

Rhetorical Narrative Theory:  
An Interpretive Framework for Literary Analysis in the High School English Classroom

DISSERTATION

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By

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## **Abstract**

This paper centers on a ten week teacher-research inquiry study in which I taught a high school English Children's Literature elective course at a local independent school. Unlike most secondary English teachers, I made my theoretical framework explicit, and sought to scaffold the terms and concepts of rhetorical narrative theory with our classroom texts. Data are drawn from student journals, essays, and creative projects during this class, as well as my teacher-researcher journal. The research objective was to investigate what happens when secondary students engage with rhetorical narrative theory and use this approach to interpret literature. Data analysis indicates that students were able to translate and integrate this particular interpretive language, and that quite often, I as their teacher merely provided the vocabulary for their pre existing familiarity with the function and form of narrative. Additionally, the data suggest that using children's literature in a secondary classroom allows for independent, deep, thematic textual analysis, which, in turn, is a space primed for narrative theory pedagogy. This study suggests that rhetorical narrative theory, at least when combined with children's literature, is a symbiotic pedagogical and critical match for secondary English students.

## **Dedication**

To all teachers—

whose profession is maligned but essential;

whose work is invisible but consequential;

whose impact is ongoing and immeasurable.

## **Acknowledgments**

This dissertation is my proverbial baby, and, like all children, it took a village to be raised well. The process of studying, researching, and writing was in no way a solo effort; intellectual inquiry and production relies upon numerous others in myriad ways, and for them I am deeply grateful.

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work a couple of times a year. Thankfully, it is so much more than that, and we all know it. I am beyond lucky to have had so many colleagues turn into lifelong friends.

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To Kristen, Jennie, and Brittany—the last remaining members of the original Nerd Herd—how would I have any fun without you? Our reunions are too few and far between, but you are some of the greatest, funniest, most wonderful women in my life, even if we’re generally sharing it electronically. It has been years, but it never feels that way. I adore you all. Someday, ladies, our treehouse awaits—the clink of wineglasses always a motivation to keep typing.

To the wonderful women of our cohort(ish), Anita, Sarah, Charline, Angel, Carrie, and Amy: what a gift it was to have met most of you in our 970 “trilogy.” Though we haven’t spent enough time together after surviving our first year as doctoral students (a shame, I say!), I know that we’ve been supportive of one another’s academic journeys and have developed much needed friendships outside the classroom, too. To my LYCA colleagues, Denise, Mary Catherine, Andrès, Leigh, Bianca, Tati, Enny, Wendy, and especially Lisa—thank you for rounding out the closest knit department in T&L. I have relied on all of you so much throughout this process, and only hope I have (and can

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And last, but never, ever least, to my mom. I don't think I have the words to accurately convey how much I love and appreciate you. Ever since I was little, I heard you say “I could go to school forever!” and clearly tried to live up to that on your behalf. (Gaga and Henny asking “Beezle—think you'll ever amount to anything?” was also a motivator.) No matter my endeavors, you've fully supported me in my pursuit of them. I admire you and can only hope to be as neat of a woman as you are someday. Thank you for it all.



## **Vita**

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## **Fields of Study**

Major Field: Education

Cognate Areas: Literature for Children and Young Adults, Narrative theory, and

Secondary English pedagogy and curriculum

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Background of the Study**

I find it necessary to begin this study with an academic confession: I did not major in English as an undergraduate. This, coupled with the fact that I went to a consistently poor performing high school, means that while I have always been an avid reader-for-pleasure, my exposure to critical, analytical reading and reading practices has been rather limited. I took several literature courses as an undergraduate as part of my Women's Studies major, and later cobbled together other classes from the local state university in order to gain acceptance into graduate school, but my formal training in literature was, and still is, limited to my experience at Ohio State.

My Master's degree program was singularly focused on what I now know to be called reader response theory, but I was never given any real, solid pedagogical knowledge about how to enact this theory in the classroom. Education 629, Teaching English/Language and Literacy in Middle and Secondary Schools, purported to be the methods course for the pre-service teachers in my program, but my experience (and memory of that experience) was that it was focused more on theories of literacy and teacher-inquiry methodologies; the student population of that class was a mix of the education Master's students, and language and literacy Master's and doctoral students,

and the instructor (who is frequently cited in Chapter three) is an active researcher in the aforementioned areas. I remember completing that course without feeling any more prepared to teach high school English.

I also did not have the background knowledge or critical stance to question whether reader response is how secondary teachers should approach literature in the classroom. I merely accepted this approach because my Ivy League professors told me it was good—at the expense of other approaches—and it was, at the time, all I knew. I graduated from a prestigious university without ever truly considering how I read literature or wanted to teach my students how to read literature.

Therefore, when I accepted my first teaching position in an affluent, high-performing, suburban district, I went in armed not only with the basic idea that personal response to literature should be the focus of an English classroom, but the naïve assumption that everyone taught this way. I was obviously and seriously wrong. My colleagues, tasked with preparing students for higher education—the college acceptance rate at my former district is 98%—approached the teaching of literature from a stance nearly devoid of personal response or engagement and expected me to do the same. (I now know that this approach is called formalism or New Criticism.) Over the course of my career, I became more and more conflicted about how to handle these two seemingly disparate issues in a secondary classroom. Having to sort of fall in line with my department, while also recognizing that something is entirely amiss with this philosophy of literary instruction, while also not being armed with the intellectual or analytical tools to offer up a personal (or departmental?) solution is probably the main reason why I left

my job and why I am now interested researching what literary theories get enacted in the classroom, why, and how.

This study aims to engage in and contribute to the myriad conversations centered on secondary English education, with a focus primarily on literature instruction (rather than writing instruction) and the pedagogy surrounding the instruction in methods of textual analysis. An aspect of this pedagogy that is often left out of the conversation is the theoretical framework informing a teacher's approach to literature. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the relevant terms that require definition—or at least problematizing—as well as a brief history of various literary theories as they emerged from “the academy.” Finally, I include a discussion of how the two most dominant theories in the secondary English classroom, formalism or New Criticism and reader response, are typically enacted, and then end with a statement of the problem and the research questions on which this study is focused.

### **Defining Some Terms**

**The basics: texts and contexts.** Before a discussion of how literary theory has been utilized in the secondary classroom, it makes sense to define several terms. First, “secondary classroom” for the purpose of this exploration is what Americans refer to as high school, or grades nine through twelve, which typically means students of about fourteen years old to seventeen or eighteen, generally housed in a single building (though not always). Most of the scholarship on this topic I draw on in this study concerns American practices and instruction; however, occasionally relevant research that pertains

to the same age group in another country will appear, either for comparison's sake or to emphasize a larger point. Research includes data collected primarily at public schools, though some studies (e.g. Applebee, 1993) include private and parochial schools as well.

Second, though Probst (2004) makes the rather dubious distinction between fiction and literature, arguing that fiction is what you want to read, and literature is what you want to have read (p. 3), it is beyond the purview of this study to engage in that larger debate. We'll accept for the moment that, in the secondary classroom at least, literature typically means fictional narratives, including novels, short stories, poems, and plays, and, at least in the majority of the scholarship, tends to be canonical, i.e. the "Great Books," "the classics" and their authors/poets/playwrights. Occasionally, however, especially in the more recent research, young adult novels are also considered or used by teachers and researchers. Non-fiction, like memoir and autobiography, essays, etc. have not been included, though this does not mean that these should not be considered literature or literary.

Next, what do we mean by "literature instruction"? Probst (1986) argues that depending on how we view literature, our instruction changes: do we see literature as a larger part of our cultural heritage that all citizens should know? A domain to develop basic skills, like reading (literacy) and writing? (p. 60). Purves (1997) may have summed it up best when he said that literature teachers "get students to read stories, poems, plays, and novels that they probably would not choose on their own...we try to get students to write and talk about the ideas...in a disciplined way" (p. 134). Again, it is beyond the scope of this study to articulate why it is we seem to value those particular books, or why writing about them is important (and how to teach that), or even how to engage students

in productive classroom talk. And certainly, Purves's definition is not the only one; however, the "disciplined way" in which secondary English teachers engage students with stories, poems, plays and novels is the primary focus of this study.

One more distinction needs to be made before moving forward. Although it is without question that many students in grades nine through twelve struggle with the cognitive acts of reading—Ivey (2001) found that decoding and fluency are still concerns for adolescent readers (as cited in Knickerbocker & Rycik, 2002, p. 198)—this study is not concerned with "teaching reading" in that particular sense.<sup>1</sup> The scholarship often includes language like "how do we read this particular novel?" or "what does this mean?" but the context in which these phrases are used is not concerned with issues students may have with comprehension or the literal understanding of words as they are printed on the page.

**The complex: theories and interpretation.** Even more important for an examination of how literary theory has been utilized in the secondary literature classroom and what kind of literary criticism has been dominant in the same context, we need to understand these terms as they're used throughout the research. This is complicated. Scholars often use these two particular terms interchangeably or, more confusingly,

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<sup>1</sup> An NCTE survey in the 1960s found that 90% of high school teachers felt unprepared to teach reading, while only 50% felt unprepared to teach literature (Veal, 1966, p. 108). Fifty percent is disturbingly high—hopefully these numbers have improved since—but the overall point further emphasizes the difference between the two "teachings" as used here.

conflate terms like theory and criticism with other terms like interpretation, analysis, response, and meaning or meaning-making. However, having a rough working definition of these terms is necessary, even if their usage varies.

Fittingly, William Cain (1994) suggests that theory may be threatening to some people as a consequence of the different ways in which it can be defined. Perhaps most intimidating is the way in which “some scholars define contemporary theory specifically and limit it to a concrete form of practice in teaching and scholarship” (as cited in Moore, 1997, p. 8). A helpful way to consider the term theory is to use it not as “high theory” but instead close to a definition proposed by Jonathan Arac (1994):

‘I understand theory as the deliberate thinking about the principles of activities that are already somewhat familiar’ (p. 169). In so doing, we are making not only an intellectual point, but a political point as well. It is not simply that the narrow use of the term distorts our sense of the range of ways in which theory can be deployed; more important, it does so in a hierarchical and exclusionary way by privileging certain of research and interpretive practice at certain kind of academic institutions. (Rabinowitz and Smith, 1998, p. 3)

This notion of the “deliberate thinking about the principles” is echoed by Probst (1986) who argues that modern critical theory-some of it, at least-has turned its attention to the relationships with which a teacher needs to be concerned: that between the reader and the text; that between the reader and other readers; and that between the text and other texts. The different schools of thought offer different perceptions of the relationships, of course there is no unanimity. But it may be useful, nonetheless, to consider the teaching of literature in

terms of these three relationships as they have been shaped by the schools and as they are conceived by current theory. (p. 61)

Probst's use of the adjective "critical" is often one way in which the terms theory and criticism become synonymous. Moore (1997) prefers using the Greek root *theorein*, which means "to look at," and writes "when we theorize about a text, we look at it intellectually; we inquire into it to investigate literary assumptions, principles and concepts that we may have previously taken for granted." Theory, then, "invites us to see texts differently, to look beyond the closed textual world...to investigate both the reader of the text and the world that produced it" (p. 9). Moore is using theory not as a "school of thought" but as something on which we base our thinking and a specific way to read. This, however, is more similar to how others use the term "criticism."

Much like theory, literary criticism...is a term almost incapable of definition (Purves, 1967, p. 311). Scholes (1985) describes it as "discovering the codes that are involved by a text and exposing the means by which a text seeks to control our responses to it" (p. 42, as cited in Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998, p. 19). However, Meek (1990) defines it differently: literary criticism, as a way of passing the time or earning one's living, is the constant consideration of difference and of why we react as we do to what we see, hear, and read, and why we mind about it (p. 2). For its part the Commission of English of the CEEB defines criticism as "reading well so that one can understand and evaluate, essentially asking and answering questions in the presence of a literary text" (Veal, 1966. P. 111). Purves (1967) includes evaluation as one of the four things a critic does, but also includes engagement, perception, and interpretation.

This latter term is also one that scholars define in myriad ways. Purves (1967) writes that interpretation is the process by which a reader relates the literary work to the non-literary world, whereby he invests it with meaning. He does so by showing that the work imitates the world, present a typological view of the world, or comments on it (p. 311). Probst (2004) too writes that "...the act of interpretation... demands both introspection and analysis [and] can be defined for now as drawing inferences about the meaning and significance of a work..." (p. 54). Scholes (1985) calls interpretation "what the teachers knows and you don't" or, less coyly, calling "upon all texts to stand and yield their hidden meanings (p. 40, as cited in Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998, p. 19). Unrau and Ruddell (1995), however, believe meaning to be understood as a result of the reader's meaning construction and negotiation processes. Meaning is not entirely in either the text or the reader but evolves from interactions among reader, text, teacher, classroom community, and context (p. 22).

These few definitions illustrate the vastly disparate ways of defining interpretation or even meaning, and, naturally, each of these scholars is coming from a particular orientation. Their inclusion is not an endorsement of any one definition over the other. Rather, it demonstrates how complicated the larger conversation surrounding literature instruction is.

**Metaphors.** Another way to demonstrate how these terms become complicated in the scholarship is to discuss the various metaphors used to explain the purpose and function of literary criticism and/or theory. Gates (1987) describes literary theory as "a prism to illuminate texts, which is one of the values of having a working knowledge of



the wide range of strategies that contemporary theories offer us. In...turning the prism, theory allows us to shine different lights through a text” (as cited in Moore, 1997, p. 141). Moore agrees, and says we “invite theory” into our classrooms (1997, p. 201). Although she cautions against the misuse of the term—something that happens more often than not it seems—Appleman (2000) describes literary theory as a lens through which particular aspects of texts are highlighted and brought into “sharper relief” (p. xvi). The title of her work suggests we “encounter” these lenses, while Gillespie (2010) sees criticism as something we “do.” Langer (2011) thinks we step into, move through, and step out of critical stances in order to envision literature. Soter, Faust, and Rogers (2008) see these various ways of reading as “interpretive play.” Rabinowitz (1998) argues that we “put together” an interpretation of a work, like we might assemble a swing set, gas grill, or bookcase. Other, less poetic descriptors include approach (Gillespie, 2010), perspective (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998; Soter, Faust, & Rogers, 2008); strategy (Vasquez, 2009); ways of knowing (Hines & Appleman, 2000); orientation (White, 1995); instructional models (Stahl, 1997) and even “detective imagination” (Benton, 1992). Engaging with texts in a “disciplined way” is a complicated, critical challenge—and that’s before we even open a book and read with teenagers.

**Implications for educators.** Fancy terms don’t carry much weight if they’re illustrating something insignificant. Does any of this really matter in the teaching of literature? Herz (1993) claims that, for English teachers, “theory is a fact of our present and professional life” (p. 18, as cited in Hines, 1995, p. 241). We’re *already* practicing theory in the classroom, whether or not we’re explicitly aware of it (Appleman, 2000, my

emphasis). All English teachers are theoried—just differently (Emig, 1990, p. 88). Hade (1992) agrees, stating that a teacher, who is reading and responding to literature publicly, cannot do so without transmitting a “sense of stance” which shapes the manner in which others (our students) read and look at literature (p. 197-199), something Purves (1973) corroborated in his study of literature education in ten countries. Moore (1997) states that theory helps us teach our students to become better readers, which is certainly something almost every English teacher wishes for her students. Additionally, Appleman (2000) argues that literary criticism can help students learn the power of multiple perspectives, something increasingly necessary in our ever changing and diverse world. Lastly, though perhaps most importantly, as teachers charged with helping our students learn to read the word and the world (Freire, 1973), we must be aware of the underlying philosophy we bring to the classroom: every theory has profound implications for political and moral commitments (Selden, 1989, p. 12). We are not “just” teaching literature: we are teaching our students ways of seeing and interpreting ourselves and our surroundings beyond the world of the classroom (Hines & Appleman, 2000).

As English teachers, we, too, want our students to become “good readers.” This is, like everything else, is a loaded term, though, for once, there seems to be *some* consistency among the various scholars. Purves (1981) writes “for many, if not most English teachers, a good reader can articulate...a response to the text. Students who read well can analyze, interpret, and evaluate texts” (p. 83). Vasquez (2009) writes “good readers ask analytic evaluation questions about how the story is told, recognizing literary conventions and their significance, as well as the role of the author in the writing of the

story and the role of the reader in assigning meaning” (p. 27). Similarly, Bushman and Haas (2001) describe the role of the classroom teacher as one who walks a fine line between having students read for the pleasurable act that it is and having them read to increase the powers of literary analysis that enable them to become members of an educated, literate society. In an ideal literature program, all students would experience a seamless curriculum that empowered them to grow increasingly fluent as readers, increasingly able to employ the strategies to interpret complex texts, and increasingly willing to read more challenging texts. (as cited in Knickerbocker & Rycik, 2002, p. 196)

At the risk of using cliché education jargon, we want our students to become “life-long readers” who read for pleasure and also develop sophisticated reading practices (Langer, 1995, as cited in Soter, Faust, & Rogers, 2008, p. 7). This desire hasn’t changed too drastically, even if the ways and means by which teachers attempt to accomplish this have shifted over time.

### **A Brief History of Literary Theory and Criticism**

This history focuses on the theories and modes of criticism that emerged in the United States in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, it behooves us to briefly back up just a bit, since the frameworks post 1940s were in response to previous conceptions of the nature of literature and text. The liberal humanist tradition, as relayed by Matthew Arnold in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, emphasized the centrality of the text as a cultural artifact and the reader as an acolyte (Young, 1987, p. 7-8). Until at least the 1960s, modern criticism had its root in this movement (Selden, 1989).

**New Criticism.** Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954) are often credited as laying the groundwork for what became “new” criticism in their essay on the intentional fallacy, in which they eliminated this authorial intention and “great thoughts” of the sage of text or culture.<sup>2</sup> Only an examination of the text in isolation will arrive at the “true” reading. The techniques for this approach had been laid bare in Richards’ 1929 *Practical Criticism* which dominated the literary experience of students in universities for (at least) three decades (Meek, 1990, p. 3; Young, 1987, p. 9).<sup>3</sup> These New Critics tried to establish a thoroughly professional discipline of literary study, one that was self-sufficient and could be relied upon without further knowledge about linguistic or historical skills; this was a “scientific” spirit of analysis (Selden, 1989, p. 2-3). Although seemingly democratic in its inception of a universal “everyreader” who can call the text into being, this reader was also without human characteristics like personality, social background, and a life lived in time or space (Young, 1987, p. 9). By contrast, the critic was a “neutral, careful, unbiased, highly trained observer whose job it was to find and objectively describe meanings that were right there” (Wallace, 2006, p. 85). Critics were “expert readers” who were expected to produce “model interpretations” (Rabinowitz, 1987, p. 6). Purves

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2 Other “founding members” include T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, and Cleanth Brooks (Wallace, 2006, p. 85).

3 Inherent in this argument is that these theories/criticisms begin at the university level where “research” and “scholarship” emerge. Ultimately they “trickle down” to other sites, though, as we’ll see in the next section, this is not necessarily—or always—the case.

(1980), reflecting on his time as a student, remembers that the text was there “to be understood, approached, and admired” and that criticism was “an enterprise of elegance and logic, rather than enthusiasm and emotionality; the critic was faceless” (p. 228). Often referred to as formalism for its attention to the formal elements of the text—generally in poetry, though it certainly expanded to other works of fiction—critics were no longer concerned with the message, ethics, author, or reader (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 68). Rather, they focused on literary elements like imagery, tone, paradox, irony, etc. (Selden, 1989, p. 25; Young, 1987). This New Criticism dominated throughout the 1940s and 1950s, even into the mid 1970s according to some (Wallace, 2006, p. 86). Although its star has dimmed, the technique of “close reading” has pervaded with regard to other critical methods and classroom practice.

**Chicago School and Archetypal.** Formalism was not the only school of thought during the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Chicago School of neo-Aristotelian criticism was an important alternative to the New Critics during this time (Selden, 1989, p. 30), as was archetypal criticism (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 68). The neo-Aristotelians, although also formalists, differed from the New Critics with their focus on Aristotle’s concepts of *eidōs* (shaping form) and *synolon* (shaping matter). Using various techniques, poetic works of art give shape to language to affect readers (Richter, 2005, p. 57). This rhetorical strand continued to evolve, and Booth (1961), a second-generation member of this group, argued against the New Critic’s aversion to authorial commentary with his concept of implied author, a term that is ‘standard issue’ today (p. 58). Archetypal criticism, sometimes called “mythic” criticism, built on the anthropological work of Frazer and the psychological work of Jung, both of whom argued that human experience is universal.

However, it was Frye who turned this focus to literature and the idea of primitive story formulas and patterns, declaring that even the most innovative, contemporary literature reverts to those conventions we find in myths, legends, and folktales (Gillespie, 2010, p. 117). Unlike the ahistoricism of New Criticism which renders the author's and reader's contexts irrelevant, archetypal criticism argues that themes and characters transcend both history and culture.

**Challenging the dominant paradigm.** Yet it was not for another half decade that the hegemony of New Criticism was truly challenged. During the late 1960s, "the unrest generated by the Vietnam War and the feeling that formalist criticism was propagating an endless flow of sterile explications of literary works opened the way for the propounding of alternative views on the nature of the literary work and on critical method" (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 69). Although Green & LeBihan (1996) argue that some of these, like Marxist, structuralist, feminist, and psychological evolved sooner than others, even tracing their roots back to the 1930s, (p. 7, as cited in Soter, Faust, & Rogers, 2008), the major revolution in literary theory and criticism really got underway in the 1970s (Cooper, 1985).

***Theories derived from linguists.*** Structuralism and deconstruction both stem from the work of French linguists. Structuralists focused on the underlying codes and conventions of language, and were interested in revealing these syntactic and rhetorical conventions (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 69). Scholars like Genette and Todorov, for instance, viewed stories as having particular messages supported by a shared semiotic system (Herman, 2005, p. 571). On the linguistic flip-side, deconstruction, which "crashed on the scene" in the late 1960s (Appleman, 2000, p. 103), posited that every text contained its

own contradiction and can be shown to self-deconstruct (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 69-70).<sup>4</sup>

Leggo (1998) defines it as a practice of reading that begins with the assumptions that meaning is a textual construction (p. 187, as cited in Appleman, 2000, p. 101).

Deconstruction may have been popular because it was easy to translate the methods and concepts of New Criticism into a “new and exciting critical discourse” (Selden, 1989, p. 7). This philosophical extremism, the idea that language does not mirror reality, can often be reductive because the end result of any text is the same. For this reason, some argue that deconstruction is passé (Appleman, 2000, p. 103). This method was also criticized for cutting off the literary work from the world and banishing the author (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 70).

*Theories deriving from political ideologies.* As mentioned above, theory and criticism are ideological and political, so it’s no surprise that, given the American political concerns in the 1960s and 70s (through the 80s), that several culturally-based, poststructuralist theories came to the forefront of the literary criticism world: Marxist, African American (or critical race), post-colonial, and feminist. Because these methods are similar in their approaches, despite differences in their subjective concerns, a discussion of each individually seems superfluous. Rather, a description of one specifically (feminist) will demonstrate the larger trend in poststructuralist/cultural criticism.

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4 Often, the term deconstruction gets confused with destruction (Moore, 1997) or used in common parlance to mean “take apart or analyze” (Appleman, 2000), neither of which is accurate according to this methodology.

Fetterley (1978) makes the connection between ideology and critique explicit when she writes “feminist criticism is a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world, but to change it, by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read” (p. viii, as cited in Gillespie, 2010, p. 191), though, of course, there are other views of the theory that don’t include the political aim, and the definition of feminist theory, like feminism itself, continues to evolve (Moore, 1997, p. 117). Feminist criticism has gone through three major waves, focusing first on women writers, then female readers, then a gender and sexuality based critique (Soter, Faust, & Rogers, 2008, p. 9; Moore, 1997, p. 117). Feminist theory can point out features of a text, like the portrayal of females, how the gender of the author is relevant to how a work is written, or whether a patriarchal ideology informs the characters’ decisions (Appleman, 2000, p. 77). Marxist critique posits similar ideas, though it focuses on systems of social and economic power (or lack thereof), whereas critical race and post-colonial theories argue against white, Anglo-Saxon systems dominance in the context of the literature.

***Reader response.*** The greatest change in theoretical orientation, however, was, undoubtedly, the emergence of reader response. Although sometimes lumped in as a method of criticism, reader response can more accurately be described as:

[n]ot a method at all in the sense of a particular technique...or a systemic procedure used to approach all works of literature. Rather it’s more of an attitude that can be an effective starting point for a classroom inquiry into criticism, offering a student-friendly perspective on exploring literature, a distinctive teaching outlook...[that] puts the reader into the driver’s seat. It asserts that the meaning of any literary work is not what was created by the author—or what has



been decided upon by experts or teachers...—but what is constructed by the individual reader interacting with the work. (Gillespie, 2010, p. 56).

This is a shift in orientation from text as artistic object/reader as linguistic problem solver to something more similar to text as subjective stimulus/reader as unique responder or text as aesthetic blueprint/reader as transaction partner (Corcoran, 1992). The various theorists all share a conviction that a text's meaning and significance is intimately bound up with the reader, and that a literary text is not like a monument or objective entity (Selden, 1989, p. 121). This theory is part of a realization across the humanities and social sciences that the observer affects the consequences of observation, and that the focus of inquiry should be on the observer and those observer-observed relations (Cooper, 1985, p. xix).

***Putting it all together.*** Collectively, these theorists were anxious to get rid of a text-based literary theory and distance themselves from those theorists, though they differed with regard to how this actually occurs during the interaction of text and reader (Faust, 1997, p. 333). Cox (1992) summarizes several of these nuances. Rosenblatt is considered the cornerstone, with her aesthetic and efferent stances, a continuum of where we are when we read. The text becomes the poem during the literary event. Britton and Harding use the terms “spectator” and “participant” as the different ways of doing reading, whereas Fish is interested in the interpretive community as the source of literary meaning; our stance depends on the acquisition of a culturally shared set of assumptions. Benton argues that a secondary (or virtual) world is created halfway between the text and the reader's interpretation of it (p. 18-19). Other important contributors include Holland, Iser, and Bleich (Corcoran, 1990, p. 133).

These theories and methods of critique have been influenced by one another in a sort of ebb and flow state of flux (Selden, 1989). These shifting positions of author, text, and reader in relation to one another can best be summed up as:

...changes in theoretical perspectives from formalism to cultural studies...we notice that we move from aesthetic to ideologies, work of art to the text, context and intertext, from work centered to text de-centered, from author as artist to “who is the author?”, from reader as audience to reader as writer/co-writer, from one correct reading to no correct reading, from a canon of great works to an exploded canon, from microscopic to telescopic. (p. 13)

At least in the realm of scholarship, the hegemony of New Criticism has been challenged by structuralist, psychoanalytic, deconstructive, Marxist, and feminist, and, arguably the most prominent, reader response. None of these individually has been decisive in reshaping critical practice, but taken together, they have radically shifted the focus of criticism (Selden, 1989, p. 7).

### **An Overview of Theory and Criticism at the Secondary Level**

Many secondary school teachers are unfamiliar with the changes that have occurred in literary theory over the last forty or so years (Moore, 1997, p. 4). It is no surprise then, that certain assumptions concerning the study of literature, namely, that competent readers could interpret the text and agree on the author’s intended meaning, on ‘what the text meant’ have prevailed until semi-recently (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 68). Reader response theory (in general) is the next biggest influence, with post-structuralist and

culturally based theories coming in a very distant—and only recent—third. There has been both “progress and uncertainty in the approaches to literature in schools” (Corcoran & Evans, 1987, p. 1). Even with a heightened focus on multiculturalism in terms of curriculum development across education as a whole, formalism and reader response are still the most dominant analytical frameworks utilized by secondary English teachers.

Purves’s study of literature in ten countries, published in 1973 but conducted during the mid 1960s, arguably shed first light on what English teachers and students valued in literature and reading. He and his colleagues found that the primary objectives of the curriculum in the United States were reading, knowing, and expressing response to a variety of literary works from the elite and (to a lesser extent) the popular culture; attention to comprehension, interpretation, and critical reading (p. 48). With regard to patterns of American student response to a reading of a short story, the strongest pattern of response involves the interpretive responses, or the quest for hidden meanings and general themes, which accords with the school of pedagogy dominant in the U.S. (p. 277-279). Clearly, these findings reflect an orientation toward formalism, or, as Purves writes, teachers “clinging to an outmoded set of critical values” (p. 306). Even at the height of New Criticism’s influence, education researchers saw it as “outmoded.”

In 1964, while Purves and his colleagues were conducting their empirical research, Squire (with Roger Applebee) found that while literature dominated the English program, few carefully planned lessons on the analysis of the text were observed. He concluded that more pre-professional training should be devoted to the “intensive analysis of a single work” (Veal, 1966, p. 109). This supports what Purves was seeing,

but affirms, rather than questions, the utility of formalism. Just two years later, this stance was challenged publicly at the Dartmouth Conference.

An important event in the theoretical shift took place at this seminar in 1966: held for three weeks in the summer of 1966, [it] brought American and British scholar-teachers together "to define English as a school subject and to outline the ways it might be best taught." For many teachers, the Seminar came to symbolize 'a kind of Copernican shift from a transmission model, focusing on how composition skills and literary knowledge are passed along, to a growth model, focusing on students' experiences of "language in all its forms.' ... 'Dartmouth'...meant a whole reconceptualization of English, moving away from the U.S. idea that English was a body of knowledge with a structure to which students were introduced by inquiry. (Zebroski, et al.1991, p. 694) Though of course not all agreed with James Britton's ideas or their relative importance, this seminar rocked the foundations of English teaching, even if in later years we realized we may have gone too far and returned to the basics (Tchudi, 2000, p. 33).

Twenty years after Purves published his international study, Applebee published his, which focused entirely on curriculum and instruction in the United States. He writes:

[t]he past 20 years have been a period of intense intellectual ferment in literary theory. The hegemony of the New Criticism, which had come to dominate college English in the 1950s and 60s, was quickly eroded by a variety of approaches challenging the belief that the text was primary and possessed a relatively determinate meaning. Whether formulated as reader response theory, deconstruction, feminist criticism, structuralism, poststructuralism, or Marxist criticism, the certainty of New Critical analysis has given way to formulations

that force a more complex examination of the assumptions and expectations about readers, authors, and texts as they are situated within specific personal and cultural contexts....The challenges to New Criticism, however, have taken place largely in the realm of literary theory. Only a few scholars have begun to give serious attention to the implications of these newer approaches for classroom pedagogy, and most of that attention has been focused at the college level. (1993, p. 116-117)

He goes on to say “the notable exception to this is reader response. As schools in the 1960s and 70s experimented with approaches to make education more ‘relevant’ and ‘student centered’ a number of educators turned to Rosenblatt. However, her discussions were very slim in the way of specific pedagogical techniques” (p. 117). Despite being almost two decades old, Applebee’s findings remain an important source of evidence for instructional methods in the secondary classroom. His study informs much of the current research in the area of literature instruction vis-à-vis teachers’ theoretical assumptions.

The practices of secondary education can also be evinced through trends with regard to the publication of scholarly articles and research. Tchudi (2000) reflects back on his time as an editor of a research-based publication during the 1970s. He remembers the journals being full of proposals for “new structures” of literature, like mythic, thematic, and archetypal, and notes that the “themed” issues of *English Journal* were *all* about reader response (p. 33-34, my emphasis). He claims that the 1960s and 1970s were fun and experimental, but the 1980s changed as a result of increased doubt from the public and governing bodies (p. 37).

Tchudi's claims are corroborated by Petrosky, who, in 1977, summarized the research themes of recent issues of the same publication. His meta-analysis found that responses to literature can be learned through teacher expectations, echoing Purves (1973) study. Highlights of articles during this time period include the importance of the reader's personality, life experience, and age when responding to literature and cautioning against a standardized response format in the classroom because it tremendously limits a reader's ability to respond.

Brass and Burns (2011) also note the trends in research and scholarship in their historical overview of NCTE publications since 1912. Similar to Tchudi (2000), they found that the late 1960s to 1980s saw an increase in the interest of "response to literature" with a focus on reader response pedagogy (p. 180.) After the 1990s, however, the research shifted slightly to a focus on critical pedagogy and literacy (p. 182).

These trends and instructional fashions come and go with the changing imperatives of educational reform, all of which impact instruction, even if our beliefs don't change. Applebee (1993) notes three historical "traditions" with regard to the purpose of English instruction: literature as cultural artifact, literature to acquire skills, emphasis on the child reader (p. 4-5). Langer (2011) writes that the attempt at reforming our conception of language and literature shifted to include whole language and constructivist notions (p. 66). Pirie (1997) believes the "cult of the individual," as part of the greater cultural movement of the 1960s and 70s, is partially responsible for these alterations (p. 9). Political events, like Sputnik's launch, the 1983 report "A Nation at Risk," the passage of The Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Acts, among many, many others, have also altered classroom

practices. Rosenblatt (1991) sums this up by saying that teachers, educators, and theorists aren't only competing with each other, but are also up against the public, because "all levels of the educational establishment are under attack" (p. 71). Purves (1997) was right to feel "anxious and irritated" at how the jargon gets thrown around because it denigrates teacher, parents, and, worse, students (p. 134).

### **Pedagogical Implications of Theory and Criticism**

The preceding section illustrates that instructional models of literature at the secondary level have neither kept up with nor reflected the evolution of literary theory at the university or "scholarly" level. More importantly, perhaps, is that "accounts of the theoretical developments in the past half-century have tended to designate the theories in terms of methods of interpretation without making explicit their pedagogical implications" (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 71). Plainly, we don't have a clear picture of what "doing literary theory" looks like in the day-to-day reality of a secondary English classroom. When the theoretical positions are examined with the understanding that often the methods of interpretation are not made explicit, the division lies between text-oriented theories like New Criticism and reader-oriented theories, like reader-response (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 72), though the influence of reader-based orientations is even less evident in the high schools (p. 71). Because the nature of secondary literature instruction remains somewhat firmly in these two camps (Applebee, 1993, p. 116), the following section primarily discusses the ways in which New Criticism and reader response get enacted in a typical classroom and the limitations of each.

**New Criticism.** The most notable effect of the New Critical model is that teachers become the explicators of the text (Appleman, 2000). Because this theory requires a set of sophisticated skills and a literary vocabulary that is of little interest to some students, the meaning of the text often turns out to be what the teacher says it is (Moore, 1997). This is not intrinsic in the model of New Criticism as the founding fathers meant it; however, if the reader is critic, then the student's role is to be a "critic in embryo" (Young, 1989, p. 9). It is the teacher-expert who possesses the knowledge and skills for unlocking the meaning of a text and to arrive at the correct meaning (Probst, 1986, p. 64). In the classroom, this often results in an exchange similar to what Hynds (1985) found with one of her focal students, Cathy<sup>5</sup>:

[i]n describing her least favorite English class, Cathy focused on the difficulty of getting the "correct interpretation" (i.e., the one supported by the teacher): "[The teacher would] say 'well, that's your opinion, but the author meant it to be this way!' and so you said, 'Okay (laughs) I'll go write that down' (laughs)." The theme of "correct interpretation" and the discomfort associated with getting "the right answer" run through Cathy's comments and responses to stories. (p. 44)

A New Critical classroom places the teacher with a position of considerable power and authority (Young, 1987, p. 11). As a result, students can be disengaged, and often disempowered, passive recipients of knowledge, rather than active constructors of meaning or interpretation.

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5 All names are pseudonyms used by the researchers.



Another conflict or tension centers on differences between how teachers read—their specific process—when reading for a literature class and when reading for pleasure. These tensions seem to be specific examples of larger conflicts in the study and teaching of literature (Nelms & Zancanella, 1990, p. 44). What does it mean to be a reader in a New Critical classroom? Probst (1986) writes:

the only readers who count are the teacher and the critics and literary scholars. Their opinions are to be deferred to; their techniques are to be imitated; their answers are to be returned on the tests. Other students are to be ignored if they have a history of being "wrong," followed if they have a history of being "right," scorned if you yourself are the one who is most often "right." Other readers are most easily divided into those two camps—the ones who are correct and the ones who are incorrect. Since much classroom exchange is modeled on the debate, other readers are to be argued with and beaten, if possible. We listen to them to find out what is wrong with their ideas. We do not change our minds, because to do so is to admit that we made a mistake. (p. 64)

Understanding the dynamics of the literature classroom requires a view of the teacher, not just as a pedagogical actor, but as a reader (Zancanella, 1992, p. 217). Reading for pleasure is almost entirely invisible in New Critical classrooms. Ann, one of the teachers that Hines and Appleman (2000) worked with, described her classroom as follows:

I really want them to dig into the book and think about the actual words of the writer, a lot more so than they would with just say, you know, picking up a book on their own and just reading it. I want them to find direct quotes to prove a character is this way or that - give us that character's philosophies. And so they

work with the book a lot. I hope they will go further, deeper into the literature, looking at other issues which may emerge - for instance, what this character did or the theme. (p. 148)

There is nothing innately wrong with close-reading as a method—it indeed has its merits (Gillespie, 2010, p. 248; Purves, 1980, p. 234)—nor is close reading only part of the formalist camp. But in his classroom, Faust (1997) found his students asking to “just read” instead of “analyzing” a text (p. 331). This constant focus on “digging into the book” can be antithetical to that other goal English teachers share of creating life-long readers and can distort the reading experience (Rabinowitz, 1987, p.230). Purves (1997) acknowledges that normally, when kids read, they enjoy it and get absorbed, but school changes that. Being engrossed might be what we want, but “we know that the reason we have students read or view and discuss or write has little to do with pleasure. Our lesson plans and textbooks are apparatuses that focus on a different kind of audience” (p. 135). He goes on to say that school literature is not supposed to be fun; it’s supposed to be a “mental discipline” but that “our work is flawed because many of our students resist it. Our work serves a small college bound audience” (1997, p. 136-138). His suggestion, however, is to alter the text selection as a means of decreasing this resistance, not change the critical stance of the teacher.

Indeed, curricular issues like text selection or assessment—usually beyond a teacher’s control—likely contribute to this continued emphasis on formalism. The exams offered by Advanced Placement, College Board, and the American College Testing Service encourage analysis and interpretation (Shuman, 1994, p. 58). In our era of No Child Left Behind and its emphasis on standardized literacy testing (Soter, Faust, &

Rogers, 2008, p. 1) for all students, not just the college-bound or honors students, this has only become more pervasive. Exams of this sort are typically characterized by the assumption that personal or idiosyncratic responses are inappropriate, or even inadmissible. Teachers, with an eye already on these tests, carry these assumptions into their work with secondary students (Benton and Fox, 1985, p. 103). Textbooks (or, as they are often referred to in the English classroom, anthologies) typically stress formalist values, as well (Gillespie, 2010, p. 1).

**Reader response.** Recognizing that we can't be satisfied with a way of reading that shows too little regard for the reader and that an absolute, perfect reading of a work is unlikely, if not theoretically unsound, many teachers have abandoned New Criticism for reader response (Probst, 2004, p. 55). It is undeniable that, in many ways, a reader-centered approach has made literature teaching more relevant, immediate and important (Appleman, 2000, p. 26). No longer do English teachers "have" to stand in front of classes to explicate intention or interpretation; we can explore works and their meanings with real readers—our students (Soter, Faust, & Rogers, 2008, p. 34), and the pedagogical context allows students to flourish (p. 36). When we're talking about the meaning and significance of a literary work, teachers and readers become equal (Probst, 1986, p. 64). Reluctant or struggling readers are provided with a level-playing field, (Panfil, 2008, p. 37). Even text selection (from the canon to more "teachable" books), assessment (from analytic essays to reading logs), and classroom formation (from rows to misshapen circles) often evolved (Appleman, 2000, p. 27).

All theories and approaches have their limitations, of course, and reader response should not be considered some sort of panacea<sup>6</sup>. In a classroom of 25 or 30 students, each of whom may construct an interpretation of a particular text, which one will be accepted as correct or valid? In other words, whose standards for validity will count? (Unrau & Ruddell, 1995, p. 22). Reader response seems to place equal value on all interpretation—yet teachers *do* know more than students, otherwise they wouldn't be teachers (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998, p. 82, my emphasis). Despite a theoretical understanding that reader response does not mean “anything goes” and that there will be instances of reader inattention or bias (Gillespie, 2010, p. 64), sometimes a reader response classroom is one in which students claim snarky things like “if my response is uniquely mine, then what can anyone else tell me about it?” or “you can't really tell me anything about this book since my personal response is the only thing that counts,” both of which, of course, are misreading of the true nature of reader response (Appleman, 2000, p. 29) but common occurrences nonetheless.<sup>7</sup>

This misreading is likely because much of the writing on reader response theory lacks a clear picture of what a response-centered classroom might look like, and,

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6 There is a wide variety of reader response theories, all of which have their benefits and limitations. While Rosenblatt's transactional theory seems to be the most well-known (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 70), for heuristic purposes I am grouping together here the various reader response models.

7 This could also be due to the wide variety of reader response theories. Bleich's (1978) subjective criticism does seem to affirm some of these ideas (Probst, 2004, p. 14).

especially, what the teacher's role in such a classroom might be (Nelms & Zancanella, 1990, p. 43). Faust (1997) writes that, as a teacher trying to move toward a more reader-centered classroom, he struggled with "listening to students' unguided responses" and wondered how to intervene without silencing students as readers (p. 333). Rachel, a teacher with whom Appleman (2000) worked, was also uncomfortable with a solely personal approach; she believes there is something limiting about it—it might trivialize the importance of the real differences between the reader's world and the text (p. 28). For example, can a white female student really "know how [the black children in a book] felt" after reading a book about segregation? (Many & Wiseman, 1992, p. 264). As Lewis and Dockter (2011) argue, the move to reader response fails "to acknowledge the sociopolitical constitution of textual interpretation and evaluation." By valorizing the personal, educators have ignored the ideological (p. 80). Even if we can agree that in a class of 20 or so students there is a high likelihood that people will disagree and engage one another in productive discussion about individual response, what about when we read alone? We'll end up talking to ourselves if our primary reading technique is only personal (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998, p. 59). Lastly, some believe that for a truly aesthetic reading we need to choose the text and the reading situation, two things that (for better or worse) do not often happen in the secondary classroom (Zarrillo & Cox, 1992, p. 248).

**Alternatives.** New Criticism and reader response are not the only theories or approaches to criticism available to teachers; many English educators have had success in the classroom utilizing another—or multiple—perspectives. Maggie, a teacher working with Hines and Appleman (2000) taught in a teacher/text centered, canonical, New Critical classroom for nearly twenty years until she participated in a study in 1993 which

prompted her to consider other theories. She was transformed, and her classroom terrain was altered significantly (p. 158). Others report success with introducing several methods (e.g. Appleman, 2000; Gillespie, 2010) even as they encounter student resistance along the way. Yet these, too, are not without their troubles. These “institutional readings” (Marxist, feminist, Freudian, etc.) can have a stifling effect on a reader’s ability to find something new in a text; they can turn into Procrustean readings that pre-interpret the text so that the reader knows what she’s going to find before even picking up the text (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998, p. 59). Phelan (2005) argues that these approaches, much like New Criticism, work “outside in” by applying concepts *to* a text to make connections (p. 88, my emphasis). One who is committed to issues of feminism and gender equity and economic and racial equality will see these concerns playing out in every text one way or another. When we apply a framework a priori to a text, we find ourselves in a circular argument: if we look for it and find it, that proves it exists, which proves that we should have looked for it to begin with. That doesn’t mean we readers—I certainly count myself among those committed to issues of equity and equality—with personal political convictions should ignore them upon picking up a text. However, our understanding of these patterns is strong whether we know the author is praising them, criticizing them, or simply unaware of them.

Although the post-structuralist approaches bring to bear a literary focus on multiculturalism and social justice, something many scholars, myself included, argue is beneficial, the research indicates that an overwhelming majority of teachers rely upon formalism or reader-response approach in the classroom, often combining them despite their theoretical irreconcilabilities (Applebee, 1993). Many times, teachers use the

personal nature of reader-response to “hook” students into a book, and then move to the more difficult task of analyzing the text for its one, true intended meaning (p. 125).

### **Implications for Teachers**

No matter which theory is enacted or how, the importance of coming into the classroom with a methodological approach cannot be overstated. Teachers use literary theory to transform their personal and intellectual commitments into representations of text and worlds that are then negotiated, refined, and contested by students. Literary theory should be part of a teacher’s pedagogical content knowledge (Hines & Appleman, 2000, p. 143-144). However, it seems not to be part of the typical teacher education program, at least not explicitly. Purves and Beach (1972) found that teachers were deficient in theoretical terminology (p. 171). In 1991, Rosenblatt argued that graduate liberal arts programs had recently begun to pay attention to the educational implications of the shifting literary theories (p. 71), but Wright (2008) says that it was not until she took a graduate course *specifically* on literary theory that she was able to identify a frame for the different types of questions she had been asking her high school students and understand that these frames reflected a variety of orientations toward literary text (p. 103, my emphasis).

Until very recently, good teacher training and educational practice were typically in keeping with the New Critical priorities so much so that formalism became commensurate with good instruction (Applebee, 1993, p. 117). However, now, teachers and students can explore new ways of reading that encourage multiple interpretations of texts, students, and cultures (Hines & Appleman, 2000, p. 144). Yet, Appleman (2000)

found that high school teachers are wary of theory (p. xxii). And, argue Rabinowitz and Smith (1998),

it is not surprising that literary theory has developed this reputation. Much of it is difficult much of it is jargon-ridden and poorly written...and, frankly, much of it is divorced from the concerns that made us turn to literature in the first place....This easy dismissal of literary theory impoverishes our reading and our classroom practice. “Theory” should not be the province of elite intellectuals at research universities. It has value for improving the pedagogical practice of anyone who teaches literature at any level. (p. xiii)

### **Statement of the Problem and a Possible Solution**

Despite the proliferation of theory across the academy, few studies actually substantiate the role that theory plays in instructional contexts (Hines, 1995, p. 241). Certainly, researchers need to continue to bridge this gap and to do so in a way that reaches secondary teachers. However, without the explicit instruction of theory or criticism, the perpetuation of New Criticism and reader response may continue, despite the limitations of both. A more drastic—admittedly, even lofty—goal for English educators and their university counterparts may be to attempt what Bancroft (1994) calls for: a unified theory of literary analysis (p. 23). This unified theory should be one that recognizes the needs of teachers preparing students for higher education or working with struggling readers; one that neither ignores the author nor the reader nor the context; one that places teacher and student on a relatively equal playing field; and one that focuses on



*knowing how to read* for interpretation rather than *accepting a particular* interpretation (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998, p. 48-49, my emphasis).

Benton (1992) agrees:

[w]e need to reappraise the relationship between reading and teaching literature.

In particular it is necessary to develop a methodology of literature teaching that is based upon informed concepts of *reading* and *responding* rather than upon the conventional, inherited ideas of “*practical criticism*” and narrowly conceived *comprehension*. Properly handled, literary understanding and critical evaluation develop *as a result* of reflective reading and responding: the 2Cs are part of the 2Rs. If they cease to be part of the whole reading/responding experience, then comprehension degenerates into inquisition, criticism into mechanical analysis, and a gap opens up between the reader and the text which reduces the latter to fodder for just another sort of textbook exercise. (p. 45-46, emphasis original)

Faust (1997), too, believes that “producing literary criticism of one form of another may not be the most sensible goal for many teenage readers of literature (p. 331). We also need to consider that:

most high school students won’t become literary scholars; to assume that what is of interest to the critics or scholars is what is of interest to the student is to make a rash leap of faith. Scholarly questions are not irrelevant, but other questions take precedence; they have to do with the interests and satisfaction of the average reader. (Benton, 1992, p. 29)

This reflects another factor English educators often forget—that literature isn’t written for scholars; it’s written for readers (Benton, 1992, p. 34). Even the classics of the

canon—regardless of how individual teachers feel about their inclusion in the typical classroom—were written for an audience beyond the halls of academia. But how can we encourage “the average reader” to also “read for interpretation”?

My study is an attempt to respond to this theoretical and pedagogical conundrum that impacts both teachers and students in the secondary English classroom. While I certainly do not count myself among the “best and brightest” outlined by Bancroft (1994), I suggest that narrative theory, with an emphasis on the rhetorical approach, is a framework currently under-utilized in the secondary classroom. While not without its own critical flaws or pedagogical hiccups, rhetorical narrative theory seems to address many of the problems inherent in the formalist, reader response, and cultural, post-structural approaches. Rhetorical narrative theory as I use it here posits that textual meaning is derived from a feedback loop among the implied author, textual features, and the individual reader (Phelan, 2005, p. 18). As both New Criticism and reader response pay little attention or no attention to the intelligence that created the text (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998, p. 31), this particular methodology brings the author into the proverbial discussion as well, though without necessarily falling back on issues of authorial intention. The four rules of reading (Rabinowitz, 1987) and concepts like authorial and narrative audiences (Rabinowitz, 1977) may help teachers and students blend the elusive goals of reader engagement with thoughtful reading of *all* fiction. Indeed, without naming it as such, Vasquez (2009) did just this when she was a guest facilitator in a ninth grade English class in Texas and reports positive results. Wright (2008) also utilized this particular approach in her classroom, though she really only focused on the concept of unreliable narration. Yet, like many academic discourses, rhetorical narrative theory is

rife with potentially cumbersome and confusing terms and concepts. Therefore, in order to translate, justify, and integrate these “new” terms—the three goals of narrative theory instruction as outlined by Herman, McHale, and Phelan (2010)—I argue that secondary students can be effectively introduced to this approach to interpretation by engaging with a body of texts whose implied readers are less advanced than they are, namely, children’s literature.

In the original iteration of the research design of this study, I outlined the following three questions as my research foci:

- 1) To what extent can picturebooks be used as a vehicle for learning about rhetorical narrative theory, and to what extent can high school students in turn use these rhetorical tools successfully to analyze children’s literature?
- 2) How do students respond to the explicit instruction of this approach to analyzing literature when typically theory is left out of the daily conversation in secondary English? How will the explicit instruction of my theoretical framework impact my classroom experience as a teacher when, in my past experience, this has not been part of my pedagogy?
- 3) What becomes of the literary interpretive experience in a classroom space when the teacher and students engage with texts equally unfamiliar to both parties?

However, after conducting my teacher-inquiry research and analyzing the data using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Holt, 2005), the almost singular focus of my exploration became:

- 1) To what extent can secondary students use the tools of rhetorical narrative theory to successfully analyze children's literature? In turn, what benefits arise from utilizing children's literature in the secondary English classroom?

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

Chapter two serves two purposes. First, I discuss narrative theory generally, including a brief summary of various approaches to narrative, and then discuss more specifically the communication model (Chatman, 1978), the rhetorical model, and Rabinowitz's four rules of reading, as these in a particular inform my approach. Second, I offer a review of the literature pertaining to using children's literature, including picturebooks, with secondary and college students, as this pedagogical move may seem unusual at the secondary level.

Chapter three outlines my methodological approach to the study itself, during which I positioned myself as a teacher-researcher in an inquiry stance. I describe the epistemology of this methodology, the setting and contexts of my research, and a summary of the curriculum in this classroom-based teacher-research. Lastly, I discuss my data collection processes, data analysis techniques, and some of the limitations of the study. Chapter four presents my findings from the study, and chapter five is a discussion of the significance of this study, its implications for current and future teachers, and directions for further research and inquiry.

## **Chapter 2: Textual Theoretical Framework and a Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

This study explores the advantages of using narrative theory, specifically the rhetorical model as conceived of by Booth (1961) and further developed by Phelan (2005), as well as Rabinowitz's (1987) account of what he terms "the rules of reading," in the secondary English classroom in lieu of the two more dominant theoretical models, reader response and formalism. I also argue for the use of children's literature, especially—though not solely—picturebooks, as texts worthy of study in the high school classroom, particularly when introducing the rather difficult language of rhetorical narrative theory. This chapter has two main sections: a discussion of narrative theory as an analytical framework and the case for its use in secondary English, and a review of literature.

In the first section, I discuss narrative theory more generally, including a brief overview of various approaches to narrative study, before discussing the rhetorical model and Rabinowitz's rules more specifically, paying particular attention to the idea of teaching against memory as it pertains to this study. I also discuss the limitations of narrative theory and the rhetorical model specifically. Throughout this section, I also argue for why particular definitions or approaches are a good theoretical and pedagogical fit for the secondary classroom. In the second section, I begin by offering a working

definition of picturebooks, and then review the literature wherein scholars and teachers utilize children's literature and picturebooks as a means to a variety of pedagogical ends in secondary or higher education classroom settings. I conclude this chapter by making a theoretical and pedagogical argument for using children's literature as practice texts alongside explicit instruction in rhetorical narrative theory.

### **Narrative and Narrative Theory**

**What is narrative?** Barthes (1966) describes narrative as international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself (p. 252, as cited in Abbott, 2008, p. 2). Others, like Bruner (1991) maintain that narrative is how we construct reality, a notion echoed by Herman (2007) who writes that narrative is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change—a strategy which contrasts with (though is not inferior to), scientific modes of explanation (p. 3). Whether this is evolutionary, as some believe, or cultural, as others do, we cannot escape—nor would we want to escape—from stories and storytelling.

Scholars continue to debate the “minimum requirements” for what constitutes a narrative. In her chapter “Toward a definition of narrative” (2007) Marie-Laure Ryan outlines a mini-history of how this tricky term has evolved. Some scholars, like Genette, talk about the “representation of an event or sequence of events” while others, like Prince, specify that this representation requires one or more narrators and narratees; others, like Ricoeur, add temporality into the mix, and Bal includes the notion of causality (p. 23). These definitions (there are still others) pertain to narrative across media, and include both real and fiction. Ryan (2007) goes on to specify an eight-point

“toolkit for do-it-yourself- definitions of narrative” (p. 30); these include spatial, temporal, mental, and formal dimensions of narrative (p. 29) that should work across media and without privileging literary forms (p. 26). As useful as this “toolkit” may be in order to allow scholars to sort of pick-and-choose which aspects of narrative are “required” for their definition of the term and in specific media, I think a simpler definition is more utilitarian for working within the confines of a high school English classroom for two reasons.

First, although storytelling began as an oral tradition, and that we are constantly telling stories as part of our daily lived experience, Hogan (2011) makes a smart, necessary distinction between everyday storytelling and narrative storytelling: narrative storytelling has an actual end. His example—morbid as it may be—is that I would not wait until my mom died to tell my partner she had cancer (p. 75). There is a difference between literary narrative—fictive or not—and narrative as the mode with which we experience the world. While all narrative is communication (Chatman, 1978, p. 28), Ryan (2007) specifically tailored her eight points to *not* privilege the literary, but in a secondary English classroom, the narrative mode given overwhelming attention *is* literary.

More specifically, this attention to literary narratives is focused almost entirely on print. While state standards for English/Language Arts almost always include learning targets for speaking and listening, classes like Speech and film studies are typically offered as (relegated to?) electives. Additionally, the majority of texts read by students in high school are fiction. Occasionally, nonfiction narratives, like *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* or *Night* are included in the curriculum, or a rare critical essay is included as

part of a larger unit, but fiction is the most common type of narrative students encounter in grades nine through twelve.

Therefore, for reasons that will be discussed below, I draw on Phelan's (2007) definition of narrative—somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened (p. 3). Though this applies to all forms of narrative storytelling, when applied to the type of narrative commonly taught in high school English, it becomes increasingly more interesting because of its focus on narrative as a doubly-layered communicative situation. Of course this definition, like all others, is steeped in ideology about narrative and its purpose, but the rhetorical approach to narrative is one that I see as especially fruitful for engaging with print fiction in the secondary setting, especially when we consider the aforementioned concerns of critical/theoretical instruction.

**What is narrative theory?** Narrative as a concept is difficult to define, and narrative theory is no different. The most basic definition might be “a theory of literature based on the nature of literary objects itself” (Herman, 2005, p. 21) though this definition does not include more contemporary claims. “Narratology,” coined by Todorov in 1969, was an attempt to categorize the study of narrative in a scientific way, much like biology (p. 19). It is not my purpose here to summarize the intellectual and conceptual history of narrative theory. (For this, see Herman, 2005; Herman, 2007; Fludernik, 2005; McHale, 2005.) Rather, I offer a definition with general appeal, especially for secondary English teachers attempting to locate themselves theoretically in order to provide excellent literature instruction. Simply, then,



Narrative theory starts from the assumption that narrative is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with fundamental elements of our experience, such as time, process, and change, and it proceeds from this assumption to study the distinctive nature of narrative and its various structures, elements, uses, and effects. More specifically, narrative theorists study what is distinctive about narrative (how it is different from other kinds of discourse, such as lyric poems, arguments, lists, descriptions, statistical analyses, and so on), and how accounts of what happened to particular people in particular circumstances with particular consequences can be at once so common and so powerful. Thus a key concern is whether narrative as a way of thinking about or explaining human experience contrasts with scientific modes of explanation that characterize phenomena as instances of general covering laws. Narrative theorists, in short, study how stories help people make sense of the world, while also studying how people make sense of stories. ("What is narrative," 2012)

This definition accords with what Zacarella (2007) found high school teachers want their students to “get” out of English class. He found that most educators in the language arts believe that the purpose of high school English should be to establish the “inherent worth of story in the lives of individuals and cultures...and the open notion of stories to narratives across any kind of texts” (as cited in Lewis & Dockter, 2011, p. 77). It seems that these teachers aren’t primarily concerned with where we find meaning *in* texts, whether that is derived solely from the text itself, like the New Critics, or from the interaction of the text and reader, like the reader response camp. Rather, they believe that

stories and storytelling mean something *to us*. Narrative theory attempts—through the various approaches—to explain why and how.

### **How do we “do” narrative theory?**

**A variety.** Before moving into a more in-depth discussion of the rhetorical approach and why it is a good fit for the high school classroom, I want to briefly outline other ways in which narrative theorists attempt to describe how stories work and how they work on or with the people (authors and readers) who engage with them. I certainly will not exhaust the list of prominent theorists or approaches. Instead, this will be a thumbnail sketch of two that seem already partially inform high school teaching (without the teachers’ explicit awareness).

Cognitive narratology is interested in the roles of stories within phenomena like perception, language, knowledge, and memory (Jahn, 2005, p. 67). Zunshine (2006), for example, argues that fiction engages, teases, and pushes to its tentative limits our mind-reading capacity; our ability to keep track of sources (“he said that she thought that we knew I wanted to...”), or meta-representation, is a key ingredient of this mind-reading. We make sense of fictional characters by investing them with states of mind, and our enjoyment of fiction is because we get to “try on” different mental states. In an attempt to connect literature with students on a personal level, teachers often ask them to “step into” the mind of a character and defend choices or explain actions.

Affective narratology, on the other hand, posits that story structures are fundamentally shaped and oriented by our emotion systems (Hogan, 2011, p. 1). We respond emotionally to literature because we mentally simulate the experiences of a

character from his or her point of view (p. 55). This is often part of a reader-response approach (“how did you feel when...”) though Hogan is dealing specifically with how stories are structured by this emotionality, not our actual emotions. Keen (2007), however, is interested in our emotions, namely our ability to identify with a character because we empathize with him. However, she is careful to note that this empathizing is a reading *strategy*, not a *response*. Analysis can begin with cues from the text and with whom a reader empathizes, but should not be limited by this empathizing. Warhol (2003) pushes this idea even further by suggesting that certain popular culture forms are designed to evoke particular patterns of feelings, which then produce a somatic reaction (like one’s hair standing on end at a suspenseful plot point, gasping aloud, or crying).

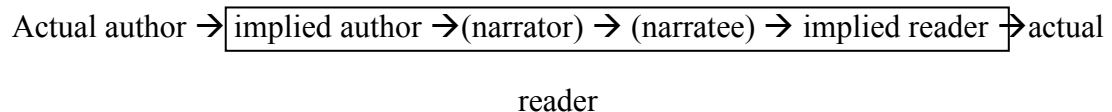
Though cognitive and affective approaches to narrative are more contemporary, structuralist narratology—now considered old-fashioned or even quaint (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2005, p. 1)—also has its place in the high school classroom, if only to provide students with a vocabulary about literature that moves beyond the typical theme, symbol, protagonist/antagonist, metaphor, setting, etc. already used. I’m not necessarily suggesting driving home the notion of story structure as a semiotic sign system derived from linguistics as the founding structuralists intended. Instead I mean introducing concepts like story/discourse, kernels/satellites<sup>8</sup>, (Chatman, 1978), issues of temporality, like order, duration, frequency, and narrative time, narrative and diegetic levels, and

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<sup>8</sup> These concepts are called by different names depending on the theorist. Bound/free motifs, nuclei/catalyzers, and constituent and supplementary events are other words used to describe the general idea (Abbott, 2008, p. 230).

focalization (Genette, 1980). These terms may be merely descriptive; however, they are generally accepted in the realm of narrative theory (if also perhaps continually debated) and, like all areas of intellectual inquiry, working with a common language is important. Moreover, when paired with the rhetorical approach, they become less descriptive and more analytic (Phelan, 2005b, p.503).

**Rhetorical.** Chatman's communication model serves as the skeleton for the rhetorical approach to narrative, or narrative as the art of communication. This model—though it has been criticized recently for some basic insufficiencies<sup>9</sup>—is status quo in narrative theory and especially the rhetorical approach. This narrative transmission looks like this:



Those inside the box are derived from the text.<sup>10</sup> Booth (1961), believing that the art of literature as communication had been long ignored by critics, pushes this further by arguing that narrative is a thoroughly *rhetorical* act of communication in which the narrator and types of narration are selected by an author to engage in a particular type of rhetoric. If an author wants to produce X effect, he should choose Y technique. Authors,

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9 Phelan (2011), for example, points out that characters don't seem to have a place here. What do we do with, say, dialogue novels?

10 Pretty much every single component of this model has been debated in the scholarship. The implied author is arguably the most contested, and a quick discussion of this idea follows in a later section.

readers, and the work itself are the sources by which we judge fiction. Booth also introduced the idea of the unreliable narrator, which is a product of (at least) the emotional and intellectual distance between the narrator and the implied author.

Rabinowitz (1977), dissatisfied with the binary of implied reader and actual reader, re-examined the role of the audience and developed terms like flesh and blood audience (the living, breathing individuals), authorial audience (for whom the author was writing, as evidenced by the creation of the text), and the narrative audience (who believes the narrative to be “true;” i.e., when we read *Cinderella*, we have to believe mice can sing, or the title character looks like a lunatic and the story is a sham). Individual readers need to simultaneously be in the narrative and authorial audiences: we need to believe the world of the text is real and realize it’s constructed all at the same time.

Building on these ideas, Rabinowitz (1987) later developed “the tacit conventions that govern readers’ interpretations and evaluations of narrative” (Phelan, 2005b, p. 503). These are the rules of notice, signification, configuration, and coherence. He argues that we pay attention to certain aspects of narrative, (titles, threats, disruptions, etc.), attend to those knowing their importance, put them together as the narrative unfolds, and then, when we’re finished, see how all of the parts make up an aesthetic and ethical whole. While these interpretive strategies are specifically for the reader, literary conventions—rules of genre, etc.—are also important for the author. Rabinowitz is not shifting to a pre-New Critical concern of authorial intention; rather, he argues that the author is operating under particular conventional limitations that are bound by history, culture, and genre. As readers, our interpretation of a text needs to begin by entering the authorial audience.

Both Booth and Rabinowitz place equal importance on the author, reader, and text. Phelan (2007), too, argues that a text's meaning is derived from a constant feedback loop among implied author, textual phenomena, and reader response (p. 18). We judge characters, develop hopes and expectations, construct hypotheses, etc. as we read, and then those are confirmed or denied, and the process continues. We also make ethical judgments about the narrator in relation to the telling and the told—what happens and how/when we learn about it—and our own personal sets of beliefs and values. This accounts for the differences in individual evaluations, but also for our shared interpretive experiences. Among other ideas, Phelan further develops Booth's concept of unreliable narrator and makes the distinction among three different axes along which a narrator can be unreliable.

**Against memory.** In addition to introducing rhetorical narrative theory, this study also explores Rabinowitz's concept of teaching against memory as a strategy for making explicit readers' interpretation of texts. In a typical classroom, the teacher is already familiar with the entire novel she assigns to students; she is teaching the text from a privileged interpretive position of coherence. On the other hand, the students are almost always encountering that text for the first time, and are attending to the rules of notice, signification, and configuration as they read. To put it plainly: students read, teachers reread (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998, p. 87).

In the chapter "'A Thousand Times and Never Like': Re-reading For Class," Rabinowitz (1998) makes the distinction among three types of re-reading, the third of which he focuses on throughout the chapter. He calls this "reading against memory." When we reread a narrative, we are reading the same text as the first time; however, our

reading of the text changes because we know, or think we know, what's coming. It is different in kind from a first reading because it is a different kind of activity (p. 91). Rereaders (especially good initial readers, like English teachers) often have a hard time distinguishing between the two activities (p. 92). Reading against memory is a theoretically loaded practice (p. 96) with possible negative consequences. One of these is that "reading against memory interferes with the classroom because it makes teaching whatever it is that we do teach more difficult, both by debasing student experience and by making it more difficult to teach our students how to read in the first place" (p. 99). The teacher is teaching from a reading for pattern, not progression (p. 97). Facts that readers are unlikely to notice on first reading—much less likely to draw conclusions from—are often treated, in retrospect, as if they were examples of 'foreshadowing.' Teachers present reading for coherence *as* reading for configuration (p. 98).

Rabinowitz believes that we should teach students to read against memory, especially because some books really do call for it, as it can enrich texts we do not understand (p. 88). However, we ought to precede that by teaching them to read intelligently and sensitively the first time through, to get back to where our students are—to blunder along *with them* through a text (p. 102, emphasis original).

**Limitations of narrative theory.** Narrative theory, despite my argument that it is a sound framework—both in and of itself as well as for the secondary classroom—is not without its critical flaws. Some interpretive methods perpetuate white male hegemony, especially the dominant structuralist claims (Lanser, 1992, p. 5). Narrative structures are determined by complex and changing conventions that are themselves produced in and by these relations of power (p. 5)—or, more plainly, corpus-begets-theory-begets-corpus.

Additionally, at its worst, narrative theory only rehearses the obvious—a “leadens naming of parts” (Hunt, 1991, p. 119). However, while Hunt’s assertion that much of narrative theory is “descriptive, classifying processes which are not always enlightening” (1991, p. 119) might be true among the literary criticism world, I think it is less true for high school students who are more novice readers (and theorists). Even the avid teen readers who enjoy fiction have probably never given *much* thought to why particular books hook them and others don’t; or, if they have, they almost certainly do not have a working vocabulary to describe the parts of the whole. We don’t want to overload them with jargon, but a lot of structuralist narratology—descriptive as it might be—could be useful at this level. Indeed, Rabinowitz and Smith (1998) believe that teaching students strategies to “unlock literary analysis” by identifying literary devices and investigating the effects of those devices enables teachers to free students from passively accepting their interpretation (p. xv). Essentially, the more equal the playing field between teacher and student with regard to talking about literature the better. However, although narrative theory shows the extent to which readers “must unconsciously master a whole range of conventions in order to process smoothly (at the level of common sense) the textual surface of fiction” (Selden, 1989, p. 66), when coupled with a difficult, canonical text, the combination may be cognitive overload. This possibility leads me to my decision to use children’s literature as part of this study.

The same difficulty of concepts bodes true for rhetorical theory as well. The idea of the implied author is debated heavily even among the scholars in the field. Phelan (2005) does an excellent job of concisely summarizing the trajectory of this debate, delineating the theoretical differences among theorists like Booth, Chatman, Rimmon-



Kenan, Bal, and Nünning (p. 38-49). Students may, for example, may agree that the implied author is merely a “teacher-game” or semantic substitute for the actual author (Zunshine, 2006, p. 67) unless the teacher spends class time outlining the theoretical reason behind it. The same holds true for ideas of implied reader or authorial audience, narrative audience, narratee, etc.

Rhetorical theory, too, with its focus on the layered ethical situation (Phelan, 2005, p. 20) also sometimes seems to ignore (or at least diminish) other aspects of reading fiction: feelings and emotions. Despite very clearly positing that “the formal logic of character narration has consequences for our emotional responses to character narrators, and these emotional responses, in turn, have consequences for the ethical dimension of our engagement with them” (Phelan, 2005, p. 5), focusing on narrative as rhetoric cannot, by design, focus on the emotional structure of stories (Hogan, 2011) or why some stories make us cry (Warhol, 2003). Already, high school teachers get accused of “over intellectualizing” literature and reading; focusing on rhetoric and structure doesn’t necessarily help with this matter.

Narrative theory also cannot escape the problem of audience (Hunt, 1991, p. 120). Although some theorists, like Herman (2009), are proposing alternatives that eliminate entities like the implied author and reader, the standard communication model remains a force in the narrative field (p. 203). If we’re constantly posing questions about the authorial audience of a text, the individual flesh-and-blood reader may feel neglected and his cultural and historical context may get ignored, even if the feedback loop of meaning as defined by Phelan (2005) focuses on the individual reader’s response to the textual phenomenon as designed by the authorial agent (p. 18).

**An added benefit.** However, the ideas of authorial audience and/or implied reader do have an added benefit that bears discussion, especially if we believe theory (and criticism) should not “just” teach literature and instead also teach our students ways of seeing and interpreting ourselves and our surroundings beyond the world of the classroom (Hines & Appleman, 2000). Though many teachers would not want to invite discourse of this nature into the classroom, narrative theory, specifically, though not solely, rhetorical, is not just a critical tool for interpreting literature, but one for interpreting the classroom and curriculum. In this way, we’re helping students potentially diagnose problems with what they find difficult about a text like those often found in the high school canon. Doing this can, in turn, help teachers (or departments) make better, more informed decisions about which texts we use in the classroom.

The arguments posed by Rabinowitz and Smith (1998) help to illustrate this point and are worth mentioning at length. In arguing for authorial readings of text—understanding and attempting to enter the authorial audience as the first step for interpretation—they make the point that

[e]very individual reader is different from every other reader. As a result, no writer can ever be sure of what his or her readers will be like. At the same time, however, no author can make any rhetorical decisions (conscious or unconscious) without relying on prior assumptions about precisely what values, experiences, habits, and familiarity with artistic conventions his or her readers will bring to the text....Of course, there will always be a gap between the actual and the authorial audience. There will always be references we do not understand, expectations we do not meet, attitudes we do not share, experiences we have missed. Any reading

will therefore, of necessity, be imperfect. The smaller the gap between the two, the better the reading. We owe it to the text and the classrooms in which we discuss them to try to narrow the gap as much as possible. (p. 5-6)

They go on to say:

[j]oining the authorial audience is not the same thing as accepting the position of the authorial audience. Critical readers—in the best sense of critical—need to question the ideology proposed by the texts they read. But you cannot step beyond the authorial audience without first recognizing it. As Phelan insists (1989), critical reading involves questioning the values of the text you engage; but you can't begin to do so unless you first determine the authorial audience. (p. 13)

Most of the canon taught in high school classrooms was written for an authorial audience far removed from a modern teenager. Even if we remove “modern” from the equation—there is no reason to suspect that teenagers in 1971 had much more success with these texts than teens in 2013—these novels are written for an audience with life experience most high school students have yet to understand. This inability to enter the authorial audience implies that something is keeping the reader from applying interpretive strategies that the author at least somehow believed to be readily accessible (Rabinowitz, 1987, p. 193). Misreadings occur when we attempt to join the authorial audience and fail (p. 174). Young and inexperienced readers—again, this is not the fault of the students—have a much harder time entering the authorial audience of the canonical texts, which makes it difficult for them to be educated, molded or discomfited by what is otherwise “powerful” literature (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998, p. 25-26). The above arguments are all the more reason why in my pilot-study of how ideas from narrative

theory can be leveraged in the secondary classroom, I used children's literature as the corpus of texts we read together.

The ideas from the rhetorical approach are certainly not the only ways narrative theory can explain why high school students have difficulty with certain texts. If we do not collaborate with the implied author, a narrative does not come to life, and we will might not absorb the information in the narrative and overlook things that are there (Abbott, 2008, p. 87). A reading might be difficult with intensified demands put on our cognitive abilities to mind-read the mental state of a character or because the metarepresentation—keeping track of our sources—is too complicated for an individual reader (Zunshine, 2006, p. 42). We might be unresponsive to a text because we can't identify or empathize with a character or feel rushed or pressured (Keen, 2007, p. 72). For storytellers to address an uncommitted audience, one without a prior, personal commitment to the storyteller himself, he must isolate some broadly shared, emotional goals (Hogan, 2011, p. 127). High school students are often an uncommitted audience, and often have very little personal commitment to the adult storytellers in canonical fiction. Reading about fictitious child characters and narrators, however, may more likely speak to teenage readers.

**Conclusion.** Admittedly, I have not touched on every aspect of a rhetorical approach to narrative. Booth, Rabinowitz, and Phelan are not the only scholars contributing to the particular aspect of the field, nor have I outlined every argument made by these three men. However, it is the equal importance placed on author, text, and reader, along with the elements of ethics and judgment that not only drew me to this particular approach, but also make it a good fit for the high school classroom. Teachers

seem to be stuck between focusing entirely on the text, at the expense of both author and reader, or focusing on the reader as she responds to the text, mostly unaware of the design behind it and how it was created in a purposeful manner in order to evoke many of the responses she's having. Secondary English teachers, tasked with "selling" literature to teenagers, often aim to teach the powerful message or theme in a work of fiction as a way of encouraging students to understand the complexities of human experience. Treating narrative as a means of communication that is inextricably bound with ethical judgment to students who are undoubtedly struggling with this exact issue seems to be a logical step. Lastly, Rabinowitz's call for literature teachers to model interpretation by not *rereading* a text is pedagogically interesting, and something I presume most teachers do not do, but could benefit from. In this way, we would "read with" our students, rather than "teaching to" them.

### **Literature Review: Children's Literature and Picturebooks in the Secondary and College Classroom**

**What is a picturebook?** In *Storytime: Young Children's Literary Understanding in the Classroom* (2008), Sipe summarizes the various theoretical definitions of picturebooks. He notes that in 1977, Sutherland and Hearne defined it as a book in which the pictures either dominate the text or are as important (p. 158). This definition does not address audience, nor does it really comment on the *relationship* between the words and text. Sipe writes that Nodelman (1988) defines picturebooks as being for young children, featuring mostly pictures with some or no text (p. vii), however, this definition, while

delineating audience (perhaps a bit too strictly?) also avoids discussing the text-image relationship. Schwarz and Schwarz (1991) comment that the text and pictorial narrations accompany, alternate, or intertwine (p. 5). Stewig (1995) distinguishes between picturebooks (like ABC or counting) and picture *story*books by the presence of a plot (p. 4, my emphasis); however, I would argue that some ABC or counting books do have a story or multiple stories (e.g. Morales [2008] a Spanish alphabet book about a trickster going to a birthday party on the Day of the Dead)—then what? “Illustrated” books in which “the illustrations are extensions of the text...but are not necessary for understanding it” (Stewig, 1995, p. 7, as cited in Sipe, 2008, p. 13) are also not the same as picturebooks.

I draw on Barbara Kiefer’s (1995) definition of picturebooks: a unique, multimodal art object in which there is an interdependence of the text and illustrations, so that the literary understanding relies upon learning to read the illustrational sequence along with the verbal sign system. Steiner (1982) writes that “a picturebook is a gesture toward semiotic repleteness” in which two sign systems “comment on each other” (p. 144). Sipe (1998) describes the relationship between text and art as synergistic because the effect of the two together is greater than either could be alone. Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) believe this interaction between the dual track in any given picturebook exists somewhere on a five-point continuum, ranging from “symmetry” to “contradiction.” Of course, this scholarship doesn’t mean that wordless picturebooks cannot be narratives, but that adjective “wordless” indicates an important distinction: a picture(story)book can exist without words, but not without pictures.

## **Picturebooks and Children's Literature for Secondary and College Students**

**Not just for kids.** Picturebooks are undervalued by students, parents, and teachers, typically because they're thought to be easy (Roser, Martinez & Fowler, 2011, p. 24). Of course, this couldn't be further from the truth. The format of a picturebooks is not an indication of the reading level or content; in fact, comprehending many of the complex topics addressed in today's picturebooks requires more background knowledge than most elementary students have (Cruz, Ford, Sheffield & Wilkins, 2008, p. 177). Neal and Moore (1991) agree, noting that many issues raised in contemporary picturebooks demand a maturity level that young children do not possess. Besides the "Four Ds"—death, drugs, divorce, and disability—topics such as war and nuclear destruction have found their way into picturebooks (p. 291). Moreover, first-rate children's literature offers the same benefits that any high quality literature and art offer, including the pleasure of a good story, the experience of knowing other people and places, and the opportunity to reflect or examine ideas and values. In short, like all good literature, children's literature provides a forum that allows us to see or think in a new way. (Bloem & Padak, 1996, p. 49)

High quality picturebooks contain rich vocabulary and well crafted sentences and stories (Carr, Buchanan, Wentz, Weiss, & Brant, 2001, p. 147), lyrical language and passages rich in metaphors and description (Neal & Moore, 1991, p. 291). However, we can't ignore the benefits of the visual track of picturebooks. "Our visually oriented society has conditioned students to employ pictures as comprehension aids. In an age of television, movies, and videos, young people are accustomed to using visual clues to augment their understanding of ideas. Picture books provide comfort to visual learners as

every page includes some form of illustration- drawings, graphics, photographs” (Neal & Moore, 1991, p. 291). Drawing on their extensive visual knowledge, students have the potential to gain a deeper sensitivity to the characters’ emotions and intentions than may be possible when reading a text-only book (Burke & Peterson, 2007, p. 74). Picturebooks require readers to use both visual and print literacies to understand and interpret them (Burke & Peterson, 2007, p. 74). These are skills in which high school students are already proficient—a sort of “street literacy” in decoding the visual signs that are omnipresent in popular culture that can then be applied to other semiotic systems, like purely verbal texts (Juchartz, 2003, p. 337).

Without sounding cynical, it would be disingenuous to ignore the fact that one reason why picturebooks are a good match for secondary students is their short length. High school classes tend to be less than an hour long, and the length of a picturebook is perfect for a short instructional time (Cruz et al., 2008, p. 179). Students can read and reread a single text or read multiple texts in a single class period. Undaunted by their length, reluctant or struggling readers might be more motivated to read (Bloem & Padak, 1996, p. 49). Though they should not be used solely for that purpose, picturebooks can increase motivation by providing easier material for less able readers (Carr et al., 2001, p. 146).

Picturebooks should be studied as literature on their own, but they can also extend the textbook (Bloem & Padak, 1996; Costello & Kolodziej, 2006; Freeman, Feeney, & Moravckik, 2010), especially for subjects like history. Textbooks are almost always written from the dominant perspective, and may not (typically do not) include the “common person” or human side of historical events; children, especially, are rarely



represented (Cruz et al., 2008). Students can compare the content of a picturebook to the textbook to understand different perspectives (Neal & Moore, 1991, p. 293). At the end of a unit, students can analyze picturebooks for accuracy (Cruz, et al., 2008). To put it plainly, they are just more interesting than textbooks (Carr et al., 2001, p. 147). <sup>11</sup>

**What to pick and how to use them.** Selection is a critical factor when bringing picturebooks into secondary classrooms. Not all picturebooks are appropriate for high school students' critical reading and interpretation of diverse perspectives (Burke & Peterson, 2007, p. 74). Richardson (2000) writes that picturebooks for older students should contain provocative issues and moral dilemmas to stimulate critical thinking and discussion (as cited in Carr et al., 2001, p. 147). Costello and Kolodziej (2006) include the teacher's enthusiasm for a text, intensity of information, portrayal of diversity, and high literary standards as criteria for selection. Roser, Martinez, and Fowler-Amato (2011) suggest using books that help readers establish clear purposes and making sure teachers have enough books—though not necessarily the same book—for all students. In nonfiction picturebooks, especially to supplement history, geography, or other cultural studies, factual information should be verified, and the picturebook should be a modern

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, one reason why they are more interesting is that picturebooks—even many non-fiction ones—tell a story rather than merely presenting information. This doubly supports my claim that narrative theory should be embraced not only by English teachers looking for a theoretical orientation, but also by other subject area teachers. The advantages of using narrative theory in the history classroom, for example, will be quickly mentioned in the next section.

representation, unless the specific learning objective is to understand historical and political changes (Landt, 2007, p. 12).

Presentation of picturebooks with older students is also important. In their research using children's and young adult literature with adult literacy learners, Bloem and Padak (1996) found that adults are not offended at the inclusion of these texts as long as they are appropriate and presented carefully (p. 49). Juchartz (2003) worked with college-aged students, and found that using texts like Dr. Seuss in his English courses were consistently met with delight with the chance to engage with these "non-traditional" materials. Students did not object to these texts as being beneath them (p. 337), though he also cautions against making students feel like children in the process (p. 340). Though college students and adults are obviously older and generally more mature than high school students, the same cautions hold true for them as well. To engage high school students with picturebooks, teachers should read books aloud (Carr et.al, 2001, p. 147) but also give students a chance, either individually or in groups, to have a hands on experience with the text (Landt, 2007, p. 10).

Murphy (2009) summarizes the benefits of using picturebooks with older students:

Picture books can help by entertaining, informing, and leading students to greater understanding of the world around them. They teach about content, about the world they represent, about form, about literature and about language and about how stories can be told. For the many students not interested in specific content or academic learning in general, picture books are a captivating medium to learn content. Picture books can pique the interest of many adolescent students who, on

the surface, may appear to be bored and apathetic. With little classroom instructional time, teachers and students can read a picturebook from start to finish and still have time for meaningful subsequent assignments, discussions, or activities. Second, picturebooks contain intriguing illustrations and are pleasurable to view. Picture books provide an array of art styles and offer opportunities for aesthetic learning. Third, picture book texts, with their trademark brevity, contain carefully chosen words. The texts are often used as writing models. Fourth, picture books are reader friendly. Young people are allowed to relax and enjoy the reading. (p. 20-21)

**Interdisciplinary.** Picturebooks and children's literature can be used in nearly every subject area. Before discussing how English teachers can benefit from including these texts—obviously my focus—I will discuss how other content teachers can benefit and what lessons these teachers have already done. The book itself can be studied as an art object, to understand artistic elements, influence of styles, movements, or techniques (Neal & Moore, 1991). In Burke and Peterson's study (2007), upper high school students in Canada participated in an interdisciplinary study of the Holocaust in Europe and examined two picturebooks, *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985) and *One More Border* (Kaplan, 1998). They talked about their illustrations, including line, color, and shape to further develop their visual literacy (p. 76-77). Picturebooks, especially postmodern picturebooks, can be used in art education in at least two ways: by their content and by their physical form. A study of the form and the illustrations can lead into art lessons about design and art media. A study of content can help teach students to decipher the cultural codes and signifiers in today's world (Hellman, 2003, p. 10). Students can study

negative space, the nature of image and style, and techniques like collage or even bookmaking (p. 11).

Math and science picturebooks can relate content to the world beyond school (Carr et al., 2001, p. 152). Children's and young adult literature that deal with difficult math concepts can introduce or highlight a term, or help students learn the history of a concept (Padula, 2005). Although research on elementary teachers integrating picturebooks with young students is quite extensive, research on using literature of any kind for senior high school students is quite lacking (Padula, 2005, p. 36). What little there is focuses on longer works, like Sriraman (2003, 2004) who assigned a young adult novel, *Flatland* (Abbott, 1880/1992), to her freshman algebra students. In this book, A. Square traveling to lands with varying dimensions, and is banished from Spaceland for suggesting there might be a fourth dimension. Sriraman reports that after some initial skepticism about using literature in math class, her students were actively engaged with the text and it led to other classroom activities, like teaching-pairs and student led Socratic seminars. The experience was so positive, Sriraman continued it the following year with the sequel. More research needs to be done on using picturebooks in secondary math and science, though Sriraman's success points to the overall value of using narratives in any classroom.

Unlike the trickier advanced science and math courses, picturebooks fit seamlessly into social studies classes. They can be used to understand historical time periods and different cultures (Carr et al., 2001, p. 148), historical unknowns and social aspects of history (people and work, etc.), as well as war, patriotism, immigration, traditions, and current issues (Neal & Moore, 1991). The images in picturebooks

naturally lend themselves to learning about geography and physical features of an area (Landt, 2007, p. 9). Using several books on the same geographic region or culture allows students to compare and contrast the sources (p. 10).

Before starting Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Taliaferro (2009) wanted to familiarize her white, middle class ninth graders to African geography and culture (with an emphasis on Nigeria, though not limited to it). She found that many of them knew very little about Africa in general and worse, had developed "single stories" about the people, like the AIDS epidemic or mass starvation. She specifically selected books that challenged these preconceived notions. After brief "book talks", students worked in cooperative groups to choose a book to explore further, filling out a graphic organizer that served as the basis for a whole class share-out at the end of each of three class periods spent on this activity. Students learned vocabulary, cultural history, and this "humanized" Africans for them (p. 33-34). When they began reading Achebe's novel, "the impact was even more apparent" (p. 34). The picturebooks were an effective tool for supporting the students' understanding of Igbo culture. Students were so interested they requested to do more work around African culture, including service learning projects to raise money that went directly to African charities (p. 35-36).

The students in Burke and Peterson's study (2007) not only studied the visual components of two picturebooks about the Holocaust, but also did writing activities and dramatic activities to explore the public and private struggles faced by individuals during the Second World War (p. 75). Through the exploration of these two powerful texts—*Rose Blanche* is about a little girl who brings food to a child in a concentration camp until she, too, is killed by Nazi soldiers; *One More Border* is the true story of a family's escape

during the war—students developed a deeper understanding of the difficult decisions people made during this time.

Cruz et al. (2008) write that picturebooks with their combined narrative and visual tracks can also shed light on difficult topics like racial discrimination and prejudice. In a unit on oppression and resistance, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher began with a picturebook about the Middle Passage before moving on to a novel on the Holocaust. The impact of seeing the forced journey of the slaves depicted visually was enormous for her students (Roser, Martinez, & Fowler-Amato, 2011). The dual visual and narrative tracks create a rich portrait of a period or event plagued by conflict stemming from skin color or physical attributes (Cruz et al., 2008).

Learning about unfamiliar cultures through picturebooks is valuable for students beyond middle and high school as well. Buck, Gilrane, Brown, Hendricks, Rearden, and Wilson (2011) wanted pre-service teachers to be more familiar with international cultures and texts so that they would then be inspired to use these materials with their students. After receiving a grant for materials, the authors bought books and put together teaching resource boxes with a variety of books and a CD of teaching ideas. One book in particular, *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* by Peter Sis (2007), an autobiographical account of the author's childhood in communist Prague, was chosen for a whole class exploration, and then the students were put into small groups to pick another book to explore in a mock-teaching activity. Feedback from the undergraduates was overwhelmingly positive. Using the picturebooks not only made them aware of the abundance of international children's literature, but also that these books take complex

topics and relate them in a manner that addresses the gravity of the situation while also providing hope (p. 58).

Exposing pre-service teachers to children's literature (toward any goal) is important and shouldn't be overlooked. Freeman, Feeney, and Moravcik (2010) outlined four purposes for using children's literature with pre-service or practicing teachers: cross-cultural exposure; preparing to work with students whose parents have divorced, supplementing the textbook, and staying informed, reflective, and effective. By reading these texts, the undergraduates and adults can learn more about childhood and increase their knowledge of good children's literature. Though the authors report getting "curious stares (or outright criticism) from colleagues for using children's literature in classes with adults," the students report enjoying it very much.

**What about English?** Picturebooks are easily integrated into different parts of the curriculum (Murphy, 2009, p. 22). Effective teachers can use picturebooks to support instruction in content area classes (Roser, Martinez, & Fowler-Amato, 2011, p. 30). Obviously, though, they can and should be used in English classes as well. For the March 1985 issue of *The English Journal*, the editors put out a call for picturebook titles and quick lesson plans that teachers were doing in the secondary English classroom. Most responses fell into one of three main categories: using them to talk about real-life issues, like bullying or divorce; using them to talk about writing, including modeling the writing process or a particular writing mode; or using them to scaffold the themes or content of a harder or more canonical text. I want to provide examples of the first two before getting into a larger discussion of using picturebooks as a scaffold for harder/canonical texts, since that directly ties into my next section.

One of the more profound examples of using children's literature to talk about real life issues is from Doneson's (1991) experience teaching a class to pregnant and parenting high school girls called "Children and Books." Her objectives were threefold: First, to lure reluctant readers into reading books by presenting subject matter of interest to all of them—specifically, the raising of children; second, to familiarize the students with the wide array of popular books and magazines available to them as resource guides on parenting and child development; and third, to introduce the students to children's books appropriate to various ages and developmental stages so that these mothers and mothers to be would become comfortable and confident in reading to their children (p. 220).

When Doneson read books aloud in class to these students who had very few childhood book or reading memories, the discussions that followed were often intensely personal and included topics like domestic violence, rape, abandonment, and other horrible events "through the vehicle of the stories' main characters. By watching the other students develop interest in and empathy for their fictional characters, the storytellers seemed to feel safe revealing themselves; they allowed themselves to absorb the support and safety of the group" (p. 221). They critiqued books for their unrealistic portrayals of themes like fatherhood, and also were able to engage in conversations about their academic histories, most of which including feeling stupid in class, underachieving, or having learning difficulties (p. 222). Although not the most academically rigorous class—nor one commonly found in most schools, though I'm sure many others would



benefit—the value of picturebooks for eliciting personal and emotional responses in this, or other, contexts cannot be overestimated.<sup>12</sup>

Picturebooks can inspire creative writing by providing outstanding models of prose and poetry (Carr et al., 2001, p. 150). However, they can also be used to model other genres of writing, like informational or persuasive. Dean and Grierson (2005) worked with a seventh grade class reading a multigenre picturebook, *One Leaf Rides the Wind* (Mannis, 2005). After a “walk through” of the book looking only at the pictures, the class moved on to reading and discussing the text, specifically how the haiku and expository paragraphs combined to provide complementary information. Using this picturebook as a model, the class then created their own multi-genre picturebook on a different topic. This process encourages students to read and write more frequently and often at greater lengths. Students in the classes they’ve worked with reported that they liked this project—even students who didn’t normally participate in writing (p. 466).

Dean (2003) often used picturebooks as models for her students’ creative or personal writing assignments, with interesting, positive results. However, her research papers—a district requirement—filled her with dread. After years of reading papers that sounded like encyclopedias, or “voiceless stacks of facts loaded on top of each other with a few quotes thrown in randomly” (p. 32), she realized that they, too, were merely mimicking their sources. She experimented with using a picturebook for this assignment. She brought in *My House Has Stars* (McDonald, 2001), a nonfiction picturebook about

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12     However, I want to point out that this teacher/researcher was using the books specifically toward a purpose of this type, not in a reader-response English classroom.

what houses look like in different cultures and geographic areas. She and her students investigated content, organization, and the writing style used in the book. Students incorporated those ideas into their research paper and produced papers that were vastly better than in the past because she had given them an accessible framework to form their own text (p. 33).

Picturebooks can also be effective instructional tools to promote word fluency and vocabulary development (Neal & Moore, 1991, p. 293). To introduce students to the richness of words, teachers can use ABC picturebooks (Polette, 1989, p. 78). Instead of memorizing a list of words out of context, students can discover and use new words in a way that activates whole brain learning by connecting the words to a visual image (p. 79). Teachers are seeing success with this activity with all ability levels; lower level students can see tangible results in their vocabulary development, while upper level students are challenged to engage with and produce new “products” (p. 79).

**Picturebooks to scaffold literature and theory.** Often, students who are struggling with the length and complexity of an assigned novel miss the subtleties of the author’s craft, such as use of mood or metaphor, time sequences, and point of view (Carr et.al, 2001, p. 148). Picturebooks can illustrate in simple form certain literary elements found in more difficult texts (p. 150). These texts certainly do not have to be canonical, adult novels. For instance, Kane (1998) remarked to a friend who taught sixth grade that Newbery Medal winner *The View From Saturday* (Konigsburg, 1996) would make a great read-aloud for her class because it is about four misfit sixth grade students who beat a team of eighth graders in an academic competition and become close friends along the way. “The teacher replied that, although she herself loved the story, she could never read

it to her sixth graders because ‘It was too confusing; instead of one straight story line, there were four separate stories that interconnected’” (p. 182). Kane realized that it was not a lack of vocabulary or fluency that troubled this teacher’s students; rather, it was unfamiliarity with story-structure or discourse knowledge about text organization, especially differences based on genre. One way we can foster our students’ discourse knowledge is to teach them to notice patterns of organization, or relationships among sentences, paragraphs, and chapters in the texts they read (p. 182).<sup>13</sup> Kane suggests using picturebooks to teach students different ways author organize stories, like temporal order, cause and effect, and compare/contrast.

Naturally, though, the classics come with their own challenges, especially for struggling or disinterested readers of any age. After his first semester of teaching remedial reading at a community college, Juchartz (2003) recognized that his students were unfamiliar not only with the “classic” authors on the syllabus but also more popular authors like Grisham, Rice, and King (p. 336). Wholly unprepared to interpret short stories by Faulkner or poetry by Rich, when faced with literary confusion, his students often reacted with anger, hostility, and derision (p. 337). He decided to experiment with scaffolding literary interpretation by introducing his students to children’s literature, like Silverstein and books by Dr. Seuss. Prior to reading Faulkner’s (1930) “A Rose for Emily,” in which the title character stubbornly (and morbidly) refuses to move on from the past, students read “The Zax” (1961) by Seuss. In this nine-page, simply illustrated

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<sup>13</sup> Kane does not cite Rabinowitz (1987), but this is a large part of his argument as well.

text, two Zax, one attempting to travel North, the other South, refuse to move out of the other's way out of willful pride; it gets them literally nowhere, and meanwhile, the world around them changes. After reading Faulkner's story, students discussed questions of conflict, change, memory, and the past, and Juchartz encouraged them to represent these ideas visually, as well.

Later, to introduce critical, poststructuralist interpretive strategies, students read Seuss's "The Sneetches" (1961) alongside a Langston Hughes poem about being defiant in the face of Otherness, and Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* (1964) as (anti)feminist before a short story in which an overweight woman only finds love after losing significant weight, and then loses it when she gains it back. Both "The Sneetches" and *The Giving Tree* engaged students in difficult, but powerful, conversations about the intersection of race, gender, and power. Juchartz writes

I argue that through the use of accessible children's books, including those by Dr. Seuss and Shel Silverstein, the number of problems that basic reading students are likely to encounter can be decreased because they are more able to share their innate reading expertise in a nonthreatening way. So much of college level reading asks students to support their understandings with textual evidence; visual literacy offers a tool for identifying and using that evidence within a sound pedagogical framework. (2003, p. 340-341)

Students are likely familiar with Seuss, Silverstein, and other popular children's authors<sup>14</sup>. These stories, like many other picturebooks, can be read on several levels, and older students are able to appreciate them with greater depth and maturity born from experience (Bloem & Padak, 1996, p. 49). Their "innate reading experience" allows them to feel successful before tackling something more challenging.

Much like Juchartz, Shea (2010) writes about opening the first day of her children's literature course by reading a well-known and loved children's book, *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963). After a read-aloud, she introduced her students to literary criticism with a "cheat sheet" of contemporary literary theories, including post-colonial, feminist, structuralist, and psychoanalytic. She and her students re-examine Sendak's story using these lenses and notice how Max, a white child in a white costume tames wild, foreign beasts and becomes their leader, and that Max's mom is entirely absent from the story. She writes that "while English majors are exposed to these theories, most non-majors are delighted to see the depth and breadth of response resulting from the application of these approaches to literature for both adults and children" (p.

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14 In 1991, Neal and Moore wrote "some of the best picture books may have been missed when students were younger or may have been published since that time. Recent publications little resemble the picture books done 10 to 15 years ago" (p. 291). Obviously, more than two decades have passed since, and Neal and Moore's claim only rings more true. Seuss and Silverstein are classics, though this doesn't mean that "unknown" children's authors like (I'm guessing) Scieszka, Wiesner, and others shouldn't be used, too.

31). Though Shea does not include any more practical pedagogical ideas, the rest of her article examines her own work and other picturebooks from a variety of critical theories, because “even the simplest picturebooks can be profound when examined through [them]” (2010, p. 34). Though her argument seems to indicate that picturebooks are *not* profound prior to a critical reading—something with which I vehemently disagree—her larger point is well-taken: there is certainly room for the intersection of theory and children’s literature.

Coats (2001) teaches a children’s literature course in her university’s English department, despite her acknowledgement that it is fraught with personal and professional risk—her colleagues don’t find her “credible” for doing so (p. 405). She argues that children’s literature allows students to learn more about ideology and the aesthetic practices of literary representation (and how it transforms culture) than in other literature courses (p. 405). It is precisely because of the “simplicity” of the texts they study that affords these intellectual insights (p. 406). In this article, Coats talks specifically about using three picturebooks about fish to discuss the ideologies of collective action, the dangers of self-mutilation, materialism and homogeneity, and censorship. Her students are usually “shocked” to discover how “deep” picturebooks can be.

Indeed, picturebooks have been used to specifically teach different theories. Meyerson (2006) writes that “students hear ‘theory’ on the first day of [educational psychology] class and many begin to disengage...as if they have learned from previous classes to associate ‘theoretical’ with negative words like pedantic, unrealistic, boring, and impractical” (p. 259). After hearing a conference presentation in which the keynote speaker read aloud a picturebook that illustrates constructivist theory, Meyerson started to

do the same. He regularly reads eight different picturebooks to supplement his undergraduates' understanding of various learning and developmental theories, like Erikson's psychosocial development, Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs, Skinner's operant conditioning, and Kohlberg's moral theory of development. However, he was concerned at the lack of scholarship about using picturebooks specifically to teach theory, so he surveyed his students about this pedagogical practice. Seventy-seven students, the majority of which were white, middle class females, voluntarily participated in a survey, which included questions on a 5-point Likert scale and an open-ended response. Sixty-four percent rated the children's literature as an "excellent" learning experience, (a five); another 23% rated it a four out of five, and the rest gave it three out of five. These literary experiences were rated significantly more positively than other classroom projects or presentations. Ninety-seven percent of the students responded to the open-ended question with comments that they found the experience enjoyable, that the books made the concepts more understandable, and that reading the books brought ideas together (p. 260). In his discussion, Meyerson writes

[f]irst, the books show the theory in operation, not just as an abstract idea.

Second, they connect the adult classroom environment (which is relatively sterile and affect-neutral) to an activity most students have not participated in since they were in grade school, a time many students remember fondly. Rereading childhood stories creates a bond between the students and me. Indeed, as one student commented on why she liked reading the books, "it makes me feel like a kid again." Third, many of these books also induce powerful emotional reactions and help create an affective connection between the student and the theory.

Fourth, as posited from Paivio's (1986) dual processing theory, they allow multimodal processing of the theories and concepts that are to be learned. Finally, and perhaps most important, I find that a good children's picture book requires its author, like a great poet, to condense a theory to its essence. Children can truly grasp this essence, and it is the best place to begin teaching college students a complex theory. From this perspective, children's picture books could be effective tools in helping to teach a variety of college disciplines. (2006, p. 261).

Caught in between childhood and adulthood, teenagers *might* not be quite as eager to "be a kid again" but Meyerson's points are otherwise appropriate to using children's literature in the secondary classroom to teach narrative theory. Picturebooks allow for dual processing and make the abstract concrete in a concise way that also activates emotions. Reading texts that both student and teacher have intellectual access to creates a more democratic classroom environment, which in turn allows for deeper relationships to develop.

Zambo (2005) also uses a picturebook to teach her educational theory course. Patricia Polacco's *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (1998) is an autobiographical story about the author's difficulty with learning to read throughout elementary school. "Trish" was bullied and teased until one teacher supported her and eventually helped her overcome her struggle with literacy. With each page turn, Zambo engages her students in discussion about the cognitive, social, and psychological experience of struggling readers like Trish that they may one day face in their classroom. Using this picturebook sets theory in context, gives a visual representation of it, and makes it come alive (p. 511). Picturebooks scaffold the learning of theories at the college level (p. 502) and beyond.



## **Children's Literature and Narrative Theory in High School English**

Secondary teachers try with all their well-intentioned might to get students to become better interpreters of texts, but when a text fails with a reader, the choice is to keep the text and change strategies, or change the text and keep the strategies. High school curricula, with their continued emphasis on New Criticism, have kept the texts. This close reading can distort the literary experience, because it results in slower reading, which means fewer texts, which isn't necessarily good. Being able to apply rules of interpretation involves being familiar with lots of texts (Rabinowitz, 1987, p. 230-231). Spending nine weeks dissecting one novel won't ameliorate this problem, especially when that novel evades interpretation by a teenage audience. Obviously, ninth grade is not the first time students read fiction, but

[i]n an ideal literature program, all students would experience a seamless curriculum that empowered them to grow increasingly fluent as readers, increasingly able to employ the strategies to interpret complex texts, and increasingly willing to read more challenging texts. The reality many students face, however, may be a welter of conflicting goals and methods—particularly as they make the transition from the middle grades to high school. The seventh-grade student accustomed to responding to *A Year Down Yonder* (Peck, 2001) in a personal journal may be ill-equipped to analyze Shakespeare or have a basic college understanding of Sophocles' *Antigone* (2001) a few grades later. (Knickerbocker & Rycik, 2002, p. 196)

We need a solid scaffold to help students begin the transition to a literature classroom oriented more toward critical analysis than personal response. Right now, we're asking student to learn a difficult theoretical vocabulary alongside challenging texts. I agree with Coats (2011), who argues that when introducing an "alienating critical vocabulary" to students, it makes sense to "rub the theory up against literature they can readily access" (p. 316). We do not need to entirely replace the "classics" of high school with other literature; rather, if we augment the canon with high quality literature for children and young adults, we can scaffold the instruction of interpretive strategies via tools drawn from structuralist, rhetorical, and other approaches to narrative.

Though skeptics might dismiss this idea as "dumbing down" the curriculum, it would actually make the classroom more democratic and less teacher-centered. Current classroom discussions tend to highly favor the teacher, which evolved because teachers teach texts that students find difficult...Therefore, the texts that teachers use to understand particular genres should not be the typical canonical literary texts, but rather should be texts students feel more in control of (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998, p. 82-3). Using picturebooks to initially teach the terms and concepts of narrative theory which students would then apply to increasingly more difficult texts sets students up for success and gives them a chance to safely practice these new ideas.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this chapter, I outline the methodology of this study. I begin with an introduction to my position as teacher-researcher, with a focus on the practitioner-inquiry stance. I also include a brief description of the school where I conducted my study and the process involved in the decision to do research there. Next, I describe in detail the curriculum of the course that served as my study, including texts and classroom activities. From there, I outline the data collection procedures and data corpus of this study and conclude with a description of the data analysis procedures.

#### **Teacher-Research and Practitioner-Inquiry Stance**

I want to begin this section by quoting at length an argument made by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) about the history of K-12 classroom teachers' involvement with scholarly research:

For much of the 50 year history of research on teaching, teachers and their work have been the topics of study. They have been the researched rather than the researchers. As subjects of research conducted by university based scholars, teachers have been in effect the objects of study. Their classrooms have served as sites for the collection of data...more recently, research on teaching has looked explicitly at teachers' thought processes and has begun to give prominence to the

complex interplay of teachers content and pedagogical knowledge and the ways that these are used in diverse classroom contexts. This movement toward recognizing teachers' knowledge and thinking as critical components in teaching, however, continues to objectify teaching and often ignores teachers' roles as theorizers, interpreters, and critics of their own practice. Although teachers have been regarded as decision makers in their own classrooms, they have rarely been included in decisions about research as knowledge generation. Teachers are also expected to be the eventual recipients of the knowledge generated by professional researchers. That is, they are expected to acknowledge the value of researchers' work for their own professional practice and to accept its validity for their day to day decision. This means that throughout their careers, teachers are expected to learn about their own professional not by studying their own experiences but by studying the finding of those who are not themselves school-based teachers. (1)

As a former full-time classroom teacher, Cochran-Smith and Lytle's argument was something I lived and experienced on a regular basis. After each in-service, or professional development day, I vividly recall my colleagues grumbling about "those researchers" who had conducted studies that ultimately led to policy decisions or best-practices that "we teachers" were now expected to implement. The distance between "research" and "teaching" was great. These memories and my experience in the secondary English classroom propelled my interest in conducting my dissertation study while actively participating in the research as a classroom teacher, rather than engaging in research in another role. I wanted to simultaneously take on the role of the researcher as well as the classroom teacher, working from the inside (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.

41). I wanted to do work as a knower, a deliberate intellectual who constantly theorizes about her practice as part of practice itself (Pappas & Tucker-Raymond, 2011, p. 3).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) write that "...[T]eacher research makes problematic in a different way the relationships of researcher and researched, theory and practice, knower and knowledge, process and product. When teachers do research, the gap between researcher and researched is narrowed (p. 58).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1993) working definition of teacher research includes fleshing out the concept of systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work. "Systematic" includes ordered ways of gathering and recording information, documenting experiences inside and outside of classrooms, and making some kind of written record. "Intentional" means that that teacher research is an activity that is planned rather than spontaneous, although Cochran-Smith and Lytle do not mean to suggest that important insights about teaching are only generated when planned. "Inquiry" suggests that teacher research stems from or generates questions and reflects teachers' desires to make sense of their experiences, to adapt a learning stance or openness toward classroom life (23-24). It should be noted, however, that I was not inquiring into "my own school and classroom work" in the sense that Cochran-Smith and Lytle delineate. Rather, I was conducting another genre of inquiry, in which practitioner inquiry is carried out by university based researchers who take on the role of teacher in K-12 settings for a specific period of time in order to conduct research on how problems of practice might be theorized and worked out (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 40).

This stance toward inquiry is particularly important for my role as teacher-researcher. "Inquiry blurs the lines between learners and leaders, between those framing

the problems and those implementing the changes in response to those problems. It is an organic, democratic theory of action that positions practitioners' knowledge, practitioners, and their interactions with students and other stakeholders at the center of educational transformation" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.123-4). Practitioner inquiry involves coming to terms with (and reflecting on) the duality of one's role as researcher and, in my case, classroom teacher (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p.41). This stance assumes that teaching can be an act of inquiry and that research can be pedagogical (Wong, 1995, p. 23).

### **Context and Curriculum**

Knowing that I was interested in conducting teacher-research, specifically research that involved implementing an atypical curriculum for secondary English classrooms, I understood that doing so would be more complicated working in a public school system. Public school curricula are often much more restricted due to the governing power of school boards and the need to adhere to state and local policies. Therefore, when I began considering sites to conduct my research, I recalled hearing of a job opening at The Warrenton School (all names are pseudonyms), which was quite close to my then apartment. I contacted the English department chair via email to propose what I hoped would be a symbiotic partnership: I would be in the instructor for their Children's Literature course—something they needed since the previous instructor had resigned—and I would, in turn, use the class as the source of my study. After several meetings with

various administrators and a teaching demonstration, everyone decided to move forward with the process.

**The site.** The Warrenton School is an independent, coeducational, college preparatory day school in the suburbs of a large Midwestern city. Serving preschool aged children through high school seniors, Warrenton was founded in 1982 by local entrepreneurs who wanted a “different kind of school experience” for their children, one that celebrated individuality, community, and holistic education. The mission of the school includes preparing citizens who achieve, lead, and find fulfillment in a global community. The Warrenton family “expects integrity; fosters mutual respect; embraces diversity; inspires each person to discover and strive to meet his or her unique potential; and celebrates excellence in character, academics, the arts, and athletics.” One central campus building is divided into three main sections separating the Lower, Middle, and Upper Schools. On site is a large cafeteria, administrative offices, physical education facilities including turf fields, a large auditorium, and a two-story library. Tuition runs from about \$10,000 a year for preschool-aged children to slightly over \$20,000 for high school students. Enrollment is approximately 600 students for the entire student body, with about one third of that number in grades nine through twelve.

The Upper School is on a five day, eight period rotating schedule designed in such a way that each class meets four times a week, twice for forty five minutes and twice for one hour, and not always in the same order (i.e., sometimes 4<sup>th</sup> period precedes 3<sup>rd</sup>). Each trimester is ten weeks long, plus a week for exams during which regular classes do not meet. After 10<sup>th</sup> grade, students do not take required English classes, and instead must sign up for a particular number of English credits per year from the variety

of classes offered, generally organized by topical content (children's literature, disability studies, banned books, etc.). Therefore, one expectation for all of these electives is that they feature literature study along with at least one paper that encourages the formal writing process (prewriting, drafting, editing, revising). This format, along with the time frame and nature of the content, were the only guidelines given to me from my English department contact about putting together the curriculum.

I was solely responsible for the selection of texts for this course. My purchase order for the longer works of narrative fiction (i.e. works that were not picturebooks) was due before the end of June, 2012. No picturebooks were to be purchased for this class, since 1) the sheer quantity would be fiscally prohibitive; 2) Warrenton has its own picturebook library; and 3) I am a member of two local library systems, one of which has two branches in roughly the same neighborhood as Warrenton. When considering the texts to be used, I wanted high quality narratives representing a wide variety of genres as well as a wide variety of narrative techniques or formats. Additionally, given my research question focused on teaching against memory (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998) I also needed to choose a novel in one of the genres that I had never read before. Below is a brief description of each text selected for this course, listed in the order we read them. I include a plot description and my argument for its inclusion in our curriculum.

*Zel* by Donna Jo Napoli (1996).

*Zel* is a reworked, reimagined version of the Grimm fairy tale, Rapunzel. Chapters are told from the perspectives of the three main characters, Zel, her Mother, and Count Konrad, the young nobleman who meets Zel in the marketplace and pursues her romantically. Only Mother's chapters are homodiegetic (using the first person pronoun



“I”); both Zel and Konrad’s chapters feature heterodiegetic narration. *Zel* begins before the title character’s 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, and closely follows the original version of the tale in which Rapunzel is trapped in a tower by her mother, discovered by her male suitor, and eventually escapes. I chose this text because I wanted to include a fairy tale in a non-picturebook format, and because the chapters are written with such narrative sophistication. Additionally, the “reveal” that Zel is Rapunzel is done in a rather subtle way that I thought would speak well to issues of implied audience, and the text does not shy away from the gruesome details in the original Grimm version, like Konrad being blinded by briars, which I thought might provide an interesting discussion on audience as well, since I assumed many of the students would not be as familiar with this content as they are with a more Disney-fied version. Lastly, I wanted to use fairy tales as examples of teaching issues of masterplot, kernels, and satellites, since there are multiple tellings of the same basic stories from a variety of cultures.

*The Watsons Go To Birmingham—1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis (1995)

Curtis’s award-winning historical fiction novel is narrated by twelve year old Kenny Watson, the middle child of parents living in Flint, Michigan. Kenny’s older brother, Byron, is, a “juvenile delinquent” who pushes the limits of his parents’ patience one too many times and gets sent to live with his grandmother in Alabama in order to “straighten him out.” The whole family, including both parents, Byron, Kenny, and their younger sister, Joetta, drive to Birmingham together with the intent of visiting for a few days and then leaving Byron there while the rest return to Flint. Instead, Grandma’s church is bombed one Sunday morning. Kenny, believing he has just witnessed the death of his sister—she was unharmed, but he saw another little girl wearing the similar shoes

get killed, thus his confusion—is traumatized. As a result of this tragedy, the entire family, Byron included, returns to Flint. No one knows exactly what Kenny saw that awful day, but ultimately, it is Byron who is able to coax Kenny out of his emotional distress. I chose this novel to address issues of narrative reliability as well as to ensure my curriculum included non-white characters. It is well written stylistically and centers on an event from a period in history I wanted to address with picturebooks as well.

*Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai (2011)

Lai's award winning novel is narrated in verse by eleven year old Hà over the course of one year, beginning with the Vietnamese holiday of Têt and concluding on the same day. During these twelve months, Ha and her mother and three brothers escape war-torn Saigon on a boat, are temporarily detained on the island of Guam, and then are ultimately fostered by a man and his wife in Alabama. While Hà's three older brothers seem to adapt easily to life in the United States, it is not so easy for Hà who is bullied by a boy in her class about her language, religion, skin color, eye shape, and clothing. Eventually, she makes two friends and is tutored by an elderly woman who helps improve her English skills. However, none of this alleviates the guilt Hà feels for disobeying the customs of Têt which, she believes, are what lead to the family's misfortune of leaving Vietnam. I chose this text because I wanted a novel in verse, as a means to "mix up" the structure of our course texts. Unlike other novels in verse for children I've read, *Inside Out and Back Again* deals with heavy issues, like racism, gender norms, xenophobia, the death of a parent, and the immigrant experience. It is also beautifully poetic, and Lai's use of symbolism is done subtly. This book does not appear in chapter four as the pedagogy and focus of this unit did not deal with narrative theory

explicitly and therefore no data were analyzed for inclusion in this dissertation even though the experience produced fruitful insight related to other topics of interest.

*Wonder* by R.J. Palacio (2012)

*Wonder* is also told in alternating homodiegetic narration, with a total of six narrators covering the arc of a year in which Auggie, a ten year old boy with severe craniofacial deformities, goes to school for the first time rather than being homeschooled again. Narrators include Auggie himself, his sister, Via, two new friends, Jack and Summer, and two of Via's friends, Justin and Miranda. Considered by many critics and reviewers to be "the best children's book of the year [2012]," *Wonder* deals with issues of bullying, fear, tenacity, friendship, and beauty. While craniofacial deformities are not considered a disability according to the family in the story, this text also served to diversify the curriculum with regard to ability. I chose this text because I wanted our "realistic" novel to deal with an interesting topic, and also because of the alternating focalization, like *Zel*. Additionally, I thought perhaps we could interrogate the masterplot of a disability story.

*The True Meaning of Smekday* by Adam Rex (2007)

I wanted to include a science-fiction/fantasy novel as the last genre, and, as an avid reader of children's and young adult fantasy, there were very few texts that I had either not read or had heard nothing about. I consulted peers and *Smekday* was one that fit both criteria. This was the last novel of our trimester, and the one that I read alongside my students instead of prior to assigning it. Unbeknownst to me before starting it, it is also a rather complex narrative, since it is written as a frame narrative. The protagonist, Gratuity "Tip" Tucci, is writing an essay in the narrative present describing her

experiences with the alien Boov who invaded America and then fought a war against a second alien race, the Gorg. There is also a multimodal aspect to Rex's novel; J.Lo, the Boov who befriends Tip and travels alongside her for the majority of the story, is a more talented artist than he is native English speaker and has drawn comic strips that Tip includes in her essay. Although I did not really care for this novel, it, too, delves into deeper issues, such as nationality, jingoism, and colonialism. Tip is a non-white female narrator, which also helped diversify the curriculum, albeit accidentally.

*The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* by H. Porter Abbott (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (2008)

In addition to being a children's literature course in which students and participants were introduced to terms and concepts regarding picturebooks and children's literature, the purpose of my study was also to introduce the terms and concepts of narrative theory, specifically the rhetorical approach. Therefore, I added a scholarly textbook to the list of required readings for my students. Having briefly met the author at a conference earlier in 2012, I took a chance and emailed him to ask for donations of his text to my project. Thanks to his generosity, nine books were mine to use for the duration of the study and then donated to the library of Project Narrative, a research and teaching initiative at Ohio State University. To avoid purchasing numerous texts myself, I also borrowed four copies of this text from friends, and then made sets of photocopies for the remaining three students.

I chose Abbott's text because it is accessible and written with a stylistic ease and explores many of the introductory concepts of narrative theory, with a hint at some of the rhetorical approaches. We read chapters or portions of chapters in the order presented in the text, beginning with the definition of narrative and its universality, paratexts, the

rhetoric of narrative, issues of closure, issues of narration, and topics associated with interpreting narrative, including gaps, cruxes, over and under reading, and intentional versus symptomatic readings. These chapters provided the basis of our shared classroom vocabulary for the formal study of narrative. I also provided a handout of Seymour Chatman's (1978) communication model mentioned in chapter two of this dissertation.

**What we did.** Generally speaking, each unit lasted approximately two weeks, or eight class meetings, though occasionally there was overlap in which one unit bled into the next unit's two-week time frame. The structure of each unit included a reading from the Abbott textbook, usually assigned over the weekend and due on Monday, a review of terms of that chapter, the in-class reading and examination of picturebooks related to the theme or topic (fairy tales, Civil Rights era history, immigrant stories and poetry, and realistic fiction and disability studies, as well texts that featured exemplars of the narrative terms from the Abbott chapters), and then formal whole class discussions about the longer piece of narrative fiction.

Before beginning the formal study of narrative concepts with children's fiction, I also used several days to introduce formal picturebook terms to my students, so that we could use a(nother) shared lexicon. We "took a tour" of the parts of the physical text (endpages, gutter, etc.) (Sipe, 2011, p. 241) and also studied various illustration styles and other artistic choices (color, texture, line, etc.) and their impact on the aesthetic picturebook experience. Additionally, we spent time analyzing the relationship between the text and the art, according to the typology suggested by Nikolojeva and Scott (2001, as cited in Sipe, 2011). This terminology was used throughout the course when reading

and discussing the picturebooks used as an introduction to the narrative concepts or themes.

The whole class discussions of the longer narrative fiction were scheduled for Thursdays and Fridays, the days on which our class period was one hour long. Classroom activities for this course included whole class and small group discussions about the longer texts as well as the picturebooks; individual and paired readings of the picturebooks (and an occasional whole class reading) along with discussion; student presentations on select illustrators; occasional lectures; one artistic activity called a story quilt, and a collaborative project with the 2D studio art students in which our novel in verse was adapted into a picturebook (this project not included as part of the data corpus). A larger discussion of the assignments that serve as the data corpus for this study follows in the next section. Below (Table 1) is an approximation of the order in which narrative concepts, picturebook genres, and our longer narratives were introduced.

Table 1: Instructional Sequence			
Narrative Concepts	Picturebook Topic(s)	Longer Fiction	Assignments
Definition of narrative; story and discourse; kernels and satellites; masterplot	Personal choice; Fairy tales	<i>Zel</i> by Donna Jo Napoli	Journal entry; compare/contrast chart; story quilt; critical paper with revision
Paratexts; narration; focalization; reliability	Historical fiction, with an emphasis on Civil Rights issues	<i>The Watsons Go To Birmingham—1963</i> by Christopher Paul Curtis	Paratext analysis; journal entry; creative rewrite and exegesis

Continued

Table 1: Continued			
Review of previous terms	Poetry and immigration	<i>Inside Out and Back Again</i> by Thanhha Lai	Journal entry; whole class/inter-class picturebook adaptation project
Implied author and reader; authorial and narrative audience; gaps and cruxes; under and over reading	Realistic and disability	<i>Wonder</i> by R.J. Palacio	Paratext analysis; journal entry
Framing narratives; science fiction	Science fiction	<i>The True Meaning of Smekday</i> by Adam Rex	Journals entries; final exam

### Data Collection and Data Corpus

**Population.** Participants for this study self-selected to enroll in a college level Survey of Children's Literature course at The Warrenton School and were told prior to the start of class that the class would be taught by a visiting instructor who was going to do a study with them. All participants were either juniors or seniors. Of the sixteen students enrolled in the course itself, eleven chose to participate in the study. Although demographic data was not collected formally, students almost always self-identified with regard to gender. Of the eleven participants, nine identified as female and two male. Students were less likely to self-identify with regards to race, however; one female self-identified as African American or black; the other students I interpreted as Caucasian, white, or European American.

**Recruitment.** On the first day of school, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, classes met for twenty minutes or so, due to the assemblies and extended homeroom that are typical for opening

day. During this time with my students, I read them the recruitment script (see Appendix A) explaining my role and my study and passed out the consent, assent, and parental permission forms (see Appendices B, C, and D). I also emailed parents notifying them of the study, and asking them to be on the lookout for these forms to come home with their student. Initially, students and parents had several days to consider participating, as I hoped to collect the forms the following Monday, August 27<sup>th</sup>. However, due to various opening week activities, including a trip to Philadelphia for the Juniors, many students (and parents) forgot to return the forms, and I gave them an extension in order to maximize participation. Parent Night at The Warrenton School was the following Tuesday, September 4<sup>th</sup>, and recruitment was extended to Friday, September 7<sup>th</sup>.

On this date, I momentarily stepped out of the room while students placed their assent and parental permission forms in a designated lock box so that I could attempt to remain as blind as possible to the study. It was not until after the class and study concluded on November 12<sup>th</sup> that I officially learned which students were participants. I did this to mitigate potential concerns among students, parents, and administrators about the ethics of assessing and grading participants. In teacher research, these issues are particularly thorny:

Although teachers are studying their own practices, they must think more explicitly about how their inquiry might affect their research participants... Teacher research impacts the social context of the classroom; it affects the community of learners that has been established in the classroom. Thus, teacher researchers need to try to step out of their role as a teacher researcher and put themselves in the place of the children, the parents, or other teacher to appreciate



any stress your research might have on them (Macintyre, 2000 as qtd in Pappas & Tucker-Raymond, 2011, p. 23).

**Data collection.** Because of the potential ethical problems inherent in the dual role of teacher and researcher, I positioned myself to students, teachers, administrators, and my committee as being a teacher first, researcher second. What this meant is that I refused to “do anything” in class “just” to get data. Of course, some of the collection methods (like audio recording discussions) are not a natural part of the classroom culture, generally, but the discussions were authentic and pedagogically sound, even if the microphone was not. Although one student fretted about how harsh a grader I was likely to be because I am a “college professor,” it was very easy for me to slip back into the mode of secondary teacher, even at this new-to-me site. I also assured both parents and students that I would not assign any graded work beyond what I considered useful for the course, and I graded work anonymously when possible.

Like university based qualitative research, a strength of teacher research is that it often entails multiple data sources that can be used to confirm and/or illuminate one another (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 17-18). In teacher research, data or artifacts consist of the range of student work that can be collected in a study. This includes all drafts of students’ written work (and illustrations); journal response entries; graphic organizers such as comparison charts, semantic maps, and KWL charts; notes they have taken in student-directed inquiries; and so forth. Final posters, PowerPoint reports, or other completed projects are also artifacts, as well as class charts and teacher-made materials for use in the classroom (Pappas & Tucker-Raymond, 2011, p. 53). Below is a description of the student work that forms the basis of the corpus of data for my study.

***Journals.*** I purchased bright yellow spiral bound notebooks at a local big box store for all of my students. Throughout the course, I assigned five response journal assignments, one for each longer text. These were done for homework and were collected approximately every second Thursday, when novels were due. Additionally, throughout the course, students used these journals to respond to oral or written prompts in class like, exegeses on their more formal assignments, or paratextual analyses prior to reading the assigned novel. For the collaborative picturebook project, students also mapped out the narrative of the adaptation in their journal. Journals were assessed on a 10-point scale for completion and fulfilling the requirements for the entries and were worth 30% of the overall grade. For the purposes of analyzing the journals as data, I transcribed verbatim the handwritten entries for each participant, including grammar, syntax, and formatting (things like using arrows to “move” a thought, underlining, all uppercase typeface, and so forth). Additionally, I transcribed my responses to their entries and included their grades.

***Critical writing.*** Given that the course had to fulfill a Writing Process requirement, one assignment during the class was a formal, critical paper analyzing various texts. After reading upwards of thirty fairy tales as part of the unit containing *Zel*, students selected four multicultural versions of Cinderella and argued for which elements constituted the masterplot of a universal version of the story, using evidence from the texts to make their claim. (This assignment and rubric, like all others, appear in the Appendix.) Between the first and final drafts, students had the option to meet with me in the common area during the whole-school free period to discuss their writing. This paper was worth 10% of their overall grade.

**Creative writing.** Since *Watsons* was the only novel written in single focalizer, non-verse format, and is narrated by a somewhat unreliable narrator, I assigned a narrative rewrite piece in which students selected a scene from the novel and were given the opportunity of narrating that scene from a different vantage point, including (but not limited to) the perspective of another character in the story. This, too, went through a drafting process if students chose to revise (which was not required for this assignment, unlike the Cinderella paper). As mentioned above, students also wrote a short exegesis explaining how their narrative choices affected the scene in particular, and what might be the effect if the whole book were written that way; this was completed in their journal. This paper, too, was worth 10% of their final grade.

**Final exam.** I was required to give a final exam upon the completion of the course. On the designated time and day, students were allotted two hours for the exam. Since we had just finished *Smekday*, but had not completed a formal writing assignment on it—only journal entries—two of the final exam questions were focused on the narrative structure and themes of this novel. The other two questions were about a picturebook, *Interrupting Chicken*, by David Ezra Stein (2011). I procured enough copies for each student, and they did a blind reading and analysis of the narrative structure (in both text and art) which features a similar narrative structure to *Smekday*. They also answered a question regarding the authorial audience of *Interrupting Chicken*, a concept we had talked about a couple of times throughout the course. Most students brought a laptop in order to type their final exam as a Word document, which was then emailed to me, though a few handwrote their responses. The final exam was worth 10% of their final grade.

***Class discussions.*** After being asked to read each novel in its entirety—except for *Smekday*, which we read in three small segments due to time constraints—the students and I spent at least two full hours discussing each text. We sat in a circle so that everyone was visible to everyone else, and I changed where I sat each time to avoid favoring one spot over another. Although most of our texts naturally lent themselves to questions or comments about narrative structure, I never pushed these topics until we had exhausted other student concerns of the texts, like confusing parts, characters, theme, and the like. I used the microphone feature of a video camera to record these discussions, with the understanding that I would only use the audio for the purpose of my study. I did not record other aspects of class, like smaller discussions or instruction. Unfortunately, it was discovered during the file upload procedure that over half of these recordings were lost due to technical difficulties. Of the remaining three files, at least two focused on the 2d art collaboration/adaptation project; this, while fruitful and interesting itself, is not data directly related to my study. Therefore, only the briefest of conversational snippets concern the research questions (see my discussion in the following chapter).

***Teacher journal.*** Throughout my time doing teacher-research at Warrenton, I kept a typewritten journal. This document served as my after-the-fact field notes (Pappas & Tucker-Raymond, 2011, p. 15) as well as a reflection on both my teaching and research.

Journals are accounts of classroom life in which teachers record observations, analyze their experiences, and reflect on and interpret their practices over time. Journals intermingle description, record keeping, commentary, and analysis. Similar in some ways to ethnographic field notes, journals capture the immediacy of teaching: teachers'

evolving perception of what is happening with the students in their classrooms and what this means for their continued practice. Furthermore, because journals stand as a written record of practice, they provide teachers with a way to revisit, analyze, and evaluate their experiences over time and in relation to broader frames of reference. And they provide access to the ways that teachers' interpretive perspectives are constructed and reconstructed using data from their classrooms. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 26)

I aimed to make an entry a day, immediately upon my return home from class, though at times my schedule of teaching at Warrenton as well as at the university prohibited this. Of course, at the time of writing my journal, I knew this would be used as part of my data corpus, but I strived to be as open, honest, and un-self aware as possible, usually composing in a stream-of-consciousness mode. I often did not even correct for spelling—certainly not for grammar or syntax—and did not revisit entries once they were finished, in order to preserve the authenticity of my immediate reactions. This journal also allowed me to assemble other data points, giving a sense of chronology, description, and interpretation of the on-going course and inquiry experience (Altrichter & Holly, 2005).

**Data Analysis.** Ideas about what count as data and analysis in practitioner research are often different from those of traditional modes of inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). “Teacher researchers analyze data as they go along in their study through a cycle of observing, interpreting, planning, and enacting. Teachers don’t wait until the ‘end’ of their study to examine and interpret the information they have gathered, for they have to use their analysis of data to plan and act out changes in their practices” (Pappas & Tucker-Raymond, 2011, p. 56). As the person responsible for reading and grading all of the students’ assignments that serve as part of the data corpus of this study, as well as

being present for all of the classroom activities and discussions, I certainly informally analyzed data as I went along.

However, for the more formal analysis for this study, all data were analyzed with a grounded theory approach and then coded for themes using open and line-by-line coding. Grounded theory acknowledges that there is no one truth or one theory in the data (Corbin & Holt, 2005, p. 50). In this approach, concepts are derived from multiple sources of data, including documents, videos, diaries, and others (p. 50). Eventually, these concepts can be woven back together around groups of concepts (p. 50). Codes need to be developed in a dialectic relation among the data, the theoretical framework, and whatever else a researcher brings to the analytic process (Smagorinsky, 2008, p. 406). The aforementioned written/creative student work, my teacher journal, and discussions are mostly date-stamped, so in addition to themes across the experience, there is also an evolving narrative that emerges across time, for individual participants, me as the teacher-researcher, and the group as a whole. The reader/class journal, my journal, and taped discussions allowed for triangulation of data. Notions of validity and generalizability are different from the traditional criteria (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 43).

***Steps of data coding.*** As I reread my students' journals to begin the process of coding, it was my third exposure to this source of data—the first being the original submission for a grade during the course, the second during the process of transcription. As I read, I made notes about themes I saw emerging within and among the eleven journals. After an initial read-through of all eleven journals, I created categories based on

my notes, and then went back to the data sets, using color coded highlighters to denote portions of each individual student's journal that pertained to the relevant category.

Once that stage was complete, I then grouped my students' responses into another document organized by category. Each new document also organized by text. I then re examined each category to see what, if any, themes emerged from the reduced data, and repeated the steps of making notes and color coding. Within any category, different themes emerged from different texts; *Zel* and *Watsons*, for example, do not share subcategories, because the students' responses were, naturally, vastly different between texts. The process of reading, coding, rereading, and recoding allowed me to 1) become very familiar with my data; and 2) reduce my data to a manageable amount to report as a whole.

With regard to my teacher journal, I read through the entire document twice, making notes on emerging themes the second time through. I then color coded the document line by line for theme and added marginal notes to the coded document as a way of creating subthemes.

For the critical paper on Cinderella and final exam, I focused on the introduction and thesis statement and response to question four, respectively. Already a much smaller data source than the journals, I did not code for theme; instead, I pulled lines of text that best demonstrated student understanding (or lack thereof) of the material. The presentation of this data in the following chapter is arranged by student, rather than theme, in order to best highlight comparable data.

## **Limitations of the Study**

No study is perfect, and mine has limitations, too. Because I taught one course, this research cannot be experimental in design; I was not able to expose half the class to rhetorical narrative theory and not discuss it with the other half, nor did I teach one class with the explicit instruction of theory and another without. Another limitation is sample size; of the sixteen potential participants, only twelve opted into the study, and one of those students incorrectly filled out her paperwork for consent, thus could not be included. However, much education research does take place within one classroom space, so this is not entirely atypical. Another important limitation is the nature of the sample itself. Because I taught at a private school in an affluent suburb, the diversity of my participants is correspondingly limited. The cost of attending this school is on par with college tuition, so naturally the students hail from a relatively privileged socio-economic background. I did not collect socio-economic or other demographic information about my students purposefully, but I was undoubtedly privy to signifying information via classroom talk, gossip from other teachers, etc. and I “had a sense” of this kind of information, much like I did at my former district.

Based on my personal and professional goals with regard to the timely completion of my degree, the data collection was limited to my time spent with my students, and there will not be any semi-longitudinal follow up. I will, therefore, not be able to determine any long term impact rhetorical narrative theory has on my students’ literary life after the study. In the future, I would like to explore such issues—narrative theory has clearly impacted *my* literary and teaching life—but the constraints on this particular study were limited to the three months of the school’s trimester.



Lastly, because of the nature of the course from which the participants are derived is a children's literature elective, students are limited to what kinds of texts we'll be exploring. In many ways these choices provided a more democratic space for engaging with texts (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998, p. 83), but students did not have a chance in this class or study to then apply these interpretive strategies to the more canonical texts that they typically read in secondary English classes. Follow-up data collection could shed light on this issue, but the time limitations do not allow for this.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I present the findings of my study. As outlined in chapter three, data for this study were collected as part of a research project in which I took a teacher-inquiry stance, which prioritizes authentic classroom pedagogy, activities, assignments, and interactions rather than gathering data specific to this study. Additionally, as with all research, though especially research involving human participants, human error is a factor to contend with when considering the data. For example, despite what I thought were clear instructions for a particular journal entry, two participants completed the assignment incorrectly (providing plot summary rather than personal reaction to the text). While perhaps interesting and academically fruitful to delve further into this, situations such as these are not directly related to the present findings; therefore, they were left out of the discussion of the data for this chapter. Data include relevant student journals entries; written assignments, like the critical analysis paper on fairy tales and the final exam; my teacher-research journal, and the occasional segment of transcribed classroom conversation.

The research questions and methodology driving this study call for a “what happens when...” investigation into the pedagogy of narrative theory instruction as part

of a high school English course focused specifically on children's literature. I structure the data as follows: first, the students' journal responses, which have been coded for categories and themes, are presented. Because the journal was an on-going work (rather than a one-time assignment, like the critical paper or final exam), the overwhelming majority of the data are derived from this source. The journal data, first organized by theme and category, are also organized according to text. The categories certainly appeared across a variety of the entries, but it also makes sense to group these comments with like texts, especially since we read the texts in a particular order and the data then also show growth and development among participants.

Next, I present the findings from the critical essays and final exam, as evidence of the ongoing success (or lack thereof) of narrative instruction with children's literature. I include the relevant portions of my reflective teacher-research journal as data points when it is relevant given other data themes and categories. Due to the aforementioned technological snafus, portions of classroom conversations about the texts are included with the categories and themes of the journals as well, rather than being discussed separately, since the quantity is so limited. Though quite different in nature (conversation versus written work), this makes sense, however; often the students' journal responses were the jumping-off point for discussion or, conversely, students addressed something we discussed in class in their journals.

Based on the data presented below, I argue that, much like any skill set or knowledge base, some students had a more sophisticated grasp on the theories and concepts of explicit narrative instruction, a grasp that, naturally, grew and developed over time. By this I mean that students' textual analysis on the final exam was far more

nuanced and developed than their initial critical analysis paper. The subject matter differed from one assignment to the other, so these should not be seen even as a loose pre-test/post-test design; however, overall, the understanding of various components of narrative, including relatively more complex ideas, improved throughout the course. Additionally, as class progressed, students became more comfortable with using the language of narrative theory in conversation and journals.

Perhaps more importantly, regardless of their utilization of proper narrative terminology, almost all students, at one point or another, exhibited an understanding of the structure and function of narrative, even if they lacked the specific technical language used by experts in the field. Certain aspects of narrative, such as the effect of narrators on storytelling or the idea of kernels, satellites, and masterplots, were understood easily, with very little (if any) instruction from me. This is likely because secondary students have been exposed to an incalculable number of children's texts through school-sanctioned and personal reading and had, without necessarily being conscious or aware of it, picked up on these reading practices in ways that support an argument made by Rabinowitz (1987) and Rabinowitz and Smith (1998). However, more complex readings, such as the novel told as a frame story, benefitted from explicit instruction, after which students more fully understood the text. To me, the above—the increased understanding of, tacit awareness of, and deeper reading as a result of explicit instruction—indicates that narrative theory, specifically the issues addressed with a rhetorical approach, is a natural fit for the secondary classroom, especially, though not solely, when paired with easily accessible texts, like children's literature.

A limitation of the study, as mentioned in chapter three, is that, of course, I cannot compare narrative instruction using children's literature with narrative instruction using more canonical, oft-taught high school texts; however, I also argue that my students were able to independently read deeply for theme, make insightful comments on the texts, accurately predict narrative based on genre, interpret paratexts, and discuss matters of audience in thoughtful, interesting ways based on their reading of children's literature. Additionally, reading literature for which they were beyond the intended and implied audience created a space for students to feel empowered to position themselves as literary experts able to discuss matters of genre and audience, even if often times these latter comments were grounded in what I consider a limited view or memory of childhood and children.

With regard to the pedagogy of narrative instruction, much of my data were lost due to audio troubles; however, one discovery from coding student journals is that they, too, were a vehicle for explicit narrative instruction, something I had not realized while actually teaching the course. Additionally, although the purpose of my study was to investigate the classroom space of explicit narrative instruction, my reflections on my effectiveness of being a teacher tended to be about general classroom issues, with a focus on community building, rather than on the degree to which I was having success teaching narrative concepts. Moreover, other than one brief student worry that I was a "college professor," the issue of being a "narrative theorist" was brought up (in explicit terms) exactly once during the entirety of the course. Although my narrative theoretical framework informs my instruction of textual interpretation, it did not seem to inform our

classroom space more broadly. It is the *absence* of data on this topic that provides evidence pertaining to the second research question in my initial study outline.

Before presenting the data below, I want to reiterate that all student names are pseudonyms, and that student written responses are reproduced verbatim, which includes all grammar, syntax, spelling, and stylistic choices, errors, and issues, and my best transcription of certain physical features, like carets, arrows, and various signs to represent “and.” These are not corrected, nor have I bogged down the data with repeated uses of “[sic]” to indicate an error in the original source. Additionally, except in the section where I discuss my use of the journals as a forum for narrative instruction, my comments on the students’ journal entries are eliminated. Student writing is denoted with quotations, but without pagination or date; entries from my teacher journal are timestamped with the date of entry.

### **Analysis and Response to Narrative Structure and Textual Features**

**Zel.** For this particular journal, students were asked to write down “thoughts, predictions, reactions, connections, and personal opinions” about the text as they read. As the first novel, I wanted to leave their writing as open ended as possible. Some students, like Evan, did not complete an entry (incomplete work was not uncommon for this participant); Wyatt wrote an intelligent critical analysis of the representation of religion in the text, which, while interesting, was not the assignment. Grace merely summarized the plot. However, the rest of the students responded to the actual prompt, though Alexis apologized for “read[ing] the whole book before the reaction paper was assigned” and

assures me “I’m going to write about it, but be forewarnd I’m writing this after I’ve finished the book.”

The most frequent comments about Napoli’s retold fairy tale focused on 1) being “tricked” into reading *Rapunzel*; 2) the alternating narration between the three main characters, Mother, Zel, and Konrad, her suitor; and 3) emotional responses to the narrative structure with regard to character development. As mentioned earlier, *Zel* was the first nonpicturebook we read together as a class; I think the comments for this text are of particular interest given my above claim that students, naturally, came into class with previous experience with narrative structure, especially with regard to the fairy tale genre.

***Tricked by the text.*** By shortening the traditional name of Rapunzel for the title of the book, Napoli achieves a goal of eluding the audience about the “true” nature of the narrative. As Erin notes “Zel’s hair is pulled back in the pictures on the front cover, which is strange in a book based on her hair.” Erin is not using the term paratext here, but her noticing speaks to her understanding that paratexts matter for interpretation. She does not comment further that, almost certainly, the absence of long, flowing hair is deliberate on the part of the artist and/or author to ensure that the audience does not make the connection, but she is able to recognize the importance of cover art as a connective piece to the narrative as a whole.

Although Erin did not enjoy the book, because “I don’t like fairytales,” most others who remarked about the reveal that this is in fact a Rapunzel retelling enjoyed it and were able to deduce that this structure had an impact on the story and reading as a whole. Alexis notes that “the first thing about this book that I noticed (okay it was about thirty pages in) was that Zel is the story of Rapunzel! I felt actually pretty stupid that it

didn't hit me sooner. I mean, Rapunzel, *Zel* it is right in the title." Again, Alexis is focused on the paratext, this time the title, as part of the author's strategy for "tricking her" and "making her feel stupid." Alexis's "feeling stupid" reaction could also be a result of a tacit understanding that titles in fiction tend to be descriptive (Rabinowitz, 1987, p. p.188). While Alexis felt "stupid," Jessica thought "this book was actually really interesting. I loved it. I thought it was cool how I didn't even realize the story was about Rapunzel until several chapters in."

Similar to Erin, Courtney "found this novel to be interesting. At first, I did not pick up on the fact, until the page eighty that the novel is based off the famous fairy tale, Rapunzel. Upon, realizing that the plot will be based off this familiar story, I was a little disappointed because I am not a fan of this story or any story like this for that matter. In my opinion most fairy tales can be a bit disturbing. Especially, after our unit on fairy tales I began to pay attention to how odd and dysfunctional these stories are." As indicated in Chapter three and in Courtney's comment, prior to reading *Zel* students read nearly thirty variations on popular fairy tales, noting similarities and differences among the stories, especially across cultures. Although Courtney undoubtedly read (or watched) numerous fairy tales prior to beginning our class—the genre is almost impossible to escape in our culture, especially for students in Courtney's age bracket, who were exposed to the Disney Princess explosion in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century—she specifically points out her attention to the darker, "dysfunctional" side of the genre after our unit in class, a concept she then applies to her reading and enjoyment of the longer text.

However, it is Erica who goes beyond "cool," "feeling stupid," or "being disappointed" with her commentary about the narrative structure involved in the reveal.



She writes “It wasn’t until around page 80 that I discovered this book was about Rapunzel. I think the author did this on purpose. If she would’ve titled the book Rapunzel or even made it clear from page 1 that Zel in fact stood for Rapunzel, there would have been many preconceived notions about the way the story would go. People may have even not read the book because they assumed they already knew what it was about. However, Zel is a much different story than the picture book version of Rapunzel”.

Like Erin and Alexis, who do not use the term paratext in their journal, Erica does not talk about implied author. In fact, in some ways, she shows a misunderstanding of the idea of authorial intention (implied or otherwise); however, from my experience teaching secondary school, this “I think the author did it on purpose” reasoning is not uncommon. I would argue that of course Napoli delayed the reveal of the title character on purpose, or, even if the flesh-and-blood author did not intend to do this, the implied Napoli *did* do it, because that is how the text exists. To say it another way, as someone somewhat well versed in rhetorical narrative theory, I have the vocabulary and understanding to assert that all artistic choices in a text are purposeful; students, however, often remain skeptical of this notion. Regardless of this, however, I think Erica’s larger point is impressive and speaks to an understanding of the narrative structure of the text and Napoli’s rhetorical design of the narrative. The impact of delaying the reader’s understanding about the nature of the title character certainly speaks to both the implied and flesh-and-blood reader of the text in ways that Erica suggests.

***Alternating narrators.*** Ashley, Jessica, Gina, and Courtney responded to the narration of *Zel*. Much like her comment about the reveal, cited earlier, Jessica merely describes her reaction: “one thing that I specifically liked about this book is the tenses

and point of views it was written in. I thought it was interesting how the author split up the chapters by the characters. It was also weird that both Mother and Konrad had chapters in first person and in third person but Zel's chapters are only written in third person." Although she gets one factual component wrong—Konrad does not have a "first person" chapter—it is something she "liked" and that obviously stood out to her.

The other three participants went further with their comments about the narration. Gina writes that the "three different perspectives" "shed light on the two obsessions over Zel. Both pining for her love and presence." Although she does not mention that Mother's chapters are homodiegetic (first person) and Konrad's heterodiegetic (third person), she does speak to a larger understanding of the impact having different perspectives has on the story.

Courtney and Ashley, however, include more sophisticated understandings of the shift in narration/focalization in their responses. Courtney's comments speak to the reader's emotions while reading the novel:

Another aspect that stood out to me was the the tense switches throughout the novel. The book is constantly making a switch from first to third person, and I think the author's use of that is very interesting. In a way it gives the original story of Rapuzel a whole new twist. By reading with Zel's mom as the narrator as a reader you begin to feel sympathy for the 'crazy' mother that locks her traded daughter in a tower. But in the original story you never get that view. But of course you must still take Zel's side in the story but it was still interesting to see that point of view.

Although Courtney uses the term “tense shifts” for what are in reality changes in modes of narration, she actually discusses a significant aspect of the effect of the narration; the reader *is* meant to at least somewhat sympathize with the “crazy mother that locks her...daughter in a tower” in a way that a reader of the original version or picturebook versions cannot. Courtney also displays an understanding of the unreliability of Mother’s narration with her mention that “you must still take Zel’s side in the story.” Despite any sympathy the reader may feel toward Mother, the reader is, ultimately, designed to sympathize and root for Zel to escape the tower and be with Konrad. We are meant to understand that Mother’s reasoning for doing so is inherently flawed and selfish, something Courtney obviously understands.

Ashley’s entry about this topic is even more nuanced, demonstrating an understanding of authorial choices. She writes: “On a separate note, I’ve come to notice that Mother is the only character that tell her own story: Zel’s stories, as well as Konrad’s are told by the narrator. Perhaps this is because Mother is the only one who is able to make her own decisions in the story. Zel’s decisions, and also Konrad’s for that matter, are both dependent on Mother’s decisions. The two young characters are unable to make their own choices; because of this (perhaps), they are not even able to narrate their own stories...” Here, Ashley is making connections between implied author, narrator(s), and implied reader, albeit without specifically using the terms. It is Napoli who has written the text in which three characters have different, yet interrelated, agency, and it is Napoli who has chosen the method of narration for each character. In so doing, she has impacted how this agency is interpreted by the implied reader. The relationship between character agency and narration choices is a sophisticated, valid argument that bears out in a reading

of the text. Ashley's entry—mentioned later in the section on journal entries as narrative instruction—is also a prime example of the justification for the use of the term focalization, since she raises the issue of the difference between Mother, who can “tell her own story” and either Zel or Konrad, but does not (or cannot) articulate that the latter two characters' chapters are not “told by the narrator” and instead are focalized through the characters of Zel and Konrad.

***Emotional response to character development.*** Both Ashley and Alexis comment on Napoli's character development and the impact it had on their reading. Alexis writes “I thought the fact that mother wasn't a witch or sorceress, but someone who sold her soul to the devils was an interesting twist. It almost made her seem less evil and almost made me pity her.” With regard to Zel's suitor, Ashley writes:

On a different note, I can't decide how I feel about Konrad, which is most likely the goal of the author... I ended up really liking Konrad, which is probably no surprise because I'm sure that the author purposefully set it up so that in the beginning, the readers would feel a bit of distanced from him but that as the book progresses he grows on you. And he most definitely did: it was so enchanting how he was relentless in her search for her—I'm not quite sure whether I believe in soulmates, but this story put up a good fight in support of there existence. I have to admit near the end I was a little bit unnerved by the fact that there was a possibility that they might not find each other.”

Both girls' responses speak to emotional impact Napoli's rhetorical choices have on the audience. Ashley's remark about the book “put[ting] up a good fight in support of [soulmates]” is—again without the technical language—an understanding of narrative audience. To “buy into” the novel, the reader has to believe that it is worth it for Konrad,

a fourteen year old Count, to spend years of his life searching for a peasant girl he met for ten minutes in a marketplace. That Ashley, a soulmate skeptic, was “unnerved by the fact that they might not find each other” speaks to the success with which Napoli creates the romantic tension,—so well that the trope of “happily ever after” is almost disrupted.

The students’ reactions to both Mother and Konrad are issues that came up in class discussion, as well. On the second day of discussing the novel, Evan contributes the following:

Hb: ok, so...you were supposed to think about the questions that move the story forward. Talk to me about that. what elements of the story, what questions are you trying to get answered as you read?

Evan: uh, Zel?

Hb: yeah.

Evan: what is mother so mystical in a way ....the very beginning explains mother as a very mystical wise person who always knows what’s happening? The mystery behind that, why is she like that and how did she become like that?

Hb: perfect, great example. You’re trying to kind of solve the problem of mother—why is she like how she is, ok? What else? how many people agree with that? that that’s something you’re sort of looking to figure out? Ok. Other--

Unrecognized Girl: [inaudible]

Hb: ok, the Konrad Zel story is kind of key to this, right? how many...we talked yesterday...well, it’s a fairy tale, so he’s gonna find her, right? I mean, the prince always shows up in the fairy tale. So...so then, why do you keep reading it? if you know, if you *know* he’s going to find her because it’s a predictable story...

Evan: it’s how.

Hb: it’s *how*. So...most stories whether it’s a movie or a book...most stories are predictable. And I don’t say that to like ruin your love of reading, at all, because I think...I think that that’s actually kind of comforting to think hey, this is going to turn out the way I expect, but *how* is it gonna turn out? *How* is he going to find her? What’s gonna happen in between losing her and finding her?

In this section—though I do most of the talking—Evan manages to point out that driving forces in the novel are Mother’s narrative arc, her backstory, so to speak, and the tension that arises from Konrad. Even though Evan grasps the idea of predictability of genre, and Rabinowitz’s (1987) claim that most stories are predictable, it’s a matter of

discovering how a story turns out that is the goal of reading. Later, Evan and Wyatt continue the idea of narrative audience and Courtney's earlier idea of "taking sides."

Hb: interesting. So for those of you who were like "this isn't a kids story" maybe it's not the violence that makes it not a kids story...what other questions...what are the...what other like...problems are happening in the story... that you're like no, wait, I want this to work out in a certain way

Evan: beyond her being locked in the tower and not wanting that?

Hb: yeah, ok. how she is gonna get out of the tower? How long...you know...that kind of stuff... that, yeah, that...I mean, I hope...I kind of hope that none of you were rooting to stay locked in...(laughter)...I mean...like we're not supposed to feel that way. And if you did feel that way...that's one of those things that like, is the difference between the implied reader and the actual reader...there are some people who like...root for twisted, sick stuff, and that's ok, you know, that's who they are...but...mmm Donna Jo Napoli designed this book for you to feel sympathetic towards Zel being locked up by her crazy mother and she goes insane, obviously...what about Konrad's parents?

Wyatt: yeah. You're you're rooting so that Konrad doesn't have to marry someone else

Hb: right! I mean, they're...and it's kind of interesting that you know, a lot of the time fairy tales...it's the daughter who's being forced to marry against her will, right, so this is kind of interesting that the son, too, is sort of shows a different side, that like, the prince also is sometimes gonna be forced to marry somebody he's not so into.

Again, though I do most of the talking, with an attempt at the end of this conversation to talk about issues of gender, Evan and Wyatt talk about audience sympathy as designed by Napoli's text and the genre at large. Wyatt's comment, specifically, considers narrative audience and genre, similar to Alexis's concept of "being unnerved" earlier. Despite the implausibility of a fourteen year old meeting a girl for ten minutes and then spending years searching for her as his one true love, the reader is rooting for Konrad to find her, even though, logically, he doesn't really know her at all.

Moments like these (and others that follow) are examples of when I often interjected with a mini-narrative theory lesson, often beginning with the phrase "well, the fancy term for that is..." in order to use a student's comment or idea as a teachable moment in which to translate and justify concepts from narrative theory (Herman,

McHale, and Phelan, 2010). We might take a break from our conversation for students to get out their notebooks to jot down a term I used and had written on the board; for me, having the students naturally bring up the concept before I taught the “fancy” term provided an opportunity to access prior knowledge or understanding rather than merely foisting a term onto them for term’s sake. I would then make reference to “that fancy term we talked about” in order to assist with integration of this new language. Of course, the success with which new vocabulary was incorporated into our classroom discourse varied student-to-student and even term-by-term. In the next chapter, I elaborate on the pedagogical and critical purpose for intervening at moments like these in order to justify translating the students’ comments into formulations cast in the language of narrative theory.

*Scaffolding with picturebooks.* The concept of narrative audience is something I had briefly addressed a week earlier with a picturebook that involved talking animals and then I continued to develop the concept in connection with fairy tales (08.31.12). Additionally, I “tried introducing the concept of ‘expectations of genre’ which is a Rabinowitz thing. I need to revisit, for sure, but I think the basic idea hit home for them. This will come up more with Zel because it’s longer” (09.04.12). During our conversation on Zel, I “definitely went to fast going over the communication model, but we’ll revisit that for tomorrow” (09.06.12). I brought up Chatman’s communication model as a way to try to explain the concept of narrator unreliability (with regard to Mother) as the distance between the implied author and the narrator. The next day, I noted that the students “appreciated that I admitted that I went over it too fast” (09.07.12). The second day of discussion on Zel was “...better. More kids

participated...giving them something to read for/plan to talk about yesterday was a good idea (like...duh)...we covered a bunch of things..." (09.07.12)

Although I note that "more kids participated" the brief transcription above certainly demonstrates that quantity is not a substitute for quality, since I clearly dominate the conversation. However, it does seem evident from the journal responses and conversation that genre and audience, among other aspects of narrative, are relatively understood by the students at this point in the course, even with very little, if any, explicit instruction in narrative theory. I am beginning to give them a language to use to discuss ideas they already have. Providing them with this technical language is a means by which the classroom interpretive space can be made more democratic; this will be discussed more in depth in the following chapter of this dissertation.

***Troubling audience.*** Prior to our discussion about the concept of implied, authorial, narrative, and flesh-and-blood readers and audiences, students freely wrote about whether Napoli's novel is truly a children's novel. (The other novels did not garner as much commentary about audience, likely because it was a common topic of conversation in class.) The two concerns students had with the novel were the subtly written sex scene between Zel and Konrad once he discovers her locked in the tower and Zel's mental breakdown as a result of being imprisoned. Grace simply states "I don't think Zel is a children's book because of the whole one night stand, it maybe more a teenage book." Alexis expands on this teenage idea:

it had some things in it that I would give this book to only 12 years old and up.

Most of the plot and story line would be fine, in my opinion, for a younger audience but then somethings I feel are for a more mature audience. The first



example that comes to my mind is the scene between Zel and Konrad in the tower. It is basically a sex scene but with less description and less sexual terms. If I was a parent, I wouldn't want my ten year old reading this. Another example is when Zel has the breakdown in her tower. I don't think a young child would understand the gravity of her mental situation."

Courtney, too, remarks on this: "Also, another thing I picked up on as that the audience for this novel maybe to young. I felt the novel was very dark and graphic. For example, the scene in the book when Zel has a one night stand. To be honest, I did not even know what that word meant until at least 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade and even then I only knew the basics." Gina writes: "Even though the message was clear, the book was still dark and depressing. The obsession and isolation was crazy, almost sinister. it was more of a psychological version of the original Rupunzel. That and the sex scene made me question if the book was written to the right audience. I thought it was a little much for younger kids. At least picture books are more subtle about sex and virginity, but not so much this one."

It is clear to me here that the idea of audience-drives-the-text (rather than the text determining audience) is on the forefront of my students' minds, because they are focused on the idea of "children's literature" versus "teen" or "young adult literature. They are not necessarily pointing out what textual details provide access to the narrative—with the exception, perhaps, of Courtney whose confession about her knowledge of the term "one night stand" was not acquired until middle school—they are pointing out who should and should not read the text at all. They are operating on the assumption (perhaps rightly so, given the nature of the course content) that *Zel* is for children, and making claims about why it shouldn't be. The reader's age, the desire to

preserve the reader's innocence, memories of their own knowledge, and their individual understanding of children's likely prior knowledge all inform their assertion that *Zel* should not be considered a children's novel. As will be evident in future journal entries, and especially their final exams, the students' understanding of audience shifted throughout the course.

**The Watsons Go To Birmingham—1963.** The journal response for this novel was threefold. First, on the day I passed out the book to the students, I asked them to analyze the paratexts, which include the cover, dedication, memoriam, and back cover, to begin to interpret a novel they had never read. Next, for chapters one through twelve, students were asked to identify the author's purpose for including that chapter and information at that point in the novel, so that we could start a larger conversation about narrative structure. Lastly—though part of the same entry, since novels were assigned to be read in their entirety—students were asked to reflect on the events of the final three chapters.

As evidenced below, students demonstrate a well developed grasp of the concepts of paratextual interpretation and analysis, as well as that of narrative structure. Most of the reflections focused on the inclusion of the church bombing in the penultimate chapter and its effect on the narrative as a whole. A couple of students also commented on the issues of racism and segregation presented in the novel as evidence for arguments about the text's intended audience.

This section of data also includes the students' exegeses about their creative narrative rewrite assignment. After completing this novel, students selected a scene and rewrote it from another character's point of view. As part of their journal, students were

asked to write about what effect this new narrator would have on that scene and the novel as a whole. Segments of the creative papers are not included here; rather, I include their analysis of the effect of changing narrators, providing context where appropriate for the scene and narrator shift in question. Although students chose different scenes from one another, or varied somewhat in their selection of new narrator—there were only three or four plausible options—across the board, their critical reflections demonstrate a keen awareness of the rhetorical effect a particular mode of narration has on the telling of events in a novel.

***Paratexts.*** After a unit on historical fiction and non-fiction picturebooks about the Civil Rights movement (covering topics like the Freedom Riders, lunch counter sit-ins, bus boycotts, and school segregation), students were handed Curtis's novel and, without any discussion or instruction on my part, asked to examine the front and back covers, as well as the front matter, including the dedication and in memoriam pages, and to make predictions and begin to interpret the novel. Ashley made comments like "based on a true story—the art is photographs" and "color scheme—black and white—race will be central," a comment that Jessica echoes. Megan noted that the title tells us "it takes place in 1963, in the south" so it will probably be about civil rights" and that it "has an in memory of many people, so it may be sad." These "4 people died on the one day, that day must have some kind of significant to the story." Jessica and Ashley both noted that the cover includes a picture of a car, which "indicates traveling" or "they're trying to get away or escape," or, as Erica writes, that the characters are "going to be going on a road trip." Megan also noted that the book winning the Coretta Scott King award indicates that the novel is "probably good" and Ashley pointed out that "beginning the book I will have

a positive attitude regarding its quality and interesting—the blurbs about awards...will probably cause me to enjoy the book more than I would if it didn't earn any praise or if that praise wasn't publicized.”

Though *Watsons* is perhaps not the most abstract paratext to ask students to work with, students responded with insightful comments and the act of focusing their attention on the paratexts as initial interpretation is something that came up throughout the rest of the course as well. As discussed earlier, some students, like Alexis and Erin, had already commented on *Zel*'s cover and title; this exercise pushed their thinking and the students already understand how cover art and other front matter begin to shape our reading. I note in my journal that “we did a pretty intense paratextual analysis....but I do wish I had recorded it. they said some pretty interesting things” (09.11.12).

***Narration and structure.*** As stated above, after an in-class writing about the paratexts of Curtis's novel, students were asked to 1) write about what the purpose and content of chapters 1-11 did for the novel (this could be done in bullets or a list); and 2) to reflect on the final four chapters as they read the novel individually. The responses to chapters one through eleven demonstrate that the students understand narrative structure and authorial purpose. The reflections on chapters twelve through fifteen mostly dealt with the church bombing that occurs in chapter fourteen and how its inclusion so late in the novel affected the reading as a whole.

*What does this chapter do here?* The responses to this first part of the assignment are so remarkably similar that quoting each student individually would seem redundant. Therefore, I am going to summarize their responses, and use certain quotations to highlight the point. Every single student, for example, wrote that the purpose of the first

chapter is to introduce the family and characters. Evan writes “this chapter was mainly uneventfull as are most opening chapters. It introduced the characters and explain there personalitys, Bryon is the overdramatic kid who always has to be cool... Beyond that the main charackter is rely yong so the view of the bombing will be eather very disturbing or he wont understand what is going on. The father is very fun bring it seems and the mother is very motherly to say the least. The sister thoug is a bit yong to probly be an important charackter.” Nearly every other student said the same thing, with slight variations in style or content.

Similarly, almost every student wrote something similar to Madison’s observations that chapter two shows “the relationship between Kenny and Byron. Also to show what kind of kid Keny is.” As Ashley notices, chapter three “is significant because the narrator is starting to get some perspective on world issues-lying, hunger, injustice, cruelty—even if he didn’t realize it. The author is starting to allude to the deeper problems of the time period through more juvenile examples in Kenny’s life. Again, Kenny is a bit oblivious b/c of age. ->the reader gets to know rufus a little better -> establishing relationships.” Although her response is the most eloquent—she was among my top performers throughout—her peers echoed her thoughts, albeit less poetically.

This trend continues throughout. The students nearly all agreed that chapter four gives the reader more information about Byron, chapter five shows the strict parenting style, chapter six highlights a softer side of Bryon and Kenny’s relationship, chapter seven hints at the trip to Alabama, and chapter eight sets up the reason for going. Chapter nine is when the family begins the very long car ride from Flint to Birmingham, and as Erin notes “...starts rather comically, keeping the book happy right before it gets

serious.” Madison—who, admittedly, had read the book as a child—notes the foreshadowing using by the author in this chapter. The Watsons neighbor, Mrs. Davidson, gives Kenny’s younger sister, Joetta (Joey), a doll shaped like an angel as a going-away present. Madison writes that “the angel is foreshadowing that Joey will need to have a guardian angel later in the story.” Since Joey is the same age as the four girls killed in the real bombing, she is the character who is feared dead in the novel, but, luckily, was not even injured. The students note that chapters ten and eleven highlight the differences in the culture of the north and south for the Watson family.

Although the similarities in responses to this part of the journal prompt may seem insignificant, I argue that the opposite is true. Rather, the general similarities in the identification of each chapter’s purpose in the narrative as a whole shows that the students are attuned to narrative structure, authorial purpose, and concepts of narrative arc and character development. Only Madison admitted to having read it before, so the other ten participants were reading for notice and signification and intelligently argued for the individual chapters’ functionality, despite not having the benefit of reading for coherence, like Madison did. That their responses were all so similar speaks to their sense of the purpose of narrative and larger understanding of story.

*Reflection on the final chapters.* Nearly all of the responses for this section focused on the fact that the church bombing occurred quickly and so close to the end of the story, and how this choice impacted their reading. Grace makes an interesting point about implied versus flesh-and-blood reader: “I think I was just as shocked as joey, I knew it was coming because I knew what the book was about but I was still speechless. Most of all, I think the author kept the bombing for last because you have to keep the best

for last, not that the bombing was good but it was the most important event in the book.” Based on our discussion in class about the actual Birmingham church bombing, which is also signaled in the paratexts with the memorial page, flesh-and-blood Grace knew that a similar event would unfold in the novel. However, she was “shocked” and “speechless” when it happened in the plot.

Alexis feels similarly about the chapter. She writes “Wow, I was reading this chapter it when it dawned on me that this was the church bomb chapter, the event the whole book had been leading up to. At first I thought it was Joey who was going to get hurt in the explosion, but then I didn’t think so because this was based on real events and the Watsons aren’t a real family. It surprised me that for a book I thought was going to be fully centered on the church bombing wasn’t at all. It didn’t even happen until the second to last chapter of the book.” Although her surprise is more about the seeming significance of the bombing chapter being so near the end, she also recognizes that the book is “leading up to it” the whole time. Her comment acknowledging the fictionality of the characters and the author’s likely unwillingness to insert one of those characters into a real-world tragedy highlights an understanding of the genre of historical fiction.

Erin, too, writes about the likelihood of the family actually being involved in the bombing, and what their (mostly) lack of doing so indicates about authorial intent: “it had seemed as if the family would get caught in the church, or something along those lines, but they mostly stayed clear of it. this made it seem like the author was trying to show what it’s like to witness such an event.” Erica, too, notes that “...the author did a really good job at making it feel like you were watching what was happening as Kenny” but also points out “...that the author included nothing about racism in Birmingham aside

from the bombing. And even then, there wasn't much about that. That made it a lot more innocent than it would've been if it was told through the father's eyes. Because Kenny did not understand the reasons behind the bombing, he could not convey those facts to the readers." I would argue, of course, that a black church being bombed is significantly racist, but Erica's larger point stands. At no point in the novel does Kenny remark on the culture of the times. Explicit issues of race appear very rarely in the novel, but Kenny doesn't seem to understand them, even when other characters do. (Joetta, for example, remarks that her angel doll is white and not dark-skinned like her.) Erica's commentary shows her understanding of narrator and unreliable narration.

Courtney, however, discusses a larger issue of narrative structure and audience with her comments about the bombing chapter, which is worth quoting at length.

In my opinion, the way the author chose to write it can be seen ^in^ both good and bad way I'm very neutral and I feel that the way it is written is good depending on the attended audience. I think by ending the book with the bomb, and having so much "fluff" added is strong for those readers who are unaware about segregation and what happened. However, if it was written for adults then the bombing would have been the main idea and the book would have started with it. so I think the goal of saving the bombing is significant to the audience. If the author started the book with the bombing and the reader doesn't know about segregation then he or she wouldn't have been interested enough to continue. -> added to story of the charracters to make it more interesting. Begining, this book I knew that there was going to be conflict like a bombing. I knew about segregation and so the build up and the minor stories about each character was



irrelevant ^to me^ and I wished the novel focused ^more^ on the bomb and less on characters ->like for example if the author focused so much on Bryon in beginging he should have been more sign. because that was more interesting to me. But to a child to much about the conflict would make them less interested. ->+ more confused. The serious stuff may be to much<-But I'm netural about this topic because then I go back thinking it was strong ^for the author to do this^ comedy that was set in the beginging makes the bombing more significant because it's more drastic when the book goes from funny to serious and it shows that the bombing is a serious matter. Also, saving it for the end makes it more important and interesting then starting. ->stood out more<- it puts emphasis because starting with it because then if you start with something as drastic as that in the first chapters then the rest of the plot loses significance.

Courtney displays a very sophisticated understanding of authorial audience and story versus discourse here, even though she does not specifically use these terms (which we had gone over in class by then) and instead uses "attended" (intended) audience, which is not the same. But she, in her own way, delineates the relationship between textual features and implied reader as well as the shift in tone and story-discourse relationships that would occur if the bombing were introduced earlier in the novel. Had Courtney used the more technical language of narrative theory, her argument would be more sophisticated, particularly the segment in which she writes about the discourse of the bombing. As it stands, Courtney gets her point across, but she rambles a little in doing so. Instead of repeating the ideas of "starting" and "ending," as she does, using the more precise term "discourse" would enhance her response. A more detailed argument for the

benefit of exposing students to narrative nomenclature and how this would allow them to engage more fully with narrative follows in the next chapter.

***Creative rewrite reflections.*** Prior to assigning this creative paper, I write in my journal: “Class today was pretty good. In small groups, they read the same picturebook (I would have preferred more copies, but library screwups abound) and talked about ‘who speaks’ and ‘who sees’ and the impact on the involvement with the book. This picturebook, *Rose Blanche*, shifts narration about halfway through, but generally the pictures are a more external focalization, with a few exceptions. They pretty much got it and got into the story... Tonight they’re reading more about narration and focalization and stuff [in the Abbott text], so when we talk about *Watsons* we can address this more” (09.17.12). Three days later, they were again in small groups evaluating and critiquing picturebooks, this time historical fiction and nonfiction texts about Civil Rights (09.18.12). The next week was our whole class discussion on *Watsons*, and “The discussion flowed, people participated and had good insight. Yesterday [a committee member] observed me and afterward mentioned how well the kids did and how much they had to say. Some of the students threw out narrative theory terms spontaneously! It was awesome. I jumpstarted discussion with journal entries from two students, which really helped... We also got to talk pretty heavily about implied author and other stuff, like narrative progression. Our conversations about narration and focalization I think will really make their second writing assignments strong” (09.25.12). Later, I comment “...my students’ narrative rewrites were pretty spectacular for the nature of the assignment...” (10.01.12).

I include this material to illustrate the pedagogical scaffolding that occurred during the *Watsons* unit prior to assigning their rewrites. Again, excerpts of the creative work are not included here; rather, I include portions of their analyses of the effect of changing the narrator, with brief context to make the comments intelligible to an audience who has not read the novel. They were asked to describe the impact choosing a different narrator would have on both the scene they rewrote and the entirety of the novel. However, for the purposes of presenting the data, I have combined these two parts of the students' responses, though the syntax and phrasing of the student quotations will often make the distinction anyway. The four most common features in their responses—regardless of new narrator or scene selection—were ideas of innocence, audience, reader subject positioning, and narrator reliability.

*Innocence.* Five students remarked on how changing the narrator would lose some of the innocence of the story. Madison retold chapter fifteen, in which Kenny is dealing with the post-traumatic stress of witnessing the bombing and not doing more to help whom he thought was his sister, from the older brother, Byron's, perspective. She writes that this change "makes Kenny look a lot younger and more innocent and naive than when Kenny is narrating" and that "...the book would lose its air of innocence if the whole book was told from Byron's perspective..." Megan, who rewrote the scene in which the two brothers worry their family is on welfare, also from Byron's perspective, agrees, and writes "I don't think the book would be better with Byron narrating just because there is that loss of innocence; but if Byron was the narrator the book would gain some sophistication I guess because Byron is not oblivious to his surroundings. I guess if he narrated the whole book it would be like that." Courtney, who rewrote the bombing scene

from Byron's point of view writes "If I were to continue writing with Byron as the narrator the novel would lose some of the innocence when told through Kenny's point of view. For example, the church bombing would have a different effect than it did on Kenny." Alexis also rewrote the bombing scene, but from Joetta's point of view and writes "By taking Joey's perspective I feel like you get to see the situation from a more innocent point of view. If the whole book was written from this point of view the reader would miss some of the deeper meanings behind the bombing. Someone like Joey's age may not actually understand the bombing and why it happened." Even though, as Erica mentioned above, the novel does not really touch on many aspects of the racism inherent in the church bombing, Alexis is right in that a six year old narrator—even more than a ten year old—would miss even more of the reasons behind the tragic event.

Although she does not use the term innocent, Ashley, who did the same scene and narration change as Alexis, also discusses how a six year old narrator would impact the telling and the told:

While a ^6-year-old narrator^might appeal to younger audiences, her vocabulary is very limited, as are her insights. She is not able to process events in the same way that an older narrator might be able to, so she would be extremely since she would only elaborate on concepts she understood...Having Joetta be the narrator of the 'Joetta's not dead' scene definitely changed the scene and how it would be perceived. In some ways it was a beneficial change, by emphasizing the confusion of the scene (since it was especially confusing through her eyes) and by emphasizing Kenny's intense concern (it's as if the story is focalized through Joey, while she is looking at Kenny). However, her narration also took away from

the scene. Because she was the one describing things, the whole “is Joetta really dead?” element (obviously) disappeared, and this was an element that really added to the story. Also, if Joetta narrates the story, some of the clarity of the scene is lost. Kenny isn’t able to explain himself (and why he is so unhappy), and the reader does not get the full exposure to the bombing, since Joetta never even made it to the church.”

Ashley smartly touches on both the emotional and the logistical implications of transferring the narration and focalization to Joetta, which includes the six-year old’s limited insights and understanding of the events. Ashley’s grasp of Joetta’s inability to accurately report the bombing due to her age and prior knowledge echoes the aforementioned concerns with narrator innocence.

*Audience.* Several of the students commented that a shift in narrator would, possibly (though reasonably) change the audience of the novel as well. Grace, who rewrote a rather comical scene in which Kenny watches his vain older brother get his lips stuck to a frozen mirror from Byron’s point of view, notes that “If the whole book was narrated by Byron I think the maturity level would be much different and maybe not so much a children’s book...I think it would have been better if Byron narrated because I would find it a little bit more entertaining because of the older age. It would have definitely changed the plot and the lesson of the book because of the age difference.” Although she inserts her own wishes for the content of the book into her response, the added age and maturity level would make this text more young adult rather than children’s. Of course, there are novels narrated by children that are, most definitely, not

children's books (i.e. *Room* by Emma Donoghue), but Grace also talks about thematic content ("lesson") and even potential changes to the plot.

Erica agrees with Grace, writing "If I had rewritten the entire story from Byron's point of view, it would be very different and have a different message. In fact, the age group may even change because Byron is older and frankly, rougher as well." She, too, notes the change in "message" as well as "age group," by which it is reasonably certain she means of the reader. Jessica agrees that "Kenny had a characteristic of humor and innocence that directed the story in a way from a child's point of view with important details that made it a children's book."

It is Courtney, though, who once again, really smartly focuses not only on audience and message, like her peers do above, but also masterplot, a term that students learned during the first unit on fairy tales. Again, it is worth quoting her at length:

...I think because Byron has a better understanding and is much wiser because his age the tone would be very different. The novel itself and the overall impression it has for its readers would change, the audience especially. Kenny is used to represent the audience as a reader you are to become Kenny. So with the events that took place Kenny's reactions are typical for a boy his age. So if the book suddenly changed to Byron the reaction and story would be different...In my opinion, if Byron were to narrate the story the novel + its masterplot would flip. The events such as the bombing would remain the same but the masterplot wouldn't. It would go from Kenny's point of view and a story about a young boy that is forced to go up when trying to comprehend the events of a bombing and

the pain that results. To Byron a hot head teen that will most likely have a change of heart after the bombing.

Here, Courtney makes the distinction between two different types of coming-of-age stories: one in which a child (Kenny) grows up too fast due to a troubling event, and one in which a character with a tough outer shell (Byron) learns a hard lesson. Although it is perhaps a *bit* overstated to refer to each of these common narrative arcs as different masterplots entirely, her thinking highlights an understanding of theme.

*Reader subject position.* Much like Courtney above, who writes about the reader “becoming Kenny,” without using the term, both Gina and Wyatt discuss how the reader’s subject position is, naturally, altered when the narrator changes. Wyatt rewrote the final scene of the novel, when Kenny is finally able to confess to Byron what he saw the day of the bombing and how much it impacted him, from Byron’s perspective. He notes that “seeing as Kenny and Byron were two characters who conflicted and faught at many point in the story, we would start to sympathetize less with Kenny, and more with Byron.” Gina, also choosing Byron as her narrator, though for a different scene, writes “changing the book to Byrons perspective would change the book in the sense of ‘rooting’ for the main character. I feel like you wouldn’t be able to root for Kenny as much because the connection would be lost.” Both students understand that changing the narrator often changes the position of the reader with regard to her emotional attachment.

*Reliability.* Megan, Erin, and Erica, all of whom transferred the role of narrator to Byron, mention how the reliability of the telling would also shift. Megan, working with the ‘welfare scene’ writes that “...if the book was in Byrons perspective it may be more accurate. By this I mean since Kenny is a kid he doesnt understand everything that

happens and sometimes he may be less reliable than Byron.” Erin, choosing to work with the scene in which Byron tells a tall tale to his younger siblings about why their mother insists on bundling them up too heavily during the winter months, writes “in the snow clothes scene, Byron as the narrator causes it to seem like Byron’s much older and Kenny’s much younger. They both, obviously want to describe themselves as old and wise, so who the narrator is determines how this will seem. Byrons also the one telling the story, so his narration is slightly more reliable.” It is interesting to note, of course, that for Megan and Erin, narrator reliability seems to correspond to increasing age. This rather misguided notion could be a result of a misunderstanding of the concept of narrator unreliability, or perhaps is merely related to the fact that they, as teenagers, consider themselves more reliable storytellers than children.

Yet Erica, who rewrote the same scene as Erin, believes Bryon would make a *less* reliable narrator. “Because Byron always wants to seem cool, he might not always tell the truth about certain events. Especially ones that made him seem dumb. If it was told from Byron’s point of view, it would lose it’s reliability.” Here, Erica is assuming that Kenny’s portrayal of Bryon is accurate, which itself is a factor of narrator choice. If that is a given, her assertion actually makes a lot of sense, perhaps even more so than the rather facile idea that with age comes reliability.

I did scaffold the concepts of narration and focalization before assigning this novel and creative assignment plus critical response. However, I think that my students’ ability to examine the impact of an alternate narrator—not to mention the actual scene rewrites—goes beyond what I taught them through explicit instruction with picturebooks or discussion. It is not all that difficult to convey the idea that *who* is telling a story



affects the storytelling, but it is another skill entirely to be able to argue *how* the story changes. Again, this supports my argument that narrative theory is a natural critical and pedagogical fit for the secondary English classroom. I provided a language for concepts they already grasped, which allowed us as theoretical non-equals to get closer to a more democratic classroom space, since their understanding of narrative features was the foundation for the translation and integration of terms. Providing the technical language of narrative theory and its enhancement for student engagement with text will be discussed further in the next chapter.

**Wonder.** The majority of the students' responses to this text will appear in the next major section, Predictions Based on Genre, because of the nature of the journal assignment I gave them. However, several students remarked about the alternating focalization of homodiegetic narrators. The common thread among their reactions is their pleasant surprise at this design. Ashley "definitely didn't predict the story would be told from different view points" and "thought it added so much to the story." Alexis "...also liked the way the author kept it in first person narration throughout the whole thing (so much better than the way it was in *Zel*). Another interesting thing about the different character chapters was how each character, pretty much, started from the time where the last Auggie chapter did. It showed the events that took place from each characters point of view." Although Alexis only refers to the term narration, she is able to compare and contrast this text with our first novel in which both the focalization and narration alternates. She also identifies how the author uses the alternating focalization to develop the plot. Gina elaborates on this point, touching upon the effect that changing focalization has on character development and also on the reader: "It also was told through different

perspectives, which was cool, because you got to know exactly what other people were thinking. Not just the outer portion and bits and pieces, but their actual thoughts.” And Courtney further refines Gina’s thoughts, by pointing out how this textual feature affects not only the text, but the masterplot as well: “I found it interesting because these stories are always in the ‘bullied characters’ opinions so you never know if the story told is completely accurate narration. You’re suppose to feel bad for the narrator when he is bullied but like Via [the bullied character’s older sister] feels he could be exaggerated. they’re always the victim and yes bullsyng is wrong but you never know much of the event being told is completely accurate.” Once again, Courtney is touching on concepts of reader subject position and narrator reliability.

In my reflective write up about our class discussion of *Wonder*—which was heartbreakingly lost on audio—I write:

HOLY moly! I actually did a little dance in my chair today when some of my kids were totally rocking Rabinowitz’s rules of notice and signification with zero prompting! They laughed at me, which is good. I still don’t have everyone participating, but...the kids who do are saying great things. Emily did a lot of crossover work with my class and [another teacher’s] disability class, making some really good points. (I made sure to email him with the encouraging words.) I handed out a reading on authorial audience with specific discussion questions about the allusions and epigraphs in the novel. The kids also had really good things to say about the shifting narration and what we can/do learn from it and why it’s structured this way. Seriously—the ones who participate and engage are really doing awesome work” (10.26.12).

Although this is anecdotal and not caught on tape or documented in writing, I remember specifically that Alexis made a comment that the minute Auggie's mom warned him not to hurt his new glasses, that "of course something bad was going to happen to them. Otherwise the author wouldn't have written that." Similar comments were made about the final scene in which Auggie is photographed with his friends—something he remarked earlier in the novel he would "never do"—among others. I remember walking out of The Warrenton building and getting into my car with a huge grin on my face that day, solidly believing that what I hoped to accomplish was working.

**Smekday.** *The True Meaning of Smekday* was the text that I assigned my students without having read it prior. Adam Rex's (2007) science fiction novel is a frame narrative, written as an entry for a national time capsule essay contest. Gratuity "Tip" Tucci is the author of the essay, and we read her first and second drafts of the assignment, which Gratuity's teacher has assigned to all students. A much longer novel than the previous three, *Smekday* and its corresponding journal responses were broken down into smaller parts (pages 1-32; 33-150; 150-176; 176-423 for the final exam, no journal), unlike the other novels, which were to be read in their entirety. Therefore, students did have the benefit of classroom instruction in between writing the next section's response, even though I was no more familiar with the plot or book than they were, since I read alongside them.

Reading a novel for notice and signification, rather than reading from memory, was a challenging, but fruitful exercise. I wish I hadn't saved doing so for the last book of the semester, since it felt rushed to get it finished before exams. And, again, the audio for these discussions is lost, which is troubling, but I do remember—even if I cannot prove

with data—that I took fewer conversational turns in our discussion. That, alone, has significant pedagogical implications for the secondary classroom space, but a lack of proper data for this claim prohibits me from delving into it further. However, as my last entry in my reflective teacher journal, I write the following:

Well, I could kick myself today. I didn't record part of class, thinking that it was 'just' going to be doing some direct instruction on framing v. embedded narratives, and instead it turned into a pretty interesting discussion. They totally got the idea of framing v. embedded narratives, and how it's playing out in our book, *The True Meaning of Smekday* by Adam Rex (*Smekday* for short), but the actual book confused them. That one of my brightest students, Ashley, was confused about the first page that is an assignment given by a teacher, and then the following section is that essay by our protagonist, Tip, is shocking. Others were confused about the narrative (which is the embedded tale, since these events already happened) in which Tip and her cat are attempting to drive to Florida, per the directions of the Aliens, (Boovs) who are now in charge, having invaded America. One girl, Alexis, told me that she is such a fast reader that she a) read ahead, but b) skipped a page that had a picture on it! Another girl, Erica, told me that she doesn't understand how Tip is writing the essay if Aliens invaded. Another girl told me that she didn't realize the protagonist was a girl until much later in the assigned section—despite the fact that it says so on the back cover. Wyatt, however, was doing some really interesting thinking about how the time setting of the frame tale (as he now knows it to be) is 2013, which means that in a year, our audience response to the novel will be different than it is now, having

‘out lived’ the narrative present of the novel. Courtney said that it is ‘typical in a book about monsters for the kid to befriend one’ which is something that has happened already in the embedded tale. Madison said that if she, as a senior?, was confused, how is this a children’s book? We didn’t really start talking about the narrative itself, exactly, because we spent a lot of time clearing up confusion on structure. One kid asked if this whole BOOK was going to be Tip’s essay—since I haven’t read it yet (per my proposal), I didn’t really know, except that to break down their reading assignments, I did see a page that says ‘the end.’ So pointed it out to them. some girl (Jessica? Erica?) also said ‘wow, this is some essay for a girl to write!’ as we looked at the ‘length’ of the essay. I’ll remember to bring that up on Monday, when we’ve gotten to that point. Wyatt and I had a neat side conversation about genre, in which I said that ‘scifi is often social commentary’ as a response to his comment about how everyone is going to learn a lesson about the true meaning of Smekday, and how Christmas is now Smekday in the book. We’ll see how this social commentary plays throughout the text. (11.02.12)

It’s clear to me that my decision not to record is why this entry is so detailed with names of students and their respective comments and questions; I am making up for potentially lost data. We had two more discussions on this novel which explains why this is my last entry, since the course is almost finished. Although we have only read 32 pages by this point, I do not go into much more about the experience of reading for notice rather than memory except to say that I could not answer a student’s question because I did not know the answer.

Yet, from my journal here, and the journal entries of students included below, *Smekday* provides some rich data, if not about the experience of reading against memory, at least about what came up for them as they read. As indicated in my journal entry, many students reported having trouble with the entry into the novel as a whole, because they were unaccustomed to reading a frame narrative. However, as their entries also indicate, the class conversation referenced above also helped them with later reading. Additionally, many students, like Wyatt above, had some very interesting comments to make regarding genre and narrative; some of these are saved for a later section, Reading Deeply With Children's Literature, but those specific to narrative concepts are mentioned here. Although the focus of our classroom inquiry into narrative terms naturally shifted as the course progressed, I continued to be impressed with my students' understanding of the concepts.

*Initial confusion and post-class clear up.* Numerous students reported in their first journal response (for pages 1-32), that they were quite confused. Megan writes "so far I am very confused. I do not understand what is going on. Where are they? Who is the narrator? Is there actually aliens? And I cannot tell if this is something she wrote and put in a time capsule. It sounds like moving day [when the aliens forced the humans to relocate] is not recurring even though it sounds like it." Jessica writes "This book starts off really vague and kind of weird. for awhile, I was so confused that I couldn't even make any predictions. It was clear to see that Gratuity is narrating her own story of how the Aliens took over but I found it interesting that she was essentially writing an essay for school so a few pages had text written by the teacher as an assignment." Gina echoes the "weirdness" of the novel: "So far this book is kind of hard to follow. It's all very weird to

me.” Wyatt also admits his unfamiliarity with the genre, and writes: “I thought that ^the beginning of *The True Meaning of Smekday* was very good, but also very strange. Seeing as I do not read a lot of science fiction, I found many of the ideas very confusing.” Alexis speaks directly to how her confusion was addressed in class:

When I first started reading this book, I have to admit I was completely confused (which was perhaps what the author wanted?). the initial writing prompt in the very beginning went right over my head—like is aid in class, I thought that the prompt was some random competition that the F+B readers could enter in, not a part of the story. I didn’t realize that the first 32 pages were actually part of the embedded story until I saw her grade at the end. then it got pretty confusing—she’s talking to people in the future, but talking about events in the past, but her present is our (the F+B readers’) future...yikes. However, now that I’ve realize that Smekday is made up of a framing narrative and an embedded narrative, the whole concept is kind of growing on me.

Alexis is the reader I mention early who is “such a fast reader,” so certainly her confusion could stem from skipping over parts of the text. However, it is also clear that our class discussion scaffolded her understanding of the novel as a whole.

*Trouble with audience.* Two students had trouble entering the narrative audience for this science fiction novel. Gina writes “You know how in Zel you said you have to believe in certain things for the book to work, well I don’t believe in Aliens, + them taking over the world. this book does nothing for me.” Although she later writes about parts of the novel she does like, she expresses difficulty at first. Erica, too, was initially resistant: “I guess I’m biased because I don’t like science fiction. I just can’t seem to

make myself believe that aliens are real, even for the purpose of this book.” Yet later, she adds “This section of the book became a little more clear and I’m starting to understand it more. That could also be because we discussed framing and embedded narrative in class.” Though our class discussion can’t really fix problems with entering the narrative audience—what a reader has to accept as true to engage with the narrative—our discussion did help Erica better understand the narrative structure.

Although Grace does not mention anything about her challenges entering the narrative audience of Rex’s text, she does question his authorial choices with regard to the narratee and authorial audience: “I also wonder if people (the ‘audience’) would really know who J.Lo is in 100+ years I think she is talented but not a world wide ledgande that will be a house hold name for many years to come.” J.Lo—the current popular culture nickname for the female performer Jennifer Lopez—is the name the main Boov has chosen for himself, which Gratuity (and the implied reader) is meant to find comical. But Grace certainly has a point: is the real J.Lo such a mainstay that the narratee of Gratuity’s essay reading it 100 years in the future will see the humor? What about flesh-and-blood readers reading Rex’s novel? I considered Grace one of my weaker students with regarding to reading comprehension and writing ability, so as her teacher, I was floored by this observation.

*Observations about narrative.* Whether it was this book in particular, or perhaps just a result of the fact that we were nearing the end of the term and concepts had finally “stuck,” many students made some really smart comments about other aspects of Rex’s novel. Grace points out that “After moving day and when they got to Florida I had a feeling they wouldn’t be staying there plus the cover/back gives it away.” Here, she is



hinting at the importance of paratextual information when reading. Conversely, Alexis makes the same point: “I also (when I read it) was surprised by having the humans not be in Florida, but having been moved into Arizona. I realize now that if I had looked at the back cover I would have known that, but I didn’t so that affected how I read the story.” Although Alexis ignored this paratextual plot-signal, she understands that doing so impacted her reading.

Megan, Ashley, Alexis, and Courtney make keen observations about what the reader is told and when. Ashley, for instance was “kind of irritated that the women from the time capsule committee flat out said that the Gorge were defeated...though I’m sure there was a reason that the author decided to leak this information at this particular point in the story, I wish it would have been later! I was kind of excited to read on on about the gorg and what all happened with them, but now I kind of feel like it’s been ruined for me (...by the author!) all of the suspense is gone!” Ashley understands that Rex “leaked” plot based information “on purpose,” but it negatively impacted her experience with his text, and she is able to articulate why.

Concerning another plot-point, Megan remarks “also I was right about her having to win the contest. If she didn’t win then there would be no point to the book. Since it was introduced at the beginning then it had to be used and she had to win otherwise this author wouldn’t have mentioned it.” She is not using the terms reading for notice or signification here—I never did formally introduce those concepts—but this is precisely her point. Rex would not emphasize the time capsule so much if Gratuity’s essay did not go on to win the contest. Making Rabinowitz’s (1987) rules explicit here might help Megan further develop her skills as an adept reader by prompting her to recognize how

Rex may have utilized other rules (or more rules of notice and signification) and how they combine to help her interpret the text as a whole. How Megan (and others) might benefit from an introduction to and understanding of these terms will be discussed in the next chapter.

Megan makes an important point about solving one of the mysteries in the novel: “Would Tip really have figured out about the gorgs being allergic to cats? Technically the reader should have been able to figure it out since they had the same information as Tip, but I didn’t connect the dots at least.” Her questioning the validity of a 12-year old narrator deciphering information that she herself did not aside, Megan is making a smart observation about “who knows what when” in the narrative, noticing that the narrator and the implied (and flesh-and-blood) audience is privy to the same information in the telling. Technically, since Gratuity is writing her essay after the events of the embedded narrative have occurred, she does have more information than the reader; however, her essay is written in the present-tense as though she does not, and Megan’s comment is well taken.

This essay structure gives Courtney pause when considering audience and narrator reliability: “I guess I’m distracted by the way she tells her story. I know she is a child and as an audience the book is technically written for younger children I feel that he writting would be different if she was writing an essay for a teacher. Then I got to thinking of the possibility of whether or not what Tip is telling us, the reader is completely accurate. I worry that she could have stretched the truth to make the story seem better and for her essay to stand out.” A few other students pointed out that Tip’s “essay” is a bit too long for a realistic portrayal of a child’s writing ability, but only

Courtney thought to question the truthfulness of the content as a result of the narrative situation.

**Section wrap up.** The extensive data from (mostly) my students' journals speaks volumes about their acute responses to and understanding of narrative structure and textual features. From concerns about narrator reliability to audience, to pacing and noticing, to paratexts and genre, these secondary students demonstrated an awareness about authorial intention, implied and flesh and blood readers, and other concepts which rhetorical narrative theory lays bare. Students have intuitions about narrative that a rhetorical approach provides one metalanguage for, and providing them with said language is pedagogically useful. Of course, sometimes they garbled the actual terms or misread a feature of the text, but on the whole, students were able to critically examine features of the various texts, before or without explicit instruction. I argue, therefore, that rhetorical narrative theory is a good fit for the secondary classroom, because students seem to have a basic understanding of how written, fictional narratives work and benefit greatly from being introduced to the technical language for the concepts, because they can engage in a more sophisticated, democratic conversation about text and textual features. Additionally—though again I recognize that this study, by design, cannot lay bare otherwise, because it is not experimental—secondary students' familiarity with novels written for younger audiences allowed them to be able to focus more skillfully on critical analysis and interpretation. Other than confusion about the essay feature of *Smekday*, which was cleared up with explicit instruction about frame stories, the students were not bogged down with attempting to read a plot or writing style that was challenging, like many canonical texts can be, since they are written for an audience that

is beyond the implied readership of high school students. This familiarity and previous exposure to “easy” literature also empowered students to make accurate predictions about genre and read deeply for thematic content, as outlined in the following sections.

### **Predictions Based on Genre and Masterplot**

For the last two books of the course, *Wonder* and *The True Meaning of Smekday*, students were specifically prompted to predict elements of the plot based on their understanding of the genre—realistic/disability fiction and science fiction, respectively—and their assumptions about their masterplots. Much like the *Watsons* section above, in which students were asked to discuss the narrative purpose of the first eleven chapters, their individual answers were remarkably similar and astoundingly accurate and insightful. Similarity-of-response is not an end goal of secondary English instruction, but it speaks to a collective understanding of genre. Echoing arguments by Rabinowitz (1987), I once again posit that this ability to make keen observations about these novels is likely a result of their previous, extensive exposure to literature for young people. In turn, using these novels in the classroom provides a basis for the students to think critically about issues of genre, theme, plot, and character.

**Wonder.** *Wonder*, by R.J. Palacio (2012) is a realistic fiction novel that focuses on Auggie Pullman, who, because of his severe craniofacial deformities, considers himself to have a disability (his deformities do present some difficulties with hearing and vision, but otherwise do not interfere with his abilities). The arc of this narrative is Auggie attending regular school for the first time, after being homeschooled from kindergarten through fourth grade as a way to shield him from other students. Before they

began the novel—but after reading the back cover and inside flap—I asked students to predict what would happen in the story. Responses fell into one of several categories: predictions based on awareness of genre or masterplot, predictions of character, self congratulations on predicting correctly, and surprises or elements they “didn’t see coming.”

*Awareness of genre or masterplot.* Many students made very simple, though accurate, observations based on the knowledge that this was a “disability” novel. Evan writes “it is going to be a master plot of the character overcoming himself and the community.” Jessica goes further and introduces the element of bullying: “This genre of disability basically fits in with a masterplot where a single kid, usually nice and innocent, is new to a place and they don’t necessarily fit in so they get bullied.” Gina notes that “there’s always the point where the character gets bullied/no one likes them, something really big happens, and a happy ever after where all is resolved.” Megan says something almost identical: “I think that when he is at school at first he is going to be made fun of then he will help someone or do something good using his disability, and everyone will like him.” Erica, too, discusses the arc of difficulty-resolution: “Clearly this book follows the masterplot of overcoming obstacles, and even more specifically, overcoming a disability. In this sort of masterplot what usually happens is the main character is faced with a problem that they initially struggle with. It seems to be going okay at first, but then they get blindsided with a set back of some sort. Finally, they manage to get back on their feet and emerge successful.”

Courtney makes similar remarks, but also gets more specific: “-also as a new student ->in a book<- walking in the hall is always dramatic everyone stares and

whispers...-people are beginning to love Auggie and I fear it will get bad again before it is good forever. I feel like in other books I read it follows the pattern of decent-bad-horrible-good-bad again- -> he has to have one more bad event until it's fully good if the book is following this typical genre... The walk home is the happy ending that every 'bullying' book is supposed to have, just reading this you know at the end he'll have friends and worry free-everything has to fall into place to be 'a good book.'" Her noticing about the "walk down the hallway" and "walk home" are particularly impressive and nuanced—a result, no doubt, of her myriad experiences with narratives of this kind, given her use of the word "always."

However, it is Erin, who at the time was dual-enrolled in my course and a course on disability literature—incidentally also taught by an Ohio State doctoral graduate whose work focused on narrative theory—who ties the masterplot to the implied audience: "As Wonder by R.J. Palacio is a disability story, the main idea was very predictable. Nearly all disability stories are about overcoming especially ones meant for kids. The implied audience for Wonder is nondisabled children, and it's meant to teach them to be more accepting. If the intended audience was disabled kids, the book would have been written differently, but it's not, so it's very predictable that Auggie will overcome in the end." Her commentary here—no doubt a result of being enrolled in her disabilities study course more so than mine—really highlights the degree to which children's literature and rhetorical narrative theory can be combined in the secondary classroom in order to make critical analyses about texts.

***Predicting character.*** Students also commented on predictable elements beyond plot. Ashley writes:

For instance, Wonder will probably fit into the ‘overcoming obstacles’ masterplot, and possibly the ‘disabilities’ masterplot as well. I predict that the story will begin by introducing the main character in a way that makes him very appealing to the reader, so that we root for him from the start. I also predict that the reader will be introduced to happy times that Auggie has had ^in the past^ in order to draw a contrast between those happier times and the challenges that he will inevitably face as the novel continues. He probably won’t fit in at his old school immediately; he’ll be isolated and without friends for a time... However, I think he’ll make a friend somewhere along the way (perhaps someone unlikely), and this friend will help Auggie adapt without succumbing to conformity. Also, I predict that Auggie’s family will be very supportive of him, and that he will not be outwardly hurt or ‘weakened.’ (But most likely inwardly damaged ->until he adapts).

Yes, Ashley addresses issues of plot, but also of reader subject positioning (Auggie will be presented so we “root” for him) and character (making friends with someone unlikely).

Once again, Courtney makes really smart observations about the book as a whole, but specifically the different characters that will appear in the story. She writes:

the kid in these masterplots always meets someone nice -> it got me to think there will be a teacher that makes the situation a bit better. Maybe not her [the secretary in the first school scene] but its common in these genres so it will happen...-he finds his friend summer who is every story like this makes the situation better...-in every story such as this there is almost always a character left

in the shadow, in this case it's the sister...it is obvious that Summer is the one friend the every bullied character finds in every story the friend is always made fun of by others for being the 'loser's' friend so in this story summer got a chance to be popular-she wasn't before-and August is bringing her down, so she will be forced to chose, and like in other books she might begin to hid August to remain liked. people never get why a person is friends 'loser' but what usually happens is the others just follow bully but then August will do something and they'll begin to see what Summer aw in him to begin with...also typical the 'popular' kid always likes the 'loser' deep but won't admit, b/c that's not cool. He'll go with the crowd until August gets bullied so bad and he feels guilty + cares about him that he'll defend him then everyone follows. in every story like this the person like Jack always starts out not liking bullied kid thinking he's weird until they step into his shoes + become their friend -> they don't actually like the popular kids.

Courtney makes very astute comments about the "typical" characters in children's novels featuring someone who is different. Courtney hits nearly every character in this novel on the head: the friend who is worried about being popular but then realizes the "different kid" is a better friend; the helpful teacher; the character in the shadow of the different kid; and the friend who gets made fun of (and has her popularity revoked) for befriending the protagonist.

***I knew I was right!*** Many students mentioned instances in which they were "right" about their predictions. Ashley wraps up her journal entry with "Some of the predictions that ended up being correct include Auggie's family being very supportive, Auggie not fitting in when he first arrives at his new school, finding friends along the



way (Mr Tushman, Summer, Jack-> I was also right about making ‘unlikely friends’ and ^fitting into^ the whole ‘overcoming obstacles’ masterplot.” Megan, too, ends her entry on a self-congratulatory note: “And at the end everyone loved August and he had friends and no one cared what he looked like. That is exactly what I thought was going to happen.” Gina talks specifically about a scene at the end: “When Auggie won his award it was like duhhh. No brainer.” Grace doesn’t see this predictability as a problem, though: “The masterplot was predictable for the most part, but R.J.P. was able to hit me as a reader more personally and emotional than I ever get hit by, by books.” This relates to the earlier class discussion of *Zel* in which Evan noted that it is “how” a book gets the reader to the ending, not what the ending is, since they are generally predictable especially if the reader is familiar with the genre or masterplot, like my students obviously were.

***Didn’t see it coming.*** However, even the brightest readers can’t predict everything in a novel, and my students were no different. Perhaps not shockingly is that in a novel so accurately predicted, it was the “surprises” that stood out to them and made for a more enjoyable read. The most comment feature that stood out to them as being unpredictable was the change in focalization. Gina writes “I thought the book was just going to be told from Auggie’s perspective, so when i saw Via had one, and then Justin, Summer, Jack, and Miranda was nice.” Alexis agrees, writing: “It didn’t go exactly as I thought it would. I wasn’t expecting different sections from each characters point of view. I think it really helped the story though.” Ashley elaborates more on the effect the different focalizers had on her reading: “I definitely didn’t predict the story would be told from different view points. I thought this added so much to the story. I especially thought the via and Justin’s narrations were particularly interesting. I thought it was really eye-

opening to be able to hear Via's thoughts, especially her deep-down considered what it might be like for Via, but when she started describing how she was sometimes forgotten, it made complete sense why she would be a little resentful. It really made me appreciate Via and it made me realize how strong she is." I agree that Palacio's choice to tell this story from multiple perspectives is different from other disability/bullying novels, which are, as Gina mentioned, usually singularly focalized through the different/bullied character's perspective. I also think that my students enjoyed this feature because three of the focalizing characters, Via, Miranda, and Justin, were high school aged (the others were all fifth graders), which perhaps gave the novel an "older" feel than if Palacio had limited the perspective to only middle school students.

Although the students could have made predictions about any text, the accuracy with which they did so for this text is a result of their tacit or explicit understanding of how children's stories (novels or otherwise) featuring a character with a major difference tend to progress. Conversely, using a text like *Wonder* in the classroom, because it is so familiar to them, allows for the text to be used as a platform for discussing narrative elements, like masterplot and focalization.

**Smekday.** Much like *Watsons* and *Wonder*, *Smekday* journal predictions were quite similar to one another. Because the students finished the book for the final exam rather than class, there are fewer "surprises" discussed in these journal entries, because they were still unaware of the entirety of the novel as they wrote. Yet two students, Megan and Gina, assume "there has to be a happy ending, right?" which, unsurprisingly, turned out to be true. Student predictions for *Smekday*, a novel about a dual alien invasion and a quest to find the narrator's abducted mother, revolved around the ideas of finding

Gratuity's mother, the inevitability of the human-good alien friendship, and a "save the day" narrative arc.

*Friendship.* Although Gratuity writes that she was initially scared and distrustful of the Boov (the aliens that end up being "good"), eventually one of them, J.Lo, helps her fix the car she's driving from Pennsylvania to Florida. Madison writes "When Gratuity allows J Lo to fix her car I predicted that they were going to befriend each other and go on some kind of adventure. Megan notes that "the Boov she met will help her out the rest of the time." Jessica "...figured that the Boov that was 'nice' would eventually become friends with Gratuity. It was interesting to read how their relationship first develops because Gratuity is so tense and is questioning whether or not he will attack her or not. But in the long run, Gratuity decides to trust him and I predict that they will team up." Grace was "not positive what will happen next, but I'm taking a guess the story will have a monster and child masterplot, where Boov and Gratuity will become friends." She goes on to remark on the purpose of this: "I think this book is trying to get across the meaning to children that even outsiders are just like us. Even an alien can become a good friend. I think Boov will help Gratuity reach her goals..." Courtney also references this masterplot: "I'm not exactly sure what's going to happen or if I like the book but I have a feeling it will follow a typical 'monster + child' masterplot. What's going to happen is the Boov will help the girl to escape together they'll fight against the other Boov. -> they'll become friends." Erica was not surprised that her predictions about JLo came true: "in almost every story when the main character interacts with someone she thinks is an enemy very early in the book, they become friends, not actual enemies." Wyatt, who earlier stated he does not read science fiction, "was very surprised to learn that she meets

up with a Boov, who she has convinced herself she hates.” Yet, despite his self-identified nascent understanding of the genre, he also predicts

...that later in the book, when the other aliens attack, the humans and the Boov will ban together using their combined strength to overcome and conquer these new and threatening creatures. After this, they will both realize that the two races can live together symbiotically, in mixed and integrated communities, as if they were not different at all. I predict that throughout the story, J.Lo and Gratuity will grow closer as friends and will teach each other more about each other’s cultures. Through their teachings, they will become more understanding of each other, realizing that they aren’t so different after all. The will ban together to start a revolution and fight the Gorg.

This “acceptance” theme echoes Grace’s comments about the lesson inherent in an alien-human friendship.

*Finding Mom and saving the day.* This Gratuity-Boov friendship was also predicted to carry on to other plot points in the novel. Ashley, Madison, Megan, Jessica, Gina, and Alexis all predicted that Gratuity, with JLo’s help, would find her mother, who had been previously abducted by the Boov. (Hence her understandable mistrust of them.) Madison notes that “...they might try to get her mom back because even though it seemed like no big deal that her mom got abducted she still loves her mother and still wants her back.” Gina predicts not only that they will find Gratuity’s mom, but that afterwards “their relationship is better than before.” Jessica believes JLo and Gratuity will “team together to defeat the Gorg and find her mom.” Ashley, too, believes that “the main character is going to be reunited with her mother by the end of the novel and that

she will ‘save the day’ at some point.” However, Ashley also makes a prediction about the structure of the novel: “I’m also guessing that as Gratuity’s drafts continue (if they do), she will continue to tell us more about her encounters with the boov, rather than actually answering the prompt.” Here, Ashley is talking about the structure of the novel as a frame story with the essay competition—the prompt for which Gratuity is not focusing on with her response, as Ashley mentions—and how her understanding of Gratuity as a narrator, and the “essay competition” as a plot device will impact the telling of Rex’s novel.

**Section Wrap Up.** The students demonstrated their ability to accurately predict the plot, theme, and even character development in two novels falling within different genres. Although some students were more specific with their predictions, or more eloquent with their writing, on the whole, the students’ responses were quite similar. They had previously developed an awareness of the tacit rules of genre (Rabinowitz, 1987). This, I argue, is a direct result of using children’s literature in the classroom. Because they were, generally, unsurprised by the plot development, using these texts in the classroom therefore afforded us the opportunity to be reading more deeply, because students were generally not as concerned with “what will happen” like they might have been with novels whose genre or masterplot they are less familiar with. There is, too, some truth in the “it will have a happy ending” prediction for every novel we read, regardless of genre, which demonstrates their understanding of the field of children’s literature more broadly. Using literature with which the students are likely more familiar is also useful for introducing the terms of narrative theory, since the students’ tacit understanding of narrative features provided an opportunity to scaffold this instruction in

a way that more canonical literature may not have. Students seemed to recognize their own expertise about our children's literature, so when it was an appropriate moment for me to provide more explicit instruction about narrative theory, I was "only" teaching them terminology, rather than also having to work through textual or literary issues.

### **Reading Deeply With Children's Literature**

Over the course of the class, I was consistently impressed with my students' ability to make insightful comments about the texts. This happened more with *Smekday* than with any other text, and the majority of this section is dedicated to the comments made by students regarding the connections they made between Rex's novel and American history. My argument here is twofold. First, I argue that the "children's" nature of their reading allowed for more independent thematic connections. Because the books were "easy" to my high school students, they did not generally struggle with language, syntax, or even plot. (The confusion about the frame narrative in *Smekday* was cleared up with one lesson on structure, as mentioned earlier.) Therefore, students could focus on analyzing larger elements of the text, like theme or message. With regard to *Smekday* in particular, these students were "forced" to think critically about this text without teacher guidance, because I was reading alongside them rather than teaching them a novel with which I was already familiar. I did not have the privileged position to say to them "be on the lookout for how this novel might be discussing colonialism" or something similar, because I had no more idea what would transpire than they did.

**Zel and Watsons.** Before getting into a much larger discussion of the students' comments about our last class novel, I want to include two much briefer comments that struck me as particularly interesting from responses to *Zel* and *Watsons*. My students' deeper understanding and insight regarding religion (*Zel*) and literary devices (*Watsons*) is worth noting. As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, human "error" is replete in studies with actual people, and my data support this. Wyatt did not respond "accurately" to the first journal prompt about *Zel*. Instead of writing about his reactions to the text, he summarized the plot and then offered some critical analysis about religion. However, though he did not provide an accurate response to the prompt, Wyatt offered a really smart comment:

Zel brought forward the religious controversy between the native paganism and the encroaching Christianity through the character Mother. Her connection to the 'devil' and nature, and the fact that she was called a 'witch,' represent that she was actually a pagan. Pagans believe in this sacred feminine, ^ connection with nature^, and devine fertility. Seeing as Mother was infertile, she seeked her religion through connection with nature. At the time, Christianity was trying to take told in Europe. Their style of propaganda was naming paganism as devil worship. This fact brings forward many different aspects to the story of Zel that are not usually considered in the classic version of Rapunzel.

Wyatt's analysis of Mother's character is something no one else, myself included, brought up in class and is, in my opinion, quite brilliant. It is obvious he has prior knowledge about European religious history, and it is certainly possible he would have made similar comments about a non-children's novel. Yet he also points out how *Zel* is

different from the classic version of the same story; it is because of his familiarity with this common fairy tale that he is able to see the deeper meaning behind Napoli's design of the character, something he would be less able to do well with a text more divorced from a children's literature genre.

When reading *Watsons*, Ashley made two astute comments about Curtis's use of metaphor and allusion. In chapter six, Kenny and his older brother Byron discover what they think is a loophole in their ability to "sign for groceries" at the local market; Byron uses this to his advantage and starts buying snacks "for free." In the second half of the chapter, Byron is eating some cookies, which he shares with Kenny, much to the narrator's delight. However, this happy brother moment is ruined when Byron decides to throw cookies at a bird on an electrical wire, ultimately killing it despite his intention only to scare the animal. Kenny is impressed, since they had been trying to hit birds for years and always missed, but Byron cries and vomits. About this scene, Ashley writes "it alludes to the fact that, during this time period, underneath all the sugar coating (metaphor-cookies), there is pain and failure (like the bird)." Her interpretation of what is a rather powerful scene—heretofore Kenny and the reader had not seen this side of Byron—speaks to not only her understanding of metaphor, but of the thematic connection of this scene to a novel about racism. Regarding Kenny as a narrator, Ashley pointed out that "Kenny references historically upsetting events in the story (Nazis, poor relationships between whites and Indians), and yet he is almost oblivious to the tragedies that are occurring around him in his present life." She also picks up on Kenny's repeated use of the phrase "Ready! Aim! Fire!" and its significance for the bombing that occurs later in the novel. Making connections between an author's use of metaphor, allusion, and



repetition to the larger novel as a whole, is a skill many secondary English teachers want their students to develop, and Ashley has done so independently, and smartly, with Curtis's novel.

**Smekday.** Rex's novel was our longest text, and, as a result both the length and the timing of the course—we were getting close to the end, near finals—I assigned journal entries over multiple sections of the text, the pages of which were broken down based on chapter ends and how many days passed between due dates. As the assignment with the most required entries, and the longest text, it is not all that surprising that student' journals were longer for this novel than for the previous four. I did not expect, however, that my students were reading this children's science fiction novel as a commentary on America's history as a colonial empire, or as commentary about the nature of human interaction when confronted with difference.

Ashley, Jessica, Erin, Erica, and Courtney each pointed out the similarity of America's colonial history that Rex paralleled in his novel. Ashley writes first about the use of propaganda on the part of the Boovs:

The second thing that stuck out to me was when J.Lo was telling Gratuity that the Boov came because they were told humans were like animals, and that they were 'nasty' and 'backwards' and needed to be taught how to live (page 150).this part really made me think about Germany before WWII. The citizens were being manipulated into thinking that Jewish people were cruel, and wrong and dangerous/threatening, and that the German people needed to go against them and suppress them because of those fake descriptions. This seems to be basically what the Boov were told about humans. It also made me think of imperialism and 'the

white man's burden.' The Boov were taught to believe that humans needed the Boov and needed to be taught, just like imperialists believe it was their duty to teach the colonies (about religion, etc.).

Jessica notes that this similarity creates a new sympathy in the reader: "...I noticed is how similar this movement is to our own 'real' history. It reminded me of how the Americans pushed the Native Americans out of the land. We were so forceful and unfair about it and it's interesting to see the same concept but it's again the Americans this time. Now we can see the reactions of the other side and truly see how harmful it was."

Courtney also discusses issues of racial equality: "This entire theme seems significant and that it is a retelling of another event in history. Of humans during colonial time or just the concept of equality + being able to unite two races."

Erin, too, notes how the reader's emotions shift as the plot develops along these lines:

The arrival of the Boovs is obviously similar to that of the colonists to America. They easily take over with all their fancy technology. At the beginning, the reader fully emphasizes with the humans, and sees the Boovs as strange alien creatures, but J.Lo's nice personality helps the Boovs begin to seem humanlike. The Booves and humans seem to share the role of the good guys as the Gorges try to take over earth. The Booves took over earth after the Gorgs took over the Boov's home planet, but now the Gorgs are trying to take over earth as well, making the whole situation a giant mess of stupidity, much like humanity." Her comments are a bit cynical at the end, perhaps, but are nonetheless an accurate reading of the text.

Erica, however, provides the longest, most in-depth analysis about this idea, commenting not only on the colonial reading, but also the authorial purpose of this parallel:

...throughout this section I noticed something else. yes, this is a science fiction book written for kids, but I think there's a hidden meaning. Think about it. a different type of being invade a land that's not theirs because they want it. They force the natives out of their land and homes. They even kill some. It's just like what the colonists did to the Native Americans. On page 60, Gratuity tells us the reasons the Boovs gave to justify their actions such as they discovered the planet so it was rightfully theirs, it was their destiny to colonize new worlds and that they thought the humans would fit in nicely to Boov culture. Those are pretty much the same justifications the colonists gave for invading the homes of the Indians. The Boov even made all the humans move to Florida, just like the colonists made the Indians move west. J. Lo even said the Boov felt like it was their job to educate the humans. And also, they were greedy of their land, just like the colonists were. The Boov didn't want the Gorg to have the land. I think that Adam Rex did this on purpose. Our culture always tries to justify what we did, but we never try to see it from the other point of view. He made the humans land be invaded, not the Boovs because we always sympathize with the human and how we can kind of know it felt. I think he did this to educate kids on the moral side of what the colonists did without making them read a history book. I thought it was really interesting how many parallels Adam Rex drew between their history and ours. I first noticed this when JLo tells that certain Boov's announced that the

industry is polluting the waters and that unless things were changed, the ocean would no longer be able to sustain life. A year later the higher Boov say that this cannot be proven so it cannot be accepted as fact. For some reason I almost thought this was mocking the way our society responded to global warming, but I found it funny too. JLo mentions other things such as art turning to entertainment which later turned to people talking about entertainment. If you really think about that, it's so weirdly true for our society.

Again, there is a slight misunderstanding about the idea of authorial intention with her “thinking” Adam Rex did this on purpose (the implied Rex *did* do it), but Erica’s larger point is well articulated and on point. Erica’s close reading highlights several details from the novel that support her claim about Rex’s message to his audience. Though not as many students wrote about this colonial parallel as they did, say, the narrative utility of the *Watsons* chapters, those that did demonstrate a sophisticated, mature reading of theme, authorial intent, and audience.

**Section Wrap Up.** The ability to independently conceive of larger thematic elements of a text is, in my experience, a key goal of secondary English instruction. Of course I wanted my former students to enjoy reading and to appreciate various writers’ styles, but more importantly, I wanted my students to appreciate the “so what?” of any given text: what message does this give the readers about humanity or our lived experience? With more complex, canonical novels, like those I taught previously, this was often difficult. Of course, sometimes my students would make keen observations about the message or theme in a text we read together as a class, but often when asked to do so independently, they required much more guidance and assistance. This is not

inherently negative—teachers presumably know more about the subject matter than their students do—but the opportunities for students to demonstrate their critical reading abilities independently were rare, because it was difficult, if not nearly impossible, for students to enter the implied readership of the canon. With children’s texts, students are given a chance to showcase their understanding of narrative.

Students’ opportunities for success are, in my opinion, even greater when the instructor is just as new to a text as the students are, like our classroom experience for *Smekday*. Because I, the supposed expert, was reading for notice and signification and not coherence (Rabinowitz, 1987) just like my students, I was unable to direct their reading much beyond providing some background information about the story-within-a-story structure of Rex’s novel. Therefore, the students had to rely upon their own understanding of narrative, genre, and other tacit conventions of reading to come to their conclusions about theme, character, and plot. I think this is not only empowering for students but also a more authentic method for students to demonstrate knowledge than what I, at least, have done before. Lay readers, especially students with limited formal training, typically do not open a book to read with any foregrounding about “what to look for” in order to complete subsequent academic tasks. Yet, as Rabinowitz (1987) argues, and my students demonstrate, lay readers are equipped with knowledge about narratives. Creating a space in which reading for reading’s sake is more akin to the activities of the “everyreader” than a formal reading “assignment” is helpful, productive pedagogy.

## **Student Journals as a Space for Narrative Instruction**

I did not realize until I reread my students' journals to code them for data analysis how often I used them as a space for narrative instruction. Although writing comments in journals is something I have done with my former high school (and current college) students, and therefore something I did with my students at The Warrenton, it was not until I reexamined my students' journals that I noticed how often I used this written space for instructive purposes.

However, using journals as a space for mini-lessons on narrative is tricky. Because each journal entry stood alone, students did not revisit the topics about which they had written previously, even if they read through my comments when I returned them. Additionally, I collected journals approximately every two weeks, on alternate Fridays, and while I returned them quickly (by the following Monday), often times something a student had written was nearly two weeks old before I read it. The topic at hand could have been addressed in class or forgotten about prior to my commenting in the journal, thus potentially rendering my comments moot.

Despite those concerns, however, I think it is valuable to include these data here, because my study did center on narrative instruction in a children's literature class. My instructive comments fell into two broad categories: statements and questions. The statements I used tended to serve to correct a misconception on the student's part or to provide information, much like a verbal lecture would do in the classroom. The questions were often rhetorical, ending with "yes?" or "no?" but were also a way for me to push my students' thinking with regard to narrative terms and concepts.

Much, though not all, of the data presented below have been presented earlier in this chapter under a different subheading; I revisit this material in order to contextualize my comments on the journals. As in previous sections of data, I organize my comments around narrative case studies. For purposes of clarity, the students' comments are left in regular typeface, while mine are offset with parentheses and italics. Any unique formatting, like underlining for emphasis, has been transcribed verbatim from the originals.

**Statements.** As stated previously, I sometimes used student journals as a way to correct misconceptions or inform students about terms and concepts with which they were unfamiliar. I make statements less frequently than I ask questions (next subsection), which is similar to my in-class teaching style.

**Zel.** Ashley wrote about Zel's mother in her journal: "I'm a bit disappointed because I've realized that I don't have much patience for Repunzel -> or to be more accurate, her mother. She infuriate me. (*she's supposed to.*) On a separate note, ive come to notice that Mother is the only character that tell her own story: Zel's stories, as well as Konrad's, are told by the narrator. (*well, Mother is a narrator, too, just a different kind/type.*)" Madison comments on the opening chapters: "So far in the book the main characters have been introduced, Zel, Mother and Konrad. Zel and her mother live by themselves on a farm in the country. the book is pretty flow but this point and not much has happened. (*HB: lots of intro chapters are character development, not plot.*) Here, I affirm Ashley's feelings about Mother with the idea that the author designed her to be infuriating, and attempt to reject Madison's worries about the beginning with the fact that many novels start off that way as a means to introduce characters. I am not using terms

from narrative theory here, though I do correct Ashley's statement that Zel and Konrad's stories are "told by the narrator." Narration and focalization are ideas that get discussed in class, but have not yet been formally introduced; I try to do that here.

**Watsons.** Madison reflects on her experience reading Curtis's novel a second time: "As a fourth grader I remember being confused about the ending of the book. I felt like I didn't understand exactly what was going on. Reading this book again as a high schooler the book takes on a whole new meaning. Even though the intended audience is for 6<sup>th</sup> graders, (*well, intended audience isn't the same as reading level.*) it would be a good book for an 8<sup>th</sup> grader to read to have an innocent approach to a serious topic that they actually understand." This idea of "intended audience" was something that some students continued to struggle with throughout the course, because the rhetorical approach posits that the text creates the audience, not the other way around, and students, like Madison here, often had trouble wrapping their minds around the difference between "marketing" audience or the publisher's indicated reading level and the kind of audience as created by the text in terms content and writing style.

Evan, in his paratextual analysis of the novel's cover, writes: "My immediate thought is that this is about an African American family in the south. The reason is the name and the pickturs. (*well, the title is ...GO to... so they aren't from there.*)" My pointing out a different paratext, the title, in an attempt to get him to rethink the setting is an example of how the two-week turnaround for journals was less than ideal; by the time I read this journal, Evan and his classmates had finished the novel. Hopefully, however, my comment, or class discussion about the text, got Evan to reconsider how he interpreted the pictures alongside the title, even for future texts.



Students were not expected to write only about what they liked about any text, and many of them freely included their disappointments. Erica, for example, writes: “However, I did not like how rushed the ending was. I felt like the entire book was describing the Watson’s lives. And I’m not saying shorten that because I definitely think it was necessary. I just feel like all the action took place in a few chapters... The only detailed part is the epilogue. But what kid reads that anyway? (*haha! Well, the epilogue = paratext*).” Though I don’t correct it, I think Erica’s notion that kids don’t read the epilogue is likely misguided, but here I attempt to remind her that once the narrative is over, the other pieces are important parts of the reading experience. I try to offset her feeling that the narrative is too rushed at the end by indicating that the epilogue does, in fact, matter.

***Smekday.*** The journal-based narrative instruction for *Smekday* focused mainly on the narration. Courtney writes: “I find Gratuity’s language to be a bit distracting. Not particularly the part where she is like “excuse my language” that didn’t seem to bother me. I guess I’m distracted by the way she tells her story. I know she is a child and as an audience the book is technically written for younger children I feel that he writting would be different if she was writing an essay for a teacher. (*well, she is writing for the capsule people. Rex is writing for younger*).” Here, Courtney exposes her misunderstanding of the rhetorical communication model (Chatman, 1978). She does not separate Gratuity’s narration and narratee from Rex’s authorship and audience. Her understanding of these ideas does improve, though, because her final exam response to the idea of audience is remarkably better and more accurate.

Alexis asks a question about the narrator, Gratuity, herself: “I have a question, did she mention what she looked like at all in the first section? I wouldn’t be surprised, if she did I just missed it, but when she is talking to the boys under the castle, she says they gave her certain looks (pg 13). I didn’t really get why. (*well, first person narrators tend not to describe themselves.*)” Rather than actually responding to her question about why the boys in the novel give Gratuity funny looks—it’s signaled at that moment in the text the looks are because she’s black—I instead bring up a relatively advanced concept of narrative. Obviously there are exceptions to the first-person narrator description “rule” that I’ve laid out here (e.g. Holden Caulfield), but I recall discussing this idea with peers in an advanced narrative theory course, and believed this was a good moment to impart this knowledge. I don’t know if it was helpful, of course, but Alexis was one of my top students, so I hope this gave her something to think about.

Another one of Alexis’s comments is the last example of my use of “statements” as instruction. Regarding a plot point in the novel, she writes: “I also (when I read it) was surprised by having the humans not be in Florida, but having been moved into Arizona. I realize now that if I had looked at the back cover I would have known that, but I didn’t so that affected how I read the story. (*paratexts matter ☺*).” Here, I am merely affirming her own statement based on avoiding the back cover, but I make sure to use the narrative term paratext as instructive reinforcement.

**Questions.** Although it was surprising to learn how often I used student journals as a space for written narrative instruction, it was not surprising to learn how many of these occurrences were phrased as questions. In my typical classroom discourse, I tend to avoid direct instruction, and rather try to get students to answer their own (or each

other's) questions instead. In this space, as previously mentioned, this tactic was probably wasted in practice, since there was very little, if any, follow up once journals were handed back. I can only hope that students read my comments and gave them even a little bit of thought. Some of these questions were rhetorical in nature, yet others are meant to get students to deepen their thinking about narrative.

**Zel.** I use rhetorical questions with Ashley, Jessica, and Megan. Ashley writes: "I am a bit surprised but I ended up actually liking the story quite a lot! I found some answers of some of my earlier ambiguous question and concerns. (*most big Qs end up answered, yes?*). Jessica comments "I thought it was cool how I didn't even realize the story was about Rapunzel until several chapters in. (*yes. a good design by Napoli, no?*)," and Megan discusses her surprise at a plot point: "At this point in the book, Konrad is obsessed with finding Zel. I am surprised his parents are letting him search for her. (*me too. it's part of the fairy tale genre, yes?*)." Although rhetorical in nature, these questions do get at larger conceptual elements, like narrative structure and genre.

My other questions addressed everything from symbolism to audience to narrative structure. Madison writes "I have a feeling that the goose will have a lot of symbolism in the book. (*yes! At what point does a 'thing' turn into a symbol?*)." Her thinking is smart here—the goose is quite symbolic in Napoli's text—but I want to get her to consider why some "things" are symbols and others aren't. Courtney and Alexis discuss audience in their comments, respectively: "Another grotesque example [of the maturity of the text] is the chapter about the eyes or the stolen soul. The overall plot is a bit to much for the intended author. (*audience? And isn't the audience determined by the text, not the other way around?*)" and "Another example [of the maturity of the text] would be when Zel has

the breakdown in her tower. I don't think a young child would understand the gravity of her mental situation. (*then is the book meant for a younger reader? I'd say no.*) Though they could not have known what the other person had written, my response to both students is similar; I am trying to introduce the idea that the implied audience is a result of the text, not the age of the person toward whom the book is marketed according to the publisher. Authors of children's texts likely make assumptions about general reading levels of their audience when writing, but in terms of content, the students were hung up on exposure to content as being appropriate or not for an age group. Alexis also writes two comments that discuss issues of narrative structure. First, "The first thing about this book that I noticed (okay it was about thirty pages in) was that Zel is the story of Rapunzel! I felt actually pretty stupid that it didn't hit me sooner. I mean Rapunzel, Zel it is right in the title. (*hmm. is DJN trying to make us feel stupid? Or are we just supposed to think she is clever?*)" and then later "Some parts of this story, in my opinion, at least felt extremely slow. I wasn't really a fan of all the chapters from Konrad looking for Zel. Yes, he missed, yes he wanted to find her, yes he looked everywhere for her, but I felt that it was over stated and over done. (*well, what does this do for the story as a whole? doesn't it make it that much more rewarding to know he tried so hard?*)." I am, once again, attempting to get her to think about authorial design with regard to the plot and structure of the novel and its impact on the reader.

**Watsons.** I only wrote questions to two students, Megan and Erica, for this text. It is interesting to note, I think, that Megan gets two rhetorical questions that are, in my opinion, rather simplistic, while Erica's lengthy journal entry gets peppered with far more advanced questions about narrative. Megan, in her analysis of the narrative purpose of

Curtis's chapters writes: "This chapter [2] gives us more background about Kenny, and how he was in school, who his friends were etc. Just some more background (*makes him reliable, yes?*). [Ch 3] Kenny's friend, and how they forgave each other because of Kenny's mother. He thought his savior was going to help him, instead he got a friend (*this comes up later, yes?*)."

Asking Megan to consider the establishment of the narrator's reliability isn't necessarily a simplistic reaction to her point. However, my second question is quite simple, since, by the time I wrote it, she had finished the book and had discovered for herself that Kenny's friend Rufus comes up later in the novel.

As mentioned in the previous subsection, Erica did not like the rushed ending to Curtis's novel. Below is a larger segment of her entry with my questions sprinkled throughout:

However, I did not like how rushed the ending was. I felt like the entire book was describing the Watson's lives. And I'm not saying shorten that because I definitely think it was necessary. I just feel like all the action took place in a few chapters. (*agreed.*) especially the church scene. It was the most crucial part of the book, yet they barely discussed it at all. (*hmm. Maybe CPC doesn't see it as the most crucial part? if he had, wouldn't it have more?*) the book is called The Watsons' go to Birmingham, but it isn't about them in Birmingham at all except for a few chapters. (*so then, maybe it's about them going? [not being?]*) The author should have expanded this section and talked about the aftermath of the bombing in Birmingham. (*ok. I hear you. but he didn't expand it. so now how do we react to that?*) Even more shocking was the fact that the author included nothing about racism in Birmingham aside from the bombing. And even then,

there wasn't much about that. *(so...how can we interpret this based on what is in the book?)*

Erica has fallen into the all too common trap of “authorial should have.” While her comments about the rushed ending are valid—it does seem very quick that the bombing is in the second to last chapter—she is basing her interpretation around what the author did *not* do, rather than what he did do. In my multiple questions, I am trying to get her away from interpreting the text based on her desires for it and get her to think about what we do with what exists. The bombing being “the most crucial part” is the best example of this. To her, a flesh-and-blood high school reader, the bombing is the most crucial part. And maybe to the author it is, too; however, her idea that it should be discussed “more” if it’s the most crucial part is misguided, and I’m trying to get her to consider how the implied author—though I do not use that term—considers the importance of the bombing based on how quickly it is dealt with in the novel. I affirm her thinking with “ok. I hear you,” but then want her to step outside her textual “wants” and focus on textual “is.” Although a reader finding a particular textual feature less than satisfying constitutes a legitimate form of reader response, for purpose of interpretation, I think focusing on reactions to the actual text is a way for a reader to go beyond preferences to say something new and interesting about the text.

**Section Wrap Up.** Teaching and learning take place outside of the classroom. Feedback on written assignments is just one other way that teachers attempt to engage students by broadening their thinking. As an English teacher who consistently uses student essays as opportunities to improve student writing (correcting grammar or spelling, making suggestions for improved syntax or organization, etc.), I am not sure

why I was so surprised to learn how often I used my students' less formal writing as a space for narrative instruction. Certainly, not all of my comments were of this nature; many times, I just wrote "yes!" next to an interesting observation, or even a smiley face. Yet, I see the moments where I did make statements or ask questions specifically about elements of narrative as individualized instruction. This is especially true for my top students (Alexis, Ashley, Courtney, and Erica), whose journal entries were often longer, more detailed, more developed, and more insightful than their peers'. I aimed to advance the understanding of narrative for all of my students, but journals were a way for me to ensure that students who were doing some really smart thinking got a bit of extra narrative instruction. The aforementioned limitations of using the journals for instruction are relevant, of course, and I can't even be sure that students read my comments once they glanced through to find their grade—though I'm pretty sure most of them did—but the journals provided an extra—not the only—space to have my students think about texts in a particular way.

### **From Beginning to End: Critical Essays on Picturebooks and Narrative**

Twice during the trimester, my students wrote formal (rather than creative or explanatory) responses about our texts. The first was an essay, due approximately three weeks into the course, in which students were asked to analyze several Cinderella narratives they had read as part of a larger unit on fairy tales. I chose Cinderella to focus on specifically because of the abundance of variations available in picturebook format; I think I borrowed upwards of twenty different versions from local libraries, most of which

were non Euro-centric. To scaffold this essay, students completed a compare/contrast chart (see Appendix) for each book they read. This assignment required them to identify the ways in which the stories followed particular fairy tale tropes (animal helpers, use of the number three, etc.) to provide the basis for a larger conversation about genre. Before I assigned the essay itself (see Appendix), I had students complete a reading from the narrative textbook (Abbott, 2008) that focused on the terms kernel, satellite, and masterplot, the terms with which I began our exploration of narrative theory.

Students had finished reading *Zel* prior to the paper due date, too, and we did an in-class artistic activity called a storyquilt—really, just a fancy term for folding paper into squares and drawing something in each—in which they identified four kernels and four satellites for Napoli’s novel and then shared in pairs and with the class. I provided feedback and scored the first draft according to the rubric (see Appendix) and gave students the chance to meet with me in person to go over the first draft before turning in the final, revised copy, also scored with the rubric.

The second time students were asked to do a formal, critical analysis of a picturebook or other text was their final exam (see Appendix). This in-class exam was two hours long and students did not know the prompts ahead of time, other than being told that two questions would be about *Smekday* and the other two about a picturebook they had not read previously; I provided each student with a copy of this book. In this section, I focus on the questions about the picturebook, *Interrupting Chicken* (Stein, 2010) because 1) *Smekday* has been discussed significantly already; and 2) since the first formal paper was on picturebooks, this data is a more comparable source.



The prompts for the two critical assignments ask students to respond to vastly different narrative elements: kernel, satellite, and masterplot for the Cinderella essay and frame narrative, masterplot, and authorial audience for the final exam questions. In my opinion, the final exam questions are much more complex than the initial essay prompt. This makes pedagogical sense, too, since my course (like many) built on previously understood ideas and progressed in difficulty as time went on.

In this section, I use excerpts from my students' essays and final exams to demonstrate their individual understanding (or lack thereof) and growth (or not) throughout the course with regard to narrative terms and concepts. As part of the course, I also taught my students about the formal, technical features of picturebooks, the vocabulary of which students employed in both instances as well. Though not formally cumulative in nature, the blind or first-time reading of Stein's picturebook did serve as a mechanism to assess students' ability to demonstrate their knowledge about both picturebooks as a literary medium and about narrative theory. The comparison of these two formal writing assignments also provided me the opportunity to reflect on my teaching; by examining my students' end-of-term responses, I am able to gain a fuller picture of what terms and concepts they were able to translate and integrate (Herman, McHale, and Phalan, 2010) and where more instruction would have been helpful.

Unlike previous sections, this section is organized alphabetically by student and rather than category and text. Doing so allows for the most coherent way of comparing like with like. Excerpts were selected to highlight what I, their teacher, considered insightful or, in some instances, misguided statements about Cinderella, *Interrupting Chicken*, and narrative theory.

**Alexis.** Alexis was continually one of my top students, both in terms of engagement (participating in class, doing homework on time, etc.) and her insights. She writes in the introduction of her Cinderella paper that "...the masterplot of the Cinderella story is that of a seemingly unworthy girl who, against all odds, wins the heart of a powerful man." She argues that the kernels are Cinderella losing her mother, a social event in which she meets the important man, the presence of jealous females, and that Cinderella must be kind and humble. Without these particulars, she argues, the plot would not progress as it does: Cinderella's motherless state evokes pity, she must have an occasion to meet this important man, the jealous other women vying for the man's attention give the reader an easy antagonist, and her gentle nature is ultimately what wins him over. Alexis, a self proclaimed avid reader, especially of fairy tales, has a firm grasp on the Cinderella story.

On her final exam, Alexis continues to show her understanding of masterplot. She argues that Stein's story "almost rebels against a particular masterplot. The reader would think that little red chicken would eventually get so tired that she would stop interrupting and fall asleep. In the end of the story, though, little red chicken is the one telling papa chicken and story, and he is the one falling asleep." She goes on to point out that "to enter the audience for this book, I think the reader has to believe that chickens act like people. They can read, and talk, put their chicks to bed, and read our bedtime stories to them. The reader has to let go of the reality that chickens actually don't do any of those things..." Alexis's ideas regarding the bedtime story masterplot is on target, and yes, to enter the audience of this book, a reader must (among other things) believe chickens can act like humans. However, the prompt asked for *authorial* audience, not *narrative*

audience, so Alexis's answer is not as precise as it could be. The narrative audience must treat the fiction as real—believing that chickens can read, etc.—while the authorial audience is the ideal construct of the reader as laid out by the text itself and that recognizes that the text is fictional.

She also points out, regarding the framing and embedded layers of this text, that, “The illustrations are used, mainly, to show the transitions between the levels. When the narrative goes more embedded the illustrations are of bedtime story, like the reader is papa chicken reading little red chicken the story. When the narrative is more in the present the illustrations show both little red chicken and papa chicken. This going back and forth between the two levels works very well for this story, and the illustrations enhance this by making the reader feel like she is part of the story.” She is able to dissect how the illustrations help denote level, as well as what impact this has on the reader.

**Ashley.** Though Ashley is naturally a bit taciturn, she makes up for her quietness by writing well. She opens her Cinderella paper with the following:

Often times when people consider the story of Cinderella, they envision an unfortunate, neglected girl born into a wealthy family, a masterful fairy godmother, a pumpkin that magically becomes a luxurious carriage, an elegant ball, and most importantly, a glass slipper lost at the stroke of midnight. These events are generally thought to be the *kernels* (or the *constituent* events) of the story, meaning they are the events that are necessary for the story to be the story that it is. However, in reality, these seemingly essential elements do not, in fact, define the narrative.

Here, Ashley not only rather seamlessly introduces the concept of kernels (and its synonym), but thoughtfully disrupts the popular understanding of the defining elements

of the Cinderella narrative. In her thesis, she corrects this erroneous assumption, and, like Alexis, believes that a chance meeting between the title character and the man, jealous females, a “likeable” personality for Cinderella, and the “triumph of the underdog” are necessary for the masterplot.

However, unlike Alexis, Ashley’s understanding of masterplot for *Interrupting Chicken* is not quite as sophisticated. Rather than discussing the “bedtime story” idea, Ashley argues that Stein is rebelling against the “happily ever after” trope. The frame story does end quite happily—both Papa and Chicken are sleeping soundly, so this is a misread. However, in her discussion of the authorial audience, Ashley points out that for Stein’s text to have maximum impact on the reader, “the reader must be familiar with the three stories (or allusions) read by Papa Chicken. “ This is an excellent point, and, quite frankly, the answer I was “looking for” for this particular prompt; in order for a flesh-and-blood reader to find Chicken funny with her constant bedtime story interruptions, he must be aware of the originals, otherwise the humor is lost. She was one of only two students who responded this way; thus, it is obvious to me as their teacher, that I under-taught the ideas of authorial versus narrative audience.

Ashley’s understanding of the framing and embedded levels of Stein’s story demonstrate an awareness of genre, even if they also show a slight misreading of the nature of frame story: “Interrupting Chicken is a narrative with both framing and embedded levels because it is essentially four smaller children’s books within a children’s book. This concept adds to the story because it emphasizes how all aspects of a story are interrelated...since the three stories read by papa are very common, without the framing narrative (the dialogue between the two chickens, and the interruptions) the story

would hold no new meaning.” The fact that there are excerpts of popular children’s folk tales in *Interrupting Chicken* is not what makes it a frame narrative; however, her last point, about Stein creating a new story by using old ones is valid and interesting.

**Courtney.** Although I am focusing on students’ final drafts of their Cinderella papers for purposes of this data section, Courtney’s first draft is useful here as a misreading. She writes: “No matter what the culture is, Native American, Africa, or America, the world has some understanding of Cinderella. Though there are many versions of the idea that is the good are rewarded while the bad are punished is constant throughout any Cinderella story. Each version has one masterplot, which is the backbone of the story.” Though she goes on to identify the masterplot as “a seemingly unworthy girl goes against all odds and wins the heart of a powerful man...” her initial understanding of the concept of masterplot is misguided. A Cinderella story—I would argue that is very close to her definition—*is* a masterplot; it does not *have* one. I corrected this thinking on her draft and also in person during our revision conference.

On her final exam, Courtney more accurately responds to the question of masterplot. She writes: “David Stein rebels against what the implied audience assumes would be the masterplot. When I began reading this children’s book, I thought it would fall into any masterplot of bedtime stories. The audience knows that the *Interrupting Chicken* is possibly a bedtime story itself, and so it would follow the masterplot of a any bedtime story. That the kid would be told a story and then enter into that story. But when the end the child falls asleep. But Stein’s book; however, the masterplot is different. He rebels in a sense that the child at the end takes the role of the parent reading the story, and the Papa falls asleep.” Again, this is a good reading of the “anti” bedtime story nature of

Stein's text. The first page of Stein's text reads "it was bedtime for the little red Chicken," so her claim that the audience knows it is possibly a bedtime story itself is valid.

Courtney, like Alexis, also discusses that the implied audience must accept the fictional components as true. I completely understand that she uses "implied audience" rather than "authorial audience" as prompted in the question; the concepts are very similar, and I am quite sure I used them interchangeably despite their not being perfectly synonymous. Both terms denote the ideal reader for whom the implied author is writing; however, the authorial audience also recognizes that the text is a fictional construct. However, what she is talking about is narrative audience, which is inherently different, as mentioned earlier.

In her discussion of the frame story of Stein's text, Courtney points out a key feature of picturebooks:

The illustration does a lot for the structure of the story because it allows the reader to understand when the book is turning for one level to the next. It does this because the illustration portrays the chicken in the story, therefore he has reached the embedded level of the story. Another example, is when the father begins to read the stories the illustration becomes the story and you see the chicken within the book he is reading. Though the illustrations portray that the chicken has physically entered into the story, you know as a reader that has simply interrupted. The idea is that by showing the chicken entering the reader understands the message that is being portrayed, which is the chicken is

continually interrupting the story being told. The illustrations form the overall structure of the story. The text needs to the illustration in order to be understood. Although I would argue that knowing *Chicken* does not “simply interrupt” Papa reading, she makes the larger point that neither the picture nor the text can exist alone for the story, which is a fundamental aspect of picturebooks we discussed throughout.

**Erica.** Erica did not return her final drafts to me, so these data, like Courtney’s, is derived from her first draft. In her introduction, Erica references the definition of masterplot from Abbott’s text, including the component that different cultures rely upon different masterplots. (In class we discussed how America relies heavily on the “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” masterplot, one that other cultures do not necessarily value as heavily as we do.) Erica writes that “Cinderella is different from other stories because its master plot is not culture specific. In fact, throughout time, it has become its own masterplot....Every culture in the world has its own version, but the underlying plot is always the same.” She goes on to argue that this underlying plot includes a mistreated woman, villains, a prince of some sort, and “the triumph of the good and poor.” In class, we frequently discussed ideology, especially in fairy tales, and Erica is definitely referencing class conversations with the last part of her thesis statement. Additionally, her comment that over time Cinderella has become its own masterplot demonstrates her understanding of the cultural impact on stories, and vice versa.

Like Alexis and Courtney, Erica’s understanding of Stein’s rebelling against a particular masterplot in *Interrupting Chicken* is, as she phrases it that “of a parent putting his or her child to bed, or more specifically, parents taking care of their children.” This doesn’t exactly get at the idea of “bedtime story,” but comes close. She, however, says

that the authorial audience is “definitely kids, but...parents too. Stein wants to show kids that sometimes they can take charge, but he also wants to show parents that sometimes it’s okay to need their kids to put them to bed.” While not necessarily “wrong,” I think Erica misses the larger point about audience here, and I think she had not fully wrapped her thinking around authorial or implied audience versus intended audience in terms of marketing on the part of the publisher (rather than targeted by the author). As previous sections have shown, this distinction was something that troubled her.

**Erin.** Erin writes in her Cinderella story that the masterplot “allows the stories to keep the same form, but still allows the authors to add in cultural aspects and other details which make the book original. The masterplot is all of the necessary parts needed to form the basic storyline, which are recurring in every variation.” Although she, like Erica, touches on the cultural issues at play with regard to masterplot, her understanding of the concept is not quite on target; she seems to be combining the idea of masterplot with that of kernels, which is a legitimate connection to make—masterplots are defined in terms of invariant elements, and kernels are those invariant elements. Similar to her peers, she, too, believes that “a poor or mistreated girl with a kind attitude” who meets a nobleman is part of the masterplot of a Cinderella story.

Throughout the course, Erica shared some really interesting insights into literature, especially in our disability unit. Yet, by the final exam, her understanding of masterplot did not necessarily improve. About *Interrupting Chicken* she writes: “The masterplot of *Interrupting Chicken* is a young chicken being difficult at bedtime, and her Father falling to sleep before she does. Little red chicken keeps jumping in and giving the characters advice in every story read to her. This rebels against some masterplots,



because there is no character development.” The “difficult at bedtime” piece approaches the right idea, but “no character development” is entirely off base. However, in her discussion of the authorial audience, she writes “the audience has to be old enough to easily recognize the classic stories referenced in this and the problems with them that little red chicken is pointing out.” The rest of her response to this question focuses on age, as does the portion of the response just cited, but Erica comes close to identifying key aspects of the concept of authorial audience, even if she is also conflating a reader’s age with familiarity with classic folktales.

Erin, an artist, draws upon this knowledge when responding to the exam question about framing and embedded levels of the story. She notes that the illustrations shift in the different levels of the story, and that “Stein draws out a book in the embedded levels, and makes it look kind of vintage with muted colors and sketch pictures. In the framing level however, the pictures are painted with brighter colors and few lines. This shows the obvious difference between the two levels. It also shows how the stories are old and classic...” Erin was my only student to specify the techniques Stein uses in the illustrations and how they impact the tone and mood of it.

**Grace.** In her Cinderella paper at the beginning of the course, Grace did not fully grasp the concept of masterplot, though she does understand kernels and satellites. About masterplot, she writes in her first body paragraph: “the masterplot is a very important detail in a fairy tale such as Cinderella because without a master plot general the themes, layout, moral, among other things can change the view and the ending of the book.” In her introduction, she shares that “the master plot has a great deal with how so many versions seem to be all the same, but at the same time be so different,” which I would

consider a reasonable idea, even if Grace's way of putting this point is not as eloquent as some of her classmates, so it's unclear how she transitions from a basic understanding to a less developed one.

Yet by the final exam, Grace more accurately discusses masterplot. She writes "Stein rebels against the master plot in the way that the Red Chicken never falls asleep, in most cases a bed time story always ends with the child falling asleep or going to bed once the story is over. In the case of this book, the Red Chicken stays up and keeps on wanting more books to be read, but keeps on interrupting, until Papa Chicken makes her read him a bed time story. Papa fell asleep as soon as she flipped the first page." She, too, mixes up authorial and narrative audience, but her answer is accurate despite this conflation. As mentioned before, I considered Grace to be one of my weaker students when it came to writing, at least—she participated often in class—but she eventually grasped the narrative concepts.

**Jessica.** In her Cinderella paper, Jessica demonstrates knowledge of masterplot, kernels, and satellites, even mentioning the cultural aspect of the concept of masterplot. Her answer is not unlike many of her classmates above. However, though she turned in decent written work throughout the trimester, Jessica rarely participated in class discussions. Therefore, I often had a hard time assessing whether or not she was learning our narrative concepts. I was a bit surprised, then, when she wrote on her final exam that the authorial audience involves "whether or not they know the stories that are being read and how they end." Though not as eloquent as Ashley, above, Jessica accurately describes what makes up the authorial, rather than narrative, audience of Stein's text, and I was pleasantly surprised that Jessica in particular understood the concept.

**Madison.** Madison, like Jessica, did not participate often in class, and the two of them, along with another female student, formed a cliquish trio that frequently gave me trouble (teacher journal 10.04.12). Madison's discussion of masterplot is well done in her Cinderella paper, though her ideas about kernels and satellites are a bit off in her introduction, even though throughout her paper she actually demonstrates an understanding of these ideas. However, in her final exam, Madison does not adequately respond to questions of masterplot or audience, though she does correctly answer the question regarding framing and embedded levels in *Interrupting Chicken*. This strikes me as a bit odd, since I would expect a student who showed an early understanding of a term to carry that throughout the course.

**Section wrap up.** Using picturebooks like fairy tales and postmodern texts like Stein's *Interrupting Chicken* to facilitate learning about narrative theory concepts, from the simple to more complex, is a sound pedagogical idea. To be sure, some students mastered the ideas more quickly and easily, much like any other skill set. In turn, narrative theory provides the vocabulary for students to advance their analysis of "simple" texts like picturebooks and children's literature. These data in particular afford me, the teacher-researcher, an opportunity to reflect on my pedagogy. As I mentioned earlier, it is quite clear from the students' final exam questions that I under-taught the difference between narrative audience and authorial audience, since only two students, Ashley and Jessica, really manage to hone in on the difference. Twice in my teacher journal (09.18.12 and 10.26.12) I write about being stressed about the timeline of the course and fear I won't get to do everything I planned. It is possible that this rushed feeling led to rushed teaching with respect to these concepts. That two students who I

considered quite different in terms of work ethic and demonstrated intellectual ability did respond quite well to the prompt about authorial audience tells me that the concept itself is not beyond the reach of secondary students. The majority of the students did confuse two terms, yes, but I do not believe this is evidence that the terms themselves are inherently too difficult.

Additionally, although the idea of frame story was introduced with a full-prose narrative first, the students easily translated this knowledge and were able to combine their learning about picturebooks with the narrative terminology during a “blind” reading of Stein’s text. Although only a couple of students, most notably Erin, a talented artist herself, really spoke to Stein’s technical choices, almost all of the students mentioned how the illustrations were utilized to show the alternating between framing and embedded levels.

In the following chapter, I discuss more broadly the theoretical and pedagogical implications of this teacher-research study, locating it in a larger context of secondary English education. I also briefly mention how the findings of my study can be useful to teachers facing the implementation of the new Common Core Standards for Language Arts, although this was not an intended goal of my study.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discuss the pedagogical and critical benefits and challenges of introducing narrative theory into the secondary English classroom, based on my findings from this study. I situate this discussion more broadly in the context of secondary English education, focusing on how ideas from narrative theory can help bridge the conceptual and pedagogical gaps between reader response and formalism, the two frameworks for interpretation most commonly used by high school English teachers. I then briefly discuss how incorporating rhetorical narrative theory in the secondary English classroom aligns with the Common Core Standards for English/Language Arts before ending with directions for future research.

### **Pedagogical and Critical Benefits of Narrative Theory in the Secondary Classroom**

In chapter one, citing Rabinowitz and Smith (1998), I argue that secondary English teachers need to embrace a theory of literature that can be useful and productive for a wide range of students—from those in Advanced Placement courses or bound for higher education, to those who struggle to read. The required approach would give reader, author, and context roughly equal weight, and narrow the gap of expertise between teacher and student in addition to teaching students *how* to read for interpretation rather than merely *accepting* an interpretation. I also agree with Benton

(1992), who argues that the relationship between reading and teaching literature needs to be re-examined in a way that foregrounds reading and responding rather than “practical criticism” and comprehension, and that recognizes that the texts used in the classroom setting—even the canonical ones—were written for readers, not scholars.

Based on the evidence presented in this study, I argue that introducing students to the terms and concepts of rhetorical narrative theory accomplishes these goals. Students in my class who demonstrated more advanced intellectual ability (or, if nothing else, a greater interest in reading in general), as well as students who seemed less interested or less capable, showed an understanding of our assigned texts that intuitively matches many of the insights laid bare by rhetorical narrative theory, such as the impact of narration and focalization choices on reader response, as well as the importance of matters such as narrative progression, narrative and authorial audience, expectations of genre, and masterplot, among others. I do think that some of this has to do with the children’s novels we used as case studies; it is reasonable to assume that my upper middle class students enrolled in a pricey independent school have had many (perhaps innumerable) experiences with children’s literature by their junior or senior year in high school. Yet this almost intuitive understanding of narrative concepts for which rhetorical narrative theory provides a metalanguage is precisely why the language of narrative theory should be introduced more formally in the secondary classroom, regardless of text selection.

To help make this point, I return to the findings of Vasquez (2009) who introduced formal, technical language to struggling readers in a 9<sup>th</sup> grade English classroom in Texas. In recounting her experience as a guest teacher, she writes about

teaching a particular student a new term, and how she found that he “was pleased to be ‘let in on’ the secret language of literary analysis and to realize that it is not nearly so mysterious once you learn the process of constructing meaning and the associated terminology with which to describe it” (p. 23). Vasquez also cites Rabinowitz and Smith (1998) in developing her claim that “teaching students strategies to unlock literary analysis by identifying literary devices and investigating the effect of those devices enables teachers to promote the reading and interpretation skills students need to construct their own interpretations, thereby “freeing them from passively accepting their teachers’ interpretations” (p. xv, as cited pg. 24). Although I am, without a doubt, a more highly trained and effective narrative theorist than my study participants, a result of age, education, and practice, I aimed to bridge the gap between my students and my repertoire of interpretive skills. In many cases, as with *Smekday*, I was sincerely impressed with their readings of the text.

In short, when teachers instruct their students in the formal, technical language of an interpretive framework, they bridge the gap between expert and novice. Students, armed with an understanding of narrative based on their own reading experiences as well as the sophisticated language with which to talk about that understanding, are on a more equal playing field with their teacher in a classroom. Students (and the teacher) can start from a place of personal response based in likes, dislikes, confusion, etc.—e.g. Erica’s dissatisfaction of the rushed ending of *Watsons*—and then move toward a more analytical space in which author, audience, textual features, and context are considered more formally. The feedback loop among reader, textual features, and author (Phelan, 2005, p. 18) allows for the individual reader’s response to be grounded in concrete elements of the

text, and also in a conversation with the author, while neither privileging the expert or teacher's interpretation nor assuming one correct interpretation as formalism does. And, unlike the typical pedagogical enactment of reader response theory, which focuses on an individual reader's personal connection with the text—which is sometimes unethical, like when white middle class students claim they can relate to the experience of black children during Civil Rights (Many & Wiseman, 1992, p. 264)—rhetorical narrative theory aims to “say something” about the text, rather than saying something only about the reader.

For example, as mentioned in chapter four, several students had a personal reaction, ranging from “I felt stupid” to “it was cool,” to Napoli's delayed reveal about her title character in *Zel*. That Alexis felt “stupid” is likely due to the fact that she is an avid reader whose favorite picturebook as a child was in fact *Rapunzel* by Zelinsky (1997). However, if the classroom space includes interrogating the rhetoric of the author's artistic choices, Alexis and the others who commented on this textual feature can get beyond “I felt stupid” or “it was cool” to talk about how this delayed reveal impacts audience more broadly. Integrating the specific terminology for particular concepts, like authorial audience, encourages a more formal discourse by letting students “in on the secret” and creating an analytical, skills-based approach to literary instruction.

To put it another, analogous way: would—or could—a biology teacher instruct her students and avoid using terms like evolution, phylum, or respiratory system? High school physics teachers work with students who have an understanding that releasing an object from a point in space will cause said object to fall to the ground. At some point, probably as a younger child, those students likely learned the term gravity. However, this



basic understanding can be advanced with instruction about the rate of gravitational acceleration, and I'm sure more than one physics teacher has demystified a student's naïve assumption that heavier objects fall at a faster rate than lighter ones. I am not making the facile argument that the humanities should be treated like a hard science—though narratology did get off the ground in similar fashion (Todorov, 1969); rather, I'm suggesting that in all academic disciplines, English included, acquiring a more precise language is intellectually beneficial. The better one's tools, the better one can build something, whether it is a scientific experiment to test a hypothesis or an interpretation of a particular text. And being familiar with the precise name for a tool, in addition to understanding its utility and how we might use it for our explicit purpose, is part of that process by which students at all ages gain expertise in a given field of inquiry.

Rabinowitz (1987) makes this claim when he uses the analogy that reading is like building a swingset. You have to start somewhere, need to know how to recognize elements of the text, etc. You might make an error—the actual swings might hang too low, in his analogy—and sometimes have to start over from scratch, but knowing the difference between a dowel and a screwdriver is essential for putting together this swingset. Later, Smith, Rabinowitz's co-author (1998), expands this analogy to include knowing whether you're putting together a swingset or a grill. My students clearly recognized that reading fairy tales, disability fiction, and science fiction involve very different interpretive protocol. But if they were better able to name their interpretive tools, they would be more adept at using the tools that are especially helpful in any given interpretive situation.

Furthermore, some tools of rhetorical narrative theory exist because they are better than the previous tools. Narratology has largely rejected the term “first person narrator,” for example, opting instead for homodiegetic narrator, because it highlights the basic similarity between autobiographical narratives told in the third and the first person, while revealing the contrast between autobiographical and non-autobiographical accounts. Similarly, narrative theory recognizes the difference between narration—who speaks—and focalization—who sees. These tools both better apply themselves to, and help us understand, the problem. This narration/focalization distinction, for example, is relevant to *Zel*. The chapters about Mother are written homodiegetically, while the chapters about Zel and Konrad are narrated heterodiegetically but focalized through the two teens. All of the chapters in *Wonder* are homodiegetic but with shifting focalizations.

In this way, explicit instruction in narrative theory can also assist students with comprehension and understanding of texts, even “simple” ones like children’s literature. Recall that many of my students expressed frustration with the beginning of Rex’s science fiction novel, *The True Meaning of Smekday*. Several were confused by the essay written by the narrator, Gratuity. However, after our in class discussion of the first thirty two pages of the text, during which I taught them about framing and embedded narratives, the students reported a better understanding of the structure. Many of these students also went on to make insightful comments in their final exams about the impact of Rex’s design of his frame story. My students had also never heard the term “unreliable narrator” before I introduced it to them during our discussion of *Zel* with regard to the character of Mother. We talked about how sometimes the author wants you to understand that we should not take a narrator at face value—a sort of distance between the implied

author and narrator in Chatman's communication model—which helped them understand her characterization better. Many students later competently used this term when examining their narrative rewrites for *Watsons*. These findings support my hypothesis that secondary English teachers, much like secondary math or science teachers, can and should enrich their students' literary understanding by teaching students a technical language for interpreting texts. At the same time, my findings suggest that whereas the pedagogy of formalism posits that there is one, correct interpretation, which, by design, the teacher is privy to while the students are not, rhetorical narrative theory allows for more fluidity and openness with regard to interpretation even as it grounds the process of interpretation in concrete elements of the text, unlike many pedagogical iterations of reader response theory.

My study therefore suggests that providing students with the language to help them better express a somewhat intuitive understanding of how narratives work was potentially empowering. Too often in secondary education, students are expected to be empty receptacles waiting to be filled with knowledge. Despite much scholarship on the benefits of accessing prior knowledge in order to teach curricular requirements across disciplines, many teachers (myself included) often find this pedagogical practice difficult and challenging, since we are met with external pressures like standardized testing, merit-based pay, and parents. Yet by having my students share their understanding of a concept at work in a particular text and *then* providing them with the metalanguage used by theorists to label said concept, I was able to send the message that they are intelligent readers who have much to bring to the proverbial academic table.

## **Pedagogical and Critical Challenges of Narrative Theory in the Secondary Classroom**

As briefly mentioned at the end of chapter four, one of the challenges of this study was time. Three and a half hours a week for ten weeks is not a lot of time to cover picturebooks, rhetorical narrative theory, and a range of longer children's fiction. Based on journal responses and the final exam, it is clear to me that I undertaught some terms, like authorial versus narrative audience, and didn't get to others, like the ideas of reading for notice and signification, even if I did manage to mention those ideas very briefly in passing. I am also sure that I undertaught concepts during my first year of teaching nearly a decade ago; pedagogy is messy and never perfect, especially the first time out of the instructional gate. I would adjust for this in future iterations of a similar course by having students read excerpts from Rabinowitz's article (1977) alongside the Abbott text. Still, my students read and did more in one trimester of class than my former students did in a year, at least in terms of quantity of novels read. To me and others (Rabinowitz, 1987), more reading leads to better reading, especially across genres.

Another adjustment I would make in a future iteration of a course like this would be when in the instructional sequence I introduced the text that I was teaching against memory. We read *Smekday* last, and upon reflection, the new-to-me text should be placed much earlier in the narrative sequence in order to highlight expert interpretive strategies so the students can work with these concepts from the beginning. *Smekday* was rushed—granted, it was also a much longer novel than the others, which matters—and as a result I think I missed some important pedagogical moments regarding interpretation and “swingset building” with my students. Of course, another challenge of this particular

teaching/reading method is that I did not care for *Smekday* at all, which I couldn't have known before beginning the unit. By design, teaching against memory will always include this possibility; however, the potential benefits of this approach outweigh the concerns, in my opinion. As a classroom teacher, I did not enjoy every text I had to teach, nor did I have prior exposure to my entire curriculum before accepting my job. It is easier, I think, to teach a text about which one is enthusiastic, but it is not a requirement, and K-12 educators the world over teach material they don't "love" all the time.

Another trouble I encountered—though again, I think some of this has to do with our limited time—and that I think would pervade a similar study or classroom experience is the “translation” piece of introducing narrative theory terms (Herman, McHale, and Phelan, 2010). To use a previously mentioned idea, students have typically been instructed on “first person” and “third person” narrators for years by the time they get to high school. Without a sweeping overhaul of the literary instruction at all educational levels, trying to get them away from ingrained language—even when different terms are crucial for capturing a text's meaning, like in *Zel* or *Wonder*—is a challenge.

My study, by design, cannot speak to how much effort would be required to introduce narratological concepts in conjunction with more canonical texts, and I question whether the intuitiveness of much of my students' responses would play out similarly if our curriculum was more similar to what I taught previously. How would students take on the concepts and terminology while also tackling difficult texts like *Beloved* or *The Great Gatsby*? Although students were confused by some elements of our children's texts, I do think that the subject matter and the often more sophisticated

writing style of adult, canonical texts could be a barrier inherent in the oft-taught “classics.”

Additionally, although I was doing my study at a school that happened to employ another narrative theorist, using an interpretive framework that is uncommon at the high school level could be challenging, not only for students, but also for teachers. Imagine if my juniors start talking about focalization and authorial audience in their senior English courses? Or worse, in a public system in which students are mandated to take state wide tests, imagine a student using “homodiegetic narrator” in a standardized essay prompt? To teachers unfamiliar with narrative theory, these terms are meaningless and confusing, and it could even be detrimental to the student to demonstrate knowledge in this manner. Of course, I believe that students understand the “academic game” and could likely remember to code-switch and use “first person narrator” on a state exam, but the larger point stands.

### **Common Core Curriculum and Rhetorical Narrative Theory**

According to the official document released by the Council of Chief State School Officers, “the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (“the Standards”) are the culmination of an extended, broad-based effort to fulfill the charge issued by the states to create the next generation of K–12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the

end of high school” (2010, p. 3). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage in a larger discussion of the implementation of the Common Core or mandated standardized curricula. However, I do want to point out how rhetorical narrative theory fits in with these standards, focusing on the objectives for secondary students grades 9-12.

Literature reading standards for grades 9-10 call for students to be able to “[a]nalyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise” and by grades 11-12, students should be able to “[a]nalyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact” and “[a]nalyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed)” (CCSSO, 2010, p. 38). Even elementary students are expected to be able to “[d]escribe how a narrator’s or speaker’s point of view influences how events are described” (p. 12), and eighth graders must “[a]nalyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor” (p. 36).

The ability to engage in an analysis of narration, structure, character, pacing, and authorial purpose and their impact on the aesthetic whole of a text is something that the tools developed in various approaches of narrative theory are designed to do. Terms and concepts like narrative progression, unreliable narrator, story and discourse, and

focalization, among others, would certainly aid students in expressing their ideas about these topics. Is it possible to do so without employing the terms of narrative theory? Sure, but again, having the best tools for the job makes the final product even more impressive. As the Common Core standards roll out in various school districts, perhaps teachers and students will begin to include rhetorical narrative theory (and other approaches) as an interpretive framework for secondary—or even primary—English/Language Arts classroom.

### **Areas of Future Research**

Many of the limitations of this study suggest strategies for exploring further how rhetorical narrative theory might be incorporated into the secondary English classroom. Because this study focused on the intersection of narrative pedagogy with children's literature, further research would be necessary to see how this rather difficult technical language could be introduced with a more typical, canonical literary curriculum. What might be the problems and benefits of this approach? Additionally, this study was limited in time as well as scope; what sort of experience would students have if we started a full-year English class with narrative theory and children's (or young adult) texts, and then read canonical texts armed with our interpretive vocabulary? To shift to a different but related issue, how might using picturebooks, children's, or young adult literature in a college English classroom benefit nascent literary theorists, particularly those also engaged in teacher training?

This study also focused on a predominantly literature-based course; so how might rhetorical narrative theory coexist in a more blended language arts course that combined



literature and writing pedagogy, like most high school English classes are now designed to do? How might narrative theory be taken up in elective based classes, like film studies, speech, or special topics seminars? Given the standards listed above for elementary and middle school students, in what ways might it be possible to begin narrative instruction in the earlier years of schooling? Although I'm not certain whether much of the difficult terminology would be appropriate for fifth graders, the larger concepts could be.

As I alluded to a moment ago, I am also interested in the pedagogy of narrative theory for students training to become secondary English teachers. As mentioned in chapter one, most pre-service teachers do not have literary theory as part of their content-knowledge coursework prior to becoming certified to teach (Wright, 2008). In what ways can teacher mentors and education or English professors work with future teachers to bring literary theory, particularly narrative theory, into their training and experience before heading into the classroom? In what ways can new or veteran teachers learn to see the value in this particular framework, especially if narrative theory pushes against their formalist or response-based training or practices? Would this task of translating, justifying, and integrating be more difficult with educators, despite the requirement that they implement the Common Core?

Lastly, what becomes of students who are part of a classroom space that "does" narrative theory when they go home and read for pleasure? Though statistics abound indicating that fewer and fewer young people do read for pleasure, many still do. What impact does a more formal framework, and specifically a narrative theory framework, have on students when there is no paper to be typed nor journal entry composed? I know that for many adult readers, especially those who have some training in a particular

approach, this part of the reading experience is hard to shut off, even if we're "just" reading a novel (or watching a movie or television show) for entertainment. Did the students in my study pick up a book during school break and interrogate the narrative perspective or think about the authorial audience of that text? I would like to think so.

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### **Children’s Literature**

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## **Appendix A: Recruitment Script**

Recruitment Script: First day of class, August 22, 2012

Hello, class.

I need to read the following verbatim from a piece of paper, ok? This might be weird, but I have to do it this exact way. My name is Ms. Brewster, and I am delighted to be your teacher for this class, a college survey of children's literature. I have taught high school in the past, and am excited to be back in the classroom, especially because this time I get to teach books I am really into.

I am also a doctoral candidate at The Ohio State University and am working on my dissertation. This means that I need to do research and write up the results in order to graduate with my Ph.D. I am hoping to use our experiences together in this class toward this goal.

Therefore, in addition to taking this class for regular credit, you also have the opportunity to participate in my study. Participation will not involve anything outside of what you will be expected to do as part of class; there will not be extra work, extra meetings, or

extra time required of you in order to be in the study. You will not receive extra credit or any other rewards for participating in the study, and there is no penalty for choosing to not participate. Basically, you *can* be in the study if you're in this class, but you don't *have* to be in the study to be in the class. Does that make sense? The study is going to be about the ways teachers and students think, talk, and write about literature. We'll be reading the books I've picked out for the class, and I'll be teaching you what I think is a new way to analyze and interpret them. If you're not in the study, you'll still learn this information and do all of the same readings and assignments.

The only differences between just enrolling in the course or participating in the study is that I will use any and all of your written work (journals, essays, projects, etc.) as part of my data collection. Additionally, you will be videotaped, and relevant comments or questions you raise during class discussion could be used as data, too. The reason I am using video tape instead of audio tape is so that I don't have to try to remember who said which comment later; your image will never be used. When I write up the data for my dissertation, you will be assigned a pseudonym or false name; your real name will never be used. No one but me will ever see these tapes, and they will not be used for anything other than writing up my research. The tapes and all written documents will not be kept forever; after five years everything gathered as data for the study will be destroyed.

As with all research, your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. In keeping with school policy, however, you must remain in the class itself to receive school credit. All written work

will be graded anonymously so that you don't have to worry that your grades will be impacted by being or not being in the study.

I am going to email your parents and guardians this same information. If you are under 18 as of today, you need their permission to participate, and also need to assent to participate yourself. I am handing out both forms in class today for you to take home and talk over with your parent or guardian. In my email to your parents, I will also tell them to be on the lookout for you to talk about this with them. If you are 18 as of today, you do not need parental permission, but instead need to fill out what's called a consent form, indicating that you are making the informed decision to participate as an adult. If you are willing to participate in the study, please have both forms signed and returned by our next class meeting, on Monday, August 27<sup>th</sup>.

If you have any questions, I can answer them now, or, if they come up throughout the study, you or your parents can call, email, or speak to me, my advisor, or the Ohio State employees who deal with research design. This information is on the forms I will give you.

Thank you so much for thinking about being in my study, and I am really looking forward to our class this fall.

## **Appendix B: Assent to Participate**

### **The Ohio State University Assent to Participate in Research**

**Study Title: Narrative**

**Theory in the High**

**School Classroom: An**

**Illustrated Approach**

**Researcher: Barbara**

**Kiefer, Hilary**

**Brewster**

- **You are being asked to be in a research study. Studies are done to find better ways to treat people or to understand things better.**
- **This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to participate.**
- **You should ask any questions you have before making up your mind. You can think about it and discuss it with your family or friends before you decide.**

- **It is okay to say “No” if you don’t want to be in the study. If you say “Yes” you can change your mind and quit being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.**
- **If you decide you want to be in the study, an adult (usually a parent) will also need to give permission for you to be in the study.**

### **1. What is this study about?**

This study is about learning a way of thinking about literature that you likely haven’t been taught before. You’ll be learning a specialized vocabulary to talk about literature with.

### **2. What will I need to do if I am in this study?**

You’ll just participate in class as you would with any other class—read, write, do your homework, contribute in class, etc. There is nothing special to do in that regard.

However, our classes will be videotaped every day, and your homework/journals/projects/essays will included as data after the class is over. I will specifically collect your reader’s journal, essays about each book we read (6), your final picturebook project, including the personal reflection, and your narrative rewrite creative assignment, including the personal reflection. I will not be collecting any personal information to use as data.

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

The class runs during the first trimester of school, from August 22<sup>nd</sup> through November 7<sup>th</sup> (and then finals week). There will not be anything beyond class needed for the study.

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

You may stop being in the study at any time. You can be in class without being in the study.

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

*Being in the study will just be like being in class, so nothing bad can happen.*

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

Learning about children's literature is really interesting, and it's always good to have different ways to think about books. This class/study will hopefully give you an insight into literature that maybe you've never considered before.

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

*I will provide reading journals at the start of the year, but I will collect them as data from those who choose to be in the study. You will not be given anything like money, prizes, extra credit, etc.*

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

For questions about the study you may contact **Hilary Brewster 215-870-4844.**

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

## Signing the assent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form. I have had a chance to ask questions before making up my mind. I want to be in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature or printed name of subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date and time

AM/PM

## **Investigator/Research Staff**

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person obtaining assent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person obtaining assent

AM/PM



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Date and time

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

## **Appendix C: Parental Permission Form**

### **The Ohio State University Parental Permission For Child's Participation in Research**

**Study Title: Narrative**

**Theory in the High**

**School Classroom: An**

**Illustrated Approach**

**Researcher: Barbara**

**Kiefer, Hilary Brewster**

**Sponsor: None.**

**This is a parental permission form for research participation.** It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you permit your child to participate.

**Your child's participation is voluntary.**

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to permit

your child to participate. If you permit your child to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to introduce students to a different way of thinking and talking about fiction through direct instruction with children's literature.

**Procedures/Tasks:**

This study will function like any other English class—we'll read literature, respond to it in writing, talk together as a class, write essays, do projects, etc. If your child agrees to participate, I'll use his/her written work as data. I will specifically collect the reader's journal, essays about each book we read (6), the final picturebook project, including the personal reflection, and the narrative rewrite creative assignment, including the personal reflection. I will not be collecting any personal information to use as data. I will also be videotaping class every day so that I can refer back to important discussions, and include participants' comments as data, too.

**Duration:** The study will run during the fall trimester, August 22<sup>nd</sup> – November 7<sup>th</sup> and then finals week.

Your child may leave the study at any time. If you or your child decides to stop participation in the study, there will be no penalty and neither you nor your child will lose

any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

***Risks and Benefits:***

**The risks are nonexistent because this is just like taking any other class. The benefits include learning new information and a new way of thinking.**

Confidentiality:

Efforts will be made to keep your child's study-related information confidential.

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

Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;

The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;

The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

All names will be kept confidential; pseudonyms will be used in the write-ups of any data, including written work and transcribed video.

**Incentives:**

None. There are no rewards, financial or otherwise, for participating. There is no extra credit for students who participate in the study as part of class.

**Participant Rights:**

You or your child may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you or your child is a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

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

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to

applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

#### Contacts and Questions:

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact:

Hilary Brewster, 215-870-4844

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

If your child is injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Hilary Brewster, 215-870-4844

## Signing the parental permission form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to provide permission for my child to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to permit my child to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

---

Printed name of subject

---

Printed name of person authorized to provide permission for subject

---

Signature of person authorized to provide permission for subject

---

Relationship to the subject

---

Date and time

AM/PM

**Investigator/Research Staff**

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

---

Printed name of person obtaining consent

---

Signature of person obtaining consent

AM/PM

---

Date and time



## **Appendix D: Consent to Participate**

### **The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research**

**Study Title: Narrative**

**Theory in the High**

**School Classroom: An**

**Illustrated Approach**

**Researcher: Barbara**

**Kiefer, Hilary Brewster**

**Sponsor: None**

**This is a consent form for research participation.** It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

**Your participation is voluntary.**

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to introduce students to a different way of thinking and talking about fiction through direct instruction with children's literature.

**Procedures/Tasks:** This study will function like any other English class—we'll read literature, respond to it in writing, talk together as a class, write essays, do projects, etc. If you choose to participate, I'll use your written work as data. I will specifically collect your reader's journal, essays about each book we read (6), your final picturebook project, including the personal reflection, and your narrative rewrite creative assignment, including the personal reflection. I will not be collecting any personal information to use as data. I will also be videotaping class every day so that I can refer back to important discussions, and include participants' comments as data, too.

**Duration:** The study will run during the fall trimester, August 22<sup>nd</sup> – November 7<sup>th</sup>

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

Risks and Benefits: **The risks are nonexistent because this is just like taking any other class. The benefits include learning new information and a new way of thinking.**

Confidentiality:

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

Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;

The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;

The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

**Incentives:** None. There are no rewards, financial or otherwise, for participating. There is no extra credit for students who participate in the study as part of class

#### Participant Rights:

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

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

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

#### Contacts and Questions:

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact  
Hilary Brewster, 215-870-4844

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

If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Hilary Brewster, 215-870-4844

## Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

---

Printed name of subject

---

Signature of subject

AM/PM

---

Date and time

---

Printed name of person authorized to consent for subject  
(when applicable)

---

Signature of person authorized to consent for subject  
(when applicable)

AM/PM

---

Relationship to the subject

---

Date and time

**Investigator/Research Staff**

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

---

Printed name of person obtaining consent

---

Signature of person obtaining consent

AM/PM

---

Date and time

### Appendix E: Fairy Tale Chart, Assignment, and Rubric

TITLE/ ORIGIN					
OPENING LINE					
TIME					
HOME					
PARADISE					
BAD PLACE					
MAIN CHARACTER					



HER AGE					
PARENT(S)					
ELDER					
TRUE LOVE/ HERO					
VILLAIN / TRICKSTER					
HELPER / FRIEND-H					
HELPER / FRIEND-A					
#s 3, 6, 7, 12					
MAGIC OR					

SORCERY					
REWARD(S)					
CLOSING LINE					
AGENCY?					
TRIUMPH OF POOR?					

Children’s Literature Writing assignment #1: Due Friday, September 14<sup>th</sup>

In his segment on masterplot, H. Porter Abbott attempts to explain the concept “masterplot” by very, very obliquely referencing Cinderella as an example. He doesn’t *really* give any textual evidence for this, other than an offhand remark about whether the masterplot of the famous, cross-cultural fairy tale requires a missing shoe or attending a ball. Having read four Cinderella picturebooks—at least some of which were multicultural—and compared/contrasted them with regard to the most common fairy tale

motifs, make an argument about which elements are required for the Cinderella masterplot (kernels). Use evidence from your readings to back up your claims.

#### Things to consider

You should define your basic terms in your introduction (masterplot, kernel v. satellite), and also make your thesis statement (about which elements *you* think are required for a true Cinderella story).

You should refer to the various editions accurately—get the culture correct, the characters' names correct, the author/illustrator and/or translator correct, etc.

This is a persuasive essay, so you're looking for things that are *common* among your four readings and discussing those as evidence to back up your claim. While you may need to *briefly* describe/summarize the different versions, this paper asks for *analysis*, not *description or summary*.

You should organize your essay logically, write with a sense of voice and style, and proofread for correct grammar, syntax, spelling, etc.

There is no set length, though shorter than two full pages probably doesn't answer the question well enough for the kind of grade you'd like to earn.

	Argument	Evidence	Organization	Style/Voice	Conventions
Sophisticated-reflects superb quality (A)	Carefully considered, specific and interesting	Very specific references for <i>each</i> piece of <i>each</i> version	entire piece follows a logical flow that is finely nuanced	word choice, sentence structure are distinct and engaging throughout	Error free with regards to spelling, punctuation, and grammar
Proficient-reflects good quality (B)	Accurate and thoughtful, less specific and interesting	Mostly specific references, some may be less so	Entire piece has a logical flow	Word choice and sentence structure are mostly engaging	The very occasional, non disruptive error
Emergent-reflects adequate quality (C)	Accurate, but perhaps obvious	Mostly vague references with a couple	Logical flow for most of the piece	Word choice and sentence structure attempt to	Errors more than occasional, but not disruptive

		specific ones		engage	
Needs improvement-reflects struggling quality (D)	Questionable accuracy, obvious	Vague references throughout; some may be inaccurate	Confusing flow throughout piece	Word choice or sentence structure is engaging	Errors are frequent and disruptive
Does not meet expectations (E)	Incorrect	Inaccurate	Illogical or disruptive flow	Boring and repetitive	Piece is disruptive and unreadable

## **Appendix F: Narrative Rewrite Assignment and Rubric**

Children's Literature Writing assignment #2: First draft due Friday, September 28<sup>th</sup>

We've talked a lot about how narration and focalization affects a reader's interpretation of the events. Obviously, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* is narrated by and focalized through Kenny. Naturally, this impacts the presentation of events.

Your challenge is to select one of the scenes listed below and alter the narration. You can choose to give Byron's, Joetta's, or Rufus's narration, or choose an external narrator (like the Zel/Konrad chapters) and focalize it differently. We'll talk in class about the limitations of doing this—some things can't change (dialogue, events) and some things can. Voice should remain consistent with the character that Curtis has created, though of course you'll have to get inside that character's head in a way that Curtis did not.

In addition to the narrative rewrite, you will also write what's called an exegesis—or an analytical reflection—on your product. This will count as part of the overall grade. This piece analyzes what impact your narrative choices have on the interpretation of the scene. What is gained and lost from altering the perspective?

Scenes: The frozen tongue (12-18); meet Rufus (32-37); snow clothes (50-54); Byron's burning (); welfare list (75-80); cookies and birds (80-85); Byron's hair w/Mom (86-92); Byron's hair with dad (93-99); arrival at Grandma's (155-161); Joetta's not dead (186-190); Pet hospital into the bathroom (196-201ish).

	Accuracy	Consistency	Voice/Style	Conventions
Sophisticated- reflects superb quality (A)	Reflects precise accuracy to original throughout	Narrative choice remains consistent and finely nuanced throughout the entire piece	Entire piece rings true to the voice of the original work	Error free with regards to spelling, punctuation, and grammar
Proficient- reflects good quality (B)	Almost entirely precise throughout	Narrative choice remains consistent and mostly nuanced	Most of the piece rings true	The very occasional, non disruptive error
Emergent-	Somewhat	Consistent	Piece mostly	Errors more

reflects adequate quality (C)	precise, parts may diverge	but less nuanced, or partially inconsistent	rings true, perhaps some deviations	than occasional, but not disruptive
Needs improvement- reflects struggling quality (D)	Mostly divergent	Mostly inconsistent	Original voice is generally un noticeable	Errors are frequent and disruptive
Does not meet expectations (E)	Incorrect	Inaccurate	Completely unrecognizable	Piece is disruptive and unreadable



## Appendix G: Final Assessment and Rubric

### Children's Literature Final Assessment

You must answer all of the following questions in approximately half a page length each, double spaced if you are typing *or* hand-writing. (This is equivalent to a long paragraph.)

The rubrics are on a separate sheet and need to be turned in to Ms. Brewster upon the completion of your exam. Please let Ms. Brewster know when you are ready to do questions 3 and 4, since they involve reading a picturebook which she will provide you.

Make sure you put your name on your exam document, number the questions (you do *not* need to rewrite the prompt), and email it to Ms. Brewster at [hilarybrewster@gmail.com](mailto:hilarybrewster@gmail.com) with your name in the subject line.

In narratives that feature a framing and embedded story, the reader typically starts in the framing tale, goes “down” a level to the embedded, and then comes back “up” through the framing before the story is over. We tend to spend at least *some* time in the narrative present of the framing story. ...*Smekday* is not really designed like this. What effect does spending the overwhelming majority of time in Gratuity's embedded essays have on this novel? What *gets left out* from not spending more time in Gratuity's present? What *good does it do* for the story?

If we assume that 1) literature is a manner of communication between author and audience, as seen in this diagram that we've talked about:

Actual author → implied author → (narrator) → (narratee) → implied reader → actual reader

and that 2) the implied author chooses to write his/her story in a particular way to elicit particular thoughts/emotions/or ideas from the reader, and that 3) which thoughts/emotions/ideas s/he wants to elicit probably says something about the implied author, what might we say about the implied Adam Rex? Focus particularly on what we learn about the implied Rex once Gratuity and J.Lo reach Arizona. What does the implied Rex believe in when it comes to humanity and human interaction, friendship, leadership, and government? What evidence from the text supports this?

In what ways is *Interrupting Chicken* a narrative with both framing and embedded levels? What does this structure do for the story? What techniques does Stein use in the illustration of the story to convey to the reader that we're entering another level? What effect do these techniques have on the story?

Discuss the masterplot and authorial audience of *Interrupting Chicken*. In what ways does Stein sort of rebel against a particular masterplot in his book? What does the reader need to know in order to enter this audience and why?

## Terms

Implied author and reader

Flesh and blood author and reader

Narrator and narratee

Masterplot

Narrative audience

Story v. discourse

Kernels v. satellites

Crux

Gap

Over and under reading

Frame v. embedded narrative

Focalization (versus narration)

Paratext

## Rubrics

All essays are worth the same amount and are graded on the criteria below on a check/check plus kind of system to assess overall quality

### Essay 1

\_\_\_ understands and properly discusses framing and embedded narratives

\_\_\_ accurately discusses Rex's use of these terms in *Smekday*—uses details from the text, etc.

\_\_\_ writes articulately about the effect of this narrative structure on the reader

\_\_\_ essay is not too personal, but also demonstrates knowledge of the text garnered through having read well

\_\_\_ grammar and conventions are accurate and well done considering a) the time crunch, and b) the fact that word documents have spellcheck, etc.

\_\_\_ writing style is also done well considering the blind and timed nature of the assignment

### Essay 2

\_\_\_ understands and properly discusses the concept of implied author

\_\_\_ accurately discusses how this particular section of *Smekday* gives the reader insight into the implied Rex—uses details from the text, etc.

\_\_\_ essay is focused to respond to the particular topics asked in the question

\_\_\_ essay is personal, but also demonstrates knowledge of the text garnered through having read well

\_\_\_ grammar and conventions are accurate and well done considering a) the time crunch, and b) the fact that word documents have spellcheck, etc.

\_\_\_ writing style is also done well considering the blind and timed nature of the assignment

### Essay 3

\_\_\_ understands and properly discusses framing and embedded narratives

\_\_\_ accurately discusses Stein's use of each for the story

\_\_\_ writes articulately about the effect of this narrative structure on the story

\_\_\_ writes articulately about the illustration techniques and their effect on the story

\_\_\_ grammar and conventions are accurate and well done considering a) the time crunch, and b) the fact that word documents have spellcheck, etc.

\_\_\_ writing style is also done well considering the blind and timed nature of the assignment

### Essay 4

\_\_\_ understands and properly discusses concepts of masterplot and implied reader/authorial audience

\_\_\_ accurately discusses how Stein disrupts masterplot and what the audience needs to know and why

\_\_\_ grammar and conventions are accurate and well done considering a) the time crunch, and b) the fact that word documents have spellcheck, etc.

\_\_writing style is also done well considering the blind and timed nature of the assignment