reading stance in interviews as follows. Both Vivian and Anne indicated that they enjoyed reading the story itself without paying much attention to anything else, and that cultural differences did not seem to interfere with their enjoyment of reading. In Anne’s words, “the first time I read a story, I simply focus on the story development. If I re-read a story, then I will think about other perspectives as well” (“第一次是看故事發展，第二次之後看是從其他角度這樣下去看”; Interview 2). Anne emphasized that she “read a story just for the story’s sake” (“我就是純粹喜歡看故事”; Interview 3). The students’ focus on the story plot might filter out possible “aesthetic restriction,” to use Soter’s (1997) term, which resulted from unfamiliarity with the culture of the text. This does not mean that culture did not exist as a factor in the reading process. Rather, it suggests that the students chose to ignore some cultural differences or interferences and tried to appropriate the meanings of the text in their own ways instead.

When asked what they would do if they had questions regarding the culture portrayed in a story they were reading, Kelly replied,
during the reading process, if I have any questions, I just put them aside and keep reading for I think what will happen next will probably answer my questions. But when I finish the whole story, I may have completely forgotten all the questions. (Kelly, Interview 1)

Here Kelly revealed that she, as a reader, was suspending her disbelief of what she did not understand or was not familiar with. In addition, Kelly tended to view the text as a self-contained world operating with its own rules, and she relied on the contextual clues provided by the text in her attempt to construct the textual world. During the reading process, her momentary questions or wondering about the represented culture might be resolved as she read on and acquired more information from the text, or they might be simply washed out in her stream of consciousness. Either way, Kelly was fundamentally story-oriented, looking for a good story and willingly being carried away, no matter whether she could understand all aspects of the text or not. Similarly, as Jane described her reading experience, it was like “being drawn in by the story itself, and you can not help but keep reading on and on until you reach the end” (“那種感覺很像被劇中的內容牽著這樣走...你會想要知道結局是什麼，那就一直往下看”; Jane, Interview 3).

Both Melanie and Lindsey also stated that they focused their attention on reading the story itself without other concerns.

Therefore, the students’ cultural awareness during the reading process might exist to some extent all the way along, but it did not loom large in their consciousness, probably because the students were preoccupied with experiencing the secondary world of the story in the first place. On the one hand, the students’ awareness of the represented
culture as a distinct culture might have accompanied their literary responses, but was not strong enough to be given center stage in their consciousness during the reading process. On the other hand, cultural awareness could also be seen as a result of literary experience. That is, cultural understanding comes after experience.

The students’ self-stated stance aligns well with their actual literary responses shown in the previous sections. When reading the literature of another culture, the students tended to take Rosenblatt’s (1995) “aesthetic” stance or Britton’s (1984) “spectator” stance. As data in this study have shown, during the reading process, the students’ attention was turned toward experiencing the story world itself rather than processing the cultural information within the story analytically. When faced with the unfamiliar, the students willingly suspended their disbelief, drew on the contextual clues, and appropriated the meanings of the text in their own ways. Cultural understanding was not their major concern, but it came as a natural development from their literary responses.

Summary

This chapter described and analyzed the results of the study. Analysis of the students’ literary responses showed three levels of response: interacting, interpreting, and evaluating. Each level of response encompassed several kinds of response activities. In the interacting responses, students were engaged in picturing, associating, predicting and speculating, and emotional involvement. In the interpreting responses, the students made judgments about characters’ actions, derived thematic meanings, and made generalizations about life. In the evaluating responses, the students stated their likes or
dislikes, praise or criticism, of the stories on the basis of their personal connections to the subject matter or the author’s manipulation of literary craft. The students’ literary responses were found to be predominantly interpretive, judgmental and didactic. These responses also showed that students drew on their linguistic, personal, intertextual, and sociocultural frames of reference in their transactions with the text. Different points of references seemed to be given equal say at the level of interacting responses as students were trying to build up the secondary world. The sociocultural frame of reference was especially prominent at the level of interpreting responses, while the personal and intertextual frames of reference were drawn upon equally at the level of evaluating responses.

The students revealed their cultural awareness in their responses with questions about cultural background information and with their stereotyped conceptions about the depicted culture. The students also demonstrated their cultural awareness by making comparisons and contrasts between cultures and by reflecting upon their understanding of the cultures. However, the students’ cultural awareness as demonstrated in their literary responses was limited. The students did not show as much cultural awareness in response journals as they did later in group discussions and individual interviews. Some subject matters, like parent-child relationships and sexual relationships, were found to solicit more cultural awareness than others. The students tended to adopt a predominantly aesthetic stance when reading the literature of another culture. However, while the students were preoccupied with experiencing the story world during the reading process, greater intercultural understanding tended to be a natural development from their literary
experience though the cultural understanding was limited and needed to be probed to become known.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the study and discusses the results presented in the previous chapter in relation to the literature and prior research. It also provides pedagogical implications and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

This study was conducted in response to the call for use of authentic literature with ESL/EFL learners. Since traditional structured readers often fail to generate English learners’ interest in reading or to engage them in meaningful learning, educators have advocated using real literature with ESL/EFL students in order to provide a motivating and meaningful medium for language learning (e.g., Amer, 2003; Carlisle, 2000; Ghosn, 2002). In addition, these educators point out that authentic literature can also foster students’ personal involvement in reading, broaden their cultural perspectives, and nourish their literary appreciation. There seems to be little doubt that using literature can promote literacy development in ESL/EFL students (e.g., Cho & Krashen, 1994; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Krashen, 2004). However, few studies have been conducted to examine the nature of the English language learner’s experience of reading the target language.
literature, nor to provide insights into the mechanisms associated with the various benefits that educators claim reading literature can offer. While reader response research on English L1 readers is a well-developed field that informs the literature-based reading program at different levels (e.g., Karolides, 1997, 2000), similar research on English language learners has been scarce.

To remedy the lack of research, this study sought to explore the responses of six Taiwanese EFL adolescents to selected realistic American short stories for young adults and to examine their cultural awareness when reading the literature from another culture. For literary responses, I tried to answer the following questions: What were the students’ response patterns? and What did they draw on in order to make sense of the stories? For cultural awareness, I tried to answer these questions: To what extent was the adolescents’ cross-cultural awareness demonstrated in their literary responses? and What were the adolescents’ reading stances when reading across cultures?

This study adopted qualitative research methods in order to explore the complex nature of the students’ literary experience and cultural awareness. Data sources included questionnaires, response journals, group discussions, individual interviews, and field notes. Response journals and group discussions were the major tools used to capture the students’ responses while the other sources served to triangulate the data. The multiple data-collection method contributed to the trustworthiness of the study.

Data collection procedures were as follows. Before the participants began reading the stories, they were asked to complete a questionnaire about their reading habits, reading preferences, and prior knowledge of American culture. Then, every week they
read one short story at home and kept a response journal, following response writing guidelines adapted from Benton (1992a) and Kooy and Wells (1996). The participants brought their journals to the weekly meeting to talk about their responses to the story they had read that week. The group discussions took place after school as a club activity in a schoolroom. The group discussions were led by the researcher and followed Chamber’s (1996) “Tell Me” approach. There were six stories read in total. Individual interviews were conducted at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the study. The constant comparative method was employed for data analysis (Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 1997).

The major findings of this study were as follows. Three levels of literary response emerged from data analysis: interacting, interpreting, and evaluating, with the latter tending to be built upon the former levels. The levels do not imply a hierarchical value of significance or preference. Rather, the levels indicate a progressive and cumulative development of the students’ response. The participants’ frames of reference for making sense of the text were found to include linguistic, personal, intertextual, and sociocultural dimensions. Different frames of reference were given relative emphasis at different levels of response. All frames of reference were drawn on at the level of interacting, and the personal frame appeared at all three levels of response. However, the intertextual frame seemed more prominent at the levels of interacting and evaluating, while the sociocultural frame was generally limited to the level of interpreting. The participants’ primary response mode was characterized by didactic interpretation of characters and themes, which was greatly influenced by their sociocultural frames of reference.
With regard to awareness of the differences between their own culture and American culture, the participants’ cultural awareness initially seemed to be limited and needed to be probed to become known. The participants did not show as much cultural awareness in response journals as they did later in group discussions and, especially, individual interviews. Moreover, the participants adopted a predominantly aesthetic stance when reading the literature from another culture. This stance directed their attention toward personal connections and the lived-through experiences. That is, the participants read mainly for pleasure rather than to process the cultural information in the text critically or analytically. Such a reading stance might be the reason for the seeming lack of cultural awareness at first. Nevertheless, the participants seemed to express increased cultural awareness as a subsequent development from reading the stories, as revealed in individual interviews. Additionally, some of the stories tended to stimulate more cultural awareness than others. The participants showed most cultural awareness when the subject matter of the story was parent-child relationships and sexual relationships. This fact points to distinctive cultural differences between the participants’ own culture and the culture portrayed in this regard.

Findings Related to the Literature

The findings of this study support and extend existing reader response theories and research. In line with reader response transactional theories, this study found that these readers actively participated in the meaning-making process by drawing on their past experience and knowledge as they transacted with the text. The participants were able to have virtual experiences through the text, interpret the characters and meanings of
the fictional world, and make a detached evaluation of their literary experiences. Among the three levels of response, the first level, *interacting*, which focuses on building up the story world, reflects the personal lived-through experience that most transactional theorists emphasize and elaborate on (e.g., Benton, 1992a; Rosenblatt, 1994). This study found that, at the level of *interacting*, the students were engaged in the mental activities of picturing, associating, and predicting and speculating as they became emotionally involved. Such response activities fit Rosenblatt’s (1980) definition of “aesthetic” reading, in that the reader’s attention is turned to “sensations, images, feelings, memories and ideas” (p. 388) that are evoked by the text and fused into a personally lived-through experience.

However, the later levels of *interpreting* and *evaluating*, which focus on the students’ reflective understanding of life and of the textual world as art, respectively, appear to correspond to Langer’s (1995) “stepping out” stances or Britton’s (1984) “reader-as-spectator.” In Langer’s (1995) literary envisionment, when the reader is stepping out and rethinking what s/he knows, s/he uses insights gained from the literary experience to reflect upon life and to imagine alternative values, beliefs and emotions; when stepping out and objectifying the experience, the reader reflects upon how the literary work as a piece of art works on him or her. Similarly, Britton’s (1984) reader-as-spectator takes the role of a spectator viewing other people’s lives and tests out his or her own values against those of other people. The participants’ *interpreting* and *evaluating* responses thus demonstrate the reflective thinking that Galda (1998) claimed to be associated with the inherent power of literature for developing values.
This study also found that the participants’ interpretation and evaluation tended to be built upon their *interacting* response. In Cox and Many’s (1992) study, literary analysis was attributed to an “efferent” stance that resulted in less personal meaning and understanding, while an “aesthetic” stance was associated with deeper, richer personal meaning and understanding. However, this study found that the students’ efferent interpretation and evaluation were largely based on their personal lived-through experience with the secondary world, an experience initiated by an “aesthetic” stance (Rosenblatt, 1994). Therefore, a dichotomous view of the efferent/aesthetic reading seems to be inappropriate. As this study has shown, the students’ efferent analysis of their response to the story did not necessarily entail less personal meaning or understanding because it tended to be a subsequent development from their aesthetic response.

This finding also supports the results of earlier studies on adolescent reader response by Applebee (1978) and Thomson (1996) that adolescents tended to use their subjective and personal response to justify their generalizations about the meaning of the textual world or their evaluation of the textual world as a construct. All in all, for adolescent reader response, it is perhaps better to regard “aesthetic stance” as compatible with Britton’s (1984) reader-as-spectator, which involves not only the virtual experience but also the interpretation and evaluation of the fictional world.

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5 According to Cox and Many’s (1992) explanation of Rosenblatt’s aesthetic and efferent stances, the aesthetic stance focuses on “story part or aspect,” “imaging and picturing,” “hypothesizing, extending, and retrospecting,” and “relating feelings and associations evoked,” while the efferent stance focuses on “analysis” and “story content” (pp. 109-114). Cox and Many found that their fourth- to eighth-grade students tended to take the aesthetic stance toward reading literature when they were left to their own devices.
In this study, more than half of the participants’ literary responses were interpretive, and the primary response mode was didactic. This finding echoes the studies by Cai (1992) and Chou (1999), both of whom found that students of Chinese cultural background tended to provide didactic or moralistic interpretations of characters and themes. There are two possible reasons for this phenomenon. First, Chinese culture emphasizes moral education. Second, it is probable that the students in Taiwan have always been taught in schools to read for the morals in literary works. Thus, the participants’ literary responses most likely reflect their own cultural values and the influence of their schooling.

In addition to their linguistic knowledge, the participants’ frames of reference in making meaning from the text were found to include their personal experience, intertextual knowledge, and sociocultural values and attitudes. As in the research by Many and Anderson (1992) and Short (1992), the participants in this study made more intertextual connections to television programs and movies than to works of literature. Thanks to the globalization of mass media, the television programs and movies that these students mentioned were from various countries, such as Japan, Korea, and, especially, the United States. This suggests the power of the mass media in shaping adolescents’ knowledge and world view. It was sometimes difficult to distinguish which references belonged to Chinese culture and which were influenced by foreign cultures. Such a phenomenon is especially true of the popular youth culture.

This study also found that the participants’ responses to certain topics, like parent-child relationships and sexual relationships, reflected the dominant influence of their own
Chinese cultural background. Their culture-specific responses were especially
predominant when they were interpreting characters and inferring thematic meanings.
Altogether, it is perhaps better to think of the reader’s sociocultural frame as relational
and fluid, receptive to and influenced by various cultural forces.

Transactional reader response theories are sometimes criticized for failing to
address the issue of culture in the reading process (Lewis, 2000, 2001). In her
transactional theory Rosenblatt has never explicated how culture impedes or facilitates
reader’s comprehension in a reading event. To fill this lack of knowledge, the findings of
this study unveil how EFL readers manage cultural differences in the text during the
reading process.

First, the participants’ responses in this study revealed that they were able to have
a rich literary experience with the selected realistic short stories despite some cultural
differences. This finding reinforces the results reported in other studies on reading across
cultures, such as Altieri (1995), Ho (1990), and Mangat and Johnston (2000), all of whom
recognized the reader’s involvement and enjoyment in reading literature of other cultures.
In other words, cultural differences in the text cannot pose a barrier for reading pleasure.

Secondly, the reader can bypass cultural differences in the text during the reading
process. In this study the participants tended to adopt a predominantly aesthetic stance
when reading across cultures. In agreement with Jordan and Purves (1993) and Jordan
(1997), this study found that the participants tended to respond to the literature from
another culture on a personal basis, temporarily disregarding cultural differences during
the reading process. Indeed, the participants were looking for good stories that presented
situations and problems that they also shared (Davis, 2000). Although the participants might have encountered “aesthetic restriction” initially because of cultural differences, their aesthetic stance enabled them to suspend their disbelief and rely on “the imaginative dimension” for a virtual experience (Soter, 1997). Moreover, the participants’ aesthetic stance enabled them to enjoy the reading process even though they had a limited knowledge of literary terms and could not name their literary experiences.

In addition to bypassing cultural differences, this study also found that the reader can circumvent cultural differences by means of cognitive progression. To understand different cultures, the participants in this study adopted a strategy of progression from wondering to reflection (Enriquez, 2001; Jordan, 1997). For example, when the participants were interpreting the characters’ actions, they could draw on their sociocultural frames of reference. This indicates that the students applied their own sociocultural values to the characters in order to make sense of the characters’ motivation and behavior. By testing out their own values against those of the characters, the students were induced to reflect upon cultural differences between their own culture and American culture. Consequently, the participants increased their understanding of cultural differences by juxtaposing the two cultures against each other. In this way, reading the literature of another culture developed the students’ cross-cultural awareness.

In summary, this study’s findings illustrate how readers negotiate the cultural differences inherent in the text. The reader might strategically bypass cultural differences during the reading process. Moreover, the reader can also subtly circumvent cultural differences by means of cognitive progression: they proceed from wondering, go through
reflection, and arrive at increased awareness. With both reading strategies, the reader can effectively deal with the cultural differences inherent in the alien literature. To conclude, the factor of culture is not a barrier in cross-cultural literary appreciation, and reading the literature of another culture can potentially promote cross-cultural awareness.

Pedagogical Implications

The results of this study provide support for using American young adult short stories with high school EFL students in Taiwan. This study has implications for high school EFL classes in terms of classroom practices, criteria for story selection, and the approach to reading such stories.

The rich data of the participants’ literary responses revealed that the selected realistic young adult short stories could successfully engage their interest in reading. Sloan (2003) argued that “the first real business of reading instruction is to make children want to read” (p. 4). According to Krashen’s (1994) pleasure hypothesis, if a pedagogical activity promotes language acquisition, it is enjoyable. For the participants in this study, reading the selected young adult short stories was enjoyable. In addition, the use of interesting reading material is generally considered the most important factor that motivates a student’s decision to read in a second language (Day & Bamford, 1998; Williams, 1986). It is probable that the pleasurable reading experience with young adult short stories could stimulate the EFL students’ enthusiasm for reading and develop their love for reading in English. Therefore, the curriculum designers and textbook writers for EFL classes in Taiwan should consider including young adult literature, especially short
stories, in the curriculum because such stories can serve as interesting and meaningful reading materials for adolescent EFL students.

High school EFL teachers in Taiwan can use young adult short stories as an alternative to traditional structured basal readers. EFL teachers should try to include young adult short stories in EFL classes and/or encourage free independent reading of such stories. EFL teachers should introduce their students to young adult short stories by giving book talks or providing class time for discussion of literature, because most EFL students probably do not know about such reading materials. To encourage free independent reading, it is also important that teachers make such reading materials available in the classroom or school library.

With regard to the criteria for story selection, the teacher should consider both the subject matter and literary elements. This study showed that the students’ evaluation of a story depended upon whether the story represented adolescent concerns and problems they felt connected to, whether the story was humorous and plausible, and whether the story ended happily. While the subject matter influenced the students’ first impression of a story, their evaluation of the story was based on the literary criteria that were reflective of their adolescent perspectives. Therefore, to ensure that the book or story selections meet students’ preferences, the teacher should first choose stories that deal with problems that are also common among Taiwanese adolescents. Then the teacher should judge whether the problems discussed in those stories are represented in a way that is artistically satisfactory to adolescent readers.
The findings of this study also have pedagogical implications for the approach that teachers take to reading young adult short stories. High school EFL teachers should encourage their students to adopt an aesthetic reading stance toward young adult short stories. Some educators suggest taking a critical approach to reading multicultural literature in order to ensure the sociopolitical goal of multicultural education (e.g., Cai, 1992; Lewis, 2001; Sutherland, 2005). However, in my view, such an approach does not seem to be appropriate for EFL students. This study found that the students had a tendency to engage in aesthetic reading when reading across cultures, and that this stance did not preclude the possibility of developing their cultural awareness even when they were reading on their own. In fact, the students did demonstrate varying degrees of cultural understanding and reflection as a result of their reading experience with the target language literature. Therefore, an appropriate approach to reading the target language literature for EFL students should be response-centered, emphasizing personal response and pleasure, because the main purpose of using literature with EFL students is to stimulate their interest and engage them in reading. Deepening the students’ critical or reflective understanding of life and culture may subsequently result from their virtual experience of the foreign culture. As Galda and Liang (2003) have argued, the virtual experience of the story world can be the impetus for critical thinking and discussion, but “the experience must come first” (p. 274). That is, critical response begins with and builds upon aesthetic response.

According to Rosenblatt (1982), education has always emphasized “what can be quantified,” which often becomes “the guide to what is taught, tested, or researched” (p. 154).
Similarly, in EFL reading classes, teachers have always emphasized discrete reading skills, such as summarizing and paraphrasing, rather than the pleasure of reading. Perhaps EFL teachers should have more faith in literature and in their students when they use authentic literature and when they encourage their students to take an aesthetic stance toward such reading materials. For those teachers who are concerned with the sociopolitical goal of multicultural education and those who are preoccupied with the direct instruction of sequential language skills, the following quote from Rosenblatt (1982) might be appropriate to relieve them of some of their worries:

Aesthetic reading, by its very nature, has an intrinsic purpose, the desire to have a pleasurable, interesting experience for its own sake. . . . Paradoxically, when the transactions are lived through for their own sake, they will probably have as by-products the educational, informative, social, and moral values for which literature is often praised. Even enhancement of skills may result. (p. 275)

Aesthetic reading of literary works can give EFL students the “flow experience” that Csikszentmihalyi (1990) identified as intrinsically rewarding for reading. Students can thus become intrinsically motivated in reading when they take such a stance, and the positive reading experience will be conducive to their language learning.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on six Taiwanese adolescent EFL students’ literary responses to six realistic American short stories for young adults and the students’ cultural awareness as demonstrated in their literary responses. Although the findings enrich previous research on reader response, this study has some inherent limitations, including the small sample size, the participants’ age, gender, and English ability, the time of the study, and the genre of the literature selected. All of these variables influence the
generalizability of the findings. However, since the intent of this study was to describe local truths in a specific context rather than to deliver universal context-free generalizations, discerning readers will have to determine for themselves to what extent the findings are generalizable to other settings and how the findings can contribute to their needs.

Nevertheless, there are some possibilities and recommendations for further research that I would like to point out. First, the actual study was conducted in six weeks. A study conducted over a longer period of time would result in richer data and provide a more comprehensive description of students’ experiences. A longitudinal study would also provide a better opportunity to observe possible changes in students’ response patterns and reading stances over time.

Second, only realistic short stories were used in this study. Using different genres of literature may elicit different kinds of response. Further research is needed to examine how different types of text influence EFL students’ response patterns.

Third, although this was not a deliberate choice, the participants in this study were all girls because no boys volunteered. Further research is needed to investigate why or why not boys want to read. Moreover, further research is needed to look into whether EFL students of different genders show different response patterns when reading American YAL.

Fourth, this study employed Benton’s (1992a) guidelines for journal writing and Chamber’s (1996) “Tell Me” framework for group discussion. Benton’s response writing guidelines and Chamber’s “Tell Me” approach may have proved to be effective tools in
directing students’ attention to the lived-through experience during the reading process. However, it seems that such tools did not encourage students to take a more critical and analytical stance toward the sociocultural aspects of the text. Further research is needed to determine how different tools can be best used with EFL students for soliciting or facilitating their different kinds of response to the target language literature.

Fifth, future research is needed to determine the impact of the reader response approach to reading American YAL on EFL students’ reading attitudes, reading habits, and reading abilities. Would such an approach effectively motivate EFL students to read and read more? How much gains would EFL students make on English reading assessment after their exposure to a response-centered approach to American YAL for a certain period of time?

Sixth, the study was conducted mainly in Chinese, the participants’ first language. Further research is needed to be conducted in English, students’ target language, to look at their improvement in English writing and speaking over time when responding to the target language literature.

Seventh, the group discussions in this study were led by the researcher. How to sustain the students’ reading behavior without adult intervention after their participation in a response-centered, literature-based reading program deserves further attention from researchers. Since the use of the computer is becoming a popular pastime among students in Taiwan, researchers may want to examine how the employment of computer chat rooms or blogs can encourage students’ independent reading and their expression of response.
Focusing on adolescent EFL students’ response to the target language literature, this study provides empirical evidence in support of the reader response approach to EFL reading instruction and further clarifies the role of culture in EFL students’ reading process. The characteristics of the students’ response patterns and their configuration of cultural awareness that this study uncovered provide support for the use of young adult short stories and a response-centered approach with high school EFL students. The results of this study remain a beginning effort in understanding EFL students’ response to authentic target language literature. Further study is needed to investigate the kinds of genres and tools that can best be used with EFL students and the effects of the reader response approach to authentic target language literature on EFL students’ language learning.
APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

I am here to invite some of you to participate in a research study to learn about Taiwanese adolescents’ responses to American young adult literature. The information that will be collected will be used in my PhD dissertation at the Ohio State University College of Education.

I am inviting your participation because I believe that your thoughts, feelings, and reactions when reading American young adult literature will help me to better understand how Taiwanese adolescents respond to the literary works in English as a foreign language. The benefits to you of participating in this study are that you might have more opportunities to learn English, experience the pleasures of reading in English, enjoy sharing your response with other students, and increase your knowledge of self and the American culture. As a small token of my appreciation for your participation in this study, you can keep the books, from which the short stories used in this study are selected. Your participation in this study will also help me and other educators to better understand how to use young adult literature in high school English class in Taiwan.

In the following weeks I will visit your English class regularly. I will observe your classroom interaction so as to identify some possible participants. Then I’ll have a “book talk” with these possible participants, probably ten, to see if you can attend to the tasks to be involved in this study. Finally, six students who can meet the selection criteria will be chosen to participate in the actual study, and I will further contact these students for consent. The selection criteria are your English reading ability, and your ability and willingness to express your responses honestly in writing and verbally.

The length of the actual study will be about six weeks. If you agree to take part in the research, you will be asked to complete one questionnaire, read one short story (6-20 pages) each week, write one response journal (no length limit) each week, and participate in a small group discussion (about forty minutes) with other participants once a week. The reading and journal writing are done at home. You will be given guidelines for the journal writing. The discussion sessions will be held in a school room after the regular classes. All I will be looking for in your responses is your free expression of opinions, ideas, or feelings, rather than the “right” interpretation of a story.

In addition, the participants will be interviewed by me three times (about 15 minutes each) during the course of the study. I will talk with you about your reading experience
and your conceptions of the American culture. Again, there is no right or wrong answer to the question I ask you. All I am looking for is what you really think. You are not compelled to answer every question I ask if you don’t feel comfortable doing so.

I would also like to ask your permission to photocopy your journals, audiotape the group discussions, and audiotape the interviews. I will be the only person who sees, listens to, and uses all the data collected. When I am not using these materials, they will be kept in a locked cabinet. Whenever I use your information, I will identify you with a pseudo name (you can decide what name I use for you if you want). Your name and the name of your school will not be mentioned in the report on this study. All the audiotapes and photocopies of journals will be destroyed after the final dissertation has been approved.

Although I guarantee the protection of your privacy and confidentiality, you should also know that there is a risk that other participants might reveal the content of your group discussion to others.

You should also understand that you can refuse to participate in this study and that you can withdraw from this study at any time. Your participation is voluntary. There will be no penalty if you decide not to participate in this study, or if you decide to stop participating while the study is in progress.
APPENDIX B: GUIDELINES FOR KEEPING A RESPONSE JOURNAL

What is a response journal?
A response journal is used to keep a record of your reading responses—thoughts and feelings as you read a story. While you are reading a story, you may find yourself asking questions, predicting, or reflecting on the characters, events, or language of a text, etc. Keep a record of everything that is rambling through your mind as you read the story. You may do this as ideas strike you or right after you have read the story.

How long should the entry be?
There is no set length for the entries that you write. Sometimes you will want to write several lines; at other times, you will want to write much more. Just do your best to record as many of your seminal responses as possible.

What kinds of things should I be writing?
Please don’t summarize the story. Instead, record your responses to the text. You’ll find it will contain:
- QUESTIONS that you ask yourself about characters and events as you read.
- MEMORIES from your own experience, provoked by the reading.
- GUESSES about how you think the story will develop, and why.
- REFLECTIONS on striking moments and ideas in the book.
- COMPARISONS between how you behave and how the characters in the novel are behaving
- THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS about characters and events.
- COMMENTS on how the story is being told—for example, words or phrases or even whole passage which make an impression on you.

What is the right response?
There is no right or wrong response. All your genuine responses are legitimate. Since we all had different experiences, we will react to a text in our own unique way. No one will have the exact experience as you have with a text. Therefore, your response will be unique. Please remember what I am looking for is the free expression of thoughts rather than the “right” answer.

Who will read my journal?
I will read your journal. Also you may want to talk about what you write during group discussion sessions.

Will you grade my journal?
No. Your journal will not be graded. I will only write encouraging but non-evaluative comments in response to your entries.

Also remember:
Write in Chinese.
Indicate the page in the story you are reading if your response is about a certain part or passage.
Relax and enjoy the pleasure of reading.

(These guidelines are adapted from Kooy and Wells’ (1996, pp. 18-20) and Benton’s (1992a, p. 35).)

Please keep this paper for reference during the course of study.
APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE

Your Name: __________________________

Please answer the following questions and fill in the blanks.

1. How many years have you been learning English? ________________________

2. What are your purposes of learning English? ______________________________

3. Do you like to read in English? ______________
   If yes, what kinds of English books or reading materials do you like to read?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

   On what basis, do you choose books to read?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

4. In your free time, do you read literary works (either Chinese or English) for pleasure? _____
   If yes, please name some books that you like.
   (Chinese) __________________________________________________
   (English) _____________________________________________________

5. Have you ever read American young adult literature either in English or Chinese translation? __
   If yes, name some titles and tell me what they are about.
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

6. How do you come to know the American culture? Through what means? For example, English textbooks, TV, Movies, pen pals, outside reading, traveling, and so on.
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

7. Have you traveled much? __________________
   Have you ever traveled to or lived in the U.S.? __________
   If yes, how long did you stay there? _________________________
   And how’s your experience?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

8. Tell me what you know about the American culture.
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

9. What do you expect a story about American young adults to contain?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview I

1. What are your reading preferences?
   - Genres?
   - Literary elements?
   - Your favorite stories?

2. What preconceptions do you have about American culture?

3. What do you think about the story you have read this week?
   - Do you have any question about the stories?
   - Do you have any difficulty reading the stories?
   - How do you like the story?

4. Do you have anything to say about our study?

Interview II

1. What do you think about the stories you have read?
   - What do you like/dislike about the stories?
   - Which story is your favorite? Why?

2. Tell me about what you notice about the American culture when reading the story.

3. Tell me what role the cultural differences in the text play in your reading experience.
   - Do the cultural differences interfere with your enjoyment of the story?
   - Do the cultural differences entice your interest to read the story all the more?

4. When you were reading the story, what connections, associations or comparisons do you make? What do you bring to the text?

5. Can you identify with the protagonist and his or her problem? Why or why not?
   - Did you feel as if everything was happening to you, as if you were one of the characters?
Did you feel as if you were an observer, watching what was happening but not part of the action?

6. After you have read the story, do you find anything similar to or different from your impression or understanding of American culture?

7. Is there anything more you want to talk about your reading experience of the story?

**Interview III**

1. What do you think about the stories you have read?

2. Tell me about what you notice about American culture in the stories.

3. Tell me what role cultural differences in the text play in your reading experience.
   Do the cultural differences interfere with your enjoyment of the story?
   Do the cultural differences entice your interest to read the story all the more?

4. After you have read the stories, do you find anything similar to or different from your previous impression or understanding of American culture?

5. If your friends ask you about your experience of reading American young adult literature, what would you say?
   - Literary experience?
   - Cultural experience?
APPENDIX E: STORY SUMMARIES

Short Stories for Young Adults


Maria wishes that she could be like other girls in the barrio, wearing make-up and sexy clothes and hanging out with boys. But she made promises to her dying mother that she would try to get a good education and take care of her younger brother and sister. Frankie, a popular and handsome boy, has a crush on Maria, and he invites Maria to cruise with him. For the first two times, Maria refuses. Maria agrees to go at the third time. Frankie offers her cigarettes and marijuana, and Maria feels tempted. Finally, the crying of a crazy woman in the distance reminds Maria of her own dreams and brings her back to reality. The story is told in the omniscient third person point of view.


Gogi feels that her stepmother, Dorine, has been on her since the day she came into their house. Gogi’s father is jobless and irresponsible. Her stepmother is a singer and most of the time is not home. Although Dorine gets along well with Gogi’s older sister, Linda, Gogi refuses to meet Dorine halfway. Dorine asks Gogi to do the dishes, but Gogi always finds excuses. This time Dorine will not compromise. This story is told in the first person from Gogi’s perspective.


Scott is quite upset about his failing grade in Mrs. Whitman’s math class. Seeing the Lost Dog signs everywhere about Mrs. Whitman’s dog, Scott comes up with a way to get revenge. He calls Mrs. Whitman that her dog is in his hands and he asks for one thousand dollars. Later, Scott feels regret and calls Mrs. Whitman again and apologizes.


When the Lin family emigrated from China to America, they had a hard time with American table manners. They are invited to a neighbor’s house for dinner, but because
they are not familiar with American table manners, they make a fool of themselves. To return their friendship, the Lin family invites their neighbors for dinner too. This time, their American neighbors did not know how to use chopsticks.


Charlotte gets the best job she has ever had—earning ten dollars an hour by giving English lessons to Mr. Alexander, a Greek immigrant who owns a cafe. All Charlotte needs to do is to get Mr. Alexander to talk and correct his English. During the lessons, Mr. Alexander talks about his life and dreams, so does Charlotte. Charlotte and Mr. Alexander become friends. Charlotte does not get along well with her father and her stepmother, Lorna, but Mr. Alexander tells Charlotte not to hate them. When Charlotte knows that her stepmother tries to take advantage of Mr. Alexander, Charlotte gets mad. Charlotte intends to tell Mr. Alexander the next week that whatever Lorna does has nothing with her, but Mr. Alexander dies of a heart attack unexpectedly and they never have another lesson. The story is told in first person narration from the point of view of Charlotte.


Wendy is so crazy about a rock star “Craig the Cat” that she asks her best friend Rosalind to go with her to The Dominion Imperial International Hotel in an attempt to get Craig the Cat’s autograph. They wait in the hotel lobby until Craig the Cat shows up. Although Craig the Cat devises elaborate disguises, Wendy still can recognize him because she is “an expert on him.” Finally, Wendy gets to talk to Craig the Cat and gets his autograph on his latest album jacket. The story is told in first person narration from the perspective of Rosalind.


Monique and Carla are attending a summer church camp at Jersey State College, and they are roommates. Upon seeing the picture of Monique’s “goddaughter,” Maya, Carla can not help exclaiming that Monique’s goddaughter is “the spitting image” of Monique. Monique feels that she can not fool Carla anymore, so she tells the truth that Maya is her daughter. The remaining story focuses on Monique’s description of how Maya was born on her sixteenth birthday, how Monique tried to deal with a new-born baby, and how her family reacted to the incident. Dialogue between Monique and Carla comprises the form of this story.
APPENDIX F: PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

The Ohio State University Parental Permission
For Child’s Participation in Research

Study Title: The Responses of Taiwanese Adolescent Girls to Selected American Short Stories for Young Adults
Principal Investigator: Barbara Kiefer
Sponsor: None

- This is a parental permission form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you permit your child to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to permit your child to participate.

- Your child’s participation is voluntary. Your or your child may refuse participation in this study. If your child takes part in the study, you or your child may decide to leave the study at any time. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty to your child and neither you nor your child will lose any of your usual benefits. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University. If you or your child is a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

- Your child may or may not benefit as a result of participating in this study. Also, as explained below, your child’s participation may result in unintended or harmful effects for him or her that may be minor or may be serious depending on the nature of the research.

- You and your child will be provided with any new information that develops during the study that may affect your decision whether or not to continue to participate. If you permit your child to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the signed form. You are being asked to consider permitting your child to participate in this study for the reasons explained below.

1. Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this study is to learn about Taiwanese Adolescents’ responses to American young adult short stories and to provide pedagogical implications for using young adult literature in EFL class in Taiwan.

2. **How many people will take part in this study?**

Six students will participant in this study.

3. **What will happen if my child takes part in this study?**

Your child will be asked to complete one questionnaire, read one short story each week, write one response journal, and participate in a small group discussion with other participants once a week (about forty minutes). The reading and journal writing are done at home. The group discussion takes place after regular classes at school. In addition, your child will be interviewed by me three times (about 15 minutes each) during the course of the study.

4. **How long will my child be in the study?**

The study will last six weeks.

5. **Can my child stop being in the study?**

Your child may leave the study at any time. If you or your child decides to stop participation in the study, there will be no penalty and neither you nor your child will lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

6. **What risks, side effects or discomforts can my child expect from being in the study?**

No greater than minimal risk is expected of being in the study.

7. **What benefits can my child expect from being in the study?**

The benefits to your child of participating in this study are that he or she might have more opportunities to learn English, experience the pleasures of reading in English, enjoy sharing your response with other students, and increase your knowledge of self and the American culture. In addition, they can keep the books used for this study.
8. What other choices does my child have if he/she does not take part in the study?

You or your child may choose not to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

9. Will my child’s study-related information be kept private?

Efforts will be made to keep your child’s study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your child’s participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your child’s records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor supporting the study, their agents or study monitors; and
- Your insurance company (if charges are billed to insurance).

If the study involves the use of your child’s protected health information, you may also be asked to sign a separate Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) research authorization form.

10. What are the costs of taking part in this study?

There is no cost on your part of taking part in this study.

11. Will I or my child be paid for taking part in this study?

No.

12. What happens if my child is injured because he/she took part in this study?

If your child suffers an injury from participating in this study, you should notify the researcher.

The cost for this treatment will be billed to you or your medical or hospital insurance. The Ohio State University has no funds set aside for the payment of health care expenses for this study.

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13. **What are my child’s rights if he/she takes part in this study?**

If you and your child choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights your child may have as a participant in this study.

You and your child will be provided with any new information that develops during the course of the research that may affect your decision whether or not to continue participation in the study.

You or your child may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

14. **Who can answer my questions about the study?**

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Li-Feng Lee at ________________.

For questions about your child’s rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If your child is injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Li-Feng Lee at ________________.
15. Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this document and I am aware that I am being asked to provide permission for my child to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to permit my child to participate in this study. I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this consent form. I will be given a copy of this signed document.

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**Investigator/Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A signed copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

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APPENDIX G: ASSENT FORM

The Ohio State University Assent to Participate in Research

Study Title: The Responses of Taiwanese Adolescent Girls to Selected American Short Stories for Young Adults
Researcher: Barbara Kiefer
Sponsor: None

- You are being asked to be in a research study. Studies are done to find better ways to treat people or to understand things better.
- This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to participate.
- You should ask any questions you have before making up your mind. You can think about it and discuss it with your family or friends before you decide.
- It is okay to say “No” if you don’t want to be in the study. If you say “Yes” you can change your mind and quit being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.
- If you decide you want to be in the study, an adult (usually a parent) will also need to give permission for you to be in the study.

1. What is this study about?

The purpose of this study is to understand your responses to American young adult literature. The findings will help educators better use young adult literature in high school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class in Taiwan.

2. What will I need to do if I am in this study?
You will be asked to complete one questionnaire, read one short story each week, write a response journal each week, and participate in a small group discussion once a week. In addition, you will be interviewed by the investigator three times during the course of the study.

3. **How long will I be in the study?**

Six weeks.

4. **Can I stop being in the study?**

You may stop being in the study at any time.

5. **What bad things might happen to me if I am in the study?**

No bad things are expected to happen to you if you are in the study.

6. **What good things might happen to me if I am in the study?**

You can have more opportunities to learn English, experience the pleasure of reading literature, enjoy sharing your responses with other students, and increase your knowledge of self and the American culture.

7. **Will I be given anything for being in this study?**

Yes, you will be given the young adult books used in this study.

8. **Who can I talk to about the study?**

For questions about the study you may contact Li-Feng Lee at ______________.

To discuss other study-related questions with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.
**Signing the consent form**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form. I have had a chance to ask questions about things I don’t understand. I want to be in this research study and understand what will happen to me.

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**Investigator/Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A signed copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

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This form must be accompanied by an IRB approved parental permission form signed by a parent/guardian.
LIST OF REFERENCES


and linguistically diverse classrooms. Columbus, OH: Merrill.


Lally, C. (1998). The application of first language reading models to second language study: A recent historical perspective [Electronic version]. Reading Horizon,


