

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

CRITICAL LITERACY IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

CARA V. DORE  
SPRING 2018

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for a baccalaureate degree  
in Childhood and Early Adolescent Education  
with honors in Childhood and Early Adolescent Education

Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Vivian Yenika-Agbaw  
Professor of Education  
Thesis Supervisor

Carla Zembal-Saul  
Professor of Education  
Honors Adviser

\* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

## ABSTRACT

Critical Literacy is a framework through which teachers can encourage critical thinking in their students, through an analytical and productive domain (Winograd, 2014). This thesis illustrates my journey as a pre-service teacher through an understanding of ideologies in children's literature, to a discovery of how Critical Literacy can equip students with the analytical tools to parse those ideologies, and finally to an application of Critical Literacy in my classroom. I begin with an ideological analysis of a popular young adult novel, to demonstrate the extent to which author bias runs through the literature we instruct. Then, I introduce Critical Literacy as a pedagogical tool to empower students to consider how texts position themselves and others. Finally, I describe the ways in which I implemented Critical Literacy at a first grade level. Implications for future practice are discussed.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 Feminist Ideology in Children’s Literature .....	3
The Repression of Ella .....	9
The Response by Ella.....	12
A Counterpoint.....	16
Implications for Teaching .....	17
Chapter 2 A Review of Critical Literacy .....	19
Chapter 3 First Grade English Language Arts Curriculum with Critical Literacy .....	36
Conclusions .....	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	52

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Vivian Yenika-Agbaw, for her thoughtful feedback and wealth of knowledge which she has shared with me. I would also like to thank my honors advisor, Carla Zembal-Saul, for her enthusiastic support and guidance during my time as an honors student. Thank you both for your guidance and expertise at every step in this process!

Next, I would like to thank Laura Hudock for passing on her passion for children's literature to me and for providing me and countless others with a wonderful educator role model.

Last, I would like to thank my mom, dad, brothers, and Brad. Each of you has inspired me, supported me, and validated me in more ways than I can count. Thank you for everything.

## **Introduction**

“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

As a pre-service teacher at the Pennsylvania State University, I have accumulated numerous pedagogical wonderings. Whether in science, art, or physical education, there is always more to question and learn. One wondering that I find myself returning to quite frequently is how education can impact students to create a more equitable world. Through coursework on children’s literature, I started to wonder about literature’s role in influencing students to believe one way or another. In particular, I became fascinated by the concept of ideology in children’s literature. Therefore, my thesis begins in Chapter 1 with a critical examination of ideology in children’s literature, specifically through the feminist lens.

The more I researched into the topic of ideologies, the more steadfast I became in my belief that children need instruction to become critical thinkers. I wondered how I could instruct elementary students to grasp an abstract concept like ideology. This led me to the framework of Critical Literacy as a method for encouraging critical thinking with students. In Chapter 2, I explore Critical Literacy and review the history and main components of it.

Once I had an understanding of the concept of Critical Literacy, I knew that I wanted to apply this knowledge in the classroom. I wanted to know how to engage in Critical Literacy with elementary students— to find out what strategies work and what strategies do not. Through my

student teaching placement, I was able to explore this wondering. Therefore, in Chapter 3, I describe the curriculum I designed over six weeks for a small reading group with a focus on Critical Literacy. I reflect on what went well and what I would change in the future. I hope that my thesis can serve as a guide to other beginning teachers who are interested in Critical Literacy.

## Chapter 1

### Feminist Ideology in Children's Literature

To initiate a discussion on children's literature, I will begin the same way my own journey unfolded— with a critical examination of ideology. According to Elizabeth Parsons, “ideology” means “a system of ideas that define a culture” (Parsons, 2011, p. 13). Human patterns of thought as well as our ideas about what is “normal” come from the ideologies in our culture. For example, I might think it is normal for every child in my classroom to vote on what they will buy for lunch, however, this reflects my democratic ideology. In other cultures where a different form of government is accepted as normal, the process of selecting school lunch might look different. The objects and systems that humans design are all products of our cultural ideologies, including architecture, laws, fashion, and literature (Parsons, 2011). One manifestation of ideology that is particularly pertinent to the future of society is children's literature. There are numerous values and beliefs expressed through children's literature. When children accept them as normal, these ideologies embed themselves in society and will continue to influence future generations, so long as they remain unexamined.

In Peter Hollindale's (1998) book, *Ideology and Children's Literature*, he reveals three levels of ideology with which we can interpret texts. First is the “explicit social, political or moral beliefs of the individual writer, and his wish to recommend them to children through the story” (Hollindale, 1988, p. 4). We often discover the recommended belief through characters which have “surprising rather than customary behaviour” (Hollindale, 1988, p. 5). An example Hollindale gives is the ideology of gender: girl and boy characters which act outside of

traditional gender roles reflect the author's desire to recommend feminism and more fluid gender roles. Next is the passive, unexamined ideology of an author. Unconscious ideologies reflect widely shared societal values. Readers may not notice these values in books because they perceive them as 'normal.' When shared societal values are left unquestioned, we simply pass on problematic ideas to the next generation. The third level of ideology Hollindale addresses is the concept of what 'children's literature' is at all. Most societies have an ideology about children's literature which requires it to be, perhaps ironically, written by an adult. Adults are the ones who therefore determine what is developmentally appropriate for children to read. Hollindale recommends that our society expand this ideology to include literature written by children themselves.

In Rudine Sims Bishop's *Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction* (1982), she writes, "Others, such as women, Blacks, and other so-called minorities, fear that literature will reinforce and perpetuate the racism and sexism that have had such negative effects on their lives and on society in general" (Bishop, 1982, p. 2). Racist and sexist ideologies may be present on the unconscious level Hollindale (1998) describes— a symptom of perceived normalcy in a racist, sexist society. Or, more disturbingly, these problematic ideologies may unfold purposefully on the part of authors who wish to instill certain values in their readers. It stands to reason that the more one ingests a particular opinion, the more that opinion becomes normalized and the more likely it is to become or remain an ideology. In the case of racist or sexist ideologies, as Bishop (1982) recalls, this is particularly concerning. Bishop also reports that there are "studies to support the contention that children's books do have the power to affect self-concept and world view" (Bishop, 1982, p. 2). So, if we



as educators and citizens of the world wish to push for more just societies, it is crucial to examine the ideologies we present to our children.

There are obvious instances of harmful ideologies in children's literature, such as Stürmer Publishing House's anti-Semitic children's books produced in the 1940s. The story of "*The Poodle-Pug-Dachshund-Pinscher*," or "*Der Pudelmopsdackelpinscher*" in the original German, tells children stories which compare Jews to various problematic animals, such as locusts and snakes (Hiemer, 1940). Three of the stories end with a call to extinguish these "creatures." Today, Hiemer's disturbing productions of Nazi children's literature seem obviously wrong. Our first thought is to assume that Stürmer Publishing House operated on Hollindale's (1988) first level of ideology: directly and purposefully proselytizing the belief in the superiority of Germans over Jews. While these children's books were certainly propaganda in a politically charged climate, they garnered enough support at the time to be published. We should consider, then, that perhaps the publishing house was also operating on the second level of ideology: a passive, unexamined mirror into widely shared, racist values.

If we extend this concept to the modern day, we must consider that our society may present similarly, if not equally, destructive ideologies in children's books today. In fact, Nodelman and Reimer (2003) argue that most ideologies are subtle and seem "unquestionable." It is in these subtle cases that ideological interpretations of the text become critical. Reading in order to grasp the ideology of a text enables the consumer to consider whether or not he or she agrees with the author's presentation of the way the world is or should be. When one analyzes text ideologically, the reader asks the question, "How does the text position the reader to accept a certain set of values?" (Parsons, 2011, p. 113).

There are many ideological interpretations one can choose from to interrogate a text. In Georgandis' (2003) *Children's Classics Through the Lenses of Literary Theory*, several are explored. Marxist criticism of literature is when a reader analyzes the dynamics of social class. Post-colonial criticism examines parts of the world affected by colonialism over the last three centuries and observes cultural changes which were a result of that colonialism. Reader-centered criticism places priority on the subjective, unique interpretation of a text each time a reader interacts with it (Georgandis, 2003). Feminist criticism pertains to analyzing gender's role in a text: "Feminist critics generally agree that their goals are to expose patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices, to promote discovery and reevaluation of literature by women, and to examine social, cultural, and psychosexual contexts of literature and literary criticism" (Guerin, Wildred, et al., 1999, p. 197).

For the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to analyze a title from a feminist perspective. This ideological lens on children's literature is worthwhile because it focuses our attention on how we position readers to accept or refuse society's gendered expectations. Through feminist criticism of children's literature, readers come to understand the way the author's beliefs about girls, boys, and gender roles, impacts their writing. An author could be writing from a passive ideological stance—the way he or she believes girls *are*. If writing from this perspective, the author writes what is "normal," and is not consciously advocating for a particular view on gender. This would reflect Hollindale's (1988) second level of ideology. However, an author could also be writing from an active stance—the way the author believes girls *should be*. This would reflect Hollindale's (1988) first level of ideology because the author is purposefully expressing their vision for how society should treat gender. Certainly, both of these stances are ideological; the difference is that one author is aware and the other is not.

The rationale for why ideological interpretations of children's literature in general are important lies in the knowledge that children's literature has the power to maintain or expand understanding of ourselves and the world. In Bishop's (1990) article, she explains how books can be mirrors, windows, or sliding glass doors. As a mirror, books provide readers with understanding of themselves. As a window, books provide a distant glimpse of worlds which may be similar or different from one's own. As a sliding glass door, books provide readers with rich environments to immerse themselves in new places and ways of thinking. Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors can offer positive conceptualizations of oneself and others, or, they can pass down stereotypes and the status quo. Bishop captures the transformative power of children's books by stating, "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part" (p. 1). When we apply this concept to gender, we see that girls and boys need literature that empowers and enables them to think about themselves and others in a positive light (Feeney & Moravcik, 2005).

While reading on the topic of feminism in children's literature, I was particularly influenced by the article *Enigma Variations: What Feminist Theory Knows About Children's Literature* by Lissa Paul (1990). In this work, Paul postulates that we can benefit from applying feminist analysis to children's literature because, "Both women's and children's literature are devalued and regarded as marginal" (p. 149). Both categories of writing are about populations which are seen as inferior and which have been largely written about without a voice. After reading through this article, I became intrigued by the notion of the subtlety of women and children's entrapment. Though in some stories, they may not be outright discriminated against, forces such as economic dependence and muted expression are more discrete sources of

oppression. In particular, I appreciated Paul's notion about the ways in which women and children reposition themselves to maintain dignity or victory in the face of challenge— often through deceit, trickery, and guile. These are lower-order and belittled survival tactics compared to the heroic journey typical of males. Letting go of guile and rebellion are seen as a positive part of growing up for girls (Paul, 1990). Female characters thus grow up to accept their repression. This has been repeated in literature time and time again—Paul names *Anne of Green Gables* (Montgomery, 1908) and *Little Women* (Alcott, 1868) as examples of this repressive resolution in the canon—so much so, that one can argue this has become a part of our ideology of gender.

For my project, I chose to delve further into the question of how girls resolve conflict and respond to repression in children's literature. Out of all the Cinderella retellings available, I selected *Ella Enchanted* by Gail Carson Levine (1997) as my title to analyze due to its widespread popularity and critical acclaim—a 1998 John Newberry winner, as well as a 1999 Dorothy Canfield Fisher winner. The book was made into a movie in 2004 and children still read and watch both renditions of *Ella Enchanted* almost two decades later. I read *Ella Enchanted* as a girl myself, and thus this text is of particular interest to me in my wondering about how I might have been positioned to accept certain gender roles as a child. The young adult novel features a young, female protagonist. More profoundly, the main character is influenced by an element of the surreal: Ella's free will is restricted by a curse placed upon her at birth. The magical limitation surrounding Ella mirrors the societal restrictions placed on girls in regards to gendered expectations of passivity and submission. I decided to analyze this novel in search of the ways in which Ella has been repressed and the ways in which she responds to her repression, in order to expose patriarchal premises in the book as well as reality, according to Levine. As Hollindale (1988) wrote, authors of children's books often recommend beliefs through their work. Through

analyzing Levine's depiction of Ella's universe, and the ways in which this retelling subverts the fairy tale genre, I wanted to better comprehend the beliefs Levine recommends and those that she shuns.

The story unfolds in her home kingdom of Frell, where Ella lives happily with her mother and fairy godmother cook, despite her troublesome curse which forces her to agree to any command. Unlike the original Cinderella tale, it is the kind mother who dies and the domineering father who re-enters the picture. Ella's father places numerous demands on Ella that require more and more submission from her, including attending finishing school and even marrying someone decades older than her. Similar to the original story of Cinderella, Ella has to struggle against girls who bully her and treat her as subordinate. They nearly become her step-sisters, too. Throughout the book, Ella experiences a transformation from a repressed girl to an empowered woman. She meets a prince named Char who does not demand her affection. Their relationship, and the autonomy Ella has in it, ends up breaking the curse and freeing her from the holds of gendered expectations. In the next few sections, I describe Ella's journey and the different stages of rebellion that she works through to reach her self-actualized state.

### **The Repression of Ella**

The first scene in *Ella Enchanted* is the fairy Lucinda bestowing a gift upon Ella at her birth (Levine, 1998, p. 3). For the first hour of Ella's life, the daughter of Lady Eleanor and Sir Peter of Frell cried inconsolably. Feeling inspired, Lucinda gave Ella the gift of obedience and ordered Ella to stop crying. With this silencing of Ella's natural reaction to discomfort began a long journey of repression for Ella. Lucinda's goal in gifting Ella with obedience was not

wickedness. Indeed quite the opposite, Lucinda truly believed that little girls should be obedient and that the compulsion to obey would benefit Ella throughout her life by keeping her consistent in acquiescing to the wishes of others. In this way, Lucinda represents the patriarchal set of expectations in the universe of *Ella Enchanted*. There is a pecking order to the society in *Ella Enchanted* in which men hold the power, such as Sir Peter and Prince Char, and women, such as Lady Eleanor, Mandy, and Ella, stay at home and perform duties suited to the political fancies of the men. Even though the universe of *Ella Enchanted* includes fantastical beasts and magic, it is remarkably similar to reality in terms of its hierarchy.

When Ella encounters Lucinda later in the novel, she does not shift her ideological standpoint; in fact, Lucinda casts another spell by ordering her to "...be happy to be blessed with such a lovely quality" (Levine, 1998, p. 127). Not only does Ella now have to acquiesce to commands, but she also must feel delight in doing so. Throughout the duration of this spell (it is later relieved by Ella's fairy godmother), Ella reports, "I knew I was happy only because I'd been ordered to be, but the happiness was absolute... I imagined future commands, awful ones, ones that would kill me, and I glowed at the idea of obeying them" (Levine, 1998, p. 128). Though Ella recognizes the forces that stifle her, she feels at peace with them. This concept represents an internalized sexism through which a person has succumbed to believing in rigid, passed-down, patriarchal gender roles, even those which constrain oneself and enable self-destructive behavior. An example of this internalization in the novel is Ella's eagerness to marry a man four times her age, even though she should feel uncomfortable with being traded for money. An example of this in historical reality which Nodelman & Reimer (2003) explain in *Common Assumptions About Childhood*, is "...a woman who wants to express herself as a businesswoman will understand that her desire to do so is abnormal and will see herself as a

freak” (p. 80). As they go on to explain, this internalized acceptance of off-base ideologies deprive women of “most opportunities to support themselves, and therefore of the power to control their own lives” (p. 80). This is certainly true in the case of Ella, who had no say in whether or not to marry a middle-aged stranger at the age of twelve and no say in how to feel about it either.

The fairy is not the only character who believed Ella would benefit from being stripped of choice. Ella’s father, Sir Peter of Frell, was even more demanding of Ella’s obedience. Unaware of Ella’s curse, he issued commands with the expectation of absolute submission due to his role as Ella’s father. His nescience symbolizes the largely unconscious power and privilege males possess in our society. When Ella’s mother passes away, Ella bursts into tears at the funeral. Her father pulls her in close and whispers, “Get away from here. Come back when you can be quiet” (Levine, 1998, p. 11). Similar to the stifling of Ella’s natural reaction to childbirth at the beginning of the story, this interaction demonstrates another example of the expectation of silent docility. Even though Sir Peter played no role in Ella’s life until the death of her mother, he reenters and assumes a role of power. He is so appalled at Ella’s lack of finesse— she often stumbles, mumbles, and spills— that he commands that she must attend “finishing school.” Ella protests, but Sir Peter silences her again and intimidates her until she stops complaining. Finally, Ella is forced to say: “I’ll go to finishing school...But I shall loathe it” (p. 36). Peter responds, “You are free to loathe or to love, so long as you go” (p. 36). The patriarchal patterns that give Sir Peter absolute power over Ella are neatly summarized in his acceptance of utter authority: “They may have said I’m selfish, and I am. They may have said I’m impatient, and I am. They may have said I always have my way, and I do” (p. 35). The contrast between father and daughter is stark.

In finishing school, every aspect of the curriculum is aimed at socializing girls into acting according to acceptable behavior, as defined by the patriarchal society of *Ella Enchanted*. The whole concept of a young girl needing to be “finished” underscores a larger perception that their natural state fails to measure up to a societal standard. Upon Ella’s arrival, the Sewing Mistress said to her, “It’s never too early to start being finished” (Levine, 1998, p. 62). Ella struggles to meet expectations: in sewing class, her stitches are too wide, in dancing class, her steps are too heavy, in choir class, her singing is too boyish. In every activity that Ella fails, the orders to become perfect literally take hold of Ella, as she has no choice but to obey. After a couple of months of painful learning curves, Ella’s curse of conformity has made the rules second-nature: “light steps, small stitches, quiet voice, ramrod-straight back, deep curtsies without creaking knees, no yawns, soup tilted away from me, and no slurping” (p. 72). Levine paints these narrow guidelines to femininity in a political and patriarchal light when she writes that the Sewing Mistress frequently incites King Roland’s disappointment in the girls when they make mistakes. In those instances, Levine demonstrates that the whole goal of being “finished” is to earn a favorable opinion from a man in power.

### **The Response by Ella**

This leads me to my analysis of the ways in which Ella reacts to her repression. Ella begins by fitting Lissa Paul’s (1990) model of opting for deceit in situations of helplessness. On page five, Ella explains, “Instead of making me docile, Lucinda’s curse made a rebel of me” (Levine, 1998, p. 5). For example, when Hattie orders Ella to pick up the dirt in the carriage, Ella must obey. However, she continues on to grind the dirt in Hattie’s face. When Hattie commands



Ella to remove Hattie's slippers, Ella does so, and then throws them out the window into the mud. In finishing school, Ella must obey outwardly to the orders of the Mistresses, but Ella uses her imagination to rebel and retain her dignity: "I'd pile Headmistress's best china on my head and walk with a wobble and swagger till every piece was smashed. Then I'd collect the smashed pottery and the smashed meat pastries and grind them into all my perfect stitchery" (p. 73). Just as Paul (1990) expresses in *Enigma Variations*, girl characters often respond to strife through repositioning themselves in order to maintain dignity or victory. This is exactly what Ella has done when faced with the cruelty of Hattie and the Headmistress. Rather than remain subservient and belittled, Ella regains her self-efficacy and pride by making a mockery of her abusers. She tricks them and outwits them, also representative of Lissa Paul's ideas about girls responses to their own repression.

Thwarting the intentions of her commanders is one tactic, consistent with feminist perspective, that Ella uses to fight back against her repression. It is also the most passive. The next step in her rebellion is more active and it is to escape orders. She makes the first plunge into this stage when she chooses to run away from finishing school: "I hadn't promised Father I would stay at finishing school, only that I would go. I could leave whenever I wanted. And by leaving, I'd never have to take another order from Hattie" (Levine, 1998, p. 86). The impetus for running away from finishing school came when Hattie ordered Ella to stop being friends with Areida, a girl from a lower social class also attending finishing school. In an effort not to hurt her friend by inexplicably shunning her, Ella makes the decision to flee. On page 89, Ella sees a phoenix rise from ashes, symbolizing rebirth into a new state of life. Ella spends several days on the road free from orders, until she is captured during the night by ogres. It is through the ogres that we see that while Ella's tactic of escape is a meaningful start to resisting her repression, it is

not sufficient in extricating herself from expectations. The ogres claim which parts of Ella each of them will get for dinner while Ella attempts to sneak away. She is stopped in her tracks by an order from one of the ogres and is thus rendered powerless. Ella's curse transgresses a loss of pride— with the ogres, she falls into physical danger.

In this situation, two things assist Ella in survival: her intellect and the help of Prince Char. Ella had learned some ogrese when she still lived in Frell and practices over and over again how to persuade the ogres not to eat her. To her surprise, using the ogres' own language against them works and she succeeds in lulling the ogres back to sleep. Prince Char and his knights arrive at the scene at this moment, clearly impressed with Ella. Char binds the ogres' feet and does not succumb to their inviting, persuasive voices because of the beeswax in his ears. The ogres awaken and become furious, but instead of Char taking over and attempting to rescue Ella, he asks for her help: "Can you tame them again, Ella?" (p. 104). A question; not an order. This tactic works and Ella and the knights are safe.

In Lissa Paul's *Reading Otherways* (1998), she poses a framework of questioning which reveals who holds the power in a story and who does not. One of these questions is "Who acts? Who is acted upon?" Up to this point in *Ella Enchanted*, Ella has been acted upon, with other characters commanding her to do things, while Ella is only able to stir up trouble after the fact. This relegated her to a lower level of power than the other characters. However, in this scene in particular, Ella is the one to act. It is thanks to her intellect that the group of humans outsmarts the ogres. What is equally novel in the book is Char's request for help. He does not take advantage of his position of authority and chooses instead to respect Ella and confront the problem at hand as equals with her. The author, Gail Carson Levine, is therefore demonstrating

in this scene that relying on your own abilities is important. She also demonstrates that earning respect outweighs demanding it.

The final step in the journey to autonomy for Ella is to reclaim her power by giving orders. Ella moves from complying to commanding. Sir Peter decides to marry Dame Olga, Hattie's mother, in an attempt to refrain from going bankrupt. When Hattie arrives at Ella and Sir Peter's estate in Frell, Ella interjects before Hattie can utter a word: "'If you speak to me at all today, Hattie,' I hissed, 'I'll snatch off your wig and pass it around to the guests'" (Levine, 1998, p. 146). In a reversal of the silence imposed upon Ella at the beginning of the novel, Ella is now the one silencing an almost-command. This corresponds to Lissa Paul's question of "Who speaks? Who is silenced?" (Paul, 1998). Ella has reversed herself from a position of silent submission to a position of noisy assertion. The empowerment of Ella in regards to her curse represents the empowerment of women who recognize the ways in which they have been restricted and speak out against them.

The climax of Ella's seizing back her freedom comes when Char proposes to marry her. They had been writing letters back and forth, and, over the course of several months, fell in love. However, Ella fears that someone could manipulate her obedience in an attempt to take advantage of or hurt the Prince. Terrified at this possibility, she chooses to decline his offer and break both of their hearts. Distraught, Prince Char demands to know if Ella loves him, to which she, in spite of herself, must admit. Joyfully, Char says, "Then marry me!" (p. 224). Compelled to obey by her curse, Ella almost abides— but she stops herself. She will not marry Char for any reason but love. She refuses the possibility of being a slave to the danger of someone taking advantage of their union. She refuses to be the weak link: "In that moment I found a power beyond any I'd had before, a will and a determination..." (p. 226). It is this point where Ella

does not just escape from but rather fully rejects her curse. In this moment, Ella casts aside the shackle of her spell and becomes fully in control of her life. She becomes “Ella. Just Ella. Not Ella, the slave. Not a scullery maid. Not Lela. Not Eleanor. Ella” (p. 228).

Ella’s complete transformation from a victim to a victor illustrates Gail Carson Levine’s feminist ideology. Unlike the children’s literature which Lissa Paul describes in her *Enigma Variations* (1990), Levine has created a universe where a patriarchy exists, is challenged by a young girl, and the young girl is rewarded for her rebellion. At the end of the story, Ella has not relinquished her rebellious ways. She remains a steadfast, confident character and is loved because of that quality: “Decisions were a delight after the curse. I loved having the power to say yes or no, and refusing anything was a special pleasure. My contrariness kept Char laughing, and his goodness kept me in love” (Levine, 1998, p. 232). Stephens (1996) stated in his article *Gender, Genre and Children’s Literature*, “In many traditional literary genres, and especially those common in children’s literature, schemata for gender and for story can overlap almost inextricably” (p. 17). However, the opposite is true for *Ella Enchanted*. It seems that Levine has intentionally reversed the trajectory of most female protagonists and opted to tell a story about a woman’s strength rather than a woman’s submission.

### **A Counterpoint**

Certainly, people will argue that analyzing children’s literature to this extent is “over-intellectualizing” a story meant for children who will not grasp these lofty concepts. My response to this critique is that whether or not students are aware of the ways in which the texts they read position them to accept certain values, the texts they read will still pass on ideologies.

In Marshall's (2004) *Stripping the Wolf: Rethinking Representations of Gender in Children's Literature*, she states that so integral are books in our society's changing ideologies, that books actually *produce* our idea of "normal." Children grow up accepting what is presented to them as normal, including the books they read and the values inherent in them (Bishop, 1990; Marshall, 2004; Parsons, 2011). For this reason, analyses of children's literature are worthwhile because it allows educators to choose texts carefully and deliver intentional messages to children about gender as well as a myriad other beliefs.

I believe it is crucial to include books like *Ella Enchanted* in our schools, libraries, and homes. *Ella Enchanted*, and other subversions of traditional genres, consciously acknowledge ideologies in an attempt to empower readers of all genders. These sorts of books raise awareness and challenge the norm. By challenging norms, we seek out the features of our society which are right, wrong, and every shade of in between. My ultimate goal as a teacher is to do just that—and, to borrow Hollindale's (1998) phrasing, "Our priority in the world of children's books should not be to promote ideology but to understand it, and find ways of helping others to understand it, including the children themselves" (p. 4).

### **Implications for Teaching**

While in the process of this project, I started thinking about how to incorporate a feminist perspective in my classroom. I ran into some difficulty finding sources on the matter. However, I did find a Schreyer Honors College Honors Thesis by Katharine Gillen (2009) that was helpful. In Gillen's thesis, she discusses what a pro-feminist classroom looks like: "A pro-feminist classroom creates an environment where all voices hold equal weight and where

different ideas are debated, discussed, and respected; it is also one that seeks to discuss and eradicate inequalities and injustices in the immediate community and the world as a whole” (p. 13). This reflects Georgandis’ (2003) purpose for feminist criticism literature in that the goal is to uncover patriarchal inequalities and balance the scales. Out of a commitment to creating an equitable classroom in which all students have equitable opportunities for success, regardless of gender or any other assigned variable, I knew I needed to look further into strategies for fostering such an environment. My wondering about how to interlace feminism and ideological readings of text into my classroom pedagogy led me to do more digging. In Chapter 2, I describe the resources I discovered to put these beliefs into practice, namely Critical Literacy.

## Chapter 2

### A Review of Critical Literacy

Through ideological analyses of children's books, we discover the societal premises that we present to children as 'normal.' In Sutherland's (1985) article, *Hidden Persuaders: Political Ideologies in Literature for Children*, he refers to the 'politics' of children's books as the ideologies they express and categorizes them in three ways: the politics of advocacy, the politics of attack, and the politics of assent (see p. 145). A book expresses the politics of advocacy when it actively lends support for a specific cause or point of view: "In essence, advocacy seeks to persuade readers of its ideology; to promote the authors' world views and...to influence readers' thinking, feeling, and behavior" (p. 147). Levine's *Ella Enchanted* adheres to this form of politics, as it rejects the traditional notion of what a princess should be and influences readers to respect Ella for her active role in shaping her own life. In this way, the author 'advocates' for feminism. The politics of attack is just as pointed, but adversarial rather than supportive in nature. In young children's books, the ideologies under attack tend to be conceptual, such as "selfishness" or "intolerance." However, there are certainly children's books with allegorical critiques of society, such as J.K. Rowling's criticism of the British education system through characters like Dolores Umbridge in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling, 2003).

Sutherland's final category, the politics of assent, occurs when an author has internalized an established ideology and transferred this into their writing in an unconscious manner. The

author writes as if their beliefs are unquestionable, largely because society has not questioned a passed-down norm. One of the longest-standing ideologies to which authors assented passively for generations is that of traditional masculinity and femininity: “This ideology, which I call the ‘Dick & Jane consensus,’ did not express itself through the politics of advocacy; it didn’t have to: authors had so far internalized the societal beliefs about “maleness” and “femininity” and the kind of behaviors appropriate to each that the stereotypes came unbidden” (Sutherland, 1985, p. 154). Myriad examples of the Dick & Jane Consensus exist in beloved classics, such as Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868). Characters, like Jo, are cast aside for not living up to the expectations for women at the time. Jo, like many other female characters of ‘the classics,’ develops into a woman by relinquishing her rebellious ways and acquiescing to restrictive gender roles. While narratives of traditional femininity might not be as palatable to modern audiences, thanks to literature like Levine’s *Ella Enchanted*, which have challenged our concept of ‘normal,’ there are certainly beliefs we hold as a society which pass by unquestioned in literature and society at large.

Sutherland’s (1985) analysis of the politics inherent in literature reminds us that no text is neutral. Throughout their school careers, students will read thousands of books, each delivering a message of “advocacy, attack, or assent.” The beliefs and norms presented in these books are therefore reinforced thousands of times, concretizing our students’ foundations and core beliefs in the world. It is an educator’s responsibility to think critically about the kinds of messages we pass onto children. While scouring over every title we give to students would be a thorough method to control the kinds of ideologies we promote, it would be infeasible, and frankly, unethical to handle the problem in this way. Simply controlling what students read does not prepare them to parse the uncensored flow of information outside of school boundaries. It also



puts the power in educators' hands to pass on the beliefs that we hold in the world, which is a bias in and of itself. Instead, we should equip students with the skills to question what they read and consider from which perspectives authors write. By empowering students to challenge biases, they become critical learners, less simply persuaded by politics of any sort.

In examining this phenomenon, an approach that is perhaps underappreciated but highly applicable, is that of Critical Literacy. The majority of the literature cites Paulo Freire as the father of critical pedagogy (Ciardiello, 2004; Comber, 2015; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Luke, 2012; Pandya & Ávila, 2014; Winograd, 2014). In 1970, Freire published *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and argued in it, that the world will become a more egalitarian place when people who are excluded from the dominant group in society can transcend their oppression by making space for themselves. The way to do this is through an education that empowers students not only to read the world, but to redefine it, as well: “As women and men, simultaneously reflecting on themselves and on the world, increase the scope of their perception, they begin to direct their observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena” (p. 27). The more the Oppressed challenge the world, the more power they have to change it. As Ken Winograd (2014) put it: “Paulo Freire had a profound effect on our thinking about literacy when he argued that literacy and power were inextricably linked” (p. 4).

Since 1970, teachers and researchers alike have dedicated their energy to creating the space for students to challenge their worlds. In Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys' article (2002), they synthesize thirty years of Critical Literacy research. The four components into which Lewison et al. break Critical Literacy are: a) disrupting the commonplace, b) interrogating multiple viewpoints, c) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (d) taking action and promoting

social justice (see p. 382). Indeed, echoes of these four dimensions run throughout the research I reviewed myself.

The first dimension, “disrupting the commonplace,” implies that students should practice problematizing texts as well as the world at large. This is a significant shift of the onus of responsibility; rather than adults critiquing texts and conveying those critiques to children, the adult’s role is to empower students to engage in critical thinking themselves. When students engage in disrupting the commonplace, they ask questions about how texts position them as readers, they learn to question the status quo, and they consider the bias and motives of the texts they read. A strong example of this approach to Critical Literacy is in Jennifer O’Brien’s lesson, *Show Mum You Love Her* (O’Brien, 1993 in Comber, 1993). Using advertisements in local catalogues and junk mail, O’Brien lead her students to consider what the purpose of Mother’s Day advertisements are and who benefits the most when consumers purchase advertised items. Students determined that the catalogues positioned them to feel like they need to buy certain presents for their mothers in order to make her happy, and therefore benefit businesses selling the products. Once O’Brien’s students understood that advertisements can have an angle, they questioned why some items, like make-up, were included in the catalogues and others, like bicycles, were not. Through drawing and labelling, O’Brien compelled her students to understand that commercialized gender norms do not reflect what their actual mothers and fathers might want. Then, the class created their own Mother’s Day catalogues to reflect their realities. In O’Brien’s lessons, she helped her students disrupt the status quo surrounding a gendered holiday, and to develop a critical perspective to text in the real world.

Another strong example of disrupting the commonplace comes from Vivian Vasquez (2000) in her article, *Our Way: Using the Everyday to Create a Critical Literacy Curriculum*,

where she describes how her students learned that one of their peers would not be able to eat at the school barbecue since it did not offer any vegetarian options. The students then thought critically about what a barbecue is, disrupting the assumption that it would be an enjoyable occasion for everyone and disrupting the status quo of only offering meat options. This class went beyond disrupting the commonplace by crafting and sending letters to the chair of the school barbecue committee, requesting that vegetarian options be added. This act of civic engagement in the pursuit of inclusivity for their vegetarian classmate falls under the category of “taking action and promoting social justice” (Lewison, Flint, & VanSluys, 2002).

The second dimension Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys describe is “interrogating multiple viewpoints,” which means students should ask themselves questions like “who or what does the text include or exclude?” and “what is the purpose of including or excluding?” Interrogating multiple viewpoints is the natural progression from disrupting the commonplace. The reader moves beyond considering how the text positions herself to challenging how the text positions all characters and narratives woven into the book. While text selection is an important component for teachers to consider while guiding students in thinking about multiple perspectives, it is worth noting that any text can provide the basis for students to engage in Critical Literacy. As Meller, Richardson, and Hatch (2009) note in *Using Read-Alouds with Critical Literacy Literature in K-3 Classrooms*: “...texts are not critical in and of themselves; it is the conversations that take place around the texts that qualify as critical” (p. 77) Whether it is with a familiar or an unfamiliar book, teachers must scaffold students’ discussions and interpretations of the books they read through perspective-taking questioning and critical thinking.

In her book, *Reading Otherways*, Lissa Paul (1998) details her own process of learning to read with multiple perspectives in mind. She provides a list of questions for teachers to routinely ask their students while guiding them to consider multiple perspectives.

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

Through these questions, readers discover the ideological stance of a text, whether it is in literature or daily media. Students learn to question the viewpoint of the author and the choices she or he made in including, excluding, and representing characters and/or beliefs in certain ways. This is a crucial step for children in understanding the biases of texts and to think critically about whether or not they agree with the author. In Chapter One, my analysis of *Ella Enchanted* used Paul's questions to illuminate the feminist advocacy in the text.

The third dimension in Lewison et al.'s (2002) article is "focusing on sociopolitical issues," and implies students should reflect on how power relationships influence their and others' actions and perceptions. A prominent feature in critical pedagogy is the critical read aloud (Pandya & Ávila, 2014; Vasquez, 2017; Winograd, 2014). In a critical read aloud, a teacher selects a text which involves sociopolitical issues. One might think this is uncommon in children's literature, but texts featuring social issues are increasingly prevalent—a quick search for children's books featuring social issues on Barnes & Noble's website yields 6,000 results.

When the search is expanded to include young adult literature, the number increases exponentially.

Scholarly articles provide numerous lists of books featuring social justice issues (Ciardiello, 2004; Glasgow, 2001; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002), but I have found the most current and compelling titles online through websites such as Teaching For Change (<http://www.teachingforchange.org/socialjusticebooks-org>). In particular, I recommend Teaching for Change as a resource for finding critical read alouds, as they have categorized their texts into more than fifty topics, making it easily navigable. Books in these lists focus on sociopolitical topics ranging from race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, class, age, immigration status, and homelessness. In Meller, Richardson, & Hatch's (2009) article, *Using Read-Alouds with Critical Literacy Literature in K-3 Classrooms*, they cite Harste's (2000) criteria for selecting critical texts. Critical read-aloud texts should therefore meet one or more of the following criteria: "explore differences rather than make them invisible; enrich understandings of history and life by giving voice to those traditionally silenced or marginalized; show how people can begin to take action on important social issues; explore dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society to position people and groups of people as 'others'; don't provide 'happily ever after' endings for complex social problems" (Harste, 2000 in Meller, Richardson, & Hatch, 2009). Written at age-appropriate levels, books which meet one or more of those criteria in addressing sociopolitical issues provide an excellent base for launching into critical discussions of these topics.

Once a teacher has selected an appropriate book for the read aloud, delivering it in a critical way depends on several key steps. Meller, Richardson, and Hatch (2009) detail the steps in delivering a successful critical read aloud which helps to develop students' Critical Literacy,

using the book *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson. This book is about a young white girl and a young black girl in a time of high racial tension, who become friends through a fence which is dividing their yards. This text matches Harste's criteria due to its illuminating story on the history of racial tensions in the United States, from a child's perspective. First, Richardson previews the book to find spots to ask key comprehension questions and connections to students' lives. Second, she brainstorms critical questions and posts these on sticky notes throughout the book. These questions will further students' connections and understandings of the book by pushing them to ask their own questions. Third, Richardson completes a mini-lesson with students to elicit their background knowledge on the theme and historical context, as well as touch on the definitions for unfamiliar words in the read aloud. Fourth, Richardson does a "picture walk" with the class, encouraging them to notice how the characters' emotions change throughout the story. Students think up a story in their heads before reading.

Now that students have developed some context for the information they are about to receive, the critical read aloud actually begins. Richardson stops at the critical questions she had marked down and prompts students to discuss these as they go (Meller, Richardson, & Hatch, 2009). Once the read aloud is finished, they discuss questions students brought up themselves in response to why the author wrote the book and what it means to us today. Even in a read aloud of a text that the teacher agrees with the message, she is encouraging students to consider how the author positions the reader— what message does the author want us to believe? After the discussion, Richardson asks students to write about a time they felt like one of the characters in the book, further promoting students' understanding of complex sociopolitical issues in an age-appropriate manner. Through the process of the critical read aloud of *The Other Side* by

Jacqueline Woodson, Meller, Richardson, and Hatch (2009) thoroughly develop the sociopolitical dimension of Critical Literacy.

Similarly, Vivian Vasquez (2017) highlights the critical read aloud methodology of a second grade teacher, using the book *White Wash* by Ntozake Shange (1997) to focus on racism and bullying. The teacher, Lee Heffernan, chose the book based off of a conversation she had overheard her students having about there not being many people of color in the books they were reading. In addition to Heffernan's preparation of critical questions and eliciting the background knowledge of her students prior to reading, she adds several steps to stretch students' stamina in discussing sociopolitical issues. These sessions include: a) revisiting the book through a picture walk where students respond to prompts focused on personal connections and multiple perspectives; b) taking those responses and, in small groups, making connections between similar books previously read; c) deciding in small groups whether or not they believe other people should read the book and generating reasons why or why not; d) a whole-group discussion related to topics which students had brought up in the previous sessions; e) choosing an illustration and caption which reveal the most important part of the story, and; f) writing a longer reflection on one theme in the book (see p. 33). These steps expand the impact and comprehension of a critical read aloud by allowing students multiple opportunities to process the book's messages.

While literature does offer a familiar genesis for a focus on sociopolitical issues in the classroom, there are other avenues for tying in this dimension of Critical Literacy to instruction. Issues which play out in the classroom, school, and local community are also powerful bases for focusing on sociopolitical issues. Barbara Comber and Pat Thomson describe Marg Wells' critical approach to teaching her mixed grade 2/3 class, where many students are concerned

about the conditions of their neighborhood and the proposal to demolish it and build new houses (Comber, Thomson, Wells, 2001). Wells started by asking students to respond through words and pictures to several prompts: “What made them really happy, worried, or angry, what they would wish for if they could have three wishes, what they would change about their neighborhood, school, and world, whether they thought young people had the power to change things” (p. 455). Many students wrote about the poor conditions of the neighborhood and their vision for making it look better.

Using her students’ legitimate concerns for their community, Wells guided them in inquiry into collecting data, researching who has the power to make changes in their community, and composing letters, diagrams, and maps which created a clear vision for their desires and communicated them to the people in charge of the urban renewal project. Throughout this process, students learned a great deal about the link between literacy and power. They also learned how to apply their skills to take legitimate social action: “[Students] learn these forms of literacy as social practices that are part of everyday life, in the here and now, part of living in a particular community and attending a particular school” (Comber, Thomson, Wells, 2001, p. 457).

It is worth noting that focusing on sociopolitical issues is the dimension of Critical Literacy which is most closely linked to Freire’s (1970) essential purpose in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* — it is in this dimension of Critical Literacy where the Oppressed learn how their position in society restricts what they can and cannot do. Subsequently, the Oppressed transcend their position by taking social action through literacy. Wells’ work with her second and third grade class is a prime example of students, who are relatively powerless, learning why their neighborhood is not as well-kept as they would like. Through literacy, these students regain their



voice and take action to pursue more equitable resources in their community. The process of taking action leads to the final component in Critical Literacy.

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

Employing literacy to increase cultural connectivity and interaction, until there is no “other” based on “body, culture, history, space, land, and psyche,” is one route to social justice (Giroux, 1992). In Giroux’s article, *Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference*, he proposes using literacy to challenge and redefine cultural borders: “[Literacy] marks out the boundaries of difference that “define the places that are safe and unsafe, [that] distinguish *us* from *them*” (Anzaldúa 3)” (p. 3). Dale Weiss pursues social justice with this goal in mind in *We*

*Teach Who We Are: Teaching Social Justice* (Weiss, 2014). After an attacker shot and killed several people at a local Sikh temple, Weiss (2014) reflects on the learning she and her students did alongside each other to knock down the uncertainty over cultural boundaries between Sikhs and the student body. Through critical read alouds, presentations from Sikh community members, and a service project to benefit the victims of the tragedy, Weiss's second grade class responded to a horrific event by taking action. The results of this unit about Sikhism was an increase in familiarity on the part of the students with the religion, as well as a more close-knit relationship between the school and the Sikh cultural center.

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

Teaching about history in these ways pushes students to analyze how retellings of history can be used to maintain one worldview in the place of another. As Janks (2000) notes in *Domination, access, diversity and design: A synthesis for Critical Literacy education*, Critical Literacy functions best when it can knock down the language of dominion and reconstruct it with narratives which promote "what is a shared goal of all Critical Literacy work: equity and social

justice” (p. 179). Instruction which focuses on clarifying historical misconceptions and generating accurate and ethical understandings have, at their core, social justice as their motive.

The four dimensions of Critical Literacy that Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) present: “disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice” are intertwined. Aspects of each weave in and out of instruction with Critical Literacy in mind, some lessons drawing more on some than others. Throughout the examples in this literature review, many lessons touched on all four dimensions of Critical Literacy. One reason for this intersection is that the dimensions inherently draw on the characteristics of each other in order to be explored. For example, pursuing social justice would be impossible without disrupting the status quo which maintains inequitable ways of being. An example that I believe illustrates the crossing of all four dimensions of Critical Literacy is Flint & Laman’s (2012) description of a poetry writing unit with third graders. The students ‘disrupted the commonplace’ through bringing in their personal lives to their academic work, such as the games they play on the playground and the movies they watch. Then, students ‘interrogated multiple perspectives’ by reading poetry written in languages and dialects represented in their households. Next, students ‘focused on sociopolitical issues’ through reading poetry about important current and historical events. Last, students ‘took social action’ by creating their own poetry to express their concerns and beliefs about our world. Throughout the critical poetry unit, students’ understanding of poetry and the world around them expanded. By the conclusion of the unit, students were drawing from this heightened academic and social awareness to analyze their own worlds and compose transformative poetry.

While Flint and Laman’s description of the critical poetry unit beautifully demonstrates four distinct dimensions of Critical Literacy, there are many critical units of study which are

harder to categorize neatly. The overlapping of these four dimensions has led several Critical Literacy researchers to think about Critical Literacy in a different way. For instance, Ken Winograd (2014) condensed the four dimensions down to two: the “intellectual-analytic dimension” and the “action-oriented productive dimension”. Within the intellectual-analytic dimension, students learn that texts are reflections of a particular worldview and they consider how texts may look differently from a different perspective (Janks, 2010). In the action-oriented productive dimension, students “speak truth to power” by creating responses through various literacies to effect change in their schools, communities, and beyond (Winograd, 2014). Some researchers believe there is no one definition for Critical Literacy at all, since it heavily depends on the discrete context in which learning occurs. Pandya and Ávila (2014) believe that: “...Critical Literacy must be defined by individuals once they have learned about, and experienced, its central ideas and what the Critical Literacy communities, which have obviously shifted over time, have documented about their own efforts to make literacy critical” (p. 7). Rather than define Critical Literacy in one way, Vivian Vasquez (2017) lists ten important tenets of Critical Literacy in her book, *Critical Literacy Across the K-6 Curriculum*, including a focus on social issues, reconstructing and redesigning texts, drawing from students’ lived experiences, and an analytical stance towards text as well as our interpretations of the text (see p. 3-5).

While there is disagreement over the precise definition of Critical Literacy, there are trends in the literature which offer key components of the framework that have developed over time. Early in the research on Critical Literacy, theorists focused their attention on ‘reading the word and the world’ (Freire & Macedo, 1987). The critical stance to reading entails a commitment to the idea that every text is a socialized product; therefore, no text is ever neutral. As time went on, ‘text’ became more broadly defined as any socialized product, “including the

media and peer and home traditions”— books, newspapers, television programs, games, and songs (Comber & Simpson, 2001). With the expansion of the definition of a ‘text’ came the expansion of critical methodology to include taking action (Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001; Janks, 2010; Kamler, 2001; Luke, 2012). Since the augmentation of critical pedagogy to include taking social action, Vivian Vasquez and Barbara Comber (2016) have both championed the cause for basing critical instruction off of children’s lived experiences. Comber’s focus is on the pedagogy of place; she believes that Critical Literacy is necessarily local and the work done by students should be grounded in current issues in their lives. Vasquez (2017) has contributed to the literature with her retellings of how organic classroom interactions became the bases for her critical pedagogy.

Much of Critical Literacy research has focused on either adolescent students or on marginalized learners. There is evidence for the positive impact of Critical Literacy in disadvantaged schools (Comber, 1993, 2015, 2016; Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001; Luke, 2012; Luke, Dooley, & Woods, 2011; Pandya & Ávila, 2014; Ukpokodu, 2006). Students who have been marginalized in education, whether a result of the underserved school they attend or the exclusion of their home traditions from the classroom environment, regain voice and power in understanding their authority to question what they experience. When learning centers on legitimate pressures that students face, their engagement and comprehension increase (Morrell, 2008; Ukpokodu, 2006). There is also significant literature devoted to critical pedagogy in secondary education which suggests that students become more engaged and more self-motivated when building literacy skills in a critical context (Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, & Petrone, 2014; Chaplin, 2016; Glasgow, 2001). Similarly, an emphasis on children’s lived experiences permeates as the driver of meaningful Critical Literacy.

While the literature on Critical Literacy with adolescent students and disadvantaged schools illustrated the importance of critical pedagogy to me, my background in elementary education led me to wonder how to boil down the Critical Literacy framework to the foundational skills students can begin to develop at a young age. Fortunately, there are brave educators who have pioneered Critical Literacy in the primary years with tremendous success. It is these educators who have influenced me to believe that the praxis of Critical Literacy can best be defined through the unique context in which it is carried out, with certain students, in a certain school, at a certain point in time (Pandya & Ávila, 2014). The instructional choices and techniques a teacher makes to support her students in critical pedagogy vary each time they engage in Critical Literacy. As a pre-service teacher in a first grade classroom, I knew I wanted to try my hand at engaging in Critical Literacy with my own students in our own particular situation.

My belief in the benefit of beginning to develop a critical approach to literacy guided my design, particularly because my first graders' journey to literacy learning has newly begun. My belief in the importance of feminism in my teaching pedagogy also guided my design. I incorporated feminist instruction in a few ways. First, I sought to create a reading group where all voices held equal weight and all ideas were discussed with respect (Gillen, 2009). Furthermore, our group discussed inequalities and gained insight into social justice, both reflecting my commitment to creating equitable learning environments and to engaging with social concepts (Gillen, 2009). Though the texts I had available to work with in my school did not consciously advocate or attack an ideology of gender, like *Ella Enchanted*, I kept in mind the fundamental force behind feminist critique: "to expose patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices, to promote discovery and reevaluation of literature by women, and to examine social,

cultural, and psychosexual contexts of literature and literary criticism” (Guerin, Wildred, et al., 1999).

I applied my background with feminist critique to the books I had available. I expanded my approach to incorporate an examination of other social, cultural, and psychosexual contexts of the literature we had to work with. While I would have loved to interrogate gendered perspectives in our books, we only did this here and there, since the books we had available tended to focus on other critical concepts. Therefore, my purpose for the following section is to inquire into the process of supplementing existing Reading curriculum with a critical lens. I demonstrate how I worked with my specific context to implement Critical Literacy. My purpose is therefore also to chronicle what worked well and what I will change in my future instruction.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **First Grade English Language Arts Curriculum with Critical Literacy**

As a pre-service teacher, I had the opportunity to inquire into the process of implementing Critical Literacy instruction with a small group of first grade readers during Reading Workshop. In this chapter, I briefly describe the curriculum I designed for this group. Over the course of six weeks, my students and I studied literature as well as informational texts, on a variety of topics. The standards addressed were prescribed from the school district's curriculum and are noted for each set of lessons. All standards are from the Pennsylvania State Standards: [www.pdesas.org](http://www.pdesas.org) (2018). I focused on designing instruction which would support students' comprehension skills while simultaneously fostering beginning Critical Literacy in them. To demonstrate this, I have made a table for each set of lessons. One column lists the standards addressed in the lessons; in the other column, I describe the dimension of Critical Literacy, according to Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys' model (2002), which I endeavored to integrate. I include my ongoing reflections about what went well and what I would change in future practice.



<b>Lesson Set 1: Fearless Freddie by Shelley Swanson Sateren (2015)</b>	
<b>Standards Addressed</b>	<b>Critical Literacy Dimension Explored</b>
<p>English Language Arts CC.1.3.1.C: Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.</p> <p>English Language Arts CC.1.4.3.S: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and informational texts.</p> <p>English Language Arts CC.1.1.1.D: (...) Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.</p> <p>English Language Arts CC.1.1.1.E: Read with accuracy and fluency to support comprehension. (...) Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.</p>	<p>Interrogating multiple perspectives : Through questions which push students to dig a little deeper, students went beyond describing main “characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.” They analyzed secondary characters, who were spoken about and did not have a story of their own. For example, we discussed why they think the mother did not interact with the children while the siblings argued. This pushed the students to think about a story line which the author chose to exclude as well as apply their background knowledge to analyze the text from a different angle.</p> <p>In addition, the students reflected on the main character’s motivations to help his sister conquer her fear of thunder— another element of the plot which was not overtly explored. They used evidence from the text and their background knowledge as the basis for their inferences.</p> <p>I would recommend asking these types of open-ended inferencing questions because they elicited strong enthusiasm and students generated all different answers, leading to rich discussions.</p> <p>Disrupting the commonplace: The prompt which students needed to answer after completing the book asked them to think critically about the title ‘Fearless Freddie.’ Using evidence from the text, I asked students to explain why or why not they thought the title fit the character and to change the title so it would reflect their thinking. My goal in asking this question was to start putting them in the habit of considering that titles can be misleading. Even though this book delivered a relatively harmless ideology through the title, it still positioned us as readers to think about the character, Freddie, in a certain way. By reflecting on whether or not they agree with the title and subsequently renaming the book, students engaged in challenging what the title tells them about a character and redesigning it according to what they see actually reflected in the text about the character.</p>

<b>Lesson Set 2: Magic Bone by Nancy Krulik (2013)</b>	
Standards Addressed	Critical Literacy Dimension Explored
<p>English Language Arts (Reading) CC.1.3.1.B Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.</p> <p>English Language Arts (Writing) CC.1.4.3.S Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and informational texts.</p> <p>English Language Arts (Reading) CC.1.3.1.G Use illustrations and details in a story to describe characters, setting, or events.</p> <p>English Language Arts (Reading) CC.1.3.1.H Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.</p>	<p>Interrogating multiple perspectives: The focus in reading <i>Magic Bone</i> was on using evidence to describe characters, settings, or events. The main character in the text was a dog named Sparky. Every chapter, Sparky came across new characters. There was plenty of textual evidence to support claims about Sparky's opinions of the other characters, through both pictures and written details. However, there were far subtler clues as to how the other characters felt about Sparky. I wanted to get my students in the habit of thinking about multiple perspectives, so every chapter, I integrated inferencing questions on the secondary characters in tandem with my more expected questions about Sparky.</p> <p>The following is a sample of questions focused on multiple perspectives: <i>What does Josh [dog owner] think happened when Sparky knocked over the vase?</i> <i>Why was Frankie [another dog] scaring Sparky about the pound?</i> <i>Why does Frankie stop and listen to Samson?</i> <i>What do the humans feel when Sparky arrives at their picnic?</i> <i>Why do you think the Bulldog Boys are mean to Sparky?</i> <i>What do the Bulldog Boys have or do that makes them in control of the pound?</i></p>

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

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

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

<b>Lesson Set 3: Iditarod: Dogsled Race Across Alaska by Jeffrey B. Fuerst</b>	
Standards Addressed	Critical Literacy Dimension Explored
<p>English Language Arts CC.1.2.1.A : Identify the main idea and retell key details of text.</p>	<p><b>Disrupting the commonplace:</b> This set of lessons on the Iditarod was our first foray into the non-fiction unit. Something that I latched onto through researching Critical Literacy is that authors have bias in all texts, even informational texts. I designed the curriculum for this set of lessons to therefore prepare students to begin considering how an author’s opinion comes through in non-fiction. This skill disrupts the commonplace because students start to see that non-fiction presents them with facts and positions them with opinions. Students start to read with and against the text. Rather than only reading for facts, reading for facts and opinions helps reinforce in students the understanding that no text is neutral.</p> <p>Before I got students to find evidence of author bias, we spent a few days reading through the text, discussing the main ideas and supporting details in each chapter, and becoming familiar with the topic of dog sleds. The final section is called “The Greatest Race on Earth,” and the author discusses several reasons the Iditarod is the greatest race in the world. It is during this chapter that I led students in focused readings to find author bias. Questions I asked my students included: <i>How does the author feel about the Iditarod?</i> <i>How does the author want you to feel about the Iditarod?</i> <i>What words does the author use which give us a clue as to his opinion?</i> <i>How would this chapter look and sound differently if the author did not like the Iditarod?</i></p> <p>In designing this set of lessons, it was reinforcing the belief that students can develop Critical Literacy through any texts. The fact that the author likes the Iditarod and thinks readers should, too, is a fairly harmless bias and a fairly simple one to pick up on. I wanted the next step in curriculum design to involve comparing across texts, perhaps for more subtle bias. I felt like analyzing across two different texts would help support students’ development of interrogating multiple viewpoints.</p>

<b>Lesson Set 4: Sled Dogs to the Rescue! by M. Aboff</b>	
Standards Addressed	Critical Literacy Dimension Explored
<p>English Language Arts CC.1.2.1.A : Main Idea : Identify the main idea and retell key details of text.</p> <p>English Language Arts CC.1.2.1.I : Analysis Across Texts : Identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic.</p>	<p><b>Disrupting the commonplace:</b> Since this book built off of our Iditarod knowledge from the previous lesson set, we began our discussion about the author’s bias by remembering how the author of the Iditarod book felt about the race. Then, I asked students if it was really easy or kind of hard to tell how the author in this book felt. We all agreed it was a little harder to tell how the author of <i>Sled Dogs to the Rescue!</i> felt about the topic because she did not use phrases like “The Greatest Race on Earth.” I knew it was harder to tell, but I wanted students to use their understanding of where to look for authors’ opinions to reach the conclusion that this author was not telling us outright what she believes about sled dog racing.</p> <p><b>Interrogating multiple perspectives:</b> Instead, I chose to make the Critical Literacy focus in this book about a side of the story that was not explored— the perspective of the dogs themselves. In <i>Sled Dogs</i>, the author describes the historic sled dog relay in Alaska to get medicine to children who urgently needed it. The relay took place in blizzard conditions and several dogs did not make it the whole journey. There was plenty of text evidence to help students make inferences about the dogs’ perspective, so I asked them to think about how the story of this famous medicine run might be a little different if it were told by one of the sled dogs.</p> <p>In addition, I had students compare and contrast this book about the history of the medicine run with the Iditarod book which covered the current state of the race as well as the history behind it. Several ideas about the texts’ similarities and differences came to light during our discussion. Since talking about author bias was more subtle in this informational text, I decided that the next focus would be on biographies. Since biographies are written out of the ‘politics of advocacy’ typically (Sutherland, R., 1985), I hoped we could have some rich discussions based on biographies.</p>

<b>Lesson Set 5: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks Biographies from It's A Teacher Life (2016)</b>	
Standards Addressed	Critical Literacy Dimension Explored
<p>Reading 1.2.1.A : Main Idea : Identify the main idea and retell key details of text.</p> <p>Reading 1.2.1.I : Analysis Across Texts : Identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic.</p>	<p>Focusing on sociopolitical issues: As noted in the lesson set above, I chose to incorporate biographies into our non-fiction unit due to my prediction that there would be a lot to discuss with them. This was a perfect time for me to study people who could get us talking about sociopolitical issues. Due to the students' familiarity with the following historical figures, I chose one passage on Martin Luther King, Jr. and one passage on Rosa Parks. Before reading, we discussed what we already knew about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. Already, students understood that both people helped black people have more rights, which is about the level of knowledge on the subject I expected. Then, we read through the passages and found more details on their lives that we may not have known before. Finally, we compared and contrasted what we learned about the two civil rights activists and discussed their impact.</p> <p>According to Harste (2000), critical read alouds should focus on one of four criteria; this read aloud focused on 1) exploring differences, rather than making them invisible, and 2) enriching understandings of history and life. The passages do not mince words in terms of what segregation and Civil Rights were. In fact, they bolded these words and included definitions, openly addressing the different treatment black people and white people received. During our conversation about what Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks have in common, we discovered many similarities including: neither one acted alone, both of them hated segregation, both of them were very brave even though they were scared. Through students' empathetic connections to how the activists felt as well as the students' articulations of why we have Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks to thank for all people being able to live in our neighborhoods and play on our sports teams, I saw them demonstrate a grasp of what segregation is as well as an admiration for those who changed it. In this way, their understanding of history and life were enriched in the process of reading and discussing these biographies.</p> <p>After comparing and contrasting, we discussed why the students think we still learn about Rosa Parks and MLK today. Additionally, we discussed in what ways they think the work of MLK and Rosa Parks still affect us today. My reason for posing questions focused on their impact on society today was to push students to not only see these activists as in the past. According to</p>

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

Harste (2000), critical read alouds should avoid providing a “happily ever after” ending to “complex social issues.” My hope in pushing students to consider how the work of civil rights activists Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks still impacts us today was to provide the opportunity to engage with the fact that Civil Rights was not just a chapter in history, but rather, is a living issue. Even though I was happy with the meaning students gained from the focus on sociopolitical issues, I still wonder how I could better connect the lessons of Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks with the current day’s racial tensions. In my future practice, I will be searching for strategies to explore current issues of racial inequality in a developmentally appropriate way. As always, a focus on students’ agency through ‘taking social action’ is a good starting point for making a heavy topic more productive and meaningful for young students.

<b>Lesson Set 6: I Am Jackie Robinson by Brad Meltzer (2015)</b>	
Standards Addressed	Critical Literacy Dimension Explored
<p>Reading 1.2.1.A : Main Idea : Identify the main idea and retell key details of text.</p> <p>Reading 1.2.1.I : Analysis Across Texts : Identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic.</p>	<p>Focus on sociopolitical issues: After the lessons on Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks, I decided to choose a biography about another important figure in Civil Rights history who came from a different approach: Jackie Robinson. The comparing and contrasting we did with what students knew about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks helped students enrich their understanding of history and see the issues of racial inequality as a broad problem which affected a beloved activity: baseball.</p> <p>Through these lessons, the concept of civil disobedience also emerged, via a discussion of the lesson Jackie learned from his mother: to choose kindness, forgiveness, and leading by example. This notion corresponds to another criterion in Harste’s model of critical read alouds: “show how people can begin to take action on important social issues” (2000). While we did not name ‘civil disobedience’ outright, students demonstrated understanding of how Robinson’s peaceful, patient response to discrimination contributed to his legacy.</p> <p>Questions I asked included:  <i>“What is something good in Jackie’s life? What is something bad in Jackie’s life? Who else have we learned about that had similar experiences?”</i>  <i>“What life lesson did Jackie learn from his mother?”</i>  <i>“While we are reading, I want you to find examples of times people were hateful to Jackie as well as examples of how he reacted.”</i></p> <p>I decided to frame my questions about the impact Jackie Robinson still has on us today in the same way as I did for the previous set of lessons on Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks. My thinking was that if I ask consistent, predictable questions which focus on Critical Literacy, students will be more likely to ask those questions of themselves later.</p>



Over the course of six weeks, I designed reading instruction which I implemented, reflected on, and adapted for the following week. I employed Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) model of Critical Literacy to guide my design as well as my reflection. Throughout this journey, I learned several important things. In my conclusion section, I discuss the strategies to instructing Critical Literacy at the primary level which I felt worked well. I also discuss the aspects of my journey which I will change for the next time.

## Conclusions

After inquiring into the methodology of critical reading instruction with young students, I realized how important my early exposure to feminism and ideological analysis was. Through the research I did on ideologies in general, as well as the feminist analysis I did of *Ella Enchanted*, the notion of ideologies in children's literature became much more clear for me. Discovering that *every* text has an ideological perspective, whether conscious or unconscious, was a crucial piece in learning to apply Critical Literacy. I found that I needed this background to have a clear idea of the benefits to reading with a critical mindset. For example, the covert nature of the ways girls and boys solve problems differently, rejected by Levine in *Ella Enchanted*, prepared me to analyze the gendered way children problem-solve in other children's books I read. Prepared to consider whether I agree or disagree with the way the authors portray this issue, I discovered the excitement and power of being a reader who can critique a text in this way.

This clear vision and enthusiasm of the benefits of Critical Literacy helped guide my scope and sequence, as well. Since the process of honing my own Critical Literacy skills was fresh in my mind, I found I had a better understanding of what my students would need to begin with as well as areas for potential struggle along the way. In particular, I believe beginning with relatable, high-interest texts is vital to allow students to first practice their critical thinking. With my first graders, and likely many first graders, it was important to provide their first experiences in disrupting the commonplace with friendly concepts that did not distress them. I wanted to pass on the power and excitement I felt in grasping author bias, so I chose to expose premises such as the author of *Iditarod: Dogsled Race Across Alaska* wanting the readers to agree that the Iditarod is the greatest race on Earth (Fuerst, J. B., 2000). Learning about author bias should be a skill which empowers children, so they hopefully apply this skill as they move on to read other books

on their own. I believe that my own journey from feminist critique into Critical Literacy gave me an appreciation of these fundamental building blocks.

Through the process of designing and implementing reading instruction with a critical focus, I learned that it is entirely possible to introduce students early in their literacy development to Critical Literacy. The setting for our Critical Literacy group was a small group. This setting afforded me the opportunity to hear from each student every day and to assess their success with reading in a critical lens. While there is still so much room for me to grow in my development of critical instruction, we made meaningful strides towards my students' development of Critical Literacy's fundamental skills as well as my understanding of how to teach from a critical approach. In the following few paragraphs, I provide some brief insights for future practice. These are honest reflections of my own learning and I hope they will serve to guide beginning teachers interested in Critical Literacy.

First, I would recommend incorporating the critical focus right into the objectives of the lesson. I realized the benefits of writing objectives in this way through the process of data analysis and I wish I had done this throughout. By weaving in the critical focus into the objective, Critical Literacy goes beyond just tacking on questions at the conclusion of the lesson. Whether the concentration is on disrupting the commonplace or interrogating multiple perspectives, it is beneficial to reiterate and reinforce those skills at many points throughout the lesson. This way, students become familiar with the expectation to engage with a critical lens. I found that I was more easily able to provide multiple opportunities for reinforcement when I tied in my critical focus with my regular objectives.

Next, I learned that repetition is key to students adopting Critical Literacy skills. I repeated my questions about the impact of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks in my lessons

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

In addition, I learned that disrupting the commonplace and interrogating multiple viewpoints is possible with literature and non-fiction texts which do not specifically focus on sociopolitical issues. For example, in our literature unit, I did not have a choice in the texts of *Magic Bone* (2013) and *Fearless Freddie* (2015). Neither book deals with an important social topic. What I gained in attempting to bring a critical lens to my instruction of these books was a reinforced notion that every text presents an opportunity for Critical Literacy. We disrupted the commonplace through challenging the title of the text and generating more accurate titles based on what we read in the book. We interrogated multiple viewpoints by asking and answering questions about the points of view of secondary characters. I observed students rising to the challenge and getting enjoyment out of this task. In our non-fiction unit, we were able to disrupt the commonplace through finding evidence in the texts for how the authors want us to feel about the topic, even though our first topic was the Iditarod and did not entail a focus on sociopolitical issues either.

Subsequently, I learned that biographies are a great starting place for weaving in sociopolitical foci. We studied important people in the history of the civil rights movement —

Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Jackie Robinson. I would recommend starting with people with whom students are familiar, so the skill they are focusing on the most is understanding sociopolitical issues. With background knowledge on the Civil Rights movement, students were able to contemplate the connections these figures have with today's world. Once students are in the habit of critical questions— and again, repeating similar questions throughout the unit will likely help— they can tackle new topics, expanding their understandings further.

Last, taking social action was the most challenging dimension to integrate. I believe this aspect of Critical Literacy is crucial, and yet is the biggest departure from a typical reading workshop set-up. Reflecting on the design and implementation of my reading lessons over six weeks, I would say that we did not reach this step in Critical Literacy. I believe that first grade students are capable of the abstract thinking needed for Critical Literacy instruction, and the increased engagement that may come with the challenge of thinking differently helps young students participate even more. In the future, I have numerous ideas for how to foster social justice action with my students. First, I will try writing letters to either fellow children or the historical figures in the biographies we read. This would bring in another format of literacy: letter-writing. We could write these letters to tell others why they should learn about various historical figures, thus requiring students to connect with the contemporary importance of the people they study. If we wrote letters to a historical person we studied, I would have them interview them with questions, thus fostering their inquiry into a sociopolitical issue. While these options do not directly improve current sociopolitical conditions, they require students to explore the sociopolitical issue further and to inform others of what they have learned. They increase students' awareness of and valuing of the historical figures, as well.

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

In summary, this thesis focused on my journey as a pre-service teacher as I explored the ideologies in children's literature, specifically the feminist ideology in *Ella Enchanted* (Levin, G.C., 1998). My wondering about how to foster an equitable classroom for all students led me to Critical Literacy. In Chapter 2, I reviewed the history of Critical Literacy as well as the main components and significant contributors. In Chapter 3, I adopted Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys' four-dimensional model of Critical Literacy as I described the curriculum I designed for my reading group. I reflect on the benefits of this approach as well as what I would change in the future. My hope is that this thesis can support other teachers as they begin their own critical journey. Finally, I hope that educators reading this thesis will remember Dr. King's message:

“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education.”

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aboff, M. (2018) *Sled Dogs to the Rescue! Reading A-Z*.
- Alcott, L.M. (1868). *Little Women*. Roberts Brothers.
- Bigelow, B. (1989). Discovering Columbus: Rereading the Past. *Language Arts*, 66(6), 635-643.
- Bishop, R. S. (1982). Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction. Urbana. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).
- Bishop, R. S. (1988). Mirrors, Window, and Sliding Glass Doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3).
- Borsheim-Black, C., Macaluso, M., & Petrone, R. (2014). Teaching Canonical Literature for Critical Literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(2), 123-133.
- Chaplin, M.S. (2016). Social Justice and Student Empowerment: Developing Social Justice Awareness and Empowerment Through Novel Studies. In: Papa R., Eadens D., Eadens D. (eds) *Social Justice Instruction*. Springer, Cham.
- Christie, E. M., & Montgomery, S. E. (2010). Beyond Pilgrim Hats and Turkey Hands: Using Thanksgiving to Promote Citizenship and Activism. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, 23(1), 27–30.
- Ciardello, A.V. (2004) *Democracy's Young Heroes: An Instructional Model of Critical Literacy Practices*. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(2), 138-147. Wiley.
- Comber, B. (1993). Classroom Explorations in Critical Literacy. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*. 16(1), 73-83.
- Comber, B. (2015). Critical Literacy and Social Justice. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. 58(5), 362–367.
- Comber, B. (2016). *Literacy, Place, and Pedagogies of Possibility*. Routledge.
- Comber, B. & Simpson, A. (2001). *Negotiating Critical Literacies in Classrooms*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Comber, B., Thomson, P., & Wells, M. (2001). Critical Literacy Finds a "Place": Writing and Social Action in a Low-Income Australian Grade 2/3 Classroom. *The Elementary School Journal*, 101(4), 451-464.
- Duncan-Andrade, J.M. & Morrell, E. (2008). *The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Schools*. Peter Lang.
- Feeney, S. & Moravcik, E. (2005). Children's literature: A window to understanding self and others. *Young Children*. 60(5).
- Flint, A.S. & Laman, T.T. (2012). Where Poems Hide: Finding Reflective, Critical Spaces Inside Writing Workshop. In Pandya, J. Z. & Ávila, J. (2014). *Moving Critical Literacies Forward: A New Look at Praxis Across Contexts*. Routledge.



- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Herder & Herder.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. Bergin & Garvey.
- Fuerst, J.B. (2000). *Iditarod: Dogsled Race Across Alaska*. Wright Group.
- Georgandis, A. (2003). *Children's Classics Through The Lenses of Literary Theory*. Bellaire High School.
- Gillen, K. (2009). *Identity and Empowerment: An Educational Philosophy Manifesto*. The Pennsylvania State University.
- Giroux, H. (1993). Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference. In Lankshear, C. & McLaren, P. (Eds.), *Critical Literacy: Politics, praxis, and the postmodern*. State University of New York Press. 367-378.
- Glasgow, J.N. (2001). Teaching Social Justice through Young Adult Literature. *English Journal*, 90(6), 54-61.
- Guerin, Wildred, et al. (1999). *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. Oxford University Press: New York.
- Harste, J. C. (2000). Supporting Critical Conversations in Classrooms. In Meller, W. B., Richardson, D., & Hatch, J.A. (2009). *Using Read-Alouds with Critical Literacy Literature in K-3 Classroom*. *YC Young Children*, 64(6), 76-78.
- Hiemer, E. (1940). "Der Pudelmopsdackelpinscher." *Der Stürmer-Buchverlag*. German Propaganda Archive. Calvin College, Web. <<http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/pudel.htm>>.
- Hollindale, P. (1988). *Ideology and the Children's Book*. Thimble Press.
- Janks, H. (2000). Domination, access, diversity and design: A synthesis for Critical Literacy education. *Educational Review*, 52(2), 175-186.
- Janks, H. (2010). *Literacy and Power*. Routledge.
- Kamler, B. (2001). *Relocating the Personal: A Critical Writing Pedagogy*. State University of New York Press.
- Krulik, N. (2013). *Magic Bone: Be Careful What You Sniff For*. Penguin Random House.
- Lankshear, C. & McLaren, P.L. (1993). *Critical Literacy: politics, praxis, and the postmodern*. State University of New York Press.
- Levine, G. C. (1997). *Ella Enchanted*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.
- Lewis, M., Flint, A. S., & Van Sluys, K. (2002). Critical Literacy: The Journey of Newcomers and Novices. *Language Arts*, 79(5), 382-392.
- Luke, A. (2012). Critical Literacy: Foundational Notes, *Theory Into Practice*, 51(1), 4-11.
- Luke, A., Dooley, K., Woods, A. (2011). Comprehension as Social and Intellectual Practice: Rebuilding Curriculum in Low Socioeconomic and Cultural Minority Schools. *Theory Into Practice*, 50(2), 157-164.
- Marshall, E. (2004). Stripping for the Wolf: Rethinking Representations of Gender in Children's Literature. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 39(3), 256-270.
- Meller, W. B., Richardson, D., & Hatch, J.A. (2009). *Using Read-Alouds with Critical Literacy Literature in K-3 Classroom*. *YC Young Children*, 64(6), 76-78.

- Meltzer, B. (2015). *Ordinary People Change the World: I Am Jackie Robinson*. Dial Books.
- Montgomery, L. M. (1908). *Anne of Green Gables*. L.C. Page & Co.
- Morrell, E. (2008). *Critical Literacy and Urban Youth: Pedagogies of Access, Dissent, and Liberation*. Routledge.
- Nodelman, P. & Reimer, M. (2003). *Common Assumptions about Childhood. Pleasures of Children's Literature*. Boston. Allyn and Bacon.
- O'Brien, J. (1993). Show Mum You Love Her. In Comber, B. (1993). *Classroom Explorations in Critical Literacy*. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*. 16(1), 73-83.
- Pandya, J. Z. & Ávila, J. (2014). *Moving Critical Literacies Forward: A New Look at Praxis Across Contexts*. Routledge.
- Parsons, E. (2011). Ideology. Cited in Lissa, P., & Nel, P. (2011). *Keywords for Children's Literature* (pp. 113-16). NYU Press. Retrieved from:  
[https://books.google.com/books?id=FqIUCgAAQBAJ&dq=keywords+in+children%27s+literature+elizabeth+parsons+ideology&source=gbs\\_navlinks\\_s](https://books.google.com/books?id=FqIUCgAAQBAJ&dq=keywords+in+children%27s+literature+elizabeth+parsons+ideology&source=gbs_navlinks_s)
- Paul, L. (1990). Enigma variations: what feminist theory knows about children's literature. In *Children's literature: the development of criticism*. Hunt, Peter ed. New York. Routledge. 148-165.
- Paul, L. (1998). *Reading Otherways*. Thimble Press.
- Rowling, J.K. (2003) *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Bloomsbury.
- Sateren, S.S. (2015). *Adventures at the Hound Hotel: Fearless Freddie*. Picture Window Books.
- Stephens, J. (1996). Gender, Genre, and Children's Literature. *Signal*, 79, 17.
- Sutherland, R.D. (1985). *Hidden Persuaders: Political Ideologies in Literature for Children*. *Children's Literature in Education*.
- Teaching For Change (<http://www.teachingforchange.org/socialjusticebooks-org>)
- Ukpokodu, O. (2006). Essential Characteristics of a Culturally Conscientious Classroom. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, 19(2), 4-7.
- Vasquez, V. (2000). Our way: using the everyday to create a Critical Literacy curriculum. *Primary Voices*, 9(2), 8-13.
- Vasquez, V. (2014). *Negotiating Critical Literacies with Young Children*. Routledge.
- Vasquez, V. (2017). *Critical Literacy Across the K-6 Curriculum*. Routledge.
- Weiss, D. (2014) *We Teach Who We Are: Teaching Social Justice*. In Winograd, K. (2014). *Critical Literacies and Young Learners: Connecting Classroom Practice to the Common Core*. Routledge.
- Winograd, K. (2014). *Critical Literacies and Young Learners: Connecting Classroom Practice to the Common Core*. Routledge.

# Cara V. Dore

caravdore@gmail.com | (610) 741 3935

---

## EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University, *Schreyer Honors College and College of Education*  
B.S Childhood and Early Adolescent Education, PK-4 Option  
Minors in Human Development and Family Studies; International Studies; French and Francophone Studies  
HONORS THESIS: 'Critical Literacy in the Primary Classroom'

University Park, PA  
Class of May 2018

IES Language and Area Studies Program

Paris, France

COURSEWORK: French History, Creative Writing, French Language, French Female Lit. *January 2016-June 2016*

---

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Professional Development School (PDS) Intern

State College, PA

*Grade 1; Park Forest Elementary School*

2017-2018

Chosen to participate in the Penn State University Elementary Education collaborative, 185-day, full time student teaching internship in the State College Area School District (Pennsylvania). This 20-year partnership is nationally recognized, receiving the Exemplary Professional Development School Achievement Award from the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) in 2018. The program has also received the 2011 Spirit of Partnership Award, the 2009 Exemplary Partnership Award (NAPDS), the 2004 Holmes Partnership Award for the best partnership between a university and a school district, and the 2002 Distinguished Program in Teacher Education Award from the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE).

KinderCare

Malvern, PA

*Instructor*

2016-2018

- Designed and instructed curricula for Pre-K – Kindergarten students of all abilities
- Led language activities in French and Spanish

Upper Main Line YMCA

Berwyn, PA

*KinderCamp Counselor & Dance Camp Director*

2014-2015

- Designed and instructed dance curricula for students aged 3-12
- Created and led science, art, nature, sports, and music activities for students aged 3-12
- Enforced camp security and implemented safety and medical procedures

Teaching Elementary Science Leadership Academy

State College, PA

*Student Teacher*

2013-2015

- Received training in discovery-based learning and Claims-Evidence-Reasoning scientific method
- Developed and delivered after-school and weekend science programs at Discovery Space Children's Science Museum for students aged 3-14

The Philadelphia Urban Seminar

Philadelphia, PA

*Student Teacher*

2014

- Observed and taught in a second-grade classroom at Stearne Elementary School
- Delivered running records evaluations to primary students
- Completed the Philadelphia Urban Seminar program which included workshops, coursework, and lectures from experts on education in an urban environment

---

## AWARDS

Academic Excellence Scholarship, Provost Award in Education, J. Leonhard Scholarship in Education, Silvestri Scholarship in Education, Schumacher Honors Scholarship, Friedman Scholarship in Education, Ed Off Memorial Scholarship, Honors Scholar, Phi Kappa Phi Honors Society, Pi Lambda Theta Educational Honors Society