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# READING

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# Message From the Editors

BY CHRISTINE A. DRAPER, PH.D. AND LINA B. SOARES, PH.D.

Nelson Mandela stated, "Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world." As teachers we need to remember that our arsenals should be filled with valuable tools, methods, strategies, and understandings to ensure that our students are learning and succeeding. This edition of the *Georgia Journal of Reading* brings you a collection of articles that address literacy issues and topics relevant to Georgia Educators today and that you can add to your teaching arsenal.

Michelle Reidel's case study "Resistance and Retreat: Preparing Preservice Secondary Social Studies Teachers to Teach Reading" analyzes how adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices were integrated and utilized in a secondary Social Studies methods course. She notes the importance of utilizing adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices as a starting point for reading instruction.

Erinn Bentley, Kim Cason, and Kimberly M. Evans' article "Summer Acceleration in Literacy: A Collaborative Reading Camp Experience" helps to address the summer slide that students often experience. This article describes one school's initiative to provide middle school students with additional summer reading support and provide reading pedagogical training to pre-service content teachers. This article describes the camp's structure and its impact on students, in-service teachers, and pre-service teachers.

Our own Lina Soares brings us a fresh look at literature circles in her piece "Literary Circles: Something Old, Something New". She addresses the overall concept of literature circles, including descriptions and explanations of how the approach is most commonly used in classrooms today. This is followed by the research evidence that defines the critical benefits students receive from literature circle participation. Finally, readers will appreciate the information presented about literature circles for the 21st century.

Finally, Christine Draper's regular column "Books You and Your Students Need to Check Out" highlights several award winning titles from the 2015 Notable Children's Books in the English Language Arts award. Notable books for readers from K-8 grade are summarized and further information about the national book award is presented. See if there are some new titles you wish to bring into your classrooms or homes.

We invite you to sit back and add new ideas and insights to your teaching arsenal this spring season while reading through this edition of the Georgia Journal of Reading. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the many reviewers who helped to make this edition possible. We appreciate your hard work to provide thoughtful comments and recommendations to the articles that are included in every journal.

# President's Page

BY ANITA BEASLEY

Greetings GRA members:

As we enter the spring season, it seems that our lives become super busy coming out of the dormant winter months. It is full-on testing season for elementary and middle schools with the Milestones and End of Course tests for high schools. We have SLOs and TKES to complete. We frantically try to get all of our standards in to finish out the year while trying to reach all of our students and bring them as far as we can in the time that we have had them. We have end of the year reports and surveys to finish, parent conferences to hold, report cards to fill out and grade placements to make. Let's not forget that all the while we have lesson plans to still write, PTO meetings to attend, professional learning to complete. All this and we are supposed to have a life outside of school, right? With the demands that we all have facing us, it is often easy to say, "I don't have time to be a member of a professional organization right now". But should we?

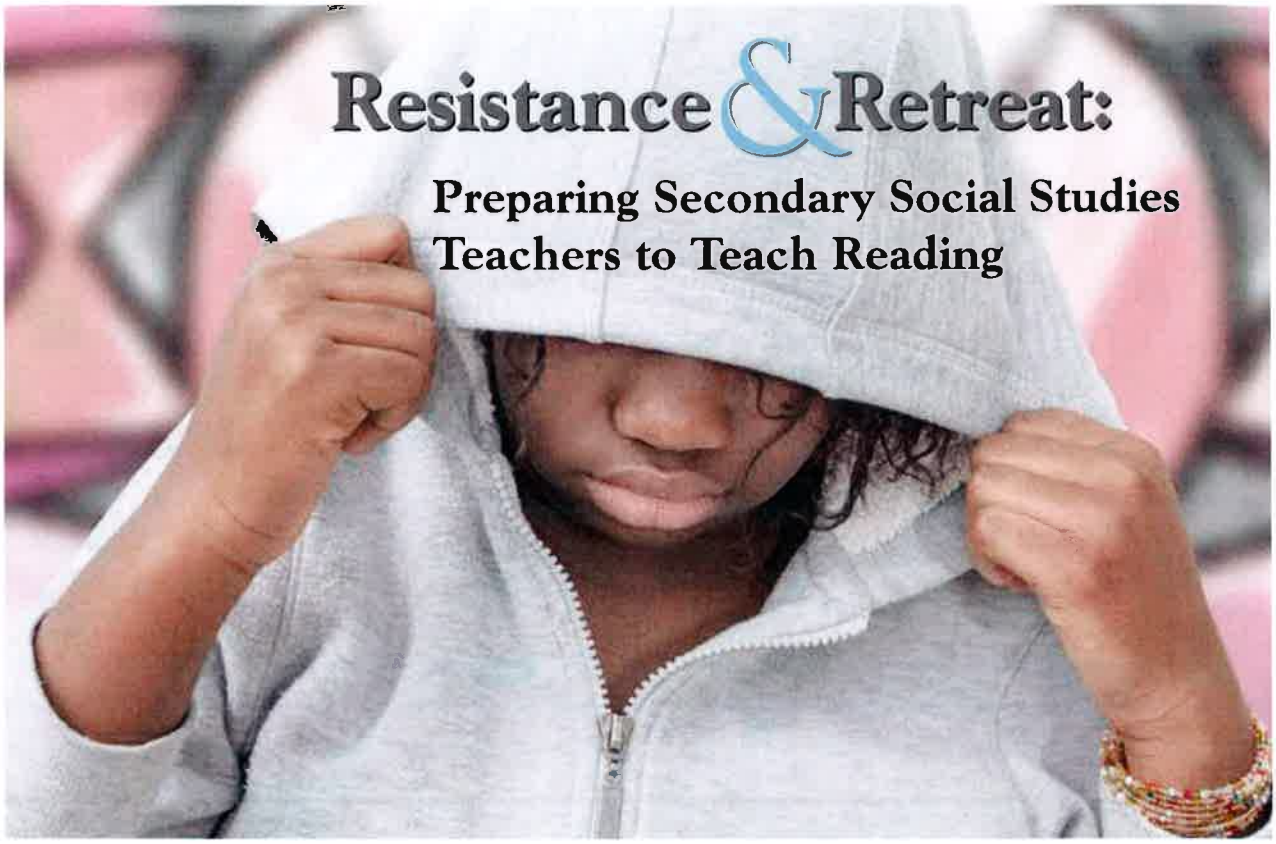
I was reminded of a story about a starving baker after seeing a picture of an empty coffee cup with the saying "You can't pour from an empty cup" make its round on Facebook recently. The baker was trying to have a successful business and in doing so, stayed late in the night preparing pastries and breads to cook the next day. He arrived early to begin baking before his customers awoke in order to be ready when the shop doors opened. Throughout the day, he served his customers with a smile and if he did not have what they wanted, he would make it and have it for them as soon as possible. Business was good and he appeared to be successful. But over time his customers noticed that he was losing weight and looking tired all the time. His menu never changed and so his customers grew tired of the same – old, same – old and moved on. What was happening was that the baker was forgetting to take time for himself; he was starving himself to death because he took no time to eat. He never left the bakery to get a change of scenery to feel refreshed. He never took the time to learn new recipes because he was always too busy. This is often an analogy for teachers today with the demands that we have on our professional and personal lives.

However, being a member of a professional organization is a way in which we can be in touch with colleagues that can give us new ideas, help us solve problems and just listen to our frustrations and our success stories with empathy. The articles that you will find in GRA's journals and newsletters can renew a spark in oneself or answer a problem that we might be trying to solve. Attending conferences can be like a breath of fresh air surrounded with people that "can fill your empty cup". Even going to local reading council meetings to hear what is going on locally and meet fellow teachers from surrounding schools can be enlightening. So I encourage you to read the articles in this edition, find a local council to join and plan to attend our next conference. It is important to refill your own cup so you can pour into others!

Sincerely,

*Anita Beasley*

*President, Georgia Reading Association*



# Resistance & Retreat:

## Preparing Secondary Social Studies Teachers to Teach Reading

BY MICHELLE REIDEL


### Abstract

This case study analyzes how adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices were integrated and utilized in a secondary Social Studies methods course. The specific focus of this study is to analyze preservice teachers' responses to this approach, their efforts to integrate reading instruction into their planning and classroom practices and why it is important for secondary Social Studies educators to engage with and honor adolescents' personal literacies.


### Introduction

A strong equitable democracy rests upon the ability of citizens to critically evaluate what they read, see and hear and to use this information to make informed decisions. For Social Studies educators, historically charged with preparing students to meaningfully participate in our democracy, providing students with multiple opportunities to learn and practice these critical literacy skills is essential. However few secondary Social Studies educators integrate reading instruction into their practice (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Levstik, 2008; Ness, 2007). The causes of this disconnect are varied and complex. Institutional constraints such as the culture and pressures created by high-stakes testing, along with the traditional "grammar of schooling" (Tyack & Tobin, 1994) can have a powerful marginalizing effect. The deep knowledge of discipline specific reading skills, practices and dispositions essential to helping students engage with advanced complex academic texts can be difficult to develop (Nokes, 2010, 2011). Finally, secondary Social Studies educators' personal beliefs about and experiences with reading and reading instruction can also encourage them to avoid reading with their students (Alger, 2009; Hall, 2005).

Repositioning the role of reading in secondary Social Studies classrooms depends upon a multi-faceted approach; one that not only addresses the structural and cognitive challenges outlined above but adolescents' emotional investments and attitudes toward reading. Many adolescents resist and refuse to engage with school texts. There is an "unfortunate shifting of reading attitudes – from enthusiasm to indifference to hostility" (Gallager, 2009, p.3) as students transition from elementary to middle and high school. Literacy educators argue that adolescents' increasingly negative attitudes toward reading are in part a result of the ways in which their personal literacies are ignored, disregarded and devalued in school (Aleverman, 2003; Moje, 2008; Skerret & Bomer, 2011). To effectively address this resistance, meaningfully integrate reading instruction into Social Studies classrooms and foster the critical literacy skills all citizens need to make informed decisions,

secondary Social Studies educators must learn about and value adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices. They must also be prepared to utilize these practices to help students learn Social Studies content and increase their proficiency with more traditional academic texts.

This case study analyzes how adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices were integrated and utilized in a secondary Social Studies methods course. The specific focus of this study is to analyze preservice teachers' responses to this approach, their efforts to integrate reading instruction into their planning and classroom practices and why it is important for secondary Social Studies educators to engage with and honor adolescents' personal literacies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Secondary Content Area Literacy

Educators have wrestled with the role of reading in secondary schools for over a century (Jacobs, 2008; Moje, 2008). Underlying this tension is the conflation of learning to read with reading to learn (AEE, 2010). The process of learning to read – to decode text and achieve fluency – has traditionally been the purview of elementary educators and as a result most secondary teachers assume students know how to read when they arrive in the ninth grade. While many adolescents (almost 70%) do posses basic reading skills less than 30% can comprehend, analyze or use what they 'decode' (NCES, 2009; 2011). Without these advanced skills and the disposition to read actively, most secondary students do not have the literacy skills they need to use reading to learn content (AEE, 2010, 3).

Despite this need, few secondary content area teachers consider themselves reading teachers and Social Studies educators are not immune to this tendency (Hall, 2005). Defining themselves as content experts, many secondary educators view reading instruction as someone else's responsibility, (Hall,2005), believe that literacy instruction does not 'mingle' with content instruction (Lesley, et al, 166) and contend that "students do not need reading instruction to be successful with the text(s) used in their classrooms" (Hall, 2005, p.406 ). Research also reveals that many secondary educators do not possess "positive attitudes" toward academic reading themselves (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Lesley, Watson & Elliot, 2007; Nathanson, Pruslow & Levitt, 2008). Lesley, Watson and Elliot (2007) found that the preservice secondary teachers in their study regularly engaged in "pseudo-reading" or skimming and defined themselves as "bored, unmotivated readers" (156-159). This lack of enthusiasm for reading on the part of many secondary content area teachers only exacerbates their reluctance to integrate reading instruction into their practice (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Lesley, Watson & Elliot, 2007; Nathanson, Pruslow & Levitt, 2008).

Many states require secondary preservice teachers to complete a course in content area literacy as part of their teacher preparation program as a way to address this gap and help students develop advanced literacy skills. Traditionally, content area literacy instruction focused on generic reading strategies (Hall, 2005; Moje, 2008). More specifically content area literacy courses centered on the cognitive practices of 'good readers' and how secondary educators could integrate these practices into their instruction (Hall, 2005; Moje, 2008). Learning to ask questions, make predictions, test hypotheses, summarize, self-monitor and employ fix-it practices were highlighted as some of the strategies content area teachers could teach their students in order to support the development of their reading skills (Hall,2005; Moore, Alvermann & Hinchan, 2000). In content area literacy courses, preservice secondary content area teachers are often provided with opportunities to utilize these strategies as readers and to apply them in school settings (L'allier & Elish-Piper 2007; Nathanson et al., 2008). This type of application is noted by content area literacy specialists as "one of the most effective ways to help teacher candidates understand and value reading instruction" (L'allier & Elish-Piper 2007, p. 338-339, emphasis added). This is essential as research has consistently demonstrated that students' attitudes and reading behaviors can be strongly influenced by the reading practices, habits and dispositions teachers model in their classrooms (Applegate & Applegate, 2004).

Though content area literacy courses can foster a more positive attitude and make clear the value of teaching reading this new attitude rarely translates into classroom practice (Hall, 2005; Moje, 2008; Nathanson et al.,2008). Almost 50 years of research reveals that the impact of content area literacy courses has been minimal at best (Hall, 2005; Moje, 2008; Nathanson et al., 2008). Lesley, Watson and Elliot (2007), for example, found that the preservice teachers in their study continued to view reading as "superfluous to their content area" (159). In her study of first year teachers, Alger (2009) discovered that the reading strategies teachers utilized with their students were those that required "minimal engagement with text" (67). Teachers employed what Alger (2009) calls "workarounds" or the integration of strategies that would minimize the amount of independent reading required of students and as a result opportunities for students to become more effective readers were limited (66; 68).

### Discipline-Specific Literacy

Research suggests that one reason content area educators do not utilize the literacy strategies and practices learned in their content area literacy courses is because these strategies and practices are not aligned with values and structures of the disciplines they teach (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). In response many content area literacy experts contend that content area literacy instruction must be refocused within a disciplinary frame (Moje, 2008, 99). Each discipline has its own way of "knowing, doing, believing and communicating" (Moje, 2008, 99) and disciplinary-based reading depends upon the acquisition of content specific, sophisticated skills and interpretive practices (Shanahan and Shanahan, 2008). Rather than beginning with the generic practices of good readers, content area literacy instruction should be grounded within the specific reading and writing practices of mathematics or science or history.

In the Social Studies, most of the work on discipline specific literacy focuses on history and what it means to 'read like a historian' (Damico, Baildon, Exter & Guo, 2010; Joel, Hebard, Haubner & Moran, 2010; Monte-Sano, 2011; Wineburg, 2001). Wineburg's seminal text, Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts (2001), forms the foundation of much of this research and provides a powerful portrait of historians' reading practices. The Stanford History Education Group has built upon this research to design curriculum materials including the Reading Like A Historian program to help educators teach these discipline-specific reading practices to their students. These curriculum materials are relatively new and therefore research on how teachers are utilizing these materials with their students is only beginning. Reisman's (2010) research on the ways in which high school history teachers can design document-based lessons that manage the "real world realities of school" (p. 234) inluding pressures to 'cover' content for high-stake exams and struggling adolescent readers is one such effort.

Vital to the increase and effective use of discipline specific reading practices and curriculum materials such as the Reading Like A Historian program in secondary classrooms is a re-thinking secondary Social Studies teacher education. As Gewertz (2012) notes the analytical approach to doing history and reading like a historian embodied in discipline-specific literacy practices and new curriculum materials requires a "type of preparation that isn't common in programs of teacher education" (p. 10). To prepare secondary Social Studies educators to teach their students how to read like a historian, preservice teachers need opportunities to develop and practice these skills themselves. Neumann (2010) argues that in "many cases teachers' inability to shape students' understanding of primary sources reflects their own epistemologies" (p. 489) and the ways in which some teachers remain "philosophically naïve in their approach to documents" (p. 489). Given these tensions, Neumann suggests that teacher education coursework should focus on the "purposive nature of texts" (p. 490) in order to better prepare preservice teachers to teach advanced reading skills to their students.

In "Preparing Novice History Teachers to Meet Students' Literacy Needs" Nokes (2010) analyzes his own efforts to integrate content area literacy into his secondary Social Studies methods course. More specifically, the course was structured to both provide opportunities for preservice teachers to learn and practice how to read like a historian and to consider how they can teach their students the same skills and dispositions. Nokes notes that one-third of the course including instructional time and reading materials addressed issues of literacy (2010). Particular focus was given to the process of selecting texts to read with high school students as well as research-based instructional strategies and Nokes also modeled effective literacy instruction. However as the practicum associated with the course was primarily observational, preservice teachers did not have an opportunity to apply the strategies learned in high school classrooms (p. 515). Reviewing data from six consecutive semesters Nokes found that a majority of the preservice teachers enrolled in his secondary Social Studies methods course deepened their knowledge of discipline-specific literacy and were able to apply this knowledge in the development of lesson plans and learning activities. Each preservice teacher wrote what Nokes calls a 'practicum literacy paper' that revealed preservice teachers developing awareness of literacy instruction and different types of texts (p. 509-512). However "only a handful of candidates recognized students' unique literacy identities" (p. 512), a majority were surprised by adolescents' disinterest in reading school texts and none acknowledged students' out-of-school literacies practices (p. 512).

### Adolescent Literacy

Few adolescents benefit from reading instruction if they are not motivated to read (Kamil, 2003). Throughout the literature on adolescent literacy the importance of motivation and engagement in reading comprehension is a common refrain (Pitcher, et al, 2010; NCTE, 2006; NCTE, 2007; Moje, et al, 2008). Studies on motivation, adolescents and reading suggest that providing students with access to a wide variety of text types, "desirable reading material," and choice is key (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; NCTE, 2006; NCTE, 2007; Pitcher, et al, 2010; Moje, et al,

2008). Other contextual factors that foster motivation include the integration of electronic and visual media, the incorporation of multiple perspectives, a clearly articulated purpose for any reading activity and a classroom environment in which students are provided with multiple opportunities to discuss what they read (NCTE, 2006; NCTE 2007).

Although most adolescents are not proficient with traditional, print-based academic texts, outside of school many engage with a wide range of multimodal texts (Franzek, 2006; Mills, 2010; Skerrett & Bomer, 2011). Websites, video games, online fanfiction, social networking sites, graphic novels, magazines, digital movie composing and music lyrics are among the nontraditional texts adolescents interact with daily (Franzek, 2006; Mills, 2010; Skerrett & Bomer, 2011). In a myriad of ways adolescents live "purposeful, practical, richly literate lives" outside of school (Skerrett & Bomer, 2011, p.1251) and the multifaceted nature of literacy should not be ignored if we hope to engage adolescents with more traditional academic texts. Adolescents' existing literacy practices can act as a resource to both increase students' motivation and build bridges to more traditional academic texts (Franzek, 2006; Mills, 2010; Skerrett & Bomer, 2011). Vasuderan (2007) found that by attending to the multimodal literacy practices of adolescents she was not only able to create new opportunities for learning content but to build a stronger relationship with her student. Similarly, Skerrett & Bomer (2011) found that teachers' efforts to situate instruction within the context of students' literacy lives outside of school enabled students to develop powerful connections between these out-of-school literacies and the official curriculum. These scholars argue that "approaching students with school demands without first acknowledging their competence in so many (out-of-school) literacy activities" is questionable at best (Skerrett & Bomer, 2011, p.1276). Yet adolescents' everyday literacy practices are rarely valued and utilized in most classrooms (NCTE, 2007). Alverman (2003) suggests that "rather than remediating students we need to re/mediate the curriculum by including media and other texts that are important to adolescents" (p.22). Building reading instruction upon adolescents' everyday literacy practices is an asset-oriented approach that positions students as capable rather than deficit (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009). Ignoring or rejecting students' existing literacy practices as valuable only increases their resistance to academic or school-based reading (NCTE, 2007).

Over the last five years I, like Nokes (2010), have worked to integrate literacy and more specifically reading instruction into a secondary Social Studies methods course. Attention is given to the practices of 'good readers,' the discipline specific skills and dispositions of reading like a historian and research-based instructional practices. Preservice teachers and I participate in a number of reading activities and workshops as well as lesson design. My students deepen their understanding of literacy and the practice of reading like a historian as well as their knowledge of instructional strategies; yet, the implementation of these lessons and reading activities is anything but smooth. There are many factors that inform if, how and when any lesson will 'work' but the common denominator in this case has been the ways in which I failed to attend the complex world of adolescent literacy. Without explicitly attending to, engaging with and honoring the personal literacy practices adolescents bring with them to history classrooms, I helped preservice teachers to design and implement reading instruction that ignored students' personal literacy practices. Drawing upon these experiences and the above research I re-designed the Social Studies methods course with a specific focus on adolescents' out-of-school literacies as the starting point for integrating reading instruction into secondary Social Studies instruction. In this case study, I analyze preservice teachers' responses to this approach, their efforts to integrate reading instruction into their planning and classroom practices and why it is important for secondary Social Studies educators to engage with and honor adolescents' personal literacies.

**Methodology**

Secondary preservice teachers in Georgia are not required to complete a course in content area literacy as part of their teacher certification programs. The secondary education program at my institution also does not require candidates to complete a course in content area literacy and therefore reading instruction must be integrated into content area methods courses if it is be addressed during secondary teacher education programs in the state. Over the last five years I have worked to integrate literacy instruction into the curriculum of the middle grades and secondary Social Studies methods courses I teach. My focus has been to draw upon the reading practices of historians – sourcing, contextualization and corroboration – to model critical literacy and to support preservice teachers as they work to integrate this type of reading instruction into their practice. The results have been questionable at best. Anecdotal evidence suggests that preservice teachers were reluctant to embrace reading instruction in part due to their frustration with high school students' negative attitudes toward reading. With this insight in mind, I revised the curriculum of the course to specifically address adolescent literacy, adolescents' everyday literacy practices and their resistance to academic reading. The intent was to increase preservice Social

Studies teachers' awareness of the reading practices, skills and dispositions many high school students bring to the classroom and to help them understand how to use these resources in the design and implementation of reading instruction.

To provide a detailed contextualized analysis of my efforts, a case study research design was utilized (Yin, 1984). The case for this study is the Secondary Social Studies Methods course required for all Secondary Social Studies preservice teachers enrolled in the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program at my home institution. Preservice Social Studies teachers in the MAT program have completed an undergraduate degree in history or another social science as well as an educational foundations course, a special education course, and an introductory instructional methods course prior to enrolling in the secondary Social Studies methods course. The methods course meets one night a week for approximately three hours over the course of a sixteen week semester. The spring 2011 section of the course was the specific site for this study. There were ten students enrolled in the methods course in the spring of 2011. All ten students were White. There were six men and four women enrolled in the course and of these ten students five agreed to participate in the study. Among the participants were three men and two women with an approximate age range of 23 to 27. All five had a bachelor's degree in history.

## Data Collection

A variety of qualitative research methods were utilized to document the activities of the secondary Social Studies methods course and a graduate student in the College of Education assisted with data collection. Interviews were conducted by the graduate student assistant at the beginning and at the end of the semester with each participant. The focus of the first interview was on participants' perceptions about the role of reading in Social Studies teaching and learning as well as their perceptions of the challenges they might face as they teach reading within the context of high school Social Studies. The second interview focused on participants' classroom-based experiences, their efforts to integrate reading into instruction, students' reactions to reading assignments and the lessons they learned from these experiences. A second data source is a series of video recordings of the secondary Social Studies methods course. Each week the class met, the graduate student assistant attended the class session and videotaped all learning activities and discussions. Written work created as part of in-class learning activities and the instructional units developed by the preservice teachers participating in the study constituted a third data source. Finally, my own reflective journal entries, completed after each class session, are the final data source.

## Data Analysis

Data sources were organized chronologically in order to construct a narrative account of the semester. Data sources for each week were grouped together. I then read and/or viewed all data sources beginning with data collected during week one of the semester and proceeding week by week. Digital audio and video files, student-created documents and my journal entries were used to triangulate data sources and

develop categories for coding. A constant comparative method was utilized for data analysis (Creswell, 1998). This initial review of data was utilized to identify data segments that corresponded with my effort to integrate adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices into the course, preservice teachers' responses to reading instruction as it was enacted in the secondary Social Studies methods course, and their experiences teaching reading to adolescents. Open coding was employed to analyze these data segments. These initial codes were then grouped into broader categories that became the foundation for major themes emerging from the data. To share findings from this case study, I provide a narrative account of the semester integrating a description of class activities, preservice teachers' participation in and reaction to these activities with my analysis.

## FINDINGS

### Week One – "Reading is important!"

After the first meeting of the secondary Social Studies methods course, students who consented to participate in the study were interviewed about their perceptions of the role of reading in teaching and learning Social Studies. Of the five preservice teachers who participated in the study all five concluded that reading is essential to teaching and learning Social Studies. Renee noted that "reading is most of Social Studies" and concluded her remarks by stating that "you can't have Social Studies without reading." Others discussed the ways in which reading can provide students with opportunities to "get the viewpoints of different people," and Andrew argued that students cannot "really understand the subject without reading."

While each participant was convinced of the power of reading as a way to learn none noted that in order for this learning to occur explicit reading instruction may be needed. Asked to consider their responsibility to teach their students how to read, participants responded with hesitation and in some cases confusion. "Well I suppose it is everyone's responsibility to teach reading," Peter suggested but could not articulate what this might look like in a high school Social Studies classroom. Ensuring that students understand what they read was the focus for most participants as well as helping students to evaluate and analyze different types of sources. Once again participants did not and/or could not articulate how they might help their students understand, evaluate and analyze different types of texts. Each participant spoke enthusiastically about the type of texts they hoped to utilize in their classrooms but in doing so did not also consider that they will have to teach their students how to read these texts. Renee was excited about using primary sources and even described a possible lesson utilizing Martin Luther King Jr's Letter from a Birmingham Jail. Only one participant mentioned textbooks as a possible tool and none mentioned websites, digital and print newspapers, graphic novels, magazines, music lyrics or any other texts that most adolescents interact with on a daily basis.

When asked to consider what challenges they might face when integrating reading into instruction, all participants' responses echoed Peter's who noted "I haven't thought about this." Andrew, Peter and Renee each suggested that the different reading levels of students could be "problematic." Susan and Daniel mentioned that some students dislike reading. While Susan did not elaborate, Daniel noted "I would just force them to."

This initial interview revealed that each participant believes reading plays an important role in teaching and learning Social Studies but had thought little about what this might look like in practice. More specifically, though they envisioned using primary sources to teach Social Studies content, they could not articulate how they would help their students read these sources. Caught off-guard when asked to consider their own role in teaching reading, these preservice secondary Social Studies teachers had also not considered the possible obstacles or challenges to utilizing reading as a way for students to learn content. Though discussion about the use of primary sources is promising, participants did not consider any other nontraditional texts as a possible resource.

### Weeks Two & Three – "I didn't realize it was such a problem."

During the second and third meetings of the secondary Social Studies methods course, I engaged participants in an investigation and discussion about both adolescent literacy and current classroom practices. This investigation began with an assessment of what preservice teachers enrolled in the course knew about adolescent literacy and their personal observations. Using the free online tool, Poll Everywhere, participants texted their responses to the following questions: (1) what percentage of high school students can comprehend and evaluate what they read? and (2) what do you think is the number one reason why adolescents resist and/or refuse to read?

Responses to the first question ranged from sixty to seventy percent and in response to the second question a majority of participants indicated that they believed students' refusal to read was intimately tied to their abilities and not necessarily linked to the type of text or its interest level. Once all responses were registered and visible, I revealed the differences

between preservice teachers' beliefs and assumptions about adolescent literacy and what research has demonstrated. As results from the 2009 NAEP reading assessment were posted, participants were shocked and visibly upset. "I can't believe it is this bad," Renee noted, shaking her head. Peter was not convinced that the results of the NAEP reading assessment were accurate. "How can this be true when so many people go on to college? It's not like we're a bunch of illiterates." Along with shock and disbelief, two participants expressed concern about the implications of adolescents' poor reading skills for their practice as Social Studies educators. Somewhat stunned by the fact that only 30% of high school graduates can comprehend and evaluate what they read, Susan wondered, "How can we teach Social Studies if they can't read? We'll have to lecture all the time."

Participants listed "difficulty comprehending texts" as the number one reason why adolescents resist or refuse to read. When prompted to explain this response Andrew noted that "the students who refuse to read are the ones who can't" disregarding other reasons why students might resist reading. This comment generated a discussion about aliteracy and why someone who can read might simply refuse to do so. When I shared with preservice teachers that the number one reason adolescents refuse to read is because they view the texts that they are asked to read in school as "irrelevant" and "dull," reaction was almost instantaneous. Daniel spoke first, proclaiming, "This is ridulous! They can't expect to be entertained all the time. We all had to read textbooks –so can they." Others, such as Susan, while partially agreeing with Daniel, also noted that she did not complete assigned readings she considered "boring."

As a follow-up to this discussion, participants were asked to spend the next week at their practicum site gathering data about the type of reading materials and reading activities utilized in the classroom as well as an approximation of time spent on reading during each class session. Findings from these informal observations were shared during the next class session. Preservice teachers reported their findings in small group settings, analyzed the data for patterns across multiple classrooms and then reported to the whole class. This data collection revealed that preservice teachers had limited opportunities to observe reading/reading instruction in local secondary Social Studies classrooms. More specifically, a majority of the preservice teachers noted that few if any independent reading assignments were required and there was little time allotted in class for students to read the textbook or other materials. According to preservice teachers' observational data, teachers who did integrate reading into their instruction relied primarily on the course textbook and the occasional primary source. The instruction associated with these reading assignments included completion of comprehension questions and graphic organizers.

At this point, I shared with preservice teachers informal survey data I collected in the fall of 2010. An invitation to participate in an online survey was issued to all high school Social Studies teachers in the school districts where secondary Social Studies preservice teachers are placed for their practicum and student teaching experiences. The survey focused specifically on the role of reading in teachers' instruction. Results from this survey mirrored the patterns identified by preservice teachers based on their observations. While the preservice teachers only recorded their observations, the survey also included items about teachers' perceptions of the challenges and/or obstacles to integrating reading into their instruction. Student resistance was cited by a majority of respondents as the primary obstacle to integrating reading into their instruction. After sharing this data with preservice teachers enrolled in the secondary Social Studies methods course, I asked participants to consider how they could work through this type of resistance with their students. A lengthy silence ensued. Peter was the first to speak. "I suppose we could let them know what the consequences would be for not doing the reading like a zero in the grade book or something like that." As other participants offered similar suggestions, it became clear that most preservice teachers perceived students' resistance to reading solely as a threat to a teacher's authority. The idea that students' resistance to reading could be understood as a form of agency or a sign that reading as it was introduced, practiced and evaluated in Social Studies classrooms did not build upon and honor adolescents' personal literacies was never considered.

At this point, I asked students to consider the disconnect between the ways in which our class defined reading as essential to learning and teaching social studies, the marginal role of reading in many secondary Social Studies classrooms and the ways in which student resistance was a major deterrent. "The reality," Peter explained, "is most high school students can't read well enough and the teacher has to cover all the standards in time for the End-of-Course exam. There is simply no time and students won't do it." Peter's comments solicited some nods of agreement while Daniel asked "Why don't you just teach us how to teach Social Studies without reading? I mean ways that we can teach the content and avoid asking the students to read." I agreed with Daniel that in many ways this approach was the "most logical" solution but I also challenged his thinking by asking "So do we just give up - even though we think reading plays an

important role in teaching and learning Social Studies content? Are there other issues we should consider – beyond teaching content? What role does reading play in the lives of citizens?" Preservice teachers discussed these questions in small groups and then shared their ideas with the whole class. Andrew shared that his group decided it "wasn't fair to students to avoid reading because it was hard." In general participants were uncomfortable with idea that the 'wisest' solution to this dilemma would be to purposefully avoid reading with their students. Discussion of the ways in which illiteracy can create "nasty citizens" (to use Andrew's words) was intense with preservice teachers noting not only low voter turn-out but the recent economic downturn as problematic consequences. As our discussion shifted to considering alternatives, Renee recalled "last week we learned that the primary reason students refuse to read is because they think what they are given to read is boring. Maybe that has something to do with it." I concluded the class noting that over the next six weeks we would explore how to address student resistance by utilizing a wider variety of materials and adolescents' everyday literacy practices.

Learning activities and discussions held during week two and three revealed that preservice teachers enrolled in the secondary Social Studies methods were generally unaware of our nation's "adolescent literacy crisis." When confronted with the reality that many of their future students will struggle to comprehend academic texts and/or simply refuse to read, they were dismayed. Their initial reaction was to consider how they could teach Social Studies and avoid asking their students to read. Thus even the idea of student resistance and/or difficulty pushed these preservice teachers into what Linda McNeill has elsewhere called a "defensive teaching" stance (1988). McNeill argues that some teachers adopt teaching methods and stances that enable them to maintain discipline and control in the classroom rather than confront "unruly" or resistant students and create challenging curriculum (1988). In choosing lessons that fragment, omit, mystify or simplify – such as those that 'workaround' reading – teachers also maintain control over knowledge rather than provide opportunities for students to question and challenge. (McNeill, 1988). The next six weeks of the course were intended to address the likelihood that many of the secondary preservice Social Studies teachers enrolled in the course would encounter student resistance to reading and provide resources to help them work with their students to move through this resistance rather than around it.

**Weeks 4-10 "Does this count as reading?"**

During the next six weeks as preservice teachers worked collaboratively to develop units of instruction, I modeled how to utilize adolescents' everyday literacy practices as a way to begin to address students' resistance to reading and integrate reading instruction into their practice while teaching important Social Studies content and literacy skills. Preservice teachers were required to include one lesson integrating reading instruction into their unit. Each week I utilized a different type of text including blogs, video, graphic novels, music lyrics and young adult literature. As we utilized each of these texts we practiced the discipline-specific literacy skills of sourcing, corroboration and contextualization. Model lessons included a specific purpose for each reading activity, multiple opportunities for preservice teachers to discuss what they were reading and to make connections between the texts, historical and contemporary issues.

Video recordings of weekly class sessions suggest that while most participants were engaged during the lessons, the content of their debriefing discussions revealed skepticism about the benefits of using some of these alternative texts. For example, during a model lesson on the Bill of Rights Jonathon Hennessey's and Aaron McConnell's graphic adaptation of the U.S. Constitution was the focus text and was utilized to introduce participants to graphic novels and their potential uses in Social Studies classrooms. The lesson began with an anticipation guide asking preservice teachers to consider the constraints on students' first amendment rights in public schools. For each statement on the anticipation guide, preservice teachers were asked to indicate whether or not the speech act described would be protected by the 1st Amendment. Statements were based on Supreme Court cases dealing with students' first amendment rights such as Tinker vs. Des Moines and Hazelhurst. As preservice teachers shared their responses, it became clear that there was little if any agreement about which speech acts would or would not be protected and this discussion provided context and an explicit purpose for our reading of the Bill of Rights.

Each participant was provided with a color copy of the depiction and explanation of the 1st Amendment found in Hennessey's and McConnell's *The U.S. Constitution: A Graphic Adaptation* (2008). Hennessey's and McConnell's depiction of the Bill of Rights begins with their explanation of why the Bill of Rights was included in the Constitution. I utilized this two page explanation to model for preservice teachers how to read a graphic novel and consider how composition, viewing angles, color, text and images are used to position the reader. In the *US Constitution: A Graphic Adaptation* the image of a huge, three-headed creature is utilized to depict the ways in which if left unchecked the power of the federal government can be dangerous. In the next panel, the monster is still fierce but calm and

chained by the Bill of Rights. Our discussion and analysis of these panels and those that followed was lively and provided opportunity for preservice teachers to consider different aspects of the text. Following this whole class read aloud and discussion, preservice teachers worked in pairs to read about the 1st Amendment, learn about the ways in which freedom of speech is not absolute and how these restrictions might apply in the case of public school students' 1st Amendment rights.

As I visited with each group during this reading activity, there was every indication that Hennessey's and McConnell's text was well received. "This is image of the 'zone of freedom' will really help students understand limitations on freedom of speech," Andrew remarked and in another group Peter and Renee were debating the appropriateness of some of the images utilized by Hennessey and McConnell. Though all the preservice teachers in the class actively participated and seemed to enjoy reading this graphic adaptation of the U.S. Constitution, our debriefing discussion following the lesson revealed an entirely different response.

After groups shared their findings from reading and discussion of the text and completed a short writing activity to conclude the lesson, I conducted a book pass that provided preservice teachers with opportunity to see the wide variety of graphic novels available to teach Social Studies content. Next, I asked participants to discuss if, how, when and why they might utilize this text or another graphic novel in their instruction. Groups were also asked to consider the benefits of this type of text as well as some of the drawbacks. During the discussion it became clear that while most preservice teachers recognized the power of images to teach difficult concepts they were also hesitant to embrace this text or graphic novels as "legitimate" texts for secondary Social Studies classrooms. Andrew and Susan noted that the images provided could "really help students understand ideas that can be confusing." Renee agreed and also noted that "students are already reading a lot of graphic novels so they might be more willing to read if we use these." Though there was general agreement with the idea that graphic novels can support student learning, Peter argued that the "pictures can create more confusion. They confused me."

Peter's comment shifted the focus of the discussion away from the potential uses and benefits of graphic novels toward critique. "Even though they might be helpful, I won't use them because they are not real texts," Susan noted. When asked why, she explained, "They read this type of stuff all the time outside of school. In school they need to read the real thing – like the actual Constitution." Renee countered "I might use them occasionally but I think Susan is right. They need to read the real thing." Other participants immediately agreed. Andrew, Peter and Renee quickly noted that they wanted to use "primary sources all the time" and therefore they wouldn't need to track down all these different types of texts. When I asked them to consider how they can use graphic novels and other types of text as a bridge to what they called "real reading," there was an uncomfortable silence. Daniel broke the silence by explaining, "Really Dr. X……..we need to teach them what the need to know for the CRCT and the End of Course Exam. And the textbooks are aligned with the exams. They need to read those." "The other thing," Andrew added, "is that no one is doing this at my school." At this point I asked participants to recall why most students refuse to read and how using different types of texts might address this resistance. Responses to this question were vague at best. Though two preservice teachers (Susan and Peter) were intrigued enough to borrow two of my graphic novels, each participant was hesitant about utilizing these types of texts in their classrooms.

As the above example illustrates, the model lessons I implemented produced mixed results. Preservice teachers actively engaged with a wide range of texts during this six week period. As a result of this exposure some wanted to read more such as Peter and Susan and most were willing to note the potential benefits. There was also a clearly articulated perception that alternative texts such as graphic novels and music lyrics do not "count as real reading." Though participants recognized digital newspapers as "legitimate," they were reluctant to consider multimodal texts such as graphic novels as valuable. In this instance, it was not necessarily preservice teachers' desire to avoid student resistance but a particular conceptualization of literacy and knowledge that informed their response. Denoting multimodal texts such as graphic novels as not "real" texts the preservice teachers in this study articulated a very specific belief about reading; one built upon a "hierarchy of importance" that defined out-of-school literacy practices as irrelevant (Lesley, 2011). Despite their own engagement with alternative texts such as graphic novels and these texts' potential to support student learning, the preservice teachers in this study were reluctant to view these texts as "appropriate" or as bridge to more traditional academic texts.

### Weeks 11-16 "I'm forcing them to do something they don't want to do."

During the last six weeks of the course, preservice teachers finalized their instructional units and then implemented these units in secondary Social Studies classrooms at their practicum site. Each participant was interviewed about their teaching experiences with

particular attention given to their efforts to integrate reading instruction into their unit. Preservice teachers were required to integrate reading into at least one lesson in their unit.

Reading lessons created by participants provided a clear purpose for reading activities as well as multiple opportunities for students to discuss what they read. For example, Peter utilized a read aloud format that integrated paired discussions and quick writes as a way to help students process the ideas and concepts presented in the selected text. Renee asked students to work in groups of three, to assume three different perspectives and to discuss reactions to a common text from the assigned perspective. While each participant integrated reading-based discussion into their lesson design, their choices of reading materials included more traditional academic texts. Two of the five participants asked students to read short newspaper articles. Daniel required students to read the assigned textbook, while Andrew utilized Supreme Court cases in his unit on the Bill of Rights. Renee was the only participant to utilize a nontraditional text such as those explored in the methods course. In her unit on the Cold War, Renee asked students to read selected sections from Larry Gonick's *Comic History of the World* (1991).

The instructional units designed by participants suggest that they were beginning to understand the role of discussion in reading to learn and the importance of providing a specific and clear purpose for each reading activity. Each preservice teacher also designed a series of questions to help students evaluate authors' purpose and intended audience; one of the fundamental practices to learning to read like a historian. In this regard, their units reflected the reading instruction modeled in the Social Studies methods course. The disconnect between reading instruction modeled in the Social Studies methods course and reading instruction designed by preservice teachers was in the choice of texts. Despite my emphasis on the ways in which nontraditional texts can motivate and engage adolescent learners, a majority of participants rejected this concept and utilized more traditional academic texts.

When reflecting on their teaching experiences during the second interview, participants discussed both students' reactions to their efforts to integrate reading instruction into their unit and the lessons they learned from these experiences. Daniel insisted that students "hated the reading lesson," and noted that reading should be "secondary to the curriculum" in Social Studies classrooms. Susan and Peter expressed frustration with their students' "negative" reaction to reading and Susan noted that in the future "I will definitely keep it (reading) to a minimum." All participants noted that their students "moaned and groaned" about reading and described reading assignments as "boring" and "too hard." For Andrew,

students' complaints and "foot-dragging" prompted him to drop one of the assigned readings. Only Renee had a semi-positive experience noting that her students were "intrigued by the graphic novel."

The role of reading in secondary Social Studies classrooms was revisited during this second interview and while all participants still noted its importance, they were more conflicted about their role in teaching reading and how they would integrate reading into their instruction. Andrew concurred that reading instruction is "definitely needed" but that "most of it should happen in Language Arts." As noted above, Daniel concluded that reading should be "second to the content.'" Susan argued Social Studies "should have some reading in it but it should be taught in English. We should ask students to read some but not very much. " None mentioned the relationship between literacy and an active, informed citizenry.

Each participant did speak openly about students' resistance to reading. "When I asked them to read the textbook it felt like the longest 10 minutes of my life," Daniel noted in his interview. "I don't want to feel like that again." Susan, Peter, Renee and Andrew also spoke about the discomfort, frustration and "pain" they felt when they asked students to read. "Their mood shifted so much when I said we were going to read a newspaper article," Peter explained during his interview. "They were just being stubborn. It was really frustrating after I had spent all that time creating the lesson and finding a reading. What a waste!" Susan's reaction to students' resistance was more inwardly focused. She spoke about her disappointment with the reading lesson and concluded her remarks by contending that "rejection hurts."

Despite efforts to prepare preservice teachers for adolescents' resistance to academic reading, participants still seemed "shocked" by their students' lack of motivation and disengagement. Facing students' negativity preservice teachers once again retreated. As noted earlier, participants in this study adopted a defensive teaching stance rather than address students' disengagement with reading and adjust their notions of what "counts" as reading.

**Discussion and Implications**

There are a myriad of reasons why reading and reading instruction are not a prominent feature of many secondary Social Studies classrooms. As noted earlier, the pressures of content coverage and high-stakes exams and the difficulties of teaching discipline-specific reading practices can in part explain why most secondary Social Studies educators do not read with their students. Adolescents' reluctance and resistance to engaging with traditional academic texts poses yet another challenge. In this case study, I attempted to attend to the challenge of adolescents' resistance by working to prepare preservice secondary Social Studies teachers to utilize adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices as a starting point for reading instruction.

Like many preservice secondary teachers, the participants in this study had not seriously consider the role of reading/literacy instruction in teaching content and more specifically Social Studies content prior to this semester. Their knowledge of adolescents' proficiency with academic texts and adolescents' personal literacy practices was marginal at best. Over the course of the semester as we learned about the complex world of adolescent literacy preservice teachers engaged with a wide variety of texts and discussed possibilities for utilizing these texts to teach Social Studies content and discipline-specific reading practices. Their knowledge of reading instruction deepened as they participated in, planned and implemented reading lessons. However, an overall reluctance to recognize 'non-academic' texts such as graphic novels, music lyrics and video games as 'legitimate' and valuable forms of reading meant that the preservice teachers in this study did not create reading activities utilizing adolescents' personal literacies.

Reflecting on their attempts to utilize reading as a way to learn Social Studies content, participants were frustrated and in some cases even angry at their students limited engagement with the texts they had selected. Rather than considering how their curriculum choices played a role in students' overwhelmingly negative reactions to reading, preservice teachers were quick to retreat suggesting that perhaps reading and reading instruction belong solely in Language Arts classrooms. The role of critical reading skills in a democracy and Social Studies educators' role in helping young people develop these skills forgotten.

I have attempted to integrate reading and literacy instruction into the secondary Social Studies methods course I teach for over five years. Results of my previous efforts were mixed. Preservice teachers developed new understandings about reading instruction and discipline-specific reading but when attempting to integrate reading into their practice they met with such strong resistance from students they quickly retreated. My earlier attempts ignored the ways in which adolescents' personal literacy practices are an important tool and resource upon which secondary Social Studies teachers can build connections to more traditional academic texts. To address this gap and provide preservice Social Studies teachers with tools and knowledge to address and move through adolescents' resistance to academic reading I situated

the out-school-literacy practices of adolescents as fundamental to reading instruction. However, because I did not require preservice teachers to utilize adolescents' everyday literacy practices in the lessons they created, a majority chose to utilize more traditional academic texts such as textbooks and newspaper articles rather than graphic novels, song lyrics or video games. The results of their efforts to use reading to learn important Social Studies content mirrored those of previous semesters. Strong resistance to and negativity toward reading from their students meant that the preservice teachers in this study were quickly ready to abandon reading.

From these results it is difficult to ascertain if the focus on adolescents' personal literacy practices could have provided a way for preservice teachers to work through students' resistance to school texts as they were unwilling to utilize this approach. The questions preservice teachers raised about the 'legitimacy' of the non-traditional texts and reading practices modeled in the methods course provides a clue to understanding why they refused to apply what they learned in their methods course to their own instruction. Preservice teachers' beliefs about reading and reading instruction were not explicitly engaged and analyzed as part of the secondary Social Studies methods course.

Stewart (1990) argues that unless content area preservice teachers' "complex and deeply ingrained beliefs" (p.62) about literacy and their own literacy identities are made visible and carefully examined little will change. Literacy experts and educators have long argued that autobiographical writing about reading experiences is fundamental to the process of preparing secondary content area teachers to integrate reading instruction into their practice (Alvine, 2001; Bean, 1994; Clark & Medina, 2000; Lesley, 2011; Soliday, 1994). Without engaging in this type of reflection it is difficult to critically examine deep-rooted beliefs about literacy or to consider the ways in which reading is not a 'natural' act but a culturally and socially situated practice (Soliday, 1994).

In this study a critical examination of preservice secondary Social Studies teachers' beliefs about reading and reading instruction might have mitigated their rejection of 'non-academic' texts as legitimate teaching and learning tools. It may have also helped them to recognize the ways in which adolescents' personal literacies can act as the starting point for reading instruction in Social Studies classrooms. Findings from this study and my earlier efforts to integrate reading into the secondary Social Studies methods course suggest that it will be important to engage preservice secondary Social Studies teachers in an autobiographical exercise such as those recommended by scholars like Bean and Lesley.

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# Summer Acceleration In Literacy:

## A Collaborative Reading Camp Experience

By Erinn Bentley, Kim Cason, and Kimberly M. Evans

**Abstract**

As students progress through middle and secondary grades, they continually encounter increasingly rigorous texts. These students must possess the comprehension and critical thinking skills needed to respond to such texts. Additionally, students need teachers who possess the pedagogical knowledge to teach reading comprehension across content areas. For those students who are struggling readers, the summer months – in particular – can be detrimental if appropriate reading resources and instruction are not provided. This article describes one school's initiative to provide middle school students with additional summer reading support and provide reading pedagogical training to pre-service content teachers. By collaborating with a local teacher preparation program, in-service teachers in the focus middle school developed an interdisciplinary reading camp. This article describes the camp's structure and its impact on students, in-service teachers, and pre-service teachers.

Imagine this scenario: It is a sunny Tuesday morning in June. According to the calendar, it is summer vacation. In one middle school, however, the sound of students' chatter and laughter fills two brightly decorated classrooms. Students sit in small groups, fingering through the pages of a novel as they exchange ideas with their peers. Next, they will compose and illustrate poems, which will be posted next to other student-made work on the walls. Working alongside the students are several pre-service teachers who are trying out instructional strategies with these energetic adolescent learners. These students have been carefully selected for this unique, two-week summer learning experience. They are not gifted or advanced. In fact, these students possess some of the lowest Lexile levels in their grade. They are part of a pilot program developed for a Title 1 middle school called the Summer Acceleration in Literacy (SAIL) camp.

The idea for the SAIL camp came from the local needs and collaborative efforts of three educators. First, Kim Cason (a literacy coach in the focus middle school and SAIL camp administrator) noticed a large number of students were below grade level readers. With summer vacation quickly approaching, she wanted to ensure these struggling readers were provided with instructional support during those months. Next, Erinn Bentley (a teacher education instructor at the local university) was asked to develop a summer literacy methods course for pre-service teachers. In this course, she wanted pre-service teachers to not only learn pedagogical strategies, but also observe and assist teachers implementing these strategies. In order to create such a summer learning environment, a creative classroom teacher was needed. Enter Author Kim Evans (a 7th grade language arts teacher in the focus middle school) who facilitated learning tasks to engage these struggling readers and model best practices to the pre-service teachers. In this article, we - all three educators - will describe our process for developing the camp as well as how the camp impacted students, in-service teachers, and pre-service teachers.

### Setting SAIL: Our Story

Our story begins the winter before the SAIL camp was launched. In preparation for the first testing wave of the Common Core requirements in literacy, we knew that it would take an "all hands on deck" approach to adequately prepare our students for the rigor of

the new Georgia Milestones Assessment. Despite teachers' best efforts to encourage students in our focus middle school to read and use comprehension strategies, data revealed that students' Lexile levels continued to flat-line, and, in some cases, plummet. As we examined our reading Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) data, the downward trend was startlingly evident. Teachers had attempted to motivate students to read more complex texts to meet the rigor and demands of the upcoming Milestones Assessment. Yet, this approach was not successful as many of our students were not reading at or close to the recommended Lexile grade level bands. Figure 1 below shows the Common Core Grade Band Lexile levels. According to the figure, students in grades 6-8 should be reading at a Lexile level of 925-1185. As Figure 2 notes below, a significant percentage of our students did not meet this grade band requirement. Many of the students entering our school as sixth graders were well below grade level in basic reading skills, and our teachers noted that most students lacked intrinsic motivation.

| Grade Band | Current Lexile Band | "Stretch" Lexile Band* |
|---|---|---|
| K–1 | N/A | N/A |
| 2–3 | 450L–730L | 420L–820L |
| 4–5 | 640L–850L | 740L–1010L |
| 6–8 | 860L–1010L | 925L–1185L |
| 9-10 | 960L–1120L | 1050L–1335L |
| 11–CCR | 1070L–1220L | 1185L–1385L |

*Figure 1. Common Core State Standard Lexiles*

| Grade 6 2015 | Grade 7 2015 | Grade 8 2015 |
|---|---|---|
| 61% of students did not meet the recommended reading Lexile score range of 860-1010 | 38% of students did not meet the recommended reading Lexile score range of 860-1010 | 26% of students did not meet the recommended reading Lexile score range of 860-1010 |

Note: For our data in this article, the CRCT was used due to the fact that we were in preparation for taking the new Georgia Milestones Assessment.

*Figure 2. Percentage of students not reading on grade level at focus middle school*

As educators, we knew that our middle school students possessed unique learning challenges. For many of our sixth grade students, receiving instruction in multiple subjects in a single day was a new experience. Additionally, being confronted with multiple (and rigorous) content-specific texts was challenging for low-performing readers. Our students were not alone; the authors of *Adolescent Literacy* describe this learning challenge as,

> The move from elementary to secondary school entails many changes including fundamental ones in the nature of literacy requirements. For adolescents, school-based literacy shifts as students engage with disciplinary content and a wide variety of difficult texts and writing tasks (Gere, Aull, Dickinson, Orzulak, & Thomas, 2007, p. 3).

Another challenge our students faced entailed the type of reading tasks they were required to perform. With the emergence of the Common Core State Standards, an increased emphasis has been placed on students engaging in "close readings" of texts (Brown & Kappes, 2012; Snow & O'Connor, 2013). The International Literacy Association (ILA) recognizes the term "close reading" as, "...an approach to teaching comprehension that insists students extract meaning from text by examining carefully how language is used in the passage itself" (Snow & O'Connor, 2013, p. 2). When students engage in a close reading, they move beyond simply summarizing a text's main ideas. Instead, students make critical judgments or inferences regarding the text's meaning, and they support their textual analyses by referring to passages from the text itself rather than outside sources. The close reading approach proved to be challenging for our struggling readers. Such readers can often decode words and skim to summarize a text's main idea, but they may have difficulty engaging in the time-consuming process of reading (and re-reading) a rigorous text to construct meaning and justify that meaning (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Lattimer, 2014; Snow & O' Connor, 2013)

Reading data (CRCT) results from our focus school clearly indicated an urgent need for supporting our struggling readers. The task of finding a solution was daunting, yet critical if we were going to develop college and career ready students. Additionally, the end of the school year was quickly approaching. We were running out of time to provide our students with targeted instruction and support. One issue all English teachers this time of year face is a class filled with students who have shown slight improvements in reading, but are now going into summer vacation where they will most likely encounter the "summer slide". Not only do these low-performing students lose access to books and other educational services, well-balanced meals and ample parental supervision are also inaccessible to them. Although a middle- to high-income child will make reading gains during the summer months, a low-income child will lose two to three months of reading achievement because of the unavailability of resources (Cooper, Nye, Charlton,

Lindsay, & Greathouse,1996; Downey, von Hippel, & Broh, 2004). We wanted to provide our struggling readers with resources, opportunities, and motivation for learning during the summer. We began with a list of brainstorming questions in order to help us develop a plan:

- *How can we effectively engage our low-achieving students in a summer literacy program?*
- *How can we motivate them to continue to become stronger readers and writers?*
- *What skills do we need to truly focus on in order to boost literacy skills that will carry our students beyond the Georgia Milestones and into high school and college classrooms?*
- *How can we use our community resources to support us?*

With these questions as a framework, we could have structured our summer program in several ways. In fact, other educators and scholars have addressed summer reading loss using a variety of approaches. For example, two elementary schools found that providing low-income and low-achieving students with free texts to read voluntarily over the summer resulted in marginally increased test scores (Kim & White, 2008). As part of this initiative, researchers also studied the effects of providing students with free reading materials and scaffolded oral and reading comprehension instruction; researchers found that those students performed at higher levels than students who did not receive instruction (Kim & White, 2008). Other districts have tried to improve students' reading achievement by bringing books (and instruction) directly to students' homes through weekly visits by a teacher and bookmobile during the summer months (Melosh, 2013). Another district provided students with free books and "motivational tools" throughout the summer months, such as teacher phone calls, post cards, social events centered around reading, and prizes for reaching reading goals (Bigelman, 2013). Researchers have agreed that in addition to supplying students with reading materials, "...all children also need consistent access to rich and explicit demonstration of the thinking that proficient readers do before, during, and after reading. They need access to expert instruction, in other words" (Allington and McGill-Frazen, 2013, p. 14). Based on the work of previous educators and scholars, it appeared that for us to reach our low-income, low-achieving readers over the summer, we needed to provide them with both books and instructional support.

Our solution emerged as the development of the SAIL camp. A two-week voluntary camp held at the beginning of students' summer vacation, SAIL was designed to motivate our students to read independently and "jump start" their learning with targeted instruction. The overarching goals of the camp were as follows:

1. Create a supportive, intellectually stimulating and motivating small group environment that inspires students to want to learn and read.
2. Create an "alternative" experience in reading and writing where students can fall back in love with reading while successfully mastering the CCGSE literacy standards and developing strategies for success.
3. Partner with our local college in order to provide pre-service teachers with an opportunity to work closely with struggling readers and help them learn and develop literacy strategies for use in their future classrooms.
4. Create an environment that fosters inquiry-based learning and motivates students to take ownership of their learning beyond the camp experience.

We came to the conclusion that with SAIL being optional for students, the reading camp would not be like the typical classroom; we wanted as many qualifying students there, and we wanted them to continue coming back every day for the entire two weeks of camp. Therefore, we structured the camp around numerous engaging activities that tied in various informational supplement texts aligned with the extended text students would read.

**SAIL Camp: A Description**

The camp took place in our focus middle school. Of the roughly 450 students attending that school, all rising 7th and 8th grade students whose Lexile scores were below grade level were invited to attend the camp. In spring semester, letters were sent home to these students and their parents, notifying them of the opportunity to participate in the free camp. Thirty students committed to attending the camp, consisting of a two-week program from 8:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. on Monday through Thursday. Students were fed breakfast and lunch provided by Title I services. The literacy-based curriculum for the camp centered on Alan Gratz's novel, Prisoner B-3087 (2013), which recounts one boy's experiences surviving ten concentration camps during World War II. Since the majority of our struggling reader population were males and had Lexile levels between 500 – 800, we felt the novel was the perfect page-turner for engaging our readers into a "want to read" environment. Once again, we did not want this camp to become merely another summer school experience of endless packet-paced activities or computer-assisted independent instruction. We wanted our students to truly experience the novel while we brought it to life through hands-on activities and interactive discussions.

For example, the camp's opening activity engaged students in describing or drawing objects they might pack inside a "suitcase" they would take to an

unknown place. The purpose of this activity was to help students connect with the novel's main character prior to reading the text. That is, students were able to "feel" what it may be like to choose favorite objects under the pressure of a time limit and "feel" uncertainty about the unknown destination for their imagined "trip". Next, students were further encouraged to empathize with Holocaust victims by reading diaries composed by children in Nazi concentration camps by completing the "butterfly project" (see Appendix A). With the project, each student received a poem written by one of the children in the Terezin Concentration Camp and created a handmade, colorful butterfly in honor of the victim. These butterflies were posted outside of the room in remembrance of all Holocaust children. Another hands-on activity included the instructors leading students in a Bar Mitzvah ceremony, similar to the one experienced by the main character in the text.

As students learned more about the character's concentration camp experience, several other activities were implemented. With the availability of three instructors who specialized in English Language Arts, math, and social studies, we developed cross-disciplinary lessons. For instance, our math instructor led a graphing activity of the Star of David, which required the students to use their knowledge of the Jewish symbol and x-y coordinates to construct a star on graphing paper (see Appendix B). As we began reading about the meal rationing with Holocaust victims, the math instructor also led an activity where chicken broth, bread, and cheese were allocated to the students just as such rations were given to characters in the novel. During this activity, students used their weight and height to calculate how many calories they needed to survive while living in the concentration camps (see Appendix C). They then determined, based on their daily calorie needs, if the rations provided would sustain them.

In planning our lessons, we used elements found in "traditional" guided reading practices: introducing the text by predicting themes based on the cover, forming small groups to examine sections of the novel, listening to each other read while questioning and drawing inferences, and engaging students in conversation about the novel's rising and falling actions. A Prisoner B-3087 slide show was created with our visual learners in mind; it served as a guide, prompting questions for each chapter and activity, and focusing on vocabulary by allowing the students to come up and match the picture with the correct word. Soon, vocabulary words such as genocide, gallows, and resettlements became commonly used words in our discussions. The purpose of this approach was to assist students in developing strategies for when they read independently. We wanted to display for them appropriate ways to question and think critically about what they read before they began their independent summer reading.

Finally, since our middle school was a member of the Partner School Network with our local university, we felt it would be beneficial to collaborate with their teacher preparation program and include as many pre-service teachers as possible as assistants in this camp experience. During the summer semester, a literacy methods class was being offered to secondary education majors at the university. These pre-service teachers included majors in English, biology, chemistry, physics, earth science, and math education. In the literacy methods class, pre-service teachers learned strategies for teaching reading and writing. These pre-service teachers, then, were required to participate at least one day in the SAIL camp by assisting the camp instructors in leading small group or whole-class activities. The camp provided these pre-service teachers with valuable hands-on experiences working with struggling readers.

### Camp Results: Reaching Our Destination

The SAIL program's biggest successes resulted from the time we took to plan engaging, inquiry-based projects for our students. For the students involved, such lessons truly helped them connect to this text in ways we had not seen previously in classroom settings. For the teachers involved, the camp provided opportunities to collaborate and plan, to build an interdisciplinary unit, and to team-teach. Rarely do teachers get to experience these three key components of quality instruction in one setting. Finally, for the pre-service teachers, the camp provided an opportunity for them to apply pedagogical strategies learned in the methods course. In order to best capture the ways this camp positively impacted participants, we will describe three perspectives in this section. First, Author C will describe her perspective as a middle school ELA teacher; next, Author B will provide her perspective as the camp administrator. Finally, Author A will describe how the camp experience impacted pre-service teachers in her literacy class.

### Kim Evans: Middle School Instructor's Perspective

As an instructor at the SAIL camp, I feel that we exceeded our initial goals. Our room of low-performing students shined during this time together. What the students experienced in the camp differed greatly from the traditional classroom, but what I learned as a teacher is that this same experience can exist during the school year with careful planning. During the school year, the learning environment is different in that we only have 55 minutes of instruction time, which means that one lesson can expand over the course of three days. With the camp being available

during the summer time, students had three hours per day to learn new material. Camp lessons were not interrupted by the "bell schedule;" instead, all content-area instruction was integrated into a single classroom. Students verbally stated how much they appreciated this additional time and not having to stop in the middle of a task. It is difficult to hold a child's attention for several hours, but not impossible if lessons are planned carefully. With the camp, we did not focus on specific ELA or math content as discrete pieces of knowledge. Instead, we looked for ways to help students make connections across the content areas by activating their prior knowledge, using interactive activities to sustain their engagement, and perfecting their critical thinking skills. There were times when students did not seem to realize they were learning because they were so engaged in each lesson. These children were making connections with the subject of the Holocaust, whether it was through prior knowledge of the slavery period, or in remembrance of the movie "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas."

As a teacher, I experienced several "ah-ha" moments throughout our time spent at SAIL, but my favorite was when three of our male students discovered near the end of the novel study that the protagonist, Yanek, was not simply a fictional character. This character was based on the life experiences of the novel's author. In this moment, I could see *Prisoner B-3087* had an impact on these students, and they felt compassion for all that Yanek endured during the Holocaust period because he was a "real" person. It was also near the end of the novel study when the students expressed that they felt hatred towards the ruthless character, Amon Goeth. These examples demonstrated that students were able to make personal (and emotional) connections to the text. Their excitement to talk about the novel, coupled with the extended learning time by not following a bell schedule, made it clear that we met one of our goals for SAIL: To "[c]reate a supportive, intellectually stimulating and motivating small group environment that inspires students to want to learn and read."

### Kim Cason: Camp Administrator's Perspective

As the camp administrator, my "a-ha moment" emerged when the students successfully read Eve Bunting's "Terrible Things" (Bunting & Gammell, 1989) and were immediately able to discover that it was indeed an allegory of the Holocaust. Through text-to-text comparisons, and a Socratic Seminar environment, the students were able to truly comprehend the piece and draw connections to *Prisoner B- 3087* (see Appendix D). Using Double Bubble Thinking Maps as tools for comparison and contrast, not only did the students connect the two texts; they were also able to apply the situations to examples of dictatorship and genocide in our world today. They asked such questions as, *Why is this type of abuse still allowed to happen in the world today?* and *What can we do to make sure situations like the Holocaust never happen again?* This was true Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Level 3 learning at its best where students are encouraged to go beyond the text and engage in strategic thinking to hypothesize, draw conclusions, differentiate, compare and contrast and cite evidence in real world example (Webb, 2002). As educators, we may shy away from assigning tasks requiring such rigor and complex thinking with our low-level students because we think these tasks are too difficult and too demanding for them, but in reality, our struggling students appreciate the challenge and rise to it more often than not. Collaboration and complex thinking are their motivating factors for engagement. Our students thrived on the opportunity to make connections, and they were very creative in their responses to this challenging assignment. They enjoyed the opportunity to create solutions and analyze the *whys* and *what ifs* from the pages of history.

Students were excited to be able to read the novel without the fear of failure. In fact, there were no failures on any assignment. These low-achieving students "aced" every assignment that they were given; they came in every day excited to learn and motivated to "read the next pages" in the novel. They even begged to leave breakfast time 30 minutes earlier in order to get to class in order to start turning pages and READ. One of our goals for SAIL was to "[c]reate an 'alternative' experience in reading and writing where students can fall back in love with reading while successfully mastering the CCGSE literacy standards and developing strategies for success." Watching how students delighted in opportunities to work in groups and collaborate with their peers, and seeing the quality of work the students created, I believe we exceeded our expectations for this camp goal.

### Erinn Bentley: Literacy Methods Course Instructor's Perspective

As the instructor of the pre-service teachers' literacy methods class, I believe participating in the camp provided the pre-service teachers with a much-needed "dose of reality". That is, often when pre-service teachers learn educational theories and strategies, they need to see those theories and strategies enacted with real students in order to fully grasp their effectiveness. In fact, the ILA (2015) recommends that all secondary-level pre-service teachers need to do more than simply study literacy standards for their respective content areas; they also need opportunities to observe, develop, and implement literacy learning with students.

In the summer literacy methods course, secondary science, math, and English education majors learned various strategies for teaching reading comprehension, speaking and listening skills, vocabulary acquisition, and writing. Additionally, the pre-service teachers developed materials for integrating literacy instruction into their respective content areas. Lastly, the pre-service teachers read *Prisoner B-3087* and discussed the novel in the methods class using Literature Circles (Daniels, 2002) in preparation for attending SAIL camp. They were required to attend at least one day of camp where they could develop and teach an original lesson or assist in facilitating lessons pre-planned by the camp instructors. Three of the 17 pre-service teachers chose to develop original lessons; the remaining pre-service teachers served as facilitators.

In order to understand whether participating in the camp impacted the pre-service teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices, I asked them to write a brief reflection describing their camp experiences. I was surprised to see that the majority of the pre-service teachers focused on two topics: their misconceptions regarding struggling readers and their appreciation for building relationships with students. First, several of the pre-service teachers explained that the students in the SAIL camp did not fit their perceptions of struggling readers. For example, one wrote, "I was very surprised that a lot of the students were proficient readers…I was impressed by their academic abilities." Another remarked, "The students brought energy and excitement along with serious thoughts about the meaning of the poem. This was impressive and unexpected." A third explained, "I found it hard to believe that some were behind on their reading skills. They seemed so sharp and capable." These responses are significant because they demonstrate how pre-service teachers' perceptions of students' abilities may not align with students' actual abilities. By working closely with these struggling readers, the pre-service teachers discovered that many of the students were intelligent, thoughtful, and insightful. Though the students did not meet grade-level Lexile scores, they did possess critical thinking and reading comprehension skills. The pre-service teachers would soon be in classrooms filled with students possessing a wide range of learning needs. They will have to differentiate instruction to meet their students' varied needs, and they will need to treat students equitably. Working with struggling readers helped these pre-service teachers realize that all students have the capacity to learn, regardless of their test scores or abilities.

Next, nearly all of the pre-service teachers described specific moments in which they built relationships with students. They commented, "I learned a lot about the importance of building a relationship with a student who may have a negative idea about school" and "I realized that some of the students we will be teaching don't need an enforcer, they just need someone to listen and create a warm, welcoming environment for them." In particular, the pre-service teachers reflected on how the camp's structure provided allowed them to build rapport with students. For example, one wrote, "It seems like strict classrooms may make students nervous and afraid to ask questions, so they don't even try…these students succeed when they are in small groups because then they feel that they have the necessary attention and are not afraid of sharing their ideas." Similarly, another pre-service teacher compared the camp structure to a more typical class period held during the academic year. He wrote, "It is not feasible to give each student in a classroom individual time with a teacher, but it is possible when students are in small groups and there are several teachers in the room…Also, we spent all morning with the same group of students." In the camp, pre-service teachers were able build rapport with students, draw out students who may not typically participate in whole-class activities, and see first-hand the power of positive reinforcement. Such experiences may not be possible when pre-service teachers are placed in a classroom and are expected to work with a large number of students in a limited amount of time. Based on the responses from the pre-service teachers, I believe we successfully met our third goal for SAIL: To "[p]artner with our local college in order to provide pre-service teachers with an opportunity to work closely with struggling readers and help them learn and develop literacy strategies for use in their future classrooms."

**Continuing the Voyage**

Our final goal for the SAIL camp was to "[c]reate an environment that fosters inquiry-based learning and motivates students to take ownership of their learning beyond the camp experience." In other words, how could we help our students continue reading (and learning) after the camp ended? First, students were encouraged to read five non-fiction and five fiction books during the remainder of the summer months. Rewards were offered for students who completed the summer reading challenge, including a field trip to the Breman Holocaust Museum in Atlanta, Georgia. Sixty percent of the students completed the reading challenge and gained an average of 33.2 points in Lexile scores over the summer as a result.

To encourage sustained reading opportunities throughout the 2015-16 school year, the Summer SAIL students were enrolled in Increased Learning Time (ILT) classes for continued support in reading comprehension for the remainder of the school year. During ILT, these struggling students continued to

develop their reading and critical thinking skills as they were encouraged to read novels of interest to them as well as informational texts. Book clubs were formed and teachers planned lessons similar to that of the Summer SAIL camp, keeping the students engaged and increasing their interest in reading and motivation. Students were tested weekly during their ILT period through the STAR Reading program; scores were viewed and analyzed to see whether improvement was being made with vocabulary and comprehension. Most importantly, the students were given a Lexile tracker tool for keeping up with their own progress and charting their own course for reading success. Using the document in Figure 3 below, students were able to see their progress and have a visual of their reading level gains.

With this tool, students actively took ownership in their own rate of success and engaged in friendly competition among their peers with the number of books read per nine weeks. The ILT environments quickly became the place to read complex texts, engage in comprehension -based activities and strategies and collaborate with peers; these classes have become quite the hub for continued literacy-based activities. Success has been evident as our students have increased their Lexile scores through this continued commitment to reading and understanding complex texts. As Figure 4 below shows, our targeted SAIL students have shown considerable improvements in reading progress throughout the 2015-16 school year. At the mid-year point, our students have already grown an average of 151.6 points in their Lexile scores.

Based on students' Lexile growth and their participation

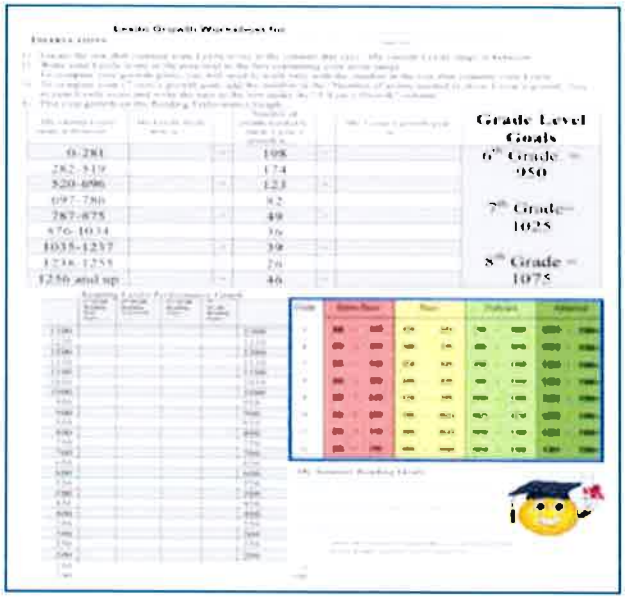


*Figure 3. Student Lexile tracking sheet*

| Summer SAIL Student | Beginning Lexile Level prior to SAIL camp | Jan, 2016 Lexile Level to date | Total Growth |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | 685 | 840 | +155 |
| B | 740 | 885 | +145 |
| C | 540 | 695 | +155 |
| D | 590 | 705 | +115 |
| E | 290 | 450 | +160 |
| F | 445 | 695 | +250 |
| G | 165 | 220 | +55 |
| H | 375 | 530 | +155 |
| I | 545 | 890 | +345 |
| J | 770 | 880 | +110 |
| K | 420 | 515 | +95 |
| L | 310 | 500 | +190 |
| M | 790 | 1015 | +225 |
| N | 710 | 795 | +85 |
| O | 805 | 890 | +85 |
| P | 835 | 870 | +35 |
| Q | 665 | 750 | +85 |
| R | 830 | 880 | +50 |
| S | 525 | 705 | +180 |
| T | 150 | 405 | +265 |
| U | 35 | 330 | +295 |
| V | 505 | 590 | +85 |
| W | 710 | 930 | +220 |
| X | 830 | 1060 | +230 |
| Y | 720 | 835 | +115 |
| Z | 695 | 775 | +80 |
| AA | 935 | 1100 | +165 |
| BB | 770 | 885 | +115 |
| CC | 540 | 590 | +50 |
| DD | 340 | 595 | +255 |
| **Average Growth** | | | **151.6 points average Lexile growth of SAIL students as of January 2016** |

Note: Scores in this table were calculated using the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR). STAR is a progress monitoring tool allowing schools to measure student comprehension and track Lexile scores. (Scores based on December- January reports).

*Figure 4. SAIL students' Lexile growth*

in ILT reading classes, it is evident that the SAIL camp (and follow-up activities) have positively impacted their academic learning and attitudes toward reading. Moving forward, we plan to launch a second SAIL camp to further support our students and allow pre-service teachers opportunities to work with struggling readers. As teachers, we know that our strongest readers are ones who read – and read a lot. As Allington and McGill-Franzen (2013) assert, "Children need an enormous supply of successful reading experiences, both in school and out, to become proficient, independent readers" (p. 14). We do not believe our SAIL voyage is completed as long as there are students who still need assistance and encouragement in becoming independent readers. Our goals are to continue providing students with ongoing access to engaging reading materials, access to supportive learning environments, and access to trained literacy teachers during the school year and summer months.

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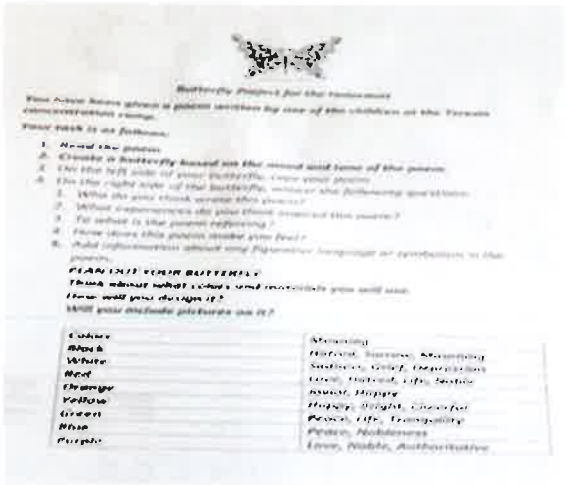
## Appendix A

Holocaust Butterfly Poetry Project

Students were given a poem from a child survivor of the Holocaust. They were asked to analyze the poem and then create a butterfly visual for the poem.



## Appendix B

Star of David Activity: Social Studies and Math Literacy

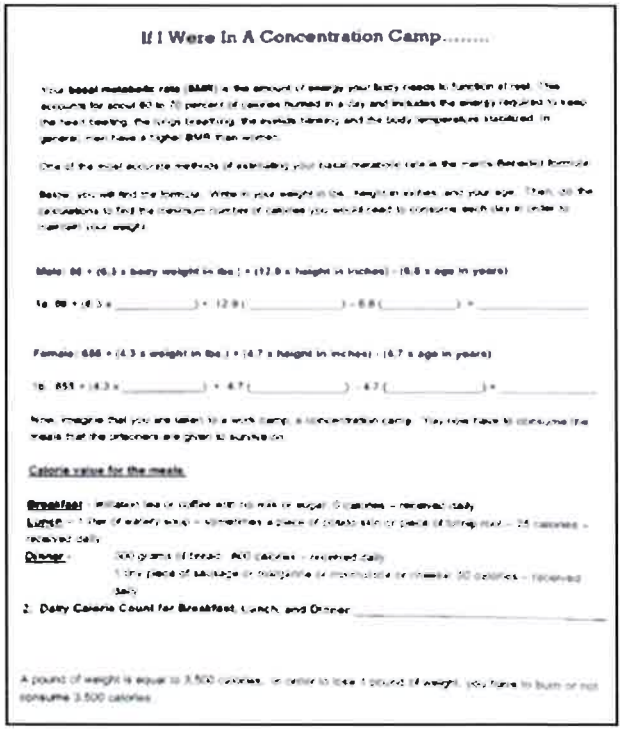
The following photographs show the Star of David activity. Students were given coordinates to graph, and then they completed a constructed response writing activity in which they had to explain the process of the task.

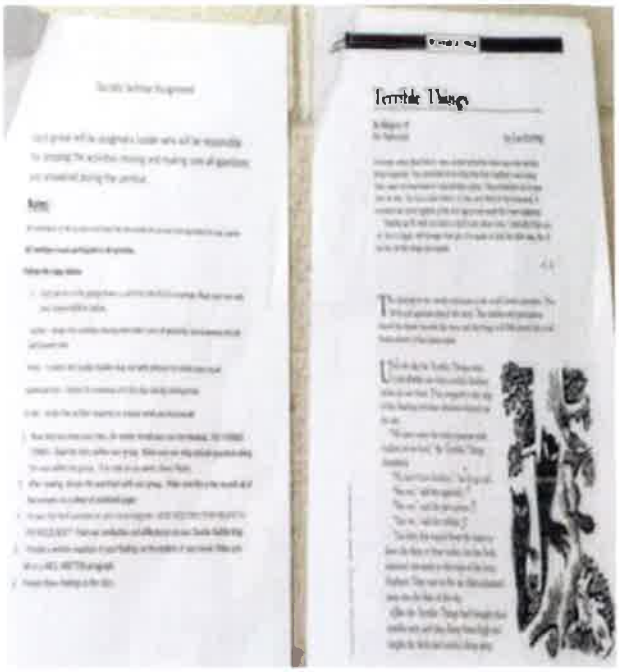
## Appendix C

Concentration Camp Prisoner Simulation

*Caloric Intake Activity: Science and Math Literacy Activity*

The students calculated their Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR) and then calculated the number of calories they would burn as a result of one day spent in a concentration camp. Students then calculated the average calories burned per hour. Students constructed foldables to explain what was happening to their bodies as a result of the hard work and reduced daily caloric intake.






**If I Were In A Concentration Camp.....**

A day of work in the concentration camp was at least 12 hours long. Carrying a heavy load would burn 475 calories per hour, carrying logs burns 680 calories per hour, digging ditches burns 510 calories per hour. Find the average calories per hour for carrying a heavy load, carrying logs, and digging ditches.

1. Average calories burned per hour: _____

This will be the calories burned per hour we will use for this lesson.

4. How many calories were burned for a full day's work in a concentration camp? _____

How: Take the amount of calories for your daily food ration and put it here: _____

Put your daily calories burned for your hard day's work here: _____

5. Put the difference between the calories you ate and the calories you burned here: _____

6. How many pounds of weight did you lose in 1 day? _____
7. What would your weight be today? _____

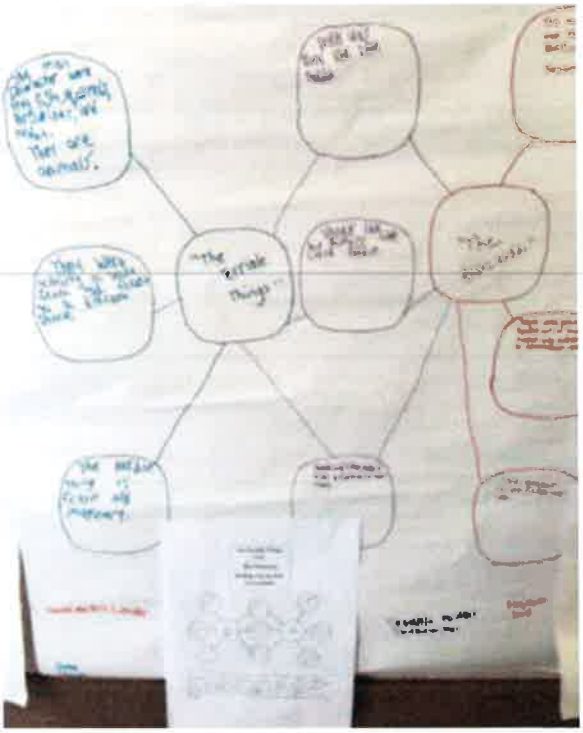
8. If this continued for a week, how much weight would you lose? _____
9. What would your weight be on this day? _____

10. If this continued for a month, how much weight would you lose? _____
11. What would your weight be on this day? _____

How long do you think it would take for a prisoner to die of starvation? _____

How would you react if you came to school this morning and you were given fake tea or coffee? What would your stomach be doing at this time of day?

How would you react if during lunch, you are given 1 liter of watery soup with nothing in it?




## Appendix D

Allegory Analysis: Social Studies and ELA Activity

Students engaged in a Socratic Seminar and then used a Double Bubble Thinking Map to analyze *Terrible Things* by Eve Bunting. They then compared this text to *Prisoner B- 3087* and wrote an extended constructed response essay of their analysis.

# Literature Circles: Something Old Something New

By Lina Soares

**Abstract**

Motivating students to read is an important aspect of Reading researchers have determined that activities focusing on reader response, such as literature circles, dialogue journals, and classroom discussions are ways of connecting students' life experiences to texts, increasing understanding of texts, shaping subjectivities, and building communities of learners. Literature circles are a literature-based instructional strategy employed in literacy classrooms today as a way to encourage students to talk about literature. The concept of literature circles, including a description and an explanation of how the approach is most commonly used in classrooms today is presented, followed by the research evidence that delineates the critical benefits students receive from literature circle participation. The article concludes with a brief look into literature circles for the 21st century.

In an effort to understand the nature of classroom contexts that can enhance the development of higher-level thinking among diverse groups of students (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003), a good place to begin is to understand that learning is a function of the activity, the context, and the culture in which it occurs (Lave, 1988). In other words, learning is situated. Situated learning can be traced to the work of Vygotsky (1978) who posed that knowledge is constructed through the process of interaction in a social context. As learners collaborate on knowledge formation, they become part of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This premise is supported by Vygotsky (1978) who posited that the use of collaborative groups is an effective method of social interaction because the collective thinking of the group helps each individual group member's thinking. From this perspective, discussion of literature may be viewed as a site for social interaction as group members collaboratively work together to construct meaning while reading and responding to texts.

Collaborative literacy encompasses a variety of titles and varying interpretations that focus on developing comprehension and an appreciation for literature. Wood, Rozer, and Martinez (2001) articulate that collaborative literacy is a construct in which students work together to read and discuss literature in a context that promotes acceptance. In fact, research has shown that collaborative book discussions provide the opportunity to develop literacy skills that lead to thoughtful, competent, and critical readers (Sandman & Gruhler, 2007). Further, research has

shown students who once felt marginalized in whole class discussions, learn to discover their voices and become competent participants (Johnson, 2000; Sandman & Gruhler, 2007) in small group literature discussions. In essence, students realize the power of the written word and in turn, they begin to value participation in the democracy of learning (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007).

As a teacher educator who understands the important role that collaborative literacy plays in developing discerning readers of text, I present a discussion on a popular form of collaborative literacy – literature circles. First, I begin with a brief description of literature circles, followed by the typical protocol to implement literature circles in the classroom. Next, I offer a snapshot into how literature circles have been implemented with nonfiction texts. A discussion then follows with a sampling of research that has shown the positive benefits for students when literature circles have been implemented in classroom reading programs and concludes with a brief look at literature circles integrated with Web 2.0 technology.

**Description of Literature Circles**

Literature circles are a form of collaborative literacy that is widely used in classrooms today. Essentially, literature circles are formed when a group of readers gather together to discuss a book in-depth (Daniels, 2002a). The purpose of this approach is to encourage students to read with a focus and then report on what they have read. These discussions are guided by student responses to what they have read, determining for themselves what is significant in their reading (Burner, 2007), rather than by a list of teacher questions.

Harvey Daniels (1994, 2002a) defines a literature circle as a small, temporary reading group in which each member agrees to assume specific responsibilities during discussion time. The students meet regularly, and the roles or responsibilities change at each session or meeting. When the group finishes reading and discussing the text, group members determine the manner in which to share their comprehension in a whole-class setting. Typically, the reading approach centers on content, rather than a random offering of material. Students choose from the offered reading material, develop their own schedule for reading, and facilitate discussions of the text.

In some versions of literature circles, students are individually assigned roles or tasks that they must prepare for each discussion group. The roles most often utilized with elementary and intermediate students engaged in reading narrative text include the Discussion Director, Word Finder, Literary Illuminator, Connector, and Illustrator (Daniels, 1994). The purpose of the roles is to give students a focus, as well as a task to help guide and scaffold their own comprehension of the text. The idea is for students to become proficient in literature circle participation so that the classroom teacher can eventually move students away from the strict roles. In fact, Daniels (2002b) warns that strict over-dependence on role sheets should he avoided when he writes," What was originally designed as a temporary support device to jump-start peer-led discussion groups can actually undermine the activity it was meant to support" (p. 44). To state succinctly, Daniels perceived participation roles as a means and not a means to the end.

In many middle and secondary literacy classrooms, literature circles are implemented as a text-based collaborative learning strategy (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). Students work in small groups to discuss a novel and other genres of literature, but more importantly, to interact with each other about the text. Texts can be either assigned or self-selected and can be implemented with a wide range of student abilities. Primarily, learning is decentralized in these small groups because the meaning-making process requires students to negotiate, construct meaning, and to assume alternate reading identities in order to arrive at new understandings (Alvermann et al. 1996). During this collaborative group time, the role of the teacher is to be a facilitator and a model for the students, who guides correct student discussion and response techniques (Short, 1999).

**Non-Fiction Texts**

An effective model to promote small group discussion with nonfiction texts is the collaborative text-based discussion strategy known as TextMaster. TextMaster is a comprehensive program designed to create the collaborative environment of literature circles while reading content in middle and secondary classrooms (Wilfong, 2009). Predominantly implemented in science, social studies, and history content areas, students are assigned the role of Discussion Director, Summarizer, Vocabulary Enricher, and Webmaster to "master the text." The roles were developed to address textbook structures and features (Wilfong, 2009). Students read a portion of a textbook chapter, prepare their roles for discussion, and meet on a continuing basis until the chapter is completed.

Research has shown positive results when TextMaster has been in used in conjunction with nonfiction texts (Miller, Straits, Kucan, Trathen, & Dass, 2007; Stein & Breed, 2004; Straits & Nichols, 2006). Stein and Breed (2004) recommend TextMaster as an effective strategy to teach academic vocabulary in the content areas while Miller et al. (2007) found TextMaster to

be an effective discussion technique to use with biographies. With a specific focus on science content, Straits and Nichols (2006) modified the reading roles to enhance students' comprehension in a science classroom when reading a novel.

### The Value of Discussions

Ketch (2005) asserts that literature circles promote conversation; learning is enhanced when students have opportunities to talk about the ideas and to respond to the ideas of others. In a seminal study, literature circles were found to aid comprehension through the practice of retelling (Hanssen, 1990). Students spent time reading, retelling what they had read, and then they demonstrated the ability to answer comprehension questions. This type of exchange provides students with scaffolding for higher-level thinking skills as they hear the comments of their peers, and it enables them to either accept or reject the comments of their peers Ketch, 2005). Further evidence suggests that small-group discussion supports intellectual engagement with text. Kucan and Beck's (2003) research findings show that in order for students to learn how to think at higher levels about text, they need participation in conversations with others. When given the opportunity to ponder confusing aspects of text and to challenge the text, Kucan and Beck (2003) found that students "gain not only a deeper understanding and appreciation of text ideas, but also a deeper understanding of what it means to think about those ideas" (p. 3). Blum, Lipsett, and Yocum (2002) echo this finding by offering that discussion of text develops students' critical thinking and overall comprehension. Correspondingly, Hill, Johnson, and Noe (1995) contend that student discussion provides the opportunity to "communicate one's ideas in a clear, detailed manner through conversation, writing, or an aesthetic response" (p. 108). The authors further argue that as students engage in discussion, the act of studying, pondering, and thinking carefully leads students to be more thoughtful and evaluative of their own responses.

### Increased Comprehension and Motivation

Literature circles have been linked to increased reading comprehension. In a study that examined the effects from small group reading discussion, McIntyre, Kyle, and Moore (2006) concluded from their research that small-group dialogue played a pivotal role in shaping students' co-construction of meaning because the literature circle context provided the problem-solving environment in which the learners could draw from prior experiences and then probe, challenge, and collaboratively work together in the meaning-making process. In addition, Avci and Yüksel (2011) found that literature circles have a positive impact on reading comprehension. The participants in their study reported that the opportunity to engage in discussions with their peers helped them retain the reading material and increased their comprehension.

Moller (2004) provides support that literature circles play a pivotal role in increasing comprehension and higher-order thinking through an inductive case study that examined one fourth grade student's participation in a heterogeneous literature discussion group who had difficulty with print-based literature. Working closely with the classroom teacher, discussion group dialogue was introduced, appropriate behavior for a literature group was modeled, and role-play activities were conducted to increase bonding among students for the two discussion groups that participated in the study. Recognizing that many at-risk students are excluded from the social aspects of reading, the researcher situated her work to focus on one student in particular who struggled with decoding, comprehension, and group acceptance. A culturally diverse selection of picture books was first introduced to address social issues and then the researcher and classroom teacher moved the two discussion groups to a more advanced level of participation by having the students read and respond to three novels that varied by genre. The results were positive.

The focal student of the study advanced from a literature group outsider to a more capable peer who worked at her actual level of reading development. Moller (2004) concluded that a learning context, rich in engaging literature and supporting of discussion, contributed to the focal student's demonstration of competence. In addition, research findings showed that with explicit teaching strategies, an environment of trust, and the student's personal belief that she had something significant to contribute and learn were positive factors to her increased identity as a valued member of the community of learners and her strengthened abilities to decode, comprehend, and engage in critical discussions within literature circles.

Literature circles have also been linked to positive motivation. Gambrell and Almasi (1996) posit that literature circles encourage students to become more engaged in reading because students are situated in a context that promotes response and challenge to one another's interpretations, share opinions about texts, and question the meaning of texts. Lloyd (2004) concurs by offering that high-quality discussions through student interaction on a reading activity provide the stimulant needed to sustain conversation. Further research shows that interesting and relevant texts motivate students to read (Evans, 2002). The twenty-two fifth-grade participants in the study confirmed that when they were given an opportunity to choose what aspects of the text they wanted to

discuss, they were more engaged and motivated to participate in discussions.

In a study conducted by Cox and Lacey-Parrish (2010), the researchers found that literature circles promote a love for reading. As the participants moved from a teacher-led literature circle format to a student-led format that involved student selection of texts to read, the students were motivated to develop more in-depth questions and made more personal connections in their responses. Similarly, DeVault (2009) found that literature circles help students, "develop a lifelong love of reading" (p. 24). The study centered on a mixed-ability fifth grade class in one school's library as literature circles were implemented as a small group discussion technique.

### Higher-Order Thinking and Increased Metacognition

Gambrell and Almasi (1996) ascertain that exchange and exploration of ideas are central elements to enable students to engage in increasingly more complex levels of reading and thinking. This premise is supported by Gove and Long-Wies (2003/2004) who found that literature circle discussions promote critical thinking. The study involved twenty-seven fourth-grade students who were taught how to investigate and find out about explicit and implicit text information, pose open-ended questions, and solve problems while reading and discussing issues of social justice. As the students grappled with prejudice and racism, Gove and Long-Wies (2003/2004) concluded that literature circle discussions provide a forum for students to consider multiple viewpoints.

Diehl (2005) conducted a case study to determine if literature circles are a viable means of promoting thoughtful literacy. As an active participant in the study, the researcher described the scaffolded support given to the five student participants who could easily decode words, but were unable to comprehend. For purposes of the study, Diehl modeled strategies to promote thoughtful reading. She demonstrated how to ask clarifying and thinking-aloud-type questions while she read to illustrate for the students the process of metacognition. In addition, she modeled for the students her own approach to meaning making. The researcher explained that as the five students' comfort levels with language discussion increased, she spoke less because the students became increasingly skilled and more adept at self-regulation during literature circle discussion by applying the strategies and monitoring their own comprehension without teacher prompting.

This study underscores the fact that reading is a highly metacognitive activity where the reader not only thinks about the material being read but also monitors that thinking. Diehl (2005) articulated that as the students in her study developed more autonomy and more positive feelings about the process of comprehending, the students became more active participants in the literature circles.

### Identity, Gender Equity, and Cultural Understanding

One seminal study confirmed that the culture of discourse in the classroom is not only interaction, but also the ideologies that frame the social context and activities. Lewis (2001) conducted a yearlong ethnographic study to determine if literacy practices in the classroom are indicative of the social codes and cultural norms of the larger community. Assuming that classroom communities are subject to frictions that arise during literacy activities, the focus of the study involved five students who were representative of the community at large and who provided contrasting traits by socioeconomic status, gender, and reading ability. Four literacy activities were integral to the classroom reading culture and included: (1) read-aloud to support commonalities among the students, (2) peer-led literature discussion which provided the opportunity for students to establish social roles, (3) teacher-led literature discussions so the researcher could examine the influences of community cultural norms, and (4) independent reading so that students could examine their own beliefs and question the beliefs they held.

Research findings showed that the assumption of power by certain students in peer-led discussions resided with the more socially dominant, white middle-class students. Further data revealed that gender, age, and reading ability were contributing factors to changing subjectivities as some students were observed to reposition and reinvent identities within reading group discussions. For example, many of the boys in her study became non-participants who often resisted their teacher's expectations by symbolically sitting on the margins during whole-class literacy activities. Yet, these same boys repositioned themselves to take up power in the presence of females during literature circle discussions. As a result, Lewis (2001) posits that teachers must give students the opportunity to try differing roles to encourage personal growth in reading and identity development. At the same time, students must be given opportunities to accept, reject, or reinvent social codes and societal norms that affect their lives.

Literature circles have also been found to advance gender equity in the classroom as students work together to examine gender roles in literature and how gender differences are portrayed in texts. During a study of fifth-graders, Clarke (2007) found that

literature circles provide the context to illuminate larger issues of gender and social class. In the fifth grade study, the female participants repositioned themselves into positions of power when they were able to try out the strong female voices in the storylines during circle discussions. In conjunction, Smith (2000) described an all-girls book club that allowed the girls to "negotiate their identities and visit dangerous places" (p. 37) within a teacher-assisted learning environment that emphasized student interaction and discourse. The study consisted of eleven middle school girls who were taught discussion techniques. Smith (2000) concluded the girls engaged in meaningful discussions without the intimidation of their male peers.

Au (2009) advances the idea of culturally relevant instruction by advocating teachers implement culturally responsive literacy discussions. Au (2009) posits that diverse students need opportunities to examine texts through their cultural values and make connections to their world. Not seeing oneself or representations of one's culture in literature has been shown to prompt feelings of marginalization; a point emphasized by Colby and Lyon (2004) who assert, "Students need to be able to make connections between literature and their everyday lives. To state succinctly, children need to receive affirmation of themselves and their culture through literature" (p. 24).

Meacham (2001) provides an interesting discussion based on a yearlong case study in a combined third, fourth-grade classroom of twenty-eight students with eleven different cultures and languages to demonstrate that a culturally diverse learning environment embodies important advantages in higher-order conceptual development with respect to reading comprehension through the practice of literature circles. In this study, the classroom teacher was able to weave the personal, cultural, and educational diversity of her students toward the enhancement of reading comprehension. Essentially, the classroom teacher asked questions that provoked the students to make their own personal connections between sociocultural themes discussed and their own prior knowledge. As a result, students began to function on their own in literature circle discussions by posing questions, countering, and responding in ways that allowed them to form connections across cultural domains. As a result, Meachem (2001) concluded that literature circles offer a culturally diverse context in which intercultural connections can be emphasized and provide the beneficial activity structure for the development of higher-order thought processes.

**Online Literature Circles**

Prensky (2001) explicates that most students in today's schools have grown up with the Internet such that they are digital natives. Technology is part of their lives from the use of cell phones to iPods, iPads, Twitter, Instagram, and computers. With the advent of Web 2.0 technology, students are now able to engage in collaborative activities and openly share information (O'Reilly & Battelle, 2009). While literacy has always been a social phenomenon, the new literacies (New London Group, 1996) contain even more of a social component. Much of the new information that is available on the Internet resides in the people who use it, not in isolated texts. Teachers who engage their classes in collaborative projects with Information Communication Technologies (ICT) (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) are preparing them in important ways for their future. In addition, the new literacies broaden a deeper understanding about the many ways of knowing that exists in different cultural contexts and this factor enables students to develop richer and stronger understandings of the global society (Kamil, 2003).

Research has found positive benefits when classroom teachers implement online literature discussions and virtual literature circles. In a study that implemented the use of blogs for students to engage in text discussion, Ellison and Wu (2008) found the students were more enthusiastic to openly share their thoughts and indicated that blogging was more meaningful when addressing written assignments because the blogging improved their comprehension. In addition, Churchill (2009) shares that blogging not only improved comprehension for the participants in the study, but increased motivation. The combination of Message Boards with literature circles have shown increased reading comprehension. In a study involving 125 third and fourth graders in Missouri, Thomas and Hofmeister (2002) randomly selected 25 of their 125 participants and concluded the 25 students made significant reading gains and developed higher levels of critical thinking. Similarly, increased comprehension was found with a group of eight grader classrooms (Moreillon, Hunt, & Ewing, 2009) who used virtual literature circles to discuss a chosen text.

**A Final Word**

Classrooms are simply corporeal spaces, but through multiple learning activities that involve interaction between teachers and their students, a social group emerges (Collins & Green, 1992). Literature circles are unique social spaces where each reader becomes an active participant in the construction of meaning by drawing on both textual and contextual information, as well as his or her own prior learning knowledge and experiences, with the aid of teacher, peers, and texts (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). To come full circle, the construction of knowledge mediated in an environment of social interaction is a function of situated learning. (Lave, 1988). Literature circles provide the context for learning to occur, for knowledge to be constructed,

and for students to engage in lively discussions. Literature circles can be both motivating, contagious, and accommodate readers in the 21st century.

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*Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.*

—FREDERICK DOUGLASS

# Books You and Your Students Need To 'Check Out'!

BY CHRISTINE A. DRAPER

For the past 3 years I have sat on the Notable Children's Books in the English Language Arts (NCBLA) Book Award Committee. To receive this award, books must:

- explicitly deal with language, such as play on words, word origins, or the history of language;
- demonstrate uniqueness in the use of language or styles;
- invite child response or participation;
- have an appealing format;
- be of enduring quality;
- meet generally accepted criteria of quality for the genre in which they are written.

This column includes several award winning titles from the 2015 NCBLA list that you may want to add to your reading list. Listed below are a few of my favorites:

***Voices from the March on Washington***
*Written by J. Patrick Lewis and George Ella Lyon*
WordSong, 2014, 114 pp., ISBN 978-1620917855

Lewis and Lyon share the experience of the historic March on Washington in 1963 through a series of riveting poems by six fictional characters. Although many students know about this momentous day solely by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous speech, there were many more perspectives that are not often addressed in history classrooms. This book gives readers a feel for the history and emotions of the March that they may not understand from typical history textbooks. The poets' introduction, a guide to the historical figures found throughout the book, plus additional lists of resources and websites are included that extend the reading experience.

***Shooting at the Stars: The Christmas Truce of 1914***
*Written and Illustrated by John Hendrix*
Abrams Books, 2014, 40 pp., ISBN 978-1419711756

Shooting at the Stars intertwines fact and fiction while presenting a moving account of the actual "Christmas truce" that spontaneously occurred in 1914. Hendrix based the story on letters from actual English soldiers of the time, who wrote home and shared stories about their Christmas Day Truce with the Germans. Despite the brutal fighting both Allied and German soldiers ceased fighting on Christmas Eve and came together on the battlefield to celebrate the holiday by singing carols, exchanging gifts, and even lighting Christmas trees. Hendrix's story truly shows the human side of war. The author's back notes also speak to some of the negative ramifications that came later from the soldiers' actions that day. A bibliography, index, and glossary are included to provide further historical information.

***Rhyme Schemer***
*Written by K.A. Holt*
Chronicle, 2014, 167 pp., ISBN 978-1452127002

Kevin James is the school bully. Holt's novel told in the stream of consciousness of a middle school boy's thoughts reminds us that bullies may not always be what they seem. The tables turn when Kevin's brother throws his secret poetry notebook through a car window and Robin, a boy Kevin has bullied, finds it and uses it to blackmail his former tormentor. To gain back some of his lost power, Kevin posts a series of found poems around the school that drive the teachers and principal crazy—and turn him into somewhat of a legend. Readers will enjoy Holt's powerful novel in verse which highlights one boy's transition from bully to the victim.

***Silver People: Voices from the Panama Canal***
*Written by Margarita Engle*
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, 272 pp., ISBN 978-0544109414

Margarita Engle tells the story of the building of the Panama Canal, and the human and environmental costs of this feat. In poetic prose, Engle follows three characters recruited to work on the project, and a young native herb girl, all of whom are witness to the harsh, dangerous, and discriminatory situations due to skin colors and ethnicities. Readers also hear the voices of the trees and howler monkeys who suffer devastating losses to their species and habitats. The different characters and cultures are strikingly etched in this story infused with culture, history, and beauty.

***Take Away the A***
*Written by Michaël Escoffier*
*Illustrated by Kris Di Giacomo*
Enchanted Lion, 2014, unpaged, ISBN 978-1592701568

Escoffier's Take Away the A is a delightfully imaginative approach to the traditional alphabet book. Within our language there are words that can change and become a different word with the subtraction of a single letter. For example, the beast is best if you take away the

A, or the chair has hair when one takes away the C. Young readers will laugh at the pictures and enjoy puzzling over the words that appear when a letter from the alphabet is taken away. Readers young and old are encouraged to take a look beyond the pages and to create even more crazy word pairs that change by simply removing one letter.

If you would like to view the entire list of award winners for 2015, please visit the Notable Children's Books in the English Language Arts webpage on the Children's Literature Assembly website at http://www.childrensliteratureassembly.org/notables.html

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## GEORGIA JOURNAL OF READING CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

As editors of the *Georgia Journal of Reading*, a refereed journal of the Georgia Reading Association, we invite those interested in improving reading and language arts instruction at all levels to submit manuscripts for publication in future issues. *The Georgia Journal of Reading* is published twice yearly in Spring and Fall.

We request articles that are grounded in current theory and research, book reviews, or creative teaching strategies that address all levels from elementary to college. Three types of manuscripts are currently being solicited.

**Full-length Articles**

These articles should deal with research, current issues, and recent trends in reading or literacy programs. Appropriate topics for the Journal include project descriptions, research or theoretical reports that address pedagogical implications or issues in reading education at the local, state or national level. Preference is given to articles focusing on topics that impact Georgia's students.

**Articles for the Exchange Column**

Articles for this column should describe creative teaching ideas and strategies that can be implemented in the classroom. These articles are shorter than full-length and may or may not require references.

**Book and Resource Reviews**

Reviews should describe and critique children's books, professional books, or reading resources that are appropriate for use by teachers and reading professionals. Complete bibliographic information, the address of the publisher, and the cost of the resource should be included.

**Manuscript Guidelines**

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically in Microsoft Word, double-spaced, and the format should conform to the guidelines presented in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th Ed.). Manuscripts should not exceed twenty double-spaced typed pages. The author's name, full address, telephone number, email address, and school/affiliation, and a brief statement on professional experience should be submitted on a separate cover page. The author's name or any reference that would enable a reviewer to know who the author is should not appear on the manuscript. Manuscripts will not be sent out for peer review until this information is provided. All manuscripts will undergo a blind review by at least two members of the editorial board. Decisions will be made within 8-12 weeks of publication of the journal for which the submission was made. Only electronic submissions will be accepted.

**Please submit all manuscripts to the co-editors:**
**Lina B. Soares and Christine A. Draper**
**grasubmission@georgiasouthern.edu**

***Lina B. Soares, Co-Editor***
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