The Use of Children’s Books as a Vehicle for Ideological Transmission

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

Literature can be defined as a tool for ideological transmission. The exclusion or inclusion of specific topics within classroom discourses reflects the ideologies of the teachers leading the class discussions. One children’s literature author popular across generations is Theodor Geisel, a.k.a. Dr. Seuss. Several educators have published educational materials on the uses of his books in the classroom, in order to promote specific ideological values. Professionals in the field of pedagogy have written about the messages embedded in his texts and have concluded how to best use his books. Scholars and educators have aligned their values with messages from his books like The Sneetches, The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book, in order to promote their own ideologies while teaching reading to their students.

The aim of the study was to determine to what extent educators in public schools have used and still use children’s literature and the works of Theodor Geisel to transmit ideology to their students. The first part of the study investigated the published works of scholars and educators who have promoted Geisel’s books to transmit an ideology to students. The second part of the study examined the teaching practices and philosophies of current teachers in a Midwestern suburban school district in central Ohio. Qualitative inquiries were made, in order to gather information related to the topics of ideological transmission through children’s literature and the purposes of children’s literature in the reading curriculum.
From the study I concluded that a polarity arose within the set of teachers interviewed. Teachers were adamant about what topics of discussion they would and would not allow in their classrooms. Questions from the interviews and the surveys led to two viewpoints about the purpose of children’s books in school. On one hand the findings suggest that teachers felt a book’s sole purpose is to build cognitive reading skills. They simultaneously, however, opposed the insertion of books which might promote certain ideological values within classroom discourse.

The teachers conveyed strong opinions on what they would and would not discuss in their reading groups as it related to racism and African Americans, heterosexism and sexual orientation, and environmentalism. While the majority of the teachers recognized the relevance of discussing racism and African Americans in literature circles, they dismissed the relevance of discourse related to heterosexism and sexual orientation. The teachers unanimously supported the discussion of environmentalism with their students. The findings were consistent regardless of the teachers’ stated political alignments.

Classroom teachers hold positions of power and greatly influence the opinions and values of their students. The types of literature used can mold their students’ ideological frameworks. The absence of certain pieces of literature can also exclude ideological elements and points of view that are meaningful to a liberal and multicultural education, which is the philosophical foundation of a modern education.
in the United States. The findings support the argument that certain children’s books will continue to be ideological transmitters in the American public school system.
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Chapter 1: The Nature of the Problem

Background of the Problem

Some educators and literary critics have considered Theodor Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss, a writer who wrote texts embedded with moral, political, and ideological messages within his seemingly simple children’s stories. His talent and creativity still appeal to many children and adults as is evident in his continuous popularity since his first book in 1937. Some grew up to become educators and leaders, who have gravitated to his ideological messages. I discovered through research that scholars and teacher-researchers alike have utilized Dr. Seuss literature to promote specific ideological messages to their students. My hope was to determine to what extent educators have selected Theodor Geisel’s books and applied them as ideological transmitters and to determine how and to what extent working classroom teachers today might utilize Geisel’s books with their students.

Scholars have written articles about the implementation of Geisel’s texts within classrooms across the nation as a means to impress upon students the concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, and appropriate or inappropriate. For example, teachers and researchers have professed the worth of using The Sneetches to teach the absurdity of racism, The Lorax to teach the societal ills of excessive greed and exploitation of the natural environment, and The Butter Battle Book to instruct students on the notion that war is evil and irrational (Adlerman, 2005; Barone, 1993; Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1986; Cobb, 1992; Dow & Slaughter, 1989; MacDonald,
Research Questions

To what extent have scholars and educators utilized Dr. Seuss literature in publications and published unit plans to promote specific ideological messages? How would current educators utilize Dr. Seuss literature in their classrooms? In addition, how would educators choose to use his books when presented with the opportunities to engage in discourse that conflicts with or aligns with their ideological mindsets?

Statement of the Problem

Literary discussions can lead to valuing characters’ behaviors; that is, deeming what characters in the stories demonstrated unacceptable behaviors or behaviors contrary to a shared ideology and acceptable ones or those in accordance with a shared ideology. I wondered if the exclusion or inclusion of specific topics within classroom discourses might reflect the ideologies of the teachers leading the class discussions. I wondered if other teachers today might still utilize Geisel’s stories to transmit unique ideological elements to the children in their classrooms.

Since some adult educators and researchers have published research proposing the uses of Geisel’s books to promote specific ideologies to students they have taught, I wondered how current classroom teachers might decide to use the popular stories The Sneetches, The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book when confronted with a questionnaire that asked them to decide what topics they would discuss with their
students after reading the three aforementioned books. I wondered if they would allow discussions about racism and the experiences of the African Americans in the United States when reading Geisel’s books or conversations about heterosexism and sexual orientation. I moved to the assumption that teachers today still believe they have an obligation to teach right and wrong with the secondary consequence of transmitting certain ideological values when reading and discussing children’s literature.

My research centered on several avenues of investigation: the exploration of scholarly works, published lesson plans, and ethnographic research in elementary classrooms. My goal was to discover the uses of Geisel’s literary works within pedagogy and what types of classroom discourse might be generated with their students. In other words, which types of classroom discourse would elementary teachers foster or dismember after reading the following works: The Sneetches, The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate educators’ published works related to ideological transmission using Geisel’s books as well as current teachers’ potential and actual applications of them. Although many scholars have written about Geisel as a literary moralist, some educators believe that his books are better utilized as mechanical skill builders. In my opinion he is still relevant today and still has fifteen books listed as bestsellers, according to the 2009 Publisher’s Weekly.
Teachers who grew up reading Dr. Seuss books have entered into classrooms as educators and leaders, and they serve as conduits of knowledge and information to their students. Some have used Geisel’s books to generate discourse based on literary themes pulled from the stories or to provide students amusing means to develop their cognitive reading skills. Some may believe in reading but work to avoid topics like racism, warfare and heterosexism. It may be that elementary teachers are more comfortable with discussing more general topics like mutual harmony, multiculturalism, pluralism and diversity education while avoiding the visceral experiences pervading the community around them.

Many previous adult educators and researchers, however, have utilized Geisel’s texts to relate their own ideologies and concepts of right and wrong to the children that they teach. They have used The Sneetches, The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book to demonstrate to their students the underlying social political commentary within the seemingly simplistic plots. They have required the students to verbalize and decide what concepts within the books are good and which ones are bad. The use of these three books in the classroom has been a reflection of the adult educators’ underlying beliefs with respect to their own senses of social morality and ideologies. The didactic approach of these pedagogues has impressed upon the children in their classroom the concepts of right and wrong and what is good or bad using The Sneetches to teach the absurdity of racism, The Lorax to teach that excessive greed, capitalism and exploitation of the natural environment all lead to
human destruction, and *The Butter Battle Book* to instruct students the concept that war is evil, senseless and to be refuted by any means (Adlerman, 2005; Barone, 1993; Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1986; Cobb, 1992; Dow & Slaughter, 1989; MacDonald, 1988; Mensch & Freeman, 1987; Pace & Podesta, 1999; Roth, 1989; Sadler, 1989; Van Cleaf & Maring, 1986).

Geisel’s books have often addressed questions of morality within a democratic and capitalistic society. *The Lorax*, for example, is a parable that warns us about the evils of monetary greed and the human potential to destroy the world and humankind along with it. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is an anti-materialism tale that demonstrates the quest for love and giving. Some critics have proposed that certain pieces of literature that he published were ways for Geisel to proliferate Marxist principles. He seemed to reflect and want to call attention, perhaps, to unfair treatment of immigrant autoworkers who worked in factories where he grew up (Riverdeep, 2005).

Professionals in the field of pedagogy have written about the ideological issues found in Dr. Seuss works and have come to conclusions about how to best use his books in the classrooms. The works seem to fit well with their own agenda, and they accomplish two important pedagogical goals: 1) keep the children’s attentions and 2) teach them the morals that are evident in the books. In this manner, the children are interested in reading while simultaneously ingesting the elements of a specific ideology.
Some educators have included many of their own political philosophies and concepts of what it means to be moral in their classrooms. They have additionally used the works of Dr. Seuss to teach moral behaviors and values to the children in their stead. These current educators have used works such as *The Sneetches*, *The Lorax* and *The Butter Battle Book*, in order to promote their own political ideologies, in order to teach their concepts of good and bad, and, furthermore, to disseminate their own vision of appropriate education in their classrooms. They interpret the messages in books according to their own belief systems and relate them to their students.

**Importance of the Study**

I believe my research is important and interesting to scholars of children’s literature, English and education, as well as teachers and school professionals that utilize Dr. Seuss books in their classrooms. In order to shed light on some of the methods employed by teachers, it is important for me to investigate the published research and anecdotes on Theodor Geisel’s books. Several teacher-researchers and scholars have written about the use of Geisel’s works in their classrooms, in order to promote lines of discourse with their students that include racism, materialism, environmentalism, and peace education. By performing a content analysis of published research and anecdotal evidence, I opened up the opportunity to analyze the elements of ideological transmission that occur through literature discussions between teachers and students. Furthermore, by investigating the possible uses of Geisel’s
works in current teachers’ classrooms, I hope to open up more discussion related to the purposes of children’s books in elementary education.

Procedure of the Study

I discovered through informal readings that there were a number of published works and empirical evidence related to the works of Theodor Geisel. The published texts were embedded with moral, political and ideological messages. I decided to perform a content analysis on the published materials and determine which types of ideology were being transmitted by educators to their students. The patterns that I discovered suggested that teachers and scholars have utilized Geisel’s works, especially the three works selected for my paper, and that through the specific utilization of those works, have generated discourses with their students in alignment with their own ideologies. The evidence that I gathered from the analysis of published materials led me to a second data collection procedure involving teachers currently working in classrooms, which helped to triangulate my data and my analysis of the published texts.

I began working part-time as an intervention specialist at an elementary school in the winter of 2007. I developed a good relationship with the principal and some of the teachers while I worked there. It became clear to me that the opportunity to interview the elementary teachers for my dissertation research could become a reality. I had become comfortable enough as a co-worker to approach them with my ideas of conducting a survey and interviews, in order to answer my questions about
the uses of Geisel’s books and the transmission of ideology within contemporary elementary classrooms. I formally contacted the principal of the elementary school and set up a meeting with him and some of the elementary teachers. I presented my thesis to them and explained to them the nature of the questionnaire and my study. I asked permission to contact the rest of the elementary staff and to ask them to participate in the questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to ascertain how they would use Theodor Geisel’s The Sneetches, The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book in their classrooms. The three books were chosen for based on published interpretations made by past educators and scholars.

The Sneetches (1961) is about a group of creatures called Sneetches. There are two kinds of Sneetches, ones with stars on their bellies and ones without. Other than this seemingly innocuous marker one cannot tell them apart. Yet it becomes a social distinction within their culture. The story has been interpreted as a commentary on racism, social class structures, and other social problems having to do with capitalism, and teachers have used it to teach children lessons pertaining to liberty, justice and equality (Cobb, 1992; Mensch & Freeman, 1987). The Lorax (1971) is a story about a small creature trying to convince the reader and the main character about the apparent dangers of rampant capitalism and overuse of the earth’s natural resources. Many teachers have used the story to teach about the values of recycling and minimalist lifestyles (MilleChai, 2004). The Butter Battle Book (1984) describes two individuals who cannot agree on anything. They begin building a wall between
them in the city and start throwing things over the wall to try and harm the other. The book has been used to teach children about the senselessness of warfare and violence (Van Cleaf and Maring, 1986; Wakefield, 1987).

The questionnaire asked them to specifically choose which themes they would be more apt to discuss and less apt to discuss with students. The questionnaire also asked them to state why they would choose certain themes and why they might exclude certain themes. The purpose of the follow-up questions was to obtain supporting information for their choices.

After the questionnaires were collected, I contacted the staff and asked for volunteers to meet with me and perform follow-up interviews on the information they gave on the questionnaire, their rationales for choices they made and to ask them more in-depth questions pertaining to teaching reading and children’s literature in their classrooms. From the four volunteers I received, I chose one teacher to interview and observe in her classroom during reading times and literature discussion sessions.

I decided to interview one teacher, because I had developed a comfortable relationship with her, and I felt that I could ask her questions about children’s literature and its uses in the classroom including the topics of racism and heterosexism. I conducted six interviews with the teacher and observed her classroom six times. I chose mornings to observe her classes during language arts periods. I also selected different days and planned with her ahead of time, so that I might see her teaching several concepts related to reading. I observed her teaching different styles
of lessons, which included two observations of literature circles, two observations of reading groups, and two observations of whole class instruction and read-aloud events followed by individual tutoring. Field notes were taken to record the data and the observations. My concern was to obtain information on the teacher’s classroom procedures and means of teaching literature in her classroom, so that I could follow up with her and have her reflect on her teaching practices with me during the qualitative interviews that ensued.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study of teachers’ uses of Geisel’s literature in their elementary classrooms was subject to some limitation with regard to the sample and procedures. A description of the restrictions and limitations inherent within the investigation is given within this section.

1. The questionnaire and follow-up interviews were limited to a sample of nineteen teachers from a public suburban school district in north central Ohio. The student population and the teaching staff are not representative of a diverse community or urban population that would include a more equitable sample of students and teachers from various ethnic groups. A limitation inherent within any study requesting volunteer participants is characteristic of my study. The principal of the school and lead teachers were contacted personally to recruit teachers to respond to the questionnaire. The teacher
selected for the in-depth interview and classroom observations was also a volunteer. As a result of their interests in assisting me in my study, it is possible that the teachers may have been adherents of Geisel’s works of literature and had possibly used them for specific educational purposes in their classrooms.

2. The length of the study was limited to six months of observations and interviews with the participating teacher. It is possible that more information and insights could be gained from this particular teacher over several years’ time.

3. The number of stories chosen for the questionnaire and interview were three. The three stories used for my study were selected by me, the researcher, because of my interests and discovery of past research and practices utilizing The Sneetches, The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book. It is possible that other stories written by other authors have been used by teachers, in order to conduct moral lessons with their students within a literature discussion that they would feel are more salient than the three Dr. Seuss works that I selected for the study.

4. Finally, the study refers to public school systems, which traditionally have a teaching philosophy reflective of the governing principles of democracy, civil liberties and the rights of the
individual. Other school systems, which are private or parochial, may aspire to different teaching principles and may instill specific moral and ideological elements into their students as part of the official curriculum.

Organization of the Study

A review of the related literature is presented and interpreted in Chapter Two. Chapter Three explains the methods employed in selecting the books, the teachers for the questionnaire and interview, and in collecting the salient data. The last section of Chapter Three describes the purpose, procedures and results of the questionnaires and interview. The major focus of Chapter Four is the interpretation of the findings from the content analysis performed on published research and evidence related to the uses of Geisel’s works in education, followed by the qualitative data collected from the questionnaires and interviews with current teachers. Published content was triangulated with current viewpoints and practices of educators challenged with the idea of using Geisel’s works as a tool for ideological transmission. Chapter Five presents a summary of the investigation and suggestions for further investigations and research.

Definition of Ideological Transmission

For the purpose of this paper, I am obligated to define ideological transmission as it pertains to my findings and to my interpretations throughout the study. Ideology captures the concepts of beliefs, traditions, political philosophies, and
the cultural values of individuals that simultaneously belong to larger groups. Our ideologies as human beings can be the sum of all our mental parts, which include our views on politics, what we have learned from our parents and teachers, our sense of morality, and even what we deem as appropriate or inappropriate in social interactions. The concept of ideology is a complex one. Ideological transmission has been discussed in terms of power imbalances, whereby the group in power transmits ideology unilaterally to another group. This can happen generationally from adults to children through various media. It can also happen from a dominant group to a marginalized group. The events can occur consciously or unconsciously for all parties involved (Balkin, 2002; Zornado, 2001). For the intentions of my study, when I write about ideological transmission, I am writing about and discussing how educators have used or would use children’s books to transmit elements of their ideologies to students in their classrooms.

Summary

There have been various studies published focusing on Dr. Seuss, as well as resource guides for teachers that speak directly to moral development in classrooms in the United States. The importance of his literature for many educators has come to my attention through website journals and other texts published on the Internet. Both types of textual sources provided me with viable evidence to answer my research questions. Follow-up research in the forms of interviews, survey questions and
conversations with teachers provided a deeper and more fruitful addition to the original discursive investigation, as well.

I spent time contemplating research questions, in order to investigate scholars’ texts with regard to the literature of Theodor Geisel. I also spent a significant period of time performing literature reviews of any and all scholarly works related to his books. I assembled a list of texts and research articles related to his works and how they have been used in the classroom. I searched materials on OSU Libraries’ Website, ordered books through the online websites, publishers’ sites, and I collected a bibliography of books and articles written by Dr. Seuss, as well as any research produced about his literary pieces.

My investigation of the secondary literature of Geisel’s texts and their implementation as didactic tools in the classroom led me to conduct a mixed method analysis of published research and triangulate my patterns and findings with ethnographic methods of data collection in the forms of surveys and follow-up interviews. Content analysis was the first step of my data collection, but I wanted to bolster my findings with current voices from educators working in the classrooms today. I performed my own investigations through interviews and questionnaires to investigate more deeply the personal cognitive processes and teaching philosophies of current educators faced with the questions on the uses of Geisel’s books to transmit ideology to their students.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Books as Ideological Transmitters

A literacy event is a dynamic system of actions and reactions (Kiefer, Hepler & Hickman, 2007). The text inside of a book originates from the writer but is also consumed by the reader. This allows different interpretations and messages to arise. The writer formulates a string of thoughts, writes it down and publishes it in a book. The reader acquires the published record, peruses the text, formulates opinions, reacts to it and incorporates it into her own life story. Time and again we read texts, digest them and tell others how the ideas within have changed our minds, altered our opinions, inspired our lives or perhaps motivated us to do something new.

Books have the power to change minds and influence future behaviors (Zinser, 1998). The constructs of human reality are stories we tell ourselves, in order to make sense of the world around us. We construct both our pasts and our futures with narrative. By the same token, good books can help alter our reality and add crucial elements to our life stories as we progress in years. Good stories teach us how to live our lives more fully, how to come to grips with painful memories, and even how to love others more deeply. Literature can provide aesthetic experiences which help us see the world differently and it can also shape our thoughts (Huck, et al., 2004; Sloan, 1991).

Children’s books can bring positive images to help build a different mindset. Some scholars believe that books will eventually become the savior of a progressive
loss of imagination and powers of visualization due to increased exposure to the Internet and television in the digital community in which our children now grow up (Chambers, 1991). Having a child read a book like Paul Fleischman’s *Weslandia* can present to her the unique view that imagination is a useful skill that needs to be cultivated. Literature can shape human behaviors as well as provide insight into human behavior (Huck, et al., 2004).

Children’s books have a history of being tied to moral instruction in Western civilization. Back in the 1860s children’s books like *Cruel Boys* and *The Water Babies* held morals within their storylines to instruct children on the proper ways to behave and the consequences of immoral actions (Huck et al., 2004). Children’s literature has historically been associated with moral messages and children’s books have traditionally been written to build morality in children (McVicar, 1995; Roth, 1989).

Teachers have committed themselves to pedagogical strategies under the guise of modern scientific method, but the reality is that psychology and behavioral medicine involve a heavy reliance upon the moral judgment of a child’s actions. Behavioral scientists and psychologists both deem a child’s actions as normal or abnormal, and appropriate or inappropriate. The dichotomous procedure of behavior evaluation integrates almost seamlessly with the philosophy of modern pedagogy. Although a lot of research and energy has been dedicated to student-centered teaching practices, teachers still rely on a teacher-centered approach, which allows for more
controlled discussion (Buzzelli, 1996; Lotman, 1988). The teacher remains the sole proprietor of ideological capital in the elementary classroom.

It is important to investigate the treatises of philosophers and theoreticians that have studied and written about morality and ideology, in order to truly appreciate the depth of knowledge transference that occurs at such early ages in a child’s education. Piaget, Kohlberg, Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin are but a few in the past century to look into the ramifications of moral reasoning within the confines of Western society and provide commentary on it. Constructs of ideology affect the core of every school curriculum in the United States, and educators select and exclude books for their students based on these constructs.

Children’s Literature and Moral Instruction: A History

If we accept the conventional wisdom of children’s literature scholars, we will begin its history in the seventeenth century. Perspectives of childhood in Europe changed with the influences of John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78). The resultant assumption was that children had their own needs and children had to be educated strategically, in order to become responsible and productive citizens in society. The Sunday School Movement (latter half of the eighteenth century) and the installment of a public education provided increasing opportunities for children to learn how to read and, consequently, to learn how to become moral adults.
Morally bound children’s books were the rule, and teaching reading to children meant teaching them to behave as good Christian citizens. Books like *The Goodly Godly Books of the Puritans* (1671; 1683; 1700) and *Mother Goose’s Melody or Sonnets for the Cradle* (1765) were treated as learning tools to morally instruct children inside the home and across the community. Innovations in printing and publishing afforded certain communities a substantial amount of attractive books for children throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Butts, 1992).

Mass production of children’s books became a possibility in the eighteenth century. As a result of this industrial progress, the ideological values of the ruling class became more prevalent in society. The groups that owned the printing presses and could afford to print en masse were able to disseminate their values within the genre of children’s literature.

John Newberry’s *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (London, 1744), claimed by many scholars to be the first example of a children’s book for entertainment, displayed woodcuts of children at play but simultaneously sent a more serious message: the value of the Protestant work ethic and the promise of material rewards for good behavior (Butts, 1992). Children’s literature as the imaginative shaping of life and thought sent moral and political messages to the reader under the guise of enjoyable reading (Perrault, 1697; Newbery, 1744).

Books for children were cultural artifacts of their era (Nilsen and Donovan, 2001), and they were written to promote a distinctive set of cultural values. The last
half of the eighteenth century saw writers influence the moral development of children in their community, as Sarah Fielding demonstrated in 1749 with *The Governess*, and as Barbauld did in 1760 with *Easy Lessons for Children* (Huck, et al. 2002).

Other proponents of moral and political instruction adhered to the trend started by John Newberry, as the Evangelical Christians entwined their Christian ethos into the pages of children’s stories. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they promoted books such as Hannah More’s *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* (Bath and London, 1795) to morally instruct their children. Other didactic tales in the early nineteenth century such as Maria Edgeworth’s *The Parent’s Assistant* (1796) reflected the patriarchal values of the era and portrayed these social norms unquestioningly. Even fantasies reflected the social values of the culture. Magical characters came from other worlds, in order to rescue an uneducated protagonist from poverty in the story, because no reasonable reader of the time would have believed that an uneducated commoner could realistically help himself out of a dire situation (Butts, 1992). From the start, children’s books were carefully constructed to relay the desired ideological messages the writers and publishers endorsed.

In the 1860s, an English clergyman and scientist decided to write a story for his son. In 1863, Charles Kingsley published *The Water Babies* (Subtitled, *A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby*). *The Water Babies* became popular as a serial novel in Macmillan’s Magazine in 1862. It was then published formally with illustrations in
1863. It is the story of a young boy and chimney sweep named Tom, who is employed by the unhappy and mean Mr. Grimes. Falling down a chimney, Tom finds himself in the presence of a girl named Ellie. Her cleanliness makes Tom aware for the first time of his own dirty, blackened body. He escapes from the adults, who are chasing him, but he falls into the river where he enters a magical underwater world, and where he changes into a water-baby (Kingsley, 1863).

Like Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* or White’s *The Sword in the Stone*, Kingsley’s tale explores alternate reality and the possibility of a different world. In this new world Tom learns moral values and becomes clean again. The didactic strategies employed by Kingsley reflect the stated purpose of children’s books in the eighteenth and nineteen centuries in Western Europe and the United States. It was even enjoyed and endorsed by Kingsley’s royal contemporary, Queen Victoria of England. Kingsley’s book transmitted a powerful ideological message of social Darwinism, which was supported by those in positions of power.

Popular fiction is one of the ways in which society instructs its members in its prevailing mores and ideas, presents its dominant discourse and legitimates its values. It is a form of social control that directs the will towards certain viewpoints deemed desirable by those controlling the production of books. Fiction serves as a mirror of those views (Sloan, 1991). It is selective in what it shows and constructs selected elements of life that are organized into coherent patterns governed by a set of underlying presuppositions. It legitimizes particular mindsets, and it relies on the
recycling of characters and situations as a ritual that cements the beliefs of society and enforces the social norms, while successfully exposing the social deviants (Butts, 1992).

Fiction can simultaneously be a social product (Nilsen and Donovan, 2001) as well as something that shapes the cultural norms of a society. It plays an important role in the socialization of children. It serves as a vehicle for children to learn to form opinions on politics and to give meaning to the less definite areas of a communal culture, including socially accepted behaviors, moral values and personal belief systems (Rockwell, 2002).

A child’s character is a collection of good habits to be shaped by training, modeling, punishment and reward. Character education classes have been created in the past three decades, so that children will learn good habits and thereby develop proper moral character in the forms of obedience, care for property and other socially valued traits (Cartledge & Milburn, 1980). The children who develop these traits then grow up to be adults of strong moral character (Kohlberg, 1966; 1980; 1984). Adults with strong moral character then proceed to become successful contributors to American society, who demonstrate the acceptable traits of the dominant culture. The successful learning of positive social skills benefits everyone: the individual, the educator and society (Cartledge & Milburn, 1980).

There is, however, wide disagreement on the definition of socially appropriate behavior and what it means to be morally sound. In this case, where should educators
draw the line, and whose moral opinion should the educators profess to the youth? They are, after all, charged with prescribing children rules of moral behavior for their own good and for the greater good, or are they? Kohlberg asks similar questions: Is moral education simply a means to keep children in check, or is it a higher moral aspiration shared by all of society? Do parents really know what teachers are teaching their children (Kohlberg, 1966; 1984)?

Aidan Chambers (1995) is an author of children’s literature and a former English teacher, who further asserts that educators are the protectors of children and that they must provide them with alternative political and moral perspectives. He believes that books are the means by which to open up conversations with children. Books are the tools that teachers can use to foster critical thinking and discussion of issues essential for developing a sense of responsibility in children. He proposes that literature inherently carries a moral message to every reader, regardless of the original intentions of the text’s author. Books are all moral treatises and are without exception tools that force the reader of those works to grapple with the moral messages within. He also describes readers as impassioned and interested, and he provides in detail the possibilities that reading affords children, including the ability to reflect upon themes, to learn to question what they have read, and to verbalize feelings related to the books.

They can also learn to read the world (Freire, 1989) and ingest the ideological messages alongside the seemingly innocuous storyline and processes of character
development within fiction. The indoctrination through texts that we generally see in U.S. classrooms still, however, provides little room for any type of reflection, and it more so reinforces elements of the dominant culture within the school’s community.

Literacy as Socialization and Ideological Absorption

The experience of literature involves both the book and the reader (Huck, et al. 2004). All our constructs of reality are stories we tell ourselves about how the world works. We use narrative to order our world. Literature develops a child’s imagination and helps her consider people, experiences and ideas in a novel way (Huck, et al. 2004; Sloan, 1991). Literature provides the possibility to see the world differently or to present to them unique views of the world. It can do all of this; however, adults teach children to read, and they consequently influence the children to see the world as adults see it.

Imagination is a creative and constructive power and is at the heart of a child’s intellect and emotions. Children and adults use imagination to participate in conversations, to make decisions, to analyze news reports and politicians’ speeches, and to evaluate advertisements and entertainment, among other things. Literature fortifies our imaginations because it has the capacity to develop our imaginative perspective on reality. It describes what happens to human beings as they come to terms with living and gives shape to shifting human experience. Literature puts into words our own imaginative experiences and stimulates our own imaginative powers, creating a truly human world. We have to use our imaginations to describe what sort
of life we desire to lead and what kind of world in which we would like to live. Transformation of the mind leads to transformation of our reality (Sloan, 1991).

Utilization of literature as a vehicle to carry us to possibilities of a world with other options is one of the primary missions of advocates for social change. Teachers can select particular texts that will provoke thoughts in their students and generate a conversation about a reality that they may not otherwise consider if they are not challenged through reading a text that discusses the collective experiences of marginalized groups that speak against the dominant narrative. Teachers can also propel students to become more aware of the dominant narrative that perpetuates power relations and stereotypes. Reading stories and analyzing them with detachment leads to the discovery of concepts and beliefs that we would not normally learn through other means (Foucault 1979; Sloan, 1991).

Literature can build awareness of the effects of stereotypes and power positioning. Students can acquire meta-awareness, so that they are more conscious of the utility of propagandistic texts. Tools of educators for social change help students come to the realization that imagination is but a construct of one individual or a group of individuals, who sometimes are charged with the maintenance and distribution of a collective imagination that reflects their group’s ideological agenda. Selection of literature can be important to classroom discourse, in order to open up new conversations and refute the dominant narrative’s stance that its views are universal, historical and factual (Freire & Faundez, 1989).
Setting up the reading environment leads to teachers and students engaging in discourse that includes the text and the interpretation of the text. It further leads to valuing the text. Teaching others to read involves a transmission of ideology and of values. Selection of a text is the first step to ideological transmission. Once the book is selected, the teacher reads the book with the students and guides their interpretations. Literature influences a person’s interpretations of the world around him or her. The texts tend to reflect the cultural and political values of the school’s community. The teacher provides those specific texts to the child reader. The transmission of the teacher’s ideology has begun (Chambers, 1991).

The practitioners of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2002) want the exact opposite effect from reading. They want to issue texts that provoke and incite, in order to cause social and political change. They welcome the disturbances and challenges that come from reading controversial texts. They want to read against the grain and they want to teach children to deconstruct the texts that they read. They want to teach them to be liberators and questioners.

In essence, the child must borrow the teacher’s identity and wear it like a coat. By doing so, the child learns to read the word and the world (Freire & Faundez, 1989). Whose world the child learns to read is not her own, but that of the teacher from whom she is gaining reading skills. The child accepts her teacher’s version of history, politics and a particular ideology, whilst applying it in an appropriate manner, in order to be academically successful. She abides by the cultural norms proposed, all
for the sake of learning to read in school. Cultural identity can be absorbed and created through reading and discussing books. Children absorb the stories and learn to perform the appropriate scripts in the classroom, so that they can win the praise of their teachers (Chambers, 1991).

The transmission of information from teachers to children relies on social relationships necessarily guided by human morality. Teachers intend to change children’s behaviors to attain a prescribed goal. Teachers make judgments based upon their governing system of values, which make them moral judgments, for all intents and purposes. Teachers attempt to make children better human beings (Buzzelli, 1996; Edwards & Mercer, 1987).

Learning and literacy are social events. Learning is an intentional and socially mediated practice that is simultaneously a process of meaning making (Jonassen, 2000). Meaning making, or resolving the dissonance between what we know for sure, what we think we know, and what we believe that others know, is a natural process that results from puzzlement, perturbation, expectations violations, and curiosity. There exists a discrepancy that we are trying to resolve. Humans are social creatures who rely on feedback from fellow humans to determine their own existence and veridicality of their personal beliefs. The act of meaning making is a social negotiation among participants, according to the social constructivists. Learning is inherently a social-dialogical process (Savery and Duffy, 1995). People align
themselves with certain social groups and, thus, read texts quite differently using
different cultural lenses and political perspectives (Gee, 2004).

Under the framework of understanding social learning theory and literacy
studies, reading is for all intents and purposes a social achievement, but many schools
still see it as strictly a cognitive skill. Professionals are still trained to analyze the
cognitive components of reading and treat them as neurological symptoms to be
cured. Gee (2003) entreats us to see reading as a more wholly social act and to
devalue the significance of cognition, in order to better understand the impact of
reading and its social element with regard to learning. Reading is a way of being in
the world and taking on a certain sort of identity, as we combine new knowledge with
our cultural backgrounds and the influences from the community (Gee, 2003;
Engstrom, 2001; Wenger, 1995).

The power of literacy is connected to the social and cultural traditions in
which it operates. The traditions contain an agency that transforms the minds of
individuals. Appropriate application of these tools within a unified cultural context
allows teachers and students to understand and reform the world (Applebee, 1996).
Toni Morrison speaks of the conflicted feelings that marginalized groups experience
when attempting to embrace the dominant cultural traditions and language to which
they are exposed (Morrison, 1992). Within the dominant culture’s framework, the
marginalized minorities always remain on the periphery. From a critical perspective,
and as questioners of history and the dominant narrative, teachers must introduce
discussions about the power structures that have been successfully preserved over so many centuries. Teachers must guide students to construct wholly different narratives and ask them to entertain other possibilities in the texts (Freire & Faundez, 1989; Freire, 1989).

Applebee (1996) is concerned with the traditions of discourse within which we both preserve and transform cultural knowledge and he wants to discuss the manner in which teachers can bring students into those traditions within schools. Knowledge, he hopes, will arise out of participation in a dialogue between professionals, in order to decide what is most important to learn. He further asserts that whether the traditional canon is implemented or a move towards multiculturalism is pushed, the discourse needs to be situated within the context of the larger traditions of discourse that we have come to value.

Applebee (1996) informs us that attacks on the quality of certain texts made by persons are really debates between adults about the types of conversations they desire their children to engage in. For some parents texts are considered dangerous weapons that can harm the moral make-up of their children. The ill feeling generated from certain texts leads educators to omit them from the reading curriculum; so as to avoid conversations related to any themes that some communities deem inappropriate.

What we may be left with are two different archetypal pedagogues competing in Bakhtinian fashion for the minds of their students, armed with texts and justified
by two opposed ideologies. What really matters is what is being transmitted ideologically to the child. Are we asking our students to disguise themselves and don the immediate cultural dressings of the nearest classroom facilitator? Every classroom session is a literacy event, and, although ephemeral, it has the ability to last a lifetime. Chambers (1991) believes that an adult’s reading history is bound to how she came to think, can change behaviors and affect one’s life intellectually and ethically.

The event may only last forty minutes within the walls of the classroom; however, the child carries those ideological elements out into her world and the greater community. The traditions embedded in text and in the discourse that evolves from it can evoke change in the student, provide her with a new appreciation of her existential experiences, and give her the opportunity to move beyond the inherited cultural capital. The child will then make decisions based on the newer cultural traditions and values being transmitted to her in school every day. At the end of the day, the educator along with every influential adult in the child’s life makes a political decision to transmit specific ideological elements and cultural capital to children through the modality of text.

The society in which one lives determines the traditions of knowing and doing. They are encoded into the individual in the forms of culturally driven behavioral patterns and common language symbols. Traditions of knowing and doing are performances of literacy. There are characteristic ways of knowing and doing that are contextual (Applebee, 1996). When we ask a child to adopt and adapt, according
to our own idiosyncratic (and highly arbitrary) expectations without the recognition that our cultural artifacts are artificial, we are asking the child to put on a mask and perform cultural traditions, much like an actor dons a costume and performs on a stage.

Generally speaking, the first set of traditions that the child experiences outside of the home is the one set forth by the school and the teacher. The further away the child’s traditions stem from the school’s traditions, the greater steps the child has to take to approximate the new cultural norms. It is psychologically more difficult for the children coming from marginalized groups to adjust to the new expectations of the school. The child, in order to survive in the new cultural domain, has to disguise herself as a character member in the dominant group. She must adopt new cultural traditions and adapt her own intellect to do what is considered appropriate. Children from black families who force themselves to become more versed in the dominant narrative often say they feel like they are acting white. They are becoming aware of the notion of acting artificially, in order to function in the dominant culture. Being successful in school means mastering the school discourse (Applebee, 1996). In essence they are learning new scripts, so that they might successfully act the part.

Each new tool acquired by the child allows them one more avenue of access to the dominant culture. Piece by piece they change, gaining new images to incorporate into their school identity collage, while they temporarily paste over the authentic images of their true cultural identity. Eventually, however, they acquire the ability to
forget what it is they have hidden. On some level, they begin to lose their authentic cultural identity. They don’t read to learn; rather, they read to belong. This is how cultural identity is made (Chambers, 1991; Applebee, 1996). And playing the part of a reader is more important than actually being able to read.

Learning to perform like a reader as well as learning the cultural traditions of the school is crucial for successful participation. In this sense, becoming a reader is indeed a role the child performs, and that role is culturally bound and politically charged. It is less important to perform the cognitive skills necessary to perform reading comprehension. It is much more important to perform appropriately the role of reader. Children perform the reader’s role successfully when they ask the appropriate questions; that is, what questions the teacher deems appropriate. Schooling becomes quite necessarily a learning process that involves appropriate behaviors measured by the dominant culture’s unforgiving yardstick.

The most significant reading skill that we are teaching our children is ideology absorption. It is not so significant that we are teaching them the mechanics of reading; rather, that we are teaching them cultural traditions that are reflective of cultural-historical and political values within society that we believe are important. The training of the child’s mental faculties becomes less about cognition and more about tradition. They learn to appreciate greatness and identify greatness, while they learn to make arbitrary distinctions between “good” literature from the traditional canon and everything else not belonging to it. They begin to understand that reading the
world means reading the teacher’s world. It is only a matter of time before they begin
reading the teacher’s world as if it were their own.

It is quite reasonable to suspect that those who pursued a homogenous
ideology in politics and morality a century ago created ramifications still being felt
today in schools across the United States. The American school curriculum still
reflects the political and cultural values that were pushed by a specific group in
charge in the 1870s and 1880s in this country. Reading curricula and policies from
the 19th Century still provide the basis for the dominant discourse disseminated in
modern schools and play a large part in training students to be traditionalists. In order
to be good readers, students must learn to appreciate and accept the idea that
“greatness” is embodied in being politically conservative, intellectually elitist, male,
white and rich. The requirements for college entrance were in the 1870s culturally
homogenous and represented white male Euro centrism, as the following list aptly
reflects: Shakespeare, Goldsmith, Irving, Byron, Dickens, Milton, and Hawthorne
were required reading for every school student across the country. Today, still, the
most frequently cited titles in schools across the nation are Romeo and Juliet,
Macbeth, Huckleberry Finn, Julius Caesar, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Scarlet Letter,
Of Mice and Men, Hamlet, The Great Gatsby, and Lord of the Flies (Applebee,
1996). It is not difficult to come to the recognition that we have progressed little
towards social change and a more representative cross-section of Children’s and YA
Literature, since the list of the most widely read authors in U.S. schools has not changed significantly in over 100 years.

Reputed scholars of children’s books like Sloan (1991) tell us that literature is essential to the development of readers and to the education of the child’s imagination. Imagination is a creative and constructive power and is at the heart of a child’s intellect and emotions. Children and adults use imagination to participate in conversations, to make decisions, to analyze news reports and politicians’ speeches, and to evaluate advertisements and entertainment, among other things. Literature educates our imagination because it has the capacity to develop our perspective on reality. It describes what happens to human beings as they come to terms with living and gives shape to shifting human experience. Literature puts into words our personal experiences and memories to create a truly human world. The study of literature can lead to a “transformation of the mind and a transformation of the reality, which we create (Sloan, 1991, 14-15).”

Utilization of literature as a vehicle to carry us to possibilities of a world and a society that we would like to enjoy is one of the primary missions of advocates for social change. Teachers can select particular texts that will provoke thoughts in their students and generate a conversation about a reality that they may not otherwise consider if they are not challenged through reading a text that discusses the collective experiences of marginalized groups that speak against the dominant narrative. Only
by reading the texts and discussing its contents as real experiences that humans suffer can they really begin to appreciate the other.

Sloan (1991) expands her argument by asserting that a culture’s beliefs and actions take shape around a social vision constructed by the imagination, and she names the genres of folktales and myths as evidence. The United States has a mythology that reflects ideals of self-reliance, independence, and respect for democratic process. The stories that establish these ideals in metaphor help to clarify our understanding of history, politics, religion and other aspects of society in the United States (Sloan, 1991). Because they are stories, however, we can analyze them with detachment, and we can make observations about our own beliefs and actions as a society, which otherwise would be quite difficult to do.

For example, commercial media advertisements rely on the myth of Cinderella (Perrault, 1697) and what it represents, in order to sell beauty products that promise to turn every girl into a princess. Such use of language and myth has a purpose to persuade us to accept for another’s gain the values of the society in which we live. Literature can be used to educate children to guard against passivity and question the effects of accepted slogans promoted by popular discourse. Literacy practices like gender performances are socially constructed, not biological (Ortner and Whitehead, 1981; West and Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1990); furthermore, they are merely operations that are arbitrary and can be countered (Sloan, 1991; Cherland, 1994; Davies, 1993; Gilbert, 1989). Educators can work to remind children from an
early age that the constructs of media, text and children’s books are all part of imagination, and students have the power to imagine different stories and different worlds that will debunk the stereotypical mythologies of our society. Challenging the normative assumptions through text is a crucial step children take to incorporate visions of how they and others can be and how they can perform gender in the world (Dutro, 2001; Davies, 1997; Blackburn, 2005).

Gender-specific boundaries are but one example of how the power of the dominant discourse exists and functions in schools and in our society. The process of dualism is a convenient means to organize knowledge in our world. We grow comfortable intellectually by categorizing the things we see as weak or strong, passive or active, emotional or stoic, nurturing or productive. They become psychosocially entrenched stereotypes that infuse themselves within our daily conversations, and they become ever more difficult to challenge or even notice. They are used often enough to appear as natural truths. Children pick up on polarities and explain differences between themselves and peers beginning the first day of school (Dutro, 2001).

It is with this idea in mind that agents of social change seek to use their choices of literature, in order to bring to light other possibilities of the imagination – to equip the child in the classroom with the ability to see through the accepted mythology of the dominant group’s values to create new constructs that will make space for the voices from the edges of the mainstream, and to incorporate them into a
newly imagined reality that turns the dominant discourse on its head (Dutro, 2003; Davies; 1997; Huskey, 2002). Social change educators move to discourses that sound much different from the dominant one. Either way, the pursuit of more progressive methods and application of literary dialectics will reflect more accurately the highly evolved society in which our children now live. Multidimensional and pluralistic readings of marginalized voices will jettison the dominant narrative temporarily to the side, in order to make space for the meaningful work of others.

History as a Fiction of the Dominant Narrative: Walter Benjamin’s *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*

Gerald Prince (2003) defines narrative as the representation of real or fictive events by one or more narrators to an audience of one or more, which leaves us with an open field to begin a conversation about the significance of history, storytelling, culture and ideology in YA and Children’s Literature. Application of the epistemology purported by Walter Benjamin, German philosopher of the twentieth century, in his treatise on history, provides the educator concerned with school literacy practices an interesting background to understand the deeper implications of text as a vehicle for ideological transmission.

Walter Benjamin issues the bold claim that history is but one story told by the victor, or the oppressive group, or the ruling party of any society. For Benjamin, history is the subject of structure whose site is homogenous, empty time filled by the presence of the now. History is simply a string of chapters told by those in power to
maintain a system of hegemony that functions in the present, controlling the less fortunate around them. History, then, is a structural narrative that one can manipulate and distort for the purpose of maintaining one’s current position of power over others. For example, Robespierre, while imposing martial rule on the French working class, conjured the memory of Rome and applied its glorious legend to his own contemporary government in France: The revolutionary oligarchy led by Robespierre presented itself to the French citizens as Rome incarnate, which allowed Robespierre and his peers to assume power and make a tiger’s leap into the past (Benjamin, 1968).

The purpose of this tiger’s leap into the past is to maintain a hierarchy in which the ruling party continues to dominate the rest of the people under its rule. The power of yesterday can be harnessed, in order to function for those in charge today. Robespierre effectively pulled the image of Rome out of its own history and juxtaposed it with his government in contemporary France. He used the story of Rome to justify his privileged position in France centuries after the fall of Rome.

Implementation of this strategy by the dominant class allows it to create an ominous narrative by which to keep those who live under it in check. The history of Rome becomes synonymous to the history of France, and consequently, all of Rome’s justifications and destinies for power are inextricably linked with those of Robespierre’s ruling class. The ruling class has produced a fiction, which relies on the essential metaphor to complete its ideological mission. How can the oppressed argue
with a destiny that has been justified across thousands of years and several powerful nations?

Up until the 1970s, scholars of literary studies relied on history as an objective and permanent background, upon which they could place layers of interesting (albeit innocuous) interpretation. The scholars believed that history was unified and singly true, and they could produce thereby a more complete understanding of a literary work by using it as a backdrop. The historiographic function revealed the Weltanschauung (worldview) of time and place for a text. History, essentially, could guarantee the truth of a literary analysis. History was single, unified and extra-discursive (Watkins, 1999).

Over the past thirty years, though, scholars have challenged the notion of history being immune to interpretation. History has been questioned by new schools of thought that have concluded that the history to which we had earlier subscribed was nothing more than one version of history. It is but one side of the story. History is but a narrative supported by the dominant group with a particular interest to maintain their own position of power over the marginalized groups within society. As a result, the dominant group’s history works to become everyone’s accepted history through the available economic and political channels afforded to the dominant group. One group wrote the story, held the pen and published the books. In our own United States we have seen American history only from the eyes of one particular, hegemonic cross-section: white, male, heterosexist and Eurocentric.
The white, male, heterosexist, and Eurocentric prototype is quite symbolic, and, from several postmodernist camps’ theoretical perspectives, nothing more than a spectral image next to which we can hold our own identities, in order to gain a better understanding of it and them (Morrison, 1992; Mills, 1996; Bell, 1987; Bell, 1992). In other words, we all can find ourselves along a continuum on which we either approach this prototype or repel it. Whiteness, for lack of a better term, is not a bounded category that is impermeable and narrow. Every individual that has grown up in the United States and has functioned within its dominant, mainstream culture can display aspects of whiteness in varying degrees, although some individuals display more characteristics of whiteness than others. And some individuals display characteristics of whiteness more often (and in more situations) than others may want or need to.

For example, a working class, white American can reflect characteristics of the prototypically heterosexual white, but he could nevertheless be an imperfect example. Certain gay, lesbian and black Americans may reflect more characteristics of whiteness and simultaneously perform the stereotypical behaviors accorded to their body type or gender, so that they may gain access to some of the cultural capital in our society. To further complicate the issue of whiteness and accessibility, the aforementioned white-skinned American, heterosexual male may not perform the accepted behaviors of whiteness, but he may have access to certain social privileges simply based on his physical appearance. Whiteness is a complicated, multifarious
category that encompasses physical and metaphysical characteristics. Reproduction of characteristics of whiteness can also manifest themselves in the clothes people wear, the moral values they hold, the ideological positions they maintain, and even the dialect they use in daily conversation.

The story of American history has come under scrutiny by recent methodologies like critical race theory (CRT), feminist theory, queer theory and postmodernism. Within the fields of social sciences, education and literary analysis, these can loosely be categorized within the boundaries of Cultural Studies (Watkins, 1999). Their common goals are to uncover the once-hidden and still repressed voices of the marginalized and to construct new narratives that will disrupt the dominant narrative and its hold on our understanding of our history as a nation.

Jenkins (1997) views the historian as a writer of fiction, who takes the past and gives it an imaginary series of narrative structures and coherences it never had. We can never see the past with our own eyes. The historian takes the content of a historical event and strings it together in a palatable sequence for us to consume. He creates a story and hopes to make it as believable as possible. In this sense, the historian is writing fiction. If historical works can be viewed as inventions, they can also be classified as mere artifacts bounded by culture and invented by persons with unique cultural identities and political agendas. The history we read in our textbooks is for the most part stories of white, heterosexist, Eurocentric men who have waged wars, signed proclamations and wrote classics. The historians who wrote the great
works of fiction with their one-sided history subscribed faithfully and religiously to the dominant narrative.

Let us take a look at a famous historical hero: Alexander the Great. We automatically refer to this ruler and warrior in Western history not as Alexander, but as Alexander the Great. Was he great simply because of the amount of territory he claimed during his grueling campaigns? The “coherences” that Jenkins (1997) refers to can be scrutinized more closely in Alexander’s story. Simply stated, we accept him as “great” because he was allegedly successful at defeating his enemies in foreign territories. Some group of historians decided that, and they wrote a story (a fiction).

Would we still consider him great, if we owned and read ten thousand pages of neatly written text containing the painful and raw descriptions of each defeated person raped and/or mutilated during his campaigns? We can use cultural studies to find the unwritten narratives (the counter-narratives) surrounding every seemingly unified event in our history. The lenses of cultural studies remind us to read history with the awareness that past events are apprehended and appropriated by historians with a political agenda to promote the ellipsis. But hidden or unseen, remembered or disremembered, the counter-narratives can still be found. We just need to use different lenses.

Catherine Belsey (1980) describes history as the sum of available written documents and text that humans interpret to make sense of the world. Who holds the documents and texts makes all the difference in the world. The growth of radical,
alternative histories based on cultural studies have begun to compete with the dominant narrative, so that we can garner new perspectives on old stories, like the way in which feminist scholars have reworked texts to construct a different perspective on the history of women, and the way in which postcolonial scholars subvert the narratives found in European history. These strategies are typical of cultural studies and they engender doubt on the validity and relevance of conventional, historical facts (Barker, et al. 1991). The traditionalist’s history that we know is limited in perspective and a fiction in the sense that it is the story of one group of persons that have lived during that time, and it ignores the groups outside of the dominant group in control.

So, if the greater discourses of American history are but fictions told from one limited perspective, it makes it difficult for us to use historical texts as a background for the analysis of young adult (YA) and children’s literature. Furthermore, the canon of American classics begins to reveal its own ideological mission, which contributes even more strongly to the dominant narrative generated by one group in power. The result is a multi-layered fictional account that becomes virtually impermeable. Psychologically and culturally speaking, there exist the very real ideological transmissions that transpire as children read what we consider to be fictive novels. Just because the story is labeled fiction does not mean the knowledge transmitted will not have a real world effect on our readers.
We can also view works of YA and children’s literature as textual transactions between the author and reader. The author creates the text for the reader to consume. The text is a vehicle by which that author transmits cultural information to the reader. The reader, however, interprets the author’s cultural information with her own unique historical-cultural lens, coming to the text with her or his own cultural background, family history and ideological constitution. The reading event thus shifts in power from the author to the reader. The reader then makes meaning from the text without the guidance or input of the original creator of the text. A reader with a critical lens can read the classics and other works of literary art with a more discerning and disruptive eye. This transaction effectively undermines the transcendental significance traditionally accorded to the literary text to recover its histories (Dollimore and Sinfield, 1985).

In other words, the literary text is no longer granted immunity. It is an event that is created by the author, but then it can be read by the reader in multiple ways and can, thus, be rewritten tenfold. The text does indeed work on the reader by shaping the psychic and moral consciousness of young readers but we can also do the cultural work necessary and legitimate it or subvert its dominant class or gender ideologies (Myers, 1988). This is the power of using lenses provided to us by critical race theory (CRT) and queer theory.

Readers are cultural beings that enter into a literate event when they open a book, watch a movie or engage with any text. From the first moment, the reader
manipulates the text with the tools of her own cultural ideology, while the text emits back to her distinctive cultural, moral-political and ideological information. Neither the reader nor the text is universal or impervious to change. CRT theorists can work this transactional phenomenon to their favor, in order to undermine any text’s immunity (or historical-factual weight) that may have been traditionally accorded to it. The text, then, is written anew in the moment it is read by that individual, and the event morphs differently according to the unique cultural identity of each reader that engages the text.

Finding out who is using language to do what to whom (Bloome, 2006) and for what purpose leads us to two premises embedded in the understanding of critical race theory (CRT) and queer theory: power and struggle. Dominant groups that subscribe to the legitimacy of whiteness and heterosexism render texts and the values within them as natural (by this I mean “just the way things are,” so to speak), but this is their narrative, and it serves their interests. It reemphasizes their position of power. It simultaneously marginalizes those outside of the dominant culture. The marginalized cultures resist the process in various ways, in order to make their own meanings and to assert their own cultural identities. The process is not always an overt mission (or admission), and it is sometimes hard to locate. Most times, it is a matter of reading texts more closely and paying more attention to the tacit assumptions that are being made, as well as recognizing the ideological transmissions that are being forwarded.
The Dominant Narrative and Voices of the Marginalized

Mainstream ideology in the United States presupposes cultural values and practices most closely aligned with the dominant narrative. The dominant narrative of this country is supported by the white middle class. Many have called for a theoretical framework that challenges the assumptions of a white political philosophy. Universal human rights based on a humanistic moral code, belief in personhood, natural states of freedom, and civil rights were originally contracted to and meant only for privileged whites in the United States and the British colonies. Non-whites were excluded. The logical conclusion is that those outside of the label “white” and “man” will be necessarily unequal and have no access to the rights reserved for an exclusive group. Thus, the theories of social contract work smoothly based on the assumption that only white males will have access to civil rights, property rights and other actions protected under a free, democratic state (Mills, 1997; Locke; 1690; Gregor, 1996). The missing piece presupposes logical, reasoning and what it means for non-whites on a daily basis, and how they are excluded still from inalienable rights (Freire, 1989). The focus needs to remain on real world issues, in order to explain justice and injustice in terms of prejudices towards those falling outside of the dominant group.

The same might be said for what happens inside elementary classrooms. Some mainstream pedagogues have subscribed to the dominant, oppressive culture as the standard to which all students should be held. They have come to adhere to the mainstream ideology infused with the dominant culture’s values and moral code. The
teachers have continued to learn and read the texts of the aforementioned scholars and
have accepted their words as truth.

Teachers have the option, however, of revising the curriculum to include texts
that have not previously been there. This has proven to be a difficult task at times,
because the dominant narrative of the community can be resistant to change
(Hammett, 1992; McVicar, 1995). Through careful selection of texts coupled with
persistence, they can introduce entirely new topics into the classroom discourse and
expose their students to authors and characters not from the traditional mainstream
groups. Deliberate inclusion of new authors with voices outside of the dominant
narrative leads to new conversations and opportunities for children to see other
versions of the universal story (i.e., history), which can lead to opportunities for
social change (Athanases, 1996; Blackburn, 2005).

New texts elicit new ways to analyze and identify stereotypes and other
artifacts of social convention that they may have previously taken for granted. The
shift in the curriculum can bring the students into diverse genres and discourses. The
school reading curriculum can provide an outlet for students to develop ongoing
conversations about their lives and the world in which they live, not the world in
which the dominant group lives. Calling more attention to the prejudices in the
American school’s curriculum can help to empower students from the marginalized
cultures, instead of subjecting them to one central value: the value of being from the
dominant culture (Applebee, 1996; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Prendergast, 2003).

Adherence to the cultural patterns of the dominant culture yields tremendous educational benefits at school. Students less successful at mimicking these patterns preclude themselves from the benefits of literacy. The successful duplicators of the accepted cultural practices and values move readily into advanced-level curricula, while those displaying less move into the remedial tracks.

The champions of social justice in education interpret the philosophy of education in a practical way. They attempt to place ideology into action, so that students in classrooms across the nation can gain a critical understanding of the world in which they live. A pedagogy of questioning, which includes training our students to reject the mainstream authoritative voice, must reflect variegated forms of cultural practices from more than just the dominant culture of society. It works to develop the language of the marginalized groups in the streets and in the classrooms, while promoting the concept that language and culture are not universal (Freire and Faundez, 1989; Freire and Macedo, 1987).

Until recently in our history, virtually all readers of American fiction have been positioned as white, heterosexual and male. Those who fall outside of the dominant culture struggle to find a voice when writing texts and when reading them. That is why it is crucial to rework the school curriculum to incorporate inclusive
literature. Even prolific and well educated writers have to contend with operating within a language neither created by them nor for them (Morrison, 1992).

The agency of American literature offers unprecedented opportunities to understand fully the force of the “imaginative act” within literature, especially upon the landscape of the United States with its story of growing up with racist and heterosexist policy, whilst telling its fiction of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all citizens. The competing stories and contradictory concepts provided by classics as well as new texts in American literature provide educators and students with the opportunity to call these contradictions into question through counter-narrative and examining previously accepted narratives and texts more critically. Scholars believe that social change can happen through the implementation of such textual tools. Storytelling builds solidarity within marginalized groups, and it also forces dominant groups to confront their own assumptions about society and cultural phenomena they would otherwise take for granted.

The implementation of fiction from outside of the mainstream ideology in the classroom can demonstrate interesting experiences of students who have experienced racism, prejudices and other modes of oppression due to their status of otherness. Allowing space for new voices and stories provides our children with opportunities to read and discuss experiences of peers within marginalized groups. It also promotes learning skills that include empathy and the capacity to appreciate the phenomenon of oppression as it relates to racism and prejudice. Scholars have begun to build the
foundations for transformational resistance through the use of qualitative inquiry and
counter-storytelling in education (Williams, 1991; Morrison, 1992; Delgado and
Stefancic, 2001; Delgado, Bernal and Solorzano, 2001).

Knowledge and cultural capital within a society are limited and originate from
a single perspective, which has been traditionally and conveniently owned by the
“victors,” or the dominant members of Western society (Benjamin, 1968). But the
fallacy of history, like science and its fallacy of neutrality, is that facts do not exist
without the historian, and so, in many ways, writing history is writing a fiction, since
you only have a few pieces of the puzzle (Tuchman, 1981). History, then, is just
another story that we have told ourselves to explain why things are they way they are.
But history does not have to run through the streams of our collective consciousness
unchallenged or unquestioned for all of eternity. Marginalized sections of our society
have long been voicing their own fictions and truths, countering the perceived
historical facts and providing space for their own unique (and interdependent)
histories. As a whole, our schools have failed to provide the appropriate space for
them in the curriculum.

Continuously calling attention to the spaces that can be created to resist
mainstream culture (Banks, 2006), either through the avenues of rhetoric or
technology, while creating new political spaces for narratives that counter the
dominant ones are but a few useful ways to subvert the traditional power imbalances.
The overriding grand discourse (Foucault et al.), long unchallenged, can then become
subject to bombardment from competing voices in the hopes of social restructuring. Language and ideology can be redefined, in order to reverse hegemony and restore balance (LaClaue & Mouffe, 1985; Billig, 1995). Discourses that enjoy the accoutrement of ‘truth’ (Sutherland, 2005) in our society can summarily crush the voices of difference that have just as much to inform us. For this reason, it becomes ever more urgent to generate space for marginalized narratives in American schools’ curricula. Through narrative we readers hope to gain empathy for the storyteller’s situation, and we make an effort to understand those unique life experiences. A good story allows us to walk in the shoes of that individual. In this case, and in the case of cultural studies in education, we learn to view history through a specific sociopolitical prism (Tuchman, 1981), which, hopefully, evokes change within the mindset of the reader, and will, eventually, lead to social change.

Through personal narrative we gain insight into a real-life experience that is both interesting and empirically valid (Williams, 1991). The competing voices find places and spaces in texts, through visual media and other means of knowledge transmission. We need to learn to treat every counter-narrative as a potential balance restorer and powerful communicator of ideology within our delicately compounded society.

Counter-story telling, or counter-narrative, is a powerful tool to tell other truths and to cross boundaries not normally crossed in non-fiction and scholarly research. The art of counter-storytelling provides us with a vehicle to transmit new
versions of cultural identity and ideology. They allow us to expose the lackluster veil of neutrality that many choose to hide behind when voices of difference begin to acquire volume and a place to be heard. We must, then, continue to provide the proper political lenses to the books and texts we use within education, in order to properly discover the subordination of difference reflected by the micro-aggressions of daily encounters with members of the dominant group (Williams, 1991) that so often remain ubiquitous and scandalously effective within educational institutions of the United States.

Poststructuralist Theory and Children’s Literature

In order to continue the discussion of text as a vehicle for ideological transmission in YA and children’s literature for the purpose of social change and representation of marginalized groups, it is necessary to create a connection between poststructuralist theory and children’s literature as it relates to those marginalized by the grand narrative by race and sexual orientation. Poststructuralist theory is based in literary studies (Foucault, 1979; 1981; Derrida, 1973), but it has proven to be useful in the study of literacy in education and in children’s literature, as well.

Several scholars of pedagogy in the last twenty years have embraced its tenets to help explain difference and inequity within our school systems. Unlike the structuralists in literature, who found worth in the structure of literary texts (e.g., narrative voice, foreshadowing, and genre), poststructuralists deconstruct literary texts, showing that structure is never perfectly balanced and that meaning can never
be fixed (Eagleton, 1983). Poststructuralist theories share fundamental assumptions about language, meaning and subjectivity. Subjectivity refers to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of individuals, their sense of themselves, and their ways of understanding their relations to the world (Weedon, 1987).

Subjectivity is constructed, socially produced, not natural and not innate. It is not simply a stereotype, either, since it is one’s sense of self, not just one’s sense of others. It is also not just considered one’s identity, because subjectivity suggests that it is unfixed, malleable, quick to change, and fluid. Identity is more unified and stable. Subjectivity constantly responds to the “discourses of the culture” and that is where language comes into play (Fairclough, 1989).

In poststructuralist theory, language is not seen as static self-expression of a unique individual but the place where subjectivity is entirely constructed. People use language, both written and spoken, to define and contest the way the world will be. Language is where and how status quo is preserved and is also where the processes of political change occur (Weedon, 1987). This includes language in all its forms and functions, including literary texts, classroom conversations, informal conversations and the messages from the news media. Poststructuralist theory suggests that the subject is constantly being created and recreated by conflicting discourses. The subject feels pushed and pulled by competing discourses, all of which are telling the subject to behave, act and appear a certain way, in order to satisfy the demands of a prescribed cultural identity.
People emit multiple cultural elements as they engage a text, including individual abilities, background knowledge and familiarity with the given topic. In addition to these factors, theorists have also stated that people can read a text with cultural-historical lenses, including but not limited to a gender-biased lens, a racial lens and a socioeconomic lens. Reading texts with multicultural lenses brings a richer understanding of the text. Multicultural readings and the othering of a text can evoke different interpretations not considered beforehand. Reading critically helps to refute stereotypes and to question the validity of the images portrayed in a certain text. It also helps to portray the images of marginalized or minority characters in stories in new and positive ways. Reading against the grain of a literary text, so to speak, can uncover ideologies of oppression and resistance embedded within it. Setting up opportunities for discourse that deconstructs traditional gender and race stereotypes leads to greater awareness of power imbalances. It also challenges categories that function within the grand narrative (Harris, 1999; Yenika-Agbaw, 1997; Appleman, 1995; Derrida, 1973; Foucault; 1981). The discovery of power imbalances and hidden agendas leads to change.

For example, poststructuralist theorists work to reveal the phenomenon of polarity. It promotes the notion that heterosexuality only means something in relation to homosexuality (Pinar, 1998) and being white only means something in relation to being non-white (Morrison, 1992). In order for a person to be able to categorize herself in a certain manner, she has to see herself opposite of the “other.” In this way,
dominant members of a society will subordinate others into what they consider to be lesser categories. Because the necessity exists (the necessity to have the opposite other), in order to create a meaningful identity for oneself, it simultaneously opens up the opportunity to disrupt both categories and the entire discursive system they represent. Because traditional heterosexist patriarchs need the label of homosexual to subordinate those that they feel fit into that category, they leave language (and their tidy labels) open for radical interpretations.

Through textual and linguistic disruption, agents of social change can tear apart the traditional descriptors conveniently attached to homosexuality and heterosexuality. They begin to intersect them with newer terms and images and they borrow things from both categories and insert them into the other. By mixing the names and items up in both categories, they succeed in a disruption of the archaic, Christianized system of polarity. As a result of disruption, the conversation theoretically moves toward a differently balanced, more diversified social system.

Understanding sexuality and race as relational constructs reinforces the concept that they are socially constructed categories manipulated by a group in power, in order to subjugate the individuals falling outside of the group. Poststructuralist theory provides us with tools to introduce competing discourses in the classroom, so that our students can begin to understand different political perspectives and embrace different ideologies (O’Neill, 1993). Texts as tools for ideological transmission and cultural “reconsideration” are really what we are talking
about. The texts we choose will either reinforce the white heterotopia, or it will disrupt it. The counter-narratives we show to children will give them opportunities to see the other sides of reality, and it will make space for different discourses.

The Biography of Theodor Geisel a.k.a. Dr. Seuss

In this portion I intend to describe the history behind Theodor Geisel’s life and career, in order to shed light on the factors that may have contributed to his insertion of moralistic tendencies into children’s literature and to provide the reader with a more comprehensive view of the author known as Dr. Seuss, a.k.a. Theodor Geisel. Dr. Seuss, as he is known to most of the world, developed his unique style of writing and published his first children’s book titled *And to Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street* in 1937. The book’s focus on light humor combined with clever rhyming schemes made him interesting to children, while his subtle moral message appealed to adults and educators. Through his popularity and completion of more than 40 books, Dr. Seuss established himself as a prominent writer and an indelible influence upon millions of American readers.

According to secondary sources Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss) developed his love for writing and drawing as a child in Springfield, Illinois. His father worked as a superintendent of the Springfield parks and its metropolitan zoo. The young Ted Geisel’s exposure to the zoo animals apparently influenced his creative imagination and his penchant for unique drawings of fictional animal characters. His father was also a philanthropist and believed in altruism as an important part of a human being’s
existence. The adult Theodor Geisel also went on to develop a sense of disillusionment with the business world and this may have affected his choice of themes in his written works as he established himself as a legitimate children’s book author (Cobb, 1992, 26-28; Roth, 1989).

While he was an adolescent, teenagers in Geisel’s neighborhood ridiculed and physically abused him for being German. During the time of World War I it was not always popular or safe to be of German descent because, at the time, the Germans were enemies to the United States. His father managed a brewery during this time of his childhood, and the adolescents would yell out racial slurs to him, calling him the “drunken Kaiser” and they would throw coals at his head, forcing the young Geisel to flee home for safety (Wilder, 1979, p.62). Although Geisel claimed that his early childhood did not influence him to a great extent (Sadler, 1989), childhood experiences such as those previously described could have influenced Geisel to write moralistically laden stories such as The Sneetches or The Butter Battle Book.

He became motivated to become a children’s literature author when he was legally unable to write other forms of literature due to a contract he had signed with an advertising agency. Since children’s literature was not included in the ban, he wrote And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street in 1937. The sounds of a ship’s engines that he heard inspired his rhythmic style of writing that he developed so uniquely in many books to come (Fensch, 1997; Greenleaf, 1989). Although many different publishers rejected his first work, it finally found a home at Vanguard Press.
Theodor Geisel used the pseudonym Dr. Seuss in the literary world and his first book catapulted to success. Apart from writing, Dr. Seuss employed himself as an artist, a filmmaker, and a cartoonist. He created very controversial political cartoons that were published in the *Army-Navy Screen Magazine* and were essentially sources of propaganda used by the United States government to influence soldiers and the American public to support the war. He won two academy awards for his documentary films *Hitler Lives and Design for Death* in 1946 and 1947. He won an Oscar in 1951 for the production of his cartoon entitled *Gerald McBoing Boing*. He also won the Peabody Award for two TV animated films of his books, *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas* (1957) and *Horton Hears a Who* (1954). He received the Curtis Award from the International Animated Cartoon Association for the animated version of *The Lorax* in 1971 (Roth, 1989). Ted Geisel had managed to be successful in many occupations including writer, filmmaker, cartoonist and even as a propagandist for the United States government (Fox, 1991; Cobb, 1992).

Upon the enormous success of *The Cat in the Hat*, Random House opened a new division, Beginner Books, and the company named Theodor Geisel the president and chief editor of the subsidiary. At one point in his career at Beginner Books, Geisel held four positions within the company: president, chief editor, author and illustrator. The lucrative subsidiary gave Geisel continued success and absolute artistic control over his work up to the very last book he published (Roth, 1989).
As a children’s literature author, for which he is best known, the author known as Dr. Seuss has become a dominant force in the education of children all across the United States of America. His works have been utilized in many school settings and still continue to be used to teach children right and wrong and the good and evil of humankind. The moralistic messages that Dr. Seuss inserts into many of his works fit well with the worldviews of many teachers in the modern U.S school settings.

The social and moral issues Geisel’s books cover racial prejudices, warfare, minority rights, materialism, topics related to corrupted political systems and the environment. Dr. Seuss books often addressed questions of morality within a democratic, capitalistic society (Adlerman, 2005; Barone, 1993; Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1986; Cobb, 1992; Dow & Slaughter, 1989; MacDonald, 1988; Mensch & Freeman, 1987; Pace & Podesta, 1999; Roth, 1989; Sadler, 1989; Van Cleaf & Maring, 1986). Some critics have proposed that certain pieces of literature that he published were ways for Geisel to proliferate Marxist principles. He seemed to reflect and want to call attention to unfair treatment of immigrant auto workers who worked in factories where he grew up (Riverdeep, 2005).

Professionals in the field of pedagogy have written about ideological issues found in Geisel’s works and have come to several conclusions about how to best use his books in the classrooms. The works seem to fit well with their own agendas, and they accomplish their two most important goals: 1) keep the children’s attention and
2) teach them the ideological messages embedded in the books. In this manner, the children are interested in reading and they ingest the ideological fiber, and from there they develop into citizens with the same beliefs as their adult educators. The published materials on Dr. Seuss led me to question further the uses of his books as ideological transmitters by teachers and scholars within the field of pedagogy.
Chapter 3: Methods of Procedure

Analysis of Published Research

A significant portion of my methods involved a content analysis of the published research and texts related to Geisel’s children’s books. Educators and literary critics have considered Geisel a moralist and have professed to use his books as effective tools of moral, political and ideological transmission. My investigations centered on answering the question of to what extent and why have educators utilized Geisel’s books for ideological transmission. They have also purposefully implemented Geisel’s books into their reading curricula in an effort to effect social change by influencing the ideological and political frameworks of their classroom students (Adlerman, 2005; Barone, 1993; Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1986; Cobb, 1992; Dow & Slaughter, 1989; MacDonald, 1988; Mensch & Freeman, 1987; Pace & Podesta, 1999; Roth, 1989; Sadler, 1989; Van Cleaf & Maring, 1986).

I spent time contemplating research questions, in order to investigate scholars’ texts with regard to the literature of Dr. Seuss. I also spent over a year performing literature reviews of any and all scholarly works related to the life and works of Seuss. I assembled a list of texts and research articles related to his works and how they have been used in the classroom. I searched materials on the OSU Libraries’ Website, ordered books through the online websites, publishers’ sites, and I collected a bibliography of books and articles written by Dr. Seuss, as well as any research produced about his literary pieces.
Because of the nature of my study, which included both content analysis and ethnographic research, I had to develop a systematic research process. Upon discovery of the initial articles related to children’s books by Dr. Seuss, I developed a list of key terms that guided my research questions. I searched for articles published in the fields of pedagogy, social science and literature that held the following terms: ideology and Dr. Seuss, morality and Dr. Seuss, peace education and Dr. Seuss, social change and Dr. Seuss, democracy and Dr. Seuss, politics and Dr. Seuss, warfare and Dr. Seuss, racism and Dr. Seuss, heterosexism and Dr. Seuss and environmentalism and Dr. Seuss. I also performed searches related to key terms that involved children’s literature and the previously mentioned key terms.

I performed literature reviews and searches online for six months prior to beginning my survey and interviews with current classroom teachers. I visited university and public libraries, in order to peruse published materials related to my research question. I discovered published works online and professional websites posted by teachers that have developed lesson plans related to moral instruction and ideological transmission using themes in Geisel’s works. I recorded notes on unit plans specifically created by teachers, which promoted values in Geisel’s texts and instructed students on their versions of political correctness, moral choices and social awareness. I explored how scholars and teachers presented their selections of Dr. Seuss’s literary works within pedagogy and what nature of discourse was generated using these works with students. My explorations led to focusing on three works that
have been most often discussed in published journals and on published websites: The Sneetches, The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book.

Secondary Analysis: Field Research

My investigation of the secondary literature of Geisel’s texts and their implementation as didactic tools led me to conduct a mixed method which included a content analysis of published research followed by ethnographic data collection, in order to triangulate my patterns and findings. My pursuit of research through such methods proved effective by means of textual analysis and research in the field. By conducting a study of published research and then comparing it to empirical evidence disclosed by teachers using Geisel’s works in their classrooms, I had the opportunity to connect past evidence of ideological transmission with potential ideological transmissions happening now. The evidence that I gathered from the discourse analysis of published materials led me to a second data collection procedure involving teachers currently working in classrooms, which helped to triangulate my data and findings in the published texts. The implication that Geisel’s books continue to have an impact on American education is a powerful one.

Extracting the ubiquitous ideological themes from Geisel’s works, I then moved to current teachers in a specific classroom setting to see what types of discourse might be generated with The Sneetches, The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book. My survey directly confronted them with the topics of racism, heterosexism, and environmentalism, all of which were important themes of discourse in the
published research. The teachers responding to the questionnaire had to decide what topics they would discuss with their students after reading the three aforementioned books. I wanted to find out specifically if they would foster or exclude discourse related to racism and the experiences of the African Americans in the United States, heterosexism, sexual orientation, and the experiences of gays and lesbians, and environmentalism.

Selection of the Children’s Books

I selected the three books written by Theodor Geisel because of the fact that The Sneetches, The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book have been most often written about and used by teacher-researchers and scholars, in order to promote ideological discourses and political messages centered around racism, Marxism, capitalism, environmentalism, peace education and other societal issues (Adlerman, 2005; Barone, 1993; Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1986; Cobb, 1992; Dow & Slaughter, 1989; MacDonald, 1988; Mensch & Freeman, 1987; Pace & Podesta, 1999; Roth, 1989; Sadler, 1989; Van Cleaf & Maring, 1986).

The Sneetches is about a group of creatures called Sneetches. There are two kinds of Sneetches, ones with stars on their bellies and ones without. Other than this seemingly innocuous marker one cannot tell them apart. Yet it becomes a social distinction within their culture. The story has been interpreted as a commentary on racism, social class structures, and other social problems having to do with
capitalism, and teachers have used it to teach children moral lessons pertaining to liberty, justice and equality.

**The Lorax** is a story about a small creature trying to convince the reader and the main character about the apparent dangers of rampant capitalism and overuse of the earth’s natural resources. Teachers can use the story to teach about the value of recycling and minimalist lifestyles. **The Butter Battle Book** centers on two individuals feuding with each other. They build a wall to separate themselves from each other and begin assaulting each other with simple weaponry. They then develop more offensive weapons to hurl at each other. The story has been used to teach children about the senselessness of warfare and violence. Since there has been a significant amount of researchers and practitioners, who have published their interests in the ideological messages inherent in Geisel’s works, I decided that pursuing my study would be well grounded.

**Selection of the Field Site**

I began working part-time as an intervention specialist and aide at an elementary school in the winter of 2007. I developed a good relationship with the principal and some of the teachers while I worked there. It became clear to me that the opportunity to interview the elementary teachers for my dissertation research could become a reality. I had become comfortable enough as a co-worker to approach them with my ideas of conducting a survey and interviews, in order to answer my
questions about the uses of Geisel’s books and the transmission of ideology within contemporary elementary classrooms.

I formally contacted the principal of the elementary school and set up a meeting with him and some of the elementary teachers. I presented my thesis to them and explained to them the nature of the questionnaire and my study. I asked permission to contact the rest of the elementary staff and ask them to participate in the questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to ascertain how they would use Theodor Geisel’s The Sneetches, The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book in their classrooms. The three books were chosen for their storylines and for the moral messages that have been interpreted by past educators and scholars. The questionnaire asked them to specifically choose which themes they would be more apt to use to teach their children moral lessons and which ones they would be less apt to choose. The questionnaire also asked them to state why they would choose certain themes and why they might exclude certain themes. The purpose of the follow-up questions was to obtain supporting information for their choices.

The questionnaire asked them to specifically choose which themes they would be more apt to discuss and less apt to discuss with students. The questionnaire also asked them to state why they would choose certain themes and why they might exclude certain themes. The purpose of the follow-up questions was to obtain supporting information for their choices.
After the questionnaires were collected, I contacted the staff and asked for volunteers to meet with me and perform follow-up interviews on the information they gave on the questionnaire, their rationales for choices they made and to ask them more in-depth questions pertaining to teaching reading and children’s literature in their classrooms. From the four volunteers I received, I chose one teacher to interview and observe in her classroom during reading times and literature discussion sessions.

I decided to interview one teacher, because I had developed a comfortable relationship with her, and I felt that I could ask her questions about children’s literature and its uses in the classroom including the topics of racism and heterosexism. I conducted six interviews with the teacher and observed her classroom six times. I chose mornings to observe her classes during language arts periods. I also selected different days and planned with her ahead of time, so that I might see her teaching different concepts related to reading. I also wanted to observe her teaching different styles of lessons. Two of the observations centered on the children reading parts of the story aloud with the teacher monitoring them. She followed these two events with literature circles, in which the children discussed topics from the stories. Two observations centered on reading groups, in which the students were grouped according to their reading levels. They read excerpts from stories and answered discussion questions. They then presented their answers to the class, while the teacher guided their discussions. The final two observations were whole class instruction and discussion related to previously read stories. She then assigned the students
discussion points related to literary elements (e.g., plot, character and setting) and provided individual tutoring to each student during class time. The variety of lessons provided me with different perspectives on how children’s literature is taught in her classroom.

During six months of interviewing and observing the teacher, I collected enough ethnographic data to begin writing my dissertation. I met with the classroom teacher on six occasions and observed her classroom six times during the six-month period of data collection. I recorded the observations and the interviews using a digital recorder. I also took handwritten field notes to support the recorded conversations and discourses by digital recorder. Field notes were taken to record the data. My concern was to obtain information on the teacher’s classroom procedures and means of teaching literature in her classroom, so that I could follow up with her and have her reflect on her teaching practices with me during the qualitative interviews that ensued.

Development of the Instruments

Because of my interest in Dr. Seuss books and their potential moral messages, I developed a questionnaire that would challenge the teachers directly with questions that would instigate thoughts on ideological transmission and political agendas related to the works written by Geisel. The questionnaire focused on the three works most often cited as tools to discuss racism, prejudicial and unfair treatment, environmentalism, and peace. I wanted the teachers to agree or disagree with the
consensus that these books could be used in elementary classrooms for such purposes. I also wanted to know about their own perceptions of children’s literature and its purpose in the elementary classroom.

I performed my own investigations through interviews led by the questionnaire and more in-depth interview questions, in order to obtain more knowledge about Mrs. S.’s philosophy of teaching reading, her perspectives on the uses of children’s books (and Dr. Seuss books, in particular) in her classroom. I wanted to investigate more deeply the personal cognitive processes and teaching philosophies of current educators that generate discourse with elementary students in the United States. I wanted to challenge Mrs. S.’s thought processes and her reflections on the purposes of literature and reading in her own classroom. I wanted to answer the questions of what she would and would not teach as it pertains to moral instruction and why she would discuss certain moral-political and social issues with her children but not others.

Selection of the Teachers for the Survey/Questionnaire

After meeting with a core group of lead teachers and the principal of the elementary school, I asked permission to place surveys in the teachers’ mailboxes. I then announced with a flyer in each mailbox that I would be placing questionnaires in each of the teacher’s mailboxes in a week, and that I hoped that they would participate. I attached a self-addressed, stamped envelope for their convenience. I asked them to fill out the questionnaire honestly and to support their choices with
reasons. I reminded them that their responses were anonymous, and that I was merely interested in their input for research purposes only. I placed the questionnaires in their mailboxes after school and asked them to fill them out and mail them back to me within three weeks. Of the 34 teachers in the building, I received nineteen responses back in the mail. Several of the teachers (five) responded with largesse and supported their choices sufficiently. The rest supported their choices on the questionnaire with a sentence or less. I then realized that a follow-up, qualitative approach to the questionnaire and my questions would be crucial to gain more knowledge related to my research questions.

Selection of the Teacher for the Qualitative Interview

I chose Mrs. S. from a handful of volunteers for the follow-up interview, because I had developed a rapport with her over the first two months of interacting with the teachers at the elementary school. I felt that we had developed a confidence between each other, and that she would feel the most comfortable answering my interview questions frankly. In return, I felt comfortable asking her more questions and challenging her framework of ideas as they relate to literacy in her classes. I wanted to be able to discuss the role of literature in her classroom and discuss themes of racism, peace education and heterosexism openly. A rapport strong enough to withstand uncomfortable topics during conversations (and questioning why these topics are uncomfortable for some) was crucial for knowledge to be gained in this study.
Data Collection

I collected data over six months through surveys and follow-up interviews. Nineteen educators were surveyed during the first two months of the study, followed by a four-month period of qualitative interviews and classroom observations involving one of the teachers in the school. I found it important to select and work with one teacher, while performing intermittent classroom observations during literacy events to enhance the interviews and conversations, as well as to generate more informal questions about classroom procedures and classroom discourse. Communication was pursued through e-mail, by phone and in person. Data was recorded with audio recording devices and handwritten notes. I recorded data using field notes and a digital recorder sitting out on the table by which I was sitting. I recorded each interview with Mrs. S. by writing down handwritten field notes and by recording the interview with the digital recorder. I recorded each observation in the classroom during literacy events with a digital recorder and supplemented the recordings with handwritten field notes.
Chapter 4: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to pursue research that could answer several questions. The content analysis discovered answers to the question what have scholars and educators written about regarding the utility of Geisel’s books to promote ideology. I also wanted to know how current teachers might utilize Geisel’s works to promote or deter certain elements of ideology in their classrooms.

The content analysis of the published works on Dr. Seuss brought me to the challenge of obtaining teachers’ opinions on the purpose of children’s literature in the elementary school setting. How might they apply Dr. Seuss’s books as tools to transmit ideology to their elementary students? Although many scholars have written about Dr. Seuss as a literary moralist, some educators believe that his books are better utilized as tools to build mechanical reading skills.

A Content Analysis of Educators Transmitting Ideology through Geisel’s Texts:

Racism and Prejudice

The Sneetches, some say, is about prejudices. One group of Sneetches has stars on their bellies and one group does not. The Star-bellied Sneetches deem themselves of higher quality because they have stars and they treat the starless Sneetches as inferiors. One day a character named McBean arrives with a star-making machine, and the starless Sneetches pay him to have stars placed on their bellies, so that they can be like the others. The outraged, original Star-bellied Sneetches pay
McBean to have their stars removed by a second machine, so that they can differentiate themselves from the newly starred Sneetches. Ultimately, McBean becomes handsomely rich due to both groups’ desires to change something quite arbitrary. In the end, the Sneetches learn to treat each other equally (Geisel, 1961).

Many people have constructed more specific theories on the moral-political agenda underlying this seemingly simple children’s story. Johnson (1988) believed that Geisel intended to paint a negative picture of racial prejudice. Johnson grew up in a segregationist society and has claimed to have been heavily influenced by The Sneetches. He recognized the misconceptions of racial prejudices, segregationist society and treatment of blacks by whites only after reading Geisel’s book. Others have written that Geisel claimed it was related to his personal opposition to anti-Semitic groups and that story’s concept drew influences from his own experiences with prejudicial treatment during his childhood in the United States (Cott, 1983; Cobb, 1992; White, 2007).

Geisel contributed significantly to the genre of children’s literature by providing children with exposure to existential issues of political power, while at the same time exposing them to the possibilities of personal enrichment through the use of imagination; in essence, he provided the possibility of social change within his works (Roth, 1989; Mensch & Freeman, 1987; Glasman, 2000). He was also concerned with discussing the power imbalances that exist and the struggles of the
marginalized as they work within and against the conventional boundaries of Western society (Mensch & Freeman, 1987).

Irma Ghosn, an educator and researcher, used *The Sneetches* to write unit plans dealing with methodology, critical thinking and moral education. She described it as a classic tale of power relations and an expression of the potential damage that prejudice causes in society. She instructed her readers on how to utilize it in any classroom, but especially in the elementary setting. She implemented the book to teach graduate students and teaching professionals in her courses, while simultaneously promoting the moral-political message embedded within it. She created courses of study centering on the importance of *The Sneetches* as a tool to transmit specific aspects of ideology and moral education related to prejudice and racism (Ghosn, 1998).

Ghosn (1998) praised Geisel’s writing style as an effective means to instruct elementary students on appropriate behaviors related to cultural sensitivity. One example using *The Sneetches* includes not only point-for-point directions for the teacher in the mechanics of classroom instruction, but it also includes ways to elicit the intended, favorable moral opinions from the children:

“Lead a discussion on how the Star-Belly Sneetches felt about the Plain-Belly Sneetches and how they showed their feelings. Tell the children that this type of attitude is called prejudice. Have children talk about how they think the Plain-Belly Sneetches felt about the Star-Bellies’ attitude and behavior, and how the prejudiced
attitudes and stereotyping affected the life of the two groups and the Sneetch community as a whole (Ghosn, 1998, 3).”

She demonstrates how the teacher can guide the students to the realization that, in many ways, the characters in *The Sneetches* are just like people with prejudices and wrongful attitudes and behaviors towards other groups. She assumes that there is a clear, correct answer to questions of morality and ideology, and that there is a clear wrong answer, which both Irma Ghosn and the teacher reading her text should support. She also provides highly influential guidelines to ensure that, if indeed, you are intending to teach this lesson that you know what the obvious right and wrong answers are. The majority rules, in this case, because no teacher in a liberal, democratic society would find the behavior of the Star-Bellies acceptable according to her standards, as can be observed in the following excerpt:

“Ask in what ways are the Sneetches like people. If children have difficulty, ask if there are groups of people that other people treat like the Star-Bellies treated the Plain-Bellies…when working with this and other similar stories where there seems to be a clear ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ side (hardly any teacher will find the Star-Bellies’ behavior acceptable!) (Ghosn, 1998, 5-6).”

She does go on to caution that teachers should not pass their own values on to the children and that they should be allowed to formulate their own opinions on the behaviors of the Sneetches in the story (Ghosn, 1998). Realistically, though, because of the manner in which the guidelines and directions for instruction are apportioned,
there leaves little room for the students to exercise their freedoms of expression, especially in the elementary classroom, where children are taught to observe, listen, memorize and respond with the right answer, no matter what.

The right answer is placed in front of them before they have a chance to create their own interpretations. In this case the right answer is that prejudices cause people to denigrate each other and that people with prejudices are bad characters, in general. The teacher wants the children to respond in such a manner that comforts her own perceptions; primarily speaking, that an ideology that promotes prejudices does not reflect the values of an ideal, democratic society.

Cobb (1992) studied the use of Geisel’s work, The Sneetches, in order to ascertain the elementary student’s response to the theme of racism. Cobb (1992) chose to investigate children’s ability to ascertain the moral messages within The Sneetches by utilizing reader response writing practices. She asked students to write their own responses to the story, but she followed up with worksheets and guidelines that clearly displayed her own preconceived notions of what messages the story relates to the reader. The students received the teacher’s interpretation of the text and answered accordingly. Cobb’s interpretation consisted of the negative effects of racial prejudices enacted by the characters in the story. Although the differences in these two groups of Sneetches were not physically of great significance, much was made of one group being superior to the other. The contrasts were indicative of the racial inequities evident in U.S. society.

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Cobb’s students also talked about many themes other than racial inequity. She nonetheless chose to guide the students to see one specific theme as the appropriate interpretation of the story through her conversations with the students. She literally equated the theme of the *The Sneetches* to racism by having the students fill out a word match worksheet.

The students at first came up with many different themes. When writing free of educator influences they came up with the following themes: transcending social differences, rich and poor children can be friends despite class difference, no one is better than anyone else, that money was wasted by the Sneetches to try to be alike, that people with disabilities can work through hardships, and that the Sneetches were ultimately punished for being superficial (Cobb, 1992).

Using the Reader Response method can serve as a means to extract interpretations without adult influence; however, after the investigator introduced the matching worksheet, the students had little choice but to interpret the story according to her conclusion: The Star-bellied Sneetches were racists. They did not like the Plain-bellied Sneetches, because in some instances people of one color do not like people of a different color. All of the variant themes extracted from the students during the independent writing exercises became extraneous. After the investigator inserted her interpretation of the message in the story, the students then had to shape their opinions according to what was now the appropriate interpretation of the story.
Other educators believing in the power of Geisel’s books to transmit ideology to children include Danny and Kim Adlerman. The seemingly hopeful saviors of a future U.S. society are authors, musicians and entertainers from New Jersey. They primarily perform and write books for elementary schoolchildren. They believe that Geisel performed the role of an author, who simultaneously combined interesting writing with valuable lessons on morality. They respect his writings and lessons so much that they actually promote him on their website and utilize his stories as part of their own performances in front of schoolchildren in the Midwest (Adlerman & Adlerman, 2004).

They promote the use of Dr. Seuss literature because they believe that his works transmit educational benefits to children in an entertaining manner. They serve to promote the appropriate moral and ideological messages crucial to the preservation of civic ideals in modern American society. They consider the book *The Sneetches* a book that portrays the faulty conditions and hypocrisy tied to humanity, while simultaneously poking fun at the concept of prejudice. They claim that Geisel’s intent in writing the book was to describe the hatred associated with The Holocaust. His main point, however, was to also promote the concept of civil rights in the sense that all people are created equal (Adlerman & Adlerman, 2004). Geisel’s books are keys to transmitting important ideological messages to children: “Dr. Seuss was able to live what so many of us are at best merely able to echo: Literacy is the key to
freedom, communication, and survival (On Dr. Seuss, http://www.dannyandkim.com/OnDrSeuss.html).”

During an annual Dr. Seuss celebration the team served as the ringleaders for the promotion and potential preservation of an ideology reflective of their own community in Tinton Falls, New Jersey. Police officers, politicians and educators all joined together to create the event that would provide youngsters with a moral education and set them on the right path, all through the medium of Geisel’s literature:

We were not the only ones helping the Atchison School celebrate. The Mayor was there. An assemblyman was there. An assemblywoman was there. The Chief of Police was there. A firefighter was there. A local doctor was there. Why? To share their favorite nursery rhymes with the students. To honor Dr. Seuss by sharing their love for literacy with a new generation. To share their commitment to the community, and to the future. Literacy, education, our future, and our very freedom is at stake. Just as we know our schools cannot serve as dumping grounds for our children, just as surely as we know parental involvement is critical to the well being of a child's education, we also know that the community itself must play a part in taking responsibility for the welfare of those who will soon be taking care of it! Just as no one is an island, we are also not a myriad of little islands floating in the sea of ignorance, never touching. We must be one cohesive unit, keeping our individuality, which makes each of us so precious as we learn to grow together, to help one another, to benefit from each other's experience and involvement. When you take a look at all of his books together, this is what Dr. Seuss said, and

With the help of politically powerful mayors, police chiefs, writers and educators, ideological transmission through the works of Geisel is speeding forward still today in the present-day United States. The children are presented with Dr. Seuss stories, taught to praise him as an American cultural hero, a savior of a moral society and a really fun person, all around. The Platonic message is clear: Educate the children with the morals that you see fit, make them understand them, ingest them and memorize them. Give them books to read that transmit the ideology you believe in, leave out the others and wait for the youngsters to grow up to be responsible, highly moral adults, who will continue to represent the protectors’ beliefs and values, as well as continue to take care of the protectors as they become old and decrepit. The responsibility starts with adults in the community with political and personal power over the children and then they begin to instill proper attitudes and behaviors with the help of a funny limerick and a mascot dressed up as The Cat in the Hat.

Oppression and racism are two common themes associated with the text and scholars and educators alike have preserved their interpretations and transmissions in carefully constructed unit plans (Pace & Podesta, 1999). They wanted to drive home the point in the book and to ensure that the students got the moral message that Sneetches, like people, are no better than any others and that superficial (albeit sometimes too powerful) prejudices and exclusionary tactics in our society are
immoral and socially destructive to a liberal, democratic and peaceful society (White, 2007; Pace & Podesta, 1999).

Peter Glassman (2002) believes that Dr. Seuss’s deceptively simple stories carry powerful ideological elements that influence children’s views on racism and cultural sensitivity. He remembers reading Dr. Seuss’s stories and attests that once he had read his books, that he could no longer even fathom the idea of being a bigot or a racist. He read *The Sneetches* and felt transformed by the deeper social message embedded within the pages. Teachers continue to utilize Geisel’s picture books as a means to construct an ideological foundation within children in schools every day in the United States.

A Content Analysis of Educators Transmitting Ideology through Geisel’s texts: Environmentalism and Materialism

Other critics have interpreted *The Sneetches* to be a story about materialism and superficial glamour attached to certain elements of society, which leads to irrational spending and arbitrary social classifications, wholly apart from racial prejudices. Some have written that it stems from his own struggles as a child, being picked on because his dad owned a factory, while others have claimed that it demonstrates the evils of extreme materialism in modern capitalist society (Cobb, 1992; Cott, 1983).

Another book written by Geisel which has been utilized by educators to promote the discussions of materialism and environmentalism is *The Lorax*. The
Lorax was published in 1971, and it tells the tale of the Once-ler. The Once-ler serves as the narrator of the story. The Once-ler takes the tufts attached to the Truffula trees, in order to produce a product called thneeds. He produces them and markets them and grows a successful business. In the meantime, however, the Truffula trees swiftly disappear, as do the animals and other living things that have grown dependent on the trees for their own existence. Despite the warnings of the Lorax, the Once-ler continues to chop down the trees until none is left. In the end, the Once-ler is remorseful for the destruction of the trees and the environment. On the final pages the reader sees a rock engraved with the single word “unless.” The Once-ler did save one single Truffula tree seed, and the fate of the environment rests in the hands of one child, who becomes a chance for a new beginning (Geisel, 1971).

Educators have described The Lorax in no uncertain terms as a representation of the destruction of our own planet and the eventual demise of the human race. They have utilized the book to instruct children on the greedy ways of human beings. Humans have practiced utilitarianism to the point of their own ultimate destruction, which represents the trends of real life and civilization as humans know it now. The book is a tool used to demonstrate to children that extreme capitalism leads to selfish business practices. Teachers can use the story of The Lorax to transmit a united ideological message: That rampant capitalism makes the world and its people unhealthy, and that a more controlled, liberal and even socialist political system will stop businessmen from killing human beings in this world. Children can learn to
judge greedy businessmen negatively by the means they use to make money; i.e., profiting financially whilst polluting the environment and killing off innocent species of animals (Cobb, 1992; Johnson, 2008).

Students learn appropriate responses to social issues by interpreting The Lorax as a social problem that was caused by immoral sentiments. The students in the class capable of completing the lesson are the ones that can verbalize ideological stances in accordance with the adult instructor’s interpretation of the story. Essentially, the ideological message that the students had to get, in order to succeed in this exercise was clear: capitalism equals greed, and greed leads to destruction of the human race.

The protectors of modern society have utilized Geisel’s books in a similar fashion. They may not be as dogmatic and verbose with their selection or exclusion of materials, but they certainly send a clear message to their students and to parents by promotion of certain authors and the exclusion of others. They sing the praises of Dr. Seuss and develop intricate lesson plans, so that they may use his moral messages within the classroom. Some specifically like the story, The Lorax, due its political context. The story creates the situation of characters with greed falling short and characters breeding generosity receiving a greater happiness and all the wonderful things of the modern world. Those that seek monetary gains are villains and end up with serious pangs of guilt and endless remorse, knowing that they are responsible for the destruction of the planet’s environment. Geisel’s work has been touted as tool to send adults and children powerful messages through a simplistic children's book.
Pollution and disregard for the earth’s environment are results of capitalism that leads to punishment from a higher power (MilleChai, 2004).

The “caring child” in The Lorax serves as the hero of the story depicted as the savior of the society, and he has access to the single seed of a plant that will save the planet and restore the world’s physical environment. He is pure and caring, and he is the last hope of a restored, secure society – a future leader of the ideal society for Geisel’s advocates and classroom teachers in the United States. Additionally, educators want their students to see themselves as supporters of a greener environment, so that they feel comforted when their future leaders leave their classrooms; perhaps, by showing them as heroic protectors of the natural environment, they will someday protect it, and they will be morally strong characters with a like-minded political philosophy likened to Geisel’s diminutive character in The Lorax.

It could be that only Geisel knows why he wrote on the topics he chose and what the messages were. Perhaps the writer’s own moral-political philosophy was in strict accordance with his embedded ideological messages in his children’s books. For certain, modern educators have interpreted the texts according to their ideological paradigms and have employed the texts as vehicles for ideological transmission. Teachers decide, for the most part, what students will read in the classroom and how the students will interpret the passages that they read. The liberal supporters of a greener environment would be very excited to teach The Lorax to their students. They
truly believe that they are professing a better way of life for the entire society, and that they bear the responsibility of leading the youth, the future power-holders, into the appropriate moral and political direction.

Plato believed that a society will become more and more ideal, morally speaking, the better the rulers become at directing works of art into the eyes and ears of the public youth. The rulers must choose the literature and art in congruence with the society’s ideological make-up and insert those artistic texts and pieces into the youth’s psyches. They also have the responsibility of excluding pieces of literature that may contradict the ideals of said society. Ultimately the chosen texts seep into the minds of the young and they integrate the information into their own ideological structures. The continuous flow of ideological information seeps into their minds and they begin to act morally and with reason; that is, to think and act within the best interests of the society in which they live (Jowett, 2004).

Some educators also believe that it is their duty to insert Geisel’s texts into the psyches of their students, in order to preserve and promote a government and society which reflects most accurately their own beliefs. The beauty of reason, perhaps for modern teachers and educators, has to do with the concept that their students will eventually recognize the dangers of capitalism and rampant utilitarianism by reading The Lorax.

A Content Analysis of Educators Transmitting Ideology through Geisel’s texts:
Peace Education

In The Butter Battle Book, the Yooks and the Zooks are not quite as wise as the Sneetches. The Yooks eat their bread “butter side up,” while the Zooks eat theirs “butter side down.” Rather than respecting each other’s ways of eating, the Yooks and the Zooks develop more and more powerful weapons to force the other side to change. By the end of the book, both sides have created “a Big-Boy Boomeroo” that can blow the other “clear to Sala-ma-goo.” The final question is: “Who’s going to drop it? Will you or will he?” Still, it offers excellent opportunities for children to weigh the seriousness of different conflicts, examine the need to respect different perspectives, and seek alternatives when trying to resolve conflicts in a nonviolent manner (Geisel, 1984).

Crichton (1984) declared that the author was promoting a thinly disguised social message in The Butter Battle Book and that the story referred to the dangers of the nuclear arms race of the 1980s. Its lack of a happy ending was criticized by some, but according to sources, Theodor Geisel actually admitted that a happy ending to his story would have been in his mind too dishonest (Crichton, 1984; Cobb, 1994). The story of the Yooks and the Zooks, fighting over whether it was right to butter your bread on the top or the bottom of bread, end up divided and hating each other equally. At the end of the story, either group marches past each other, divided by a single wall, taunting each other with their own weapons, threatening the destruction of one another. Both sides build bombs and continue to threaten each other, but because both
groups are equally equipped with similar weaponry, they are forced to accept an ominous stalemate (Geisel, 1984).

Some educators criticized Geisel for writing such a morally-laden story without a happy ending, but the author held fast to his opinion that nuclear war, does not, after all, have a happy ending (MacDonald, 1988). Other groups of educators and adults have praised *The Butter Battle Book*, stating that the story was a representation of people of different backgrounds finding means to get along. It portrayed the concept to the reader that violence and wall-building are not viable solutions to social problems. It suggested that there could only be one appropriate ending to the book and that meant that violence and fortifications are not solutions to any social problem (Cobb, 1992).

In a study performed with students the researcher discovered that the students were mature enough to recognize and verbalize the moral message in *The Butter Battle Book* and apply it to real-world situations. Some of the students stated that it reminded them of the Persian Gulf War, that men can get killed during wartime, and that there is sadness attached to war in the forms of lost loved ones. Some even were able to initiate the idea that war holds no proper moral solution. Many students in this cohort also did not like the fact that the book had no conclusive ending (Cobb, 1992).

Barone (1993) found that only 21 of the 489 (less than one-half percent) students she studied in 4th, 5th, and 6th grades clearly understood the allegory about war after reading *The Butter Battle Book*. One third of them actually were more
concerned about completing the story with a conclusive ending, either that one of the sides dropped the first bomb, that one side accosted the other side or that one side thoroughly defeated the other side. Many voiced to the researcher that they believed that the story was too childish for them and that the story should be read to younger children. Those that actually did comprehend the underlying moral message or interpreted the analogy of war still did not internalize the seriousness of it.

Students in first grade in her study focused on bombs as the main idea of the story and they also chose sides, labeling one side “bad” and the other side “good.” She then concluded that the fourth graders in the study consistently made appropriate connections between The Butter Battle Book and the history of warfare and world peace. Earlier in the article, however, when she reports on the second and third graders, she admits that 40 of the students within this cohort (approximately 11% of those reporting) labeled the story as “funny.” Of the 368 students surveyed among second and third graders, she cites one third grader as being able to verbalize that war is irrational, which, according to Barone and other educators that believe in the sanctity of The Butter Battle Book is the main moral message of the story (Barone, 1993). Besides this discrepancy in her conclusions, she also reported that less than one half percent of the 4th, 5th and 6th graders combined were able to recognize and verbalize the underlying moral message that war has no logical conclusion.

Many more fourth, fifth and sixth graders voiced the idea that the story was too childish for them as did the small percentage who actually got the serious moral
message (Barone, 1993). Needless to say, the results of her study demonstrated that the majority of elementary students were unable to comprehend the more complex ideological messages found by adults in Geisel’s book. The data suggests that teachers interpreting specific messages from texts will influence their students’ interpretations of books.

Peace educators support negative representations of warfare. They cherish the idea that war has no logical purpose and that it serves no moral purpose. They believe that warfare in today’s world only leads to self-destruction and that it only breeds evil. They, therefore, readily expose their classrooms to the moral dilemmas posed in The Butter Battle Book. In my opinion they have seen it as the perfect tool to educate their children on the horrors of warfare and its fundamental irrationality.

Dow and Slaughter (1989) justify the introduction of the topic of peace education into the elementary school, because they found a prevalence of students who voiced anxieties related to war. They cited that 59% of junior and senior high school students in indicated more concern with war than any other topic. After the study, they constructed a carefully guided instruction manual for elementary teachers, so that all elementary teachers using The Butter Battle Book could teach their students a more peaceful morality and anti-war tendencies.

For peace educators the solution is through Dr. Seuss’s The Butter Battle Book and the explicit methodology is attached to peace education. The ideas of peace education include the following actions: Expand concepts, expression of ideas, strong
sense of self, cooperation and conflict resolution in peaceful manner, appreciate similarities and differences among all people, and to extend understanding of war and peace through group discussions and activities (Dow & Slaughter, 1989; Ghosn, 1998).

The ultimate responsibility of adult educators is to teach children to work toward a meaningful future through the use of children’s literature in the curriculum. Children’s literature has always been accepted as a way to cause positive effects on moral development. It is a useful tool to foster respect for oneself, for families, for groups and for our natural world (Dow & Slaughter, 1989). A teacher’s selection of The Butter Battle Book reflects that teacher’s own political philosophical beliefs and ideological agenda as it relates in most cases to peace education. For the pacifist this particular Dr. Seuss story is a perfect tool to accomplish a stronger, more peaceful, and more liberal society.

Although others have criticized the unsettling plot, the lack of any resolution to its violent conflict and its consequent unhappy ending (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1986; VanCleave and Martin, 1986), Dow and Slaughter (1989) decided that The Butter Battle Book could be a powerful tool to influence the opinions of elementary children. They included lessons for teachers to use in their classrooms after reading the Dr. Seuss stories, in order to promote discourse related to socially relevant topics and which challenged elementary students to engage in problem-solving real world dilemmas.
Some of the included lessons deal with understanding different cultures, perceiving dissenting worldviews, conflict resolution, and actually eating bread buttered on both sides. Providing solutions to the dilemma in the story between Seuss’s Zooks and Yooks and guiding children to realize that a non-violent solution to a conflict between groups or individuals is the most crucial responsibility for any teacher engaging the text of *The Butter Battle Book* with classroom learners.

For older children the teacher should lead an open-ended discussion and have them generate possible and appropriate outcomes to the dilemma in *The Butter Battle Book*. Dow and Slaughter (1989) define appropriate outcomes as conclusions that the students generate and then subsequently judged as preferable by the teacher. It is mandatory that the students come up with the idea that a peaceful solution is possible and that people have the capacity and opportunity to act accordingly, so that they can achieve a peaceful solution.

A follow-up discussion to *The Butter Battle Book* lessons is necessary to define the meaning of peace. The authors recommend only books that emphasize the value of peace and peaceful resolutions to conflict. They ask teachers teaching peace and moral ideals within the confines of the elementary classroom to provide the children with alternative courses of action to conflict that are non-violent. They ask the students to make preferable conclusions that reflect the politics of peace education and they select certain works of art to pursue the line of a liberal democracy. They go on to state that undoubtedly the students will suggest peaceful solutions “with
guidance” from the teacher. They end the suggestive peace education unit plan with a suggestion for a party to celebrate peace, in order to properly send the moral message of *The Butter Battle Book* home. For them the use of such books to transmit ideology to children is critical to the success of a society.

In addition to the moral Platonists Dow and Slaughter, Pace and Podesta (1999) similarly tout the powers of Dr. Seuss’s stories to recreate a more peaceful, democratic and liberal society. They again selected *The Butter Battle Book*, among others, to prescribe to fellow educators the importance of Dr. Seuss’s works to propagate the proper moral behaviors in American children. They believe that peace education empowers people, maintains human relationships and teaches how to appropriately deal with conflicts. Peace education extends beyond the classroom and what a youngster learns in the classroom he or she can use to resolve international conflicts, as well. It helps to create a safe world and develops human rights protection from exploitation and war.

Numerous conflict-resolution and peace-education programs have been designed and implemented in schools worldwide. Whether for young children or older youth, they teach students the skills necessary to become nonviolent peacemakers and peacekeepers in an increasingly violent world. One of the most successful and creative approaches to teaching conflict resolution is through the use of children’s literature.

Children’s literature is an accepted medium through which to help children
confront problems and cope in a real and complex world. They believe that research has proved the positive effect of children’s literature to promote appropriate moral development. Using the works of the most prolific children’s literature authors has allowed them to promote profound moral themes and expose their students to morally and educationally valuable materials. They believe that Geisel’s book is the ideal medium for transmission of ideology related to peace education (Pace & Podesta, 1999).

Other practitioners have utilized Geisel’s books like *Horton Hears a Who* and *Yertle the Turtle* to promote the tenets of peace education as it relates to social justice and conflict resolution. Activities included self-created picture books, role plays and literature circles whereby students have the affordance to discuss the reasons people develop prejudices, why warfare exists, identifying problems in their own lives and generating peaceful solutions to conflicts. The students then discuss what they can do to see other sides of a story when they are having conflicts.

Some educators have felt that it is their duty to develop civic responsibility in their children and that this will to a more peaceful and democratic society:

Each day leaders from emerging democracies come to the United States with a relatively surprising question. They ask for guidance on teaching democratic and philanthropic principles to their children, and about systems for passing on the tradition of private citizens working for the common good. They come to the United States because they recognize its civil society sector is fundamental to building and sustaining a secure democracy, supporting
government, and making our heterogeneous society function. There has never been a formal curriculum for teaching the facts or inculcating the values of the civil society sector. We have relied in the past on faith institutions, families, friends and neighborhoods to teach children the value and significance of service and giving. We have assumed that our children know their heritage as citizens who do not need to be "empowered" by an outside agency, but who are born empowered as their inherent right of citizenship. It is sadly ironic that today, as emerging foreign democracies seek our assistance in establishing philanthropic traditions of their own, the traditional forces for teaching this ethic to children are eroding (Larkin, 2007).

Teachers can implement exercises that push students to see perspectives other than their own. Students learn that they must first understand the views of other persons involved before they can resolve any conflict. Using Geisel’s books may be enough to start them on the right path to skills and values that eventually will lead to a more peaceful world (Pace and Podesta, 1999; Schmidt and Friedman 1991; White, 2006; Larkin, 2007; Ghosn, 1998).

A Content Analysis of Educators Transmitting Ideology through Geisel’s texts:

Working for Social Change

In order to move students towards what some scholars call a critical literacy, teachers have to spend time training the students to think for themselves and to question classroom and community doctrines. It takes time to allow students to reflect on a concept, to formulate an opinion and to create an argument to support that opinion. These are skills, though, that are crucial to the development of critical
thinking and human discourse; that which allows our society to flourish and for individuals of variegated backgrounds to coexist under one set of governing laws.

Educators are charged with the task of developing student’s personal opinions, to connect learning to personal experience and prior knowledge and to foster the awareness of alternatives to hard and fast rules, to not accept all authoritative rules with blind faith. Now, granted, these concepts can also be unnerving for school officials and classroom managers. Alongside these concepts the teacher must develop mutual respectfulness and civilized actions. Some have referred to the education of morality and human rights consciousness as the theories of cultural studies and critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2000).

Students learn to identify moral issues and attempt to reconcile the actions of individuals with the felt consequences of the individual’s social network. The teachers commit to the provision of viable strategies for their students to apply in real-life situations, in which they have opportunities to practice their responses while receiving support from teachers to create new solutions and to imagine new possibilities, in order to make their world safer and more livable. If teachers do not support alternative viewpoints and do not provide opportunities to think outside the box, then students lose insight. The loss of alternative viewpoints in classrooms seriously narrows the sense of the possible and serves the conservative forces in society (Roth, 1989).

Educators and scholars have gone to great lengths to demonstrate the
necessity of his works and moral messages in the grade school curricula of U.S. school systems, in order to preserve the desired moral ideals within society. Some have written entire units that describe the use of several Dr. Seuss stories to promote moral education. The educators have dedicated their time and energy to promoting one version of morality, because they believe that the children will benefit from those particular messages within Dr. Seuss books, and they will become more moral beings by learning and applying those same moral messages to situations in their own lives.

Geisel’s books have been touted as useful tools in every classroom to expose the children to the possibilities of social change, anti-conservatism and resistance to authority. Teachers can increase the children’s interest in Geisel’s texts by providing them opportunities to reflect upon the stories, the meanings behind them and to express their opinions on how the stories connect to their own lives (Roth, 1989).

Through these methods, the students can learn of the opportunity for emancipation. The students can emancipate themselves from the oppressive hand of authority by developing their imagination. This in turn may develop their abilities to create new endings to their own life stories, and to fight oppression as adults. Refuting oppressive ideologies that reinforce the dominant narrative in the established society and helping children to find an alternative voice are tough challenges. His works urge us to turn away from passive conformity and encourage active engagement and a sense of community. His texts preserve in children a private imaginary space to deal with the powerful adult world that does not allow for fantasy.
or imagination (Roth, 1989). His stories begin the pedagogy of questioning (Freire, 1989). Geisel’s books are useful media to begin to question ideologies deeply rooted in American culture and they speak to the urgency for the pedagogy of questioning. Transformation of the minds of children and the development of a critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2002) are crucial elements of the transmission of ideology through children’s literature.

Roth (1989) continues to suggest that, in addition to the specific political questions raised while reading Dr. Seuss, perhaps other ideologies are being challenged here, as well. Perhaps challenging the ideas that adults always know best and that leaders always make reasonable judgments for the good of society are good places to start. Furthermore, the enhancement of the pedagogy of questioning possibly leads to better informed youth and future citizen, who can deconstruct the dominant narrative structures. Classrooms are important environments in which to engage in such discussions.

Teachers need to foster the construction of collective responses built on the views of the individuals that comprise the classrooms. By doing so, educators can help children gain a connection to one another. The ultimate goal is to develop their sense of community and that the purpose of a productive community is to serve the needs of all their members and to promote social change (Roth, 1989). Other scholars have noted that Dr. Seuss literature provides youth with opportunities to explore differences among classmates and to learn how to promote acceptance among their
peers. Adolescents, in particular, develop a heightened awareness of their own differences between them and their classroom peers. They seek acceptance from their friends beginning in middle school and the parents hold less influence over them. As a result they start to examine their own values and beliefs as compared to their colleagues in the room. Teachers should use instructional time to reflect upon these changes in values and belief systems and must have a willingness to engage in conversations about alterations in their perspectives of whom or what is important.

Geisel’s works provide the teachers and students with the ability to address meaningful and personal topics while remaining in the confines of the literary world through his use of symbolism and the creation of his imaginary characters. The format he brings allows readers to examine the hidden agenda within many social contexts. The standards of behavior and values can be deepened by reading his books (Brown & Varady, 1997). Educators pursue a powerful agenda that transmits ideology through the books they choose to have their young minds read.

Cobb (1992) believes that Geisel’s books hold many messages beneath the façade of entertaining children’s books. Their power lies in the notion that young children gravitate to the books because of the humorous pictures and magnetic rhyming patterns within the texts, while unconsciously and simultaneously exposing themselves to the hidden social and political commentaries that are transmitted on an adult level. The works of Geisel gave a dignity and interest to the field of children’s literature that it lacked prior to their entry into the field. The books present us with
fun and imagination while simultaneously teaching us ideological values. The books have to be cherished as priceless media that can transmit such values.

She applied Geisel’s books in an attempt to ascertain children’s abilities to comprehend the moral messages in his literary works, including *The Sneetches*, *The Lorax* and *The Butter Battle Book*. She believed that adults comprehend the deeper, more serious social and moral concepts in his books, whereas children enjoy the author’s interesting pictures and captivating rhyming patterns. In her study, she worked to reveal the ideological capital within the three aforementioned stories through application of a teaching methodology known as reader-response theory.

Investigating more closely, we can assume that ideological transmission exists within the foundation of pedagogy. At the end of each lesson presented to the students, the researcher requested that they fill out a matching exercise, in order to properly match the moral-political message to the given story that they had read earlier in the unit. The first days of the unit lesson the students generated their own interpretations of the stories, but, in the end, they were required to think inside the walls of a much smaller ideological box.

They had to match the right story with the right moral-political message. They had no freedom of response and no opportunity to answer freely to open-ended questions. In the end, they had to match the right story with the right moral agenda, in order to receive credit. For example, on the matching worksheet, *The Sneetches* story had to be matched with racial prejudice, *The Lorax* with the responses ecology and
conservation and The Butter Battle Book had to be paired with nuclear war (Cobb, 1992).

What interests me is that she, like many other educators that use Geisel’s books in studies and in daily lessons, does not question the potential ideological transmissions that the books propagate. In my opinion they use them to transmit political philosophies and an ideology congruous with their beliefs. The lessons in the Seuss stories are as ideal to her as they are to the other educators that believe in the power of the combination of Seussian morality and creativity. This method of teaching speaks volumes to one’s beliefs regarding pedagogy. The teacher decides that a student’s ability to comprehend values considered good and bad shall be determined by whether they agree or disagree with the teacher’s own idea of what values are good and bad. The students read the works the teacher chooses and they learn to interpret the ideological messages the teacher transmits to them within the confines of that particular reading lesson, be it racism and prejudice, materialism and environmentalism, or warfare and peace education.

Field Data Report

The survey consisted of 19 White elementary teachers (N=19) instructing in a suburban elementary school that serves grades K-5. The school is located thirty miles outside of the city of Columbus, Ohio. The survey asked the elementary teachers to opine about the uses of Theodor Geisel’s texts in their classroom. The surveys asked them to rate how strongly they would agree or disagree to utilize three books by
Geisel to discuss socially relevant topics like racism, heterosexism, environmentalism, and peace education.

The Butter Battle Book by Dr. Seuss is a story about two individuals, who cannot agree on which side one should butter a slice of bread. Because they cannot get along, they decide to build ever more sophisticated weapons to bombard each other with over a dividing wall. The Sneetches by Dr. Seuss tells the story of two groups of physically identical creatures differentiated only by a star on one of the group’s bellies (the other group of Sneetches are starless). The star signifies for them a class marker and higher social status. The desire to wear a starred belly leads to senseless behavior and ultimately to the destruction of their culture’s economy. The Lorax is a story about a person, who comes back to reflect on all of resources that he has used up and destroyed, and he realizes that his desire for wealth has left the environment depleted and dead.

Sixteen of the nineteen survey participants agreed that they would utilize The Sneetches and The Butter Battle Book to generate classroom discourse on the history of African Americans in the United States and the immoral nature of racism. Only four of the nineteen respondents agreed that they would use The Butter Battle Book or The Sneetches to teach about homosexuality, the experiences of gays and lesbians in the United States and the immoral nature of heterosexism. All of the respondents, who participated in the survey (nineteen of nineteen) agreed that they would use The Lorax to teach about environmentalism and recycling.
Only two of the nine respondents who considered themselves politically liberal would teach either of the books to discuss heterosexism and the history of the experiences of persons of different sexual orientations in the United States, while seven of those nine teachers that considered themselves liberal would teach about African Americans and racism using one of the books. Only two of the eight respondents, who considered themselves politically in the middle, would teach or discuss heterosexism in their classrooms, while all eight of those respondents in the middle of the political spectrum would willingly incorporate Dr. Seuss’s literature into their classrooms, in order to discuss racism and the history of the African American experience in the United States.

Individual Analysis of the Survey Data Obtained

1) The first teacher agreed that she would use *The Sneetches* to teach her elementary students about racism and the history of African Americans in the United States. She disagreed that she would use it to teach about heterosexism and the history of gays and lesbians in the United States. She agreed that *The Butter Battle Book* would be appropriate to teach to elementary children about war and peace education. She agreed that *The Lorax* would be a useful tool to teach the children about environmentalism and recycling. Her self-proclaimed political leaning was “in the middle.” She did not belong to a political party.

2) The second teacher agreed that she would use *The Sneetches* to teach her elementary students about racism and the history of African Americans. She
disagreed that she would use it to teach about heterosexism and the history of gays and lesbians in the United States. She agreed that she would use The Butter Battle Book to teach children about racism but strongly disagreed with the idea of using the same book to teach them about heterosexism. She strongly agreed with the idea that The Lorax could be used to teach about environmentalism and recycling. She identifies herself as a liberal and does not follow a party.

3) The third teacher agreed that she would use The Sneetches to teach about racism and heterosexism. The third teacher was neutral about the idea of using The Butter Battle Book for any social issues except for teaching non-violence and peace education. He strongly agreed with the idea of using The Lorax to teach about environmentalism.

The teacher considers himself politically in the middle between liberal and conservative and does not follow a political party.

4) The fourth teacher would not use The Butter Battle Book or The Sneetches to teach about heterosexism and the plight of gays and lesbians but she would use them to teach about racism and the plight of African Americans in the United States. She considers herself politically in the middle and does not follow a candidate based on their political party but on their individual “track record.” She would use The Lorax only as a tool to teach students and/or children about recycling, the environment and/or how businesses can better utilize and replenish our resources.
5) The fifth teacher would use *The Butter Battle Book* to teach about racism and African American experiences but would not use it to teach about heterosexism and the gay/lesbian experience in the United States. This teacher would not use *The Sneetches* to teach about any of the topics. She would use *The Lorax* to teach about environmentalism. She considers herself in the middle of the political spectrum and does not belong to a political party.

6) The sixth teacher would not use *The Butter Battle Book* or *The Sneetches* to teach about racism or heterosexism. She would use *The Lorax* to teach about environmentalism. She considers herself to be liberal and not part of a particular political party (independent).

7) The seventh would use *The Butter Battle Book* and *The Sneetches* to discuss racism and the African American experience, violence, heterosexism and the gay/lesbian experience in the United States. She would use *The Lorax* to teach about environmentalism. This teacher professes to be mostly liberal on the political spectrum and is a registered Democrat.

8) The eighth teacher would use *The Butter Battle Book* to teach about non-violence and peace education but would not use it to teach about racism or heterosexism. She would not use *The Sneetches* to teach about racism or heterosexism. The teacher considers herself liberal and does not follow a political party.
9) The ninth teacher would not use The Butter Battle Book to teach about racism or heterosexism, but she would use it to teach about violence in our society. She would use The Sneetches to teach about both racism and heterosexism. She is liberal and does not follow a political party.

10) The tenth teacher strongly disagrees that she would use any Dr. Seuss books to teach about heterosexism or homosexuality, but she agrees that you could use The Butter Battle Book or The Sneetches to teach about racism and African Americans. She would use The Lorax to teach about environmentalism. She claims to be politically in the middle and does not follow a political party.

11) The eleventh teacher would use The Butter Battle Book to teach about racism, African Americans, and to teach about violence. She would not use The Butter Battle Book or The Sneetches to teach her children about heterosexism and gays and lesbians. She would use The Lorax to teach about environmentalism. She claims to be politically in the middle leaning towards liberal, and she does not belong to a specific political party.

12) The twelfth teacher would use The Butter Battle Book to teach about racism and African Americans but not about heterosexism or the plight of gays and lesbians. She would not use The Sneetches for any topics. She would use The Lorax to teach environmentalism. She considers herself politically in the middle, and she does not follow a political party.
13) The thirteenth teacher strongly disagrees with using any of the books to teach about heterosexism. He agrees with using *The Sneetches* to teach about the history of African Americans and racism. He would use *The Lorax* to teach environmentalism. He considers himself to be politically conservative and he belongs to the Republican Party.

14) The fourteenth teacher strongly agrees that she would use both *The Butter Battle Book* and *The Sneetches* to teach her elementary students about racism and African American history, but she strongly disagrees with the idea of using these books to teach about heterosexism and the history of gays and lesbians. She added that a K-5 elementary classroom is not appropriate to teach them about homosexuality because they are not mature enough to discuss such a topic. She feels that all of the Dr. Seuss books mentioned in the survey should be used for teaching morality through universal themes like “being an individual, doing right for the greater good, and racism.” She considers herself politically to be in the middle and votes independently.

15) The fifteenth teacher would not use *The Butter Battle Book* to teach about racism or heterosexism, but she would use it to teach students about “differing points of view concerning politics and social issues.” She would use *The Sneetches* to teach about African Americans, racism, heterosexism, gays and lesbians. She believes that it would be appropriate to discuss both racism and heterosexism in a K-5 classroom. She considers herself to be politically between middle to liberal, and she does not belong to any political party.
16) The sixteenth teacher strongly disagreed with teaching heterosexism and homosexuality in the classroom using any texts. She agreed that she would be comfortable teaching the children about racism and the history of African Americans in the United States. She would also use The Butter Battle Book to deal with classroom disputes. She agreed that she would use The Lorax to teach about environmentalism and U.S. economics. She considers herself a liberal and belongs to the Democratic Party.

17) The seventeenth teacher strongly disagreed with teaching her students the immoral nature of heterosexism or the plight of gays and lesbians in the United States. She was neutral to the idea of teaching her students about the immoral nature of racism using The Butter Battle Book and The Sneetches. She agreed that she would use The Lorax to teach about environmentalism and recycling. She considers herself a liberal and belongs to the Democratic Party.

18) The eighteenth teacher would use The Butter Battle Book to teach about racism and African American experiences but would not use them to teach about heterosexism or experiences of gays and lesbians. She claimed to use The Lorax every Earth Day during the school year to teach her children about environmentalism and recycling. She considers herself a liberal and belongs to the Democratic Party.

19) The nineteenth teacher agreed that she would use The Butter Battle Book and The Sneetches to discuss racism in her classroom. She strongly disagreed with the idea of using either of those books to discuss heterosexism in her classroom. She agreed that
she would use The Lorax to discuss environmentalism and recycling with her elementary students. She considers herself politically conservative and belongs to the Republican Party.
Table 1.
Political Spectrum Analysis: N=19

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<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
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<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16/19 (84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4/19 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmentalism</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19/19 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considered themselves liberal: 9
- 7 would teach about African Americans and racism
- 2 would teach about gays and lesbians and heterosexism

Considered themselves in the middle: 8
- 8 would teach about African Americans and racism
- 2 would teach about gays and lesbians and heterosexism

Considered themselves conservative: 2
- 1 would teach about African Americans and racism
- 0 would teach about gays and lesbians and heterosexism
Table 2.
Political Party Analysis: N=19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Democratic</th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16/19 (84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4/19 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmentalism</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19/19 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considered themselves Independent: 13

- 10 would teach about African Americans and racism
- 3 would teach about gays and lesbians and heterosexism

Considered themselves Democratic: 4

- 4 would teach about African Americans and racism
- 1 would teach about gays and lesbians and heterosexism

Considered themselves Republican: 2

- 2 would teach about African Americans and racism
- 0 would teach about gays and lesbians and heterosexism.
Background of the School Setting

The school setting in which field data was collected was located thirty miles outside of Columbus, Ohio in a suburban school district. The neighboring city has a population of thirty thousand. The surrounding school districts’ populations including the school district in which the teachers and Mrs. S taught have been an amalgam of farmers, factory workers and small business owners. The majority of the current students’ parents residing in the community are white, middle class blue-collar workers. The parents of the community have generally come from farming families that have sold properties in the past twenty years and have moved into blue-collar positions. The racial demographics of the community are dispersed as follows: 94.6% white, 1.4% African American, and 1.7% Hispanic and .8% Asian-American. 23.9% of the students’ families are classified as economically disadvantaged according the state’s socioeconomic standards.

Mrs. S. and the School Setting

More qualitative data was collected through interviews and classroom observations working with one teacher referred to as Mrs. S. in the study. I chose to work more closely with and interview Mrs. S. because we had developed a good rapport and I felt comfortable observing her classes and asking her frank questions about racism, heterosexism and other social issues.

Mrs. S. works at an elementary school that serves children from kindergarten through the fifth grade. The majority of her students come from white, middle class
backgrounds. Average size classroom size at the school was 19 students. Mrs. S. has nine years of elementary teaching experience. The school district is a quickly growing district that has recently added an additional elementary school and an additional middle school in the past four years. Mrs. S’s classroom was situated inside of the elementary school building to the right and back of the L-shaped school building. Mrs. S. has an Apple computer at her teacher’s desk, and there are no other computers or PC stations in the classroom. The classroom shows several projects that were created by the classroom students. Mrs. S teaches second grade. She also reported that her classes are conducted with her primarily sitting or standing in the front of the room, but that she periodically gives instructions and circulates to individuals during group and individual work.

Description of Mrs. S.’s Teaching Philosophy

Mrs. S believes that every child in her classroom is unique and special. She knows that different learning styles are inherent in every student. She employs different teaching strategies in her classroom, so that different types of children will benefit from various teaching strategies. One of her primary responsibilities is to ascertain each child’s level of learning ability and learning style, so that she can transmit information to each student in the best way for that particular child. She believes that all children have a right to an education, and that means not only attending school, but having a teacher that believes in them. She works diligently to teach them most effectively, and she communicates regularly with the children’s
parents. She believes that communication with the parents is the most important part of her role as a child’s teacher. Communication between the parents and herself leads to a more successful student. She further adheres to the philosophy that all children deserve access to an educational environment that is safe, fun, and motivating. Making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process, and mistakes should never be perceived as negative events. Mistakes can be manipulated to provide greater learning experiences for students. In general, a safe and positive learning environment is crucial to the success of children at the elementary level.

Description of the Teacher’s Classroom Procedures

Mrs. S. teaches language arts/reading in the morning. The students start off with a whole group lesson, which includes vocabulary, phonics, and a targeted reading strategy. These lessons include teacher directed lessons, group activities or games to reinforce reading skills. She also spends time reading stories to the class, and students are obligated to sit quietly and to listen to her read the story aloud to them. During two of the observed literacy/reading times, Mrs. S. selected students in the class to read pages from the book as the rest of the class listened. She utilized this strategy to monitor the reading skills of all of her students while simultaneously allowing the class the opportunity for a guided reading time.

After several of the whole-class reading events, Mrs. S. conducted ensuing literary discussions about the books that they read together. She then divided her students into centers and guided reading groups. Centers consist of work that
children can complete independently. The purpose of the centers is to reinforce skills being taught in the class. During guided reading groups, she meets with groups of children who are grouped by reading levels. She reinforces skills taught to the whole class, but each group reads a book that corresponds to its reading level. This is a more focused and intense reading time, as she is able to then listen to children read independently. It is during this time that she is able to take note of what each child needs to work on to improve her reading skills and to also provide individual instruction based upon this.

After reading groups, they come back together as a class and review the skills taught that day. She then moves on to a whole group writing lesson. The writing program works similar to reading. They begin by focusing on a strategy in whole group. They spend two to three days modeling and writing a whole class story. Once this is completed the students move into a writer’s workshop where each child writes his/her own story using the strategy taught. During this process she conferences with each child, which allows her to focus in and instruct each student independently based upon where he or she is in their writing ability.

They then go to recess and lunch. When they return from lunch they usually have teacher read-a-loud time. She believes strongly that it is important for children to be read to and to hear a variety of types of books. She likes to read the first chapter book in a series. Chapter books are categorized by reading levels. Often after completing a chapter book, children will look for other chapter books within a series.
After read-a-loud the children do Saxon Math, which is a scripted lesson. They then have a second recess and a special. They finish the afternoon with a spelling lesson and a theme lesson. Theme lessons are based upon the social studies and science standards for the class. A lot of times the social studies and science themes are integrated into the reading activities performed during the language/arts section of the school day.

During most of the class time, the teacher circulated among the students offering assistance when specifically asked by the students. The teacher would sometimes sit down with the student and explain how to continue the steps of task completion depending on the subject. Her reported primary goal is to facilitate their ability to independently initiate, sustain and complete a task. She also claims to circulate intermittently and randomly, looking at students’ progress and probing them, essentially soliciting feedback from them on how they felt about the current steps of completion (e.g. were they stuck on a particular step, were they confused or frustrated, etc.).

Mrs. S. stated that she did not use her computer to present any materials to her class. She relied heavily on the dry erase boards on her walls and once in a while she used an overhead projector and wrote notes on it with a dry erase marker. When she uses the overhead and dry erase markers, she expects students to contribute their answers within the boundaries of a whole-class discussion format. Students take notes at their desks and respond orally to questions asked by Mrs. S. during literature
discussions. Mrs. S. conducts whole-class lectures approximately a fourth of the classroom time. The remainder of the time she coordinates and organizes the students into pairs and works with them individually, which allows her to circulate and assist students as needed.

While helping students individually, she would also use the time to reflect on questions and confusions as individual work takes place. She likes to then come back to the whole-class format and present the questions to the class that she has gathered from individual interactions. She believes this type of reflection and clarification helps the children understand the tasks and concepts more thoroughly, and that it also provides additional explanation to students, who may be reticent (or less aware of the need) to raise hands and ask for help. She then returns to individual work and circulation around the classroom to obtain feedback and to monitor student learning as they work.

Constructivist or student-centered learning focuses on a question posed to the students followed by collaborative work in small groups. The students work in groups to discover answers to the question or solutions to the proposed problem. The students play an active role performing the processes to discover solutions and to develop new insights (Yager, 1991). Mrs. S. reports that she has moved toward a less traditional classroom format and that she allows student-centered conversations to take place, in order to bolster the students’ motivation to work together and to ask each other questions to resolve the academic problems in front of them. She believes
that this leads to more independent thinking and more initiative within her students. Scholars have found that the context and the expectations of that context can retard or promote linguistic production. The allowance of more informal discourses during pair work can result in what seems to be a more authentic learning environment for children. It can contribute to more linguistic output and more social learning. These factors in turn allow them to obtain positioning with more power and capital during literature discussions and provide them with opportunities to construct their own voices during classroom discourse (Au, 1980). Although Au focused on minority learners (in particular, Hawaiian children), the educational concept of authentic discourse that empowers children with more leverage in the classroom community benefits all young learners, regardless of cultural capital owned by them. In this study it seemed to benefit the children in Mrs. S.’s classroom.

Mrs. S. and Her Approach to Children’s Books in Her Classroom

Mrs. S.’s classroom uses a district mandated reading program entitled Literacy by Design. The program consists of a number of books ordered by reading level. As the children demonstrate comprehension at a particular reading level, they transition to a higher reading level, which consequently opens up opportunities to read more cognitively challenging books. The primary method implemented for the subject of reading is instructional reading. The students also have access to a classroom library of picture books and chapter books that are arranged by levels, so that the children
can pick appropriate books (according to their reading level) for their independent reading times.

Mrs. S. stated that it is important for students to learn to read fluently and to obtain comprehension through their reading. Reading comprehension is the most important skill that she can teach her students. In order to learn other subjects and be competent and confident in their lives, she believes that they must not only read, but they also have to understand what they read. Higher-level thinking is critical, as well. They should be able to read and make connections whether it is text-to-text, text-to-self or text-to-world. When children are reading they should be able to realize the author’s purpose for writing the book. It is important that children learn to read to learn, to obtain new information, as well as for entertainment.

“Along with reading, it is important to teach writing skills along with spelling. Children should not only be able to read high frequency words, but spell and write them as well. They will use these words daily in both their reading and writing. Proper sentence writing needs to be mastered. This includes capitalization, punctuation, and structure. Once this is mastered, I move on to story writing. Children should learn to write stories that have a clear beginning, middle and end that contain all the important parts of a story. They need to learn to include characters, setting, plot, problem and solution in their story. It is important to teach the proper writing process and that they understand that every established author goes through
this process. Writing a good story takes time. They also need to learn to take pride in
their writing and to share with others their accomplishments.”

Mrs. S. views literature and the consumption of books by her students more as
a tool for developing the cognitive components, such as phoneme awareness,
linguistic meta-awareness, and pronunciation, so that they can learn to read more
skillfully. She did not initially approach reading as a literacy event with cultural,
moral-political, or ideological implications. She has not considered seriously the
implications of reading books and the ideological messages that are potentially
transmitted to her students in the classroom, but she believes that children should
“read to read”; that is, that reading in her opinion is mostly a skill that leads to
absorption of information. Children who become skilled readers develop into
cognitively mature adult readers. Her students participate regularly and ask lexical
questions related to the book, but also questions about the plot. The information and
conversation generally tends to be focused on what happened first and what happened
next, which follows her beliefs in what is important to teach and learn during literacy
events in her classroom. She does, however, realize on a certain level that books can
transmit ideology secondarily. She still feels, however, that reading time in school is
limited during the school day. For this reason, time and energy should be spent
working on the mechanics of reading, not focusing on the ideological transmissions
or cultural capital embedded within the bindings of the text.
Mrs. S. felt that *The Sneetches* would be a highly effective tool for her second graders to read and discuss racism and the history of African Americans’ experiences in the United States. She strongly disagreed with the idea of using *The Sneetches* to discuss heterosexism and homosexuality in her classroom. She felt that *The Butter Battle Book* would be a very useful text to generate classroom discourse around the topics of tolerance, the celebration of individual liberties and rights in the face of nationalistic tendencies (specific to the rights of ethnic groups) and acceptance of differences in others. She admits to already using *The Lorax* annually to discuss environmentalism and recycling with her elementary students.

Mrs. S. stocks her classroom’s library with books she has bought. The books she selects are related to the chapter books and the reading standards set for her class’s grade level standards. The majority of the books that her students read are from inside of her classroom. Reading comprehension is the primary focus of book reading in her classroom. The students and Mrs. S. focus on lexical questions more so than the moral lessons, ideological messages or political interpretations of the books.

Mrs. S. chooses books for her students based on each student’s reading level. She keeps her classroom’s library labeled and leveled. Students are told what labeled tubs are appropriate for them and they choose from the designated tubs. She chooses their reading group books for them. She also sends home catalogues from book companies once a month, so that her students’ families have the opportunity to buy books from catalogues similar to the books they read in her class.
She believes that guiding her students to choose from a small group of books within a reading level category enables them to become better readers. She is of the opinion that her students will learn to read more skillfully and learn to enjoy reading if they select books that will challenge them but not overwhelm them cognitively. Her students are told to choose what she called “good fit” books. According to Mrs. S., “good fit” books are books that are a good fit for a particular student. This is based primarily on a student’s cognitive reading skills. If the child can read most of the words on the first page without a struggle, then the book is determined to be a good fit for the child. In addition, she encourages the student to determine if the book’s first page is interesting to her or him. If the student finds the book challenging, interesting, and not too hard to understand, then the student should begin reading it.

Mrs. S. feels that children’s books have a variety of academic purposes in school. She believes that children’s books build reading skills, foster critical thinking, provide knowledge to the child, challenge the child’s imagination and promote interest in lifelong reading as a pleasurable activity. Personally she does not feel that any books had a particular or definite impact on the type of person she has become. Her moral structure and ideological formation as an adult was shaped most strongly by her teachers in school and her parents at home. She does not ascribe much importance to the idea that books can influence the ideological and moral-political structures of the children in her classroom. She ultimately believes that books are
primarily tools to teach mechanical reading skills and that children’s books do not serve the teacher as ideological transmitters.

Summary and Interpretation of the Findings

Sixteen of the nineteen respondents regardless of where they fall on the political spectrum would willingly use Geisel’s books to teach and discuss racism and the history of African Americans in the United States, while only four of the nineteen respondents would consider using them to teach and discuss heterosexism and the history of gays and lesbians in the United States. One of the two conservative teachers would teach about racism, while neither would teach about heterosexism. Only one of the four respondents belonging to the Democratic Party would teach either of the books The Sneetches or The Butter Battle Book to discuss heterosexism and the history of the experiences of persons of different sexual orientations in the United States, while all four of those Democratic teachers would teach their students about African Americans and racism using at least one of the books. Only three of the thirteen respondents, who considered themselves independent of any political party, would teach or discuss heterosexism in their classrooms, while ten of those respondents would willingly incorporate Geisel’s literature into their classrooms, in order to discuss racism and the history of the African American experience in the United States. Neither of the two Republican teachers would consider discussing heterosexism, but they would both willingly discuss racism with their elementary students.
It seems that the teachers surveyed from this elementary school are in favor of the use of Geisel’s books in the classrooms. The use of the books by the teachers would differ, however, according to the teacher’s individual stances on the discussion of heterosexism and racism in the elementary classroom. It did not seem to matter whether or not the teachers considered themselves more liberal or more in the middle on the political spectrum. It seemed to matter less that they belonged to a political party. Why is it that an overwhelming majority of the teachers surveyed (84%) would willingly use Geisel’s books to discuss racism and the African American experience while only 21% of the teachers would be willing to introduce the topic of heterosexism and experiences of gays and lesbians?

In my opinion these teachers have had more exposure to the history of African Americans in our country and have grown up learning more about the history. The history and cultural identity of African Americans in this country have also become nationally sanctioned through holidays and positive events like Black History Month, which public schools recognize across the country. Perhaps because the agenda has reached into the dominant culture and the collective psyche of the American people of all races, it has become a more readily acceptable and comfortable theme for these teachers to incorporate and discuss with their students. Heterosexism and the experiences of gays and lesbians, on the other hand, have not been recognized nationally with official holidays or school events that are celebrated by public schools during the year. Neither the teachers nor the students receive the same quality or
quantity of exposure to the experiences of their history or cultural identity. It is most likely less accepted by their community and personally uncomfortable for the teachers in this study to discuss topics related to heterosexism and the experiences of gays and lesbians.

I believe that most teachers and parents align themselves with the community in which they function, which leads them to adopt specific ideological and cultural lenses akin to that particular community (Gee, 2004; Engstrom; 2001). Teaching literature is a powerful literacy event that can transmit ideology and transform minds (Applebee, 1996). I believe that if teachers of this community continue to make decisions to exclude certain texts and to devalue certain social topics for discussion, marginalized groups will continue to remain on the periphery (Applebee, 1996; Morrison, 1992).

Furthermore, in this community, heterosexism and those of different sexual orientation will continue to be viewed as persons engaging in unacceptable behavior; that is, behavior not common to the community’s dominant discourse. The children will not have an opportunity to read about characters of different sexual orientation nor discuss their experiences. Critical pedagogy would assert that such exclusions from the conversation will continue the cycle of the dominant traditions that devalue those falling outside of the community’s mainstream ideology (Freire & Faundez, 1989; Freire, 1989).

Additionally, elementary teachers from this school tend to rely on chapter
books to teach their students reading skills, not revelations related to cultural identity, racism, heterosexism or other topics within the social-political arena. Mrs. S., for example, uses chapter books and some books that she selects for her class, but she does not feel that reading is an ideologically laden literacy event, or that text contains any potential for ideological transmission. But the elementary teachers and Mrs. S. simultaneously hold a very strong opinion about what books they would choose to read with their children in the classroom, and what topics that they would allow them to address during a literature circle, especially when it comes to topics that they believe to be either inappropriate, too controversial or too discomfiting. The majority of the respondents, including Mrs. S., would willingly and comfortably read Geisel’s books with their students to discuss the complex topics of racism and the plight of African Americans. Mrs. S.’s children are in the second grade. The other K-5 teachers in the school answering the survey believed that their children could comprehend and discuss intellectually the complex topics of tolerance, racism and ethnicity. But they do not feel that their elementary children are mature enough to handle topics related to heterosexism. The majority of the respondents also feel that their school is not the place to discuss the topic.

When I challenged Mrs. S. to consider teaching a children’s book that simply portrayed a gay or lesbian couple raising a child, she strongly resisted this idea, as she believed that such a controversial image would offend some parents. In her mind, to expose her students to such an image would be not worthwhile. Images and
discussions surrounding such a topic that promotes same-sex family units would be offensive to the ideological beliefs of most parents of the children in her classroom. In this line of reasoning, then, Mrs. S. does indeed believe that children’s books hold the potential to transmit ideological messages to her children. I discussed the phenomenon with Mrs. S., but she initially disagreed with my argument. She intimated to me that the topics of heterosexism and the history of gays and lesbians were qualitatively different than the topics of racism and the history of African Americans in the United States.

Referring to the scenario I proposed to her (above), Mrs. S. stated that allowing such a book to enter her classroom discourse would merely be controversial because parents are uncomfortable with the subject, regardless of how they truly felt about same-sex families. I tried to help her make a connection between discomfort, exclusion of books, and ideological transmission. During the first several interviews she did not concede my argument. In my opinion, the decision for teachers to take a stand against texts that portray such social messages is a political and ideological stand against a marginalized group such as gays and lesbians. The exclusion of topics constitutes an act of ideological transmission (or perhaps an obstruction to certain types of ideological transmission). Ultimately Mrs. S. acceded to my argument, but it took several concerted efforts and long discussions with her during the qualitative interviews. Mrs. S. finally agreed to an extent that texts could, indeed, transmit ideological beliefs and that her selection and exclusion of books in her classroom.
could potentially mold the ideological values of her own classroom students.

Mrs. S., when challenged with questions related to politics and social justice, voiced discomfort with the idea of classroom discourse related to heterosexism. She verbalized to me that she would be much more comfortable guiding a discussion that demonstrates ideal behaviors in our society and in interpersonal relationships that can prevent conflict. Additionally, if the topic of racism would by chance arise during discussions, then she would surely address it. She admitted, though, that she would even be reticent to elicit conversations with the students centering on racism or the African American experience, even though she did state beforehand that she would willingly use *The Sneetches* or *The Butter Battle Book* to generate classroom discourse on the topic. In all reality the discourse in Mrs. S.’s classroom would essentially follow two guiding principles: Avoid discussion of topics related to racism and the African American experience and abolish the discussion of topics related to heterosexism and the lived experiences of gays and lesbians in the United States.

She admitted that children may indeed be comfortable with discussing controversial political issues and that they may be better equipped to handle such conversations in the classroom, because they may have “less at stake” to discuss their opinions. I interpreted this message as her discomfort with the topic and what ramifications may be in store for her should she breach controversial topics in her classroom. Communities with conservative ideological beliefs can place pressure on teachers generating discourses related to heterosexism. In her mind, children may be
in a better position to generate opinions that may be less popular, because they don’t have to worry about careers and such.

I further questioned her on her line of reasoning. I asked her if she agreed that children can also be subject to the powerful pressures of majority opinion. The dominant narrative spans across social circles and trickles down to the children’s cabals. The majority voice works to dominate the social discourse and works to intimidate any marginalized voice or less popular opinion. She reflected on this point and agreed that peer pressure and social conformity can be just as powerful within groups of children, but that the stakes are different. All in all, she returned to the personal tenet that her students did not have the emotional maturity to handle the topic of sexuality or social issues related to sexual orientation and homosexuality, which left any realistic opportunity for discourse centering on heterosexism and the experience of gays and lesbians null and void.

Mrs. S. stated: “I teach second grade. The topic of homosexuality is an inappropriate topic to be taught or talked about in an elementary classroom. I feel this is a subject that should be dealt with at home at a parent’s discretion. My students are too young to understand what this (homosexuality) means unless they are in a home environment with same-sex parents, and, even so, I feel that they are too young to understand the prejudice towards this way of life.”

She also verbalized to me that she felt her role as a reading teacher and elementary teacher did not include classroom discourse related to social justice and
ideological transmission in our society. She did not believe that it was her
responsibility to teach them to be more conservative or more liberal. She believed that
it was her responsibility to help her children make better informed decisions in
general. She responded furthermore that Geisel’s literature was not intended for
children of such a young age (second grade). She felt that his books were not useful
tools to elicit discussions on such controversial subject matter (except, of course, if
the discussion would center on environmentalism, with which she is completely
comfortable). She believed that it is okay to teach second graders the concepts of
right and wrong, universally speaking. She disagreed with the notion that a primary
school teacher could successfully guide her children in discourses related to
ideological themes like racism and heterosexism. Teaching students how to write
their first and last names legibly, learning how to read simple words and sentences
and pronouncing words successfully are the primary goals of second graders. In her
opinion, they need to learn to read; that is, to build mechanical reading skills erelong
they can begin to interpret texts and formulate personal, political or moral opinions on
them.

The problem, however, is that once they can read; that is, decode the written
language successfully using applied cognitive skills, they have already ingested an
ideology congruent with the dominant discourse that lies hidden within the chapter
books they are required to read. The dominant ideology also pervades their minds
through the seemingly harmless and obsequiously apolitical and amoral children’s
books the teachers commonly choose to read with them. These are the generic books, the ones that they grew up with, which promote and reciprocate the mainstream ideology pregnant with three powerful, stereotypical and traditional messages: 1) heterosexuality is normal; 2) white middle class culture is the acceptable standard; and, consequently, 3) all other groups of people not identified with heterosexuality and white middle class are rightfully marginalized. The prejudices that Mrs. S. claims her students are too young to understand have already started to settle into their psyches through the texts that are embraced and the texts that are excised from the reading curriculum.

Teachers do not consider the concept that every text that enters into the classroom discourse reflects a cultural way, and that it also transmits an ideology or promotes a specific political agenda. They do not recognize the powerful ellipsis in which they participate every day when they begin a “normal” children’s book in their classrooms. They do not consider that what they exclude from the academic conversation is just as much an ideological transmission as what they include in it.

The majority of the elementary teachers were comfortable using The Sneetches and The Butter Battle Book to generate discourse on racism and the plight of African Americans but they refused to open up discussions about heterosexism and the plight of gays and lesbians in American society. They also agreed that The Butter Battle Book would be an appropriate tool to converse about the senselessness of war and the promotion of peace education in their classrooms. They unanimously agreed
that they would use *The Lorax* to teach their students about and discuss the issues of recycling and utilitarianism in our society. The discussion of environmentalism would be appropriate and nearly unavoidable, and an open discourse concerning the environment and instructing them on how not to be wasteful would be readily embraced. The topic of recycling trash seems to be a less arduous discussion than ones concerning more pressing and more humanly relevant social ills like racism and heterosexism.
Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions and Implications

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions Restated

The purpose of the study was to investigate answers to the following questions: To what extent have scholars and educators utilized Dr. Seuss literature to promote specific ideological messages? How do current teachers in the classroom utilize Geisel’s books? How would current educators utilize Dr. Seuss literature in their classrooms when confronted with the challenge to introduce socially relevant topics like racism, heterosexism and environmentalism?

The content analysis of the published texts using Dr. Seuss led me to the desire to ascertain current teachers’ willingness to apply Geisel’s books as tools to transmit ideology to their elementary students. Although some scholars have touted him a literary moralist, some educators believe that his books are better utilized as reading tools to build component skills. The reason that I chose to focus on Dr. Seuss is that his appeal is still widespread in the United States and that you can still find his books in elementary classrooms today.

Conclusions

The teachers surveyed and interviewed hold positions of power when it comes to the development of children’s literacy skills. They may use Geisel’s books to generate discourse around the plot or to provide students with amusement while learning to develop cognitive reading skills, but the majority surveyed would not generate literature discussions around moral and political topics like heterosexism.
Although they are more prone to use his works to discuss racism and the African American experience, it is not their first instinct to use Dr. Seuss to do so. They are more comfortable with discussing more general topics like “how to get along” or “tolerance for others” while avoiding the realism that pervades our world every day in the media and in our communities immediately outside the school’s walls.

The content analysis revealed the trend that educators and researchers have utilized Geisel’s books to relate their own political philosophies to the children that they teach. They have used popular stories like The Sneetches, The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book to demonstrate to their students the underlying moral messages and political commentary within the seemingly simplistic plots.

They have taught right and wrong and have attempted to morally educate these youth by having them read the books and discuss what characters performed right and wrong behaviors. They have required the students to verbalize and decide what concepts within the books are good and which ones are bad. The use of these three books has been a reflection of the adult educators’ underlying beliefs with respect to their own senses of social morality and political ideologies. They selected Dr. Seuss stories intentionally to persuade children to see an ideology similar to theirs. The didactic approach of these pedagogues has impressed upon the children in their classroom the concepts of right and wrong and what is good or bad using The Sneetches to teach the absurdity of racism, The Lorax to teach that excessive greed, capitalism and exploitation of the natural environment all lead to human destruction,
and *The Butter Battle Book* to instruct students the concept that war is evil, senseless and to be refuted by any means.

As a children’s literature author Theodor Geisel remains relevant in public school systems. His works are still used in public school settings and still continue to be used to teach children right and wrong and the good and evil of humankind. The moralistic messages that Dr. Seuss inserts into many of his works fit well with the worldviews of many teachers in the modern U.S school settings. The messages interpreted in his books cover racism, Marxism, warfare, property rights, materialism and environmentalism. Scholars and pedagogues have addressed questions of morality and ideology and have drawn conclusions on how to best use his books in elementary classrooms. The aim has been the application of Dr. Seuss, in order to promote their own political ideologies, and, furthermore, to disseminate their own vision of the preferred moralistic education in their classrooms. They interpret the messages in Dr. Seuss’s books to be congruous with their own beliefs and teach these beliefs to their students as right and wrong.

In this paper I conclude that educators still serve as protectors of a specific ideology through incorporation of Dr. Seuss literature into their classrooms but with a careful monitoring of the appropriate topics to be discussed. They have used literature, a form of art, to teach morality to the youth. They have selected desirable images and moral messages, exposed their students to those messages, and they have encouraged them to learn those messages as an accepted truth. They have
simultaneously excluded topics they deem inappropriate, which molds the ideological structure of their students even further. By encouraging their pupils to read and interpret moral messages from the literature of Dr. Seuss and by asking them to discuss the moral messages through their guidance, these teachers promote their own ideas of what makes a good and livable nation. Through moral instruction and interpretation of Dr. Seuss stories they have supported a Platonic philosophy of education and have intended to shape future generations of children to believe and act as they believe and act. The overall purpose has been to morally instruct. By doing so they have attempted to create a society that might maintain moralistic beliefs similar to theirs which consequently marginalizes African Americans to an extent and even more so homosexuality, which reproduces the heterosexist dominant discourse of the White middle class.

The concern for the state of the republic and the sustenance of a social morality in children of the United States continue to drive the minds and actions of picture book authors, teachers and statesmen in this modern world. The protectors of our social morality have studied, worked and earned professional degrees as experts in the field of education, in order to earn the right to teach masses of children what is good and evil, and what is right and wrong, according to them. The protectors are often veiled with specialties in Early Childhood Development, bachelor’s degrees in Elementary Education, and even doctorates, but they are nevertheless charged with
one underlying mission: to teach children social conventions and ideological elements aligned with the dominant narrative.

Implications for Children’s Literature and Children’s Literacy

The author of a children’s book is the creator, and writes from her ideological perspective. After the text is created, it is read by the second being with her own unique ideology. This begins the reading transaction. The reader interprets and discusses the book with a third person. This person hears the story as told by the second person (the reader) and interprets and helps the reader rethink her first interpretation of the work.

Text is an ideological artifact. A book is an ideological tool because it does not exist in a vacuum. The moment it is written, illustrated and published, it becomes a consumed entity and is owned equally by author and reader. The agents that act on the entity can influence the interpretations of the artifact. Every text is bound by a human context.

Readers make judgments of the books’ words, images and storylines. Readers interpret the meanings of those storylines. Readers often receive guidance and influences from teachers. The school is at the center of learning in our nation. What is excluded from an elementary classroom’s discourse as it relates to a book cannot rely on the normal avenues of communication to be heard. The voices of the marginalized groups in our communities will have to continue to push from the outer edges until the inner circle of the mainstream opens up. The voices from the margins will
struggle not to fall into the mainstream and get swept away. Sometimes the voices supporting the marginalized will have work within the mainstream, as they attempt to swim against the current and make a splash; otherwise they will be enveloped the overriding current of dominant history and meld with the major discursive stream.

The literary works of Dr. Seuss, with their underlying themes of righteousness and good, have been embraced by teachers and held up as beacons of rational light to guide the misguided souls of U.S. schoolchildren. The ideological elements apparent in works such as The Sneetches (racial equality and acceptance of all individuals), The Lorax (capitalistic ambitions will surely lead to the destruction of all humankind) and The Butter Battle Book (war is evil and irrational) is integrated into the curriculum, in order to educate the modern youth on the dangers of selfishness, snobbery and warfare. The educators serve as the defenders of a “Seussian” faith that promises to mold young readers and learners into saviors of a higher, more utopian society.

The books by Dr. Seuss have the potential to be incorporated into the classroom as tools to transmit values and opinions guided by the teacher. According to the findings in my content analysis and through subsequent interviews with current teachers, the educator still feels responsible for the ideological and moral structure of their students, and they adhere to the belief that they are in some way the protectors of the character of each of their students. They may stop short to admitting that they
are gatekeepers for their community’s values, but they do not hesitate to speak out against beliefs that they would not allow in their classroom discourses.

The question is: Whose ideology shall be learned? Inevitably, the beliefs of the presiding classroom teacher will be transmitted to the students in her stead. The classroom students digest the ideology of the classroom teacher and the teachers intend for the students to incorporate these lessons into their daily political and social routines for the rest of their childhood, and, hopefully, for the rest of their adult lives. But which values are the correct ones to teach? Is it appropriate for teachers to use Geisel’s books to discuss racism and simultaneously reject a discourse revolving around heterosexism?

While some of the political and ethical beliefs of the modern teacher in today’s American schools may differ from the philosopher, Plato, the application of those same Platonic concepts originally published by the ancient scholar so many hundreds of centuries ago is easily observed. The teachers in the classrooms have a distinct and established ideological structure, and those values will indubitably surface within the classroom and affect the content that they teach to the children under their care. It is hard to admit, perhaps, on a basic level, that anyone would propose that a teacher would want to manipulate children to behave in certain ways, but that, indeed, is one of the primary purposes of education.

I believe that every teacher's ideological framework eventually seeps into their curriculum and their daily classroom instructions. It may be difficult to admit that
censorship of literature is a common practice and that what a teacher does not select for instruction is just as important as what a teacher does choose to teach students. It is essential, however, to acknowledge that the calculated selection of certain types of literature, laden with specific types of political and moral opinion, is, indeed a propagandistic method of instruction.

It is important to consider other avenues of research and other angles to pursue meaning in texts. The consideration extends beyond the literature of Dr. Seuss to other genres of children’s literature, as well. The lenses of CRT and queer theory are but two that help us to focus our attention on the stories we miss. Feminist scholars have focused on disruption of a history that has neglected the contributions of essentially fifty percent of the population of the United States. They use their lens to bring to light the unfair categorization of women and have worked to generate the recovery of our nation’s histories (Watkins, 1999). They perform virtual mining operations, in order to uncover the buried histories of women writers and their words, so that they can provide alternative streams of history for the rest of us. In a similar fashion CRT scholars do the same for black writers and black heroes of the past. Queer theorists find the stories and fictions of LBGQT youth and promote their texts. They all focus on approaches that work to revise the dominant literary canon and alter the collage of history to be more representative of our nation’s history both in historical texts and literature.
Critical race theory (CRT) and queer theory have also developed disruptive tools in the fields of children’s literature, adolescent literature and literacy education. The new lenses provide means to undermine the once solid ground on which scholars of literary analysis and historiography were free to publish. Children’s and YA literature scholars can no longer rely on history as an objective floor to stand upon. They can no longer interpret picture books and fantasy novels within the framework of mainstream Western history or other seemingly universal or neutral methodologies. CRT, queer theory and other branches of cultural studies pull up the nicely laid tiles and ask us to go deeper, by revealing each work’s ideological implications for the reader. History can be used as one facet to trouble the interpretations made by others but it can no longer serve as an indisputable truth to which we can compare textual interpretations.

The cultural creature or human being concocts the text imaginatively, invents it, and duly distorts it. Text is a cultural artifact. The cultural creature came to its social and psychological creation from a specific cultural and ideological background, which undoubtedly influenced its interpretation of the cultural artifact in the first place. In time, it was successfully passed down and accepted as an historical truth. The utopian feeling created in the past has been disrupted and questioned by contemporary thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, Freire, Mills, Bell, Butler and Morrison. They question the grand narrative and ask for competition from other voices. The owners of these other voices seek to construct their own narratives, in
order to change the landscape of the dominant narrative and combat the accepted historical truth.

Through disruption, the power of text is no longer hidden, no longer rendered natural, and it has no capacity to sustain the landscape of the dominant narrative. Roots are uprooted and space is made. The center is turned inside out, and the margins are pulled in. In this manner our social landscape can grow into a more representative and rational republic. Rejecting the Grand Narrative (Foucault, et al.) and jumping into the ellipsis will alter the reigning discourse and contribute to our teacher epistemology. What’s missing can only be discovered with more sophisticated, refined and sensitive spectacles. The true academics adjust their lenses to unmask texts to provide new visions for all of us through transformation of dominant discourse and through disruption of the mainstream ideology.

The implementation of texts that reflect ideologies outside of the dominant discourse will continue to be an important topic of discussion within education. If we do hope to provide an impact on the moral and political development of children growing up in a tolerant, diverse society, gay-themed literature and ethnically diverse literature will have to be a part of their reading lists. Educators have proven that children are capable of learning about and accepting people of different sexual orientation (Athanases, 1996). They are able to experience moments of enlightenment and extract on a basic level the social and moral messages in the books they encounter (Sychterz, 2002).
Elementary students are able to make judgments about controversial and abstract issues, and they are equipped to consider moral implications of the picture books that they read. Speaking about *The Lorax*, elementary children have successfully discussed with their teachers the ills of utilitarianism and the senselessness of the greedy ways of men destroying Truffula trees for their own gain. Students question the rationale behind killing off plants and animals to make more money, when money can not replenish the natural resources we need to survive. They question the morality of greed and senseless destruction of the environment for personal gain. They begin to conceptualize the community and the common good. They have the capability to abstract their lives longitudinally and see themselves not as children in the present but simultaneously as adult citizens of this country in the future (Cobb, 1992). Children can conceptualize moral dilemmas as readily as some adults can, and I wonder why we do not allow them to exercise their moral faculties more often.

*The Butter Battle Book* reminds them of current events in their lives that they experience through the media, citing current acts of war and violence across the globe. They can draw analogies between the actions and thoughts of the characters in *The Butter Battle Book* and the imagined cognitive processes of government officials developing wartime policies in their own country. They relate to negative experiences (loss of lives, family hardships) of real current events in their lives to the experiences of the characters in the books they read, and they aptly conclude that war is not
always the only or best solution to problems in our communities. Some of them even mention the meaninglessness of war, which proposes a very abstract and rebellious concept that some adults cannot even grasp or perhaps have the courage to question. By reading *The Sneetches*, they embraced the concepts of racism and the unfair treatment of marginalized people in U.S. society, while simultaneously perceiving and discussing the importance of the acceptance of other’s cultural differences (Cobb, 1992). But we must remember that the majority of the conclusions made by students have been shaped by the classroom educator.

What purpose does children’s literature have in schools? Is the ultimate goal simply to teach the child to read the language? Perhaps we hope to develop a love for reading, or we want our children to understand themselves better. Text can be a powerful vehicle by which to transmit opinions and induce meaningful dialogue. Some texts will lead us to discuss issues with which we do not feel comfortable. Some educators devalue texts and ban them from the local libraries. Our own political agendas and our commitment to our impression of the ideal society can be powerful factors that influence what we choose to read with our children. We become involved in a battle of voices, each one trying to push its own cultural values and overarching ideology into the arena of the child’s mind. So the questions remain: How do we convince ourselves that the children actually have any power when it comes to what they read and how they read it while inside the walls of a school? Why do we call books written for children children’s literature, when it has never been theirs at all?
Teacher-directed instruction in literacy development limits a child’s opportunities to create their own sense of morality, and many times students are confined to rote memorization of knowledge of moral and political values, instead of developing the skills to reason morally in unique, humanistic contexts. Recital of the adult educator’s words as proof of the appropriation of knowledge transmission leaves little space for independent political thinking in children. Incorporation of the teacher’s words into the speech patterns of our children generates automated ideological responses to unique cultural contexts that they will encounter outside of the classroom, and it can be counter-intuitive to our political system that has been reliant on free thinking and creativity, in order to continue to be a productive and liberal republic.

Throughout, I have attempted to open up discourse and ask questions in the veins of post-modernism, and poststructuralist theory, all within the texts of Dr. Seuss children’s books and through dialogues with current elementary educators. These educators are the present and future of our children’s education, and they hold the keys to our progress toward social justice. I have chosen to read the analyses and philosophies of educators, scholars and writers with a vested interest in childhood literacy and children’s literature in the United States. By lending a critical lens to the texts and discourse proposed in this paper I have hoped to have begun a new conversation related to what children’s literature and what children’s literacy really looks like in public school systems today. Many scholars will choose to ask the
important questions and forward critical thinking, so that we educators can someday come close to some crucial answers related to literacy. Some will continue to remain steadfast in traditional mindsets that revolve around the classic canon and drier evaluations of children’s and adolescent books related to aesthetics and style. Politics and culture drive all types of discourses, including literature discussions in classrooms. Moral-political and ideological cycles receive energy from the books read in classrooms and conversations fostered during literacy events. Teachers are the pipeline to the incoming messages and representations emitted from the selected books. Not selecting a specific book because of whatever reason is still a political choice. Ignorance of the hard questions and silence are still powerful acts by traditionalists, who can narrow the spectrum of ideological possibilities for children in a society built upon a text based upon freedom of thought. Social activists in the classroom can select books for their students that represent a more liberal political agenda. The struggle ensues.

Suggestions for Further Research and Investigation

What I hope to have done is to have opened up a dialogue that revisits and perturbs the concepts of Dr. Seuss in our U.S. classrooms. I believe that his texts have the power to disrupt the dominant discourse because of the moral messages they bring. The ease of use of Geisel’s books in the elementary classroom provides educators with an opportunity to utilize a household name and open up liberal discussions about heterosexism and the experiences of gays and lesbians in this
country. I challenge further research to ensue that will apply Dr. Seuss’s works in the classrooms and allow children the opportunity to discuss topics related to heterosexism, sexual orientation and other GLBTQ issues of point.

Secondly, the microcosm, which I investigated, was but a singular representation of one particular Midwest community, which served as a starting point for a long line of questions for me and for other researchers interested in critical pedagogy. I felt it was important to study a small group of teachers from one school to develop a focused understanding of the ideological beliefs and political mores of one community and one elementary school. The expansion of my survey involving the questions of uses of Dr. Seuss’s texts to teach and discuss racism and heterosexism to statewide levels or a national level would provide more interesting information related to teachers’ perceptions of children’s books in their classrooms and their willingness to broach topics like racism and heterosexism in their classrooms.

Thirdly, it will be necessary to continue to push the envelope from the outside in, especially when considering the nature of U.S. school systems. Most schools rely on tradition, which disallows the opportunity for counter-traditions and new trains of thought which embrace the idea that it is important to recognize heterosexism and the existence of inequalities as they are enforced upon fellow citizens of this country. The power relations structured within U.S. society are still constructed to limit the narratives in which we struggle to live. Using new means to purview traditionally
accepted texts like Dr. Seuss’s works allow the progressive minds to open up books loved by the dominant groups and turn them on their heads. By discussing the experience of gays and lesbians in our society with elementary students when reading *The Sneetches* we allow ourselves to work within the mainstream texts but to concurrently swim against its current, if you will. We stress other lenses, to highlight hidden details and to study cultural discourses between individuals.

Hinton (2004) assures us that anyone can take any lens on and read the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987) from that perspective, regardless of one’s subjectivity or identity. Hinton believes that words such as *black* and *feminist* may suggest the identity of the person who uses the theory, but this is not the intent. Any critic, regardless of race, sex or orientation can critique texts using a black theorist’s perspective, a feminist’s perspective or a queer theorist’s perspective. She fully supports that a white man can surely use different lenses to read literature. Appleman (2000) also stresses that it is crucial for both male and female students to analyze a text using feminist theory, so that both male and female students can benefit from the discourse that results from such theories and analysis. The importance is to introduce people to take other lenses and to see literature from others’ perspectives.

The transmission of ideology that is extant within elementary classrooms in the United States is not as tangible as the reading curriculum and book reports. It is nevertheless there. The teachers in the classrooms have a distinct and established ideological framework, and the values attached to it will indubitably surface within
the classroom and affect the content that they teach to the children under their care. It is hard to admit, perhaps, on a basic level, that anyone would propose that a teacher would want to manipulate children to behave in certain ways, but that, indeed, is one of the primary purposes of education.

That a teacher’s ideological structure and model for good living seep into their everyday classroom instruction seems unavoidable. It does not seem appropriate to admit that censorship of literature is a common practice and that what a teacher does not select for instruction is just as important as what a teacher does indeed choose to teach students. It is of further importance, however, to acknowledge that the calculated selection of certain types of literature, laden with specific types of political and moral opinion, is, indeed a propagandistic method of instruction.

What is crucial to note is that, just as one teacher feels that Geisel’s works can be tools of transmission related to dispelling stereotypes, disparaging racism and heterosexism and improving the ecological world, others could argue that there are other books just as important to build upon the ideological foundations of individualism, capitalism, and/or the maintenance of the grand narrative in Western society. They may even justify (to an extent) necessary evils of a white society under the ruse of manifest destiny: the acquisition of personal comforts, ambition that leads to financial success and respect, and the brave acts of American war heroes.

Do our children deserve to see both sides of our society and to appreciate a diversified point of view? Is it okay for some teachers to be comfortable and free to
use Geisel’s books to generate discourses related to racism and heterosexism, while others are free to ignore the concepts throughout their teaching careers? Is the dichotomy reconcilable? Is it appropriate for pedagogues to teach controlled propaganda, so long as they are confident that they are doing it for the good of the child and for the maintenance of a more peaceful, harmonious (and perhaps better) society? In some ways we end up with a polarized educational system or at worst a fractal system of pedagogy across the nation.

It is necessary to shed light upon the psychosocial implications and ideological elements embedded in texts and discussed within the walls of the school. In my opinion every text suggests ideological implications. People make judgments on the texts they read. It is impossible to not formulate an opinion on a story that one has read. Inevitably, the opinion formulated reflects underlying moral values, religious beliefs, cultural norms, and political agendas: All of the elements of a group’s ideology. Popular books for children are products of the times and reflect the ideology of the dominant culture that owns the means to produce and support it.

There are a number of wonderful stories that have the potential to influence the opinions and values of our children as they learn to integrate themselves into a community that will demonstrate multimodal literacy and present multiple cultural identities. It becomes more crucial, then, to investigate how the dominant culture continues to overrun every other voice coming from the outer edges and from the marginalized sections of United States society. The mainstream ideology continues to
monopolize the curriculum and reading materials of almost every school in America. The power of literature lies in its ability to impel children to develop into productive, open-minded adults, who will contribute tremendously to the future of our society. Questions still remain as to what texts will be read and what voices will be heard in the classrooms. Whose texts are read and whose voices are heard will ultimately influence the ideologies of those children. Those children are the decision-makers and creators of our future society.
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Books Cited


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Appendix A

Teacher Questionnaire

Dear Survey Taker:

Please answer the questions on the following pages and return in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided. We thank you so much for your time in taking the survey. Your answers will provide important knowledge for reading research and literacy in schools. Dr. Seuss’s books are well known and still popular with children today. Teachers have used Dr. Seuss’s books in the classroom for several generations. Remember that you can write out any opinions to go along with your circled responses to the questions on the back or bottom of the pages provided.

Your responses are anonymous, so please feel free to answer as honestly and as fully as you wish.

FIRST, PLEASE ANSWER THE FOUR QUESTIONS BELOW.

1. Do you consider yourself politically conservative, liberal or in the middle?

2. On a political scale, where do you fall? Please mark:

   Liberal_________ x ____________________________Conservative

3. Of political parties, do you consider yourself: _____Republican

   _____Democrat _____Independent _____Other

   _____x_ I don’t follow a party
NEXT PART:

AFTER READING THE SUMMARIES ON THE PAGES THAT FOLLOW, PLEASE CIRCLE THE RESPONSES TO THE ACCOMPANYING QUESTIONS BELOW EACH SUMMARY.

KEY: STRONGLY AGREE = SA, AGREE=A, NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE=N, DISAGREE=D, AND STRONGLY DISAGREE=SD.

THANKS AGAIN!
The Butter Battle Book is a book about two characters that cannot agree on anything, not even which side to butter their bread on. They wind up building more and more elaborate machines to try and defeat the other one, all the while recruiting their neighbors to dislike the “one on the other side.”

1. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about racism and what African Americans and other cultures have experienced in the United States.

SA A N D SD

2. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about the dangers of war and/or how misunderstandings can lead to violence in our society.

SA A N D SD

3. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about recycling, the environment and/or how businesses can better utilize and replenish our resources.

SA A N D SD

4. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about homosexuality and what gays and lesbians have experienced in the United States.

SA A N D SD

5. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about something else.

SA A N D SD

Please feel free to write below or on the back of this page any thoughts you have related to the questions, and why or why not you would or would not use the books for any of the above reasons. Your opinions and feelings are as important as your circled responses. Thanks!
The Sneetches is about characters called “sneetches” having stars on their bellies and others not having stars on their bellies. They look the same except for the stars. The sneetches with no stars feel and are treated inferior to their “starred” peers. One day a stranger with a star-making machine comes and adds stars to the bellies of the starless sneetches. The “original” star-bellied sneetches become upset and have spend their money to have their stars removed, in order to stay different. This happens over and over until no one can tell each other apart any longer and they have lost all their money to the stranger.

6. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about racism and what African Americans and other cultures have experienced in the United States.

SA A N D SD

7. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about the dangers of war and/or how misunderstandings can lead to violence in our society.

SA A N D SD

8. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about recycling, the environment and/or how businesses can better utilize and replenish our resources.

SA A N D SD

9. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about homosexuality and what gays and lesbians have experienced in the United States.

SA A N D SD

10. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about something else.

SA A N D SD

Please feel free to write below or on the back of this page any thoughts you have related to the questions, and why or why not you would or would not use the books for any of the above reasons. Your opinions and feelings are as important as your circled responses. Thanks!
The Lorax is about a small creature that keeps asking the narrator in the story about “what happened” to the trees, the lakes and the world around us. It turns out that the narrator/character used up all of the elements in the environment to build business products and make money without thinking to replenish any of them while doing so.

11. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about racism and what African Americans and other cultures have experienced in the United States.

SA  A  N  D  SD

12. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about the dangers of war and/or how misunderstandings can lead to violence in our society.

SA  A  N  D  SD

13. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about recycling, the environment and/or how businesses can better utilize and replenish our resources.

SA  A  N  D  SD

14. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about homosexuality and what gays and lesbians have experienced in the United States.

SA  A  N  D  SD

15. I would use this book to teach my students and/or children about something else.

SA  A  N  D  SD

Please feel free to write below or on the back of this page any thoughts you have related to the questions, and why or why not you would or would not use the books for any of the above reasons. Your opinions and feelings are as important as your circled responses. Thanks!
Appendix B

Qualitative Interview Questions

1. What books do you remember reading as a child? Which books had an impact on you? Did any shape the person that you are today? Any life lessons learned that you use today that you feel were learned from a book, movie, or story?

2. How do you choose the books your students read for class assignments? Do they choose them? Do they pick them out at the store, for example, and then do you look at them to make sure they're okay to read? How do you make these decisions? What are your criteria for choosing a "good" or acceptable book for your kids to read?

3. How have books entered your classroom? Did you buy them? Did relatives and friends buy them for you?

4. Do your students bring books from outside of the school walls and write reports on them, or do they have assigned books they have to complete and discuss?

5. Have you come across any books that you did not use or exclude from your curriculum because you disapproved of them? What was it that you disapproved of?

6. What questions do your students ask when reading books? Are they about the story, the moral lessons, the plot, etc., or are they more lexical in nature (that is, do they ask how to pronounce words or what words mean)?

7. What do you feel is the major purposes of children’s literature and children’s books in school?