Pairing Young Adult and Classic Literature in the High School English Curriculum

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PAIRING YOUNG ADULT AND CLASSIC LITERATURE
IN THE HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CURRICULUM

By
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A DISSERTATION
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
(in Literacy Education)

The Graduate School
The University of Maine
May, 2017

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Literacy experts recommend young adult literature to engage teens and scaffold their developing reading and literary analysis skills. Yet, the American high school English curriculum is dominated by a narrow list of classics, virtually unchanged since the late 19th century. This static curriculum neither reflects the diversity of American culture nor the lives of students in the 21st century. Adolescent literacy scholarship can support practitioners by expanding the research on effective strategies for using young adult literature. This research study examines the effects of an intentional pairing of a classic work of literature with a work of young adult literature in a high school English classroom. The main research question asks what literacy learning outcomes and attitudes result from pairing a young adult and a classic work of literature, from the perspectives of the students and their teacher.

The notion of scaffolding of instruction articulated by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), and its roots in Vygotsky’s concept of a zone of proximal development (1978),
provide the theoretical underpinning of the teaching strategy examined in this study.

Rosenblatt’s (1978) transactional theory of reading informs the analysis of the students’ responses to the young adult and classic texts studied, and their perceived learning outcomes.

This qualitative study used a case study design. Data was collected through individual interviews with the teacher and students, field observations, and a survey. Using a grounded theory approach, analysis of the data revealed that both students and teacher found the pairing strategy beneficial. The students value making connections between their lives and a text, and appreciate opportunities to examine complex issues and ideas. The teacher perceived increased engagement by the students as a result of the young adult/classic pairing, as well as stronger comprehension and analysis.

This study analyzes the perceptions of a small group of participants in one high school classroom. Future studies could expand the participant group and utilize different texts. Additional studies could examine other approaches to using young adult literature in high school classrooms, the barriers that exist to using young adult literature, and the influences of digital resources on student reading engagement.
DEDICATION

To my Dad,
Edward Dean Vaughan, Ph.D.
1922 - 2004
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people have guided and supported me through this research process over several years; their unwavering confidence in my ability to complete the research and dissertation means more than the degree itself.

The persuasion of my friend and advisor, Rich Kent, first brought me to the University of Maine graduate program in 2004. He has encouraged and assisted me in multiple ways. Rich is always willing to talk through a question or problem and has modeled what it means to be a teacher, a mentor, and a coach. He helped me to know what I could do and accomplish.

I am indebted to the members of my dissertation committee for their time, effort, and guidance. Each offered a unique perspective and challenged me to think in new ways about my research and writing. Thank you, Dave Boardman, Cindy Dean, Ken Martin, Maja Wilson, and Rich Kent.

I particularly want to thank the English III class of Midlands High School. The students welcomed me into their class and embraced the study. Diane, their teacher, took on this research project for a quarter of the school year, granting access to her students, curriculum, and instruction.

Special thanks are due to my dear friend and colleague, Deborah Rozeboom. Deb’s willingness to act as a coding and thinking partner and editor helped me through some of the more challenging phases of analysis and writing.

This dissertation is dedicated to my father. Although he died before I began my doctoral program, I took strength from knowing how proud he would be of me for
extending my education. Discovering his dissertation in the archives of the University of Montana gave me inspiration to complete my research and writing.

Most of all, I am deeply grateful for the patience and support of my family. My husband, Eddie, always has my back. Our children, Nick and Cassie, can’t remember a time when Mom wasn’t taking classes. They have unconditionally let me be me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .......................................................................................................................... iii  

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iv

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1  
   Adolescents and Literacy ....................................................................................................... 1  
   Statement of the Problem ..................................................................................................... 2  
   Background: Defining Young Adult and Classic Literature .............................................. 7  
      Young Adult Literature ...................................................................................................... 7  
      Classic Literature ............................................................................................................. 11  
   The Research Gap ............................................................................................................... 16

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ....................................................................................... 19  
   Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 19  
   Difficulties in Using Classics with Teens ........................................................................... 19  
   Research About Young Adult Literature ........................................................................... 27  
   Advocacy for Pairing YAL with Classics ........................................................................... 31  
   How YAL is Being Used in Classrooms .............................................................................. 35  
   Theoretical Framework ....................................................................................................... 37  
      Transactional Theory ........................................................................................................ 37  
      Scaffolding .................................................................................................................... 41  
   Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 42
3. METHODOLOGY ........................................................................................................44
   Statement of Purpose .............................................................................................44
   Theoretical Framework ..........................................................................................44
   Bounding the Case .................................................................................................46
      Research Design ..................................................................................................46
   Role of the Researcher ..........................................................................................47
   Site Selection ..........................................................................................................51
   Participants ............................................................................................................52
   Institutional Review Board .....................................................................................53
   Pairing the Texts .....................................................................................................54
   Data Sources and Collection ...............................................................................58
      Interviews ............................................................................................................59
         Teacher Interviews ............................................................................................60
         Student Interviews ............................................................................................61
   Student Survey .......................................................................................................62
   Observational Field Notes .....................................................................................63
   Managing and Storing Data ....................................................................................63
   Data Analysis .........................................................................................................64
   Limitations .............................................................................................................65
   Conclusion ..............................................................................................................66

4. RESULTS ................................................................................................................67
   Research Summary ...............................................................................................67
   Participant Profiles ...............................................................................................69
Student Survey Results .................................................................70
Teacher Perceptions About Student Attitudes, Engagement, and Learning .......75
  Teacher Perception of Student Attitudes and Engagement ......................75
  Teacher Perception of Student Literacy Learning Outcomes .....................81
Student Perceptions About Reading and Learning ........................................93
  Student Attitudes and Engagement: Are You a Reader? .........................93
  Student Attitudes and Engagement: The Young Adult Novel ...................97
    Making Connections ...............................................................................97
  Challenges .............................................................................................101
  Comparing the Young Adult Novel to Other Assigned Texts ..........103
  Student Attitudes and Engagement: The Classic Novel ..................107
    Making Connections .............................................................................107
  Challenges .............................................................................................111
    Comparing the Classic Novel to Other Assigned Texts ...............113
Student Perceptions of Literacy Learning Outcomes ..........................115
  Pairing Strategy as Comprehension Scaffold .....................................115
  Perceptions About Learning Literary Devices ..............................120
  Summary of Results ..............................................................................122
5. IMPLICATIONS .....................................................................................123
  Introduction ............................................................................................123
  Implications for Curriculum ................................................................124
  Implications for Instruction ................................................................126
  Implications for Learning Outcomes ....................................................128
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Adolescents and Literacy

A group of teen-aged girls is clustered in my kitchen late one afternoon. They – my daughter and some friends – have gathered for a group study session, prepping for a chemistry test scheduled for the next day. I listen to their conversation as I cut up a snack of apples for them. The conversation weaves chemistry prep with events of the day and plans for the upcoming weekend. These young women are active in school life; they are athletes, leaders of student council and Key Club, and high achieving scholars taking challenging AP courses. The talk turns to books when Abby, digging into her backpack for a pencil, pulls out a paperback and says to the group, “Oh my gosh, you guys, you should totally read this book. It is so good!” The book is Out of the Easy by Ruta Sepetys (2013), a young adult novel set in 1950s New Orleans about a teen-aged girl who dreams of leaving home for an elite college. It is not hard to see the appeal of the storyline. Abby is reading the novel for a new elective English course in young adult literature at her school. I ask Abby how she likes the course, and she replies, “I love it! We get to choose most of the books and they are so good! They are so much more interesting to read than the stuff we have to read for AP (English).” This remark prompts a burst of comments about various books the young women have been assigned for their AP (Advanced Placement) English courses. They acknowledge liking many of the books, but some of their comments are negative. Cassie sums up the general feeling when she says, “The Scarlet Letter was kind of interesting. The story itself, I mean, with Hester being shunned and all. But it was just so dry. By the end I didn’t even care what happened, I just wanted
to be done with the book.” There are nods of agreement around the table and Elly confesses, “I didn’t finish it. I just went for the SparkNotes.”

**Statement of the Problem**

The conversation of this group of bright, hard-working students is evidence of a flaw in the high school English curriculum. The most successful students who identify themselves as readers and who work diligently to comply with class expectations may be disengaged with the assigned literature, and some may resort to using online study guides or other resources as substitutes to avoid the reading. Yet when presented with literature that is contemporary and relevant to their immediate lives, they are enthusiastic readers. For students who are less engaged in school than these young women, and/or who struggle with reading comprehension, the traditional curriculum of classics is practically inaccessible.

The essential structures of American public schools have changed little since the early 20th century when schools were designed to train large numbers of immigrant students for factory work. Children rarely spent more than five years in school, entering the work force without completing (or even beginning) secondary level courses. Students who completed high school were typically those with the financial means to continue on to college (Dlugash, 2014, p. 76).

The original broad goals of public education have continued, as well, according to Labaree (1997): “(1) preparing students for democratic citizenship, (2) training workers effectively, and (3) enabling people to achieve social mobility” (as cited in Dlugash, 2014, p. 76). More recently, federal education reforms including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2004) and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act
have moved schools toward more equitable opportunities for inclusion and attainment of a high school diploma for children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and those who are socio-economically disadvantaged. It is now expected that all children will complete at least a K-12 education. Yet, despite school reform efforts and the rapid pace of change in contemporary society, if one walks into many American high school English classrooms, one is likely to find a curriculum that has changed very little since the late 1800’s (Applebee, 1996, pp. 26-28).

The roots of the American high school English curriculum originated in the late 19th century (Applebee, 1996, p. 22). What had been separate areas of study (reading, literary history, composition, grammar, spelling, and oratory) were combined to create “English” courses in colleges, with high schools following suit (Applebee, 1996 p. 23). The study of literature was “justified largely as a reservoir of cultural values and a source of moral strength” (Applebee, 1996, p. 23). Harvard established an English department in 1872 and issued a list of titles required for entrance into the composition program. The list included works by Shakespeare, Milton, Hawthorne, Dickens, Scott, Irving, and Byron, among others. High schools quickly adopted the required titles for their reading lists (Applebee, 1996, p. 26).

Remarkably, high school English reading lists have changed only slightly since the turn of the 19th century. Applebee (1996) studied high school English curricula in 1992 and 1993. His research identified the ten most frequently required titles named by English department chairs to include “Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Huckleberry Finn, Julius Caesar, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Scarlet Letter, Of Mice and Men, Hamlet, The Great Gatsby, and Lord of the Flies” (Applebee, 1996, p. 28).
Wolk (2010) surveyed undergraduate students about their high school reading. His students represented nineteen different high schools from a diverse geographic range. Among the most frequently listed titles, Shakespeare’s works again lead the list. The top ten virtually duplicates Applebee’s (1996) list, with the additions of The Catcher in the Rye, Animal Farm, Hamlet, 1984, and The Things They Carried (Wolk, 2010, p. 12).

I taught high school English in central Maine from 1985-1997. All of the works named by Applebee (1996) and Wolk (2010) appeared in my high school’s English curriculum at that time. I was often frustrated by students’ lack of engagement in the literature required by the curriculum, and struggled to find strategies to help them connect to the characters and themes. While most students made the effort to comply, or appear to comply, with the expectations of the curriculum, some openly rebelled against the assigned reading and refused to engage. I felt that I had failed these students when they left high school hating books and reading. In 1997, I completed a master’s degree in Library and Information Science and became the Library/Media Specialist at the high school where I had been teaching English. It was during my eight years in that role that I became an avid fan of and believer in the value of young adult literature for engaging high school students in a love of reading. One of the most memorable moments of my time in the library was the day that a young man came in to return a copy of Robert Cormier’s (1974) well-known young adult novel, The Chocolate War. I had recommended the novel to this student when he asked for help selecting a book a few days earlier. When he returned the book, he enthused about what an exciting story it was and how much he enjoyed reading it. “I couldn’t put it down,” he said. And then he confessed that it was the first full-length novel that he had ever finished. This student’s
experience, and many others I encountered, convinced me that a narrow curriculum of classics was appropriate for only a small segment of the high school population, and that schools must diversify their reading lists in order to better engage students as readers.

The values, situations, and lifestyles portrayed in classic works are vastly different than the lives of contemporary teens. That is not to say there isn’t value in reading these works and considering the ideas presented in them. There is much that can be learned from these texts. Yet, adolescents by their nature live in the present and are concerned with the here and now as they work to discover and develop their identities and places in the world – a world that would be almost unrecognizable to the Harvard scholars of 130 years ago. For many teens today, connecting to and finding meaning in classic literature is at best challenging and at worst completely irrelevant.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) calls for reform in adolescent literacy practices in a 2006 policy research brief, *NCTE Principles of Adolescent Literacy Reform*. The policy brief recognizes the challenge of engaging students in fostering literacy: “Many students who are able to read and write choose not to, rendering many forms of instruction ineffectual” (2006, p. 6). Research demonstrates that motivation can be increased through specific strategy instruction, use of “diverse texts in a variety of genres that offer multiple perspectives on life experiences,” and self-selection of texts (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006, p. 6). The findings of Applebee (1996) and Wolk (2010) reveal a lack of diversity in high school English curricula, indicating that the NCTE recommendations have not been widely enacted.

Further evidence of the need for change in high schools comes from the research on graduation rates. Tyler and Lofstrum (2009) find that overall, schools are graduating
about the same percentage of students now as forty years ago. “The evidence . . . suggests a 2- to 3-percentage-point fluctuation around a relatively flat forty-year trend line centered at about 77 percent” (2009, p. 83). Given that the essential structures of schools, including curriculum, have not changed significantly, it is perhaps not surprising that graduation rates have not changed appreciably, either.

The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) has measured student achievement and progress in reading and math since the early 1970’s. A 2012 analysis of long-term trends found no substantial progress at the high school level. “Compared to the first assessment in 1971 for reading and in 1973 for mathematics, scores were higher in 2012 for 9- and 13-year-olds and not significantly different for 17-year-olds” (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). While progress in overall rates of reading proficiency has been made among our younger students, the reading achievement of high school students has not changed significantly in 41 years, paralleling the lack of change in high school graduation rates.

The typical high school English curriculum hasn’t changed since the early 1900s; the reading achievement of 17-year-olds hasn’t significantly changed since the NAEP first began measuring reading achievement in 1971. Nor has the nation’s high school graduation rate changed appreciably in more than forty years. It would be an oversimplification of the factors influencing reading achievement and high school graduation rates to assert that the high school English curriculum is responsible for the lack of progress. However, curriculum and instructional approaches are among the influences that educators can control. The static curriculum may be symptomatic of the overall lack of change in public education since its inception. It is time to consider
making changes to the way we teach reading and approach literature at the secondary level. Literature written for a teen-aged audience - young adult literature - offers contemporary and relevant characters, themes, and situations as well as complex literary techniques to challenge and engage high school students. Using high quality young adult literature to introduce and scaffold understanding of the traditional English curriculum may be one promising approach toward increasing reading engagement and achievement for teens, and by extension, overall school engagement. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of an intentional pairing of a classic work of literature with a work of young adult literature in a high school English classroom.

**Background: Defining Young Adult Literature and Classic Literature**

Before discussing what the scholarly literature says about using young adult literature (YAL) and the classics, it is worthwhile to clearly define how those terms will be used in this study.

**Young Adult Literature**

Also referred to as “adolescent” or “teen literature,” young adult literature generally refers to works written for an audience between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Scholars offer variations on the definition. Nilsen, Blasingame, Donelson, & Nilsen (2013) use the term in reference to students in junior high and high school, and even those who may have graduated from high school and “are still finding their way into adult life” (pp. 2-3). They acknowledge that the age spread from twelve to twenty is significant in terms of maturity, interest, and subject matter. Characteristics of young adult literature described by Nilsen, et al. include the following:
• Stories are typically told from the narrative point-of-view of a teen-aged protagonist.

• Teen-aged characters, rather than adults, find ways to resolve the central problems of the stories.

• Works are thematically optimistic and characters make worthy accomplishments.

• Works are typically fast-paced, “containing narrative hooks, secrecy, surprise, and tension.”

• Young adult literature includes a variety of genres, subjects, and levels of sophistication.

• Series books have become increasingly prominent.

• The body of work includes characters of diverse ethnicities and cultures not typically found in the literary canon of classics. (2013, pp. 28-37)

Herz and Gallo (2005) similarly identify the young adult reader as middle or high school aged. Using the terms “young adult literature” and “teen books” interchangeably, Herz and Gallo (2005) trace the origins of contemporary young adult literature to 1967 and the publication of four groundbreaking novels: The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton (1967), The Contender by Robert Lipsyte (1967), The Chosen by Chaim Potok (1967), and Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones by Ann Head (1967). These novels “addressed the realities of teenage life and offered readers an honest view of the main characters’ hopes, fears, and dilemmas” (Herz & Gallo, 2005, p. 10).

Herz and Gallo (2005) detail several characteristics of “young adult fiction:”

• The main characters are teenagers.
• Length averages about 200 pages although many are much longer.
• Point of view is typically first person, and a teen character speaks in a teen voice rather than an adult looking back.
• Language is contemporary and vocabulary is accessible to readers of average ability.
• Setting is most often contemporary but also can be historical, futuristic, or imaginative depending on genre.
• The stories contain characters and issues that are familiar and relevant to teenagers.
• Parents often play a minor role; they may be emotionally absent or may be “the enemy.”
• Plot and literary style are typically “uncomplicated but never simplistic.” Nevertheless, many complex works exist.
• Traditional literary elements are present. (2005, pp. 10-11)

Bucher and Hinton (2014) acknowledge varying definitions of young adult literature among publishers, teachers, librarians, professional associations and award committees (p. 4). In their text, Young Adult Literature: Exploration, Evaluation, and Appreciation (2014), Bucher and Hinton pull from the various descriptions in the field to define young adult literature:

[YAL is] literature in prose or verse that has excellence of form or expression in its genre (Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature, 1995), provides a unique adolescent point of view (Herz & Gallo, 1996), and reflects the concerns, interests, and challenges of contemporary young adults (Brown & Stephens,
In sum, [young adult literature] provides a roadmap for readers 12 to 20 years of age (Bean & Moni, 2003). (Bucher & Hinton, 2014, pp. 8-9) This definition emphasizes the relevance of YAL to its teen audience.

Bright (2011) makes a distinction between “young adult” and “adolescent” literature, using the latter term to refer to works directed at middle school students, or those readers on the younger end of the teen spectrum. She refers to young adults as older teens, or those capable of reading more complex literature such as that often assigned to high school students (2011, p. 40).

Stephens (2007) surveyed young adult novels published between 2002-2006 to examine current trends in the literature to arrive at a definition of young adult literature and to determine what distinguishes it from adult literature. His study analyzed twelve works representing a variety of genres and themes. Stephens offers the following definition as a result of his study:

As I see it, the label “Young Adult” refers to a story that tackles the difficult, and oftentimes adult, issues that arise during an adolescent’s journey toward identity, a journey told through a distinctly teen voice that holds the same potential for literary value as its “Grownup” peers. (2007, p. 7/9)

The defining characteristics offered by these scholars overlap. Common characteristics include the following:

- A teenaged main character and distinctly teen voice;
- Topics and themes representative of the teen experience;
- Variety in genres and use of literary elements.
Furthermore, all of the studies acknowledge that within the vast array of young adult texts are many works of literary complexity.

This study will use the term “young adult literature” (YAL) to refer to works having the common characteristics of central teen-aged characters and a distinctly teen voice in the narration along with topics and themes representative of the teen experience.

**Classic Literature**

Classic literature predominates in many, if not most, high school English classrooms today (Wolk, 2010). What makes a particular work of literature a classic? How does a title come to be part of the accepted list of works known as the literary canon? There is not, of course, one official list. Nevertheless, many have offered their versions of lists of classic works of literature that comprise a canon of valued titles. A simple Google search produces lists created by libraries, publishers, newspapers, Web sites for readers, and many, many more. What criteria are these list makers using? What defines a “classic” and “the canon?”

A basic definition of “classic” from Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary online (2015) is a useful starting point. Used as an adjective, as in “classic novel,” it means, “judged over a period of time to be of the highest quality and outstanding of its kind.” Used as a noun, a classic is “a work of art of recognized and established value;” also, “a thing that is memorable and a very good example of its kind.” The word originates from French *classique* or Latin *classicus* ‘belonging to a class or division,’ later ‘of the highest class,’ from *classis*. Classic or classical can also refer specifically to the art, ideas, or history of ancient Greece and Rome (Merriam-Webster, 2015).
Sainte-Beauve (1910) seeks a definition in his essay, “What is a classic?” written for *The Harvard Classics* collection:

A true classic, as I should like to hear it defined, is an author who has enriched the human mind, increased its treasure, and caused it to advance a step; who has discovered some moral and not equivocal truth, or revealed some eternal passion in that heart where all seemed known and discovered; who has expressed his thought, observation, or invention, in no matter what form, only provided it be broad and great, refined and sensible, sane and beautiful in itself; who has spoken to all in his own peculiar style, a style which is found to be also that of the whole world, a style new without neologism, new and old, easily contemporary with all time. (1910, para. 7)

Saint-Beauve perceives classic works as having broad and timeless appeal and expressing important truths or advancing human thought.

Wheeler (2017) of Carson-Newman University offers a straightforward definition: At once, the term implies age or antiquity, but the word also implies the material is somehow valuable. It somehow shapes what comes in later time periods. When traditional literary scholars refer to classical literature, they usually mean that this literature is widely acknowledged as having outstanding or enduring qualities. Often, Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is considered a classic of English literature and *The Scarlet Letter* in American literature. (2017, n.p.)

These definitions share the concept of classics as works of long-lasting interest and literary quality.
Closely related to the term “classic literature” is the “literary canon” or “canonical literature.” Merriam-Webster again provides a basic definition: “a sanctioned or accepted group or body of related works <the canon of great literature>” (2015, n.p.).

Bright (2011) defines “the canon” simply as “literature considered ‘great works’ in high school English classes across North America” (p. 38). In her examination of connections between young adult and canonical literature, Bright delineates the canon into four categories: Classical (i.e., ancient Greek and Roman literature), Shakespeare, 19th century, and Contemporary Classics (2011, p. 43).

Contemporary American high school English curriculum is steeped in the values of the late 19th century when colleges and high schools first developed English as an area of study. The creators of the earliest courses valued works that were identified then as classics, a body of literature or canon representing a Eurocentric, white, male experience. The concept of “classic” has not appreciably changed in today’s English classrooms.

Nonetheless, scholars do not provide a clear consensus on the concept of literary quality. Miller of Indiana University of Pennsylvania and Slifkin of the Pittsburgh Public Schools, Chatham University, and the University of Pittsburgh (2010), both teachers of high school Advanced Placement (AP) English courses, note that canonical texts are typically taught in AP courses (p. 1 of 12). Miller and Slifkin find a lack of consensus among teachers, librarians, and literary critics about the criteria for literary quality. They cite Applebee’s (1996) study of the history of the American high school English curriculum (see above), Bloom’s (1994) defense of the concept of a Western canon based on “artistic criteria” (as cited in Miller & Slifkin, 2010, p. 4 of 12), and Adler’s (1988) Great Books program at the University of Chicago as examples of experts providing
differing definitions of literary quality or what makes a text part of the literary canon. The problem this poses for practitioners, say Miller and Slifkin, is that AP English teachers (and others) are left to determine what books will best prepare their students:

We are left with a choice of 1) time-tested titles that may or may not still hold social relevance to our students or 2) contemporary authors whose work may not yet be placed in the academic canon of good literature. (2010, p. 4 of 12)

It is this lack of “social relevance” of some canonical texts that compels Miller and Slifkin to use contemporary literary fiction and young adult works in their own AP courses.

A recognized canon of young adult literature might confer some value to YAL and thus lend a sense of permission to teachers in the field to use YAL at the high school level. Hunt (1996) suggests that the first version of a YA canon appeared in Donelson and Nilsen’s first edition (1980) of the textbook, Literature for Today’s Young Adults. In this edition and each new edition since, the authors include an “Honor Sampling of the best books for every year from 1967 to the cutoff date for that particular edition” (Hunt, 1996, p. 7). Hunt remarks that with the “Honor Sampling,” young adult literature “had come of age sufficiently to have its own classics. Meanwhile, high school and college teachers [in the 1980s] were constructing their own YA canon” (1996, p. 7). By the early 1990s, according to Hunt, “YA specialists are constructing not one canon, but many” through the creation of book awards, course syllabi, and school library collections (1996, p. 7). She contends that YA specialists whose main focus is high school curricula are “working on the inclusion of YA books in an existing canon of classics,” while other scholars outside of the secondary education field are “considering the existence of a
canon composed entirely of YA books” (Hunt, 1996, p. 8). Hunt herself rejects the concept of a YA canon on the basis that the intended readers of young adult literature, i.e., young adults, by nature “value now to the virtual exclusion of whatever is not now” (1996, p. 7). The concept of a canon is perhaps a more useful construct for teachers and scholars than for teen readers.

Brooks and McNair (2015) assume the existence of a canon of children’s and young adult literature, referring to “books generally considered to be traditional and contemporary classics” (p. 15). They distinguish young adult classics such as Hinton’s The Outsiders (1967), Cormier’s The Chocolate War (1974) and Anderson’s Speak (1999) from “classic adult books” commonly taught by secondary level teachers, such as Dickens’ A Tale of Two Cities (1859), Melville’s Moby-Dick (1851) and Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby (1925) (Brooks & McNair, 2015, p. 15). Seeking to identify young adult works by and about African Americans that are or could be considered classics, Brooks and McNair surveyed and interviewed experts in literacy and education about the notion of young adult classics and in particular, African American YA classics. Acknowledging that there is no single, clear definition of “classic,” these scholars nevertheless provided definitions similar to Sainte-Beauve (1910) and Wheeler (2017). Rudine Sims Bishop names a classic as a book “with a theme and literary style that stands the test of time” (as cited in Brooks and McNair, 2015, p. 15). Dianne Johnson asserts that a classic is “a text of enduring and timeless value to the extent that it offers insight into and illumination of our cultural, historical, political, and imaginative experience” (as cited in Brooks and McNair, 2015, p. 15). Violet J. Harris advances the definition of classic by distinguishing traditional and contemporary classics. She states “some criteria for both include literary
and/or artistic merit as determined by experts, selection by readers over several
generations, and books in the vanguard of creativity” (as cited in Brooks and McNair,
2015, pp. 15-16). While scholars in the field of adolescent literacy recognize a canon of
young adult literature, this recognition does not appear to extend outside the field to high
school practitioners.

For the purposes of this study, the term “classic” will refer to those works of
literature originally written for adults and traditionally found in high school English
curricula that are outside of the realm of young adult literature, unless specifically named
as a young adult classic. The term “canon” will refer to a body of classic works seen
frequently on high school and college reading lists and generally recognized as having
literary merit.

The Research Gap

What do literacy experts and scholars say about young adult literature? Hunt
(1996), Hazlett, Johnson, & Hayn (2009), and Hayn, Kaplan, & Nolan (2011) have
reviewed the academic literature about YAL. Hunt (1996) describes the origins of
contemporary young adult literature in the late 1960s and its evolution through the early
1990s. She found very few research studies as of 1996, and suggests possible reasons for
the lack of research. Similarly, Hazlett et al. (2009) found a lack of quantitative research
in journals that feature YAL. Hayn et al. (2011) searched three prominent academic
databases for research studies about YAL, finding only twenty-seven articles between
2000-2010. I replicated the database search of Hayn et al. for the years 2011-2017 and
found eleven articles about YAL. The details of the searches conducted by Hunt (1996),
Hazlett et al. (2009), Hayn et al. (2011), and by me are explicated in Chapter 2 of this
study. Although there are many articles about young adult literature, there is relatively little research examining the impact of YAL on students’ reading comprehension or engagement.

The American high school English curriculum, it is argued, would better serve students by evolving to include a variety of contemporary, relevant, and engaging works of literature (Allen, 1995; Beers, 2002; Brozo, 2002; Connors, 2015; Glaus, 2014; Kent, 1997; Kent, 2004; Newkirk, 2000; Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). One way to support this evolution is by introducing works written with a teen audience in mind that focus on characters, situations, and issues that are compelling and relevant to teens. Pairing these young adult works with traditional classics can create a bridge for teen readers that prepares them for the classic works and can help them make the connections to themes that scholars of the past and present value (Bright, 2011; Broz, 2011; Bucher & Hinton, 2014; Gallo, 2001; Herz & Gallo, 2005; Kaywell, 2010; Miller & Slifkin, 2010; Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016; Stover, 2003; Wolk, 2010). While many literacy experts advocate for pairing YAL and classics, the field is lacking in evidence about the literacy learning outcomes that result when adolescents read a young adult work in preparation for a challenging classic text. My research study intends to help fill the gap in evidence about using young adult literature with classics as one potential strategy for engaging high school students in reading, thereby improving their reading achievement and interest in books and reading.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of an intentional pairing of a classic work of literature with a work of young adult literature in a high school English
classroom. The following overarching question and four sub-questions guide the research:

- What literacy learning outcomes and attitudes result from the intentional pairing of young adult literature with classic literature in a high school English classroom?
  - What do students perceive to be the literacy learning outcomes of pairing young adult and classic literature?
  - What attitudes toward literature and reading do students perceive to be the outcome of pairing young adult and classic literature?
  - What does the teacher perceive to be the literacy learning outcomes of pairing young adult and classic literature?
  - What attitudes toward literature and reading does the teacher perceive to be the outcome of pairing young adult and classic literature?

The American high school English curriculum is rooted in a canon of Western literature identified by Harvard scholars in the late 19th century. Stalled reading achievement and flat graduation rates over the past forty years indicate a need for change to meet the goal of a K-12 education for all children in the 21st century. Literacy experts recommend a more diverse curriculum that includes contemporary texts such as young adult literature. This study will add to the research on adolescent literacy by examining the effects of a curricular unit pairing young adult and classic literature.
CHAPTER 2  
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE  

Introduction

Over the past four decades, publication of young adult literature has expanded, and with it, a nascent field of scholarship. Meanwhile, classic literature continues to dominate the American high school English curriculum. In this chapter, I discuss the challenges described by literacy experts of using classic literature with teens. I present research about the impacts of young adult literature on adolescent readers, and provide examples of how YAL is used in classrooms. The chapter concludes with a review of Rosenblatt’s (1978, 1998) transactional theory of reading and Wood, Bruner, & Ross’ (1976) concept of scaffolding instruction as conceptual underpinnings for this study.

Difficulties in Using Classics with Teens

Classic works of literature pose many difficulties for teen readers. The challenges of using the classics in the high school English classroom are described by many literacy experts (Bright, 2011; Broz, 2011; Bucher & Hinton, 2014; Gallo, 2001; Glaus, 2014; Herz & Gallo, 2005; Kaywell, 2010; Miller & Slifkin, 2010; Stover, 2003; Wolk, 2010). Archaic language, unfamiliar settings, and mature, complex themes that are beyond the life experiences of teens pose problems for young adult readers. Stover (2003) of St. Mary’s College in Maryland discusses the “gap” between high school readers and books assigned in the curriculum. Causes for this gap include “lack [of] appropriate skills, motivation, time, interest, or trust in the education system; or they just might not like school, the teacher, or the way a textbook makes them feel inconsequential and dumb” (2003, p. 77). For example, without adequate knowledge of the setting of Shakespeare’s
Romeo and Juliet, with its masques, arranged marriages, and class hierarchy, many details of the storyline may be confusing and frustrating (Stover, 2003, p. 78).

Failure to recognize students’ developmental levels as readers contributes to a lack of success in using classic literature. In their work, From Hinton to Hamlet: Building Bridges between Young Adult Literature and the Classics, Herz and Gallo (2005) argue that, while some students are ready for the complex vocabulary and mature themes of classics such as Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter or Wharton’s Ethan Frome, many students do not yet have the maturity, or they “lack the advanced reading skills necessary to handle many of the classics included in the traditional curriculum” (Herz & Gallo, 2005, p. 19). Carlsen (1980) names five stages of developing readers. Briefly, the stages begin with the “unconscious delight” of elementary and early middle school readers, “living vicariously” through action and adventure stories typical of middle school or junior high, followed by “seeing oneself,” in which the student transitioning from junior high to high school begins to step out of the egocentric stage of development. Next, the maturing high school student enters the “philosophical speculations” stage in which interests shift from self to others, and finally moves to “aesthetic delight,” when teens begin to transition into adulthood and as “readers have acquired critical awareness and begin to recognize universal themes” (Carlsen, 1980, as cited in Herz & Gallo, 2005, p. 18). When teachers ignore the developmental stages of their students as people and readers and continually expect them “to respond . . . at an aesthetic level to adult-oriented literature” (Herz & Gallo, 2005, p. 19), students may become overwhelmed and disengaged. Reading has little or no pleasure for them. The result may have devastating consequences on students’ reading lives. “We have taught them the best literature of the
past, but we have failed to help them become lovers of literature” (Herz & Gallo, 2005, p. 19).

A primary challenge of the classics for teens is that most classics were written for adults, addressing mature themes and life experiences. Teens are likely to find few, if any, connections to these works. Gallo (2001) contends that not only do students fail to become “lovers of literature” (p. 34) when their developmental needs as readers are ignored, they fail to become readers of anything. Continued use of the classics, Gallo asserts, is creating an “aliterate society” (2001, p. 34). Gallo writes about his experience as a high school student:

I wasn’t READY for classical literature when I was 13, 14, . . . 17, 18 . . . I was still a typical teenager interested in teenage things. The classics are not about TEENAGE concerns! They are about ADULT issues. (2001, p. 34)

Later in life, Gallo studied and enjoyed many classics, because, he says, he was ready for them. He calls for a curriculum that supports instilling a love of reading in young people. While advocates of the classics may share the intention of teaching an appreciation of reading and literature, the opposite has often resulted. Gallo cites the work of Carlsen and Sherril (1988) who found a thirty-year trend of negative responses to the classics taught in high schools (Gallo, 2001, p. 35).

Bright (2011) echoes Gallo, asserting that “for the most part, canonized novels deemed suitable for adolescents and young adults by teachers and curricula are not relevant or even interesting to contemporary readers” (p. 39). Requiring teens to read literature that they have little or no connection to may meet the needs of the curriculum by addressing the short term goal of complex literary analysis, but not the needs of the
student readers because it “is undesirable in promoting a lifelong love of reading” (Bright, 2011, p. 39). Concurring, Bucher and Hinton (2014) state that teens “become disconnected and lose interest in reading” when they perceive books in the literary canon as irrelevant to their lives (pp. 9-10).

Warnings about teen aliteracy are affirmed by surveys of reading habits. In a large-scale study of the reading habits of Americans, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) (2007) reports a downward trend in the number of teens reading for pleasure between 1984 and 2004. In 1984, 31% of seventeen-year-olds reported reading for fun almost every day (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007, p. 7). In 2004, that number dropped to 22%. The reading achievement levels of seventeen-year-olds declined steadily from 1992 to 2004 (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007, p. 12). On the other hand, reading scores for nine-year-olds were at an “all-time high” in 2004, and their rate of reading for fun showed no decline from 1984-2004 (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007, p. 7). The NEA report does not analyze the cause of the decline in reading for fun by teens, but may substantiate Gallo’s (2001) and Herz and Gallo’s (2005) assertions that high schools are not supporting students in developing life-long reading habits.

The instructional approach to texts is as important as the choice of texts. Broz (2011) argues that inadvertently, many English teachers encourage their students to not read. One reason this happens is because there are literally millions of resources available on the Internet that students can access for information about classic texts. Summaries, commentaries, reviews, and interpretations of varying quality abound. Broz (2011) does not tell teachers to avoid the classics all together; however, he advises multiple strategies to elicit authentic responses and thinking about books, including the use of young adult
literature to support or accompany the reading of classics. Connors (2015) similarly asserts that rigor arises from instruction, such as the kinds of questions teachers ask students and the activities they structure for students to work with texts, not the texts alone (p. 93).

Joan Kaywell of the University of South Florida, contributor to the *ALAN Review*, the journal of the young adult branch of the National Council of Teachers of English, and past president of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN), has edited a series of five volumes entitled, *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics* (1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2010). Kaywell asserts in the series introduction that “the classics are often too distant from our students’ experiences or the reading level is too difficult” (1993, p. ix). Her series describes instructional units that use young adult texts in tandem with classics to scaffold understanding of literary techniques and themes. The 2010 edition in the series includes a section on developing a world literature course using young adult literature. Kaywell remarks that, “my students learn to appreciate diversity” as a result of reading and studying world literature (2010, p. ix).

Similarly, Kelly Gallagher (2009), author and full-time high school English teacher in California, contends that, in his experience, a steady diet of the “difficult classics” without a variety of other texts will “turn students off” to reading (p. 44). Gallagher has coined the term “readicide” to name what is happening in high school classrooms: “the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools” (2009, p. 2). Gallagher references research findings that point to growing adolescent aliteracy, cited in a 2006 publication from the National Council of Teachers of English, *NCTE Principles of Adolescent Literacy*.
Reform. The NCTE publication cites the following studies: the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showing that secondary school students are reading below expected levels; the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, reporting that literacy scores of high school graduates dropped between 1992 and 2003; continuing, significant achievement gaps between racial/ethnic and socio-economic groups as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics; and the 2005 ACT College Readiness Benchmark for Reading report that only half the students taking the ACT demonstrated readiness for college-level reading (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006, p. 4). Gallagher blames an increased emphasis on standardized testing, decreased “authentic reading experiences” such as sustained-silent reading, and both “over-teaching” and “under-teaching” of books by teachers (2009, pp. 4-5). “For many students, academic reading, though incredibly important, has become their only reading” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 4). Gallagher asserts that students need “authentic reading,” such as newspapers, magazines, blogs, and high interest novels (2009, p. 29). He describes the effects of the imbalance between academic and authentic reading:

By the time they walk into my ninth-grade class, they have become sick of reading. I would tire of reading too if I was only encouraged to read difficult classics. I am not arguing against teaching classic literature. There is a real value in challenging students with longer, difficult texts. However, when academic reading is the only kind of reading put on our students’ plates, readicide occurs. (Gallager, 2009, p. 44)

Exacerbating the challenges of classics, the high school canon is seen by Wolk (2010) of Northeastern Illinois University, as outdated and lacking diversity. Wolk
echoed Applebee’s (1996) research by informally surveying dozens of middle and high school students and, more formally, a class of twenty-two college students, about their school reading. His students named a nearly identical list of classic titles compared to Applebee’s 1988 survey, revealing essentially no change in the high school reading curriculum in the past two decades (Wolk, 2010, p. 12). “When looking at what students are required to read in school in 2010, it might as well be 1960” (2010, p. 10). Wolk finds this “status quo” curriculum to be problematic in several ways. He asserts, “what students read should be determined by why they read in school” (2010, p. 10). If the goal is to produce workers “capable of reading a corporate manual,” then textbooks and classics will teach the comprehension necessary for that role. However, if, as Wolk argues, “we want to nurture lifelong readers and thinkers, to cultivate social responsibility, to make reading relevant to the 21st century, and to bring joy to reading, then the status quo will not suffice” (2010, p. 10). He further states that educators have a profound responsibility to provide “new and invigorating texts” to engage students and to represent contemporary ideas, events, and people. We would not dream of requiring our students to use the technology of 1960 (Wolk, 2010, p. 10). Wolk asserts that the effect of this dated reading list on students is “to teach kids to hate reading and to see education as irrelevant” (2010, p. 10). As students grow to dislike reading, they often learn to play the “school reading game: . . . read only what you need to get by” (2010, p. 10). The accessibility online of free resources that summarize, condense, and review the classics makes it even easier to avoid engaged reading or to not read at all.

A second objection that Wolk (2010) has to the typical high school reading list of classics is the lack of diversity in authors and characters. Wolk asserts that most works
found commonly in the high school English curriculum are written by white males and feature white, heterosexual protagonists. “Students see more diversity watching baseball on TV than they do in their school reading” (Wolk, 2010, p. 12). The top ten school-assigned titles, with a three-way tie at the end, named by Wolk’s students are nearly identical to Applebee’s list of two decades earlier:


Among these works, only one – To Kill a Mockingbird – is written by a female author. All of the authors are white and of Western European descent. Scout of To Kill a Mockingbird and Juliet of Romeo and Juliet are the only predominant female characters (Wolk, 2010, p. 12).

Not only do the most-often assigned classics lack ethnic and gender diversity, half in the list above also feature adult protagonists facing adult problems. Wolk (2010) argues like Gallo (2001) that teens are more likely to engage with stories about characters their own age that are confronting problems similar to theirs (Wolk, 2010, p. 12).

Multiple scholars describe the challenges of using classic literature with teens. The characters and situations of the classics are remote, and the texts lack the diversity of contemporary society. American teens read less outside of school now than in the past,
yet the typical high school English curriculum remains nearly unchanged from its origins. Literacy experts are challenging educators in the field to look beyond the traditional high school reading curriculum in order to engage today’s students.

**Research about Young Adult Literature**

Scholarly research about young adult literature is in its infancy. Hunt (1996) of the College of Charleston surveyed what was, in 1996, the current status of the field of young adult literature. Like Herz and Gallo (2005), Nilsen, et al. (2013), and Bucher & Hinton (2014), Hunt identifies the birth of contemporary young adult literature in the 1960s with Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1967) and Zindel’s *The Pigman* (1968) (Hunt, 1996, p. 4). YAL came of age in the 1980s and 1990s with the publication of textbooks about young adult literature, the inclusion of young adult literature courses in college curricula for secondary education students, and the proliferation of scholarly journals that include or focus entirely on issues connected to YAL (*English Journal* and *The ALAN Review* from NCTE, IRA’s *SIGNAL*, *Horn Book*, *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, *Children’s Literature in Education*, *The Lion and the Unicorn* and others).

Nevertheless, as of 1996, Hunt found little theoretical research about young adult literature. She names several possible reasons for this gap. One reason may be the relative youth of YAL (Hunt, 1996, p. 5). Another reason may be the view of many scholars that YAL is a subgenre of children’s literature (Hunt, 1996, p. 4). A third possibility is an approach to publishing and marketing young adult books with an emphasis on popularity: “the young adult books being reviewed and written about are not on the bookstore shelves, and those on the bookstore shelves are not being written about or reviewed” (Hunt, 1996, p. 5). Furthermore, many YA titles become outdated quickly when language
and dialog is written to capture what is current usage with teens (Hunt, 1996, p. 6). Hunt also acknowledges that the frequent threat of censorship of young adult books, which so often address social taboos, is “a diversion” to scholars “who might otherwise theorize the field” (1996, p. 6).

Hazlett, Johnson, & Hayn (2009) found a lack of quantitative research in journals devoted to YAL (The ALAN Review, SIGNAL, The English Journal, Voices from the Middle, Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy). Like Hunt (1996), Hazlett et al. (2009) suggest that “marketing may be one culprit in the widespread perception of young adult literature as “less than” other literature” (p. 1 of 6). The lack of a consistent definition of YAL contributes to the “confusing and varied placement of young adult titles in stores, websites, or libraries” (2009, p. 2 of 6). Furthermore, Hazlett et al. assert that despite teacher preparation standards from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) that support knowledge and use of children’s and young adult literature, “there is no guarantee that such courses will be offered or that the [preservice] students will have the option of using YA literature in their public school classrooms” (2009, p. 2 of 6). If classic works of literature continue to be the main focus in secondary classrooms, young adult literature will receive little attention from teachers or researchers (Hazlett et al., 2009, p. 2 of 6).

More recently, Hayn et al. (2011) identified research published in peer-reviewed journals available through the ERIC, MLA, and Academic Search Complete databases. The authors found that most articles about young adult or adolescent literature (both terms were used in the research) focus on textual analysis, author interviews,
bibliographies, and book reviews. They identified only twenty-seven empirical studies published in the years 2000-2010. *The ALAN Review and The Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy* were the predominant sources for scholarly research on young adult literature. Among the research articles, Hayn et al. found that about one-third of the articles examined student attitudes when engaging with young adult literature (2011, p. 178). These studies varied in focus, including, for example, multicultural education, student responses to specific texts, and the use of video conferencing and online chat rooms to engage students in discussion about literature.

Other studies looked at teacher and pre-service teacher attitudes toward young adult literature (Hayn et al., 2011, p. 179). The research methodologies were diverse, including surveys, ethnographies, analysis of syllabi, and teaching strategies. The authors propose that great opportunity exists for further research in the use of YAL in the classroom in both instruction and assessment. They note that there is very little in the academic literature about “the transaction that occurs when YAL is taught in a classroom setting” (Hayn et al., 2011, p. 177). Nonetheless, the study concludes that with continued research, “advocates of YAL can find support for the continued use of the genre in curriculum design” and “evidence exists that could convince those who doubt the efficacy of adolescent literature in English language arts education” (Hayn, 2011, p. 179).

Hayn et al. (2011) call upon educational researchers to focus their efforts on empirical research of YAL, examining student learning in the classroom (p. 176). According to Hayn et al., “we know much about what good books are available, but we know little about what actually happens when teens read young adult novels” (2011, p. 177). The authors suggest research about the transactions between teachers and students,
students and students, and readers and texts when using YAL (2011, p. 177). Educators who believe in the value of YAL “need validation for their stance in a solid body of research drawn from the field,” and so far that validation is not available (2011, p. 177). Hayn et al. recommend both quantitative and qualitative studies (2011, p. 180).

I replicated the database search of Hayn et al. (2011) by using the same search terms (young adult literature, adolescent literature) in the ERIC, MLA, and Academic Search Complete databases for the years 2011-2017. This search yielded sixteen results, including the Hayn et al. (2011) study. Among the results was a mix quantitative and qualitative studies. Of the sixteen studies, six focused on the preparation of teachers in pre-service and in-service programs. Four studies analyzed the content of specific young adult titles, one for sociological aspects of portrayals of girls and sports, one for treatment of sexuality in young adult fiction, one for portrayal of disabilities, and one examining how the concept of peace is portrayed in Turkish young adult literature. Another four studies examined pedagogical approaches using young adult literature. These studies focused on specific instructional strategies and contexts; namely, use of digital role-playing, literacy instruction for students with cognitive disabilities, teaching with graphic novels, and an extra-curricular book club using graphic novels.

Ivey’s and Johnston’s (2013) study of student engagement in classrooms using an independent reading program of self-selected and self-paced works of young adult literature was cited in two of the three databases. Similarly, Hayn et al.’s (2011) survey of the research cited earlier also appeared in the results of two of the three databases.

Born in the 1960s, young adult literature is relatively young; thus, the research into its place in literature and in the classroom is equally young and relatively sparse. The
field is wide open to explore and examine the uses of young adult literature in the secondary classroom. Additional research is needed to examine the effectiveness of YAL in supporting high school students’ reading engagement and comprehension.

**Advocacy for Pairing YAL with Classics**

Perhaps recognizing the firm foothold of classic literature in the high school curriculum, several literacy experts describe the potential outcomes of pairing young adult and classic literature.

Bright (2011) argues that young adult literature used with middle school students can be an effective means of stimulating younger teens’ interest in the classic texts that are likely to be assigned in high school. Specifically, Bright (2011) analyzed a sampling of YAL that contained allusions to classic literature. She identified twenty-five young adult novels published in the previous twenty years that had significant links to one or more classic texts frequently taught in high schools. Bright uses the term “intertextuality” to refer to the links, or “common spaces,” between texts (2011, p. 39). Within the study, a “significant link” indicates that “a text had to engage with the canon in some noticeable way, or draw attention to the significance of a canonical inclusion in the contemporary novel” (Bright, 2011, p. 40). Bright (2011) proposes that the process of intertextual analysis may bridge students’ understanding of both YA and canonical texts, and it may generate greater interest in the canonical texts. Understanding the references to a canonical text in a young adult novel creates purpose for future reading of the canonical work. It also prepares younger students by building their background knowledge and developing their “literary competence” (Bright, 2011, p. 39). Bright presents the example of the young adult novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999) and its canonical
partner *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1850). In *Speak*, Anderson includes multiple references to Hawthorne’s work, some more explicit than others. The main character of *Speak*, a ninth-grader named Melinda, recognizes that she, like Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne, is an outcast of her society (as cited in Bright, 2011, p. 42).

Using multiple examples of interconnected texts, Bright (2011) demonstrates a clear instructional strategy for pairing young adult and canonical works of literature. This approach, she asserts, takes young readers beyond traditional literary analysis to a more engaged and critical reading. The process of intertextuality will support teen readers to “engage in critical thinking to form relationships between classical and contemporary texts, and to view reading as a worthwhile and meaningful experience” (Bright, 2011, p. 45).

Bucher and Hinton (2014) assert that young adult literature should not be considered only as transitional literature; rather, YAL is valuable reading for its own sake (p. 12) because it addresses “important adolescent issues” and reflects the “interests and concerns” of teens (p. 12). Nevertheless, Bucher and Hinton acknowledge the power of YAL “to provide the perfect bridge to help adolescents cross from literature for children into the traditional literary canon that is studied in high school and college” (2014, p. 12). The bridging power of YAL comes from its being generally shorter and less structurally complex than adult literature, while “often well-written and tightly constructed” (Bucher & Hinton, 2014, p. 12). Young adult novels can provide an excellent means of teaching the elements of literature and its conventions, paving the way for the study of more complex works.
In response to the NCTE (2012) resolution on Teacher Expertise and Common Core State Standards, Milner (2013) of Wake Forest University describes several young adult texts that parallel classic texts in the use of innovative and complex literary techniques. The NCTE statement calls for “Instruction that reflects the importance of students’ academic, social, and emotional needs; background knowledge; and cultures . . . materials that respond to students’ interests and that broaden and deepen students’ understanding;” and “experiences with multiple forms of literacy” (National Council of Teachers of English, 2012, p. 24, as cited in Milner, 2013, p. 81). Milner praises the resolution as a description of excellent teaching and a “call to consider the relationship between literature’s form and its complexity” (2013, p. 81). He contends that while complex literary techniques and innovations can be explored using canonical texts, “even better results are achievable using adolescent literature” because YAL is “more in tune with the lives of students of our day” (2013, p. 81). Milner discusses eight specific literary techniques with examples for each of a classic and a young adult text through which the specific technique can be examined. For example, Melville’s (1851/2013) classic Moby-Dick is a novel that includes scenes utilizing conventions of drama such as soliloquies and stage directions. Hesse’s (1997) young adult work, Out of the Dust, is a novel written as an extended poem (as cited in Milner, 2013 p. 82). Twain’s (1885) Adventures of Huckleberry Finn employs an unreliable narrator in the voice of Huck Finn (Milner, 2013, p. 82). The young adult novel, Crispin, by Avi (2002), similarly presents narration through the young adolescent narrator, Crispin, who, like Huck, experiences a physical journey that changes his understanding of his family, home, core beliefs, and self (as cited in Milner, 2013, p. 82). Milner concludes that teachers of literature should
be mindful of the developmental stages of their students and their capacities to fully engage with the complexities of various texts. “We know that students can actually recognize the formal departures of adolescent literature and understand its complexity more clearly when they are not initially pushed to their intellectual limits reading highly sophisticated canonical texts” (Milner, 2013, p. 85).

Using YAL and canonical texts together in the secondary classroom enables teachers to take advantage of the positive attributes of both types, according to Rybakova and Roccanti (2016). By definition (see Chapter 1), canonical texts are recognized as having literary value and lasting quality. Young adult literature appeals to teens because of its contemporary and diverse characters and situations. Strategically using young adult literature to scaffold understanding of canonical texts may satisfy those who value the canon while providing teens with engaging, accessible works to bridge comprehension (Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016, p. 34).

In sum, advocates of using YAL with classic, or canonical, literature describe many potential connections between the two. Some YAL explicitly connects to classic literature through intertextual references. Other works of YAL may have similar structures or themes. The appeal of YAL to teen readers due to its contemporary and relevant content may help students transition to a more challenging classic text with similar themes or structures. Finally, students are more likely to experience success grappling with complex literary devices and/or themes while reading a young adult work that matches their developmental level.
How YAL is Being Used in Classrooms

Young adult literature studies describe a variety of uses of YAL in classrooms. Offering a range of young adult titles to students for independent, self-selected reading may increase engagement and capacity for critical reading. Interdisciplinary units using young adult literature to support content instruction may deepen students’ understanding of content area concepts. Young adult literature can also be read for its own sake, engaging students in contemporary issues.

Ivey and Johnston (2013) conducted a yearlong study in four eighth-grade middle school classrooms examining the impact on learning and engagement of “self-selected, self-paced reading of compelling young adult literature” (p. 255). The results raise questions about traditional approaches to teaching English/Language Arts using canonical texts.

The teachers participating in the study intentionally established a curriculum wherein the students selected for themselves the young adult literature they would read for class. The goal was to support “engaged reading” with “student autonomy and relevance” (Ivey & Johnston, 2013, p. 255). Young adult literature was made available to students in the belief that it is “inherently relevant in that by design, [YAL is] responsive to the emotional and cultural challenges young people face in their everyday lives” (Ivey & Johnston, 2013, p. 257). The study cites Rosenblatt (1983) who argued that texts with characters whose lives are relevant to readers support dialogic relationships and engagement, and Coats (2011), who posits that YAL reflects and is part of a “constantly shifting cultural dialogue regarding what we value” (p. 320; as cited in Ivey & Johnston, 2013, p. 257).
Ivey and Johnston (2013) found that student participants reported increased reading for extended periods of time, including outside of school (p. 260), choosing to read over other activities. Students also reported intensive involvement with characters and situations, and “widespread talk inspired by students’ experiences with books” (p. 261). The study found impacts on the students’ perceptions of relationships, identity, happiness, and agency (2013, pp. 262-263), as well as increased intellectual curiosity, expanded knowledge of the world, wider reading interests, increased capacity for critical reading, and improvement in writing (2013, pp. 264-265). Notably, the students identified the importance of the selection of young adult literature that was made available (2013, p. 265). The implications of these findings, according to Ivey and Johnston, strongly support the use of relevant, meaningful literature offered in an environment of extended, independent and intensive reading in place of the more common and traditional approach of teacher-selected and regulated reading of canonical texts (2013, p. 272).

Bull, Dulaney, North-Coleman, Kaplan, & Stover (2013) describe an interdisciplinary unit on the theme of change using young adult literature. The authors assert that YAL can be “a vehicle through which adolescents learn more about themselves and their changing world” (2013, p. 121). Several titles are recommended for use in the content areas of fine arts, visual arts, history, and science. Bull et al. (2013) state that the texts they recommend are “rich in depth and detail . . . will foster deeper understanding of the concept of change” and will provide an environment for “rich discussions” (p. 124).

Milner (2005) similarly advocates for the use of young adult literature for its rich content and relevance to students’ lives. Milner compares several YA titles to
traditionally used canonical works, arguing that the YA texts can serve similar purposes in exploring social issues in a more contemporary context that will “speak to the lives of today’s students” (2005, p. 51). Milner names YAL as “outlier” literature; that is, outside the canon and concerned with “the social, economic, and political and religious dimensions of contemporary life” (2005, p. 49). He names multiple young adult titles that address these dimensions through adolescent characters and contemporary settings and situations.

Whether used as the primary literature available to students in school or used to support or supplement canonical literature, YAL advocates argue that it may be at least as effective, if not more so, than canonical literature in engaging students in classroom instruction because of its contemporaneity and relevance to teens’ lives.

Theoretical Framework

Transactional Theory

Teachers are tasked with finding appropriate texts to use with their students to teach the reading process and eventually the interpretation of literature. Teachers may also hope to nurture enjoyment of reading as a lifelong pursuit. The transactional theory of Louise Rosenblatt (1978, 1998), educator, researcher, and Professor of English Education at New York University from 1948-1972, informs our thinking about adolescent literacy in contemporary secondary school classrooms.

At the heart of Rosenblatt’s (1978, 1998) theory is the “transaction,” or process that occurs between reader and text and which is unique to each reader and text: “transaction named a developing event in which a particular reader and a particular text, each conditioning the other, contributed to evoking meaning” (Rosenblatt, 1998, p. 890).
Reader and text are necessary for a transaction to occur, and each reader and each text produces a unique transaction. Hayn et al. (2011) point out in their survey of research about YAL that little has been written about the transactions that occur when students read young adult literature. How do readers make meaning from young adult texts? What kinds of meaning are made? This gap in the research may be an inhibiting factor in teachers’ decisions about using young adult literature.

Rosenblatt (1998) recognizes the desire of teachers to select “good” books for students and the hesitation that some teachers may feel about using works outside of the accepted high school canon. In response, Rosenblatt describes a teen reader’s “transactions” with a text:

Yet an adolescent girl or boy absorbed in reading that [young adult] text, drawing on a very different linguistic-experiential reservoir [i.e., different from a more experienced reader] and bringing different needs to the transaction, may be living through a valuable aesthetic transaction, discovering that reading can yield heightened experience of people and their relationships. The text may offer linkages with the reader’s own experiences, preoccupations, or anxieties. The very lack of complexity may make possible construction of a coherent, resonant evocation. Such engagement prepares the ground for growth in competence [emphases added] . . . Perhaps we should ask, “good in what respects for whom under what circumstances?” [when asking if a text is “good”]. (1998, pp. 914-915)

In other words, when evaluating a text, Rosenblatt argues that any text may impact a given reader in ways that are different from, but no less valuable than,
the impact on another reader. For example, a work of young adult fiction that is considered by a teacher to be less complex and of less literary value than a classic work recognized by the literary establishment, may still evoke a valuable aesthetic transaction in an adolescent reader precisely because the text is less complex and therefore more engaging, more accessible, more connected to that adolescent reader’s life experience (Rosenblatt, 1998, p. 915). Transactional theory speaks to the practitioner about recognizing and honoring the life experiences of students and their unique interactions with texts; i.e., meeting students where they are (Rosenblatt, 1998, p. 886).

Adolescents bring experiences, thoughts, memories, and attitudes toward reading that are naturally different from those that adults may bring because of the facts of their age and life experiences. The reader also makes choices, conscious or unconscious, stemming from experience, about how to approach a text. Rosenblatt calls this approach a “stance” (1998, p. 893). The reader’s stance determines the degrees of cognitive and affective positioning brought to a reading experience.

Among the educators and literacy experts who advocate for the use of young adult literature (Bright, 2011; Broz, 2011; Bucher & Hinton, 2014; Gallo, 2001; Glaus, 2014; Herz & Gallo, 2005; Kaywell, 2010; Miller & Slifkin, 2010; Stover, 2003; Wolk, 2010), the fundamental difference in the life experiences of adolescents and adults is a primary reason for recommending texts that offer characters, settings, situations, and themes to which teens can more easily make connections. The stance of an adolescent reader is likely to be significantly different than the stance of an adult reader.
Rosenblatt envisions a continuum on which any reading “event” falls between the ends of “efferent” reading (focusing on information and facts) or “aesthetic” reading (focusing on feelings and thoughts) (1998, pp. 893-894). The reader’s stance determines the mix of efferent-aesthetic transactions. Efferent and aesthetic reading are not always separated:

Competent reading requires the ability to handle both cognitive and affective aspects in a continuous process of choice, synthesis and organization. Growth in the ability to read means improvement in the capacity to relate to the text, to carry on the making of meaning, in ways that are relevant to the text, the situation, the purpose, or the reading event.” (Rosenblatt, 1998, p. 898)

Thus, Rosenblatt’s conception of the construction of meaning during reading is a highly complex process involving multiple factors stemming from each reader and each text (1998, p. 898). The reader must be able to make connections to the text to develop his/her reading skill.

Finally, Rosenblatt concludes about the importance of the concept of reading stance for its application to education. Rosenblatt declares that the ability to read critically, to make “meaning in transaction with the text” on the efferent-aesthetic continuum, is essential to the development of citizens of a democracy (1998, p. 918). Through the teaching of literature, we “are called upon to understand the human consequences of personal behavior” (1998, p. 918).

For educators undertaking the teaching of literature, then, a deep understanding of the complex reading process is critical to supporting students in their development as readers and thinkers. Following Rosenblatt’s theory, it is also critical for literacy
educators to consider a wide body of literature to meet the varying needs of their adolescent students, looking outside of the standard curriculum of classics to young adult literature.

**Scaffolding**

Scholars and practitioners who recommend using young adult literature as a bridge to classic literature are describing an instructional approach known as “scaffolding.” In construction, a scaffold is a temporary structure used by workers as they move up (or down) a building to reach the places where they are working. In education, the term *scaffolding* refers to the supports provided by the teacher to students to help them reach the next level of more complex learning.

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), describe scaffolding as a process “that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal that would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (p. 90). In a scaffolded task, the teacher designs or controls the elements of the task so that the student can focus initially on working out the steps of the problem “that are within his range of competence (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90). During this process, the teacher provides direction, maintains focus and direction in the problem-solving, brings attention to essential steps or concepts, provides feedback to the student, and may demonstrate potential solutions (Wood et al., 1976, p. 99).

The underlying concept of scaffolding is traced to the work of Vygotsky (1978) and his theory of the zone of proximal development. This zone of proximal development (ZPD) falls between a learner’s actual developmental level and his/her potential level (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). That is, the ZPD is the instructional level of a learner, where the teacher needs to concentrate instruction to move the learner to his/her next level of
learning. “The zone reveals a developmental continuum between what a child can do independently, representing his or her actual level of development, and what the child can do with assistance from others, representing the proximal level of development” (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Moll, 2014, p. 33).

Applied to instruction in a high school literature course, young adult literature can be understood as a scaffold because it may support a student in understanding a complex theme or literary device in a challenging (perhaps classic) work of literature that falls in a student’s potential developmental level. By first understanding the theme or device in a text that is in the student’s actual zone of development – e.g., a young adult text – the student is then better able to understand theme or literary devices when s/he grapples with a more challenging text. A young adult work is likely to present situations and language that are familiar to the typical high school reader so s/he will find the text relatively accessible when reading independently. The student can then develop his/her understanding of theme or literary device and be able to apply that understanding when reading a text that is more challenging – in the zone of proximal development -- due to its less familiar setting, situation, and/or vocabulary. This research study uses the young adult novel, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993), as a scaffold to the classic novel, *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994).

**Conclusion**

My review of the literature reveals a limited body of research on the uses and impacts of young adult literature in the classroom. Contemporary young adult literature is relatively young, recognized by scholars as a literature born in the late 1960s. This youth may be one factor contributing to the relative lack of research about YAL. Other
contributing factors may be a general conception of YAL as a subgenre of children’s literature, and/or publisher’s marketing tactics that promote titles not necessarily recognized by reviewers or other experts as high quality works; thus, YAL may not be widely recognized in the literacy field as worthy of research. Nonetheless, many literacy experts advocate for the use of young adult literature. Bright (2011), Bucher & Hinton (2014), Kaywell (2010), Milner (2013), and Rybakova & Roccanti (2016), among others, describe connections between young adult texts and classic works of literature, advocating for the use of YAL as a scaffold to challenging classics.

I propose to help offset the gap in the research literature about YAL by examining how a teacher and her students in one classroom perceive the students’ literacy learning outcomes and attitudes toward reading and literature when a young adult text is paired with a classic text. My proposed study is situated in Rosenblatt’s (1978, 1998) transactional theory of reading. Rosenblatt’s conception of the unique transaction that occurs between reader and text provides a window into the highly complex process of reading. She discusses the importance of the background knowledge that a reader brings to a text in facilitating his/her comprehension. Less experienced readers benefit from the scaffolding that is provided through a text that contains characters or themes that are relevant and familiar to the reader. Young adult literature, with its teen-centered content, has potential to provide this type of scaffolding to high school students who are developing as critical readers.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Statement of Purpose

This study explores the impact on students of reading a work of young adult literature paired with a work of classic literature in a high school English classroom. More specifically, I sought to observe the effects of the young adult-classic pairing on students’ literacy learning and on their attitudes about reading and books. The perspectives of the participating students and teacher are the primary data sources for understanding these effects. Exploring my research questions required spending time in a classroom, observing classroom practice and listening to the voices of participants. This chapter describes the research site, the theoretical framework supporting the research methods, data collection instruments and procedures, and limitations of the study. An explanation of the data collected and my analysis of that data follows in Chapter 4.

Theoretical Framework

For educators undertaking the teaching of literature, a deep understanding of the complex reading process is critical to supporting students in their development as readers and thinkers. My approach to this study is grounded in Rosenblatt’s (1978, 1998) transactional theory of reading. Rosenblatt identifies specific elements of the reading process that, when put together, produce a larger “reading effect,” or emerging understanding and conception of the text (1998, p. 887). These elements include the “evocation,” or sense of the text that arises from the interaction between reader and text (1998, pp. 886-888), the “transaction,” or process that occurs between reader and text and which is unique to each reader and text (1998, p. 890), and the reader’s “stance” (1998, p.
Along with the thoughts, memories, and experiences the reader brings to a text, s/he also makes choices, conscious or unconscious, stemming from experience, about how to approach a text (1998, p. 893). These choices and experiences contribute to stance. Adolescents bring experiences, thoughts, memories, and attitudes toward reading that are naturally different from those that adults may bring because of the facts of their age and life experiences. Among the educators and literacy experts who advocate for the use of young adult literature (Bright, 2011; Broz, 2011; Bucher & Hinton, 2014; Gallo, 2001; Glaus (2014); Herz & Gallo, 2005; Kaywell, 2010; Miller & Slifkin, 2010; Stover, 2003; Wolk, 2010), this fundamental difference in the life experiences of adolescents and adults is a primary reason for recommending texts that offer characters, settings, situations, and themes to which teens can more easily make connections.

Rosenblatt (1978, 1998) argues that to develop reading competency, a reader must continually build capacity to relate to the text and to engage with the text, or, in practical terms, build his/her background knowledge and experiences so that meaningful, relevant connections can be made to the text or “reading event” (1998, p. 898). Rosenblatt’s theory emphasizes the uniqueness of the reading experience for each reader. From this perspective, what is valuable to one reader may not be equally valuable to another, or may be valuable in a completely different way. The implications for curriculum are profound. Many high school students are likely to find a narrow curriculum of classic literature from the traditional American high school canon to be inaccessible. To build adolescents’ reading competency as Rosenblatt describes, we need to provide diverse literature to which students can make meaningful connections from their life experiences. Studying the reading experiences of adolescents with young adult literature may provide
insights into how reading competency develops and how classroom teachers might select
texts for their students.

Bounding the Case

Research Design

The intent of this case study is to document the perceptions of one teacher and her
students about the impact of an instructional unit using a young adult novel as a scaffold
to a classic novel. Merriam (2009) defines a case study as an “in-depth description and
analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). A single unit or entity, that is, a case, is the focus
of investigation, and the boundaries, or limits of the case, are clearly identified (2009, p.
40). This study focuses on one high school English class comprised of thirteen students
in their third (junior) year, and their teacher, from January to April, the third quarter of
the school year. More specifically, four of the thirteen students and the classroom teacher
are primary informants through interviews. Thus, the unit of analysis, as Merriam terms it
(2009, p.41), is the group of four interviewed students and their teacher. The boundaries
of this case include the setting, participants, and time frame of the instructional unit that
was observed. Each of these elements has specific parameters.

A classroom of students – even a small one such as the site of this study – offers a
plethora of variables. Students bring unique experiences, knowledge, and attitudes. The
teacher brings her own set of experiences with previous classes and her hopes for the
current group; instruction may be planned but shift with the needs and interests of
students on any given day. A fire drill may interrupt a lesson, or the absence of one
student may alter the social dynamics of the group, to name only a few of the possible
influences on learning experiences.
The case study approach supports exploration of “complex social units” such as a high school classroom (Merriam, 2009, p. 50). Through detailed, holistic description, a case study can be useful in telling the story of a specific place and time. Merriam asserts that “much can be learned from a particular case” and that the case study design is “particularly useful for studying educational innovations, evaluating programs, and informing policy” (2009, p. 51). The readers of a case study may apply the findings of a particular case to a similar situation or experience. “It is the reader, not the researcher, who determines what can apply to his or her context” (Merriam, 2009, p. 51). I judged the case study approach to be a clear match for my inquiry into the effects of pairing young adult and classic literature in one high school English classroom.

**Role of the Researcher**

My interest in the potential uses of young adult literature (YAL) in secondary English classrooms began some nineteen years before this study took place. I earned a Master’s Degree in Library and Information Science in 1997. While studying for that degree, I was introduced to the depth and breadth of young adult literature and realized that I had been missing something very important in the prior years while teaching high school English. I spent eight years, from 1997 to 2005, as a high school Library/Media Specialist, growing my knowledge of YAL and observing its impact on many of the students who sought pleasure-reading materials in the school library. I enrolled in the graduate program in literacy education at the University of Maine in 2004 with the intention of eventually researching and writing about young adult literature. After a major career shift to the position of public school district Director of Curriculum, the pace of
my graduate studies slowed, but I never lost my passion for young adult literature and my interest in exploring its uses beyond pleasure-reading for teens.

In the fall of 2015, I was finally ready to begin my research. I needed to find a high school English teacher willing and able to devote several weeks of instruction to my proposed teaching unit. Although a few of my former high school colleagues may have been willing, I wanted to avoid potential bias to the greatest extent possible. I reconnected with a Teacher Consultant colleague from the Maine Writing Project (MWP). Diane (not her real name) is a veteran English teacher in a small, rural, public high school. In addition to working together in the MWP, Diane had taken a graduate course in young adult literature through the University of Maine for which I was one of two adjunct instructors. I knew, therefore, that Diane had knowledge of YAL, was open to its use in the high school English curriculum, and that she was a well-regarded teacher-leader in her school.

When I approached her about the study, Diane was intrigued by the concept of intentionally selecting a work of young adult literature as a thematic pairing and scaffold to a classic novel. We met to select the literature and to outline the plan of instruction. Diane chose a particular class of juniors, English III, as the study participants. Because her school’s curriculum focuses on American literature in the junior year, Diane first considered the options available to her for the classic work. These options included F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), or John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* (1937/1994). The class had read Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953) earlier in the year.
Diane selected Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* (1937/1994), having experienced success in the past in engaging students in the short but powerful novel of friendship and the American Dream. She believed that of the available works, *Of Mice and Men* would be the most accessible to her students. The English III class included students who were strong readers as well as a few students with significant reading difficulties. Diane judged the sometimes archaic language and complex sentence structures of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) to be inaccessible to several of her students. Her past experiences teaching *The Great Gatsby* (1925) suggested that although students could access the language, the themes and setting were too remote for many of her students. That left *Of Mice and Men*. Of all the classics available in her school, Diane felt that the language and sentence structures of Steinbeck’s short novel were accessible to all of her students. However, the novel presents complex characters facing ethical dilemmas with no clear resolution. Thus, while students might read and comprehend *Of Mice and Men* without benefit of a young adult novel acting as a scaffold, Diane and I agreed that their analysis of the work might be significantly richer as a result of the preparation a young adult text could provide.

We next researched young adult novels to pair with the classic, looking for thematic connections. We offered the students a choice of two young adult novels for the study: *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* by Chris Crutcher (1993), and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2007). I read brief excerpts and described the books to the students, who then voted on their first choice. The majority vote was for *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, a work of realistic fiction that addresses themes of friendship and betrayal, responsibility, survival, and appearance v. reality.
My role in the classroom was primarily that of observer as participant (Merriam, 2009, p. 124-125). According to Merriam, the observer in this role focuses on information gathering first while participation in the group is secondary. The observer’s role as researcher is known to the group, and the observer may develop a relationship to the group members that allows him/her to “establish an insider’s identity” (Adler and Adler, 1998, as cited in Merriam, 2009, pp. 124-125). Diane introduced me to her students with an explanation of my research intentions. I spoke directly with the students to describe my study, my desire to survey and interview the students to gather information, and to observe classroom activities and interactions. I was present in the classroom on eleven occasions over the course of approximately ten weeks, the duration of the unit of study.

During class visits, I sat in a student desk, listened to instruction, observed student responses and interactions, and took notes on my laptop computer. Diane maintained her role as classroom teacher throughout the unit; I did not present any material or provide any instruction. On a few occasions, Diane invited me into the class discussion, and on one occasion when students were paired for discussion, she asked me to work with a student so that the pairings would be even. I became quite familiar with the routines and culture of the class during the ten-week study. The students apparently became accustomed to my presence, as well; about two-thirds of the way through the study, I was unable to visit the class for a period of almost two weeks due to various scheduling conflicts. Diane reported that the students became concerned and asked about me. This level of acceptance corresponds to the notion of an “insider’s identity” in which the observer interacts closely with the observed group’s members, but does not participate in
the central activities of the “core group” (Adler and Adler, 1998, as cited in Merriam, 2009, pp. 124-125). Diane maintained her role as classroom teacher throughout the study; had I acted as teacher at some point, my role may have shifted to a more active role as group member. However, my activities remained on the periphery in that I observed and only occasionally and briefly participated directly in classroom instruction. Diane planned all instructional activities.

Site Selection

The selection of Midlands High School (a pseudonym) began with Diane’s willingness to participate in my research study. The site was attractive for two additional reasons. First, it is my hope that this study provides results that are useful to practitioners, especially the high school English teachers, literacy specialists, library/media specialists, and curriculum directors of Maine. Midlands High School in many ways typifies rural Maine public high schools. Part of a “regional school unit” or RSU, the high school serves students from several contiguous small communities. The Maine Department of Education Data Warehouse (n.d.) dynamic Enrollment report provides a whole-school enrollment for 2015-2016 of 339 students, with 46% identified as socio-economically disadvantaged and 10% identified for Special Education services. Gender and ethnicity data provided on the school’s 2015-2016 NCLB Report Card (Maine Department of Education, n.d.) indicate that for an 11th grade class of 87 students in 2013-2014, 88% were Caucasian/White, 56% were female and 44% were male. The Maine Department of Education Data Warehouse (n.d.) dynamic Enrollment report for the state as a whole (PK-12) indicates 48% female students and 52% male, 91% as Caucasian/White, 46% as socio-economically disadvantaged, and 17% identified for Special Education services.
Diane’s English III class was comprised of 13 students, 5 males and 8 females, all Caucasian/White with 2 (15%) receiving Special Education services. Maine’s rural schools are ethnically homogenous but diverse in terms of poverty and wealth, struggling learners and high achievers. Midlands High School and Diane’s class are demographically representative of the state.

The second reason that Midlands High School was appealing is its relative proximity to my workplace. Midlands is a thirty-minute drive from the school where my office is located. This meant that I was able to visit the school to observe the class much more frequently than I would have been able to with a more distant location. The frequent visits (approximately once per week throughout the study) enabled me to come to know the students and classroom culture in depth and to collect rich field notes.

**Participants**

Participants in this study included Diane, the classroom teacher, who was a primary informant, and the thirteen students in her English III course. Diane, who has a B.A. in Communications, minors in English and Theater, and more than forty hours of graduate work, has taught English at Midlands for thirty years. As previously noted, I had worked several years earlier with Diane in the Maine Writing Project and in a graduate level course. Diane was familiar with the many potential uses of YAL in the classroom and I knew her to be thoughtful and open-minded.

All thirteen of Diane’s students completed required consent forms and subsequently participated in the initial survey given to students. Six students were invited by Diane to participate in one-on-one interviews with me. Four of the six students agreed and thus became primary informants, leaving the other eight students as secondary
informants. Two interviews per student of the primary informants were conducted: one took place after the completion of the young adult novel and the other after the completion of the classic novel. Three students, Hannah, Jordan, and Maggie (pseudonyms) were female and one, Danny, (a pseudonym), was male. Two of the four interviewed, Jordan and Maggie, were avid readers and leaders in classroom discussions. Hannah described herself as having recently become a reader. She participated actively in classroom activities. Danny was a young man who openly and unabashedly stated that he was not a reader, did not like to read, and was not particularly skilled at reading. He received support from the high school’s literacy specialist outside of regular English class. The students selected for interviews provided a representative sample of reading habits and interests, academic performance, and classroom participation as characterized by their teacher, Diane, and my observations during the first four weeks of the study. All four students seemed very comfortable with being interviewed.

**Institutional Review Board**

An application for this study was submitted to and approved by my institution’s review board. I obtained permission from the principal of Midlands High School to conduct the research at the school. Informed consent (Appendix A) was acquired from the parent(s)/guardian(s) of students in the case study class. If consent had not been obtained from a parent/guardian, that student would have been eliminated from the survey and disqualified for interviews. Consent was obtained for all thirteen students. The consent form described the steps I would take to ensure confidentiality, including use of pseudonyms for all students, the teacher, and the high school itself. The form stated that documents would be secured in a locked file in my home office, while digital files would
be secured through encryption. Consent forms also noted the absence of any benefit to participants other than an opportunity to reflect on themselves as readers and learners. Limited risks of the study were identified as the potential of feeling uncomfortable with survey or interview questions. Finally, the consent form noted that participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. In addition to providing the consent forms to parents(s)/guardian(s), I discussed the purpose of the Institutional Review Board and the specifics of the consent form with students in the case study class.

**Pairing the Texts**

At the heart of this study is the intentional pairing of two thematically linked novels. John Steinbeck’s classic work, *Of Mice and Men* (1937/1994), tells the story of two drifters, George and Lennie, bound by friendship and a shared dream. Although the novel is just over 100 pages in length and tightly plotted, its Depression-era setting on the ranches of California, working-class dialect, and social mores are unfamiliar to and often challenging for high school students as they grapple to interpret characters’ motives. Furthermore, the novel poses complex moral dilemmas for its characters that require mature readers to fully appreciate and comprehend.

The young adult novel, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* by Chris Crutcher (1993), also tells a story of complex friendship. High school seniors Eric “Moby” Calhoune and Sarah Byrnes have been buddies since elementary school, surviving together the torments of bullies and perpetual outsider status. In some ways, this young adult work is more complex than Steinbeck’s classic. There are more characters and several interwoven subplots, and the novel is substantially longer at 295 pages. However, the contemporary
setting and teen-aged characters are readily recognizable to high school students, providing entrée to the complexities of character motive and theme.

Crutcher’s (1993) novel focuses on the friendship of Sarah Byrnes and Moby. Sarah entrusts Moby with a secret that he ultimately reveals to a few trusted adults. Sarah initially feels betrayed, but eventually comes to understand that Moby’s decision was made in her best interests. Similarly, *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) portrays a friendship between two men, George and Lennie, drifters who travel together. Lennie is cognitively disabled. As a result of a complex web of circumstances, George feels compelled to kill Lennie before a lynch mob can hunt him down for the death of Curley’s wife. Diane and I posited that by having students first read *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* and analyze theme through character development, the students would more readily recognize and comprehend the development of similar themes in *Of Mice and Men*. That is, the young adult novel would act as a scaffold to the classic work and aid students in interpreting the terrible decision that George is forced to make.

As discussed in Chapter 2, “scaffolding” refers to the supports provided by the teacher to students to help them reach the next level of more complex learning. The teacher designs or controls the elements of a task so that the student can focus initially on working out the steps of the problem “that are within his range of competence (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90). During this process, the teacher provides direction, maintains focus and direction in the problem-solving, brings attention to essential steps or concepts, provides feedback to the student, and may demonstrate potential solutions (Wood et al., 1976, p. 99).
The young adult novel, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993), presents situations and language that are familiar to the typical high school reader so s/he is apt to find the text relatively accessible when reading independently. The student can then develop his/her understanding of theme or literary device and apply that understanding when reading a text that is more challenging due to its less familiar setting, situation, and mature theme, i.e., *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994). Scaffolding reading comprehension through increasingly complex texts enacts Rosenblatt’s (1978) conception of the interplay of a reader’s experiences and stance in evoking meaning from text.

The instructional unit spanned eleven weeks. Students already had some knowledge of *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993) from the book talk I had given. Diane began the unit by having students briefly journal, then discuss, in response to the prompt, “What are the ways authors use to help us learn about characters in their novels? Which method do you prefer; why?” Following the discussion, Diane explained the summative assessment for the young adult novel. Students would select four characters from the novel and trace the development of those characters, providing textual evidence with passages and page numbers supporting their descriptions and interpretations of the characters. The final product would be a presentation using a digital application such as Popplet, Storyboard That, or Google Presentation. This assessment prepared students for the later summative assessment for *Of Mice and Men*. Both assessments required students to trace the development of an idea – a character or a theme – throughout the novel, and to provide supporting textual evidence. The later assessment for *Of Mice and Men* added a layer of complexity by requiring students to trace the development of two themes.
Diane set up the scaffolded instruction by first constructing learning experiences for her students focused on potential themes in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993). Diane divided the students into four groups and gave each group a topic that had the potential to develop into a theme in the novel. The topics were heroism, appearance v. reality, accountability for one’s actions, and survival. Students worked together to identify examples of these theme ideas in the text, citing dialogue, events, and characters’ actions with specific page numbers. They used a graphic organizer to take notes with the theme idea in the center and examples extending from it. Having students search for evidence of these theme ideas in the young adult novel supported their understanding of characters, events, and authorial choices, setting the stage for similar analysis of the classic text, *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994).

Diane next created a scaffold by preparing students to understand setting and situation in *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994). Recognizing societal norms for the treatment of persons with cognitive disabilities is critical to comprehension of Steinbeck’s character, Lennie. Diane approached this aspect of the novel by asking students to read and discuss an article about the enforced sterilization of people considered by the U.S. government to be “unfit” to give birth. This practice was common for decades in the early and mid-20th century in some 35 states (Buckley, 2001). The character, Lennie, who is intellectually impaired, travels with and is protected by George. The paternalistic relationship might not seem unusual in today’s world. Diane wanted to ensure that students understood at the outset how unusual it was for Lennie to be out in the working world rather than confined to an institution. The contrast to Crutcher’s
(1993) character, Sarah Byrnes, and her admittance to a psychiatric facility where she is protected and receives medical treatment for mental illness, is striking.

The summative assessment following study of the classic novel, as noted above, was a double-entry journal piece, “Two Themes, One Story” (Appendix B). Students were asked to select two “theme ideas” from Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) that could be developed into “theme statements.” Choices offered were “Loneliness or Isolation,” “Friendship,” “Powerlessness,” “Freedom and Confinement,” “Prejudice,” and “The American Dream.” For the journal, students were asked to identify a passage, or quotation, that they believed illustrated or conveyed a selected theme, copy the passage on one side of the journal entry, then respond by “analyzing the effect of the quotation on the story, characters, and/or the theme” on the other side of the journal entry (Appendix B). The expectation was to select at least three passages for each theme idea from the beginning, middle, and end of the novel to adequately trace the development of the theme. Finally, students were asked to conclude the piece with an explanation of how the two selected themes connect, considering “such ideas as how and where the two themes interact and how they add depth or richness to the story” (Appendix B). The assignment was intended as a demonstration of proficiency in graduation standards for reading comprehension, reading interpretation, and the writing process. Through this summative assessment, Diane would gage her students’ depth of understanding of the classic novel.

Data Sources and Collection

Data collection began on January 29, 2016 and continued through April 5, 2016. I visited the English III classroom eleven times during that period, which encompassed the entire 3rd quarter and a few weeks of the 4th quarter of the Midlands High School calendar.
year. On nine of the eleven visits I collected observational field notes in the classroom in the midst of instruction. On the other two visits I interviewed student primary informants and the cooperating teacher. After each classroom visit, I reviewed field notes to contextualize and create a narrative description of the events and activities of the class. I then reflected in my research journal on the observations. At the beginning of the study, a survey of reading interests and experiences was given to participating students. Semi-structured interviews of four students took place at the mid-point and end of the instructional unit. The teacher was interviewed three times using a semi-structured approach. Analytic memos and a research journal provided space for reflection and interpretation.

Interviews

The words of the student-primary informants and the teacher are the primary unit of data examined for this research study. I sought to elicit primary informants’ thoughts, feelings, memories, and intentions – things which cannot be observed directly. An interview, or “conversation with a purpose” (Dexter, 1970, p. 136, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 88), seemed the best way to gather information about participants’ attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and reading transaction experiences. I chose a semi-structured approach (Merriam, 2009, p. 89) with a set of common questions that could be used flexibly as the interview/conversation evolved. As soon as it was practical, each interview was professionally transcribed. A first reading of the transcripts was done to correct any errors due to lack of clarity in the recording, and to change participants’ names for confidentiality. I then read each transcript a series of times to develop codes.
Teacher Interviews

Interviews with the participating teacher occurred on January 28, March 23, and April 24, 2016. The interviews were digitally recorded and took place in the teacher’s classroom during her planning period in the first two instances, and in a café where we met for the third and final interview. Questions were not provided in advance; however, descriptions of the types of questions that would be asked were provided at the onset of the study. I developed interview questions based on my original research questions discussed in Chapter 1:

- What literacy learning outcomes and attitudes result from the intentional pairing of young adult literature with classic literature in a high school English classroom?
  - What attitudes toward literature and reading do students perceive to be the outcome of pairing young adult and classic literature?
  - What do students perceive to be the literacy learning outcomes of pairing young adult and classic literature?
  - What attitudes toward literature and reading does the teacher perceive to be the outcome of pairing young adult and classic literature?
  - What does the teacher perceive to be the literacy learning outcomes of pairing young adult and classic literature?

The first interview with the participating teacher took place prior to the beginning of the instructional unit. The questions sought to evoke a description of the classroom and students, teaching goals, Diane’s perceptions of her students’ reading interests and attitudes, and her beliefs about curriculum and instruction, particularly around the use of
young adult literature and classic literature. Interview questions are provided in Appendix C. The second interview occurred mid-way through the instructional unit following the completion of the young adult novel. The interview questions focused on the instructional goals for the novel, the teacher’s perceptions of the students’ reactions to the novel including degrees of engagement and comprehension, and the teacher’s perceptions about the challenges and successes of using the young adult novel. I also used the second interview as an opportunity to follow up on some comments made by the teacher during the first interview about curriculum changes at Midlands High School. The third and final interview followed the completion of the instructional unit and the classic novel. For consistency, the questions about the classic text mirrored the structure of the second interview’s questions about the young adult text, seeking the teacher’s perceptions about engagement, comprehension, and instructional focus. Interview questions for the second and third interviews are listed in Appendices D and E, respectively.

Student Interviews

Each of the four primary student informants were interviewed twice. Interviews occurred on February 25, March 2, April 5, and April 13, 2016. The interviews (Appendices F and G) were digitally recorded and took place in a conference room within the school library/media center. Questions were not provided in advance; however, descriptions of the types of questions that would be asked were provided at the onset of the study. I developed interview questions based on my original research questions as noted above.

The first set of student interviews took place after the completion of the first half of the instructional unit and the reading of the young adult novel, Staying Fat for Sarah
Byrnes (Crutcher, 1993). Questions were designed to be open-ended and to prompt students’ responses to the novel and the instructional unit. I asked questions such as what was easy and what was challenging about the novel, how reading this novel compared to other school reading, their thoughts about using this novel or other young adult novels in the classroom, and their perceptions of themselves as readers. Answers to these questions provided insights into the students’ engagement with and comprehension of the novel.

The second set of interviews occurred at the end of the unit after completing the classic novel, *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994). The interview questions were similar to the first set, with the addition of questions about students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of pairing a young adult and a classic novel. Answers to these questions revealed students’ responses to the specific texts and to other texts read for pleasure and for school, and their attitudes about books and reading.

**Student Survey**

A twenty-one question survey (Appendix H) was administered to participating students on the first day of the instructional unit. Thirteen students completed the survey using the Google Forms application. The purpose of the survey was to build understanding for the researcher about the participating students’ attitudes, interests, and perceptions about books and reading both inside and outside of school. The survey results (Appendix I) are a secondary source of data and provide background and context for the later interviews. Survey answers were anonymous.
**Observational Field Notes**

I observed the English III classroom and recorded field notes nine times between January 29 and April 5, 2016. The class met for an 80-minute block on alternating days. My note-taking attempted to capture the total classroom environment, including learning activities, objectives/learning targets, journal entry prompts, the teacher’s instructional moves, formal and informal discussions, and student questions and comments. The notes supported thick description of the classroom environment and learning activities centered on the young adult and classic novels. I recorded what happened as well as what was said and noted the time as activity changed. I later added language and punctuation that converted abbreviated notes and fragments into a narrative. These observational field notes documented participant activity and support data triangulation. I compared patterns and themes that emerged in the field notes to the survey and interviews.

**Managing and Storing Data**

Interviews were recorded digitally on my laptop computer using the digital *AudioNote* application. After the recordings were completed, the digital files were transferred to a password protected folder on my laptop. Observational field notes, analytic memos, and transcripts of interview recordings were also stored in the password protected folder. Identifying information was removed from the interview transcripts and names were replaced with pseudonyms. Digital recordings and the key linking participant names to pseudonyms will be destroyed upon acceptance of this dissertation. Hard copies of notes and transcripts, stored in a secure cabinet in my home office, will be destroyed after a period of not more than ten years from the completion of the research.
Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a process of analytic coding. After interviews with students and the teacher were transcribed, I read each transcript several times. On the first reading, I made no notes but simply read straight through to get a general sense of the information. On second and third readings, I began coding descriptively, using the gerund form of verbs to capture what the interview subject was describing. Charmaz (2014) recommends looking for actions in the initial coding phase: “Try to see actions in each segment of data rather than applying pre-existing categories to the data. Attempt to code with words that reflect action” (p. 116). This approach encourages the researcher to code with an open mind and may prevent assumptions or “conceptual leaps” before a thorough analysis has been done (2014, p. 117). Thus, my initial descriptive coding of one student transcript includes phrases such as, “reacting emotionally to story,” “disagreeing with portrayal of character,” and “feeling connected to character.” It was during this initial process that I determined what portions of text constituted a distinct segment to be coded. I rejected the practice of using an arbitrary segment such as a specific number of characters or words. I chose, instead, to frame distinct ideas in the context of the interview transcript being analyzed with a minimum of one code assigned to each segment of student dialog in the interview transcript.

Once initial descriptive coding was complete, I perused the descriptive codes to identify potential patterns and categories. I used an inductive approach at this phase, creating analytic codes that arose from the data, as well as a deductive approach, viewing the data through the lens of my research question and sub-questions. I created a list of potential analytic codes, then sorted the initial/descriptive codes under each analytic
code. This process revealed gaps and overlaps in some categories, leading to refinement of certain analytic codes and regrouping of descriptive segments of text under the analytic codes. Once I was satisfied with a set of analytic codes, I created a coding dictionary (Appendix J), then applied the codes to each interview transcript.

To validate the analysis of the three teacher interviews, I provided Diane, the participating teacher, with a draft of the findings based on the teacher interview transcripts. I asked her to read the manuscript to verify – or contradict – the reported findings. Diane confirmed that the information accurately presented her perspective and words.

To validate the analysis of the student interview transcripts, I enlisted the help of a former colleague who is a retired high school English teacher. I provided her with a dictionary of the analytic codes I had developed and an explanation of the coding process. She coded one full student interview transcript. We then compared codes. On the first round, our agreement was approximately 20%. We discussed our differences at length, then I revised the analytic codes and the coding dictionary. We then separately coded another student interview transcript. This time we achieved a 65% rate of agreement. After one more round of discussion, revision of codes, and the coding of a third student interview transcript, an agreement rate of close to 80% was achieved. I then re-coded all of the student interview transcripts using the final coding dictionary.

**Limitations**

This study is limited in its scope. Limiting factors include the number of participants, location, time frame, and selection of texts used for the pairing strategy. Data collected from this study comes from one teacher, four students acting as primary
informants by participating in interviews, one survey of thirteen participating students, and field notes from observations of one classroom conducted over a period of four months. More is said about limitations in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

Using a case study design, I investigated the impact of pairing a young adult novel with a classic novel in one high school English classroom. I selected a site that is representative of rural Maine public high schools. By listening to the words of student-participants and the classroom teacher, and by acting as a participant-observer of classroom learning experiences and interactions, I gained insights into the factors influencing the students’ engagement with each work of literature, their attitudes towards books and reading, and student literacy learning outcomes as a result of the pairing of the young adult and classic novels.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Research Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact on students of reading a work of young adult literature paired with a work of classic literature in one high school English classroom. The research focused on the effects of the young adult–classic pairing on students’ literacy learning and on their attitudes about reading and books from the perspectives of the participating students and teacher. The overarching question the study investigated asks, *What literacy learning outcomes and attitudes result from the intentional pairing of young adult literature with classic literature in a high school English classroom?* From this main question, four sub-questions were developed:

- What do students perceive to be the literacy learning outcomes of pairing young adult and classic literature?
- What attitudes toward literature and reading do students perceive to be the outcome of pairing young adult and classic literature?
- What does the teacher perceive to be the literacy learning outcomes of pairing young adult and classic literature?
- What attitudes toward literature and reading does the teacher perceive to be the outcome of pairing young adult and classic literature?

The traditional high school English curriculum has resisted change despite decades of education reform. Scholars (Allen, 1995; Beers, 2002; Brozo, 2002; Glaus, 2014; Kent, 1997; Kent, 2004; Newkirk, 2000; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) have advocated for bringing YAL into the high school curriculum for many years, and several (Bright, 2011; Broz,
2011; Bucher & Hinton, 2014; Gallo, 2001; Herz & Gallo, 2005; Kaywell, 2010; Miller & Slifkin, 2010; Stover, 2003; Wolk, 2010) have encouraged the use of YAL as a bridge to the classics. From my first introduction to the practice of pairing young adult literature and the classics, I have been intrigued by its potential to persuade high school English teachers to open up their reading lists to include young adult literature. The idea sounded promising in theory; I wanted to see it in practice in a typical rural high school English class. I theorized that pairing a YA novel with a classic novel would engage the students and make the classic novel more accessible to them, improving comprehension and supporting a more positive view of the classics and reading in general.

To conduct this study, I became a participant-observer in one high school English classroom for a ten-week period. The participating teacher implemented a literature unit in which a young adult and a classic novel were paired based on similarities in theme. Data collected for this study includes observational field notes, a survey of the students in the case study classroom, three interviews with the participating teacher, and two interviews each with four students who became primary informants. The interviews with the teacher and students are the primary data sources. The survey and field notes provide supporting context.

Results of data analysis are reported in this chapter. I first report on the student survey administered at the beginning of the research project. Next, I report on the perceptions of the participating teacher, Diane, from the transcripts of my three interviews with her and from field notes. The findings are grouped by research question. The analysis of the teacher interviews is followed by an examination of the observational field notes taken during eight classroom observations. The field notes provide a
description of the classroom environment and activities, at times providing context for or enriching the interview data. Student interview data is reported next, in order of the interviews and grouped by research question.

**Participant Profiles**

*Note: The teacher and student names and name of the high school used in this study are pseudonyms.*

**Diane, the participating teacher**, is a veteran high school English teacher with thirty years of teaching experience. Most of those years have been at Midlands High School. Diane is recognized as a leader among her departmental colleagues and within the faculty as a whole. The Midlands principal was concerned that she might be taking on too much by participating in this research study given her other commitments at the school, which include departmental leadership and several committees. He nonetheless gave his permission when Diane assured him that she would manage all of her responsibilities.

**Hannah, the first student participant interviewed**, described herself as newly interested in reading for pleasure. Prior to this year, she read very little outside of school and did not usually finish assigned books, often relying on *Spark Notes* or other resources. Now, she enjoys reading independently and often talks with friends about books and shares books with them. Diane described Hannah as an active participant in class discussions.

**Jordan is the second student participant** whom I interviewed. Jordan identified herself as a reader. She reads outside of school and generally completes assigned reading. She often visits bookstores with friends and enjoys sharing books and discussing them.
Diane noted that Jordan often has strong opinions and is an active participant in class discussions and activities.

**Maggie, the third student participant interviewed**, is an avid reader. She belongs to a social justice book club at school that is sponsored by the school library assistant. She reads “all the time” outside of school and enjoys sharing books with friends and discussing books and ideas. I observed that Maggie is an active participant in most class discussions. Diane described Maggie as a strong student and classroom leader.

**Danny, the fourth and last student to be interviewed**, unequivocally described himself as *not* a reader and having no interest in books. Nonetheless, he “likes a good story” and talked about films he has enjoyed. He shared with me a particularly negative literacy experience in elementary school that seems to have impacted his lack of motivation to read. Danny receives regular support from the school’s literacy specialist. Diane shared that Danny is a struggling reader with a plan to ensure additional literacy support.

**Student Survey Results**

The survey was given to thirteen students in the case study classroom from whom permission to participate had been obtained. My purpose in giving the survey was to gain some sense of the students’ attitudes and experiences with books and reading, in and out of school. This context, I hoped, would aid me in developing interview questions. The full survey and results can be viewed in Appendices H and I. I will provide a summary here of the salient results.

The survey queried students about their reading interests, favorite titles, amount of time typically spent reading, and their opinions about young adult and classic works
and their uses in the classroom. The responses to the first question, “Do you like to read? Rate your attitude toward reading on a scale of 1 to 10,” reflect a pattern that held for most of the survey questions. The positive responses were strongly positive, with 50% of the students selecting the highest possible rating (10), indicating they like to read very much. Four students’ responses were in the middle of the scale (ratings of 5 and 6), while two students selected the bottom of the scale (ratings of 1 and 2), indicating they do not like to read at all. During my visits to the classroom, these responses were confirmed in the dynamics of informal conversations about books and reading that were common among several members (about half) of the class, while a small number of students were always clearly outside of these conversations. Social dynamics among the students were possibly a factor in the conversations, as well.

About half of the student respondents indicated they read outside of school for enjoyment “all the time;” 75% of the students typically complete “most” or “all” of their assigned reading for school, suggesting a high level of compliance among these students. Eighty-three percent like young adult books and think that YAL should be used in schools. Forty-two percent like reading classics, while 83% believe classics should be taught in schools. This implies that while students might see educational value in classics, they don’t always enjoy reading them. Responses were split 7-6 on agreeing that they have learned from the books assigned to them in school. The combination of all of these responses on students’ attitudes about books and learning are somewhat contradictory. The perception of roughly half of the students in this survey that they have not learned from books read for school raises questions about the curriculum, instructional approaches, support for struggling readers, and the students’ expectations about what
they might learn from books. Student perceptions may be influenced by numerous factors such as the classroom setting, teacher, friends’ attitudes, and accuracy of memory.

Students provided a diverse list of titles in response to the question, “What was the last book you enjoyed reading?” Interestingly, all of the titles named are young adult works:

*The Summer I Turned Pretty*

*The Red Queen*

*Hatchet*

*Blood Ravens*

*Found*

*Lock and Key* by Sarah Dessen

I haven’t really enjoyed reading any books

*Damaged* by Amy Reed (see Appendix I).

Most respondents (77%) believe that reading will be important to their success after high school; however, only 62% envision themselves reading for enjoyment as an adult. The students’ favorite books are mostly young adult titles and some intermediate level works, and one classic:

*The Summer I Turned Pretty Trilogy* [YA]

*Death’s Messenger* [YA]

Not sure

*Pride and Prejudice* [Classic]

*Willow* [YA]
When asked what makes a book “easy to read,” responses suggest that interest and enjoyment of a storyline strongly impacts readability. Four students mentioned an engaging or “action packed” plot and one named a “great hook.” Students used the words “interesting,” “enjoyable,” “relateable” [sic] and “fun” characters, and content that is “not plain or boring.” One student stated, “If I choose the book, it is easier, and if I don’t have a time frame.” Another wrote, “Something that is easier to me that will make me wonder about what will happen next.”

When asked “What makes a book hard to read,” the importance of an engaging plot is again confirmed in several students’ answers. Nine students named plot as an important factor, using the words “boring,” “slow,” “when the plot line dies out,” “no excitement,” and “not interesting.” Furthermore, five students identified language as a factor, citing “hard words,” “written in a style or uses wording that different [sic] from what someone is used to.”

Further indications of the importance of an engaging plot are seen in responses to the question, “What is a book that you have read for school that you liked? What did you like about this book?” Five responses specifically identified plot, action, or suspense as a
factor in liking a particular book. Three students named the classic mystery by Agatha Christie, assigned in their ninth-grade year, *And Then There Were None* (1940), as an assigned book they liked. Two students named Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960); one described Lee’s work as a “second favorite book” and the other cited the “characters and dialogue” as the qualities that s/he liked. Lee’s work is a sort of crossover title, recognized as a classic and as a young adult work. Another student identified Gary Paulsen’s intermediate favorite about survival in the wilderness, *Hatchet* (1987), writing, “It was very, very interesting. It covered topics I like.”

The survey next asked students if they like to read books categorized as “young adult” or “teen literature.” Ten of the thirteen responses affirmed liking YA or teen literature. One student wrote, “Yes because as a teen we can understand them and the concepts better.” Another stated, “I find the characters to be more relateable [sic].” One student admitted, “I haven’t read any,” while another wrote, “I honestly don’t even know what that means.” The next question asked if the students thought young adult literature should be taught in school. Nine of ten respondents to this question clearly answered “yes” or “yeah.” One student responded, “Depending on the book.”

Parallel questions about reading and using classics came next in the survey. Three students responded to the question, “Do you like to read books categorized as classic” with a clear “no” and four with a clear “yes.” One student wrote, “Yes, because it is a classic. Simple as that.” One student responded, “I haven’t read any before.” The remaining responses qualified the circumstances, stating, “some of the references in the books are out dated,” “they can be hard to understand,” and “I would not pick a classic book by myself.” One student indicated a preference for annotated versions of classics.
because of the supporting information provided. Nonetheless, ten of ten respondents answered “yes” to the question, “should classics be taught in school?”

The survey provided a window into the varied interests of the students in the case study classroom and their perceptions about books, reading, and school. The students indicated enjoyment of young adult literature and an interest in seeing it used in the classroom. Classic literature is perceived as more difficult and sometimes less connected to their lives. Nevertheless, the students think classics should be included in the curriculum, as well. The responses prompted me to include some of the same questions in the interviews with individual students in an attempt to gain greater insight into their thinking about what works for them as learners.

**Teacher Perceptions About Student Attitudes, Engagement, and Learning**

**Teacher Perception of Student Attitudes and Engagement**

The teacher participant, Diane, perceived the young adult novel, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* by Chris Crutcher (1993), as accessible and engaging for most of her students in the case study class. Diane observed that many of the students “read faster than they normally do. And . . . I could tell they were more engaged” because they often initiated informal conversations about characters or events in the novel:

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I had kids who were reading say, ‘oh, this character makes me angry, this character, or this situation infuriates me.’ It was many of them, they wrote about it in their journals . . . they just really connected with it.
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She continued, “I think they were reading faster but a little more carefully because they were interested in the book, and they weren’t simply glossing over it, so I think that’s a win.” Diane also observed that some of her students asked the school library/media
specialist for other books by Chris Crutcher. One student earlier in the school year had
admitted to Diane that before this year she didn’t choose to read very much. Diane
described a change in this student:

Now she takes suggestions from some of the people in the class . . . she didn’t like

[Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes] in terms of some of the subject matter, but she
appreciated, I think, reading it and being able to develop her thinking about the
book.

Diane considered the young adult novel as successful in engaging most of her students.
She observed students freely sharing connections to characters and events and discussing
their reactions to the novel.

Diane also perceived the classic novel, Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck
(1937/1994), as accessible to her students. The novel is short, tightly plotted, and uses
relatively simple sentence structure and vocabulary. Because the novel is generally
recognized in the field as one of the most accessible of the classics used in high schools,
Diane selected it to use for the research study. The composition of the case study class
was heterogeneous with a wide range of literacy skill levels. Diane wanted all of her
students to be able to manage the reading level of the classic novel and felt that they did:

I think it was quite accessible and, you know, truthfully I think of all of the
classics that I have at my disposal . . . that’s probably the one that if it’s going to
resonate with a majority of kids does resonate. But, I think it was also interesting
that . . . they got into it a little bit more.

Diane compared the responses of the case study class with her other classes. All of her
heterogeneous English III (non AP) classes read Of Mice and Men; however, only the
case study class read *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993). She attributed the interest in the classic novel for the case study group to some degree to the use of the young adult novel:

I’d like to think that in part it’s because we took some time with *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* just really talking about issues . . . It seemed to work all around better this year than it has in the past. At least with this one class.

Diane observed that several students read the classic novel “straight through” instead of in the assigned chunks. For students who typically engage with reading, the experience with *Of Mice and Men* is also typically engaging. Diane noticed a difference, however, with her struggling readers in the case study class:

I think they read more of it . . . and they listened to the conversations at least, if they didn’t add to them . . . their journals were . . . they seemed to write more than they normally do. So I think, I think they were more engaged than maybe in the past, or with other books, or other work that we do . . . pairing it with something very modern made it not so scary to kids, or so boring.

The participating teacher’s perception is that both novels used for the research study were accessible to her students in the case study class. She noticed that her struggling readers were more engaged with the classic novel, *Of Mice and Men*, than they had been with previous classic novels assigned for class, and generally more engaged than struggling readers in previous years with *Of Mice and Men* in particular. She attributed this increase in engagement to using the young adult novel first as an introduction to the themes in the classic novel.
For those students who were already “voracious readers,” as Diane described them, the young adult novel didn’t necessarily change their already positive attitudes toward reading:

I think their enthusiasm was a little bit infectious though . . . between their enthusiasm and the fact that it was a really good book, and that I was kind of clear about why we were doing this book before we did *Of Mice and Men*, and maybe they were just intrigued by the fact that they were part of a research study.

Diane went on to explain that the enthusiasm of the established readers in the class seemed to positively influence three-four students who tended to read more reluctantly, “who probably had mixed feelings at best about reading novels . . . I think it made a difference” for those reluctant readers.

Some students in the case study class appeared to make strong connections to characters and/or situations in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993) that went beyond general engagement or enjoyment of the novel. Diane reflected on increased engagement she observed with one particular student who had completed very little work during the first semester and subsequently had a failing grade:

She must have connected to something that we talked about, she’s still not an active participant, but she’s doing the work, and she did the *Sarah Byrnes* project, so . . . if that was the only thing that came out of it that would be a win for me.

Not only did the student complete the assessment for *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, at the time of the interview she was on track to complete the reading and assessment for *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) and to pass the third quarter. The young adult novel appeared to impact the student:
She really got into *Sarah Byrnes* . . . in her writing and in the work that she did, all of a sudden she . . . I think it did make a difference for her, and she’s choosing books now; in fact, I have to tell her to put her book away when it’s time to do something else.

Danny, one of the primary informants, who openly stated to Diane and to me during one interview that he doesn’t like books or reading, did, in fact, read *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993) and, as Diane shared,

[now] he’s reading a Pete Hautman book that he really likes, . . . so, I think [reading *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*] has been helpful. Some kids have made real growth . . . I thought the book was a great choice to give them some confidence in their own reading.

Not all students demonstrated engagement with the young adult novel. Diane described three students as “non-readers” throughout the school year. One of them has an identified learning disability and struggles to decode. The other two are somewhat more skilled but do not like to read and generally refuse to read novels or longer assigned works. This scenario is not unusual in Diane’s teaching experience. “Usually it takes me all year of working with our library/media specialist . . . and whoever else I can drag into it to find a book that they will at least read, even if it’s grudgingly.” Diane experienced frustration at not being successful this year at helping those non-readers find the “right” book to hook them into reading. She described their reluctance as “the biggest challenge” to teaching. Diane worries about the impact on these students of being outside of the reading culture in the classroom:
When so many people [in the class] are engaged, and I don’t know how that makes them feel either, that so many people are so engaged in it and they, you know, all but maybe two read the book . . . I don’t know what it does to a person’s self-esteem to think, “everybody else is getting this book, why am I not?”

I asked Diane what in her experience matters the most to engage students in reading. She stated, “It starts with a book about a subject I think that they might be interested in.” This idea of “making the match” is advocated by Teri Lesesne (2003), an expert in young adult literature and library services. According to Lesesne, “Making the match between book and reader relies on knowledge in three areas: knowing the reader, knowing the book, and knowing the techniques and strategies for bringing book and reader together” (2003, p. 1). Diane consistently employs the strategy of setting aside ten minutes every day for silent, self-selected reading, an approach that, in her view, makes a positive difference in engaging students to read more:

Knowing that you’re going to read every day, you’ve got to bring a book every day, and you know, open it . . . I do everything I can not to make it punitive, but it’s so important. So I think maybe that’s part of it too, finding that match, and letting kids read what [they choose], even if it’s not something I would choose for them.

Diane works to build a culture of reading in her classes by intentionally scheduling daily reading time, making a variety of books available to students, enlisting the support of the school library/media specialist to recommend books for students, and by talking with students about their reading. This reading culture appears to have positively impacted
most of her students in the case study class who engaged enthusiastically with *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993) and *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994).

**Teacher Perception of Student Literacy Learning Outcomes**

Diane, the participating teacher, perceived that pairing the young adult novel, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993), with the classic novel, *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994), resulted in stronger comprehension of the classic novel and more in-depth analysis of themes for most students. The pairing of novels also effectively supported students in demonstrating proficiency in one of the school’s graduation standards.

Diane used the classic novel, *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994), with four English III classes at approximately the same time. One class, the case study group, read *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993) first. Reading the young adult novel first to introduce and analyze themes that also appear in the classic novel seemed to make a positive difference in students’ analysis of the classic work. Diane explained during one interview:

> When I compare what [the case study class] did with the text [*Of Mice and Men*] versus what the other three [classes] did . . . it might have been a little bit better, a little bit more in depth . . . and it was interesting to me that their evidence in [the case study class] seemed to be, their discussions seemed to be a little bit richer . . . a little bit more on target. More kids read it. A higher percentage.

Students who read the young adult novel first seemed better prepared to analyze the classic work. The young adult novel may have acted as a scaffold to the classic novel by providing students with recognizable characters and situations with which to grapple,
preparing them to consider similar themes that arise in less recognizable ways in the classic text.

Observational field notes provide illustrations of the students’ analyses of theme in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993), supporting Diane’s perception that students reached deep comprehension and analysis of themes in the young adult text. Diane had the students form small groups for discussion of four theme ideas that she provided and explicitly stated would also appear in *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994). The learning target was posted and referenced by Diane: *I can identify and analyze multiple theme ideas in a text.* Each group was given a piece of chart paper and markers. Diane demonstrated making a four square on the paper with a theme idea circled in the center, using the example, *love.* “That’s not a theme yet, is it? It’s just a word.” Students agreed: “It’s too broad.” Diane offered two sample theme statements developed from the theme idea: “love is a many splendored thing” and “love stinks.” There was some discussion of the difference between a theme idea and theme statement. Students then worked to find text evidence in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* of their group’s assigned theme idea: *heroism, appearance v. reality, accountability for one’s actions,* and *survival.* The groups worked for several minutes while Diane circulated among them to offer support. Each group then reported on their evidence. The evidence cited by the students demonstrates that they understood how certain characters’ actions, words, and thoughts, as well as various events and situations, illustrate specific theme ideas in the young adult novel:
Accountability for one’s actions

- Dad never takes responsibility for what he did to Sarah – whole book
- Mark took responsibility for when he made Jody get an abortion. – chapter 18
- Carver takes responsibility for beating Mr. Byrnes – chapter 19
- Lemry didn’t let her students take responsibility for Mark trying to kill himself. – chapter 14

Here, students have identified specific characters and the actions of those characters that, in the students’ view, demonstrate the theme of accountability for one’s actions. The fourth bulleted item in the above list presents a negative example of accountability in that the teacher, Lemry, tells her students that they are not accountable for their classmate, Mark’s, suicide attempt. This incident in the novel generated some discussion in the class. Diane praised the students for their analysis of this incident.

The next example represents the work of the group looking for evidence of theme, survival:

Survival

- Sarah Byrnes p. 174 – “Dear Eric, They’ve been telling me – in case I’m listening – to write things down ever since I got here . . .” – This passage shows that SB was trying to save herself by admitting herself, in a way, to Sacred Heart Hospital. She did this to get herself away from her dad because she was afraid he was going to hurt her if the truth was accidentally going to come out.
• Carver (Eric’s mom’s boyfriend): “My dad. He killed himself.” “I’d gotten depressed.” Pages 218-219. This passage shows how Carver dealt with his father’s suicide and how he stopped himself from doing the same thing.

• Mrs. Lemry – Pages 220. Mrs. Lemry and Sarah Byrnes going to Reno and stopping CAT class. This is Mrs. Lemry and Sarah surviving by leaving Sarah’s father (the abuse) and looking for Sarah’s mom for salvation. Also, Mrs. Lemry stopping CAT class helped her survive another day at school without being fired.

• Dale Thornton – pages 73 and 74 – These pages reveal the reason why he is a bully. Dale was a bully to kids in school because his dad beat on him when he was home. He made himself feel tough by making other kids be afraid of him.

The students working in the “survival” group provided examples as well as explanations for their choices. Their examples show an understanding of survival on a literal, physical level as well as an emotional level.

The next example represents the work of the group looking for evidence of the theme, *heroism*:

**Heroism**

• Carver – explains to Jody and Eric that they are not responsible for Mark’s actions. Chapter 14.

• Eric continues to visit Sarah in the hospital. Starts: Ch. 1

• Eric fights Mr. Byrnes. Chapter 16.
The examples named by students to illustrate the concept of heroism in the novel indicate a mature and broad understanding of heroism as more than winning a physical battle against a “bad guy,” such as Eric fighting Mr. Byrnes, to include the challenges of facing one’s fears and acting selflessly for loved ones.

The final example represents the work of the students looking for evidence of the theme, appearance v. reality:

**Appearance v. reality**

- Mark Brittian [sic] was a strong church goer and was against abortion, premarital and much other. (chapter 8). – while – He actually forced Jodie [sic] to have an abortion (chapter 18).

- Virgil acts like he cares about Sarah when she gets admitted to the hospital (chapter 6). – while – He is actually the reason for all of her burns and he abuses her (chapter 19).

- Dale is a bully to everyone around him and a tough guy (chapter 3). – while – He actually comes from a poor home and cares about others and [their] well being (chapter 16).

- Sarah Byrnes – Sarah was an odd ball and didn’t fit in so she acts super tough and she doesn’t let anyone know about her (chapter 2). – while – she is actually broken and needs help from everyone around her, and is fighting battles of her own at home (chapter 9).
Here, the students demonstrate a complete reading of the novel in order to recognize that certain characters’ words and actions hid deeper emotions and motivations. All of the groups successfully found relevant text evidence for their theme idea.

During the small group and whole class discussions that generated the work samples cited above, students demonstrated a range of higher level thinking skills and work habits. Students were finding evidence, analyzing characters and events, choosing the best evidence, evaluating characters’ actions, motivations, and decisions, offering opinions, exchanging ideas, building comprehension by discussing the novel, negotiating what information to use as evidence, taking turns, listening, writing, note-taking, and comparing and contrasting.

The work of the case study students provides us with an image of Rosenblatt’s concepts (1978, 1998) of efferent and aesthetic reading, which I discuss in Chapter 2. Rosenblatt envisions a continuum on which any reading event falls between the ends of efferent (focusing on informational reading) or aesthetic (focusing on feelings and thoughts while reading). The case study students enacted efferent reading while seeking out appropriate textual evidence for their theme idea. As they evaluated the text for the best examples and interpreted the significance of the evidence, they engaged in aesthetic reading. Rosenblatt asserts that “competent reading requires the ability to handle both cognitive and affective aspects in a continuous process of choice, synthesis and organization” (1998, p. 898). Indeed, as the students worked through the analysis of the theme idea, their reading of the text moved back and forth along the efferent-aesthetic continuum, both demonstrating and building their competence as readers.
The students’ analysis of theme in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993) prepared them for similar analysis in *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994). One example of the case study group’s deeper analysis of the classic novel centers around the character known as “Curley’s wife.” The only female on the ranch, Curley’s wife often appears in the men’s bunkhouse or the stables and attempts to draw the ranch hands into conversation. Her actions and words may be interpreted as promiscuous. The death of the character, Lennie, results from a chain of events triggered by Curley’s wife’s attempts to seek out the company of the ranch hands. Diane noted that “if you look at the character, in the book, in the novel and the play, she’s hard to like. So how do you, how do you get some sympathy . . . you know, have some empathy for her?” Diane found that several students in the case study class did, in fact, find some reason to empathize with Curley’s wife:

We had had all those conversations about the characters in *Sarah Byrnes*, and you know, we don’t have to like them but do you see that they were, maybe that there’s another side? Or at least, there’s an explanation . . . I had more people come around to, eventually, the fact that Curley’s wife was, you know, being used . . . I can never like make that sale to them . . . [but] there were more who were willing to give her the benefit of the doubt.

Diane’s perception is that the experience of attempting to understand some complex characters in the young adult novel opened students’ thinking to analyze the complexities of Steinbeck’s lone female character in *Of Mice and Men* (1937/1994).

Diane perceived that the pairing of the young adult and classic novels enhanced students’ understanding of certain literary devices. She named the techniques of
foreshadowing and use of animal imagery as literary devices that the case study students noticed:

They talked about foreshadowing a lot . . . They were also intrigued by all the animal imagery . . . there’s always somebody who [asks], why animals? And at first they think, oh, it’s just because Lennie likes them but he kills them. But then you know, they really did come around to deeper ideas.

A third literacy-learning outcome noted by Diane was tied to the unit assessment. Diane explained that the Midlands English department, in its process of transitioning to a proficiency-based education system, has identified specific graduation standards. Students will be required to demonstrate proficiency in these standards to graduate with a diploma. Teachers at Midlands High School are in the process of developing and refining assessments for each of the graduation standards. The English department, according to Diane, had been struggling to devise an assessment for a particular reading comprehension standard: *Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of a text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.* Diane and her colleagues decided to use *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) to assess the graduation standard. The assessment asks students to write a double entry journal in which they identify specific text passages and to comment on how those passages reveal at least two themes in *Of Mice and Men.* To conclude the journal, students were directed to write an analysis explaining how the two themes are connected and how they “add depth or richness to the story” (see Appendix B for the full assessment). Diane explained that the students had prior experience with the double entry
journal format as well as with citing text evidence to support analysis of a single theme. Analyzing and synthesizing the interaction of two themes adds significant complexity to the level of comprehension being asked of students. Diane described her students’ success with the task:

This really forced them to do some thinking above and beyond the gathering evidence piece. And really see how in a well-written text everything can be tied together . . . I was really pleased with what they came up with. Some of it was simplistic but they all, I think every single one of them made the connection, made a kind of connection between the two themes that they chose.

As students developed their double entry journals, Diane supported them by discussing the idea of the “American Dream” as an example, and in recognizing other potentially universal themes by considering if a selected theme idea could fit both *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) and *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993). Diane viewed the work with the young adult novel as preparation for assessing comprehension with *Of Mice and Men*: “We talked about [themes] . . . the practice helped.”

In preparation for the double-entry journal, students again worked in small groups over several class periods to collect text evidence of a given theme idea from the classic novel. I captured their group work by photographing the completed charts during my eighth classroom visit. Diane had instructed students to focus on gathering the text evidence. Interpretation would be done individually in their double entry journals. I did not propose using student work as data for this study, so the finished analyses are not available to me. Nonetheless, the classwork provides some indication of the students’ thinking as they interpreted *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994).
The first example (below) is the work of the group assigned to look for evidence of the theme, *loneliness*:

**Loneliness**

- Page 6 “I could pet it with my thumb as we walked along.”
- Page 13 “Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world . . .”
- Page 22 “Well, I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy.”
- Page 24 “Yeah. I had ‘im ever since he was a pup.”
- Page 36 “Hardly none of the guys ever travel together.”
- Page 45 “I’m so used to him . . . I had him from a pup.”
- Page 60 “. . . Maybe if I give you guys my money, you’ll let me hoe in the garden even after I ain’t no good at it.”
- Page 77 “Think I don’t like to talk to somebody ever’ once in a while?”

In the first example from page 6, Lennie tries to persuade George to allow him to keep a mouse in his pocket. In the references from pages 24 and 25, Candy talks to the other ranch hands about his old dog. Here, students capture statements from several characters that reveal a universal longing for companionship and a place to belong.

The next example represents the work of the group assigned to look for evidence of the theme of *The American Dream*:
The American Dream

- “For two bits I’d shove outta here. If we can get jus’ a few dollars in the poke we’ll shove off and go up the American River and pan gold . . .” pg. 33
- “Well, he seen this girl in a red dress. Dumb bastard like he is, he wants to touch ever’thing he likes . . .” p. 41
- “An’ live off the fatta the lan’” pg. 14 Lennie
- “Well, it’s ten acres. Got a little windmill, got a little shack on it . . .” pg. 57
- “Another time I met a guy, an’ he was in pitchers. Went out to the Riverside Dance Palace with him. He says he was gonna put me in the movies. Says I was a natural. Soon’s he got back to Hollywood he’s gonna write me about it.” Page 88
- “Coulda been in the movies, an’ had nice clothes like they wear.” Pg. 89
- “We gonna have a little place – an’ rabbits” pg. 88
- “But not us! An’ why? Because . . . because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that’s why.” Pg. 14

The examples cited by the students for the theme of the American Dream reference Lennie and George’s plans to buy a small ranch for themselves someday, a dream that has kept them going for years, and the naïve recollection of Curley’s wife of the offer to become a movie star.

The third example represents the work of the group assigned to look for evidence of the theme of friendship:
Friendship

- “No – look! I was jus’ foolin’ Lennie. “Cause I want you to stay with me.”
  Page 13
- “What do you want of a dead mouse, anyways?” Page 6
- “The hell with what I say. You remember about us going into Murray and Ready’s and they give us work.” Page 5
- “But I wouldn’t eat none, George. I would leave it all for you.” Page 12
- “If I didn’t have you on my tail.” Page 7
- “. . . Drink hearty boys. Christmas comes but once a year . . .” Page 20
- He’s my . . . cousin. I told his old lady I’d take care of him . . .” Page 22
- “Tell you what, I’ll shoot him for you. Then it won’t be you that does it.”
  Page 45
- “Suppose I went with you guys . . .” Page 59
- “I’m so used to him . . .” “I had him from a pup.” Page 45
- “Well he ain’t doin’ no harm. I’ll give him one of them pups.” Page 50
- “We travel together.” Page 25
- “. . . why the poor bastard’d starve . . .” Page 94
- “. . . he said an’ hide in the brush till he come . . .“ Page 92
- “I done a bad thing. I done another bad thing.” Page 91
- “Maybe they’ll lock ‘im up an’ be nice to ‘im.” Page 94
- “Lennie never done it in meaness [sic].” Page 95
- “I’ll go away . . . I’ll go away.” Page 100
• “George done ever’thing he could.” Page 102 “Me an’ him travels together.”

• “I want you to stay with me here.” Page 104

In isolation, several of the examples under the friendship theme are too brief to stand alone; however, to someone familiar with the novel, the quotes capture multiple instances of the sacrifices that George and Lennie made – or were willing to make – for each other, and again of the relationship of Candy to his old dog as others urge him to euthanize the ailing pet.

The quantity of text evidence identified by students on the charts (quoted above) supports the participating teacher’s perception that most of the case study students were successful at analyzing Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck, 1937/1994). The strategies of pairing the novels thematically and using the same learning experience to analyze theme for each novel provided scaffolding that contributed to the case study students’ reading comprehension, analysis of specific literary devices, and demonstration of proficiency in a required graduation standard.

**Student Perceptions About Reading and Learning**

**Student Attitudes and Engagement: Are You a Reader?**

The four students interviewed from the case study classroom discussed their attitudes about books and reading in general as well as their responses to each of the novels used in the research study and the strategy of pairing the novels. Each student provides a unique perspective, yet there are also commonalities in their responses. In this section I will first present the attitudes expressed by each of the students toward books and reading in general, followed by their responses to the young adult novel, Staying Fat
for Sarah Byrnes (Crutcher, 1993), then their responses to the classic novel, Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck, 1937/1994). I conclude with a summary of the similarities and differences in their responses.

I theorized that having a sense of the students’ attitudes about books and reading before the research project might provide insight into their responses to the Crutcher and Steinbeck novels. Two of the interviewed students, Jordan and Maggie, describe themselves as enthusiastic readers. Jordan stated, “I love to read,” and “I’d rather read than watch TV.” She shared that she reads “a lot” outside of school. Her preferred genre is nonfiction about scientific topics; however, at the time of the interview she had recently read several fantasy novels and enjoyed them. Jordan also stated that she likes realistic fiction. Like Jordan, Maggie said, “I love to read” when I asked her to what extent she views herself as a reader. Initially, she responded that she is “a casual reader” but “I read every day.” Maggie belongs to a book club at school that is sponsored by the library assistant, and she uses Goodreads, a website where readers post book reviews and can participate in online book discussions. I asked Maggie what influences have shaped her view of reading. “I feel like definitely my teachers have brought me to love books,” she stated. “People like [my English teacher] because she’s very passionate about what she does and what she likes, and she’s always good for recommendations and hearing what I have to say.” Maggie spoke about another powerful influence from her life. Her mother, who is dyslexic, did not read to Maggie when she was younger. Maggie shared:

She would always make me read to her, so when, you know, usually mothers would come in and like read their child a story before bed, but I always had to
learn for myself, so that if she was reading anything that I had to, you know, help her out with . . . I feel like that kind of shaped me into being a reader.

Maggie talks to friends outside of school about books, talks with the library assistant beyond their book club sessions, and talks to “people online, on Goodreads, about books, too.” She mused about the power of books, saying,

Even if somebody says that they don’t like to read, they have a book that they always think of. And I find it amazing how somebody can like come up with these characters and how people relate to the stories.

Maggie and Jordan freely shared with me their enjoyment of books and reading and perceive themselves as readers.

Hannah, like the other two female students, shares books with friends and talks about them. However, she considers herself a newcomer to the pleasures of reading:

I actually just like started actually enjoying reading this school year, ‘cause I always just would put it off. But this year I’ve actually read a lot of books and I’ve enjoyed it ‘cause you kind of get to imagine the characters in your own point of view instead of just like movies, where you’re given what they look like, and you can have your own interpretation on the situations.

Hannah named two influences that have contributed to her changed attitude toward reading: recommendations of books from friends and the daily independent/choice reading time in English class with its accountability factor of a quarterly book project.

Because of the book project, Hannah said, “‘You have to have a different, like whatever assignment it is, you have to look at your book in a different way to do that . . . and you’re held accountable for reading it, not just ‘go home and read this’ or whatever.”
Hannah’s response to the choice reading assignment and attendant project was positive as she found herself enjoying the books she selected to read.

The fourth student to be interviewed and the only male, Danny, provides a distinctly different attitude about books and reading. When I asked Danny to what extent he thinks of himself as a reader, he immediately replied, “Not one. Not at all.” I pressed him about what he thinks has shaped his attitude. He described an experience in elementary school when a teacher reprimanded him:

I used to write a lot, but then I just guess, I don’t have time for it, and I don’t find interest in reading, I guess. I guess it changed a little bit over time, like, once when I was younger, I used to, I used to write my own books . . . I used to think that was the coolest thing. And then, uh, I think it was like my 3rd or 4th grade teacher. I brought in like three books that I wrote, and she was like well, you know, you shouldn’t be writing your own books, you should be reading these books instead, and then I guess I lost interest in reading just a little bit.

This negative experience from elementary school continues to influence Danny in his third year of high school. Nevertheless, Danny stated during the interview that even though he does not like to read, he does “like a good story.” He elaborated:

I like hearing a good story, and I like seeing a good action movie, or you know it doesn’t have to be an action movie but like you know, stories are played out in different ways . . . and like there’s lots of different communications, and like, you know, you could read me a story, I enjoy that, like I enjoy hearing stories, but physically reading a story myself, that’s what I find not as entertaining.
Danny further shared that he sometimes struggles to read text and receives support from the school’s literacy specialist.

In summary, three of the four students interviewed from the case study class are self-described readers. Friends are a positive influence on reading among the three who enjoy reading. The teacher, Diane, is also a positive influence through her enthusiasm for books and reading and through the structure of the daily reading time in class with its attendant quarterly project. Early experiences with literacy influenced Maggie, who read to her mother as a child, and Danny, who turned away from reading and writing after a teacher discouraged him from writing his own books.

**Student Attitudes and Engagement: The Young Adult Novel**

**Making Connections**

The experience of connecting with characters or situations in the young adult novel, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993), was discussed by all four of the students whom I interviewed. The degree to which they connected correlated to their attitude about the text and overall engagement or lack thereof.

In reference to the young adult novel, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993), Jordan stated, “I really liked it though. I thought personally it was very relatable.” She admitted that aside from an Agatha Christie novel assigned in 9th grade, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* is “the only one I’ve ever actually read cover to cover that I’ve been assigned for school.” Jordan explained:

I felt like *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* was one of the two books that I’ve ever read for school that people actually could relate to. We read *Speak* in freshman English class, which was relatable to a lot of the kids in my class.
Jordan’s sense that she could relate to Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes was accompanied by strong emotional reactions to certain characters and situations. She explained, “A lot of the topics were sensitive and personal, like to me personally, so some of the way, like, the characters handled situations really angered me.” One character in particular, Mark Brittain, was especially provocative: “Just not taking credit for anything that he did and being very hypocritical, made me so angry. I actually stormed into [English class] after study hall one day and told [my teacher], ‘This is making me so mad!’” She continued, “It was very emotional. It made me feel a lot of different things.” Indeed, Jordan found the novel was “hard to put down.”

Maggie talked about the power of connecting to characters and situations in stories. When I asked her about reading Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes (Crutcher, 1993), she stated, “I like reading young adult novels . . . that’s my favorite type [of book] to read.” She explained that she enjoys being able to make connections while reading, and young adult literature offers multiple opportunities for connections:

I love being able to connect with things and like making connections and analogies, so when I read young adult literature usually it’s about teens, and it’s easier for me to relate to and, (pause), not saying that they’re all like the same ‘cause they’re very different, but they have lots of underlying themes throughout many of the books that it’s easier for me to understand, so like if I go to read a classic I don’t, it’s harder for me to connect it to anything so that I understand it. Nonetheless, Maggie admitted that “at first, I didn’t want to read [Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes].” This reluctance surfaced because she anticipated a connection based on the title that might be potentially painful for her. “I was hesitant to read it ‘cause of like
connecting to the character . . . hearing somebody else talk about their weight, and like how they deal with it.” Maggie persisted, however, and before long found herself drawn into the story: “Definitely when we got to the mark where we learn more about Dale Thornton, that’s definitely when I started getting really into it, because you can see more of the characters and how interesting they are.” Maggie’s experience reading the young adult novel changed over time. She is aware of the impact – positive and negative - that characters and situations can have on her as a reader.

Hannah, like Jordan and Maggie, experienced strong emotions in response to the young adult novel. Hannah was troubled by the intense portrayal of child abuse in the novel. “This was kind of difficult for me to, like, continue reading it, ‘cause when I read I like to feel good about it. Like, there’s enough bad in the world, when I have quiet time I like it to be good.” Nevertheless, Hannah admitted that she was pulled into the story:

I lost track of time a lot when I was reading it, like, Mom would come, ask me to come down, and I’d be like 20 minutes later, because I just, you get so drawn into it. It’s very well written. It’s very well written. But, I didn’t, I didn’t love it, just because of that reason, that I didn’t feel like good after, and encouraged . . .

Hannah experienced mixed emotions as she read. She was pulled into the story to such an extent that she admittedly “lost track of time,” even as she felt uncomfortable with the story. Hannah identifies herself as a Christian; she found the characters Mark and Jody to be off-putting because of the portrayal of their religious beliefs:

There’s [sic] two different Christians in the book, and neither of them are really true in my opinion . . . and so that’s aggravating to me because that’s what people
now can view as what we are and what we do and I just don’t think that’s very well done.

Still, Hannah agreed that the character, Mark, changed during the novel. I asked how the portrayal of his change affected her thinking:

I think it makes you almost feel more connected to him because he did make a mistake, and everybody makes mistakes, and learning about the backstory of his father and stuff I know many families that are like that, so I could connect to that. Hannah articulated a specific connection to the character, Lemry, as well: “I know lots of families who end up taking in hurt kids, and situations like that, so I could connect Ms. Lemry to a lot of different people that I know, which is nice.” Hannah’s words reveal that she connected personally with at least three specific characters and engaged strongly with the novel.

Danny’s response to the young adult novel was markedly different:

“I like a good story, I don’t like books but, you know as in reading them, but I like a good story. And I just didn’t think it was a great story . . . I couldn’t really relate to it.”

Danny struggled to describe what he did not like about the novel: “I don’t know; I didn’t follow along with the author’s writing as well . . . I guess it was mostly the style.” I asked Danny if he had a strong response to any particular characters in the novel. At this stage in the interview I wondered if Danny had fully comprehended the story. Our dialog (excerpted below from the first interview) suggests a superficial level of understanding and engagement:
Anne: Are there any particular characters in this novel that you had a strong response to?

Danny: Um, Mark, right that’s his name?

Anne: Yeah, Mark Brittain.

Danny: Yeah. Um, I don’t know. I didn’t like him, but I kind of felt for what he was doing, you know ‘cause like I understood that he was in that position.

Anne: Yeah?

Danny: So, but Sarah, I don’t know. I didn’t connect to Sarah, I don’t know why.

Anne: Mm-hmm. (pause) She’s not necessarily likable, is she?

Danny: Right, right. She wasn’t likable, but I didn’t dislike her, so . . .

Anne: Right.

Danny: Sarah was alright. Eric, Eric was, Eric was cool. Yeah, he seemed like a nice guy.

Anne: You felt like you could relate to him?

Danny: Yeah. I feel like out of everyone, Eric would be the most relatable.

Anne: Yeah. If he were like a kid in your school, you might think he’s a decent guy?

Danny: Yeah, a decent guy, someone to be friends with, yeah.

Anne: Yeah. Hmm.

Danny: If he was at school.

Danny’s response to the young adult novel was distinctly less enthusiastic than the responses of the other three students whom I interviewed. He professed no strong
connections to characters or situations, whereas the other students reacted very strongly
to specific characters and situations and described explicit connections.

**Challenges**

I asked each of the students participating in interviews in what ways, if any, the
young adult novel challenged them as readers. I anticipated that some of them might find
some unknown or unfamiliar language and that the length of the novel might be off
putting. The paperback edition of *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993) used by
the class is 295 pages. Author Chris Crutcher avoids dialect and slang in his characters’
dialog. However, sentence structure is at times complex and language such as “sordid
expose,” “gallant,” “decorum,” and “impeccable” is used. Danny named “author’s style”
and vocabulary as challenges: “I have a hard enough time reading anyways, so . . . just
his vocabulary and everything overall” were a barrier, he said. Jordan, Maggie, and
Hannah spoke about the challenge of the content on an emotional level. Jordan
anticipated difficulty reading about situations that brought up personal experiences that
were painful:

I don’t usually read books that like cover suicide and everything like that, because
it is extremely personal, and it can bring a lot of emotions up for me, so that was
probably the most challenging thing, to sit down and force myself to read that
kind of stuff.

Hannah, as stated earlier, found that the novel was “emotional . . . I normally like to read
feel-good books and so this was kind of difficult for me.” Maggie also found the novel
emotionally challenging. She explained,
It definitely brought me out of my comfort zone to think of other people’s lives, because it really brought you, it really brought all of these characters in and made you think about them . . . it made me have to you know, bring out the sympathy for these characters.

I probed further with Maggie, asking specifically how she perceived the readability of the young adult novel. She admitted that “the beginning was slow for me just because I had the wrong idea about the book” because of the reference to weight in the title. Maggie also found the character of Sarah Byrnes to be initially unappealing. “It made it seem that like, we weren’t supposed to like Sarah Byrnes, so I was kind of seeing her as you know a little bratty kid . . . it was hard for me to connect to Sarah.” Several of the characters in the novel belong to the school swim team. Maggie found herself in unfamiliar territory: “In the beginning it took a while for me to get into the book, so, I put it down quite a few times . . . especially with swimming, ‘cause I didn’t, I can’t relate to swimming.” Maggie was able to name when her engagement shifted: “Definitely when we got to the mark where we learn more about Dale Thornton, that’s definitely when I started getting really into it, because you can see more of the characters and how interesting they are.” All of the students said they read the young adult novel in its entirety. The three students who connected most strongly to characters and situations also found some of those connections to be emotionally challenging.

Comparing the Young Adult Novel to Other Assigned Texts

To further explore the participating students’ attitudes toward and engagement with the young adult novel, I asked each of them how the experience of reading *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993) compared to their experiences with other books
assigned in English classes. All four of the interviewed students stated that *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* was different from other assigned texts. The students named a handful of previously studied texts, including some classics and one other young adult novel.

Jordan’s assessment of previously assigned texts was blunt. “A lot of the times books we’re assigned for school are, I don’t want to say boring but I guess that’s the best word.” She named two exceptions to this assessment: *And Then There Were None* by Agatha Christie (1940), a classic British mystery novel, and *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999), a young adult novel. In reference to the Agatha Christie work, Jordan said, “I really loved that book. That’s the only one besides [*Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*] that I’ve ever actually read cover to cover that I’ve been assigned for school.” Jordan enjoyed the suspense and the writing style of the mystery novel. Jordan attempted to explain what makes other works “boring:” “A lot of the stuff is super super educational, like has to do, like, historical fiction for example. And I don’t like history anyway.” She named Harper Lee’s classic, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, (1960) as an example of historical fiction that did not appeal to her. “A lot of people loved that book. I did not like that book at all.” Jordan felt that the setting of *To Kill a Mockingbird* made it difficult: “[It’s] a completely different time period so no one could really actually relate to it.” Nonetheless, Jordan acknowledged that a remote setting is not always problematic if other connections are facilitated:

If we’re doing a topic and the book goes along with the topic, like, in history class right now we’re reading, like the original *Wizard of Oz* for like allegories and stuff? And like modern day government. And it’s really helped to understand, to like tie the metaphors in between the two, like that really helps. But when we
Jordan’s friend and fellow book lover, Maggie, expressed a different view: “To Kill a Mockingbird’s my favorite novel, ever, and there are some references in here [Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes] about it, too, which is cool.” She identified the issue of prejudice in To Kill a Mockingbird (Lee, 1960) as similar to the experiences of Sarah Byrnes being outcast for her disfiguring facial scars. Maggie also mentioned Anderson’s Speak (1999), saying she could see “a lot of Speak in [Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes].”

Maggie noted that both novels address painful but important issues:

For Speak, you know [there was] that overwhelming need to talk about things that a lot of people just put un-, just sweep under the rug, and they just don’t want to talk about. And so I think that book, reading it freshman year, I think everybody read it freshman year, it was easier to, like we had some pre-knowledge about, not necessarily somebody being abused, but having something happen to somebody who doesn’t want to talk about it.

Elie Wiesel’s story of the Holocaust, Night, (1960) “helped because you got to see how people were treated in bad times, you know?” Maggie made an insightful connection between Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes (Crutcher, 1993) and Arthur Miller’s play, The Crucible (1953): “You could see Mark being so set in his ways just like the people of Massachusetts were definitely set in their ways [in old Salem] . . . until something drastic happened to them.” Maggie made several intertextual connections and recognized that works read earlier for school had given her background knowledge that helped in understanding Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes.
Hannah felt that reading *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993) for school was unique in her experience:

I don’t think I’ve really read a book like that. In other classes we’d tend to read more, like, classic stories for different time[s], like, we’ll have sections of what we’re doing, like time periods almost, and we’ll read books to compare it to that. Hannah found the young adult novel easier to read than “some of the older books” because of language – “the wording’s different” – and because of her perceived “enjoyment level.” For Hannah, this enjoyment of the young adult novel stemmed from the recognizable characters and situations:

*Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* is more teenagers going through stuff in high school . . . like we’re in high school so we understand . . . and the other books are more, like more about adults in different situations.

Furthermore, Hannah linked her enjoyment and feeling of connection to the novel to her learning:

I would say I’ve learned stuff from this book definitely, and the other books that I’ve read for school I haven’t really had any connection to so I haven’t had any learning from them.

Danny found *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993) to be “different from other books” he has read for school because of format. He recollected reading short stories and plays including *The Crucible* (1953) and *Antigone* (Sophocles & Thomas, 2005). The challenges of reading the young adult novel were “about the same” for Danny as reading other assigned literature, but he found the novel “less interesting.”
The four students participating in interviews expressed a variety of perceptions about specific works of literature. A common element of their experiences, however, is that making connections between oneself and a text, or between two or more texts, enhances the reading experience.

In summary, I have described in this section the students’ perceptions about the connections they made or didn’t make with the young adult novel, what they found challenging in the novel, and how the novel compared to other works assigned for school. Three of the four students participating in interviews made powerful connections with characters and/or situations in the young adult novel. They spoke explicitly about relating to the contemporary setting and teen-aged characters. For these three students, the greatest challenge of Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes (Crutcher, 1993) was the emotional impact of the novel’s content. For the student who did not feel strong connections, the greater challenge of the novel was the language and his perception of “author’s style.” The students who made the strongest connections to Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes compared the novel favorably to other assigned works for school.

**Student Attitudes and Engagement: The Classic Novel**

Each of the four students interviewed after reading Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes (Crutcher, 1993) were interviewed a second time after the completion of the classic text, Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck (1937/1994). The interview questions for the second interview paralleled those for the first interview, with some additional questions asking the students about the pairing strategy, their learning outcomes, and ways they think that teachers can encourage students to read more. I will discuss the students’ responses to the classic novel first, then I will discuss the responses to the additional questions.
Making Connections

The four participating students expressed distinct responses to the classic novel and they freely discussed the degree to which they connected or did not connect to the characters and situations. Jordan, who earlier had expressed her dislike of historical fiction and “older” stories, admitted that “the beginning was a little slow but then when you got like towards the middle and the end I didn’t want to put it down.” Discussing specific characters, Jordan commented:

I relate a lot to Lennie, I guess, because he has something that allows people to really look down on him, and especially here, like being openly gay in this school, a lot of people look down upon you, so I was talking to [my English teacher] about that not too long ago actually. I connected to him a lot, yeah.

Jordan made a powerful personal connection to the character of Lennie who is frequently misunderstood, feared, and is ultimately killed because of his cognitive disability.

Jordan had anticipated not liking Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) because it is an older, classic novel. Maggie, however, was prepared to like the novel based on her mother’s recommendation:

So, my mom is dyslexic, and she hates reading, and this is the only book that she’s ever fully read, so I already was like ready to read it, and then, yeah, I was really excited to get through it . . . She was like ‘you’re gonna like it,’ ‘cause we share a lot of like the same mindsets and stuff.

Maggie connected quickly to the character, Lennie, in Of Mice and Men. Discussing Lennie, she said, “I have some sort of emotional connection with people who can’t help themselves. I don’t know why but I, I think it touches part of your heart.” Maggie had a
strong emotional response to the characters. She reflected on the depth of her connection to Steinbeck’s characters. Describing her reaction, she stated:

From the beginning, when we first saw Lennie picking up the mice, it was, it was like, you felt like a connection with the characters I think. I think I felt more of a connection with these characters than I did with *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, which is weird because like there’s less of this book, but I feel like we get more personal with them . . . Their personality shows through like everything that they do, and it’s easier to, not necessarily relate but to feel for them.

Maggie was clear about the characters she liked and disliked in Steinbeck’s novel. “I liked Candy. I didn’t like Curly . . . maybe because I had no sympathy for him.” She recognized that Curly is portrayed as a one dimensional character more than the character of Mark Brittain, a “bad guy” in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993). “Yeah, [Curly] doesn’t have that much internal conflict like Mark had,” Maggie observed.

Hannah’s reaction to the classic novel was mixed. She initially found the story “confusing, with all the different characters, keeping track of who was who.” Like Jordan and Maggie, Hannah reacted strongly to the character, Lennie, and the challenges he faces:

People’s reactions to Lennie really, like, made me mad . . . I just want to go in and give him a hug, but, when all these characters are treating him so poorly . . . it’s just hard to remember that that’s what they were all treated like. And it’s hard to think that, in this society, where today, it’s still not perfect and it never will be, but it’s [i.e., having a disability] more accepted than it was.
Hannah was distressed by the mistreatment of Lennie due to his cognitive disability. She commented on the complexity of Lennie’s and George’s relationship, remarking that her reaction to George was mixed because of his treatment of Lennie. “I know he loved Lennie, but the way he treated him sometimes made me mad.” Hannah’s sympathy for Lennie springs from a personal connection to his character: “I have a lot of family who is like Lennie, and so to see how much he was treated poorly then almost makes you thankful for the way that they’re treated now.”

Interviewing Danny after the completion of the classic novel was a completely different experience from the first interview. Danny, the self-professed non-reader who had found little to connect with in Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes (Crutcher, 1993), was highly engaged by Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck, 1937/1994). “I really liked the storyline, like I enjoyed this story,” he told me right away. He spoke at length about his interest in the friendship of George and Lennie:

I enjoyed the ideology of like Lennie being, ‘cause Lennie’s slow and all that, and I liked how George was helping him out, and like they’re just trying their best, and George is doing his best to keep Lennie in check . . . and help him, ‘cause he knows that Lennie’s a good guy or whatever, but, and he knows that people are gonna judge him because of it, and probably not give him jobs and stuff, so I just liked the story of friendship. It’s a good story. It’s really good.”

I asked Danny if he made any connections to particular characters or situations. He again responded in depth:

I connect to George very well, because at my camp over the summer that I stay at, there’s this one kid and he kind of has learning disabilities, and once we were
younger, a bunch of the other kids didn’t really hang out with him as much and I
kind of felt bad for him so I stuck up for him more, so in that sense of having my
own Lennie, I connected with George. And I also kind of connected with Lennie
too, because I understood him, you know.

Danny described a profoundly personal connection with Steinbeck’s characters. His
enjoyment of the classic novel and interest in discussing it was markedly stronger than
his interest in the young adult novel. All four of the participating students named
powerful connections with characters as a reason for engagement.

**Challenges**

The four participating students identified some challenges in reading *Of Mice and
Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) but none of them found the classic novel to be inaccessible.
Jordan found the unfamiliar setting more challenging than the contemporary setting of
*Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993), but felt the language of the classic novel
was “just as easy” to understand as the language in the young adult novel. As a reader,
Jordan felt most challenged by the nature of the theme of the classic novel: “It definitely
made me question my morals . . . Because I was almost glad when George shot Lennie,
which doesn’t sound right.”

Maggie found the dialog in *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) to be
challenging because the characters speak in dialect and use some expressions that may be
unfamiliar to contemporary teens. Nevertheless, Maggie said, “It was pretty easy to read .
. . just a little more difficult than *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* just because of the
language.” Like Jordan, Maggie was impacted by the classic novel’s storyline and theme:
It just had more of an emotional grip. It’s emotionally harder to read because . . . first off these are people who don’t have any family, so you already have sympathy for them, and they’re all by themselves, and . . . you feel that loneliness and friendship between them, which already makes it hard to think about, like, reading, and then you see everything that they had to go through together, and along with Lennie’s mental disabilities, so I think that’s what made it like themewise hard to read, because there were many times where I had to like, my heart was hurting for him, like I just had to take a second.

Maggie experienced a profound emotional reaction to the novel. Furthermore, she felt intellectually challenged, and compared reading *Of Mice and Men* to reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) her ninth-grade year. “They’re very similar in the fact that you really have to think while you’re reading, and sometimes you do have to like step back and take a moment to really understand what you just read.” Overall, Maggie felt that the setting and language in *Of Mice and Men* made it more challenging – “a little bit of a jump” -- than *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993).

Hannah experienced significant challenge while reading *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994). “It was confusing, with all the different characters, keeping track of who was who.” She also named the unfamiliar setting and lifestyle of the characters as part of the challenge for her. Hannah was the only one of the four students interviewed who admitted to using a study guide for support. “I did use SparkNotes a little bit because I was on vacation and I was really far behind . . . but then some of the SparkNotes were even confusing.” Although she connected to and sympathized with the character, Lennie, Hannah ultimately “just didn’t love the writing.”
Danny’s experience reading the classic novel was very different from his experience with the YA novel:

I felt *Of Mice and Men* was an easier read than *Sarah Byrnes*. Just overall language and other things like that. And I enjoyed the story more than the *Sarah Byrnes* story, so I found myself wanting to read it and knowing what happens more, where in *Sarah Byrnes* I just was reading this book for English class.

Danny had spoken in the first interview about getting reading support from the school’s Literacy Specialist, so I asked him what supports, if any, he accessed while reading *Of Mice and Men*. He told me, “I don’t use SparkNotes.” For various reasons, he was unable to meet with the Literacy Specialist while reading *Of Mice and Men*. Despite the absence of her support, Danny “did get to finish the book in time.” He told me, “I understood this book . . . I didn’t need [the Literacy Specialist] as much as I did in *Sarah Byrnes*.”

In summary, the students experienced varying degrees of challenge from the classic novel’s setting, language, and themes. The three students who engaged most strongly with the novel – Jordan, Maggie, and Danny – experienced the least difficulty. Interestingly, Danny was the most challenged by the young adult novel and expressed the least degree of challenge with the classic novel. I will comment on potential implications of the students’ reactions in Chapter 5.

**Comparing the Classic Novel to Other Assigned Texts**

In comparison to other assigned texts, Jordan found *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) “quite different” because of the “big social issues” presented in the novel. “It got really heavy too at the end, which you usually don’t see in books assigned for school,” she remarked. I asked if she thought challenging social issues were appropriate
for assigned reading. She replied, “I think it’s appropriate to have something controversial in a book. I think it would get kids like more involved . . . to argue their opinion on where they stand.” Jordan viewed the moral complexity of the novel’s theme as a positive challenge that engaged her and potentially could engage other students.

Maggie also spoke about thematic complexity when asked to compare *Of Mice and Men* with other assigned texts. She compared reading Steinbeck’s work to reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) “where you have complex characters that you have to think about, they’re very similar in the fact that you really have to think while you’re reading.” Maggie recalled having to “go back and reread a few times” in both novels, as well as a Shakespeare play assigned the previous year. “Sometimes I didn’t quite get it the first time, just because this isn’t the language that I’m used to.” At times, Maggie found herself disengaging from *Of Mice and Men*:

> Some of the things that are happening were a little bit dry, just like in any other book that we’ve read, just little pieces that were, like you’re really interested in the book but there’s just like that dry point where you’re like, do I really want to keep going through it, and then you realize yes you do, and get through.

Maggie’s comments suggest that she is a reader who is comfortable with challenge and who knows how to use strategies such as re-reading to help her through difficult parts. As a self-described reader, Maggie knows how to persevere through difficult or “dry” pieces of a text.

Danny struggled to compare *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) to other assigned texts because he could not recall specifics – or even the titles – of other assigned texts. He was sure that he “liked this one [i.e., *Of Mice and Men*] more.” I asked him to
compare difficulty levels of other assigned texts. “I guess . . . Of Mice and Men was easier for me than other assigned books, ‘cause I connected with it more. And it was definitely shorter.” Danny admired the intensity of the short novel: “Within the short story it got through the message of all the long novels such as Sarah Byrnes did. And I feel like that’s pretty powerful. And pretty great.”

Hannah also spoke about the power of making connections when comparing Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) to other assigned texts:

Most of them I honestly don’t read at all, the assigned ones. I’ll just SparkNote them, because they lose interest quickly, but this one was intriguing because I have a lot of family who is like Lennie . . . so I think that is the difference . . . I could connect with this one on a more personal level.

Hannah’s admission that she usually reads the SparkNotes instead of the actual works of literature provides an example of the reading avoidance described by Broz (2011) and Gallagher (2009). Easy access online to summaries, interpretations, reviews, and commentaries on classic works may encourage students to attempt shortcuts in their reading.

The students’ comparisons of the classic novel to other assigned texts align with their reactions to the challenges of the novel. Jordan and Maggie compared Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) in terms of theme and the intellectual challenge of the issues raised in the storyline. Danny and Hannah returned to the importance of making personal connections for a text to have meaning.
Student Perceptions of Literacy Learning Outcomes

Pairing Strategy as Comprehension Scaffold

In addition to students’ attitudes and responses to the young adult and classic novels, this research study intended to explore the student informants’ perceptions of their literacy learning resulting from the pairing of the novels. In other words, I wondered if the students believed the strategy of pairing a young adult and a classic text was helpful to them in improving their comprehension of the novels and/or if the pairing strategy contributed to their learning about literary devices or techniques. Three of the four students perceived the pairing strategy as helpful to their understanding of themes in the classic novel.

Jordan described the pairing strategy as “definitely helpful” based on the similarity of the novels’ themes:

*Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* was heavily based on friendship, and especially at the end of *Of Mice and Men* it really makes you question what a true friend is, and I think setting the tone with *Sarah Byrnes* was like a really nice idea, because it got us thinking about friendship so we had an opinion at the end of *Of Mice and Men*, so I thought it was good.

Jordan didn’t think that understanding *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) would have necessarily been more difficult without first reading the young adult novel, but the pairing enriched the understanding of the concept of friendship:

I thought it was a good way to see two types of friendships, I guess, because Eric had to do something Sarah didn’t want him to do, for her benefit, just like George had to do something he necessarily didn’t want to do for Lennie’s benefit, but
they were two completely different situations, and I thought it was like really nice to see the correlation between the two.

Jordan stated that reading both the young adult and the classic novel helped her to improve as a reader because both were different than other books she has read. “It’s always good to go out of your comfort zone every once in a while,” she stated. “To develop yourself as person more and as a reader . . . just because I wouldn’t choose [either book] on my own, they were still really good books that I was really interested in.” Furthermore, Jordan believed that the pairing strategy supported the end-of-unit assessment, “Because it kind of got us warmed up . . . it got us thinking about different themes.”

Maggie expressed a positive response to reading the young adult novel first. “It helped me to think about the characters . . . it allowed me to carry those ideas through reading [Of Mice and Men].” The work students did in class to identify examples of themes was also helpful, according to Maggie. “We had the posters all around our classroom that had like “friendship” or “survival” . . . that really helped because we’d already done it with Sarah Byrnes.” Like Jordan, Maggie recognized the scaffolding effect of the young adult text:

I think [the pairing] made it easier at least for me to relate to these characters [in Of Mice and Men] after seeing characters that are already relatable . . . It starts making us, forcing us to put ourselves in Lennie and George’s shoes, when in a normal situation we wouldn’t . . . there’s like the age gap, and just an age of when the book was written gap. So, I think for Sarah Byrnes . . . like you had to understand the book. And I think having all of those tools with you while you’re
reading [Of Mice and Men] really helped. And I think comparing and like doing a young adult book while doing a classic is a very smart idea actually, because you’re kind of getting, you’re kind of warming up to the book. Nonetheless, Maggie felt there might be “a downside” to the pairing strategy. She wondered if some of her classmates might be more put off by a classic with unfamiliar elements after having read a young adult novel to which they connected. “Teens might not like that,” she speculated. “That’s not how I think, but I could see that happening.”

Maggie believed that she had grown as a reader as a result of both the young adult and the classic novel. She spoke at length about the powerful connection to characters she felt while reading Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes (Crutcher, 1993). As a result of these connections and the class discussions about the theme of appearance v. reality, Maggie felt that her ability to empathize grew:

I really learned to see things in a different perspective . . . I could sympathize with Mark Brittain . . . I feel like [perspective] is what’s made me a greater, a stronger reader, because it allowed me to like understand fully what the author is trying to portray . . . and I don’t think I’d ever done that before. I don’t think that I’d ever sympathized with like the antagonist.

Maggie perceived that her growing depth of understanding of character in the young adult novel led her to more clearly see the complexities of George’s decision to kill Lennie in Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck, 1937/1994): “When we had to think about how George was as a person, and how he came to the decision to murder his best friend, (pause) . . . it helped and I think has made my ability to read stronger.” Maggie found herself considering characters’ motives and perspectives more carefully as she read the
classic novel. She felt that she had been “blindsided” in the past by unreliable narrators in other novels. She was now reading with a more critical lens and pushed herself to consider multiple perspectives. “I enjoy [reading] a lot more now that I like, think about [characters’ motives] from different perspectives.”

For Hannah, the connection between the young adult and classic novels was less evident. She did not see thematic connections between the novels until her teacher explicitly directed students to make comparisons:

I couldn’t really compare the themes a lot, but when I was reading Of Mice and Men I wasn’t really thinking about Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes because they’re so different, even though they have the same kind of [storyline], but I didn’t really think about them together a lot until I was in class and like we were supposed to think about comparing them.

The in-class discussions were the scaffold that helped Hannah to make thematic connections between the paired novels.

Danny, as described earlier in this chapter, had the most extreme responses to the two novels. He made few if any connections to the young adult novel and didn’t find the story particularly interesting. On the other hand, he was highly enthusiastic about Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck, 1937/1994). As he reflected on the pairing strategy, Danny appeared to recognize the young adult novel as a useful scaffold to the classic text:

Anne: Do you think [pairing the novels] was an effective strategy and one that would be beneficial for a teacher to use in an English classroom?

Danny: I think so, yes. Very much so. Because I didn’t connect to Sarah Byrnes but I feel like if I did, then I think [Of Mice and Men] would have even been
better because I’d understand *Sarah Byrnes* very well and . . . it’s a young adult novel for someone my age . . . I understand and do well with that . . . And then contrast . . . this is a classic novel, might not be so appealing, but once you look at how well it connects to this young adult novel that you really like, it helps you through this book.

Danny’s lack of connections to *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993) did not prevent him from seeing the pairing strategy as helpful. He understood in theory, at least, that seeing similarities between a young adult and classic text could enhance reading the classic work. Or, perhaps, Danny wanted to please or be supportive of his teacher and/or the research project around the text pairing.

**Perceptions about Learning Literary Devices**

In addition to comprehending theme in the two novels, I was interested in the students’ perceptions about whether their understanding of specific literary devices was enhanced by the pairing strategy. High school teachers may be reluctant to use young adult literature to teach literary techniques in the belief that YAL does not offer sufficient opportunities to examine complex authorial methods such as foreshadowing, metaphor, personification, shifting point of view, or unorthodox structure, to name a few. My experience with YAL, however, is that many works employ complex literary devices. Milner (2013), as noted in Chapter 2, provides several examples of young adult works that include complex literary techniques. He argues that YAL may be more effective than most classic works in teaching literary devices because of the accessibility to teens of most young adult works. In this research study, I was interested in the students’ perceptions of their growth in understanding various complex literary devices and
whether Milner’s argument was true for this study. Did the students find it easier to
identify and analyze sophisticated authorial techniques in a classic work when they had
first been exposed to the technique in an engaging young adult work?

One of the participating students, Jordan, clearly perceived growth in her
understanding of one or more literary devices as a result of reading the novels. Jordan felt
that the emphasis in class on character development in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*
(Crutcher, 1993) aided her in recognizing how characters changed:

At the beginning of *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* you have one opinion of all
the characters. Like Mark, Mark especially. And then towards the end you find
out what’s really going on with them, and you kinda have a slightly different
opinion just because of the way [the author] developed the characters.

For the classic novel, Jordan remarked on “the repetition, especially of the story that
George would tell Lennie about the rabbits.” She found that the animal motif impacted
the strength of the novel’s conclusion. “If you didn’t have that repetition throughout, the
ending might not have been as strong.”

Hannah spoke about Steinbeck’s use of foreshadowing as a literary device that
she had learned to better recognize. “There was a lot of foreshadowing in *Of Mice and
Men*, and you didn’t really notice it until it happened, and then you’re like, oh that’s what
he was talking about. So I [gained] a lot of learning for that part on *Of Mice and Men.*”
However, Hannah did not directly connect this learning to having read the paired young
adult novel prior to the classic.

Jordan and Maggie identified the pairing strategy as clearly beneficial to their
comprehension of the classic novel. They recognized that the thematic connections
between the novels allowed the young adult text to act as a scaffold to the classic work. As a result, their comprehension was deeper. Jordan also perceived that her understanding of characterization was stronger as a result of the pairing. Maggie and Hannah specifically referred to classroom activities that enhanced their learning. Structured comparisons of themes lead to discussions that contributed to reading comprehension, and for Hannah, recognition of Steinbeck’s extensive use of foreshadowing in *Of Mice and Men* (1937/1994).

**Summary of Results**

In this chapter, I have described the results of a case study of one high school English classroom in which a young adult and a classic novel were intentionally paired to observe in what ways, if any, the use of the young adult novel might impact the attitudes, engagement, and literacy learning outcomes of the participating students. The primary data sources presented in this chapter are the words of the participating teacher and four students from the transcripts of a series of interviews. Additional data sources include a survey of reading interests of all students in the case study classroom, and observational field notes from the classroom. Through thick description and the analysis of data gathered from the triangulation of interviews, survey, and observations, I suggest interpretations that may offer opportunities for secondary English/Language Arts curriculum and instruction to more effectively meet the needs of contemporary students.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Despite years of reform efforts in the American public education system, neither high school graduation rates nor high school reading achievement levels have changed appreciably (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009; U. S. Department of Education, 2013). High school English curricula likewise remain largely unchanged, relying on the use of a narrow body of classic works of literature (Applebee, 1996; Wolk, 2010). The National Council of Teachers of English has a history of advocacy for increasing diversity in the literature used in K-12 classrooms to include texts that “mirror the range of students’ abilities and interests” (National Council of Teachers of English, 1999). More recently, NCTE has called on publishers of children’s and young adult literature to increase the range of cultural diversity in works they choose to publish to reflect the increasing multiculturalism of contemporary society (National Council of Teachers of English, 2015). Today’s adolescents live in a world that would be unrecognizable to the scholars of the late nineteenth-century who influenced the American high school English curriculum. Educational leaders should use their influence to encourage and support a broadening of the literature used in the high school English curriculum.

My interest in this study has its roots in my experiences teaching high school English and serving as a high school Library/Media Specialist. I have witnessed the power of young adult literature to engage students and excite them about reading, and I have witnessed many students reject the classics by simply not reading them. I wondered why so many teachers seem to resist a change in the traditional curriculum and to trying
young adult literature. While a body of research about young adult literature exists, it is relatively small. I hypothesized that many teachers rely on the classics because these works are perceived, by definition and by tradition, as challenging and educational, while young adult literature may be perceived as “junior,” less rigorous, suitable for entertainment and pleasure reading but not sufficiently substantive to support deeper student learning. Teachers may be unfamiliar with YAL, as I was thirty years ago. They may feel bound to a prescribed curriculum that does not include YAL, or simply may not have many selections available due to school financial constraints. These are barriers that can be overcome, leading me to theorize that at the heart of the matter is a belief by many high school English teachers that young adult literature simply isn’t challenging enough to merit study. The results of my study suggest that young adult literature can engage students in active reading that builds comprehension and analytical skills. A young adult work can stand on its own as a rigorous text for study, and, by building student skill and confidence, can act as a scaffold to more challenging texts such as the classics that many teachers so highly value.

This chapter suggests three areas of implication that are potentially relevant to secondary level teachers of English/Language Arts, curriculum developers, and others interested in adolescent literacy and/or school reform. I discuss the implications of pairing young adult and classic literature in a high school English classroom for curriculum, instruction, and student learning outcomes.

**Implications for Curriculum**

Student informants repeatedly spoke about the power of the connections they made to characters and situations in the young adult novel, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*
(Crutcher, 1993), and the classic novel, *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck 1937/1994). Nearly fifty instances of remarks by the student informants were coded R-CE (see Appendix J), indicating that an emotional connection was made to a character, situation, or other aspect of the text. While the type or sense of connection varied by student, a common experience was being highly interested in, enjoying, and completing a work to which strong connections were felt. Student participants found the young adult novel to be different from most other literature assigned for school because of the emotional intensity they felt about the characters and their experiences. Jordan, who considers herself a reader, stated that *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* is the only assigned novel that she has read in its entirety in high school. Hannah stated that she believed she learned more from reading the young adult novel than other assigned works because she connected more strongly to it; she couldn’t learn, she said, from a book with which she did not connect. The students welcomed the complexity of the issues posed in both the young adult and the classic works. They talked with friends about the novels outside of class, expressed strong emotions such as anger and heartache about characters and situations, and at times found themselves losing track of time as they read.

Young adult literature, written with a teen audience in mind and portraying teen characters and their lives, is designed to appeal to high school students by meeting them at the level of their development as readers and human beings. Classic literature was written for adult audiences with characters and situations that may seem remote and/or irrelevant to today’s adolescents (Herz & Gallo, 2005, pp. 18-19). The students participating in the case study demonstrated a willingness to persevere with unfamiliar elements in Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* (1937/1994) after reading a young adult work.
that prepared them for major theme ideas in the classic text. The students agreed that reading the young adult novel first supported and enriched their comprehension of the classic work. By carefully selecting engaging, high quality young adult literature to pair with certain classic works, we can enliven the high school English curriculum, engage students in reading more often and more deeply, and preserve what is most effective from the high school canon of classics. The pairing strategy may open additional doors in the high school curriculum for a broader use of young adult literature and increased diversity of text types, formats, and genres.

**Implications for Instruction**

The participating teacher found the strategy of pairing the young adult novel with the classic novel to be effective in engaging students. Diane observed that most students in the case study class were engaged by the young adult novel and some made very strong connections to the novel’s characters and situations. Students in the case study class demonstrated greater interest in the classic novel than the teacher had perceived with previous classes that had not read the young adult text. The teacher also felt that some of the struggling readers in the case study class were more engaged in and successful with the classic novel than struggling readers in previous classes. Diane intentionally scaffolded instruction with classroom learning experiences that focused on the themes of the two novels, an important aspect of the pairing strategy that contributed to student comprehension and engagement. Diane speculated that feeling comfortable and successful with the young adult work gave the struggling readers more confidence to tackle the classic novel. She observed that students who were enthusiastic and successful readers prior to the case study did not necessarily demonstrate more or less engagement
with either the young adult or classic texts; however, she sensed that their enthusiasm for both works influenced other students in the class.

Field observations of the participating teacher’s classroom illustrate that Diane’s teaching practice blends elements of traditional curriculum and approaches with more contemporary works and student-centered learning experiences. The Midlands High School English curriculum includes classics that are frequently found in American public high schools. Diane is expected to assign works such as Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953), F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* (1937/1994). She mixes in classic and contemporary short stories, essays, documents, and articles. Periodically, Diane uses literature circles (Daniels, 2002), giving students 3-5 titles to choose from for reading together in small groups. Every class period includes at least ten minutes of independent reading of books self-selected by students. During my observations, every student read for the duration of the time allotted. Some read from the assigned novels, but many read books they had self-selected; most of those books were young adult novels. Students freely discussed their books with each other before and after the assigned reading time. They recommended titles and traded volumes with each other. Diane participated in many of these conversations and made it a point to read works recommended to her by the students. She allowed students to go to the library when they needed a new book, a facility well stocked with popular young adult and contemporary adult fiction and staffed by enthusiastic and supportive professionals. Diane works to establish relationships with her students, coming to know their interests so that she can facilitate connecting students to books that will interest them. This is particularly challenging with struggling and reluctant readers. The intersection of choice, time to
read, availability of appealing contemporary and young adult works, and Diane’s persistence in “making the match” (Lesesne, 2003) contributed to a strong reading culture in the case study class. Without such a culture in place, the results of the study may have been different.

Furthermore, Diane engineered classroom learning experiences that gave students opportunities to discuss their reading of assigned texts, exchange questions and interpretations, and to search for evidence in the texts to support theme ideas and character traits. These learning experiences acted as scaffolds for building comprehension and analysis as students moved from one text to the next. This research study does not parse all of the potential influences on students’ learning. Yet, as an observer with thirty years of teaching and supervision experience, it was evident to me that the participating students’ engagement, interest, and success with the young adult and classic works resulted from carefully constructed learning experiences with well-matched texts. Pairing a young adult and a classic work provided Diane with an effective strategy that, in her words, helped her to “up her game.”

**Implications for Learning Outcomes**

The participating teacher perceived the strategy of pairing the young adult and the classic novel as effective in supporting students’ reading comprehension, recognition and understanding of certain literary devices, and demonstration of proficiency in a graduation standard. Diane observed that more students read the classic work in entirety than was typical. She noticed that class discussions were richer because students were able to cite textual evidence and to make connections between characters and themes. The students demonstrated a greater capacity to empathize with characters in the classic
novel after reading the young adult work. The pairing also enhanced students’ recognition and understanding of certain literary devices. Student work noted in field observations corroborates Diane’s observations.

Perhaps most striking was the success of the case study students in demonstrating proficiency in the graduation standard: “Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of a text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.” Diane’s students had experience with the analysis of a single theme; however, the summative assessment for Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) was a written piece analyzing two or more themes within the novel and how those themes develop. Diane attributed the success of the case study students to the pairing strategy. She felt that reading the young adult novel prepared students for the complex themes of the classic work. As a result, students were better able to analyze the classic novel and support their assertions with textual evidence. Their demonstrated understanding of characters and the ethical dilemmas they encounter in Steinbeck’s work met expectations for proficiency in the rigorous graduation standard.

Some irony exists in the results of this study in connection with the question of rigor and young adult literature. Text complexity can be gauged through two lenses: quantitative and qualitative complexity (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016, pp. 4-5). Quantitative complexity refers to mathematical analysis of text for factors such as sentence length and number of syllables in words. Quantitative measures assume that longer sentences and multi-syllabic words are more complex. One such quantitative measure that is referenced in the Common Core State Standards and used by several
assessment systems as a reliable quantitative measure of text complexity is the Lexile system (MetaMetrics, 2016a). The Lexile system – and other quantitative measures – do not take into account factors such as text structure, language conventionality or clarity, knowledge demands placed on the reader to access the text, purpose, and levels of meaning (Student Achievement Partners, n.d.). These are qualitative factors that must be evaluated by an experienced and knowledgeable educator, not a mathematical formula.

An assumption that could be made about young adult literature and classics is that classics are more complex in both quantitative and qualitative terms. While this may be true for some texts, it is not the case for all, nor for the works used in this study. *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher, 1993), has a Lexile measure of 920L, while *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1994) has a Lexile measure of HL580L. Lexile measures are not intended to strictly match grade levels; however, MetaMetrics (2016c) provides a chart that aligns Lexile spans with grade levels to indicate the quantitative demand students can be expected to manage in alignment with the Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts. According to this chart, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* falls in the upper 5th grade level with its Lexile of 920L, and *Of Mice and Men* falls in the 2nd to 3rd grade range with its Lexile of HL580L. Thus, based strictly on the Lexile, or quantitative measure, the young adult text is more difficult than the classic text.

When qualitative factors are considered, neither work matches its Lexile for grade level appropriateness. Both works address mature themes and situations with characters facing complex moral dilemmas. No thinking teacher would hand Steinbeck’s work to a 3rd grader, nor Crutcher’s work to a 5th grader. The Lexile designation of “HL” for *Of
Mice and Men addresses the significant discrepancy between the novel’s Lexile measure and its age/grade appropriateness:

A text designated as "HL" has a Lexile measure much lower than the average reading ability of the intended age range of its readers. Librarians and booksellers sometimes refer to young adult books with disproportionately low Lexile measures as "high-low" books, meaning "high-interest" plus "low-readability." These books receive an HL code. Often fiction, HL books are useful when matching older (grade 7 and beyond) struggling or reluctant readers with text at both an appropriate difficulty level and an appropriate developmental level. Despite their short sentences and basic vocabulary, HL books are designed to appeal to readers at a more mature developmental level. (MetaMetrics 2016b)

Determining the rigor and appropriateness of any text for use in the classroom clearly should go well beyond quantitative scores or the categories of young adult or classic. I would argue that teachers who take the time to read and analyze specific works of young adult literature will find many works that, based on qualitative features, are worthy of their students’ time and will support positive learning outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in its scope. Limiting factors include the number of participants, location, time frame, and selection of texts used for the pairing strategy.

Data collected from this study come from one teacher, four students participating in interviews, one survey of thirteen participating students, and field notes from observations of one classroom conducted over a period of four months. A larger number of participants may have produced much greater diversity in responses. Use of several
research sites (i.e., several classrooms and/or multiple schools) may have also significantly diversified the responses of participants and illustrated a broader range of experiences and outcomes with the pairing strategy. A single researcher also presents limitations to the study. Multiple researchers might provide observations and interpretations not recognized by a lone researcher.

Text selection is another limiting factor of this case study. The research examined the effects of pairing one young adult work with one classic work of literature. Additional studies using the same works in different classrooms might have different or more diverse outcomes. Likewise, with scores of young adult and classic works to choose from and the numerous possibilities for pairing those works, other pairings could produce different results.

Finally, I recognize potential bias in my role as researcher. My experiences with the use of young adult and classic literature in high school settings has predisposed me to believe that young adult literature can be used effectively in high school English curricula with student literacy learning outcomes equal to or greater than with classic literature alone. Another potential source of bias is that the participating teacher, Diane, and I have worked successfully together in the past. Prior to the study, I was aware that Diane values and uses young adult literature with her students. Studying the classroom of a teacher previously unknown to me, or one unfamiliar with or not in favor of using young adult literature may have produced different results.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

The field of young adult literature scholarship is relatively young. Multiple possibilities exist for future research. My research was situated in one high school
English classroom in a small, rural community. There is great potential for future inquiry on a broader scale and for using diverse young adult and classic texts for pairings. There is rich opportunity, for example, to examine various aspects of pairing such as Bright’s (2011) notion of intertextuality and Milner’s (2013) comparisons of the use of specific literary techniques in YA and classic works.

Potential also exists for studies of the use of young adult literature employed in high school English classrooms in ways other than the pairing strategy studied here. Examination of the barriers that exist, real or perceived, to using young adult works in high school curricula might yield insights about student literacy learning, teacher professional development, curriculum selection, or more broadly, education reform. Maggie’s use of the social media platform for readers, Goodreads, suggests another avenue for potential research into the uses and influences of digital media on student reading.

Louise Rosenblatt first described her transactional theory of reading in 1978 with the publication of *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*. Yet little is known about the transactions that take place between an adolescent reader and a text, classic or young adult. Greater insight into the processes of adolescent reading engagement and comprehension could be of tremendous benefit to the field.

**Conclusion**

As an educational practitioner, this study affirmed for me the value of strong teacher-student relationships, the development of positive classroom culture, and the importance of listening to the words of our students. Young adults are hungry for
opportunities to explore issues that are important to their lives. The pace of change in contemporary society signals a future we cannot yet imagine. Educators would be well-served by taking a hard look at the anchors of American education and considering a broadening of curriculum and instructional approaches to include relevant contemporary issues, materials, and learning strategies.
REFERENCES


Christie, A. (1940). *And then there were none*. New York, NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons.


APPENDIX A

Informed Consent to Participate

Pairing Young Adult Literature with Classic Literature
By Anne Miller, Graduate Student in Literacy Education, University of Maine

Dear Students and Parents/Guardians:

Students in Ms. Sawyer’s 11th-grade English class are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Anne Miller, a graduate student in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine, under the supervision of Dr. Richard Kent. The purpose of the research is to study the use of young adult literature paired with classic literature in the English classroom. Ms. Diane Sawyer’s classroom is the site of the study. If you are 18 years old or older, you may give your consent to be involved in this study. If you are under 18 years old, I must obtain consent from a parent or guardian to allow you to participate.

What Will You Be Asked to Do?

During English class, all students in Ms. Sawyer’s class will be participating in the curriculum unit. I will be present in Ms. Sawyer’s classroom as an observer during several lessons. I will observe students’ responses to the assigned books. I will be taking notes about what I observe during these lessons. These observations will not be audio-recorded, videotaped, or shared with the teacher or students. The purpose of these observational notes is to inform my understanding of the effects of the curriculum on student learning.

In addition to classroom observations, I will ask all students to complete a survey. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The purpose of the survey, which will be anonymous, is to learn more about students’ reading experiences and interests before the research begins. For example, I will ask questions such as the following:

- Do you like to read?
- What was the last book you read that you enjoyed?
- Do you like to read books categorized as young adult or teen literature?
- Do you like to read books categorized as classic literature?

I will also read some student response journals to gain insight about what students are thinking about the assigned class books. This will help me to better understand student perceptions about the books.

A small number of students (3-5) with parent permission will be selected to participate in interviews. One interview will take place after the young adult book is completed, and a second interview will take place after the classic book is completed. Interviews with students will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Interviews will require up to thirty minutes of your/your child’s time and will be scheduled during the English class period.
or at another time during the school day that is convenient. Interviews will be conducted in the classroom or a common area. I may pose questions and offer prompts such as the following:

- Tell me about reading the young adult text.
- Tell me about reading the classic text.
- What was easy or hard about reading each book?
- Do you think young adult literature should be used in high school English classes? Why or why not?
- Do you think classic literature should be used in high school English classes? Why or why not?

Risks
Other than time and inconvenience, risks are minimal beyond those of a regular school day. There is a possibility that you may be uncomfortable answering some interview questions or sharing your schoolwork. You may skip any question at any time. You may also ask that your work not be examined. You have the right to end interview participation at any time.

Benefits of Research
The research being conducted has the potential of helping teachers learn more about teaching reading and literature and engaging students in reading. The research also has the potential of helping individuals learn more about themselves as readers. Finally, this research adds to the research about teaching adolescent literacy.

Confidentiality
Your/your child’s name will not be on any of the documents associated with the study. I will replace all students’ names with pseudonyms on interview transcripts and notes. A key linking pseudonyms to names will be kept in a locked file box in my home office and destroyed by December 31, 2016. Your/your child’s real name or any other identifying information will not be used in any reports, publications, or conference presentations that result from this study. Interview transcripts and observation notes will not be available to any participants. Participants are, of course, free to discuss their own experiences in this study with others.

I will store interview audio recordings on an external computer hard drive in a password-protected file that only I can access. I will store electronic copies of interview and survey transcripts on an external computer hard drive in a password-protected file that only I can access. This computer hard drive as well as any paper copies of interview and survey transcripts or other documents such as my research notes will be stored in a locked file box in my home office for a period of not more than ten years after the completion of the
research (December 31, 2016). At that time, the external computer hard drive and paper copies of interview transcripts and other documents will be destroyed.

**Voluntary**
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time during the study. You may skip any questions asked or any writing prompts offered. In addition, if you choose not to participate, this decision will not affect your status as a student in your classroom or at your school in any way.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me, Anne Miller, at 487-3060 or at anne.miller1@maine.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Richard Kent, at rich.kent@maine.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Gayle Jones, Assistant to the University of Maine’s Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, at 581-1498 or at gayle.jones@umit.maine.edu

Your/your parent’s signature below indicates that you have read the above information and agree to participate. You will receive a copy of this form.

Student’s Signature __________________________ Printed ______________________

Date______________________

If you are under 18 years of age, a parent/guardian must sign:

Parent/Guardian Signature _______________________ Printed ___________________

Date______________________
APPENDIX B

**English III Summative Assessment**

Double Entry Journal - Two Themes, One Story

Summative Assessment

Double Entry Journals (DEJ) are set up so that you can dig deeply into sections of a text to explore them further. Through the DEJ format, show your understanding of the book by identifying and analyzing two themes in the same work (in this case, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck).

In *Of Mice and Men*, several key ideas emerge that could be developed into theme statements, including Loneliness or Isolation, Friendship, Powerlessness, Freedom and Confinement, Prejudice, and The American Dream.

Steps to completing this assessment:

- As you read, narrow your search to the two theme ideas you will pursue.
- Look for important quotations that touch on these key ideas.
- Copy the entire quotation(s) and then respond to the quotation(s) by **analyzing the effect of the quotation on the story, characters, and/or the theme**.
- Make sure that as you select the most important quotations and that your first journal entry be from the beginning of the novel, the second from somewhere in the middle, and the last from the last section.
- After you’ve completed the journal responses for both themes, write a brief concluding analysis in which you explain how the two themes are connected. Consider such ideas as how and where the two themes interact and how they add depth or richness to the story.

You will have a minimum of six double entry journal responses to turn in (THREE for each theme you choose) PLUS the concluding analysis.

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**CHS Graduation Standards**

**Reading Comprehension:** A. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of a text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

**Reading Interpretation:** A. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support an analysis of the text, including any applicable primary or secondary sources, and determine both explicit and implicit meanings, such as inferences that can be drawn from the text and where the text leaves matters uncertain.

**Writing Process:** B. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing.
APPENDIX C

Teacher Interview Protocol #1

This interview will take place before the teaching unit begins. I will begin this interview with the following script:

Thank you for agreeing to allow me into your classroom for this research project on pairing a young adult text with a classic. Before we begin, I just want to remind you that everything you say in this interview is confidential. I'm recording this interview, but the recording will be locked up and I'll be the only one who listens to it. I'll be transcribing the interview into a document. When I do that, I'll change your name to a pseudonym, and I'll also be disguising or taking out any information that might be used to identify you or your students. When I write my final paper or give any presentations about this study, I won't be using any actual names or other identifying information.

I also want to emphasize that you are free to skip any of the questions I ask or to stop the interview altogether at any point if you want. The purpose of this interview is for me to get to know a bit about reading instruction and learning in your classroom. I want to emphasize that I'm not judging what you say in any way. I'm just interested in your honest thoughts and feelings. If I ask you a question, it's not because I'm looking for a particular answer. It's just because I want to know more about what you think.

Do you have any questions before we start?

I will then ask the following questions:

What kinds of reading do you typically assign to your students? What categories of books? (YAL, classics, fiction, nonfiction, essays, articles, poems, other?)

Do your students typically read for pleasure?

What are some strategies that you use with students to support reading comprehension? (Or what strategies do you find successful with these students?)

Do your students typically find assigned reading accessible? Tell me more about that.

How important is it for students to read the classics in high school?

What place does young adult literature have in the high school classroom?

How do you envision the selected young adult text will help students to access the assigned classic work, if at all?
What are your beliefs about the purposes or goals of high school English courses? What is the place of literature in high school English courses?
APPENDIX D

Teacher Interview Protocol #2

This interview will take place after the young adult novel portion of the teaching unit is completed. I will begin this interview with the following script:

*Now that the first part of the instructional unit is complete, I would like to hear about your thoughts on using a young adult novel. Before we begin, I just want to remind you that everything you say in this interview is confidential. I'm recording this interview, but the recording will be locked up and I'll be the only one who listens to it. I'll be transcribing the interview into a document. When I do that, I'll change your name to a pseudonym, and I'll also be disguising or taking out any information that might be used to identify you or your students. When I write my final paper or give any presentations about this study, I won't be using any actual names or other identifying information.*

*I also want to emphasize that you are free to skip any of the questions I ask or to stop the interview altogether at any point if you want. The purpose of this interview is for me to get to know a bit about reading instruction and learning in your classroom. I want to emphasize that I'm not judging what you say in any way. I'm just interested in your honest thoughts and feelings. If I ask you a question, it's not because I'm looking for a particular answer. It's just because I want to know more about what you think.*

_Do you have any questions before we start?

I will then ask the following questions:

How accessible was the young adult text to your students? More or less than other works previously assigned?

How would you describe the students’ engagement with the young adult text?

What were your instructional goals for the young adult novel? To what extent were these goals achieved?

In what ways, if any, did reading the young adult text help students understand specific themes or literary devices?

What do you think were the major literacy learning outcomes, if any, from reading the young adult text?

What were the successes and challenges of using the young adult novel?

As a result of reading the young adult novel, do you think that your students have changed their attitudes towards books and reading? Please explain.
APPENDIX E

Teacher Interview Protocol #3

This interview will take place after the teaching unit is completed. I will begin this interview with the following script:

Now that the instructional unit is complete, I would like to hear about your thoughts on using the classic text and on pairing the young adult and classic text. Before we begin, I just want to remind you that everything you say in this interview is confidential. I'm recording this interview, but the recording will be locked up and I'll be the only one who listens to it. I'll be transcribing the interview into a document. When I do that, I'll change your name to a pseudonym, and I'll also be disguising or taking out any information that might be used to identify you or your students. When I write my final paper or give any presentations about this study, I won't be using any actual names or other identifying information.

I also want to emphasize that you are free to skip any of the questions I ask or to stop the interview altogether at any point if you want. The purpose of this interview is for me to get to know a bit about reading instruction and learning in your classroom. I want to emphasize that I'm not judging what you say in any way. I'm just interested in your honest thoughts and feelings. If I ask you a question, it's not because I'm looking for a particular answer. It's just because I want to know more about what you think.

Do you have any questions before we start?

I will then ask the following questions:

How accessible was the classic text to your students? More or less than other works assigned? Compared to the young adult text?

How would you describe the students’ engagement with the classic text?

In what ways, if any, did reading the young adult text first help students to access the classic text?

What were the major instructional goals for reading the classic text? To what extent were these goals achieved?

In what ways, if any, did reading the classic text help students understand specific themes or literary devices?

What were the successes and challenges of using the classic novel?
As a result of this unit, do you think that your students have changed their attitudes towards books and reading? Please explain.

As a result of this unit, have your beliefs about the place of young adult and classic literature in the high school curriculum changed at all? Please explain.
APPENDIX F

Student Interview Protocol #1

After the YA novel part of the unit is complete, I will interview each of the participating students selected for interview. I will begin the interviews with the following script:

I would like to talk to you about the books and reading in the unit just completed. I want to learn more about what students think about the kinds of books they read in school. Is it OK with you if I ask you some questions about the books and reading?

Before we begin, I just want to explain to you that everything you say in this interview is private. I'm recording this interview, but the recording will be locked up and I'll be the only one who listens to it. I'll be transcribing the interview into a document. When I do that, I'll change your name to a fake name, and I'll also be disguising or taking out any information that might be used to identify you. When I write my final paper or give any presentations about this study, I won't be using any actual names or other identifying information.

I also want to emphasize that you are free to skip any of the questions I ask or to stop the interview altogether at any point if you want. I want to emphasize that I'm not judging what you say in any way. I'm just interested in your honest thoughts and feelings. If I ask you a question, it's not because I'm looking for a particular answer. It's just because I want to know more about what you think.

Do you have any questions before we start?

I will then ask the following questions:

Tell me about reading the young adult text (insert title).

Tell me about reading the classic text (insert title).

What was easy or challenging about each book?

In what ways, if any, did reading the young adult text first help with understanding the classic text?

Do you think your teacher should use this strategy of pairing a young adult with a classic text again? Why or why not?

How interesting did you find each novel? Rate them on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 as not at all interesting and 10 as very interesting.

Tell me more about that. (What was interesting/uninteresting)?
As a result of reading the young adult text, do you think you will look for other books like it, or by the same author? Why or why not?

As a result of reading the classic text, do you think you will look for other books like it or by the same author? Why or why not?

In what ways, if any, did the young adult text help you improve as a reader?

In what ways, if any, did the classic text help you improve as a reader?

Is there anything else you would like to say about the books?
APPENDIX G

Student Interview Protocol #2

After the Classic novel part of the unit is complete, I will interview each of the participating students selected for interviews. I will begin the interviews with the following script:

I would like to talk to you about the books and reading in the unit just completed. I want to learn more about what students think about the kinds of books they read in school. Is it OK with you if I ask you some questions about the books and reading?

Before we begin, I just want to explain to you that everything you say in this interview is private. I'm recording this interview, but the recording will be locked up and I'll be the only one who listens to it. I'll be transcribing the interview into a document. When I do that, I'll change your name to a fake name, and I'll also be disguising or taking out any information that might be used to identify you. When I write my final paper or give any presentations about this study, I won't be using any actual names or other identifying information.

I also want to emphasize that you are free to skip any of the questions I ask or to stop the interview altogether at any point if you want. I want to emphasize that I'm not judging what you say in any way. I'm just interested in your honest thoughts and feelings. If I ask you a question, it's not because I'm looking for a particular answer. It's just because I want to know more about what you think.

Do you have any questions before we start?

I will then ask the following questions:

Tell me about reading the young adult text (insert title).

Tell me about reading the classic text (insert title).

What was easy or challenging about each book?

In what ways, if any, did reading the young adult text first help with understanding the classic text?

Do you think your teacher should use this strategy of pairing a young adult with a classic text again? Why or why not?

How interesting did you find each novel? Rate them on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 as not at all interesting and 10 as very interesting.

Tell me more about that. (What was interesting/uninteresting)?
As a result of reading the young adult text, do you think you will look for other books like it, or by the same author? Why or why not?

As a result of reading the classic text, do you think you will look for other books like it or by the same author? Why or why not?

In what ways, if any, did the young adult text help you improve as a reader?

In what ways, if any, did the classic text help you improve as a reader?

Is there anything else you would like to say about the books?
APPENDIX H

Student Survey Questions

This survey will be administered to students before the instructional unit begins. I will introduce the survey to students using the following script:

Good morning. Thank you for welcoming me into your English class. I am a graduate student from the University of Maine studying literacy education. Your teacher has agreed to work with me to conduct a research project about books and reading. Before we begin the project, I would like to learn more about you and your reading experiences. I am asking you to complete a survey that asks several questions about books you have read in and out of school. This survey is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Your answers are anonymous; do not write your name on the survey. This survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. I want to emphasize that I’m not judging what you say in any way. I’m just interested in your honest thoughts and feelings. If I ask you a question, it’s not because I’m looking for a particular answer. It’s just because I want to know more about what you think.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Survey questions:

Do you like to read? Rate your attitude toward reading on a scaled of 1 to 10.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
Not at all Very much

How often do you read outside of school for enjoyment?
Never
Once a year
Once every few months
Once a month
All the time

What was the last book you enjoyed reading?

What is your favorite book?

What is the last book you read for school?

How much do you typically like the books you are assigned for school?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
Not at all Very much
How much of your school assigned reading do you typically complete?
None
I read a little
At least half
I read most of it
All

In a typical week, how many hours do you spend on reading for school?
None
Less than one hour
One to two hours
Three to four hours
Five or more hours

In a typical week, how many hours do you spend on reading for pleasure?
None
Less than one hour
One to two hours
Three to four hours
Five or more hours

What makes a book easy to read?

What makes a book hard to read?

How difficult, typically, are the books assigned for school reading?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Easy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very hard</td>
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</table>

When reading assigned for school is difficult/challenging, what helps you to understand the reading?

What is a book that you have read for school that you liked? What did you like about this book?

Do you like to read books categorized as “young adult literature” or “teen literature?”
Why or why not?

Should young adult/teen books be taught in school?

Do you like to read books categorized as “classics?” Why or why not?
Should classics be taught in school?

Why do you read school assigned reading (if and when you do)?
   To get a good grade
   Parents make me
   I like to read
   Combination

On a scale of 1 to 10, do you feel like you have learned anything from the reading assigned in English class?

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
   Learned nothing  Learned a lot

How important do you think reading is to your success after high school?

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
   Not important  Very important

How often do you think you will read for enjoyment as an adult?

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
   Never  Very often
APPENDIX I

Student Survey Results

13 responses

Summary

Do you like to read? Rate your attitude toward reading on a scale of 1 to 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much: 10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How often do you read outside of school for enjoyment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once every few months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the time</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What was the last book you enjoyed reading?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Summer I Turned Pretty Trilogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Queen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatchet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood Ravens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is your favorite book?

The Summer I Turned Pretty Trilogy
Death's Messenger
not sure
Pride and Prejudice
Willow
The Devil's Arithmetic
Among the Hidden
Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire
Red Queen
It's kinda a funny story
The Summer I Turned Pretty Series by Jenny Han
Hatchet

What is the last book you read for school?

The Crucible
The Crucible
The crucible
Divided We Fall
Found
The Crucible By Arthur Miller
The crucible
Red Kayak
How much do you typically like the books you are assigned for school?

Not at all: 1 1 7.7%
2 2 15.4%
3 2 15.4%
4 2 15.4%
5 4 30.8%
6 0 0%
7 1 7.7%
8 1 7.7%
9 0 0%

Very much: 10 0 0%

How much of your school assigned reading (for English class) do you typically complete?

None 0 0%
I read a little 3 25%
At least half 0 0%
I read most of it 5 41.7%
All of it 4 33.3%

In a typical week, how many hours do you spend on reading for school (just English class)?

None 0 0%
Less than one hour 7 53.8%
One to two hours 2 15.4%
Three to four hours 1 7.7%
Five or more hours 3 23.1%
In a typical week, how many hours do you spend on reading for pleasure? (in or out of school)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one hour</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to two hours</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three to four hours</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five or more hours</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What makes a book easy to read?

- A book that has a good and eventful plot.
- A book has a great hook and is more fictional or a non fiction with spiced up facts that isn't plain and boring
- If it is None fiction
- The words they use and if its interesting.
- A book is easy to read when it is about an enjoyable topic.
- An interesting plot line that keeps the readers' attention.
- If it has a lot of action or a good plot.
- Easy, Fluent vocabulary
- Easier vocabulary and relateable characters.
- I personally prefer first person books, I also like a fantasy book with a good plot line with twists and turns, fun characters that the author really got into detail with so I could picture them in my head like I know them for myself.
- Something that is interesting to me that will make me wonder about what will happen next.
- If I choose the book it is easier, also if I don't have a time frame.
- When its action-packed.

What makes a book hard to read?

- When it uses hard words, and has a slow plot.
- Small print, boring over all, or doesn't totally grab attention
- When its got a lot of made up thing i can picture or keep of with understanding it
- The way there set up and the words used and the time frame. Also if its boring.
- A book is hard to read when it is written in a style or uses wording that different from what someone is used too.
- A book can be hard to read when the plot line dies out and loses the interest of the reader.
- If it has an bad plot with no excitement
uncommon lengthy words, older style writing
Difficult vocabulary, dry humor, and boring circumstances
When the author does not give the book action and it is just a really slow book in the beginning, also when the book does not really jump out at me to be interesting and if I cannot relate to the characters or the main character.
Slow moving something that is not interesting and the fact that I personally don't like reading.
If I am forced to read it, or have a time frame.
When its not exciting.

When reading assigned for school is difficult/challenging, what helps you to understand the reading?

Rereading
Spark notes
asking others what it was about and tying in what i thought it was about
I usually read the book and then read on Spark Notes chapter by chapter.
Talking about the book as a whole class.
When we go over the reading or i reread the section to get a better understanding of it.
asking for help, skipping it
Online sources or conferring with classmates
I think if I am having a difficult time reading the book because it is challenging to me, talking about it in class will help me. Also, if I have not read it in a while if I go back and skim through the last few pages or take short little notes along the way about important events, people, or facts.
Talking about the book in class and getting views and ideas about what has happened.
Class discussions.

What is a book that you have read for school that you liked? What did you like about this book?

To all the Boys I've Loved Before, I enjoyed the plot.
The Crucible. It was a play and went by rather quickly being mainly dialog
im not sure i dont remember reading one
And then there were none. i liked it because it was interesting and easy to read.
My second favorite book is To Kill A Mocking Bird so I was very extremely happy when we read it in English class freshman year.
During my Freshman year, my English class read "And Then There Were None" by Agatha Christie. I really enjoyed this novel because it was suspenseful and kept my interest.
The Devil's Arithmetic, I liked that it took place during the holocaust and it had a good plot and it always left me wanting to read more.
Among the hidden, this is a great book series that really grabs your attention and makes you want to read more. Also there is a slight edge and curiosity that I like about the books. To Kill a Mocking Bird by Harper Lee. I loved the characters and dialogue in this book. I really enjoyed the Book Thief, this book was kind of slow in the beginning but towards the middle it started to get really good. The plot line was really well written and even though it was based on historical events I really enjoyed the book.

I liked and then there were none. It was a very interesting story I read a few pages of it but followed along with class discussion it was fun trying to figure out who was the killer.

None

Hatchet. It was very, very interesting. It covered topics I like.

Do you like to read books categorized as “young adult literature” or “teen literature?” Why or why not?

Teen literature
I haven’t read any
Yes because as a teen we can understand them and the concepts better.
Yes and no. I do like them but sometimes they can be a little dramatic.
Yes, I find the characters to be more relatable in these types of books.
Yes, because I tend to understand it more than adult literature
Yes, they are easier to read and understand.
I absolutely love Y.A literature because it is such a wide spectrum that I believe almost everyone can find a connection to.
Yes, this is my favorite book genre. I really enjoy these books because I like the relatableness in the books and it makes reading even more fun and enjoyable.
I do not like to read any book but I enjoy the stories of teen literature because it is relatable and usually something that could happen.
I think so, but I just grab a book that looks good on the cover and read the series.
I honestly don’t even know what that means.

Should young adult/teen books be taught in school? Why or why not?

Yes because it’s a book that pertains to the age group
Yes. I feel like more people were do the reading because the books would take place in a time period they are used to and there for be more relatable.
Yes, I feel like students would be more interested/involved if they assigned young adult novels to read.
yes because it gives the kids something easy to read.
Yes because it allows everyone to enjoy a well written and simpler book to read
Yes. Definitely. I do think that adult and classic readings should also be taught for historical reasons, however y.a books have a level of relatability that I find really important for teens, because if you find a book that they will understand, then it is more likely that they will want to read the book.
Yes, I think every once in a while a teacher should assign a book in this genre because it will help students get more into reading and it could potentially bring up good habits and strengthen reading skills because students will be more likely to finish or even start a book in some cases. Depending on the book if the teacher feel as though that the book has everything that is suitable for a unit to be worked on.
Yes, because they're amazing.
Yeah, every aspect of reading should be involved.

Do you like to read books categorized as “classics?” Why or why not?

I haven't read any "classics" before.
Not generally because some of the references in the books are out dated or the language is much too strong
Yes some of them it depends on what the book is about.
Yes. I really do like classics but some times they can be hard to understand.
Yes, sometimes the classics are the best kind of book
yes, because it gives you a feeling of what the people had when the books first came out.
No, the term classic sounds boring, and who wants to read a boring book? I like to read books that are about mysteries that make you wonder.
I prefer to read annotated versions of classics, simply because many things written about have since been lost in culture and there are many things that I just do not understand. This may be because of my intelligence level, but if I am interested in a 'classic' then I will find an annotated version or a source online to help me to understand the reading.
Some of the books considered "classics" are fun reads but I would not pick a classic book by myself. I have just always been interested in fantasy books over any other type because I like a fun read.
No they are not easy to understand at all.
Sometimes
Yes, because its classic. Simple as that

Should classics be taught in school? Why or why not?

Yes
Yes because they help expand a teen's vocabulary because of the stronger language used.
Yes because the classics are what most everyone has read so you can understand other books better.
I think that classics should be taught in school but mostly just in the advanced classes.
Yes, I think it is important for students to read classical books because they can often teach us a lot of things.
Yes to some extent because even if they would be good to read some classics are hard for some to read.
Yes, Although the books may appear old and boring, they are a great read and some people like this style. Also many classic books have a meaning and teach you things.
Yes. Like I said above, classics are very important for the development of a society looking back at a historical view. We can learn so much from classic novels that I find they have a fantastic educational value and should be taught in schools.
Yes, even though they are not my favorite types of books I believe that they are important for students to read because they are where all of the books students read now really came from.
Yes because it is good to have a variety of literacy being taught.
Sure, why not?
Yeah, why not?

Why do you read school assigned reading (if and when you do)?

To get a good grade 5 38.5%
Parents make me 0 0%
I like to read 1 7.7%
Combination 7 53.8%

On a scale of 1 to 10, do you feel like you have learned anything from the reading assigned in English classes?

Learned nothing: 1 7.7%
2 3 23.1%
3 0 0%
4 1 7.7%
5 2 15.4%
6 0 0%
7 1 7.7%
Learned a lot: 10  3  23.1%

How important do you think reading is to your success after high school?
Not important: 1  2  15.4%
  2  1  7.7%
  3  0  0%
  4  0  0%
  5  0  0%
  6  1  7.7%
  7  0  0%
  8  2  15.4%
  9  1  7.7%
Very important: 10  6  46.2%

How often do you think you will read for enjoyment as an adult?
Never: 1  3  23.1%
  2  1  7.7%
  3  1  7.7%
  4  0  0%
  5  0  0%
  6  0  0%
  7  2  15.4%
  8  1  7.7%
  9  2  15.4%
Very often: 10  3  23.1%
APPENDIX J

Coding Dictionary

Student Interview Codes

Master Code: R -- BEING A READER – This master code refers to the traits and characteristics associated with being or becoming a skilled and interested reader. A reader seeks out books, reads often, enjoys talking about books and ideas, recommends books to others and seeks recommendations, identifies him/herself as a reader, and often experiences “losing” oneself in a story.

R-A – Attitude toward reading – This sub-code identifies perceptions, positive or negative, about books and reading such as liking or disliking a specific book, engagement or interest level towards books or reading.

R-F – Flow experience while reading – This sub-code references the feeling of losing oneself in a story or book; being completely engaged in the reading experience.

R-CE – Connecting emotionally to a book or story – This sub-code references emotional responses or reactions to situations, characters, events, or other aspects of a text.

R-CI – Connecting intellectually to a book or story – This code references responses to or interpretations of situations, characters, events, or other aspects of a text involving critical thinking about or analysis, synthesis, or evaluation of a given text.
**R-S – Social aspects of reading** – This sub-code references the interactions between students around texts, such as discussing characters or events, and the social construction of knowledge that develops through a classroom discussion.

**Additional Student Interview Codes**

**Ch – Challenges of the texts** – This code refers to challenges experienced by students related to books and reading.

**LO – Learning Outcomes** – This code refers to outcomes or learning named by students related to texts and reading.
Teacher Interview Codes

Master Code: CC – CURRICULUM CONSIDERATIONS – This master code references factors influencing the curriculum such as standards, text complexity, and teaching goals.

CH – This sub-code references changes in thinking about curriculum.

TS – Teaching Strategies – This code references teaching moves or learning designed and/or selected by the teacher to deliver the curriculum.

GoT – Goals of Teaching – This code references the desired outcomes of teaching, i.e., what the teacher wants students to know and be able to do, including dispositions of scholarship and learning.

SC – Student Considerations – This code references the student factors taken into account by the teacher when selecting curriculum and planning instruction; factors may include student reading levels, interests and attitudes, number of students in the class, and prior experiences of students.

Classroom Observation Codes

The codes used to analyze the field notes from classroom observations include all of the codes used with the teacher interview transcripts, and one additional master and sub-code as follows.

Master Code: CUL – Classroom Culture – This master code refers to the culture of the case study classroom as perceived by the researcher, and encompasses such aspects of the classroom environment as routines and procedures both formal and informal, norms for discussion, and interactions between the teacher and students and among the students.
CUL-CR – Culture of Reading – This sub-code references aspects of the classroom culture that are specific to the support or promotion of reading.
BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Anne V. Miller was born in Bozeman, Montana in 1962. Her family moved to the Washington, DC suburban area in 1963. Anne graduated from Lake Braddock Secondary School in Burke, Virginia in 1980. She attended the University of Virginia where she majored in English, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1984. A year later, she moved to central Maine where she discovered “the way life should be” and settled to raise a family. Anne taught English for twelve years at Maine Central Institute, an independent high school in Pittsfield, Maine. In 1995, Anne joined the Maine cohort studying Library and Information Science with the University of South Carolina through their distance learning program. She earned her Master’s degree in 1997 and became the Library/Media Specialist at Maine Central Institute. Anne is currently the Director of Curriculum for MSAD #53, a position she has held for eleven years. She is an adjunct instructor for the University of Maine and the University of Maine at Augusta. Anne is a candidate for the Doctor of Education degree in Literacy Education from the University of Maine in May, 2017.