

ACTIVITY 8.5: WRITING UP INQUIRY: MODEL EXPLORATION

This activity brings you an additional model of an inquiry write-up, the work of Cara Dore, a teacher candidate at the Pennsylvania State University, who sought to better understand how she could guide her first graders through the lens of critical literacy. Her write-up is organized into six subsections. To analyze the model she used to write up her work, read each subsection. Identify in the activity handout the key components of each subsection as well as what you might have wanted to know more about within a section and discuss with colleagues who are also embarking on writing up their inquiry work. Use this analysis as a frame to compare and contrast different models for writing up inquiry and to make decisions on the preferred model (or combination of models) you would like to use to share your work with others.

WRITE-UP SUBSECTION	WHAT ARE THE KEY ITEMS PROVIDED IN THAT SECTION TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THE INQUIRY?	WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE LIKED MORE DETAIL OR CLARIFICATION ABOUT IN THIS SECTION?
Inquiry Background		
Wonderings		
Methods/Procedures		
Findings		
Conclusions		
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Guiding First Graders on a Journey Into Critical Literacy

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INQUIRY BACKGROUND

During the LLED block last fall, I took Children's Literature as an honors option course. Through this process, I got involved in research of ideological analyses of children's literature. After learning about many different lenses for analyzing children's literature, I decided on conducting a feminist interpretation of the popular young adult novel, *Ella Enchanted* (Levine, 1997). Through my analysis, I realized the myriad messages which present themselves in the literature that children read—some conscious and some unconscious on the part of the author. I also realized that, while it was illuminating to analyze and think critically about the implicit and explicit messages within this one novel, it is simply infeasible for a teacher to evaluate every single book in her classroom library at that depth.

Rather than evaluate and control the books in a classroom library, I believe it is far more powerful to teach students how to approach reading from a critical perspective on their own. Throughout their school careers, students will read thousands of books, each delivering messages steeped in varying degrees of bias and purpose. The beliefs and norms presented in these books are therefore reinforced thousands of times, concretizing our students' foundations and core beliefs in our world. It is an educator's responsibility to think critically about the kinds of messages we pass on to children.

Simply controlling what students read, however, does not prepare them to parse the uncensored flow of information outside of school boundaries. It also puts the power in educators' hands to pass on the beliefs that we hold in the world—a bias in and of itself. Instead, I believe we should equip students with the skills to question what they read and consider from which perspectives authors write. By empowering students to challenge text, they become critical learners, less simply persuaded by biases of any sort.

An education which equips children with critical thinking skills matches the vision for twenty-first century education, exemplified in the "Four C's" from the Partnership for Twenty-First Century Learning's framework: "creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration" (*Framework for Twenty-First Century Learning*, 2017). The Partnership for 21st Century Learning, as well as thousands of educators and business leaders across the world, believe that students who can approach the information they take in with a critical mind are more prepared for living and working with success in the twenty-first century.

My wondering about how to build my students' critical thinking skills led me to discover Critical Literacy. The more I read about the topic, the more I loved the concept: Critical Literacy is a framework for teaching every subject that focuses on considering multiple perspectives and then taking action as a result (Winograd, 2014). It is primarily student-led, which matches my desire to be a teacher who fosters students' agency, too.

After reading a fair amount about the topic, I recognized that most of the literature centers on adolescents and secondary education. Since my background and career goals are in elementary education, I wanted to find strategies to incorporate aspects of Critical Literacy in the elementary classroom. Therefore, my purpose for this inquiry is to boil down Critical Literacy to the fundamental skills which will support first grade students in developing critical mindsets. I want to find out how students respond to this kind of instruction as well as how I can design lesson plans which support students' critical thinking skills effectively.

Wonderings

How can I supplement existing 1st Grade ELA curriculum to incorporate Critical Literacy?

How will students respond to this type of instruction?

Methods/Procedures

My mentor teacher and I decided that I could begin to explore my inquiry during Reading Workshop time with a small group of five readers. Each of the students is a fluent reader; in January, when I began my instruction, they were already reading at a level far above where they were expected to be at the end of first grade (mostly reading Level M when Level H is the end-of-year benchmark). They are all eager learners who enjoy academic challenge.

To investigate Critical Literacy with this reading group, I rotated through a cyclical process of research, instructional design, instruction, and reflection. I decided that the first step in my inquiry cycle was to learn from pioneering Critical Literacy educators. So, I conducted a literature review of the research out there on Critical Literacy.

While the majority of the literature cites Paulo Freire as the father of critical pedagogy with his publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970, there have been many educators since Freire to tackle the challenge of incorporating Critical Literacy into the classroom (Ciardiello, A.V., 2004; Comber, B., 2015; Lankshear, C. & McLaren, P.L., 1993; Luke, A., 2012; Pandya, J. Z. & Ávila, J., 2014; Winograd, K., 2014). One model I found particularly useful was Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys' article (Lewison, M., Flint, A. S., Van Sluys, K., 2002). In this publication, they synthesize thirty years of Critical Literacy research and divide it into four main components: a) disrupting the commonplace, b) interrogating multiple viewpoints, c) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (d) taking action and promoting social justice (Lewison, M., Flint, A. S., Van Sluys, K., 2002).

The first dimension, “disrupting the commonplace,” implies that students should challenge the perspectives of the texts they read as well as the world around them. Students learn that no text is neutral, even informational books. A strong example of this approach to Critical Literacy is in Jennifer O'Brien's lesson, “Show Mum You Love Her” (O'Brien, J., 1993 in Comber, B., 1993). O'Brien used advertisements in local catalogues and junk mail to lead her students to consider what the purpose of Mother's Day advertisements are and who benefits the most when consumers purchase advertised items. Students determined that the catalogues positioned them to feel compelled to buy certain presents for their mothers in order to make them happy. This, in effect, benefits the businesses selling the products. Once O'Brien's students understood that advertisements can have an angle, they questioned why some items, like make-up, were included in the catalogues and others, like bicycles, were not. Through drawing and labelling, O'Brien compelled her students to understand that commercialized gender norms do not reflect what their actual mothers, and fathers, might want. Then, the class created their own Mother's Day catalogues to reflect their realities. In O'Brien's lessons, she helped her students to disrupt the status quo surrounding a gendered holiday, and to develop a critical perspective towards real-world text.

The second dimension Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys describe is “interrogating multiple viewpoints,” which means students should ask themselves questions like “who or what does

the text include or exclude?” and “what is the purpose of including or excluding?” In her book, *Reading Otherways*, Lissa Paul details her own process of learning to read with multiple perspectives in mind (1998). She provides a list of questions for teachers to routinely ask their students while guiding them to consider multiple perspectives:

- Whose story is this?
- Who is the reader?
- When/where was the reading produced?
- Who is named? Who is not?
- Who is on top?
- Who is punished? Who is praised?
- Who speaks? Who is silenced?
- Who acts? Who is acted upon?
- Who owns property? Who is dependent?
- Who looks? Who is observed?
- Who fights for honour? And who suffers? (Paul, L., 1998).

Through these questions, readers discover the viewpoint of the author and the choices she or he made in including, excluding, and representing characters and/or beliefs in certain ways. This is a crucial step for children in understanding the biases of texts and to think critically about whether or not they agree with the author. Something else that I latched onto while exploring this dimension is that students can have critical discussions about multiple perspectives in any kind of text—fiction, non-fiction, books, magazines, even social media. This is something I will reflect on later in my Findings section.

The third dimension in Lewison et al.’s article is “focusing on sociopolitical issues.” Students engage in this component of Critical Literacy when they reflect on how power relationships influence their and others’ actions and perceptions. A prominent instructional feature in this dimension is the critical read aloud (Pandya, J. Z. & Ávila, J., 2014; Vasquez, V., 2017; Winograd, K., 2014). In a critical read aloud, a teacher selects a text which involves sociopolitical issues. (Despite a reputation of these books as uncommon, a quick search for children’s books featuring social issues on Barnes & Noble’s website yields 6,000 results! I recommend the website ‘Teaching For Change’ for the most current and compelling titles: <http://www.teachingforchange.org/socialjusticebooks-org>).

In Meller, Richardson, & Hatch’s article, “Using Read-Alouds with Critical Literacy Literature in K-3 Classrooms,” they cite Harste’s criteria for selecting critical texts (2009). Critical read-aloud texts should therefore meet one or more of the following criteria (Harste, J. C., 2000 in Meller, Richardson, & Hatch, 2009):

- A. “explore differences rather than make them invisible;
- B. enrich understandings of history and life by giving voice to those traditionally silenced or marginalized;

- C. show how people can begin to take action on important social issues;
- D. explore dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society to position people and groups of people as ‘others’;
- E. don’t provide ‘happily ever after’ endings for complex social problems.”

I considered these qualities when determining the books to use with my students.

The fourth dimension of Critical Literacy, “taking action and promoting social justice,” is when students apply literacy skills to work towards social justice. A strong example of taking action for social justice features in *Critical Literacy Across the K-6 Curriculum*, where Vivian Vasquez details her Kindergarten students’ observation of the books in their school’s library (Vasquez, V., 2017). In Vasquez’s class of eighteen students, there were children from many different ethnic backgrounds, who were born in many different places. When they travelled to the library to collect books which would help them learn about each other, they realized that there were only outdated or no books about several of the countries students had come from. Vasquez and her class talked about possible solutions to the problem, and they decided on two forms of literacy-based action: 1) writing a letter to the librarian, informing her of their findings, and 2) researching and pre-reading books about the missing countries so they could make informed recommendations for the books she should buy (Vasquez, V., 2017). The Kindergarten students in Vasquez’s class were able to understand that not having books about students’ home countries was an issue of concern, and they took action to remedy the problem.

An increasingly common instance of promoting social justice in schools is teaching the historically accurate versions of American holidays such as Thanksgiving and Columbus Day. In Christie & Montgomery’s article, “Beyond Pilgrim Hats and Turkey Hands: Using Thanksgiving to Promote Citizenship and Activism,” they highlight ways to jumpstart an examination of who pilgrims are and what Thanksgiving means (Christie, E. M., & Montgomery, S. E., 2010). Through a critical read aloud and inquiry project, students reconsider what it means to be a pilgrim by developing their awareness of refugees as modern-day “pilgrims.” In “Discovering Columbus: Rereading the Past,” social studies teacher Bill Bigelow details how his students unpack the word “discovery” and gain a clearer idea of what Columbus did when he ‘discovered’ the Americas (Bigelow, B., 1989).

Conducting a literature review of Critical Literacy helped me to frame my own thinking about teaching my small group of five first-graders. After reading about the brave elementary educators who pioneered Critical Literacy in the primary years with tremendous success—Hilary Janks, Vivian Vasquez, Barbara Comber, Ken Winograd, among others, I felt confident that my students could develop Critical Literacy skills themselves.

In my cyclical process of research, instructional design, instruction, and reflection, I was now ready for the initial instructional design portion. My lesson designs combine the State College 1st Grade English Language Arts curriculum with the foci of Critical Literacy: disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple perspectives, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking social action (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). The first unit we covered was literature, followed by informational texts. I will discuss more about how these components intertwined with my lesson designs in my Findings section.

To supplement the data I was gathering through my observations in real-time, I took a video of our daily 20-minute sessions, I wrote weekly field notes based on the video, and I collected student artifacts. These forms of data helped me to analyze my students' comprehension, inferencing, and engagement, and therefore, helped me to build on my understanding of how to integrate Critical Literacy into the ELA curriculum.

I analyzed students' engagement through recording the emotions they displayed in our reading group, the amount they wrote in response to my questions, and any comments they may have made to me about our reading group outside of our 20-minute meetings. I analyzed students' comprehension and inferencing through the questions they asked, the level of support they needed to apply comprehension skills, the connections they made through comparing/contrasting, and the discussions we had during our reading group. I pursued my inquiry by designing lessons, instructing my small group, reflecting, researching, and adapting my teaching based on my data for seven weeks total. Descriptions of each set of lessons are in Appendices A-F.

Findings

As a result of analyzing my data, I learned several important things:

- 1. Disrupting the commonplace and interrogating multiple viewpoints is possible with literature and non-fiction texts which do not specifically focus on sociopolitical issues.**
- 2. Biographies are a great starting place for students to begin to focus on sociopolitical issues, due to the rich information in them and the level of enthusiasm shown by students.**
- 3. Taking social action was the most challenging dimension to integrate with our small group of five first graders.**

In the following section, I will discuss each of my findings, through the data that I found to support each one.

- 1. Disrupting the commonplace and interrogating multiple viewpoints is possible with literature and non-fiction texts which do not specifically focus on sociopolitical issues.**

For example, in our literature unit, we worked with the texts *Magic Bone* (2013) and *Fearless Freddie* (2015). Neither book deals with an important social topic, but they are of high interest to my students. What I gained in attempting to bring a critical lens to my instruction of these books was a reinforced notion that every text presents an opportunity for Critical Literacy. In *Fearless Freddie*, we disrupted the commonplace through challenging the title of the text and generating more accurate titles based on what we read in the book. In *Magic Bone* especially, we interrogated multiple viewpoints by asking and answering questions about the points of view of secondary characters. I incorporated Lissa Paul's framework of considering who *acts* and who is acted *upon* in the text to frame my questions about secondary characters. I observed students rising to the challenge and getting enjoyment out of this task through video and transcriptions of their ideas.

In our non-fiction unit, we were able to disrupt the commonplace through our work with *Iditarod: Dogsled Race Across Alaska* (2000). Students learned that authors of non-fiction can still pass on their opinion through features such as a chapter titled, "The Greatest Race on Earth." Even though the author's opinion that the Iditarod is the greatest race on Earth is not a harmful belief to promote, pushing my students to consider that the book *wants* them

to feel a certain way helped them to sharpen their Critical Literacy. I observed that students enjoy finding “clues” for where the author tells us his opinion in addition to facts. For example, one student found five reasons in “The Greatest Race on Earth” chapter that the author gave for why the Iditarod is the best. The student was visually excited about this discovery, and I was pleased with his ability to match those details with the Critical main idea. Their engagement and understanding that non-fiction conveys opinions as well as facts carried over into several other informational texts we read.

FIGURE 1 Interrogating multiple perspectives through secondary characters in *Magic Bone*.

Corgie.
This dog that I
jest met is wild!
The gard.
The inch raker is
o'ing

FIGURE 2 Disrupting the commonplace through challenging the title in *Fearless Freddie*.

<p>Why is he called Fearless Freddie? Is this a good name choice?</p> <p>Use evidence from the text to tell us why it is or isn't.</p> <p>125</p> <p>but i dont think hes Fearles bec'as how is at Thunder</p>	<p>Why is he called Fearless Freddie? Is this a good name choice?</p> <p>Use evidence from the text to tell us why it is or isn't.</p> <p>its kind of brave and kind of scard. bec'us in the book hes kind of</p>	<p>brave. hes brave about truth now</p>
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FIGURE 3 Questions to disrupt the commonplace in *Iditarod: Sled Dog Race Across Alaska*.

- How does the author feel about the Iditarod?
- How does the author want you to feel about the Iditarod?
- What words does the author use which give us a clue as to his opinion?
- How would this chapter look and sound differently if the author did not like the Iditarod?

2. Biographies are a great starting place for students to begin to focus on sociopolitical issues, due to the rich information in them and the level of enthusiasm shown by students.

Through my cyclical inquiry process of design, instruction, reflection, and research, I realized that although it is possible to engage in disrupting the commonplace and interrogating multiple perspectives without books featuring social issues, we would not be able to dive into Critical Literacy’s third dimension with these types of books. This led me to wonder about how I could best introduce the next dimension of Critical Literacy: “focusing on sociopolitical issues.” I found out that biographies are an excellent way to introduce sociopolitical study to primary students because there is so much to explore and my group really enjoyed this type of book.

To begin, we studied important people in the history of the civil rights movement such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. because I knew students were familiar with these figures. I would recommend starting with people with whom students are familiar, so the skills students are engaging with are text comprehension and Critical Literacy, not striving to understand the content. Once we had spent time focusing on civil rights and developing our understanding through comparing and contrasting the work of Rosa Parks with Dr. King, we expanded our study to include Jackie Robinson. Our discussions demonstrated students’ interest and fearlessness to investigate the topic of inequality and standing up for equal rights. Find more information about our discussions in Figure 4 below.

With background knowledge on the Civil Rights movement, students were able to contemplate the connections these figures have with today’s world. I repeated the question, “How does this person’s work still impact us today?” throughout our study of biographies. I found that by the time we reached Jackie Robinson, students were already in the habit of preparing to answer this question. This demonstrated to me that students’ critical thinking was active and engaged, even when I was not explicitly asking them critical questions.

Another piece of data that demonstrates students applying Critical Literacy on their own is when a student of mine was reading the book, *Sneetches* by Dr. Seuss (1953), during his read-to-self time. I was conferring with him and asked what he thought the problem in the book was. The student independently reported that the star-bellied and plain-bellied sneetches could never do anything together, “and the stars got all the fun things, just like the white people and black people, and the black people didn’t get to go into the pool except for one day a week.” When I asked how this made the plain-bellied sneetches feel, he said “sad and hurt.” We flipped ahead in the book to the point where the plain-bellied sneetches pay to get stars on their bellies. I asked how the original star-bellies felt and he replied, “angry because now it was all fair and they didn’t want to share.” This interaction with my student demonstrated to me not only his understanding of historical instances of racial inequality, but also an awareness of *why* people with power and privilege—in his words, “all the fun things”—might desire to keep it to themselves.

In addition to the richness of our discussions, I found that students were genuinely engaged in wanting to learn more. Civil Rights captured their curiosity. One student even brought me additional biographies about now-familiar historical figures, requesting that we study these books next.

FIGURE 4 Engaging with a critical lens



Our standards-based focus on comparing and contrasting led us to engage with this skill in a Critical lens. The students generated ideas which reflected their deepened awareness of what segregation means and why activists like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King went to jail. These comparisons led us to have rich conversations about topics such as, “Is it ever okay to go to jail?, What about these historical figures got them arrested?,” and “How did people who were both white and black feel about Rosa Parks going to jail?” Through age-appropriate discussions, students’ understanding really deepened.

3. Taking social action was the most challenging dimension to integrate with our small group of five first graders.

Last, the fourth dimension of Critical Literacy, taking social action, was the most challenging to integrate. I believe this aspect of Critical Literacy is crucial, and yet is the biggest departure from a typical reading workshop set-up. On March 16th, I wrote: “*Reflecting on the design and implementation of my reading lessons over the last seven weeks, I would say that we did not reach this step in Critical Literacy. I believe that first grade students are capable of*

the abstract thinking needed for Critical Literacy instruction, and the increased engagement that may come with the challenge of thinking differently helps young students participate even more.”

I believe there are a couple of reasons that social action is the toughest dimension of Critical Literacy. First, I met with my reading group for only twenty minutes a day, four days a week. In order to make sure we were spending a good amount of time in the actual act of reading and then having enough time to discuss and unpack our reading, it was difficult to find time to add anything else in. Second, I did not want to make other students who did not get to engage in a Critical project feel left out or unimportant. Since I had only one reading group to work with at that point, I felt that it would be unfair to only expose five students out of the class of eighteen to Critical work. I discuss how I will address this in the future in the next section.

CONCLUSIONS

In the future, I have numerous ideas for how to foster social justice action with my students. First, I will try writing letters to either fellow children or the historical figures in the biographies we read. This would bring in another format of literacy: letter-writing. We could write these letters to tell others why they should learn about various historical figures, thus requiring students to connect with the contemporary importance of the people they study. If we wrote letters to a historical person we studied, I would have them interview them with questions, thus fostering their inquiry into a sociopolitical issue. While these options do not directly improve current sociopolitical conditions, they require students to explore the sociopolitical issue further and to inform others of what they have learned. They increase students' awareness and value of the historical figures, as well.

Another way I plan to bring in social justice work with my future instruction is to have students research current leaders involved in social justice and reflect on how it connects to their own lives. Based on students' research, we could decide how to take action and improve the issue, in our own corner of the world. I felt like our focus on the implications of Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Jackie Robinson could have been explored more deeply and centered on instances of racial inequity today. In an effort to keep the instruction developmentally appropriate for six-year-olds, I would choose examples which do not include violence, such as underrepresentation in children's literature. I believe students could engage in meaningful research through analyzing the titles in our school library and then taking action, perhaps in the form of writing letters to publishers requesting books which feature more diversity in their characters. Finally, bringing in our local circumstances is another avenue to social justice that I really admire in the literature and aim to emulate in future practice. Every instance of Critical Literacy-learning is unique, and there are tasks in every community to which children can contribute their efforts.

In addition to my thoughts on how I can introduce social action with my primary students, I also learned that in the future, I will tie my critical focus directly into my objectives. I realized the benefits of writing objectives in this way through the process of data analysis and I wish I had done this throughout instruction. By weaving in the critical focus into the objective, Critical Literacy goes beyond just tacking on questions at the conclusion of the lesson.

Whether the concentration is on disrupting the commonplace or interrogating multiple perspectives, it is beneficial to reiterate and reinforce those skills at many points throughout the lesson. This way, students become familiar with the expectation to engage with a critical lens. I found that I was more frequently able to provide opportunities for reinforcement when I tied in my critical focus with my regular objectives.

Furthermore, I learned that repetition is key to students adopting Critical Literacy skills. I repeated my questions about the impact of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks in my lessons on Jackie Robinson, and I found that it was useful in helping students to get in the habit of considering those questions. If I could change an aspect of my implementation, it would be to ask the same questions over and over, not just for sociopolitical issues, but for interrogating multiple viewpoints and disrupting the commonplace, as well. I predict this increased consistency would help students get in the habit of asking themselves those questions, thus increasing the likelihood of them taking ownership of their Critical Literacy skills. In future lesson design, I intend to compose several essential questions for an entire unit of reading and incorporate those essential questions throughout.

Finally, through the process of designing and implementing reading instruction with a Critical Literacy focus, I learned that it is entirely possible to introduce students early in their literacy development to Critical Literacy. The setting for our Critical Literacy group was a small group. This setting afforded me the opportunity to hear from each student every day and to assess their success with reading in a critical lens. While there is still so much room for me to grow in my development of critical instruction, we made meaningful strides towards my students' development of Critical Literacy's fundamental skills as well as my understanding of how to teach from a critical approach. As I move forward into full-time teaching, I am enthusiastic and feel more prepared to engage in Critical Literacy with my students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Lesson Set 1: Fearless Freddie by Shelley Swanson Sateren (2015)

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

English Language Arts CC.1.3.1.C:

Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

English Language Arts CC.1.4.3.S:

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and informational texts.

English Language Arts CC.1.1.1.D:
(. . .)

Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

English Language Arts CC.1.1.1.E:

Read with accuracy and fluency to support comprehension. (. . .)

Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

CRITICAL LITERACY DIMENSION EXPLORED

Interrogating multiple perspectives:

Through questions which push students to dig a little deeper, students went beyond describing main “characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.” They analyzed secondary characters, who were spoken about and did not have a story of their own. For example, we discussed why they think the mother did not interact with the children while the siblings argued. This pushed the students to think about a story line which the author chose to exclude as well as apply their background knowledge to analyze the text from a different angle.

In addition, the students reflected on the main character’s motivations to help his sister conquer her fear of thunder—another element of the plot which was not overtly explored. They used evidence from the text and their background knowledge as the basis for their inferences.

I would recommend asking these types of open-ended inferencing questions because they elicited strong enthusiasm and students generated all different answers, leading to rich discussions.

Disrupting the commonplace:

The prompt which students needed to answer after completing the book asked them to think critically about the title ‘Fearless Freddie.’ Using evidence from the text, I asked students to explain why or why not they thought the title fit the character and to change the title so it would reflect their thinking. My goal in asking this question was to start putting them in the habit of considering that titles can be misleading. Even though this book delivered a relatively harmless ideology through the title, it still positioned us as readers to think about the character, Freddie, in a certain way. By reflecting on whether or not they agree with the title and subsequently renaming the book, students engaged in challenging what the title tells them about a character and redesigning it according to what they see actually reflected in the text about the character.

Appendix B

Lesson Set 2: Magic Bone by Nancy Krulik (2013)

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

CRITICAL LITERACY DIMENSION EXPLORED

English Language Arts (Reading)
CC.1.3.1.B

Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

English Language Arts (Writing)
CC.1.4.3.S

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and informational texts.

English Language Arts (Reading)
CC.1.3.1.G

Use illustrations and details in a story to describe characters, setting, or events.

English Language Arts (Reading)
CC.1.3.1.H

Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.

Interrogating multiple perspectives:

The focus in reading *Magic Bone* was on using evidence to describe characters, settings, or events. The main character in the text was a dog named Sparky. Every chapter, Sparky came across new characters. There was plenty of textual evidence to support claims about Sparky's opinions of the other characters, through both pictures and written details. However, there were far subtler clues as to how the other characters felt about Sparky. I wanted to get my students in the habit of thinking about multiple perspectives, so every chapter, I integrated inferencing questions on the secondary characters in tandem with my more expected questions about Sparky.

The following is a sample of questions focused on multiple perspectives:

What does Josh [dog owner] think happened when Sparky knocked over the vase?

Why was Frankie [another dog] scaring Sparky about the pound?

Why does Frankie stop and listen to Samson?

What do the humans feel when Sparky arrives at their picnic?

Why do you think the Bulldog Boys are mean to Sparky?

What do the Bulldog Boys have or do that makes them in control of the pound?

Something I found helpful through designing these lessons was incorporating my focus on interrogating multiple perspectives directly into my objective: "Students will use evidence from the text to answer questions about main and secondary characters." While the difference is subtle between my objective and an objective without a focus on multiple perspectives, it helped me to normalize this line of critical thinking in my work with students. I would recommend integrating the critical focus of a lesson into the objectives so it does not become just an "add-on."

Another thing I learned through designing and instructing these lessons is that it is possible to help students get in the habit of interrogating multiple perspectives through a book which does not focus on sociopolitical issues. While Critical Literacy research has a wealth of examples on the benefits to students in using books about important topics, I believe it is good to know that one can help students build Critical Literacy skills through any book. After all, critical theorists believe that every text has a bias—even ones about dogs and magic bones.

Appendix C

Lesson Set 3: Iditarod: Dogsled Race Across Alaska by Jeffrey B. Fuerst

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

English Language Arts CC.1.2.1.A:
Identify the main idea and retell key
details of text.

CRITICAL LITERACY DIMENSION EXPLORED

Disrupting the commonplace:

This set of lessons on the Iditarod was our first foray into the non-fiction unit. Something that I latched onto through researching Critical Literacy is that authors have bias in all texts, even informational texts. I designed the curriculum for this set of lessons to therefore prepare students to begin considering how an author's opinion comes through in non-fiction. This skill disrupts the commonplace because students start to see that non-fiction presents them with facts and positions them with opinions. Students start to read with and against the text. Rather than only reading for facts, reading for facts and opinions helps reinforce in students the understanding that no text is neutral.

Before I got students to find evidence of author bias, we spent a few days reading through the text, discussing the main ideas and supporting details in each chapter, and becoming familiar with the topic of dog sleds. The final section is called "The Greatest Race on Earth," and the author discusses several reasons the Iditarod is the greatest race in the world. It is during this chapter that I led students in focused readings to find author bias. Questions I asked my students included:

How does the author feel about the Iditarod?

How does the author want you to feel about the Iditarod?

What words does the author use which give us a clue as to his opinion?

How would this chapter look and sound differently if the author did not like the Iditarod?

In designing this set of lessons, it was reinforcing the belief that students can develop Critical Literacy through any texts. The fact that the author likes the Iditarod and thinks readers should, too, is a fairly harmless bias and a fairly simple one to pick up on. I wanted the next step in curriculum design to involve comparing across texts, perhaps for more subtle bias. I felt like analyzing across two different texts would help support students' development of interrogating multiple viewpoints.

Appendix D

Lesson Set 4: Sled Dogs to the Rescue! by M. Aboff

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

English Language Arts
CC.1.2.1.A:

Main Idea: Identify the main idea and retell key details of text.

English Language Arts
CC.1.2.1.I:

Analysis Across Texts: Identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic.

CRITICAL LITERACY DIMENSION EXPLORED

Disrupting the commonplace:

Since this book built off of our Iditarod knowledge from the previous lesson set, we began our discussion about the author's bias by remembering how the author of the Iditarod book felt about the race. Then, I asked students if it was really easy or kind of hard to tell how the author in this book felt. We all agreed it was a little harder to tell how the author of *Sled Dogs to the Rescue!* felt about the topic because she did not use phrases like "The Greatest Race on Earth." I knew it was harder to tell, but I wanted students to use their understanding of where to look for authors' opinions to reach the conclusion that this author was not telling us outright what she believes about sled dog racing.

Interrogating multiple perspectives:

Instead, I chose to make the Critical Literacy focus in this book about a side of the story that was not explored—the perspective of the dogs themselves. In *Sled Dogs*, the author describes the historic sled dog relay in Alaska to get medicine to children who urgently needed it. The relay took place in blizzard conditions and several dogs did not make it the whole journey. There was plenty of text evidence to help students make inferences about the dogs' perspective, so I asked them to think about how the story of this famous medicine run might be a little different if it were told by one of the sled dogs.

In addition, I had students compare and contrast this book about the history of the medicine run with the Iditarod book which covered the current state of the race as well as the history behind it. Several ideas about the texts' similarities and differences came to light during our discussion. Since talking about author bias was more subtle in this informational text, I decided that the next focus would be on biographies. Since biographies are written out of the 'politics of advocacy' typically (Sutherland, R., 1985), I hoped we could have some rich discussions based on biographies.

Appendix E

Lesson Set 5: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks Biographies from *It's A Teacher Life* (2016)

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

Reading 1.2.1.A:

Main Idea: Identify the main idea and retell key details of text.

Reading 1.2.1.I:

Analysis Across Texts: Identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic.

CRITICAL LITERACY DIMENSION EXPLORED

Focusing on sociopolitical issues:

As noted in the lesson set above, I chose to incorporate biographies into our non-fiction unit due to my prediction that there would be a lot to discuss with them. This was a perfect time for me to study people who could get us talking about sociopolitical issues. Due to the students' familiarity with the following historical figures, I chose one passage on Martin Luther King, Jr. and one passage on Rosa Parks. Before reading, we discussed what we already knew about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. Already, students understood that both people helped black people have more rights, which is about the level of knowledge on the subject I expected. Then, we read through the passages and found more details on their lives that we may not have known before. Finally, we compared and contrasted what we learned about the two civil rights activists and discussed their impact.

According to Harste (2000), critical read alouds should focus on one of four criteria; this read aloud focused on 1) exploring differences, rather than making them invisible, and 2) enriching understandings of history and life. The passages do not mince words in terms of what segregation and Civil Rights were. In fact, they bolded these words and included definitions, openly addressing the different treatment black people and white people received. During our conversation about what Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks have in common, we discovered many similarities including: neither one acted alone, both of them hated segregation, both of them were very brave even though they were scared. Through students' empathetic connections to how the activists felt as well as the students' articulations of why we have Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks to thank for all people being able to live in our neighborhoods and play on our sports teams, I saw them demonstrate a grasp of what segregation is as well as an admiration for those who changed it. In this way, their understanding of history and life were enriched in the process of reading and discussing these biographies.

After comparing and contrasting, we discussed why the students think we still learn about Rosa Parks and MLK today. Additionally, we discussed in what ways they think the work of MLK and Rosa Parks still affect us today. My reason for posing questions focused on their impact on society today was to push students to not only see these activists as in the past. According to Harste (2000), critical read alouds should avoid providing a "happily ever after" ending to "complex social issues." My hope

STANDARDS ADDRESSED**CRITICAL LITERACY DIMENSION EXPLORED**

in pushing students to consider how the work of civil rights activists Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks still impacts us today was to provide the opportunity to engage with the fact that Civil Rights was not just a chapter in history, but rather, is a living issue. Even though I was happy with the meaning students gained from the focus on sociopolitical issues, I still wonder how I could better connect the lessons of Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks with the current day's racial tensions. In my future practice, I will be searching for strategies to explore current issues of racial inequality in a developmentally appropriate way. As always, a focus on students' agency through 'taking social action' is a good starting point for making a heavy topic more productive and meaningful for young students.

Appendix F

Lesson Set 6: I Am Jackie Robinson by Brad Meltzer (2015)

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

Reading 1.2.1.A:

Main Idea: Identify the main idea and retell key details of text.

Reading 1.2.1.I:

Analysis Across Texts: Identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic.

CRITICAL LITERACY DIMENSION EXPLORED

Focus on sociopolitical issues:

After the lessons on Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks, I decided to choose a biography about another important figure in Civil Rights history who came from a different approach: Jackie Robinson. The comparing and contrasting we did with what students knew about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks helped students enrich their understanding of history and see the issues of racial inequality as a broad problem which affected a beloved activity: baseball.

Through these lessons, the concept of civil disobedience also emerged, via a discussion of the lesson Jackie learned from his mother: to choose kindness, forgiveness, and leading by example. This notion corresponds to another criterion in Harste's model of critical read alouds: "show how people can begin to take action on important social issues" (2000). While we did not name 'civil disobedience' outright, students demonstrated understanding of how Robinson's peaceful, patient response to discrimination contributed to his legacy.

Questions I asked included:

"What is something good in Jackie's life? What is something bad in Jackie's life? Who else have we learned about that had similar experiences?"

"What life lesson did Jackie learn from his mother?"

"While we are reading, I want you to find examples of times people were hateful to Jackie as well as examples of how he reacted."

I decided to frame my questions about the impact Jackie Robinson still has on us today in the same way as I did for the previous set of lessons on Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks. My thinking was that if I ask consistent, predictable questions which focus on Critical Literacy, students will be more likely to ask those questions of themselves later.