



5-2018

## **So What's the Story?: The Teaching of Black Literature in the High School English Classroom**

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Vincent Ray Price entitled "So What's the Story?: The Teaching of Black Literature in the High School English Classroom." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Susan L. Groenke, Major Professor

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Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**So What's the Story?:  
The Teaching of Black Literature in the High School English Classroom**

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Vincent Ray Price  
May 2018

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To the faces on my computer screen that kept me going, to the voices on the phone that kept me strong, to the friends around me who kept me productive, and to the younger me who knew what he wanted but couldn't fathom actually achieving it.

This is for all of you, for all of us.

## Acknowledgments

I would not be writing this, would not be here at this present moment and milestone, would not have gained so much encouragement and support through the years had it not been for God. He kept me company during those lonely times. He gave me energy when there seemingly was none left. And He reminded me of my challenge and purpose with each personal encounter. For this, I am grateful.

Thank you to my dissertation committee—Drs. Susan Groenke, Jud Laughter, Sterg Botzakis, and Michelle Commander—for challenging me with new thoughts and experiences. Thank you for being around to support my questions and my development. Because of you and your courses, I am no longer the teacher that I used to be. For this, I am grateful.

Thank you to the friends and colleagues I gained along this five-year journey, from MS to PhD. An especial thanks to the Multicultural Graduate Student Organization for swooping me up during my master's pursuit and immersing me in a community of intellect, friendship, motivation, and productivity. Dr. Michelle Harding and future Drs. Glosanda Lawyer, Enkeshi El-Amin, and Jewel Williams, you kept me grounded and focused without losing it completely. Gracias to little Xiomara, my pretend daughter and dance partner, for putting a smile on my face even when I was drained. For all this, I am grateful.

Thank you to the faculty who became avenues of support and resources: Drs. Ernest Brothers, Dixie Thompson, Ferlin McGaskey, Christina Goode, Brittany Anderson, and Sean Hendricks. An especial thanks to the Hodges Library staff for seemingly adopting me as an unofficial employee because of the many hours I spent there. For this, I am grateful.

A final thank you to my family, a past and present collection of educators and the educated, for planting in me the seed for giving back to and looking out for one's own. From birth, I was immersed in supportive high expectations, love, and openness that led me to where I am now. For this, I am especially grateful.

It has been an interesting adventure, and I experienced thoughts of giving up at every phase of the process. Yet, because of the support listed above, I kept putting one foot in front of the other. For this and much more, I am grateful.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation answers the question of “How do high school English teachers teach Black literature?” Guided by critical race theory and using grounded theory methodology, the study surveyed (Phase 1) a pool of high school teachers on their rationales for teaching Black literature, their actual text selections, and their placement of the literature within the curricular scope and sequence for their courses. Phase 2 involved a series of follow-up interviews with four teachers, extracted from the Phase 1 participants. Survey and interview data combined to render patterns within the participants’ ideologies and practices as well as an understanding of what English teachers tend to consider when thinking of Black literature. The dissertation concludes by offering implications and considerations for practicing teachers and teacher education programs.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Imagine looking through a camera lens. When in its standard, zoomed-out position, the camera offers an overall shot of the scene on the other side of the lens, say a flower garden. From this open perspective, one gains a view of various flowers of various colors and styles—as Figure 1 illustrates. Though this general focus inhibits an identification of the specifics that differentiate one flower from the other, we nevertheless gain knowledge, and perhaps understanding, from this view. For instance, it is easy to see that various components (e.g., flowers, sunlight, grass, buzzing bees, and soil) interact with one another and contribute—somehow—to the growth and appearance of the garden. However, from this stance, we never fully grasp how this interaction progresses, how some plants adjust to limitations to stay alive, how the existence of one organism depends on the existence of another. Likewise, the diversity of the flowers is simplified to appearance—one is red, another is yellow—and the insects working in the shadowy crevices of the leaves and petals go unseen. Essentially, by relying solely on this zoomed-out perspective of the flower garden, we lose the minute details that make the garden possible and distinguish it from other gardens.

Zooming in to focus on one subsection of the garden reveals an image entirely different. From this closer perspective, we may see a particular grouping of flowers, all of the same species—to which Figure 2 alludes. We can then notice the particular features that allow them to survive in their environment, features possibly unnecessary for other flower species. We see the shadows that these flowers cast onto the insects and soil below and perhaps even the oncoming threat of an invasive species. While this focused view offers a more profound understanding of the specifics of this group of flowers, it presents its own limitations: if we were to never zoom back out and ever stay fixated on the specifics, these distinct details would



Figure 1. Overall Shot of a Garden



Figure 2. Zoomed-In Shot of a Specific Group of Flowers Within the Garden

become our standard understanding of the garden. Gone would be the overall connectedness of the garden. Neglected would be the notions that the various flowers are similar and that the multiple components of the garden contribute to its continued existence. Thus, acknowledging and appreciating the garden in its entirety require an ongoing movement between a general, overall focus and a specific, close focus—rendering the necessary interaction between the two representations of the garden.

As illustrated in the above analogy, representation matters. How something is represented controls and potentially limits our knowledge and perception of it—e.g., either the garden as a collective system or the flowers as distinct individuals, each with its own specific features. This same concept of representation applies to school curricula. According to Kliebard (1989), curriculum includes “what is taught (with implicit or explicit justification), who it is taught to (including the conditions of the audience to which it is being taught), how it is taught (pedagogy), and the bringing together of knowledge into an integrated whole” (Au, 2012, p. 32). Thus, through the representations (of people, events, concepts) featured in curricula, schools promote certain ideologies—ways of thinking, seeing, believing, and behaving—that acknowledge particular perspectives and cultures while ignoring others. Such privileging then raises the question, “Whose perception of reality is considered/constructed as valid or invalid in school knowledge, and why?” (Au, 2012, p. 65).

Returning to the above analogy, when we closely examine the seemingly healthy garden, which flowers dominate the space and receive ample water and nutrients? Which are attended to for a particular season and neglected the rest of the year? Which are treated as weeds? Those in power determine the ideology and use the curriculum to perpetuate it. Yet, as seen with the previous questions, such perpetuation of this dominant culture’s ideology can dangerously

silence or distort the realities of minority groups/cultures in school. Du Bois (1917) captures one side of this danger when he writes:

Everything great, good, efficient, fair and honorable is “white.” Everything mean, bad, blundering, cheating and dishonorable is “yellow,” brown and black. The changes on this theme are continually rung in picture and story, in newspaper heading and moving picture, in sermon and school book until, of course, the king can do no wrong... (pp. 440-441)

With this ideological pervasiveness to which Du Bois alludes comes the danger of the single story, a concept that Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie (2009) references years later. A single story can be understood essentially as a one-sided, simplified representation of a group of people that becomes the definitive image for that group, despite its inaccuracy. The representation defines the people so much so that this association of people and image becomes natural and thereby unchallenged (Delgado, 1993; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002)—e.g., a young Black male as an illiterate troublemaker or a Mexican as an “abject immigrant”:

And, as often happens in America, immigration became synonymous with Mexicans. There were endless stories of Mexicans as people who were fleeing the healthcare system, sneaking across the border, being arrested at the border [...] I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become one thing in my mind, the abject immigrant. I had bought into the single story of Mexicans and I could not have been more ashamed of myself. (Adichie, 2009)

Through repetition, one image becomes *the* image of a people, thus ushering in the need for “cultural maintenance”—finding ways to restore and preserve the life of a culture (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016; see also Jarrett, 2006; King, Crowley, & Brown, 2010).

Through such efforts as insisting on teaching students of their own culture, promoting native language use, and incorporating revisionist histories that recast histories from the ignored perspectives of minority groups, ALANAs (African, Latinx, Asian, Native Americans) have acted against cultural genocide at the hands of skewed or nonexistent representation (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016). Carter G. Woodson, for instance, used his understanding of public school curriculum to write textbooks that, among other accomplishments, “openly challenged scientific racism, highlighted the achievements of Africans and African Americans, [and] reconstructed a more true image of Africa and its importance to Black culture” (Au, 2012, p. 74; see also King, Crowley, & Brown, 2010).

Similar to the efforts of those like Woodson, this dissertation focuses on the representation and consequent perception of African Americans via the teaching of African-American, or Black, literature in the secondary English classroom. Interacting with the notions of the single story (Adichie, 2009), racial authenticity—i.e., what qualifies Black literature as *Black literature*? (Jarrett, 2006)—, and voice of color marginalization—i.e., an ALANA’s expected role of always speaking from the seat of race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Spivak, 1990; Spivak, 1993), this project examines high school English teachers’ pedagogical approaches to Black literature to determine the state of African-American representation in US curricula.

An African-American high school English teacher and teacher educator myself, I recognize the power of presence in the classroom. “Students need to see positive Black men in their lives,” someone would tell me after learning my profession. If there is nothing to challenge a representation, or lack thereof, then the representation—positive/negative, dynamic/limited—will become the proffered reality to the students. Therefore, in being concerned with the molding of young minds, not questioning that reality is tantamount to stepping into a skewed version of



the three wise monkeys: being blind, deaf, and mute to the potential harm that the curriculum causes. Black literature is more than tales of slavery, struggle, and deficit; yet if these are the sole focal areas, the sole representations, the sole molds into which Black characters are cast, what then is the consequence? Teachers use literature as a tool of instruction. How then are those texts and the ways in which the students—Black and non-Black alike—encounter them instructing the students to view themselves, others, and the surrounding world? Yet this study does not argue for giving a happy, positive representation for everyone. Humans are too complex for such a façade; rather, the study seeks to complicate the existence of single stories. Accomplishing this requires first understanding the image present in the curriculum: the flowers, the garden, or both.

### **Historical Background: Usage of Black Literature**

In his book *What Was African American Literature?*, Kenneth Warren (2011) argues that African-American literature, as a collective body, no longer exists. Taking a historical and contextual position, he states that the literature is defined neither by the author's racial identification nor by his/her way of engaging with Black traditions and "the problem of slavery" (p. 2); instead, African-American literature—as he knows it—is defined by the "contextual forces" that surrounded and subsequently influenced the production of texts by African Americans (p. 8). Warren (2011) clarifies this perspective saying,

One cannot treat African American literature as a literature apart from the necessary conditions that made it a literature. Absent white suspicions of, or commitment to imposing, black inferiority, African American literature would not have existed as a literature. (p. 17)

According to him, the legal dismissal of the Jim Crow era in the United States shifted the context in which literature by African Americans was produced, thus issuing a new category of

literature—one Warren might better label as “literature of identity” (p. 107).

However, this dissertation takes a broader, authorial position that greatly differs from Warren’s. In this dissertation, *Black literature* will be used in place of *African-American literature* to describe literature—poetry; novels; short stories; graphic novels; young adult literature; plays; speeches, autobiographies/narratives, and other nonfiction; such texts of Black vernacular as songs and sermons—produced by individuals identified as Black, Negro, African American, or the like. As a result, *African-American literature* will be treated as a subset of Black literature, one that is more likely than the other subsets to be present in United States’ English classrooms.

Continuing Victoria Earle Matthews’s (1986) consideration of *race literature*, this dissertation also frees Black literature from the confines of “race matter” (i.e., explicit discussions of race), thus allowing *Black literature* to encompass a text on any topic, race-based or not (p. 170). To return to the opening analogy, this comprehensive understanding of what Black literature includes then acknowledges both a general, zoomed-out perspective as well as a specific, zoomed-in perspective. Such an approach consequently voices two schools of Black texts: those that center racial politics and those that do not.

### **Focusing on the Flower: Centering Racial Politics**

For the Black authors producing the first group of texts, “art is propaganda” (Du Bois, 2007, p. 259); with this perspective, they thus position themselves as writers with a serious and “instrumental” purpose, not simply as writers seeking to entertain (Wright, 1978; Warren, 2011). Speaking from a historical frame, Warren (2011) elucidates, saying that

black writers knew that their work would in all likelihood be evaluated instrumentally, in terms of whether or not it could be added to the arsenal of arguments, achievements, and

propositions needed to attack the justifications for, and counteract the effects of Jim Crow. (p. 10)

Thus, as Eaton (2006) echoes, “[f]or these writers, African American artistic production is not only political, but is regarded as the key to the survival of the community within catastrophic political times” (p. 684). Every word matters. Consequently, as a response to the ongoing racial injustice and misrepresentation, Black literature developed into a testament to the collective solidarity of African Americans, their wealth of talent and interests, and hence their lack of inferiority (Brown, Heilig, & Brown, 2013; Warren, 2011).

**Black poetry.** In terms of verse, some Black writers relied on the versatility and accessibility of poems to reach more readers, affect more minds, and uplift more souls. The Black Arts Movement, for example, used poetry to issue a “call for revolution” to the Black masses (Page, 2011, p. 36). Employing the “language of the masses,” these texts were designed to be undeniably seated in racial themes and atmosphere:

Blues, spirituals, and folk tales recounted from mouth to mouth; the whispered words of a black mother to her black daughter on the ways of men, to confidential wisdom of a black father to his black son; the swapping of sex experiences on street corners from boy to boy in the deepest vernacular; work songs sung under blazing suns... (Wright, 2007, p. 270)

Likewise, nineteenth-century poet Paul Laurence Dunbar used both Black dialect and “standard” English as his means to contribute to the restorative image of African Americans. Such poems as “The Colored Soldiers” and “When Dey ‘Listed Colored Soldiers” boldly foreground the significance of Black military men, contesting their place in oblivion:

Ah, they rallied to the standard  
To uphold it by their might;

None were stronger in the labors,  
None were braver in the fight.  
From the blazing breach of Wagner  
To the plains of Olustee,  
They were foremost in the fight  
Of the battles of the free. (Dunbar, "The Colored Soldiers," 1970)

As captured above, Dunbar counters racial/cultural misrepresentation as he "tells the story of [the Colored soldiers'] history, their struggles, and the sacrifices that they made despite having to face and endure the same inequalities that existed in civilian life" (Raynor, 2010, p. 33). Therefore, like Dunbar, other poets instilled culturally specific messages of change and acknowledgement into their lines of verse in hopes that the ears that needed to hear them heard as well as listened.

**Black nonfiction.** In terms of nonfiction, such textual forms as speeches, essays, and book reviews too facilitate cultural maintenance. Pieces like Richard Wright's (1978) "Blueprint for Negro Writing" introduce ideologies to the African-American readership to ensure the establishment and maintenance of Black solidarity in the battle for social change and racial uplift. James Baldwin, in particular, used his essays to clarify his experience and, in so doing, help others to clarify and understand their own (Sylvander, 1980). He accepted the responsibility of "bear[ing] witness to something that has to be there when the battle is over" and writing it down for present and future generations (Standley & Pratt, 1989, p. 129). For Baldwin, his writing was an unavoidably political act, one designed to "examine attitudes, to go beneath the surface, to tap the source" of personal, social, and national identity to effect change in the readers' consciousness (Baldwin, 2012, p. 6; see also Standley & Pratt, 1989):

We cannot ask: what do we really feel about [the Negro]—such a question merely opens the gates of chaos. What we really feel about him is involved with all that we feel about everything, about everyone, about ourselves. [...] Our dehumanization of the Negro then is indivisible from our dehumanization of ourselves: the loss of our own identity is the price we pay for our annulment of his. (Baldwin, 2012, pp. 25-26)

Baldwin thus wielded his writing as a tool for building recognition of self, of the Other as a part of self, and of the history and emotions attached to the self-Other interaction as a part of self also.

**Black fiction.** As with poetry and nonfiction, Black writers use fiction to inspire change and voice realities that challenge the status quo. Through Black fiction, writers give voice to their concerns and to the macro/micro realities of the nation. Through Black fiction, White readers receive the opportunity to briefly step into a culture and sometimes gain insight into the thoughts, fears, and situations of the characters with whom they have become acquainted. And through Black fiction, Black readers sometimes receive affirmation and clarity, challenging calls for action, and means of healing—in addition to similar gains of insight into other areas of Black life and psyche. For authors like Toni Cade Bambara, fiction has “potency,” one that instigates change and recognition (Lewis, 2012, p. 26). As she explained in an interview:

So I work to tell the truth about people’s lives; I work to celebrate struggle, to applaud the tradition of struggle in our community, to bring to center stage all those characters, just ordinary folks on the block, who’ve been waiting in the wings, characters we thought we had to ignore because they weren’t pimp-flashy or hustler-slick or because they didn’t fit easily into previously acceptable modes or stock types. I want to lift up some usable truths... (p. 53)

Illustrated in this passage is Bambara's desire to use her writing to teach; for instance, rather than highlighting the negativity that exists in the relationships between Black women and men, she focuses on the "caring that lies beneath the antagonisms" because the caring can create "usable lessons" for her readers (Lewis, 2012, p. 15). Additionally, she transforms her young, female narrators—like that of "Gorilla, My Love"—into outspoken individuals unwilling to sit silently in the face of injustice. According to literary critic Cheryl Wall (2007),

[t]hese young characters are angered by injustice of any kind: whether it is the injustice of a theater owner who fails to show the movie that he advertised or the societal injustice implicit in the existence of a fancy store where toys cost more than a worker's annual wage. (p. 28)

Like Baldwin, Bambara sometimes wrote to provide clarity for others so that they could answer her call for action, finding "revolution irresistible" (p. 35). Thus, for some Black writers—regardless of their preferred form of writing—the responsibility for cultural maintenance was not simply on themselves as artists but also on their readers, as a necessarily active part of the community.

### **Focusing on the Garden: De-Centering Racial Politics**

There are moments, however, in which Black writers would rather be perceived as *writers*, not solely as *Black writers* who were ever expected to "feature African American protagonists alongside certain historical themes, cultural geographies, political discourses, or subjectivities defined by race" (Jarrett, 2006, p. 2). Such a desire does not mean that Black writers wish to forever cast off their Blackness and write like the mainstream White author. Neither should such a desire be automatically perceived as a fear or abhorrence of self, like that described by Langston Hughes (1926): "I am ashamed, too, for the colored artist who runs from

the painting of Negro faces to the painting of sunsets after the manner of the academicians because he fears the strange unwhiteness of his own features” (p. 694). Rather such a desire aims for the freedom to write as one pleases—whether using art for the sake of art or art as propaganda.

These Black writers at times seek to reframe their labels: as *writers who are Black*, they are free to write texts that de-center race and racism, that carry themes deemed universal, or that use Black voices that are not driven by political intentions or social revolution (Jarrett, 2007). For instance, Paul Laurence Dunbar’s *The Uncalled*, Nella Larsen’s “The Wrong Man,” and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Seraph on the Suwanee* consciously enact this reframing by “featuring main characters who [are] racially white, neutral, or ambiguous” (p. 2).

**Toni Morrison.** Her only published short story, Toni Morrison’s “Recitatif” intentionally leaves the racial identification of the two main characters ambiguous. The readers are then left to face their own biases and assumptions concerning race as they attempt to determine which of Morrison’s main characters is White and which is Black. Along the process of reading and looking for racial cues and clues, readers may catch themselves attributing certain behaviors, experiences, and beliefs to certain races and, by the end of the short story, receive no resolution in terms of racial certainty. Thus, by withholding the assigned races of these protagonists and asking the readers “What does racial identity mean to you?,” Morrison cleverly manages to “provoke and enlighten” by addressing race without explicitly addressing it (Schappell & Lacour, 2006, p. 372).

**Paul Laurence Dunbar.** Several years before Morrison, Paul Laurence Dunbar struggled with the mask of Black dialect that critics insisted upon for his poetry. In fact, rather than being held down “to a certain kind of poetry—dialect and concerning only scenes on plantations in the

South”—Dunbar (2007) believed that insisting upon a difference between Black and White art was unnecessary (p. 172). Black writers, thus, “must write like the white men” in the sense that shared living spaces render a shared culture, or an environment in which various cultures borrow from one another, blending their lines of distinction. To reflect the bidirectional nature of this cultural exchange, Dunbar’s observation can then be reversed: White writers must write like the Black men. Dunbar penned standard English poems highlighting topics of nature and love, as illustrated in “Invitation to Love”:

Come when the nights are bright with stars  
Or when the moon is mellow;  
Come when the sun his golden bars  
Drops on the hay-field yellow.  
Come in the twilight soft and gray,  
Come in the night or come in the day,  
Come, O love, whene’er you may,  
And you are welcome, welcome... (Dunbar, 1970)

Thus, by consistently employing the range of his talent, Dunbar demonstrated his intent and ability to write beyond the façade of so-called “authentic” and “pure” Blackness.

**Frank Yerby.** Then, there are Black texts that do feature Black characters but in a way deemed ill-fitting to the current literary-political wave of Black writing. Frank Yerby’s unpublished novel *This Is My Own* is one such text. This novel, though using racial uplift to positively realign the image of the African American, was written in a time dominated by the wave of racial realism catalyzed by Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) (Jarrett, 2006). Wright’s “uncompromisingly realistic” tale of Bigger Thomas ushered in a movement that refused to



further conceal some of the dark realities of Black Americans (Jarrett, 2007, p. 132; see also Page, 2011). However, with this literary-political shift came what some Black writers and critics identified as potentially harmful racial stereotypes that became unofficial requisites for publication:

From the recent successful novels of Negro life, it would be hard for an outsider to tell that we have men or women in the race like those, for instance, who read *The New York Age*, who work steadily, send their children to school regularly, and live as do normal people anywhere—in spite of the color line—with no overpowering complexes driving them to manslaughter, rape, jail, evil, defeat, decay, or an untimely death. (Hughes, 2002, p. 263)

As if anticipating Langston Hughes's call above, Yerby attempted to present a stark contrast to Wright's text with his novel: according to Yerby, the Black protagonist "is intelligent, educated—no 'Bigger Thomas' in any sense of the word. He is myself and thousands of my friends" (Jarrett, 2007, p. 150). However, because of its ill-fitting and ill-timed representations, the novel was never approved for publication, causing Yerby to abandon it for later works.

**Zora Neale Hurston.** Similarly, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) had to contend with the literary-political expectations for Black writers. Highlighted for its "careful and precise inclusion of elements of black folklore [and] a heartfelt appreciation of the lives of black folk" (Page, 2011, p. 181), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was nevertheless criticized by some writers for not keeping up with the progress of Black literature. Instead, the text lingered in the past muck of "mak[ing] the 'white folks' laugh" (Wright, 1937, p. 25). When reviewing the novel, Richard Wright echoed his view of the Black writer as a "purposeful agent [with] a serious responsibility" (Wright, 2007, p. 271). He thus reproached the novel for being

anything but serious—“carr[ying] no theme, no message, no thought” (Wright, 1937, p. 25).

Alain Locke (1938), more tactfully, addresses Hurston’s continued resistance to the ongoing literary-political agenda: “But when will the Negro novelist of maturity who knows how to tell a story convincingly,—which is Miss Hurston’s cradle-gift, *come to grips with* [emphasis added] motive fiction and social document fiction?” (p. 10).

Yet, according to Spencer (2006), Hurston had her own agenda, one using the route of Black self-affirmation to reach the shared goal of Black (re-)affirmation: “[she] redefines blackness through African American folk culture, not in the romanticism of popular fiction or the realism of social protest” (p. 120). Likewise, Frank Yerby was not necessarily undermining the movement toward racial realism; he was instead highlighting another reality, one that needed acknowledgment to more fully address representation of the Black race. Thus, because of and despite their divergence from or resistance to the prescribed literary-political program, Black texts like Hurston’s, Yerby’s, Dunbar’s, and Morrison’s nevertheless are political (Eaton, 2006). From within the circumscription of Black writers, they speak with intention as they navigate, negotiate, and extend the literary responsibility and freedom given to them.

The flowers or the garden? The seemingly irreconcilable strands of this long-running disagreement are well demonstrated in critic Robert Brustein and playwright August Wilson’s debate on the necessity for Black theater in America (Gross, 1997). Like Du Bois, Wilson contended that all art is inherently political “in the sense that it serves the politics of someone”—hence, the conclusion that a focus on the garden is just as politically conscious as a focus on the flowers (Brustein & Wilson, 1997, para. 67). For him, maintaining a special place for the uniqueness of Black theater and the nurturing of Black talent precludes the systemic silencing of Black voices. Creating a separate space is thus not an act of “separatism” (para. 22) but rather an

act of inclusion—one in which Black actors and playwrights unabashedly embrace their cultural particularity rather than reaching to “escape from the ghetto of black culture” (para. 23).

Brustein, a White theater critic and universalist, stands counter to Wilson. For him, a focus on particular flowers costs the greater beauty of the full garden—forcing the beholder to “choos[e] sides,” to align with one group or the other (Brustein & Wilson, 1997, para. 6). However, Brustein’s stance of universality comes at a price as well, for it equates to sloughing off one’s particular identity in exchange for commonalities and inclusivity. He asserts that “America will only begin to fulfill its promise when we acknowledge that we are individuals first, Americans second, and tribalists third” (para. 14). Throughout the debate, the two men—one White, the other Black; one from the historically dominant group, the other not—maintain their distinct perspectives and barely address the idea of meeting at a point where both universality and particularity share priority.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As illustrated above, representation matters. By extension, stories—as conveyors of representation—matter as well (Adichie, 2009). Two understandings arise from this statement: one stressing the impact of simply being represented in stories and the other, the impact of the representations themselves (i.e., the conditions of those representations). In education, both perspectives influence the structure and content of school curricula. For such minority groups as African Americans, this two-pronged consideration of representation necessitates critical examinations and discussions of whose voice and experiences the curriculum values. In regards to text selection and representation, Thomas (2013) states,

[We] would do well to consider the impressions of African American children and youth [that students] might be left with if the majority of the black American characters they

encounter are enslaved, suffering under Jim Crow, living under duress during the civil rights movement, or struggling to survive the nation's postmodern inner cities....What might black kids and teens themselves come to believe about their inherent worth? (p. 39)

Thus, when society views schools as neutral institutions, as sites for learning what one needs to be considered educated, they wield a potentially dangerous amount of authoritative power: as a tool of ideology, school curricula can affect consciousness, consequently controlling “how we see and understand the world” (Au, 2012, p. 16). Through the schooling process, certain ideas, images, and perspectives—endorsed by the curriculum—are rendered natural and unchallenged. This same process of normalization renders other ideas, images, and perspectives unnatural and potentially threatening to the hegemonic order (Au, 2012; Delgado, 1993; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Swartz, 1992).

For African Americans, this hierarchy of voices and lives can be dangerous, conveying to Black students the sentiment, “You are alone. You are not like us at all!” (Carr, 1972, p. 126; see also, Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016; Brown, 2010; Brown, Heilig, & Brown, 2013; King, Crowley, & Brown, 2010). By analyzing the place and treatment of Black literature in US high school English classrooms, this dissertation is a step towards fully revising this sentiment by seeking to answer the following research question: How do high school English teachers teach Black literature? The list below identifies supporting questions within this guiding question:

1. Do high school English teachers teach Black literature? If so, what is their rationale?
2. What texts/authors do they select? Why?
3. When in the curriculum or school year do they teach Black literature? Why?

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The following sections establish the necessary background for this study. After presenting an understanding of how American society views Black literature and of how American secondary English education operates, this chapter synthesizes the two by examining how Black literature operates in the secondary English classroom. The chapter then closes with the guiding theoretical framework and its points of connection to the topic of Black literature instruction.

### **Conceptualization of Black Literature**

A general knowledge of the historical atmosphere of Black writing facilitates a concurrent understanding of how American audiences and scholars define and represent Black literature. This societal definition adds to the single criterion adopted by this dissertation: the race of the author. As often revealed through the texts and authors selected for literary awards or for most frequent use, more elements are typically considered.

### **Studying Literature in College**

In a 1975 survey, Whitlow assessed the state of Black literature in American colleges and universities, both public and private. From the results of the 648 schools, he identified a consensus of what embodies Black literature. Whitlow (1975) found that when Black literature was included in courses—be they general literature courses or Black-literature-focused ones—the texts were usually written by the same authors. The top 15 most read authors include the following:

1. Richard Wright
2. Ralph Ellison
3. James Baldwin
4. Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones)
5. Langston Hughes
6. Jean Toomer
7. W.E.B. Du Bois
8. Gwendolyn Brooks
9. James Weldon Johnson
10. Claude McKay

11. Charles W. Chesnutt
12. Paul Laurence Dunbar
13. Frederick Douglass

14. Malcolm X
15. Countee Cullen  
(Whitlow, 1975, p. 643)

The fact that the majority, if not all, of these writers are associated with Black aesthetics, Black culture, and/or racial themes is a “coincidence” worth noting. Does the typical content that these authors penned reify the accepted, predominant classification of Black literature? If not associated with literary-racial politics, would these names still be present? Answering such questions before examining a list of frequently taught titles would, however, be premature.

Whitlow (1975) provides a list of “[t]he thirty most widely studied primary works of black literature” (p. 644). Table 1 (see Appendix B) lists the top 15 texts. In each of the texts, race and its culture of experience, discrimination, struggle, and difference serve as anchors for readers and writers alike. Said simply, these texts are seen to encapsulate *the Black experience* and are thus distinctly Black. Perhaps “narratives of victimization” or simply tales of empowerment, these most frequently taught texts offer an idea of how university instructors—and in turn, university students—ultimately regard Black literature: as exoticized stories of difference prized for their seemingly vicarious design (Blackwell, 2011, p. 68).

### **Awarding Black Literature**

In terms of children’s and young adult literature, the focus on cultural experience is similar. Named for the wife of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Coretta Scott King Award “accentuate[s] the work of numerous African American authors” by honoring books that highlight *the Black experience* (McCollough & Phelps, 2015, p. ix). Each year, the award committee acknowledges children’s and young adult texts that fit within pre-established criteria, one of which being the following: “Thematically the material (text or illustration) must speak to some aspect of African American culture, with an awareness of Martin Luther King Jr.’s sense of

the brotherhood of all cultures” (McCollough & Phelps, 2015, p. xiii). Of note is the second half of this statement, which moves beyond particularity into the universality of experiences, hence “brotherhood.” Thus, with this addition, the award echoes Blackwell (2011), advocating that the texts are “more than stories and poems about race” and are “wholly American: bold, diverse, and iconoclastic” (p. 68). However, excerpts from reviews of past winners prove that universality alone is not enough to receive the book award (see Table 2 in Appendix B). A brief perusal of the reviews yields an assembly of culturally specific references like the civil rights movement, racial segregation and integration, slavery, and ignored or forgotten stories of African-American firsts. From this examination, one can conclude that children’s and young adult “literature beyond race” would rarely, if ever, receive the Coretta Scott King award (Jarrett, 2006).

As with Whitlow’s (1975) study, the award committee appears to be drawn to particular authors. As Table 3 illustrates, ten authors are the most frequent award recipients, having received the honor at least twice since its existence. These multiple accolades speak not only to the author’s skill as a writer but also the award committee’s preferences to theme and content. Thus, just as the work of Richard Wright influenced and controlled the trajectory of Black literature, so too might the work of Walter Dean Myers—a 5-time recipient—act similarly in children’s and young adult Black literature (American Library Association, 2012).

Examining the content of university courses and the recipients of such book awards as the Coretta Scott King award reveals a pattern and thus a general definition of Black literature. While it begins with this study’s understanding of the literature as Black-authored texts, society’s conception does not end there. Instead, valued and acknowledged Black-authored texts must essentially be “race matter” (Matthews, 1986, p. 170), recording and “bear[ing] witness” (Standley & Pratt, 1989, p. 129) to the experiences of Africans in America and African

Table 3. Top 10 Recipients of the Coretta Scott King Award (1970-2016)

<b>Author</b>	<b>Number of awards</b>
Walter Dean Myers	5
Mildred D. Taylor	4
Virginia Hamilton	3
Angela Johnson	3
Rita Williams-Garcia	3
Christopher Paul Curtis	2
Sharon M. Draper	2
Patricia C. & Frederick L. McKissack	2
Kadir Nelson	2
Jacqueline Woodson	2

(American Library Association, 2012)

Americans—past, present, and future. Recognizing the existence of this concept is crucial to exploring the state of the high school English classroom. Only through understanding *who* and *what* Black literature looks like can we begin to accurately conceptualize *how* it is presented in the secondary English/Language Arts context.

### **Features of the Secondary ELA Classroom**

When first-year secondary English teachers enter the classroom, they bring with them a longstanding genealogy of English teaching. That is, how they teach often reflects how their own teachers taught *them*, who in turn typically did the same. Similarly, what they teach often echoes what their own teachers taught as well, and so on ad infinitum (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006). English classrooms, thus, become inundated with texts of tradition and of the canon, ensuring the instance of a grandson’s reading the same literary works as his grandmother did half a century earlier. Such an observation sets the context for understanding the relatively static nature of the English curriculum and the role that canonized texts play in this literary stability.



## Building the Literature Curriculum

**Content.** In the late 1980s, Arthur N. Applebee (1993) conducted several studies examining American secondary English education—involving teachers and department chairs of public, Catholic, and independent schools. Among the questions he asked were:

1. What literature do teachers select?
2. How are these selections presented?
3. What are the traditions represented in the selections?
4. What are teachers' goals for student learning, and how do these goals work themselves out in classroom practice? (Applebee, 1993)

Similar to Whitlow (1975), Applebee found that certain literary works are common across the U.S. literature curricula. From the 322 public high schools, he ranked the most popular books taught. Years later, Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) conducted a similar study, surveying 142 English teachers across the state of Alabama. Interestingly, despite the passing of over a decade, the most popular texts from both studies are very much identical, as Table 4 shows. Eight (80%) of Applebee's ten titles are present on the two lists—2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years—of Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber. Of the 32 total texts mentioned across the lists, only 6 (roughly 18%) are mentioned once. This lack of disparity speaks to the power of the literary canon, in the sense that time appears to have little effect on teachers' selections. The most recent text on the lists, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, was published in 1960, creating a 30- to 40-year gap between the classrooms of the two studies. Thus, the literature curriculum in general does not appear to concern itself with contemporary study but rather elects a study of “the classics,” of the best and greatest literary works (Applebee 1993; Bertens, 2008).

In 1872, Harvard's newly established English department developed a required list of

Table 4. Comparison of the Top 10 Most Frequently Taught Books Found in Applebee’s and Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber’s Studies

Applebee	Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber	
	2002-2003 school year	2003-2004 school year
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>	<i>The Scarlet Letter</i>
<i>Macbeth</i>	<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	<i>The Great Gatsby</i>
<i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	<i>The Scarlet Letter</i>	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>	<i>Julius Caesar</i>	<i>The Crucible</i>
<i>The Scarlet Letter</i>	<i>The Crucible</i>	<i>Macbeth</i>
<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	<i>Macbeth</i>	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
<b><i>Hamlet</i></b>	<i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	<b><i>Wuthering Heights</i></b>
<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	<b><i>Animal Farm</i></b>	<b><i>A Raisin in the Sun</i></b>
<i>Lord of the Flies</i>	<b><i>A Separate Peace</i></b>	(Tied) <i>Lord of the Flies, Our town, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>

(**Bold** indicates mention on only one list.) (Applebee, 1993; Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006)

such great works to determine future program enrollment. Among the listed texts were those of William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Oliver Goldsmith, and George Eliot. As Applebee (1996) notes, “the author and titles that formed the high school curriculum [i.e., the canon] were soon determined in large part by college entrance requirements” (p. 26). Consequently, the titles transformed from simple literature to *literature*, defining what true literature is and “implying a body of knowledge, a universe of things” worth knowing (pp. 26-27). Castenell and Pinar (1993) further explain this literary phenomenon, saying that

the discourse in which a canon emerges traces the formation of the canon to the intrinsic excellence of certain texts, an excellence of certain texts, an excellence established by critics and those educated to see the eternal value of such texts.... Furthermore, because they are still privileged today and are cornerstones in the canonical discourse, their very existence and fixity are evidence that they have endured the “test of time” and thus are atemporal. (p. 39)

Consequently, the teaching of such texts as *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Great Gatsby* transforms into preparing the students not just for college but also for life, for within each work are reservoirs of universal appeal, self-reflection, and connection. Essentially, through canonization, these texts become the ideal written means of learning about self, society, and the world. Meyer (2010) captures this profound connection as he reflects on Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

[A]s I read Lee's words, *I* become Tom Robinson, *I* become Boo Radley, *I* become Scout, *I* become Atticus Finch, *I* become Bob Ewell [original emphasis]. Though I may not be black or emotionally unsettled, am not a six-year-old child, am not a lawyer or an illiterate living on the fringe of society, I am Lee's characters because I genuinely identify pieces of myself in her work. (p. xviii)

In turn, denied access to these texts obliterates such a learning and identification.

Castenell and Pinar (1993) assert that, through this act of canonization, acts of monumentalization and dissolution occur as a text is esteemed as a great, essential work and is somewhat decontextualized to remain viewed as such: "each text is dissolved within the canonical discourse that sustains it, so that the words of the text are reinscribed or rewritten in the canonical discourse itself" (Castenell & Pinar, 1993, p. 40).

To ensure the work's timelessness, the canonization—or rather those collective forces driving it—then controls and limits the ways of reading and understanding the work. Thus, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is circumscribed as "an example of American Romanticism, a morality tale, a rebuttal or response to other authors, a piece of our heritage and so on" (p. 40). Likewise, *To Kill a Mockingbird* becomes "our national novel"; a story of childhood, conscience, and race; a book that "helped liberate white people" from American racism (Murphy, 2010, p. 4, 63, 202). Because such texts as these and the rest in Table 4 are

“armored” and preserved through canonization (Castenell & Pinar, 1993, p. 44), there is little wonder why English teachers—as former students—view them as staples of the literature curriculum: remove them and everything falls apart.

**Representation.** A critical examination of author representation in classroom literature reveals a monopoly of valued knowledge. Of the required public high school books, Applebee (1993) reports 86% having male authors and 99% having White authors (p. 60), leaving a meager 14% for female authors and a scant 1% to be shared among Black, Latinx, Asian, and other non-White authors. Considering the top 10 most frequently taught books, Applebee’s study reveals 1 out of 10 (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) being female-authored and 0 out of 10 written by people of color. For the 2002-2003 school year, Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) report the same proportion. A change occurs only when they report for the 2003-2004 school year: 3 out of 12 (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Wuthering Heights*, *A Raisin in the Sun*) being female-authored and 1 out of 12 (*A Raisin in the Sun*) written by a person of color.

In terms of the literature anthologies used for each grade (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>), the representation is slightly more inclusive (see Table 5). Until students begin discussing British literature, Applebee found that female-authored texts on average represented about 25% of the anthologized works. Female representation drops to 7.5% in British literature, however. Ethnically speaking, White authors dominate each grade level, with the study of British literature being virtually all White.

The literature formats for female-authored works taught in the classroom mostly include long and short fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. For works by authors of color, the format mostly includes poetry and nonfiction, representing 12% of the poetry and nonfiction that teachers taught. Of the long fiction, short fiction, and plays taught in English classrooms, Applebee (1993) found that only 3.9%, 2.2%, and 1.5% (respectively) were written by authors of color.

Table 5. Representations of Anthologized Authors, by Grade

	9 <sup>th</sup> grade literature	10 <sup>th</sup> grade literature	American (U.S.) literature	British literature
Female author (%)	26.0	29.3	23.7	7.5
Race/ethnicity of author (%)				
White	82.5	82.2	83.8	99.0
African American	10.9	10.3	9.7	.5
Hispanic	3.1	3.4	1.6	.1
Asian	2.0	1.7	.4	.1
Native American	.9	1.7	4.3	.0
Other	.5	.6	.1	.3

(Applebee, 1993, p. 94)

Thus, these data clearly indicate that when selecting literature, teachers gravitate toward the works of White, male authors, whose works seem to define great literature.

### Justifying the Literature Curriculum

Aside from the potentially unconscious practice of going with the flow of pedagogical tradition, teachers' literature selections are products of other categorized factors.

**Teacher.** This category of factors involves the skills, knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, etc. that teachers bring to the classroom. For instance, a teacher's ideology for teaching will affect not only how a text is presented but also what the class seeks to retrieve from it. Likewise, different ideologies may call for different texts to promote those particular ideologies. Hence, a teacher striving to develop students into active agents of change may be more likely to select a Malcolm X speech over a Paul Laurence Dunbar poem.

A teacher's racial identity, possibly influencing ideology, may control text selection as well. For reasons of familiarity and comfort, one may be more prone, even committed, to select texts that match his/her racial/ethnic group. Conversely, one's racial identity may hinder the inclusion of texts outside his/her racial/ethnic group because of the lack of expertise (Stallworth,

Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006).

Related to teachers' participation in tradition, their exposure to and knowledge of literature also controls and limits what they choose to teach. For instance, if Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* were present throughout a teacher's educational career—secondary school, university literature courses, university English Education courses—then he is more likely to incorporate that novel into the classroom than a novel that appeared only once or not at all during his schooling (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006).

Simply put, teachers often teach “what [they] have actually read and feel comfortable teaching” (Eaton, 2001, p. 307). To reach beyond this literary range of experience requires not only time to search for new texts but also a knowledge of where to look (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006). Though over time some may branch out to bring in new works, teachers generally stay close to what they know, ranking “personal familiarity with the selection” as the second strongest influence on literature selection—following behind “literary merit” (Applebee, 1993, p. 80).

Lastly, a teacher's knowledge of and assumptions for the students in the classroom can influence what texts are incorporated. Trying to connect to their students' interests, teachers may seek texts that feature sports or magic or real-life scenarios. The same goes for race: teachers may also select texts with characters or authors belonging to the same racial/ethnic group as their students. However, doing so as the sole basis for inclusion, according to Scieurba (2014/2015), assumes that the students, specifically ALANAs, “find primary—if not exclusive—significance in literature that reflects their racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds” (p. 309).

**Text.** This category of influential factors involves the conditions surrounding the texts themselves. Teachers cannot teach what they cannot access. With minimal funds to purchase

books, they become limited to the works in the literature anthology and class sets of books within their classrooms or school libraries (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006). Depending on these offerings, the texts featured in the classrooms may very well perpetuate the tradition of “great works,” the tradition of White male-authored works. Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) add that this funding limitation—and the consequent resource limitation—varies by school district, with some districts allocating more financial support to their teachers than others:

Although some of the more affluent districts provide teachers with additional financial supplements, that practice is the exception rather than the norm. Thus, a teacher’s option of purchasing sets of trade books or other materials to *supplement* [emphasis added] the literature anthology often is cost prohibitive, and, for some students, having to purchase their own materials would be a financial burden. (p. 485)

For better or for worse, English teachers might be left to the will and design of their anthologies.

The complexity of the text itself aligns with its ability to accomplish the intended standard and objective. Texts that are too simple, though related, may not reach the desired depth. Additionally, to avoid a disconnected class, a text is more likely to be selected if the teacher can align it with, or tie it into, another text or unit. Thus, Robert Frost poetry is more likely to fit in a class featuring a poetry unit than one featuring novels and essays.

**Audience.** This category of factors involves the audience of the text selection—both within the classroom (i.e., students) and without (i.e., administrators, parents, community). If the text is deemed too complex/difficult or too simple for the students to effectively interact with, then a teacher may avoid it. Moreover, an estimation of student-text connection plays a role in selection. Essentially, will the students be able to relate to a text, possibly “extracting meanings

they could *apply* to themselves or lessons they considered ‘important’” (Sciurba, 2014/2015, p. 314)?

Regarding principals, parents, and the community, another factor controlling teachers’ literature selections lies in the domain of approval versus censorship. Even when a teacher uses her funding to bring in a nontraditional text with which she is familiar, if the divergence from the tradition is met with disapproving eyes from her stakeholders, the text will be challenged and perhaps blocked, maintaining the status quo of literature. Modifying the literature curriculum is a risk, one that some teachers choose to avoid:

These teachers will continue to teach only from a very narrowly prescribed list of novels because they do not believe updating the curriculum with diverse titles is worth the potential negative outcomes, especially when they do not have the support of administrators who cannot or will not support teachers when angry parents demand the removal of books. (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006, p. 484)

An attempt at expanding curriculum, then, becomes a threat to not only the canon and education but also students’ minds and society-at-large. Replacing these canonized works of “Truth, Beauty, and Goodness” is villainized as “the loss of standards and the [subsequent] collapse of civilization” (Castenell & Pinar, 1993, pp. 41, 45).

Applebee (1993) concludes that teachers’ liberties to select literary works vary. The larger the school, the less autonomy a teacher has. Additionally, while a small portion of public school teachers reported having “little or no leeway” in their literature inclusions, he found that most teachers had control to some extent—ranging from needing approval for additions to “complete freedom of choice” (p. 76; see Table 6 in Appendix B). English teachers, therefore, are sometimes constricted by the various audiences that they serve.



Taken together, the factors within these categories of teacher, text, and audience work in unison within the frame of curriculum. Figure 3 presents a visual model of this interaction. Therefore, for a text to be considered by teacher, text, and audience factors, it first must fit within this frame. For example, a British literature course may restrict the inclusion of non-British texts. In their study, Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) reported that “[m]any of the more experienced teachers have a long-established literature curriculum that they follow, and they feel obligated to teach those particular works” (p. 486). Likewise, the standards for the course and whether standardized testing regulate it may allow or limit the leeway and autonomy a teacher has. Thus, if a text does not contribute to this curricular frame or threatens to steal time from the valued and traditional texts, then a teacher’s likelihood to select it is low.

Once within the frame, text decisions may play out as follows: Though one may be trained to teach Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and may foresee no administrative or parental resistance, the text will remain absent from her classroom if no viable means of access exist.

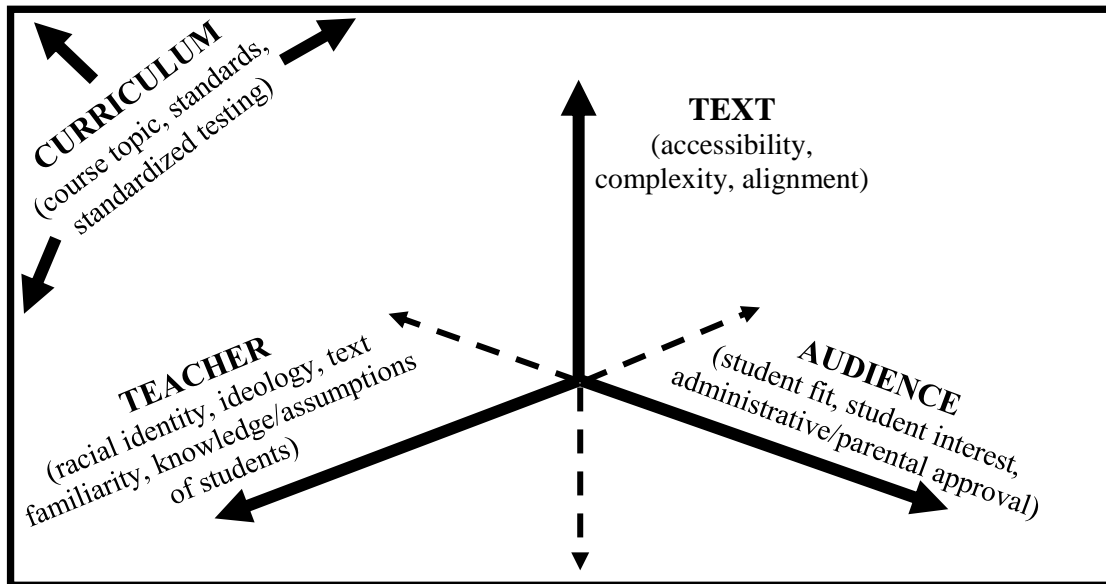


Figure 3. Visual Model of Factors Influencing Text Selection

Likewise, if parents object to having their children read Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* in place of Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, then this resistance weighs in against the teacher's familiarity with and accessibility to the text. Finally, if a teacher is familiar with Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*—a text that for generations has had a secure place in the school's English curriculum—then she is more likely to select it for study, already having multiple copies of it. With these enabling and disabling factors in mind, one can more thoroughly comprehend why educators teach, or do not teach, certain works in their classrooms, extending beyond a sole consideration of literary merit.

### **Teaching the Literature Curriculum**

Curriculum involves more than what is taught. According to Kliebard (1989), it also involves “who it is taught to (including the conditions of the audience to which it is being taught), *how* [emphasis added] it is taught (pedagogy), and the bringing together of knowledge into an integrated whole” (Au, 2012, p. 32). The design and purpose of the English/Language Arts curriculum influences “the way [literature] instruction unfolds” (Applebee, 1996, p. 49), the way students view literature, and the way they view themselves as readers (Applebee, 1993). Because of opposing views to what matters most about literature and its interaction with students, multiple approaches to literature instruction exist.

**New Criticism.** The standard approach to literature instruction in high schools, New Criticism introduces the notion of studying “the best that has been thought and said in the world” (Bertens, 2008, p. 4) in order to ultimately rescue humanity from its own moral corruption and degradation. The timeless nature of canonized texts limits the accepted role that external factors (e.g., author biographical details or socio-historical context) play in the understanding of the texts' essential values. Teachers using New Criticism thus focus on the text and little else. This

removal of context promotes what Applebee (1996) decries as knowledge-out-of-context. In exchange for objectively dissecting it to discover how it operates, a pedagogy employing knowledge-out-of-context severs authentic connections to literature (Applebee, 1993; Applebee 1996). Each literary work is an “organic whole” in which its various parts naturally work together to create balanced unity (Parker, 2011, p. 17; see also Latrobe & Drury, 2009).

Through close reading and analysis of elements (e.g., plot, character, rhyme, and irony), teachers and students are believed to better understand a text’s meaning and greatness. To understand a poem or a novel, students must study its form, gradually unpacking the work and cracking its code. Teachers therefore train students in identifying the use of metaphor, imagery, repetition, and other literary elements; for without a knowledge of the parts, understanding the whole is impossible.

Additionally, rather than focusing on author intent, teachers and students use textual evidence to identify and examine “the effect of what the author (or text) actually does,” not tries to do (Parker, 2011, p. 36). With the author’s intent, historical and cultural contexts, and even readers’ emotional responses divorced from the literary work, students are free to “pay attention to the words on the page” alone (Parker, 2011, p. 11; see also Bertens, 2008). Ultimately, students using this approach are akin to expert detectives in that they focus on details, gather clues, and discover patterns that will all lead to a resolution—a cracked case, or cracked literary text—based solely on fine analysis (Applebee, 1993; Parker, 2011).

**Reader-Response.** Unlike New Criticism, which depicts reading as a literary *analysis* of the text itself, Reader-Response theory views reading as a literary *experience*, centering the student’s response to the text (Rosenblatt, 1995). Both reader and text are important to the reading experience because they each contribute to it: the text provides the stimuli—words,

symbols, images—and the reader, “his past experience and present personality” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 12). Rosenblatt (1978) elucidates this active interaction, saying that

[The reader] was not a blank tape registering a ready-made message. He was actively involved in building up a poem for himself out of his responses to the text. [...]There was a kind of shuttling back and forth as one or another synthesizing element—a context, a persona, a level of meaning—suggested itself to him. (p. 10)

Because the reader is essentially bringing her life to the text, teachers and students come to view reading as a “living through” the text and its characters rather than as simply “knowledge about” them (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 38). This act of stepping into the lives described in the literary work—for instance, “not the fact that lovers have died young and fair, but a living through *Romeo and Juliet*” (p. 38)—renders a unique experience for the reader. Therefore, classrooms employing Reader-Response tend to be more student-centered.

Contending with New Criticism’s claim of the timeless, unchanging nature of literature, Reader-Response theory holds that changes in socio-historical context can subsequently shift readings of texts. Thus, no single, correct reading of a work exists. Such inclusivity then contributes to developing communities of readers—students and teachers alike—in which they can openly share their personal responses with one another to “learn from each other; reconsider what they found in a [literary work]; keep, modify, or reject parts of their own responses; and go away to rethink their reactions” (Small, 1992, p. 19; see also Rosenblatt, 1995; Staton, 1987).

Teachers utilizing Reader-Response see literary works as incomplete, leaving holes for the readers to fill and bring life, activity, and personality to the readings (Staton, 1987). Yet here, through text completion, this approach resembles New Criticism. Without attention to what the text offers to his response, the reader loses “the total experience” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 45):

Only as we become sensitive to the influence of subtle variations in rhythm and in the sound and emotional overtones of words, only as we become more refined instruments on which the [writer] can play, will we be able to experience the full import of the [text]. (Rosenblatt, 1995, pp. 45-46)

Each reader brings something personal to the literary work and is consequently more sensitive to different aspects of it. Thus, Reader-Response theory views reading as both a personal and social experience with the text en route to learning more about self and others.

**Critical Literacy.** Heavily contrasting with New Criticism and Reader-Response, Critical Literacy extends beyond both the text and the reader. As a theory of action, it aligns with what Applebee (1996) calls knowledge-in-action, an approach that emphasizes knowing *and* doing and encourages “participation in culturally significant traditions of discourse” (Applebee, 1996, p. 26). Students not only learn about the past but also connect it to the present; relevance is essential through knowledge-in-action. Critical Literacy, thus, “aims to challenge the status quo by disrupting commonplace notions of socially constructed concepts such as race, class, gender, and sexuality” (Wallowitz, 2008, p. 1).

Using Critical Literacy, a teacher involves students in questioning the texts—print and non-print—they are reading, how they and others are reading them, and how they and others are being read by society. According to Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002), this instructional approach carries four aspects: (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice (p. 382).

From this critical standpoint, teaching literature is not a neutral, objective, or apolitical act (Appleman, 2009; Mulcahy, 2008; Shor, 1999). The knowledge that comes from literature

instruction “communicates that which we *choose* to remember about our past and what we *choose* [emphasis added] to believe about the present” (Castenell & Pinar, 1993, p. 6).

Downplaying or ignoring socio-historical elements surrounding a text, as New Criticism does, “suggests [a] fear of the changing social world, of conflicts across race, gender, and class” and that “the symbols and patterns, the paradoxes, ambiguities, tensions, and ironies were all about language” and nothing else (Parker, 2011, p. 27). Rather, in classrooms employing Critical Literacy, teachers and students bring unquestioned, long-accepted ideologies and assumptions to the forefront of their minds (Appleman, 2009).

For texts, students begin questioning the target audience, the hidden agenda, the stereotype reification or disruption, the voiced and silenced perspectives, and gender construction (Mulcahy, 2008; Wallowitz, 2008). The variety of positions for questioning reflects the assertion that, as in Reader-Response theory, one text can produce multiple readings—based not simply on the reader’s personal experience but also on the critical lens (feminist/gender, Marxist/social class, race, postcolonial) through which the reader examines the text (Appleman, 2009; Mulcahy, 2008). Applebee (1996) captures this comprehensive notion, understanding that

Today we recognize that there are many conversations, not one. They offer us alternative perspectives, new ways of knowing and doing, not a single set of truths winnowed by time. They speak in the voices of women as well as men, people of color as well as whites, the poor and marginalized as well as privileged. All of these groups gain what they know through processes of “putting it into words,” of taking action, within culturally constituted traditions of knowing and doing. (pp. 41-42)

For transforming self and society, these added perspectives then “augment our sometimes failing sight and bring into relief things we fail to notice” (Appleman, 2009, p. 4; see also Mulcahy,

2008). Whereas New Criticism equates living fully with textual analysis of great literary works and Reader-Response, with the personal exchange between reader and text, Critical Literacy equates living fully with readers “becoming active subjects in their own lives” (Wallowitz, 2008, p. 3) and using words to both rethink their worlds (Shor, 1999) and “eradicate social injustices and inequalities” (Mulcahy, 2008, p. 17). Accordingly, with a critical and considerate eye on words and the worlds they build, Critical Literacy views reading as a tool for questioning and transformation.

**Critical Multicultural Literacy.** As a form of Critical Literacy, Critical Multicultural Literacy is designed to effect changes in readers’ minds and worlds. While traditional multicultural literacy does little more than diversify the pigmentation and culture in the curriculum, its critical counterpart does more; among other acts, Critical Multicultural Literacy “asks that not only difference be interrogated, but that the means by which it was defined as a difference be interrogated as well” (Antonette, 1998, p. 31). It therefore acknowledges the role of history, economics, and law in establishing and maintaining differences and inequities among groups of people viewed as Other (Chae, 2008). Three tenets guide this instructional approach:

- (1) a commitment to educational equity, which entails a wider commitment to equitable social relations;
- (2) the call for a curriculum that encourages reasoning within diverse cultural points of view emphasizing commonalities in the struggle for human dignity; and
- (3) the need for students to understand the logic of oppression that has stained history and repeats itself in current reality. (Weil, 1998, pp. 131-132)

Classrooms employing Critical Multicultural Literacy foreground the *how*’s and *why*’s of marginalized groups and acknowledge their shared humanity as well as their socially constructed

differences. Surface-level multiculturalism focuses on reducing discrimination and ignorance through exposing students to faces different from theirs; yet, such an approach, though admirable in design, lacks substance and inevitably reinforces Otherness (Antonette, 1998). Weil (1998) expounds on this fruitlessness, saying, “Without an understanding of the material and psychological constraints, problems, or questions at issue we face as diverse human beings, we can expect no lessening of cultural intolerance or opportunities for personal and social transformation” (p. 12).

Similar to Reader-Response, students have the opportunity to hear other perspectives. Through these critical moments to “see their own cultures as others see them,” students are enabled to reflect upon themselves, society, and how society systematically positions them (Weil, 1998, p. 12; see also Antonette, 1998). In reflecting on contextualized diversity, teachers lead students to “value what unites us all in the quest for our humanity,” including quests for freedom and social justice (Weil, 1998, p. 181). Acknowledging the necessary co-existence of commonalities and differences provides for Critical Multicultural Literacy a stronger platform on which teachers and students can unite to challenge their oppression (Antonette, 1998). Consequently, this instructional approach views reading as a time for unveiling commonalities and examining the role of history, politics, etc. in positioning our identities as inherently different from one another.

**Classroom applications.** Concerning English teachers’ active use of these approaches, Applebee (1993) found that New Criticism and Reader-Response to be prevalent. The higher the grade level, the more of New Criticism’s text-orientation students encounter. Additionally, this focus on decoding the text was more prevalent in college preparatory classes, hearkening back to Harvard’s catalytic role in the trend of analyzing great works. Through critical race theory (to be



discussed later), both Critical Literacy and Critical Multicultural Literacy exist in some English classrooms. However, choosing only one instructional approach risks both ruining its intended efficacy and weakening the power of the reader and text. A classroom with a blend of these approaches, hence, might produce a more accurate depiction of reading's possibilities: reading for analysis, for personal connection, for change, for a more complete and diverse understanding of humanity.

### **Black Literature in the ELA Classroom**

The role and subsequent use of Black literature in the English classroom metaphorically divides into the analogies of two individuals: scholar Rudine Sims Bishop and author/illustrator Christopher Myers. The two analogies—one viewing literature as potential “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” (Bishop, 1990) and the other, as maps—in a way align with this dissertation's opening analogy of the garden, respectively focusing either on the flowers or on the garden.

### **Black Literature as Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors**

According to Bishop (1990), reading is “a means of self-affirmation”; as such, “readers often seek their mirrors in books” (para. 1). Some teachers use Black literature to show their African-American students that their existence, their face, their culture, their voice—in short, *they*—are of value and consequence. Expanding the range of voices and experiences, the literature then addresses Perry's (1971) question: “What happens to that black child as he sits in an American literature class and discovers that his very presence is being denied by the omission of *his* literature from the curriculum?” (p. 1058). With the inclusion of such works as *The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963* or *A Lesson Before Dying*, the curriculum supposedly provides points of identification and connection for the African-American students. Perhaps they

can better identify with the titular character of *Bud, Not Buddy* better than they can with that of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

This curricular reflection, however, penetrates the surface of representation and delves into a profound concern: “When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read [...] they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part” (Bishop, 1990, para. 4). Young Marley Dias (2015) echoes the reality of this need for literary mirrors. Through a campaign called *#1000blackgirlbooks*, she collected books that extended beyond those in her elementary classroom, books typically about “white boys and dogs.” Although she enjoyed those books, she desired to read books featuring Black female characters. She recognizes the power of representation and notes that if the classroom “books are not diverse and do not show different people’s experiences then kids are going to believe that there is only one type of experience that matters” (Dias, 2015). Thus, some English teachers make efforts to acknowledge and affirm the lives of their students.

Lockhart (1991), for instance, created a unit on linguistic variations. In his classroom, he introduced Langston Hughes’s poem “Young Gal’s Blues”—written in African-American Vernacular English—to give his Black students “opportunities to perform literary works using their language” (p. 56). Similarly, Gebhard (1993) believes that the combination of African-American young adult literature with “classic” African-American novels—e.g., Ann Petry’s *The Street*, Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand*, and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*—contributes well to a class discussion of Black cultural identity development. Examining the Black protagonists, Gebhard (1993) believes, “may help students more fully understand the powerful influence of culture in the formation of identity in the African American experience” (p. 54).

Additionally, Stairs (2007) wrote of her student-teachers as they used culturally responsive teaching to ensure that the curriculum connected to the lives and cultures of their students, mostly Black. In a unit entitled “Metaphor and Poetry in the Harlem Renaissance,” the instructors incorporated rap lyrics, jazz and blues music, and poems of Langston Hughes in the examination of racial discrimination in the Harlem Renaissance. This method of culturally responsive teaching, so Stairs (2007) suggests, yields endless “possibilities for meaningful literacy learning, as well as social justice and equity” (p. 42).

As windows and sliding doors, Black literature essentially becomes non-Black students’ way into a better understanding of Black lives and culture. Bishop (1990) argues that these students, especially those in the dominant group,

need books that will help them understand the multicultural nature of the world they live in, and their place as a member of just one group, as well as their connections to all other humans. [...] If they see only reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world—a dangerous ethnocentrism. (para. 5)

In this way, incorporating Black literature into the curriculum attempts to educate the outsider. Crowe (2003) echoes this educational purpose as he argues for the use of African-American young adult literature to discuss slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. In his support of both fiction and nonfiction, he elaborates on the power of the “good stories” that this literature conveys:

Teenage readers who are naive, narrow-minded, or prejudiced might have their hearts and heads softened by reading books that present the struggles and triumphs of African Americans in moving, personal ways. [...] In these books, young people who, through no

fault of their own, have had little or no experience with African American people or culture can discover wonderful *windows* [emphasis added] into a part of America they may know nothing about. (Crowe, 2003, p. 131)

This text functionality is the focus for Hampton and Brooks (2003) as they suggest centering the science fiction of Black women authors. To Hampton and Brooks, the sci-fi works of these writers transcend the realm of mere futurism and extraterrestrials. Rather, such authors as Octavia Butler and Virginia Hamilton use the genre to address the experience of alienation; for these authors, the genre becomes a window or sliding door that “open[s] the imagination of readers to the construction of ‘otherness’ by painting the fantastic as realistic” (Hampton & Brooks, 2003, p. 73). Thus, through Bishop’s conception of literature as mirrors, windows, and sliding doors, all students—Black and non-Black—benefit from the teaching of Black literature as the texts are taught in such a way as to both affirm and educate, value and share.

### **Black Literature as Maps**

Though the mirror/window analogy provides teachers with rationales for reading and teaching Black literature, it has its limits in regards to the images that the glass reveals. While Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, Ernest Gaines’s *A Lesson Before Dying*, and Walter Dean Myers’s *Monster* all reflect and provide windows to Black community and experiences, a sole reliance on these books may limit the futures that Black students envision for themselves. If the students receive only the stereotypical image of the young, troubled, and incarcerated teen, then they can potentially accept that as their boundary (Groenke et al., 2015; Skelton, 1998). Hence, Christopher Myers (2014) views works of Black literature as maps: “They [the students] create, through the stories they’re given, an atlas of their world, of their relationships to others, *of their possible destinations* [emphasis added]” (para. 18). As maps, the classroom selections serve to

either limit or expand the students' area of travel. A sole focus on slavery and civil rights circumscribes Black students to landscapes of understanding that present them as the ever-struggling victim. As Skelton (1998) adds, such a "limited and marginalized representation of the past" may make deviating from it a difficult task (p. 53).

English teachers seeking to expand their students' "narrow geography" do so by not only what they teach but also how they teach it (Myers, 2014, para. 21). Essentially, they design lessons and curricula that disrupts the idea that "all black authors write about slavery and oppression; that [African Americans] have all lived the same life" and therefore must continue to live that life (Skelton, 1998, p. 54). Skelton (1998), for instance, asserts that she teaches Black literature in a way that provides her students with "access to a range of [Black] role models with which they might identify" (p. 55).

On the other hand, rather than focusing solely on slavery, Pass (2000) teaches Toni Morrison's *Beloved* "as a mother's journey to accept the death of her daughter" (p. 92). The text and the main character Sethe become models for healing as Pass (2000) charts the five stages of grief throughout the novel to help her students explore "the means by which inner peace is possible" (p. 93). Also using *Beloved*, Greenbaum (2002) "push[es] past the historical readings" and attends to the novel's inclusion of images, ideas, and stories from the past that help place it within a tradition of literature (p. 83).

Similarly, Ward (1998) promotes teaching African-American poetry "as an ongoing tradition, not as randomly selected poems" removed from their context (p. 148). According to Ward (1998), teachers and students should view poetry "as a stylized or specially angled speech"—i.e., as "language in action" (pp. 145; 147). These examples illustrate how English teachers expand the perimeters of the students' maps by extending past the socially defined lines

of Black literature, revealing that much more lies on the horizon.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

The dissertation's ultimate grounding in critical race theory requires an exploration of the key notions that frame such a critical lens: understanding culture as ordinary, curriculum as a form of ideology, cultural maintenance as a corrective counter, and speaking *as* and interpellation as transformative labeling.

#### **Ordinary Culture and Communication**

At the core of this project is the understanding that “culture is ordinary” and that every society has one that reflects its perspectives, meanings, understandings (Williams, 1989, p. 4). Through various means of communication like education or the mass media, a culture maintains or adjusts its shape. Changes, however, come slowly and with resistance, for change requires learning a new way of seeing and talking about the world, which in turn requires disrupting long secured, emotion-filled values. As Williams (1989) notes,

It is impossible to discuss communication or culture in our society without in the end coming to discussing power. There is the power of established institutions, and there is increasingly the power of money, which is imposing certain patterns of communication that are very powerful in the society as a whole. (p. 19)

Such communicative means as school curricula, television programs, and print media construct a seemingly natural system of ideologies, a system which becomes so secure and protected that Williams (1989) compares it to a “very solid wall” (p. 19).

Additionally, the culture of American education seems to function under a system that Williams calls the paternal system (Eldridge & Eldridge, 1994; Williams, 1989). Essentially, this system views those under its command—students, teachers, parents—as “unfortunate and ill-

equipped” and thus in need of guidance (Williams, 1989, p. 24). Knowing what is best for the masses, those in power then communicate it via curricula and texts of “the great tradition” under the mission of improving the state of society (Eldridge & Eldridge, 1994, p. 101). Thus, as “guardians of the society’s central values,” those controlling education view any proposals for adjustment—e.g., inclusion of multicultural texts—as undue, annoying threats to the well-being of society (p. 102).

### **Curriculum as Ideology**

A tool of the paternal system of communication, school curriculum is a form of ideology that produces and reproduces the hegemony of the dominant group (Apple, 1995). As such, it “structure[s] the accessibility of knowledge” in the classroom (Au, 2012, p. 40). The knowledge present in the curriculum is not what there *is* to know but rather what we *wish* students to know—about themselves, about others, about the past (Castenell & Pinar, 1993). If not countered, the result of such selective curricula is the reproduction of dominant norms, beliefs, and perspectives within the minds of the students. Far from neutral, curricula have the power to affect the formation of student consciousness and identity (Au, 2012). What students come to know, how they see themselves, how they “see and understand the world” are all products of school curricula (Au, 2012, p. 16).

The inverse of this observation is also true: what students do *not* come to know is a product of school curricula (Castenell & Pinar, 1993). In fact, “[i]f what we know about ourselves—our history, our culture, our national identity—is deformed by absences, denials, and incompleteness, then our identity—both as individuals and as Americans—is fractured” (Castenell & Pinar, 1993, p. 4). Therefore, if “a school’s ideology may indeed be seen as a construction in a mirror through which images are reflected” (Bernstein, 1996, p. 7), then whom

a student sees (or does not see) and *how* the student sees him/her can become problematic.

### **Cultural Maintenance**

Cultural maintenance involves ways of preserving the life of a culture. Multicultural education, for instance, is a structure of cultural maintenance seeking to place reflections that are more accurate into the curriculum. Through similar methods, racial minority groups have challenged the images being taught, specifically those creating the “inexplicable feeling that one’s life and experiences, histories, and knowledge are not valued” (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016, p. 2).

African Americans, in particular, have actively sought to displace the image of Black inferiority. A classroom featuring Blacks only as slaves—whether intentional or not—promotes a limited, negative, and “Othered” view of Black individuals, framing them singularly as perpetual victims. The making of a single story is as simple as “show[ing] a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again,” and they become fixed in that identity (Adichie, 2009). A strict adherence to Black inferiority then manifests itself into a skewed understanding of a people. Therefore, Black-produced artwork, textbooks, literature, etc. expanded into proof of Black unity and resistance aimed at lessening the negative Black image—especially during the period of Jim Crow (Brown, Heilig, & Brown, 2013; Warren, 2011).

### **Speaking *as* and Interpellation**

To retaliate against negative Black representations, Black writers charged themselves with the duty of always “speaking *as*” (Spivak, 1990, p. 60) their race, of always serving as “a voice from the margin” (Spivak, 1993, p. 55). To be “authentic” Black literature, texts needed to conform to themes and styles that prioritized the experiential knowledge of the Black voice (Jarrett, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The pedagogical result of this cultural specificity



aligns with Althusser's (2001) notion of interpellation. He argued that all individuals are both subjects and subjected, for they are marked with labels and identities that ultimately place them within a controlling ideology. Once they are labeled, or interpellated, their behaviors, thoughts, perceptions, and those of others towards them are controlled by a pre-established system; hence, "individuals are always-already subjects" (Althusser, 2001, p. 119). The moment an individual who is Black puts pen to paper and writes, he is automatically "transformed" into a *Black writer* and subjected to a specific way of writing, reading, and speaking (p. 118). More importantly, he is subjected to a specific way of being read. As Jarett (2006) demonstrates,

To say that the term "African American literature" signifies literature by, about, and/or for African Americans is not simply to utter a definition. In American intellectual society and culture, it is a determination of [...] the way teachers, scholars, and anthologists use it [and] the way students learn from it—in short, the way we know it. (p. 3-4)

Therefore, when interpellated solely as culturally specific material, Black literature risks being pigeonholed into a narrow, static interpretation and pedagogical approach.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) guided the project by providing the lens through which the participants' data—survey and interview responses, scope and sequence of curricular content, pedagogical practices, positioning of literature—were examined. Critical race theory originated from a need to voice and air social inequities. In addition to characterizing racism as both endemic (Tenet 1), CRT sets race as the hub to the intersections of class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. (Tenet 2). Thus, rather than issues of race alone, the issues of groups like Black women, lower-class Hispanics, homosexual Asian men receive focus and analysis (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Lynn & Parker, 2006).

A third tenet of CRT is the systemic presence of racism in the law and involves the notion of interest convergence, which asserts that no major change will happen unless that change benefits those in power. In the words of Derrick Bell (1980), “[t]he interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (p. 523). For example, the “separate but equal” doctrine was ruled unconstitutional in the *Brown vs. Board* decision not necessarily because Black students experienced psychological damage or because Black schools were clearly not equal in terms of resources or physical state. Instead, according to Bell (1980), the reason linked to the US’s desire to maintain its reputable image of freedom and equality in the eyes of foreign powers.

A fourth tenet is the challenge to dominant ideology, one that promotes the idea of objectivity, neutrality, or color-blindness. This dominant ideology controls beliefs and frames, normalizes certain perspectives, and decides whose story/voice contains value and receives visibility and whose does not. In connection with this idea of muted voices, the fifth tenet stresses the reliance on experiential knowledge. Through this emphasis on the “voice of experience,” CRT recognizes the power of storytelling, specifically counter-storytelling, to combat the stereotypes or invisibility that dominant ideology perpetuates. Thus, not only is the intersectionality of race and gender acknowledged, but also the counter-storytelling element of critical race theory provides an outlet for sharing the resulting intersectional experiences, revealing the complexities of social inequity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Lynn & Parker, 2006).

Introducing CRT to education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) focus on the relationship between race and property, specifically Harris’s (1993) view of Whiteness as property. According to Harris, the linking of race to property in America dates back to the country’s

founding in which those who had the property, privilege, and control were White and the ones with no power or control, no acknowledged rights, and who were deemed as property of the Whites were non-Whites (i.e., ALANAs). With Whiteness come various rights that work to sustain its dominance over “the Others”: the right to use and enjoyment, the right to exclusion, and the right to high reputation and status (Harris, 1993).

In terms of education—so argue Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995)—these rights control curriculum, school policy, school resources, etc. and ultimately delegate Whiteness as a natural, invisible, and normalized presence. Consequently, to challenge this normativity, CRT in education relies on counter-storytelling and the power it brings. The use of the voices from the margin purposes to bring “new,” different, and often ignored experiences into consideration. Using these tenets of critical race theory as sensitizing concepts (Charmaz, 2014) and by drawing from such data as text selection, school demographic information, and teacher ethnic self-identification, I analyzed the role of race—that of the author, teacher, and/or students—in classroom practices.

Critical race theory, in combination with the study’s other theories, framed the data within an exploration of curricular storytelling. In effect, what story is being told through the class curriculum? In this sense, because of his/her active inclusions, exclusions, and manners of presentation, the classroom teacher becomes the author of a text, the class. This living text is written with each curricular decision, each representation featured or omitted, each discussion topic, and each rationale behind all of the above.

Just as understanding the target reading audience and an author’s context deepens the understanding of the text itself, so too does exploring the student audience and the teacher’s context provide insight into the resulting story, or class curriculum. What story are the

students—the readers of the text—encountering throughout the school year? What cultural representations are featured in the class curriculum? Is there a pattern or theme to these representations? To what curricular outcomes (intended and actual) do the cultural representations and the context surrounding their inclusion contribute?

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This semester-long study sought to answer the following research question: How do high school English teachers teach Black literature? The following list identifies supporting questions within this guiding question:

1. Do high school English teachers teach Black literature? If so, what is their rationale?
2. What texts/authors do they select? Why?
3. When in the curriculum or school year do they teach Black literature? Why?

These probing questions are intentionally designed to resemble those of Applebee's (1993) study of literature instruction in American schools. Just as his questions (e.g., "What goals do teachers propose to guide their teaching of literature?") established a foundation of understanding, so too did the questions of the present study aim to provide "a solid base of evidence about the characteristics of [Black] literature instruction" (Applebee, 1993, p. 1).

### **Participants**

Truth County is a Tennessee school district of over 60,000 students. Of this population, high school students constitute roughly 30%, spread across 19 traditional high schools and alternative schools. Truth County has a student demographic distribution that is as follows, in descending order: White, about 70%; Black or African American, about 17%; Hispanic or Latino, 9%; Asian, nearly 3%; Native American or Alaska, less than half a point; and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, less than half a point. Additionally, the teacher demographic distribution is over 90% White, about 4% Black, and 1% non-White and -Black.

Despite the overall majority White student population, this school district was selected because of the diverse distributions of race/ethnicity at the school level—brought on by the spread of the high schools across the county. The greater concentration of Black students is

located in the center of the district, and the further one moves from the center, the lower that representation becomes and the more the White concentration increases. Whereas conducting this study of Black literature at predominantly Black schools would reveal how teachers catering to this particular audience tend to teach, this study was more interested in a general sample that included schools of varied compositions. Such variety would then collect rationales that, in the end, might apply and speak to a wider array of high school English teachers, not just those falling within one specific subset. Therefore, the study purposely surveyed and interviewed teachers who represented schools with varied school demographics.

In late August 2017, Truth County's 2017-2018 public high school English teachers (179 in total) were invited via email to complete an online survey (Phase 1). Their email addresses were obtained from the public, online school district directory. The number of submitted surveys reached a total of 45. However, because two of the 45 respondents reported not teaching Black literature during 2016-2017 and one respondent submitted the survey without responding, the total number of completed surveys was 42 (see Table 7 in Appendix B for respondent descriptive data).

Via the survey, respondents indicated their interest in participating in Phase 2—follow-up interviewing (Gillham, 2008). However, to collect a purposeful sample, one criterion was used: a respondent's planning to teach at least one Black text during the fall 2017 semester (August-December), the data-collection period (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). From those of the sample who satisfied this requirement, four were purposefully selected for participation in Phase 2. Limiting the sample to a low number enables more time and interviews with each participant during the data collection period. Selecting several participants for a semester-long collection period, while gathering multiple voices, reduces the opportunity to vet and explore the interview

responses with follow-up questions. As seen in Table 8, each teacher—selecting his/her own pseudonym—represented different schools with different student body compositions. Bringing in teaching experience ranging from six years to 25 years, these selected teachers together offered a variety of Black texts taught and underlying rationales for teaching them. With such diverse participants, the study benefitted in developing a more complete and stable theory. Specifically, because not every teacher uses a text in the same way or for the same reason, this sample of participants aided in synthesizing a theory that may encompass the pedagogical practices and rationales of more teachers.

### Methodology

As Holstein and Gubrium (1995) assert, “one’s methodological approach unavoidably shapes what the phenomenon can potentially be, and vice versa” (p. 73). To answer *how*, this exploratory study employed grounded theory methodology in data collection and analysis. Mimicking the opening analogy of garden and flowers, the study was conducted in two phases,

Table 8. Interviewee Information

Name	Demographics	Years of teaching experience	School		Classes taught
			Name	White-Black distribution	
Alice	White female	11	Love HS	W: 13% B: 81%	Inclusion CP English II, AP English IV: Language
Iago	White male	18	Baldwin HS	W: 89% B: 6%	CP English IV, AP English IV: Literature/Composition
Mariah	White female	25	Watson HS	W: 62% B: 25%	Honors English II, Inclusion CP English II, Reading Intervention, IB SL Year 1
Sarah	White female	6	Hines HS	W: 78% B: 10%	Honors English II, Inclusion English II, Inclusion English III

one sweeping and the other focused with detailed depth. Phase 1 of the study involved the participants in a web survey gathering insight into who they are (e.g., demographic data), what they do (e.g., literature selections), and why they do it (e.g., motivating and influential factors) (Gillham, 2008). Phase 2 then recruited four participants from this pool of respondents for three follow-up interviews.

The study demonstrates the value in gathering multiple slices of data for increasing reliability (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Results from surveys are “inherently superficial,” leaving “what lies behind the responses somewhat out of reach” (Gillham, 2008, p. 30). A survey response may confound in one area as much as it clarifies in another. Interviews help in this matter by plumbing the depth of a survey question, but they too have limitations. Interviews provide only what respondents *say* that they do, not what they *actually* do (Roulston, 2010).

Thus, the blend of survey data, school and class demographics, and interviews—methodological triangulation (Roulston, 2010)—worked to substantiate the study’s findings and facilitate the recognition of patterns and themes during coding. In a way, these three data sources communicated with one another, filling in the gaps to complete a story of the classroom. With this triangulation in place, the study was better equipped to describe “what is going on” in the participants’ classrooms both individually and collectively (Glaser, 2001, p. 145).

Analyses began with the collection of the survey data. Initial coding was applied to the open-ended responses (e.g., What were your reasons for teaching the Black literature?, What is your rationale for teaching the Black literature during \_[inserted text]\_?), and responses were compared across participants to detect any emerging patterns or factors surrounding the teachers’ pedagogical practices. Orientations of and rationales for teaching Black literature were synthesized from those responses and counted for frequency. Lists of the most referenced Black



texts and most referenced Black authors were compiled from the participants' responses to the prompt "List the Black texts that you taught in your class(es) during the 2016-2017 school year." Analyzing those responses aimed to ascertain whether a consensus exists among the English teachers and schools on what is considered representative of Black literature. These lists were then cross-analyzed with the rationales the teachers tended to attach to their classrooms.

The coding and memoing that followed the collection of each data point redirected and/or sharpened interview questions to test the substantiality of leads. Interview transcript coding served to "explicate how [the participants] enact or respond to events, what meanings they hold, and how and why these actions and meanings evolved" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). The developing inquiries or leads highlighted by the line-by-line coding guided the direction of subsequent interviews and informed further analyses of the already collected data. To maintain closeness to the data, codes were action-based (i.e., gerunds) and selected mostly from the words of the participants. The interdependence of data, then, speaks to the recursive nature of grounded theory; the more that relationships emerged, the more that interviews were needed to clarify and vet those relationships without forcing an ill-fitting theory onto the study.

To provide a holistic understanding of their pedagogical practices and rationales, a concept map was created for each of the four interviewees. These maps then provided focus for the drafting of teacher/classroom analyses for each interviewee. Staying close to the data of the three interviews, these analyses perhaps demonstrate how each teacher's rationales and orientations manifest in the classroom. Ultimately, the ongoing comparative analyses and syntheses led to the emergence of a theory grounded in the collected data and addressing how the high school English teachers teach Black literature.

## Research Design

### Phase 1: Web Survey

At the end of August, the potential participants of Truth County received prenotification emails in an effort to reduce nonresponse bias (Lynn, 2008; Tourangeau, Conrad, & Couper, 2013). These emails were designed to “inform participants about incoming web surveys, to stress the importance and legitimacy of the survey, and by this to increase response rates” (Manfreda & Vehovar, 2008, p. 270). A week later, the teachers received an invitation email containing a link to the Qualtrics survey. To increase the survey response rate without annoying the teachers, nonresponders received a reminder email for the four weeks following the initial email (Manfreda & Vehovar, 2008; Tourangeau, Conrad, & Couper, 2013). The study succeeded in achieving 45 submitted surveys and 42 useful surveys.

As indicated in Appendix C, the survey included both close- and open-ended questions. Leaving the study open to natural theory development, these questions were constructed to allow the inclusion and consideration of multiple factors in an effort to avoid circumscribing participant responses and the subsequent analysis. Similar to the surveys of Applebee (1993) and Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006), the survey asked the respondents to list the Black texts that they taught during the previous 2016-2017 school year—in the chance that they did not yet know their selections for the current 2017-2018 year. By relying on the teaching of the prior year, the study knowingly may have excluded any teachers who did not teach English during 2016-2017, including first-year teachers, those who taught another subject, and those who recently returned to teaching after a sabbatical.

To increase reliability and avoid confusion in terminology (Fowler, Jr. & Cosenza, 2008)—as Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) experienced in their failure to define

“multicultural literature”—the survey explicitly stated the study’s working definition of *Black literature* (literature—poetry; novels; short stories; graphic novels; plays; speeches, autobiographies/narratives, and other nonfiction; such texts of Black vernacular as songs and sermons—produced by individuals identified as Black, Negro, African American or the like regardless of theme or topic). Providing this descriptive perimeter aimed to ensure that all participants interpreted the term in the same way, without having some identify Black literature only as texts dealing with race matter and others identifying it solely as fiction and still others identify it as any text with primarily Black characters regardless of the author’s race.

## **Phase 2: Interviews**

Because interviews are subjective and contextual—“reveal[ing] particular horizons of meaning associated [...] with different experiential, physical, or cultural locations” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 74)—multiple (total of four) teachers were purposefully selected for Phase 2. Interviewing is essential to obtaining information-rich results (Patton, 2002), for it adds depth and perhaps variety to the study. The semi-structured design of the interviews provided a focus; however, this focus simply served to keep each interview on topic. Subsequently, multiple ideas and experiences arose in interviews, and all of them provided insight to how the teacher-participants perceive Black literature, how they perceive their students, and how they perceive literature in general.

It is important to note that investigating how they teach Black literature does not begin necessarily with Black literature; rather, it begins with literature in general. Thus, the opening questions for the first interview asked each teacher to reflect on the purposes of an English classroom and literature before reflecting on the more specific purpose of Black literature (see Appendix D for interview guide). A teacher’s perspective toward literature accordingly frames

his/her perspective towards Black literature, ultimately placed within the boundaries of that guiding view.

Additionally, the interviews granted space for clarification and elaboration of survey responses. For example, whereas the survey requested the listing of subjects/grades and texts taught, there was no way—through the survey alone—to know which subjects/grades featured which texts. The interviews sorted through the uncertainty created by a teacher who might teach both Advanced Placement (AP) English and Honors English classes and use Langston Hughes poems and the novel *Native Son*. Only through the follow-up interviews could the study determine whether both texts were present in only one course or one text in AP English and the other in Honors English.

To increase reliability, the study used both data triangulation (multiple [4] participants and multiple [3] interviews with each). Conducting more than one interview throughout the semester showed the dynamic nature of interviews as I used them to “check [my] understandings of participants’ views and compare these to preliminary analyses and findings gleaned from earlier interviews” and survey responses (Roulston, 2010, p. 84). For instance, when considering the sensitive and subjective nature of interviews, a single mentioning of a topic or experience during one interview offers low reliability. However, when the respondent returns to that topic or experience in subsequent interviews, the reliability increases, suggesting that the initial mentioning was not simply the result of happenstance or forced framing but rather a naturally emerging pattern.

## Chapter 4: Results

For the sake of clarity, the presentation of findings will be organized by phase: survey and interviews. Doing so allows the reader to first gather a broad understanding of high school English classroom practices regarding Black literature before focusing on the specific classrooms of the four interview participants. This organization will also help to place the interviewees within the broader spectrum of teaching practices and rationales, rather than presenting them as isolated entities.

### Phase 1: Survey

The results for Phase 1 of the study will be presented as answers to the study's three supporting research questions: 1) Do high school English teachers teach Black literature? If so, what is their rationale?, 2) What texts/authors do they select? Why?, and 3) When in the curriculum or school year do they teach Black literature? Why?

#### **Do High School English Teachers Teach Black Literature? If So, Why?**

Of the 45 teachers who submitted the survey, 42 (93%) reported teaching African-American literature to some degree during the previous school year. So with only two (4%) teachers reporting not teaching the literature and one (2%) teacher not reporting any data, it can be concluded that high school English teachers in the Truth County school district do indeed teach Black literature.

**Orientations.** To answer why they teach the literature, I examined their responses to the following survey question: What were your reasons for teaching the Black literature? A period of line-by-line coding and grouping resulted in the development of eight orientations, so called because they spoke to the general goal towards which the literature was directed (see Table 9): 1) student-oriented, 2) content-oriented, 3) merit-oriented, 4) spectrum-oriented, 5) issue-

Table 9. Orientations for Teaching Black literature

Type	Description	Examples from survey	Teacher frequency (%)
Student-oriented	tailoring to the composition of the student body; including the desire to have Black students see themselves and non-Black students to see others in literature (analogous to Bishop’s mirrors and windows)	<p>“I teach at a predominately Black high school, and it’s extremely important that the students read literature that makes them feel connected to their ancestors. It’s also important for students to be able to see themselves in the literature that we are reading.”</p> <p>“For pieces by African American writers that expressly discuss the experience of being black in America, I think that white students need to hear these perspectives.”</p> <p>“to introduce to white students the wealth of knowledge outside of their comfort zone”</p> <p>“culturally relevant to my classes”</p>	24%
Content-oriented	referencing offerings of a text—complexity, themes, skills/concepts, suggested/required coverage by curricular standards, etc.	<p>“The text offered complexity in voice and figurative language.”</p> <p>“I taught <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> to my juniors because it is a part of the standard curriculum.”</p> <p>“Usually these texts fit within the essential question or theme of the unit.”</p>	21%
Merit-oriented	disregarding race as a criterion for text selection; citing literary merit as the primary indicator for selection of “good literature” (analogous to a colorblind approach)	<p>“Good writers are good writers. I generally don’t think about the skin color of the writer but about the quality of the work.”</p> <p>“I teach literature. As long as the writing is worthy of discussion, I teach it.”</p>	15%
Spectrum-oriented	seeking to expose students to a wide array of literature, styles, and voices	<p>“It is my goal to expose students to diverse authors (not just black or white) and diverse viewpoints to expand their understanding of the world.”</p> <p>“The students needed a more worldly view, rather than one ideal.”</p> <p>“Exposing students to a wide variety of styles, time periods, and experiences is an essential practice in any English classroom.”</p>	15%

Table 9 (continued).

Type	Description	Examples from survey	Teacher frequency (%)
Issue-oriented	using literature as a political tool to address, challenge, and/or change societal/curricular structures, norms, and policies	<p>“Often, American literature is white-washed and authors of other ethnicities do not get recognized.”</p> <p>“The literature written by African American authors was utilized as a commentary on the horrific ‘political’ situation that America is going through currently. We, as a class, emphasized politicized racial issues while also empathizing with the authors.”</p> <p>“...not just the white canon”</p> <p>“Teaching diversity through literature”</p>	13%
Heritage-oriented	placing the literature within a global, national, or cultural heritage	<p>“It is part of the history of the country, part of our literary history...”</p> <p>“As an American Lit teacher, I think it is especially important to highlight the various races and genders that helped shape American literature.”</p> <p>“Black history and race relations are integral to the study of history and literature.”</p>	7%
Interest-oriented	revealing personal interest in the literature	<p>“I pick books that I find interesting...”</p> <p>“Selfishly, most of the works I teach are works I like.”</p>	3%
Power-oriented	citing the poignant effect of the literature on the reader	“It resonates with me, and is a powerful tool to teach with in the classroom”	1%

oriented, 6) heritage-oriented, 7) interest-oriented, and 8) power-oriented. Based on the responses, one can conclude that Black literature typically served as a tool for accomplishing a certain task—be it connecting to the audience, exposing the students to more literature, or directly addressing a political issue. These orientations are not mutually exclusive; thus, some teachers provided responses that included multiple orientations, as seen in the following:

I taught excellent literature that happened to be written by African American writers, but I used each piece to facilitate conversations about life experiences with which many of my students could not identify in order to expand their world views.

Here, this teacher carries both a merit orientation—disregarding race as criterion for text selection—and a student orientation—using the students’ experiences or lack thereof to direct text selection. To be noted about this particular response, however, is that the orientations seem to clash: de-emphasizing race while simultaneously emphasizing racial experiences. The latter confirms that the literature that “happened to be written by African American writers” speaks from the seat of being Black—that is, directly addressing Black experiences. By extension, this two-pronged response suggests that any Black literature not providing windows into unfamiliar “life experiences”—thus not directly speaking *as* a Black person (Spivak, 1990)—would be less likely to be selected in this classroom. There was one other response that followed this seemingly contradictory reasoning, yet the remaining responses were more secure in their orientations.

For instance, one participant reported, “I think it is important to teach a spectrum of literature/authors. As an American Lit teacher, I think it is especially important to highlight the various races and genders that helped shape American literature.” Here, the blend of a spectrum orientation with a heritage orientation reinforces itself. The teacher deems it “important” to include a variety of literature and authors in the classroom, which then translates into a more



specific spectrum within the frame of American literature. Another teacher echoes this importance of diversity in the American literature classroom, saying, among other remarks, that “you can’t teach American literature without African-American literature.”

Taking a more critical stance through an issue orientation, an additional American literature teacher added that “it is important to include Black literature in our curriculum, especially in American literature. Often, American literature is white-washed and authors of other ethnicities do not get recognized.” An intern at the time, this teacher admitted to feeling “stifled,” saying “I would have liked to teach more black literature; however, I felt stifled by the county I was teaching in and my mentor teachers. I did not get to teach any Black literature in my English II classes.” The responses from these three American literature teachers suggest that the course itself influences a teacher’s freedom and opportunity to teach Black literature—echoed by other participants’ reasoning that the literature was “part of the curriculum.”

**Rationales.** Following the analysis of orientations, I re-examined the survey data with line-by-line coding to determine whether any of the responses could be set against the backdrop of critical race theory and the guiding frameworks. This synthesis yielded seven rationales, so called because they are fundamental reasons that perhaps lie at the core of each teacher’s active pedagogical decisions around Black literature: 1) rebranding literature as all-inclusive, 2) connecting with Black students, 3) wanting non-Black students to hear/benefit from voices of experience, 4) reframing Black literature as a necessary component, 5) challenging the norm, 6) other sociopolitical issues, and 7) rebranding American literature as multiracial. Not included were the responses with content, interest, or power orientations because of their detachment from the framework theories and tenets of critical race theory.

***Rationale descriptions.*** Connecting with the notion of ordinary culture, curriculum as ideology, and CRT’s challenge to dominant ideology, the rationales involving rebranding or reframing work to change how literature—in general, American, or African American—is perceived. Along with American literature, general literature is recast as a multicultural, multi-voiced entity instead of a ubiquitous representation of White dominance. Similarly, Black literature is framed as a necessary part of culture, “integral to the study of history and literature.” Teachers carrying these rationales seemingly work to impart a different understanding of literature on their students: a world of literature exists out there and must be acknowledged and explored for fear of missing out on quality and expansion.

The rationale of connecting with Black students correlates with Spivak’s (1990) notion of speaking *as*, CRT’s focus on the voice of experience, and the concept of cultural maintenance. This rationale centers being able to not only see one’s self—via skin color, voice, experience, etc.—in the literature but also do so in a positive light that breaks away from limiting and pernicious single stories. As noted with the student orientation, Black literature under this rationale aims to encourage and engage the Black students through acknowledgment. The rationale of wanting non-Black students to hear and/or benefit from Black voices of experience relates to Spivak’s speaking *as* and CRT’s use of voice-of-experience-infused storytelling to better effect change and awareness in the minds of those unfamiliar with such experiences. Black literature here becomes a more well-received means of presenting alternate perspectives, of temporarily disarming the non-Black long enough to convey its message of expanded purview.

The rationale of challenging the norm parallels CRT’s challenge to dominant ideology. While the responses under this rationale sometimes mentioned the students in the classroom, they are not to be confused with the student-oriented responses, which focus on student

connections. The “challenging the norm” rationale includes responses that specifically address assumptions or going against standard reading practices. The final rationale includes responses that mention other sociopolitical issues outside of norm-challenging—e.g., teaching diversity. Under this rationale then, Black literature is wielded as a tool for change. It is used to confront societal weaknesses. As Table 10 indicates, the previously discussed orientations fall within one or more of the framework-aligned rationales. Participants, for example, who subscribe to the rationale of rebranding literature as all-inclusive seem likely to have merit and/or spectrum orientations and strive to be colorblind in terms of literature or to “go outside of the textbook in many instances to find a range of genres and authors.”

### **What Texts/Authors Do High School English Teachers Select? Why?**

**Popularity.** To learn which texts high school English teachers use in the classroom, the survey instructed the participants to list the Black texts that they taught during the 2016-2017 school year. A resulting list of 82 distinct texts or text groups (e.g., “Harlem Renaissance poetry”) was compiled and measured for frequency. Rendering the list involved the following response exclusions:

1. general references without attribution, e.g., “poems about inequality” or “speeches”
2. references tied to below high school, e.g., “In 8<sup>th</sup> grade, we read Langston Hughes”
3. references explicitly not tied to the previous school year, e.g., “I know I will teach Harlem Renaissance poetry next semester”
4. references to independent reading, not actually taught, e.g., “Various independent

Table 10. Framework/CRT-Aligned Rationales for Teaching Black literature

Type	Associated orientation	Examples from survey	Teacher frequency (%)
Rebranding literature as all-inclusive	Merit-oriented Spectrum-oriented	<p>“I also considered it beneficial to expose students to a wide range of authors, including black authors.”</p> <p>“I taught excellent literature that happened to be written by African American writers...”</p> <p>“Because significant literature is significant literature. Students should be exposed to all types of writing and writers.”</p> <p>“I chose to be all inclusive with the material I teach in each class. Therefore, I go outside of the textbook in many instances to find a range of genres and authors.”</p>	45%
Connecting with Black students	Student-oriented	<p>“I find that my students relate to these authors, because the majority of my students are also Black.”</p> <p>“...kids need to see representations of literature/art from individuals with whom they feel a cultural or ethnic connection.”</p> <p>“The majority (94%) of my students were African American. I want them to hear voices that speak their truth and their experience.”</p> <p>“To connect more with the demographic of my students...”</p>	33%
Wanting non-Black students to hear/benefit from voices of experience	Student-oriented	<p>“For pieces by African American writers that expressly discuss the experience of being black in America, I think that white students need to hear these perspectives.”</p> <p>“I also think it is important that ALL students understand the experiences African Americans have experienced throughout history.”</p> <p>“...I used each piece to facilitate conversations about life experiences with which many of my students could not identify in order to expand their world views.”</p>	19%

Table 10 (continued).

Type	Associated orientation	Examples from survey	Teacher frequency (%)
Reframing Black literature as a necessary component	Heritage-oriented	<p>“It is part of our cultural heritage and it’s part of our global culture.”</p> <p>“Black history and race relations are integral to the study of history and literature.”</p>	12%
Challenging the norm	Issue-oriented	<p>“So often, students assume that the protagonist is white; however, their assumption is typically right. I hope that in my class students feel that assumption challenged.”</p> <p>“It is often not taught as much as white literature, so it fills a knowledge gap for students.”</p>	10%
Other sociopolitical issues	Issue-oriented	<p>“...it exposes the ugliness of prejudice and racism.”</p> <p>“Teaching diversity through literature”</p>	7%
Rebranding American literature as multiracial	Heritage-oriented	<p>“For juniors, American literature is traditionally taught, and you can’t teach American literature without African-American literature.”</p> <p>“I think it is important to include Black literature in our curriculum, especially in American literature. Often, American literature is white washed and authors of other ethnicities do not get recognized.”</p>	5%

reading books: *All American Boys*, *Monster*, *Bluford High* series, too many here to list”

5. references not understood to be written by a Black author, e.g., “Two Kinds” (written by Amy Tan, a Chinese-American author)
6. references to author alone, not title, e.g., “Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Angelou, Claude McKay, Lorraine Hansberry, Countee Cullen, Georgia Douglas Johnson”

However, any general references with attribution—e.g., “Langston Hughes poems” or “Various Harlem Renaissance poems”—were included in the list. Because of these exclusions, it is important to note that two participants’ responses were completely struck from consideration, decreasing the sample to 40 for this particular text analysis.

Table 11 presents the top 15 most frequently taught texts, as reported by the survey respondents. Including various forms of literature, this list differs greatly from Whitlow’s top 15 book-length texts (see Table 1 in Appendix B). The only similarity is Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, which was mentioned six times on the survey. Interestingly, the top literature taught in high school English classrooms is Langston Hughes poetry in general. Rather than identifying a specific title, about 23% of the respondents listed some variation of “poems by Langston Hughes” as part of their response. Such a generic identification speaks to the popularity of various Hughes poems. His poems seem so popular that, for some teachers, they cease being separate entities and develop a collective identity. Other teachers, however, do specify titles: “Harlem,” for instance, was cited five times, with such poems as “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “The Kids Who Die,” “Early Autumn,” and “Theme for English B” being

Table 11. Top 15 Most Frequently Taught Texts from Study’s Survey

<b>Title of text</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Frequency count</b>	<b>% of teachers surveyed (w/ valid responses, n=40)</b>
Nondescript poetry	Langston Hughes	9	22.5
<i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	Zora Neale Hurston	9	22.5
<i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i> (including “Champion of the World” and “Graduation”)	Maya Angelou	7 (“Champion of the World” [2], “Graduation” [2])	17.5
<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	Lorraine Hansberry	6	15.0
“I Have a Dream”	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.	6	15.0
“Harlem”	Langston Hughes	5	12.5
<i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i>	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.	5	12.5
“Ain’t I a Woman?”	Sojourner Truth	4	10.0
“The Ballad of Birmingham”	Dudley Randall	4	10.0
“I, Too”	Langston Hughes	4	10.0
“We Wear the Mask”	Paul Laurence Dunbar	4	10.0
<i>All American Boys</i>	Jason Reynolds	3	7.5
“Still I Rise”	Maya Angelou	3	7.5
“The Ballot or the Bullet”	Malcolm X	3	7.5
“We Real Cool”	Gwendolyn Brooks	3	7.5

mentioned only once or twice. Tying with the popularity of nondescript Hughes poetry is Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston’s novel is thus the most frequently taught specific text reported by the participants.

An examination of the list reveals that certain authors appear more popular than others: Langston Hughes (3 occurrences), Maya Angelou (2 occurrences), and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (2 occurrences). To highlight this popularity, a list of most frequently taught authors was compiled. Unlike the text list, this author list includes any references to solely the author’s name but not the text—e.g., “Hurston, Maya Angelou, MLK, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, Frederick Douglas [sic] to name a few.” As Table 12 shows, Langston Hughes once again tops this list, with over half of the teachers citing either him or his work. Logically, all of the authors whose texts are frequently taught appear on this new list. A few authors make the list with just one work being cited repeatedly. For example, although Hurston published other works—short

Table 12. Top 16 Most Frequently Taught Authors from Study’s Survey

<b>Author</b>	<b>Frequency count</b>	<b>% value (w/ valid responses, n=40)</b>
Langston Hughes	21	52.5
Maya Angelou	14	35
Zora Neale Hurston	13	32.5
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.	11	27.5
Lorraine Hansberry	7	17.5
Paul Laurence Dunbar	6	15
Frederick Douglass	5	12.5
Malcolm X	5	12.5
Alice Walker	5	12.5
Sojourner Truth	4	10
Claude McKay	4	10
Gwendolyn Brooks	4	10
Dudley Randall	4	10
Barack Obama	3	7.5
Jason Reynolds	3	7.5
Chimamanda Adichie	3	7.5



stories, essays, folklore—it is only *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that teachers select for their classrooms. This perhaps can relate to one or two factors: the power of the novel or its canonized ubiquity, found in both high school and college classrooms. Addressing the latter, one participant—also an interviewee—shared the following experience regarding her teaching of the Hurston text: “*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in particular, I did three times in college [...] and I did it in high school as well.” As seen here, the frequent exposure to texts increases a teacher’s familiarity and comfort level with those texts, which in turn increases her likelihood of teaching it to her students.

**Cross-referencing.** However, seeking to understand English teachers’ perceptions of Black literature may be difficult with the frequency lists alone. So returning to the data, I cross-referenced the participants’ listed explanations for teaching Black literature with the texts that they taught. Essentially, I sought to determine whether teachers with different rationales also had different text selections and how these rationales contributed to the most taught texts and authors. I specifically looked at the texts listed by teachers who subscribe to the top three rationales, mentioned earlier: 1) rebranding literature as all-inclusive, 2) connecting to Black students, and 3) teaching non-Black students about the Black voice of experience. Tables 13-15 present the findings, grouped by rationale. However, because a teacher could have responded in a way that satisfied multiple rationales, it is important to note that natural overlap exists.

**Conclusion.** Comparing Tables 13-15 reveals similarities that sync with the list of most popular texts and authors. These text-rationale lists were necessary to further ground the “most popular” lists in data and explain why the texts and authors are frequently taught. When teachers of various rationales teach the same text, it is logical that the text will appear often among teachers. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, for example, was cited by teachers of each of the top

Table 13. Texts Selected by Teachers Who Subscribe to the Merit-Based/All-Inclusive Approach

Title	Top 15 texts?	Top 16 authors?	Title	Top 15 texts?	Top 16 authors?
<i>The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>		x (Douglass)	"Knoxville, Tennessee"		
"Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self"			"The Ballad of Birmingham"	x	x (Randall)
"The Flowers"		x (Walker)	<i>Kindred</i>		
"Everyday Use"			"The Danger of a Single Story"		x (Adichie)
"The Meanings of a Word"			"Black Boys Play the Classics"		
"Champion of the World"	x		"Formation"		
"Graduation"	x	x (Angelou)	"There Are Birds Here"		
<i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i>	x		Obama's NAACP Centennial Speech		x (Obama)
"Black Men and Public Spaces"			"We Real Cool"	x	
<i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	x	x (Hurston)	"Primer for Blacks"		x (Brooks)
<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	x	x (Hansberry)	"We Wear the Mask"	x	x (Dunbar)
Langston Hughes poetry	x		"Award"		
"Salvation"			"I Know I'm Not Sufficiently Obscure"		
"Early Autumn"		x (Hughes)	"Homage to My Hips"		
"Harlem"	x				
"Theme for English B"					
"I Have a Dream"	x	x			
<i>Letter from a Birmingham Jail</i>	x	x (King)			

Table 14. Texts Selected by Teachers Who Wish to Connect Their Black Students

Title	Top 15 texts?	Top 16 authors?	Title	Top 15 texts?	Top 16 authors?
Langston Hughes poetry	x		"Incident"		
"I, Too"	x	x (Hughes)	"Girl"		
"The Kids Who Die"			<i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i>	x	
<i>How It Went Down</i>			"Still I Rise"	x	x (Angelou)
<i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	x	x (Hurston)	"Woman Work"		
"We Wear the Mask"	x	x (Dunbar)	"One Last Time"		
<i>The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>		x (Douglass)	<i>March: Book One</i>		
<i>Copper Sun</i>			"Black Boys Play the Classics"		
<i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i>		x	"There Are Birds Here"		
"The Ballot or the Bullet"	x	(Malcolm X)	"Hair"		
<i>All American Boys</i>	x	x (Reynolds)	"To My People"		
<i>Native Son</i>			"Feminist Manifesto"		
"The Ballad of Birmingham"	x	x (Randall)	"The Danger of a Single Story"		x (Adichie)
"Ain't I a Woman?"	x	x (Truth)	Derek Walcott poetry		
<i>The Color Purple</i>		x	Morgan Parker poetry		
"The Flowers"		(Walker)	Chinua Achebe poetry		
<i>Quicksand</i>			SAG Award speeches (Viola Davis/Mahershala Ali)		
"Same Drugs"					
"I Was Here"					
"Formation"					
"Nonviolence Is the Only Road to Freedom"		x			
"I Have a Dream"	x	(King)			

Table 15. Texts Selected by Teachers Who Want Non-Black Students to Learn from the Black Voice of Experience

Title	Top 15 texts?	Top 16 authors?
<i>The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>		x (Douglass)
"Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self"		x
"The Flowers"		(Walker)
"The Meanings of a Word"		
"Champion of the World"	x	x
"Graduation"	x	(Angelou)
"Black Men and Public Spaces"		
<i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	x	x (Hurston)
"I Have a Dream"	x	x (King)
"Salvation"		x
"Early Autumn"		(Hughes)
"We Wear the Mask"	x	x (Dunbar)
"Knoxville, Tennessee"		
"The Ballad of Birmingham"	x	x (Randall)
<i>Kindred</i>		
"The Danger of the Single Story"		x (Adichie)
"Black Boys Play the Classics"		
"Formation"		
"There Are Birds Here"		

three rationales. Logically, it is one of the top 15 most frequently taught texts (see Table 11). So if multiple teachers of multiple rationales all select the same pieces of Black literature, one can conclude that the teachers consider—whether consciously or not—those most popular texts to epitomize Black literature, regardless of pedagogical rationale.

### **When in the Curriculum or School Year Do They Teach Black Literature? Why?**

Participants identified the months when they taught Black literature during the 2016-2017 school year. Figure 4 presents the resulting data. Black literature is at its lowest in May, likely due to the testing schedule. One teacher justified this low presence in saying that August through April are “non-testing months” and that “[i]n testing months [i.e., December and May] mostly all we do is review skills.” Also speaking on the influence of testing on scheduling, another teacher remarked, “April was eaten up by testing.” With multiple teachers excluding December and May, Black literature peaks in November and March before decreasing at each semester’s end. The idea that February, designated as Black History Month, would feature the highest

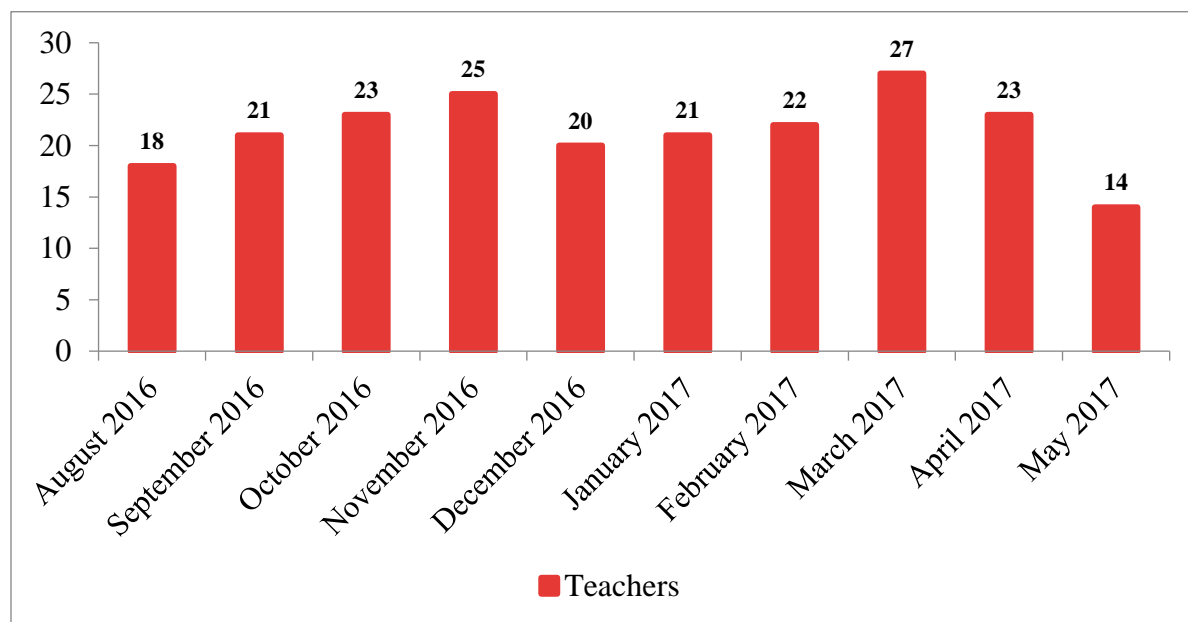


Figure 4. Teaching of Black Literature for the 2016-2017 School Year

concentration of Black literature was not observed with these data. In fact, one participant intentionally avoided teaching the literature during February, saying “I wanted to teach Black literature during times when it isn’t spotlighted in the national consciousness (February-Black History Month) to show that it should be a natural part of the curriculum.”

To examine whether race affected scheduling, the listed months were disaggregated by the race of the participants. The results, however, were perhaps skewed by the scarcity of the non-White survey responses. The rise and fall of Black literature over the year exists for only the White respondents whereas the scheduling for the non-White respondents remains more or less stable from month to month (see Figure 5 in Appendix A). However, examining the scheduling via these figures does not quite provide a stable understanding of it. Such factors as testing, class scheduling (semester-long or year-long), and the subject taught all may affect how often and to what degree an English teacher can incorporate Black literature into the class curriculum. Examining the rationales behind the scheduling is therefore necessary.

### **Phase 2: Interviews**

Taking time to zoom in on specific teachers and the classroom, Phase 2’s multiple interviews provided clarity and dimension to the survey responses of Phase 1. Each of the four teachers in this phase participated in three interviews. What resulted were possible snapshots of four distinct classrooms. Because this study frames the class curriculum as a text or product and the teacher as its author or producer, understanding the teacher’s context and rationale(s) yields a more substantial reading of his/her class. An examination of the teachers’ remarks—about rationales, student tasks, class structure, etc.—across the interviews communicated a close estimation of their preferred style of literature instruction as well as their orientations and

rationales (see Table 16). The majority of participants blended styles, which were evident in their descriptions of their teaching, experiences, and beliefs.

Following line-by-line coding of the survey and interview data, concept maps were created to capture the pedagogical context of the teacher by representing the data visually (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The maps delineate logical connections between the beliefs and actions of the participant, thus providing a quick reference for answering the *what*, *how*, and *why* questions for each teacher-author (see Figures 7-10 in Appendix A). What follows are analyses of each teacher's class, based on the three interviews. Each description reveals various classroom elements: the teacher's ideology and self-positioning, the selection of Black texts, student tasks, focal points for the literature, etc. To ensure validity and accuracy, each description was member-checked by its respective participant and updated accordingly (Roulston, 2010).

### **Participant 1: Alice at Love High School**

Love High School has a student population of about 80% Black students and 13% White. With a handful of non-Black students, the demographics of Alice's classes closely resemble those of the school. For Alice, a teacher of Inclusion College Preparatory (CP) English II and Advanced Placement (AP) English IV: Language, the purpose of an English classroom begins with reading, writing, and thinking. The ultimate purpose is to be able to effectively use those skills to "become more intelligent and productive members of society."

To accomplish this goal, Alice involves the students in exploring and understanding what is transpiring in the world around them and realizing that they can change it if they choose. Her classroom thus is "a great place to get you to think about who you are as a human being, what your purpose is in our society [and] to think about big ideas that define us." With the combined

Table 16. Interviewee Orientation, Rationale, and Style of Literature Instruction

<b>Name</b>	<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Years of teaching experience</b>	<b>Classes taught</b>	<b>Orientation (listed alphabetically)</b>	<b>Framework/CRT-aligned rationale (listed alphabetically)</b>	<b>Style of literature instruction</b>
Alice	White female	11	Inclusion CP English II, AP English IV: Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spectrum</li> <li>• Student</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecting with Black students</li> <li>• Rebranding literature as all-inclusive</li> </ul>	Critical Literacy (with a Critical Multicultural leaning)
Iago	White male	18	CP English IV, AP English IV: Literature/Composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content</li> <li>• Merit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebranding literature as all-inclusive</li> </ul>	New Criticism
Mariah	White female	25	Honors English II, Inclusion CP English II, Reading Intervention, IB SL Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue</li> <li>• Merit</li> <li>• Student</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecting with Black students</li> <li>• Rebranding literature as all-inclusive</li> </ul>	Critical Multicultural, Reader-Response
Sarah	White female	6	Honors English II, Inclusion English II, Inclusion English III	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content</li> <li>• Issue</li> <li>• Merit</li> <li>• Student</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging the norm</li> <li>• Connecting with Black students</li> <li>• Rebranding literature as all-inclusive</li> <li>• Reframing Black literature as a necessary component</li> </ul>	New Criticism, Reader-Response



use of multicultural texts (Black, White, Middle Eastern, Native American, etc.) and thematic units on such topics as activism/social justice and power systems, she seems to frame her classroom as one that is connected to the world beyond the boundaries of the school building and uninhabited by the restrictions of a textbook.

As a result of this open framing, Alice uses the literature to get her students to “see the shared human experience.” Co-existing with this focus on similarities is the importance of encountering and analyzing multiple perspectives: “Here are perspectives from women, here are perspectives from the Latino community, here are perspectives from the African-American community, here are perspectives from the LGBT community on that same issue.” Through this spectrum orientation, Alice is emphasizing not only the power of perspectives but also their limitations. Examining one issue from one static vantage point naturally leaves blind spots; thus, incorporating multiple—sometimes opposing—viewpoints reduces those blind spots and challenges the reader to augment his/her own understanding:

A White person cannot ever understand the experience of a Black person or a Latino person. So, as far as providing a perspective on what it means to be Black in America, an American Black person is really the only person who can provide that perspective.

Thus, Alice expressed being very intentional with her text selections and pairings. For instance, she coupled the race-specific BET Awards speech of African-American actor Jesse Williams with a rebuttal from Caucasian-American commentator Tomi Lahren, who criticized his racial focus. Similar race-hinged oppositions appear to make Alice more conscious of her Whiteness and remind her to construct her lessons carefully and purposefully so as not to send a misconstrued message to her class of mostly Black students. Commenting on this awareness, she said,

You have to take your own perspective into account, your own biases into account when you go to present some of these texts because it's really easy for kids to misunderstand your purpose for bringing the texts to them.

Likewise, as a “power figure,” she too is aware of her potential influence on what her students think; she therefore remains conscious of “walking the line” by adhering to her “care about the world and be politically active agenda” while giving students space to conclude on their own.

From the texts of Assata Shakur, Malcolm X, and Langston Hughes to those of singer Beyoncé Knowles, NFL player Eric Reed, and actress Viola Davis, Alice attempts to bring in pieces that “express[ ] something worth thinking about that speaks to” the students. Therefore, her selections are not about matching Black text to Black student or White text to White student; there must be more. Through her comments, she implied the importance of knowing her students—their ability level, likes/dislikes, environment. Testament to this observation is her description of the types of texts that appeal to her students:

texts that deal with overcoming some sort of hardship [...] when there's someone [regardless of race] who has terrible things happen in their life and they have to overcome it and are successful in it, that's the story that my students tend to like.

Reflecting her student orientation and her parental role as teacher, she added that the Black texts that she selects are intentional:

Every Black author I've chosen represents what I want for my children. Every author that I've chosen is educated, is articulate, is a thinker, is trying to use their words to make a change in our society. And so that's what I expect of my kids. And so I think that that's almost like showing them that mirror of expectation.

Furthermore, rather than iterating the surface-level coverage of important Black figures like Malcolm X, Alice stated that she intentionally works to counter oversimplification of lives and ideas by getting the students to “actually read his words and see what his perspective is and how he shaped this message that he has.”

In addition to Socratic Seminars, reflective journaling, and argument writing, Alice typically addresses writing style/structure, textual analysis, and social/historical context for each text “regardless of who wrote it.” Her English II class sets the goal of “understanding that we craft these things with a purpose and we make purposeful choices as writers.” Her content (standard-driven) orientation explains why discussions of text typically hinge on the following questions: “What is the author saying? How is the author saying it? Why is the author saying it? How does this impact the meaning?” This set of guiding questions then influences Alice’s likelihood to discuss race in a Black text. She explained,

So if I feel like the author’s race somehow impacts the purpose or the message of the text, then I’m likely to bring that in. But if it doesn’t, then I’m not probably as likely to talk about that either way, whether the author is White or Black. It’s not gonna be brought up unless there’s a reason to bring it up.

Because her AP class emphasizes the influence of author context and perspective, Alice shared that she is more likely to state the author’s race, sometimes via photograph. Ultimately, Alice seems to design her class to be one of high expectation where the students will be challenged to learn and grow. With the Black literature “break[ing] the stereotype of the options that many of [her] students think that they have,” the class becomes a place of expanded boundaries, ones that can be challenged and changed if the students find it fit to do so.

## **Participant 2: Iago at Baldwin High School**

Baldwin High School has a student population of about 89% White and 6% Black. Iago's CP and AP English IV classes resemble this schoolwide distribution. For Iago, the purpose of English class is to "develop [the students'] skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing." Within this goal comes developing cultural relevancy and an "appreciation of the humanities." Ultimately, however, Iago described the classroom and literature as mere means to the end of transforming the students into "more well-rounded people" by the time they graduate. Because of the various experiences therein, the literature—Black texts included—then becomes the students' tool for "learning about life" and "broaden[ing] their whole outlook" on the world. Iago explained the social significance of this expansion:

I want them to be open-minded because if they only have their own experience and the only people they talk to are their friends and family, then they're not open to other people's perspectives, and they may be very dismissive of other people's concerns because they've never had them.

To encourage this journey to open-mindedness, Iago wants to create a space for open communication, one in which his students "feel free to express their opinions and not be too worried about" his agreement or judgment. From this, his classroom appears to be one where students learn to stand alone by their position and be equipped to defend it. Iago insists on challenging them with these tasks in order to avoid "falling into indoctrination."

Using mostly the literature anthology and a few outside texts, Iago treats all literature the same. After establishing any context necessary for comprehension, he guides the students through a sort of analytic excavation of all the literature, taking it apart with such literary

elements as setting, characterization, irony, tone, and conflict. Content- and merit-oriented, Iago focuses on the state-mandated performance objectives and frames his text selection around them:

So I'm gonna want something that's engaging and something that provides a real, tangible example of "here is somebody using diction to establish tone" or "here is someone who's using point of view to express the theme of the story." [...] I'm just looking for works like that without much of a mind for anything else.

Thus, in addition to teaching about life, the literature is a vehicle for teaching curricular standards. Consequently, especially for the AP students, the classroom doubles as a training site as the students learn how to analyze and discuss texts on their own.

Because CP English IV focuses on British literature, Iago explained that he rarely has the curricular opportunity to teach multicultural texts. He does, however, incorporate a few pieces of Black literature into his AP English IV curriculum, which allows more opportunity to explore American literature. Nevertheless, his text selections are still limited by his decision to use the diversity-light but canon-heavy textbook.

Within the fall semester (the placement for the AP class), he taught three Black texts: two Ray Durem poems—"Award" and "I Know I'm Not Sufficiently Obscure"—and one Ernest Gaines short story, "The Sky Is Gray." During the discussion of the latter, Iago remarked that he provided his students with background context to "explain[ ] the things that the kids in the classroom really can't identify with from their personal experience." Failing to set up the context, he added, makes the story and experiences therein "weird" to his students, mostly White. In the first interview, he detailed how his exposure to Black literature in college gave him, a White man, confidence in teaching it to his students:

Knowing a little bit about the Harlem Renaissance and things like that make it a little easier for me. I was less intimidated on the high school level of teaching it because you always feel like a phony when you teach something that you don't have much personal knowledge of. You feel like, "Here I'm an outsider teaching other outsiders and I don't know squat."

As alluded to above, the absence of teacher knowledge of and familiarity with a text and its context hinders what Iago deems effective teaching. Understanding how the students might engage with a text seems important to him as well; the level of engagement determines how enjoyable the class is for teacher and student alike. Therefore, the more relevant the text or topic, the more engaged the students are; this goal of relevance and engagement speaks to Iago's attempt to engage his Black students by using Black texts. Ultimately, however, his class appears to provide students with analytical and communication skills to be applied mostly within a literary analysis frame.

### **Participant 3: Mariah at Watson High School**

Watson High School has a student population of about 62% White and 25% Black. Though Mariah's Honors English II class reflects this distribution, her eleventh grade International Baccalaureate (IB) class is "overwhelmingly White." For student-oriented Mariah, the purpose of English class extends beyond comma usage and developing good communicators: "But the bigger purpose is to let [students] see things that they might not have thought about before because of their culture, their race, or their gender." She explained that literature, naturally fitting within this curricular frame, then is a tool for discovery—be it discovering others through different people and worlds or discovering self through different thoughts and feelings. With texts bringing in "the truth that we find uncomfortable," Mariah's classroom

becomes a safe space to talk and question without judgment. So student and teacher appear to support one another in this discovery process as they “focus on things that make us similar” rather than solely emphasizing the differences.

In the opening interview, Mariah explained an analogy that she often refers her students to throughout the year:

We talk about icebergs and how the 10% is here, but that’s not the whole truth because there’s more underneath. So if you just stop on the surface-level with anything or anybody in your life, you’re just missing out on so much more.

This explanation speaks to Mariah’s search for complexity in her text selections. She wants her students to “see that there is not one single story.” Through IB thematic units on crime and punishment, choices and consequences, and coming of age, she tries to help the students see the complexities of individuals. According to Mariah, “our identities contribute to our experience and how we view the world.” Thus, acknowledging and unpacking individual bias contribute to deeper explorations of self:

This is what we think. This is our bias, so when we read this, we know that we’ve got it. So how can we overcome it and not let it determine what we’re gonna think happens in the future?

Mariah expressed her tendency to select Black texts that have complex characters with depth and development. Though acknowledging the importance of discussing historical topics like slavery and civil rights, she recognized that the literature must include more than those contexts. Over the past school year, she guided her students through such Black texts as Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, Langston Hughes poetry, John Lewis’s *March: Book One*, and

Kekla Magoon's *How It Went Down*. For the latter, issue-oriented Mariah connected current events that presented the issues as more than just for the African-American community:

We tied it to the travel ban [...] Just stereotyping and how some of the characters get stereotyped, saying they're in a gang and how that's not just a Black phenomenon. It's a Muslim phenomenon.

She added that her Black students engaged with Magoon's text more because it "seems more real to them" and "they want to talk about it" alongside their life experiences. Interacting with its effect on perspective, race seems to always be a part of the discussion. Because identity informs perspective, it opens doors to certain understandings and closes doors to others. Mariah shared how this awareness grounds her position as a White teacher leading racial discussions:

So, the first thing I do is realize I'm not Black, and I can't speak for what Kekla Magoon saw or felt or anything like that. So I can be an ally [...] Especially in my classes where I don't have Black kids, the one that I teach at the end of the day where there's no Black kids. So we're not Black. We can't put ourselves in this experience, but we can have empathy, which I think is one of the functions of literature.

Mariah expressed concern over the risk of being seen as an expert, a title she wants to avoid. She stated that "there's a fine line" between developing students into allies and having them look to her as someone with knowledge of all lived experiences.

Relying on the elements of power and privilege, Mariah often returned to discussing the charge for action in her classroom. She shared how she challenges her students to do something with their knowledge, feelings, and privilege:

I just want them to be able to, if they see something that's not right, to feel like "I've got the tools to do this. I can make a change. I can start something. I can at least try."



In the same interview, she connected this call to act with her White students' uncomfortable feelings when discussing such topics as racial profiling and the murder of Trayvon Martin. For her, feeling uncomfortable indicates concern for the issue; the next logical step is action:

Don't feel bad about it. Just use that to shed some light, and use that. Use your privilege to help people who don't have it. Not that you're gonna be the savior or save anybody, but you gotta do something. You can't just sit and feel uncomfortable or guilty. What are you gonna do with that emotion?

As evidenced above, Mariah concerns herself and her class more with ensuring that her students are open-minded and "good people" than with ensuring they know all the grammatical situations that call for a semicolon.

#### **Participant 4: Sarah at Hines High School**

Hines High School has a student population of about 78% White and 10% Black. Sarah's Honors English II class is similar in its majority White representation. In her first interview, Sarah shared that the purpose of English class begins with reading, writing, and critically thinking. It then extends to "being able to communicate in lots of different forms [...] and then being able to critically analyze traditional books and different types of media." Content- and student-oriented, Sarah seems to want the students to "critically examine everything"—from the literary make-up of the text to the students' own reactions to it. With the help of Socratic Seminars, small-group discussions of literary elements, and essay assignments, she structures her class into one that is "preparing [the students] for AP next year."

Additionally, by focusing on student reaction, Sarah ushers in examinations of identity: "But what part of your identity do you think makes you dislike it? And why might other people like it?" Sarah appears to use this awareness of identity as a springboard into an awareness of

one's own perspective. In the final interview, she explained the underlying motive for this focus on perspective: "By examining their own perspectives, they can better understand other perspectives by seeing that their own perspectives is a perspective and not just the norm or default."

During the first semester, the students read Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Addressing the importance of minority representation, supplemental texts (e.g., Richard Wright's negative review of Hurston's novel) were used to frontload sociohistorical context. Sarah explained that the supplemental texts were intended to bridge the gap between text and student, who she feels becomes detached from texts that are temporally distant. In two interviews, she recalled how one class of White male students pushed back on the more modern texts used for frontloading—Adichie's "The Danger of a Single Story" and the #OscarsSoWhite controversy. As a response to student resistance, she tries "not to push [her] opinions too much" and instead takes up the stance of "Here this is and maybe you'll reflect on it later."

Student connection is imperative to allowing literature, Black literature included, to "help us reflect on our own experiences and others' experiences." If her students do not find the reading relevant, they are likewise prevented from "making narrative sense of [their] lives" with the literature. As an extension of this goal, the Black literature is used to involve Sarah's Black students in the learning process. She linked Adichie's talk on the single story to this student orientation:

When you only see one picture in literature, you think that's what literature is. So, them being able to see that there are people of their race or people of their gender [...] or people of their sexual orientation in books, in literature can be affirming. Also, they know that that is considered something worthy of study.

Simply said, she uses the Black literature to re-establish and/or maintain the connection between her African-American students and academics.

Sarah described considering the feelings of her Black students when she leads racial discussions in class. Referencing her White privilege and limited perspective, she shared how she seeks approval from the students, telling them,

I don't have to talk about it if you don't want to because I can step away from this because I'm White, and I know you can't. This is your whole lived experience. And so, if you don't want it brought up in class all the time, I can do that.

Racial discussions, however, do not pervade the year. For *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, they seem to only scaffold entry into the novel and, for that reason, do not receive much focus while reading it. Ultimately, Sarah emphasizes the importance of “talk[ing] about the race and gender issues alongside the style of the texts,” illustrating her blended teaching style of highlighting textual analysis and contextual connections to readers' lives.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Future Research

### Discussion

#### Phase 1: Prominence

Each of the three explorations of whether English teachers use Black literature, what they select, and when they teach it elicited a variety of responses, all of which helped to represent diverse ideologies, limitations, and preferences. Orientations and rationales aligned to reveal that among the major influences and considerations for Black literature selection are the students and the text itself—including what it offers and whether it fits within the course curriculum and trajectory. Among the findings was observed the popularity of certain texts and authors, being mentioned at least three times across the participant pool. Schedule-wise, the participants' classrooms overall experienced an increase in Black literature leading up to the middle of each semester before declining quickly. Detailed discussions of the observed patterns and conclusions for each of these inquiries follow.

**Why do they teach Black literature?** In terms of orientation frequency, the participants' responses reflected more student orientation (24%) and content orientation (21%). Regarding the frequency of the rationales, the top three most prominent types were rebranding literature as all-inclusive (45%), connecting with Black students (33%), and wanting non-Black students to hear/benefit from voices of experience (19%).

***Student orientation.*** A student orientation aligns closely with the notion that teachers do not teach English or \_(insert subject)\_; rather, they teach *students*. Here, the focus is on connecting with the students and/or selecting texts for the benefit of student interest, exposure, or growth. Under this orientation, Black literature could be taught for cultural relevancy, allowing the Black students to “see themselves in the literature that [they] are reading.”

The literature becomes a tool of inclusion and connection to show the African-American students that their voices and experiences have value. Some teachers with this motivation explicitly cited their school's or class's student demographics as explanation: "I teach at a predominately Black high school," "The majority (94%) of my students were African American," and "I have a high percentage of students who identify as Black." To these teachers, it can be inferred that English class is more than simply reading, writing, and covering standards; it is also about connecting to the literature and the writing, as facilitated by seeing one's reflection. Analyzing these statements also reveals that, through these participants' tailoring of the text selections to engage certain students, the teachers have some form of freedom over text selection and are not completely confined by regulated text lists.

Alternatively, also within the student orientation are teachers' desire to expose non-Black students, mainly White students, to the lives of African Americans. Following this strand, participants wrote remarks like "For pieces by African American writers that expressly discuss the experience of being black in America, I think that white students need to hear these perspectives." Another teacher echoed this position, wanting "to introduce to white students the wealth of knowledge outside of their comfort zone." Such statements suggest that in order for Black literature to provide these perspectives, it would have to offer something that the White literature could not, would have to *be* something that the White literature could not possibly be.

For this strand, Black literature seems to be that which speaks with a Black voice of experience; such a voice then transforms the literature into windows to worlds unlike one's own. Like the previously mentioned strand of mirrored reflections, the strand of windows to worlds transforms Black literature into a tool for connection. The literature specifically connects students to lives and faces unlike theirs to expand and deepen their awareness of the world.

With the student orientation appearing the most frequently in the responses, one can infer that more teachers than not in the Truth County school district *actively* select Black texts for their classes and do so on the premise of connecting to their student audience—be it mostly Black, mostly non-Black, or a mixture of the two. However, these responses make me wonder whether, if asked why they teach *White* literature, the teachers would cite similar reasons: to help White students see *their* lives reflected in the text and to help non-White students expand their worldview by encountering the *White* voice of experience. Perhaps such responses would be less frequent, which suggests a necessary clarification.

The teaching of Black literature under this student orientation is not simply to connect students by presenting mirrors and windows. Specifically, the teaching of this literature may have an underlying power component: providing those in the dominant group with acknowledgment that other groups exist outside of theirs and reassuring those not in the dominant group that their presence matters, too. Hence, teachers with this orientation seem to view the students as people as well and the English classroom as a site for learning about one's self and others in the world. This observation corresponds with the participants' indicated likelihood to focus on certain connections when teaching Black literature, with text-to-world (4.76/5) and text-to-self (4.57/5) connections being dominant (see Table 17). Examined from the other angle, these teachers then perhaps see themselves as more than teachers of plot analysis and grammar but trainers of empowered and conscious individuals.

***Content orientation.*** Seemingly the opposite, the content orientation was the second most frequently cited orientation. Responses categorized in this orientation cited reasons of teaching Black literature that related to the curriculum or to what the literature contributed content- or style-wise. One participant stated that the “[t]exts were rich in complexity and connected well

Table 17. Participants' Likelihood to Emphasize Certain Elements/Connections for Black Literature

		<b>Likelihood Mean (out of 5)</b> <i>[Extremely unlikely-1, Somewhat unlikely-2, Neither likely or unlikely-3, Somewhat likely-4, Extremely likely-5]</i>
<b>Type</b>		
Elements	Textual analysis	4.93
	Historical context	4.88
	Social context	4.86
	Writing style/structure	4.69
	Reading for enjoyment	4.33
	Plot	4.29
Textual connections	Text-to-world connections	4.76
	Text-to-self connections	4.57
	Black text-to-non-Black text connections	4.07
	Black text-to-Black text connections	3.79

with themes in [the] classroom” whereas another wrote that the literature “fits into the curriculum of World Literature.” Within this orientation, the use of Black literature appears to sometimes be less of an active inclusion; the literature just happens to be “[p]art of the curriculum” or to “fit within the essential question or theme of the unit.” Such responses do not suggest strong motivation to use the literature, at least not as much as the motivation suggested in the student orientation. The participants don their role as bearers of English content and subsequently use Black literature—required or not—as a vessel for transferring that content. This observation explains the participants’ matter-of-fact, less than passionate explanations.

Furthermore, this reliance of content aligns with the participants’ high likelihood (4.93/5) to focus on textual analysis when teaching Black literature (see Table 17). Though the student orientation and the content orientation are distinct, is this distinction noticeable in the classroom? How might a student-oriented teaching of a text like Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*

differ from its content-oriented counterpart? In effect, how might an orientation affect the story that is the class? Unfortunately, survey responses alone fall short of any sort of reliable answers.

***Rebranding literature as all-inclusive.*** Nearly half (45%) of the participants appear to subscribe to the “rebranding literature as all-inclusive” rationale. The teachers aim to expand students’ understanding of what literature is. These teachers emphasize exposure and variety in their classrooms as they widen the scope of literature and acknowledge the quality of literature regardless of race. One participant noted, “I also considered it beneficial to expose students to a wide range of authors, including black authors.” Another likewise responded, “I chose to be all inclusive with the material I teach in each class. Therefore, I go outside of the textbook in many instances to find a range of genres and authors.” Thus, in classrooms supported by this rationale of inclusivity, one could expect to observe the teacher challenging the students with multiple voices in multiple forms—short stories, speeches, poems, etc. Essentially, through Black literature and other literary selections, the teacher communicates to the students, “This is what you may know about literature. Now, let’s expand that.”

However, one cannot conclude from these survey responses whether, in this colorblind approach of inclusivity, the race of the author is identified. It could be that the awareness of racial variety is one-sided: with the teacher possessing the knowledge but failing to share it with the students. Because literature written by White authors is typically identified without racial markings, such an occurrence may result in the students’ casting an author as the default White person despite his/her non-White status (Chambers, 1997).

***Connecting with Black students.*** Thirty-three percent of the teachers offered responses classified under the “connecting with Black students” rationale. The Black students become the target audience and therefore should receive literature that caters to them. One participant



reflects this perspective in stating, “I find that my students relate to these authors, because the majority of my students are also Black.” For this rationale, “connect[ing] more with the demographics of [the] students” is important to teaching. While responses such as this do not fully unpack the significance of pairing Black texts with Black students, one might conclude that relations to texts affect student engagement and interest, which in turn may affect academic and/or behavioral performance.

Other responses, however, are not as vague: “...kids need to see representations of literature/art from individuals with whom they feel a cultural or ethnic connection.” Another participant admitted to wanting students “to hear voices that speak their truth and their experience.” These responses reveal a deeper level; they suggest that without the Black literature, the students are left studying someone else’s life and hearing someone else’s voice but never their own. Absent the Black literature, the students are seemingly left with a loss of identity in the classroom.

Thus, teachers with this rationale aim to bring in texts that speak to the Black students’ connection to themselves and “to their ancestors” to bridge any gap between the text and self. The comment regarding “hear[ing] voices that speak their truth and their experience” adds a level of complexity to this text pairing however. It implies that not every Black text speaks to the truth of every Black student. As a result, the pairing begins with matching race to race on a surface level and then extends to matching voice to voice on a deeper, more substantial level.

***Wanting non-Black students to hear from voices of experience.*** Briefly, the third most prominent rationale (19%) was “wanting non-Black students to hear/benefit from voices of experience.” Associated with its student-oriented counterpart, this rationale aims to expose non-Black students to the Black experience, historical and contemporary. As mentioned earlier, the

fulfillment of this task hinges on selecting texts that speak directly to the African-American experience. It would seem that Black texts that de-center race would be unsuitable, perhaps interpreted as not speaking *as* a member of the race. The following survey response validates this conclusion: “For pieces by African American writers that *expressly discuss* [emphasis added] the experience of being black in America, I think that white students need to hear these perspectives.” The literature then becomes a tool in assisting with identity development. Through the reading and discussion of Black literature, the White students are expected to realize that theirs is not the only presence in the world, nor is theirs the only existing perspective.

**Conclusion.** From these two analyses, one can gather that the students, wittingly or not, strongly influence a teacher’s use and usage of Black literature. The student population determines whether the texts will be used to encourage (mirrors), expand (windows), or do both (mirrors and windows). Either focus, however, emphasizes the Black voice of experience. On the other hand, teachers also remove race from consideration to focus on the content, quality, and variety that the texts offer. Thus, it makes sense that these orientations and rationales align across the tables, consistently leading each in frequency: student orientation (24%), content orientation (21%), merit orientation (15%), and spectrum orientation (15%) in Table 9 and “rebranding literature as all inclusive” (45%), “connecting with Black students” (33%), and “wanting non-Black students to hear/benefit from voices of experience” (19%) in Table 10.

The reliability of this alignment can then be vetted in the participants’ responses to the survey question asking the teachers to indicate the level of influence that certain factors have on their selections of Black literature. Using a 3-point Likert scale of *little to no influence* (1), *some influence* (2), and *heavy influence* (3), the participants cited literary merit (2.66/3) and student appeal (2.62/3) as the top two factors controlling their choices (see Table 18). Therefore, these

data reveal that the high school English teachers do indeed teach Black literature and do so with race-decentered attention to content and race-centered attention to student connection or appeal.

**What texts and authors do they teach? Why?** The two lists of text frequency and author frequency (Tables 11 & 12) reveal that certain texts and authors are popular across the sampled school district. Thus, a student is more likely to encounter Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (mentioned by nine teachers) in high school than Sharon Draper’s *Copper Sun* (mentioned by only one teacher). Taken broadly, what results from this text/author popularity is a perpetual drawing from the pool of tradition, so that the majority of people in Truth County, or the United States, will have undoubtedly encountered, if not read, Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask” or Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, or even better, the staple Hughes poems—“Harlem” and “I, Too.” Thus, teachers who have been raised in the bosom of these texts seem to find incorporating them into the curriculum a less painful and perhaps natural process. The two lists of frequency suggest that, when high school English teachers contemplate Black literature, here is what they think of and here is whom they think of. In their popularity, perhaps these texts and authors have come to reify the notion of Black literature.

Table 18. Influential Factors on Black Literature Text Selection

Factor	Mean (out of 3) [Little to no influence-1, Some influence-2, Heavy influence-3]
Literary merit	2.66
Appeal to students	2.62
Personal familiarity	2.32
Difficulty level	2.29
Text availability	2.24
Recommendations from other teachers	2.22
Text length	1.9
Coinciding with another course	1.8
Censorship concerns	1.44

A closer examination of Table 11 reveals that the majority of the featured texts have a culturally specific, **race-centered orientation**: speaking with Black voices of experience, several of these texts address race relations in the United States, the quest for fair treatment, and/or the African American's inner struggle or endurance. From Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" to Reynold's *All American Boys*, many of these popular texts sharpen the reification of Black literature. Rather than merely reinforcing a familiar name or title, teachers seem to also be reinforcing a certain voice and representation that is undeniably Black and sociopolitical. Therefore, these texts seem to have something substantial to say about the African-American experience, particularly its seemingly endless struggle.

An analysis of the years of publication for these popular texts reveal that the voice—both undeniably Black and sociopolitical—is also undeniably historical (see Figure 6). All but one of the texts were published before 1980. While the texts span from 1851 to 2015—a total of 164 years—nearly half come from the same decade, the 1960s. Granted, these texts are not the *only* ones being read and discussed in English classrooms; the survey collected several other titles—some historical, some contemporary. However, those titles appear only once or twice in the data and thus speak to the variety of texts among teachers but not the likelihood of those texts. It is the likelihood that builds the unstated consensus of the story that the class curriculum will tell.

For starters, what texts might one find in a classroom of a teacher subscribing to the merit-based/all-inclusive rationale? As Table 13 indicates, despite the intended **race-decentered orientation** that emphasizes universal connections with little to no attention to race (e.g., texts like Langston Hughes's short story "Early Autumn"), the voice-of-experience element appears to prevail over the list of texts. In addition to those present on the top 15 list, such texts as Toi Derricote's "Black Boys Play the Classics," Ray Durem's "I Know I'm Not Sufficiently

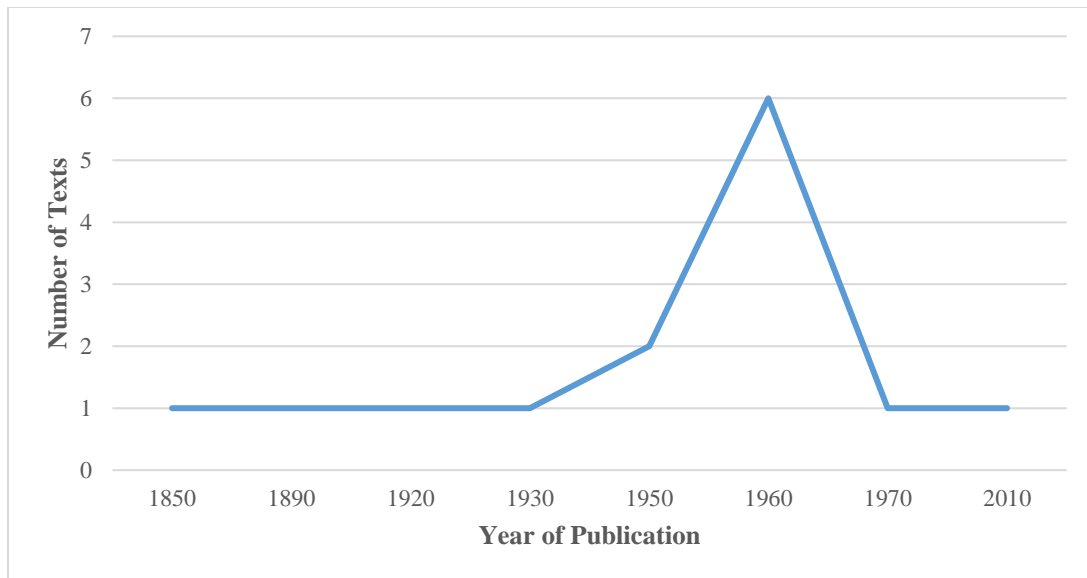


Figure 6. Distribution of Years for the Most Frequently Taught Black Texts

Obscure,” and Frederick Douglass’s narrative populate the list and bring with them definite topics and themes that foreground race and racial issues. Though this “literature is literature” rationale suggests a desire to remove race from the text selection criteria, race nevertheless returns to the equation via the trend of selected texts. Race-decentered texts like Nikki Giovanni’s “Knoxville, Tennessee” and Lucille Clifton’s “Homage to My Hips” are lightly sprinkled among the rest of the texts.

Yet a question arises? How do these teachers view and subsequently position the Black texts they select? Based on my ideology, I label certain texts as either race-centered or -decentered, yet such a sorting is not inherent; a prominent racial presence in a text does not necessitate a race-centered discussion. After all, Toni Morrison’s Black-voiced *Beloved* is as much about loss, obsession, and reunion as Nella Larsen’s race-unspecified short story “Freedom.” Thus, text positioning relies on what the teacher sees and believes about the text and how he frames it—whether by choice, default, or curricular demand/need. For instance, what about Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem “We Wear the Mask” leads some teachers to use it in

appealing to their Black students but other teachers, in addressing its merit as literature? What do they see in the text that determines what they, through instruction, will then lead the students to see as well?

With a merit-based perspective, it certainly should not be forbidden to discuss racial texts and themes in class, yet do texts that present the race-decentered side of Black writing also receive due attention in the classroom of literary inclusivity? Likewise, there is no certainty regarding how the teachers approach what I label the race-centered texts either. Without follow-up interviews and/or classroom observations, there may be no other way of knowing.

How might the texts featured in a classroom using Black texts to connect the Black students differ from those in the all-inclusive classroom? At first sight, Table 14 provides a clearly longer list of texts, the majority of which center race and the Black voice of experience. Among the titles shared between Tables 13 and 14 are Paul Laurence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask," Alice Walker's "The Flowers," and Jamaal May's "There Are Birds Here." Representing classes that use the literature to connect to Black students, Table 14 includes young adult literature like Kekla Magoon's *How It Went Down* and Jason Reynolds's *All American Boys*, both of which employ young African-American voices of experience to reveal truths about society. Also featured in this list is Congressman John Lewis's graphic novel *March: Book One*, which recounts his fledgling experiences in civil rights activism.

Using similar texts as these, teachers wishing to use Black literature to connect seem to gravitate toward texts that serve as sociopolitical vessels that speak to justice or lack thereof: "Nonviolence Is the Only Road to Freedom," "The Ballot or the Bullet," and "Incident." The texts within this rationale seem to more strongly convey messages to their Black readers: "Be aware of what's going on. It's hard out there. Continue to fight. There's still work to be done."

Thus, the curricular story resembles one of potential empowerment by means of knowing that one is not alone in the ongoing struggle and that great figures have too shared that same burden.

What, then, is the curricular story for classrooms using Black literature to allow non-Black students to hear and benefit from the Black voice of experience? What texts are present? Table 15 reveals the brief list of texts that one might find in such a classroom. Interestingly, the texts here are quite like those found in an “all-inclusive” classroom. There appears to be a blend of race-centered and decentered texts present, yet the young adult and graphic novels present in the “Black student connection” class are absent. So too is the preponderance of voice-of-Black-struggle texts, seen in the previous table. Compared with other tables, Table 15 features the least amount (3) of book-length texts, with Table 14 featuring the most (11). This suggests that, in classes where Black literature is used to expose non-Black students to Black voices, the task is more often done so with short works—poetry, short stories, and essays—allowing a glimpse into potentially unfamiliar territory and having time to explore additional territories elsewhere.

**When do they teach Black literature? Why?** An analysis rendered various rationale themes based on frequency: curriculum scheduling, curricular alignment, norm-challenging, testing, merit basis, and holiday consideration. Occurring the most frequently, **curriculum scheduling** includes responses that alluded to the scope and sequence of the curriculum. Such statements as the following were common for this theme:

- “It’s where it fell in my planning and curriculum.”
- “It was when it fell within our units.”
- “My English III curriculum goes in rough chronological order, so it is what I focus on the last grading period.”

These responses indicate little intentionality on the teacher's part; it is simply "where it fell."

However, one response within this theme explains the scheduling in more revealing detail:

Especially with *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, it's a really difficult text. I don't like to start with it, so I put it at peak time—not too late when they are tired, but not too early when they need to adjust to the class.

Here, not wanting the text to be poorly received, the participant is conscious of the importance of when the students encounter the text. However, other than this singular statement, the responses in the curriculum scheduling category do not indicate any consideration to student readiness, text complexity, or thematic relevance. So here, the presence of Black literature merely is what it is.

The second major scheduling rationale theme is **curricular alignment**, meaning that the teachers cited using the Black literature at certain times because it "fit into" or "aligned with" something else. Examples of responses matching this theme include the following:

- "It fit the poetry unit I was teaching at the time."
- "The texts connect thematically to other texts we're studying and support thinking about a central question."
- "I choose a variety of texts/authors and spread them throughout the semester to match the skills we are targeting—argumentative writing/rhetoric (speeches), close reading/literary analysis (poetry), to correspond with major novel/drama units (current events, news articles) etc."

As evident above, responses within this theme refer directly to the literary offerings of the Black texts. These offerings mostly avoid any mention of cultural specificity or voice of experience and opt instead for attention to form, skill-building, and thematic/stylistic relevance. One participant, an intern during the 2016-2017 school year, shared the following: "I wanted [the students] to be



exposed to Black literature, and Langston Hughes does a fantastic job with voice, which was the core of the lesson.” This perhaps expounds upon the theme. Teachers, with their various rationales for teaching Black literature, are nevertheless responsible for adhering to the curricular standards.

Thus, to connect Black students to self-reflections or White students to Black voices of experience, teachers must first find ways of making the literature “fit” naturally within the curriculum. Without the fit or alignment, perhaps the Black texts would appear disconnected from the curriculum, being simply piled on top. Thus, liking a particular text or wanting to challenge norms is insufficient; the bottom line is that, whatever the ideological purpose for the text, it must fit.

Regarding minor, less frequent themes, some participants provided reasons involving the challenging of norms, the focus on merit alone, the impact of testing (already discussed), and the influence of special days/months. For the **norm-challenging** theme, one participant who listed eight out of the ten months explained his/her method of dismissing the norm of white patriarchal literature: “I try to include a minority, female writer for every unit where one is available because I think it is important to understand the variety of authors who helped shape American literature (not just old white dudes).” Another teacher, whose response was previously mentioned, sought to teach Black literature when it “isn’t spotlighted in the national consciousness” in order to effect change in its perception. By teaching the literature outside the special times, this teacher aimed to “show that it should be a natural part of the curriculum” rather than an item of seasonal dotting.

**Merit-themed responses** explicitly tied the discounting of race into their scheduling rationale: “Since I teach literature as literature, not by Race, my students read selections by all

racess throughout the year.” Building onto the notion of curriculum alignment, another participant echoed, “It fit the poetry unit I was teaching at the time. I used the poems because they were beautiful and applicable, not because they were written by black people.”

Lastly, though low in number, **holiday-themed rationales** linked scheduling decisions to special days and months throughout the school year. When these occurred, they were supplemental reasons, never stand-alone. Thus, a teacher who taught Black literature during October 2016, January 2017, and April 2017 claimed the “that’s where it falls” reasoning and added, “Also, MLK Day is in January.” Likewise, another teacher—using the literature during September 2016 and February 2017—employed the same method of addition, saying “Students move from image, short text, to longer texts analysis while advancing in skill complexity. This is where it falls (for February, part of Black History Month).”

Such responses suggest that had it not been for MLK Day and Black History Month, the Black literature may not have been present in those months. This observation then discloses that because of these opportune times to incorporate the literature, teachers using this holiday reasoning employ what Banks (1995) called the contributions approach. In this approach, the integration of Black literature is “limited primarily to special days, weeks and months related to ethnic events and celebrations” (p. 247). Consequently during January and February, students may mainly see Black literature “as an addition to the curriculum, and [ ] as an appendage to the main story of the development of the nation and to the core curriculum” (p. 247). Rather than fitting in to contribute to curricular cohesion, the literature may just be inserted in for a set duration and then rarely seen again.

**Considerations.** The blend of identified themes carries with it a blend of active and passive teacher decisions. The responses of some participants spoke to their agency in the

classroom whereas other responses (e.g., regarding testing or curriculum scheduling) spoke to unavoidable limitations or a form of laissez-faire planning. Additionally, it must be noted that not all responses to the scheduling rationale survey question were considered. Perhaps because of the question's wording, some responses did not explicitly address the rationale for teaching the Black literature during the selected months *in particular*. They alternatively act more as extensions of the participants' general rationales for teaching the literature.

Illustrating this point, one participant—also an interviewee—offered the following as his reason for using the literature from August 2016 to December 2016: “The literature advances the achievement of student performance objectives as put forth in the adopted curriculum. Also, I like to advance cultural literacy in my classes so my students will be more involved and interesting persons.” Despite its level of detail, this response connects in no way to scheduling. Through a follow-up interview, he clarified that he taught the literature during those months (the first semester) because of the semester-long course that granted him the opportunity to do so. Other disconnected, and therefore disregarded, responses dealt with such issues as relevance, engagement, and history, but not timing specifically:

- November 2016, December 2016, January 2017, February 2017: “It is extremely relevant; not every author is a dead white male (DWM).”
- September 2016, October 2016, November 2016, December 2016: “It’s important to the literacy [sic] canon.”

Such responses provide little insight to the placement of the literature during those months, leaving much room for assumptions and conjecture.

**Phase 1 conclusion.** Through the online survey, Phase 1 provided opportunities to explore why a general assembly of Truth County high school English teachers incorporated

Black literature into their classrooms. The data suggests that reasons abound for their teaching; however, of considerable importance are the student audience and how the literature contributes to the curriculum. The conveyed curricular story around Black literature seems to frame it as a source of connections—Black students to themselves and non-Black students to the lived experiences of Blacks. As a result, many of the selected texts carry a distinct voice of experience as the authors depict the emotional/psychological, sociohistorical, and sociopolitical journeys of justice-seeking and injustice-enduring African Americans.

While race-decentered texts do appear in the classrooms, their presence is minimal to that of race-centered texts. A teacher's rationale affects the literature selections, evidenced by the comparison of listed texts across rationales. Teachers using the literature as mirrors for their Black students appeared more likely to use Black young adult literature and graphic novels. These teachers too appeared more likely to use Black texts with a social justice focus, connecting the students to significant Black figures of the past who confronted issues like their own. Across Truth County, the presence of Black literature ebbs and flows over the year, rising steadily until it peaks mid-semester before quickly declining by the semester's end. However, regardless of where it falls and one's underlying motive for using it, the literature typically must fit into the curriculum and contribute content-wise to skill-development in the classroom—as indicated through the strength of the content orientation and the curricular alignment theme.

## **Phase 2: Themes**

Over the course of the data collection period, the four interviewees shared details about their classrooms, themselves as students/teachers, and their students. They represented different schools and student populations as well as different approaches to literature instruction, both of which influence to a degree the story of the classroom and how each teacher uses Black

literature. Across the interviews, the teachers also expounded upon their reasons for structuring their classes the way they were structured, sometimes citing a commitment to criticality, test preparation, or development of active student citizens. From the total of twelve interviews, two themes regarding the teachers' approaches to Black literature were observed: 1) getting students to see and 2) deciding when to race texts.

**Getting students to see.** The notion of getting students to see pervades the interviewees' comments. Ideologically, the teachers often referred to structuring their classroom around expanding the purview of the students by "getting them to see" themselves, others, their society, and/or their world through critical eyes. Their arrival to this pedagogical objective seemed to have sprung from their particularly White-washed, monocultural educational upbringing. The teachers grew up and developed in an environment devoid of racial diversity. From day to day, they simply "didn't get to see it growing up." Coming from a "super-small conservative town," for instance, Mariah did not really think of race growing up; when "there were two Black kids in the school" upon graduation from high school, there was seemingly no need to. From second grade onward, Sarah similarly lived and learned in a "very, very White" environment.

For at least three teachers, college triggered a shift in awareness. Exposure to different people of different colors and Black literature through coursework or self-selection led to an awakening, a realization of their limited development due to the lack of diversity. Just as a man who just discovered that he has been thirsty for years searches for any available drop of water, so too did most of these teachers seek out diversity; they "wanted to see it." So, they purposefully sought out this diversity and awareness, driven by the fact that "there's so much more in the world" to see, to experience, to challenge and change. For them, literature—and podcasts for Sarah—provide a way in which to do that.

In the classroom, they see that their students have “a very, very narrow worldview” like they once had. Taking on parental roles, the teachers want their students to see what they themselves did not see during their youth: “I want you to see it now.” Their class curriculum then forms accordingly. The Black literature, like the other literature, becomes a tool for “learning about life” and for discovering who they are, who others are, and the similarities among them.

Through the Black texts and accompanying discussions, students learn to confront the notion of inherent difference with that of inherent similarity. Thus, Mariah and Alice challenge them to “look for things that make us similar.” Despite the messages of the media, “there is so much more that unites people than divides them.” So students learn to push past the surface level of single stories to “see” the complexity and depth of literary characters and real-life people. While Black literature does include slavery and civil rights, “[i]t can’t be just slavery/civil rights.” It too can give the Black students the chance to see themselves in more positive frames, showing them that they too can be writers and thinkers; they too can “do[ ] school.” Teacher and student alike poke and prod themselves and their reactions to the text, questioning why events seem foreign to them, anger them, make them feel bad or guilty.

Through the multiple representations in the literature, the classes confront the existence of multiple perspectives and truths. Identity controls perspective and experience. Experience informs understanding and truth. Thus, identity/perspective naturally limits true understanding. What is the author saying that a non-Black reader cannot understand? How would the story change if it shifted from a Black speaker to a White speaker? Through texts carrying voices that speak to and from Black experiences, the teachers attempt to get students to see the importance of perspective and “create a sense of empathy for others and a sense of self-efficacy.”

Yet, because self and its learned bias are elements to be maneuvered through, the classroom becomes a judgement-free space of questioning. As the students interact with text, they interact with self, monitoring their feelings and opinions and developing the confidence to share both with teacher and peers. Sarah wants them to see “how it’s a journey for everyone and that we can all talk about it.” For Iago, “English [class] is really about speaking and listening and reading and writing,” and he wants them to see that they can “express their opinion and know they’re not gonna be ridiculed for it.” So at designated points in the year, the students engage and sometimes grapple with discussions of race and racism.

Their teachers, at varied degrees, all realize that English class is more than what happens between the four walls of the classroom. It is about being an active citizen in the world through which they walk each day. Thus, with the help of texts like *How It Went Down* and Jesse Williams’s BET Awards speech, most of the teachers focus on transforming the students into “critical thinkers about their reality,” able to see the world as it is and be equipped to challenge or change it. Alice thoroughly unpacked this motive, saying,

So that’s why I think some of the texts that I bring in get [...] a little bit more political because I want them to go into the world, whatever they do when they leave high school, with this desire to not just accept the status quo and say, “Well, this is all there is for me.”

Whereas Sarah’s and Iago’s classrooms focus less on changing society and more on understanding self and others, Mariah and Alice are much more committed to action that comes from that understanding, hence their critical styles of literature instruction (see Table 16). For Mariah, understanding one’s bias and privilege is merely the first goal, not the end goal: “I want them to use that privilege. You can’t just sit with it and feel bad about yourself. You’ve got a privilege that somebody else doesn’t have.” All of the teachers expressed a concern for and/or a

duty to the development of the students as people. How they approached Black literature was an extension of this responsibility. Ultimately, then, the English classroom and the Black literature within it were tools for getting the students to see *differently*. Whether this process involves “see[ing] that there is not one single story,” “seeing [that] a different perspective helps them see that they have a perspective,” or “see[ing] that authors are writing about things that they see going on in the world,” the Black literature trains them in critical sight.

**Deciding when to race texts.** Amid the discussion of African-American literature came the decision of when to “race” texts and when not to. Racing a text means examining that text through a racial lens. This labeling process begins with explicitly disclosing the author’s race and analyzing how that person speaks through—or speaks *as* (Spivak, 1990)—his/her race in the writing. Affixing the “Black-authored” label to a literary work signals a change, one suggesting the following: *Now we’re entering a racial discussion. Now we’re going to see race as a thing, a separate entity to be discussed* (Jarrett, 2006). Thus, the teachers typically identify the race of the author—i.e., label as a *Black writer* rather than a writer who is Black—only when the class is going to frame the literature as a result of that racial identification.

For Alice and Sarah, Spivak’s (1990) concept of speaking *as* is tantamount to speaking *on*. If an African-American author is not speaking on race or the African-American experience, then that author is not speaking explicitly as an African-American person; disclosing that author’s race is therefore unnecessary. “If I feel like the author’s race,” Alice explained, “somehow impacts the purpose or the message of the text, then I’m likely to bring that in.” In a later interview, she continued, “[O]ur most recent study on gender, I don’t know what race any of those authors necessarily were because it wasn’t at the heart of what we were discussing.”



Though the author's race is introduced only when it seems worthy of consideration, worth varies by teacher. As previously stated, Alice and Sarah measure worth through the frame of speaking on/as. Iago, ever grounded to New Criticism, measures worth on whether the racial context will be "a promising avenue for [literary] analysis." He elaborated, "But some writers really defy categorization and [...] you're interested in the story, and the story is not necessarily gonna be written in such a way that you know what race the person is." Both he and Alice comment on allowing the text, being "unmistakabl[y]" Black, to speak for itself about the author's race: "[the students] probably have no clue whether the author is Black or White or Latino or whatever unless it's very obvious in the text."

Mariah, on the other hand, "always disclose[s] that the author is Black"; acknowledging the ever-present influence of perspective, she also always states when the author is White. To her, it matters who is telling the story just as it matters who is hearing or reading the story. Whatever the indicator of worth, when the teachers deem race discussion-worthy, the pedagogical approach will be voiced (Price, 2017). They will examine the potential influence of the author's race/racial experience on texts, discuss racial topics, and frontload sociohistorical contexts to scaffold entry into unfamiliar terrains.

However, when race is not discussion-worthy, the pedagogical approach is more likely to be silent (Price, 2017). The teachers will avoid the author's race, view literature as literature no matter who wrote it, and center universal themes and literary analysis. When the teachers knowingly withhold the author's race because race is incidental or "an undercurrent of the discussion," they appear to do so with a reason. The "Black-authored" label seems to erect walls around the text, defining and circumscribing it. Absent the label, absent the circumscription and allow the text to connect with students on issues outside race. This suggests that simply

mentioning the author's race automatically and inevitably ushers in a racial discussion when one is not necessarily desired. As Alice, Iago, and Sarah all admit, the result of not stating the author's race is the students' lack of awareness when reading a Black-authored text, a response that may then rely on the learned default White-author attribution (Chambers, 1997).

Furthermore, when the "Black-authored" label is acknowledged when the text is unmistakably Black, what story is being conveyed? In terms of cultural maintenance, African-American writers become stock characters limited to race matter—e.g., civil rights, slavery, Black Lives Matter, racial politics (Matthews, 1986). As Mariah articulates, while the race matter is undoubtedly important, "the role of Black literature is to see that there is not one single story. You have to have a range." Although some teachers insist on opening students' minds to diverse perspectives/experiences and to the ability to change their world, the persistence of the single story seems to undermine their purpose. By binding Black writers solely to Black talk, most of the teachers might be falling short of challenging dominant ideology. In their classrooms, students may begin to infer that African-American writers, actors, figures discuss race and nothing else, which is only half of the story.

## **Implications**

### **Connecting to Black Students?**

Concerning the rationale of using Black literature to connect with African-American students, it is important to note that connecting with these students is not clearly elaborated upon. For teachers who select the literature because it is "culturally relevant" or because the students can relate to it more, how do they know which texts are culturally relevant or which ones the students relate to more? Whereas the interviewees reported being able to informally discern the increased engagement and verbal participation of the Black students, whether the other

participants do similarly is unclear. Perhaps some teachers assume that Black students will naturally connect to Black characters, no matter the voice or representation, thereby flattening their identities. As Scieurba (2014/2015) argues,

To presume that readers gravitate exclusively toward texts that mirror them does not sufficiently honor the complexities of racial/ethnic or gender identities, nor does it consider the complexities of the very act of reading and responding to texts. (p. 309)

Or perhaps other teachers assume, without consideration of student input, that only a certain type of Black textual representation speaks to the Black students. Acknowledging that such possibilities exist implies that teachers' assumptions of their students may be more influential than the students themselves as those assumptions may dictate the literature present throughout the year.

### **Working within Policy**

Another implication concerns the Black texts mentioned by the survey participants. In a way, those selections resulted from the intersecting ideologies—of the teacher, the school policy, and the school district policy—that meet in the classroom. The macro ideologies (i.e., school and school district policies) establish the space in which the micro ideology (i.e., the teacher) exists. Concerning text selection, Truth County sets perimeters for approved book-length texts. Through this district-wide list of approved books (with very limited Black texts), the district establishes certain texts as automatically worthy of being taught, requiring no further permission or hassle.

Teachers wishing to stray from this list, teaching outside books, must receive approval by completing a three-page request form that requires them to state, among other elements, the following: what the new text offers that the approved books do not, positive reviews, the author's reputation, and specific references to any objectionable material in the text. The existence of this

time-demanding requirement, whether adhered to or not, appears to serve the purpose of deterring outside books. With such a requisite, the school district conveys the message that the already approved books should be all that one—teacher and student alike—needs for an effective and appropriate education. Likewise, with 8% (10 out of 122) of the listed texts being Black-authored, the school district conveys yet another message: *these ten books sufficiently represent Black literature, and any other Black texts are unnecessary*. Therefore, the list and the accompany approval process help to marginalize Black people and culture within the dominant Eurocentric culture.

This lengthy requirement for *book* approval may be consequently affecting the types of Black texts featured in the English classrooms of Truth County. About 75% of the texts listed on the survey are short works (e.g., book *excerpts*, poems, speeches, short stories, songs), thereby illustrating how teachers work around needing *book* approval. At the same time, of the books that were mentioned on the survey, the majority (about 68%) are not on the district-wide or school-specific approval list and are contemporary, mostly young adult novels and graphic novels like Sharon Draper's *Copper Sun* and John Lewis's *March: Book One*.

This preponderance of outside books implies that, assuming the teachers followed protocol, the material in and appeal of these contemporary texts were worth the time and effort of seeking approval via the three-page form. A teacher's perseverance through the approval process speaks to her ideology and her commitment to include Black literature that connects to the Black students, for instance. Therefore, similar to Figure 3 of the factors influencing a teacher's text selection, school- and district-wide ideological policies on text approval delimit possibilities for book choices deemed of merit. Teachers, in turn, work within these structures and adjust their text selections accordingly—hence, the prevalence of short works.

## **Expanding What's Taught**

An additional implication involves expanding the selection of texts from the most popular authors. Langston Hughes, for instance, was the most cited author; yet most of the texts used were his poems. One teacher used an excerpt from his autobiography *The Big Sea*, and one teacher used one of his short stories. However, Hughes penned several short stories, some centering race, some not. Because his poetry receives the greater part of teachers' attention, teachers—knowingly or not—contribute to the perception of Hughes as solely a poet. He is inevitably framed within a single story.

Zora Neale Hurston is in a similar situation: ranked as the third most popular author, she owes that placement to a single text, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Tying with nondescript Langston Hughes poetry on the text list, this novel is the only Hurston work cited by the teacher-participants. Nonetheless, she wrote other pieces: essays, folklore, and short stories. Despite what these other works can bring to the classroom and most likely because of the ubiquity of her novel, Hurston seems to be cast as a one-work author, the Black female author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and nothing else. If these authors appeal to both teacher and student, broadening the sample of the authors' works may deepen that appeal while adding another dimension to the authors.

## **Guiding Willing Teachers**

This study was borne from the desire to increase the presence of Black literature in high school English classrooms. Through its inclusion of teachers who actively incorporate the literature into their curriculum, the study provided an avenue into that initial desire. By knowing English teachers' *how's*, *why's*, and considerations when teaching Black literature, we perhaps have a better understanding of the possible directions toward which we can steer willing non-

teachers of the literature. Using the “most popular” lists as a starter kit of sorts, those willing but unfamiliar with *what* to teach might begin with the frequently referenced texts and authors to acclimate to the body of Black literature. Due to the popularity of those works and writers, the teachers may easily find ample discussions, analyses, and activities for the literature via teacher resource books and the internet.

Equally, those willing but unsure about *how* to teach the literature might find solace in knowing that methods vary: emphasizing the Black voice of experience to teach non-Black students, selecting pieces simply that Black students relate to, de-emphasizing race to focus on literary analysis, or even de-emphasizing differences to foreground similarities. Lastly, those unwilling but uncertain about *how often* to include the literature might be encouraged to find that inclusion need not encompass the whole year but rather—considering scheduling, course limitations, and alignment—can be any place where the literature fits. Therefore, the results from this study provide the unfamiliar teachers with a way in, one that supports them by indicating what other teachers do already.

### **Developing Future English Teachers**

Shining light on English teacher knowledge, the data collected through this study can be used to affect the training of teachers in teacher education programs. The interviewees grew up in environments that lacked diversity. Some elected to encounter Black literature in college. Something in the teachers triggered their active seeking of diversity. A sudden awareness made them realize that they had been exposed to only part of the story. As a result, they sought out courses, texts, podcasts, and other resources to not only develop their reading and knowledge base but also become more conscious and comfortable in discussions of race. Yet what happens if and when teacher candidates never experience that triggered awareness? Especially for those

coming from schooling experiences in which they encounter only a handful of African-American students, will they encounter Black literature in their teacher training? Or will it be left to chance and choice?

As witnessed in the interviewees' comments, a teacher's likelihood for teaching texts is influenced by familiarity with those texts. Likewise, a teacher's comfort level for discussing race in class is influenced by exposure to similar discussions out of class—preferably before or during teacher training. At what point are incoming teachers being prepared to be tellers of complex stories in the classroom? With the consistent and seemingly increasing presence of racial issues in US society, it appears that a knowledge of and a developing and practical competence of diversity should be a core component of English teacher preparation programs—especially if students are being trained in teaching the minds of today's and tomorrow's society. Thus, these programs may need practical ways of triggering and nurturing awareness in future teachers so that those who wish can have time, opportunity, and a safe space to develop familiarity and comfort with Black texts and racial talk.

### **Future Research**

One avenue for future research regards the participant pool, over 80% of which was White. Interestingly, this representation slightly exceeds the 80.0% population of White high school teachers in the United States, thereby almost mimicking the national average for a representative sample (Taie & Goldring, 2017). However, to further examine racialized data differences such as that seen in the scheduling, recruiting more non-White teachers into the study may be beneficial. Will the rationales align, regardless of race? For African-American teachers, will the concentration of the rationales differ from that of this study?

Another consideration for follow-up research is the inclusion of classroom observations. Teacher-participants could be observed while teaching a piece of Black literature. By providing an eyewitness account of the teachers' pedagogical practices, these classroom observations—exploratory in nature—might add more depth and understanding to the data on how English teachers teach Black literature. If the observations were supplemental to participant interviews, the sights, sounds, and thoughts encountered in the classroom could then guide the direction of the interviews and increase the rigor and focus of probing questions.

Research could also extend to teachers of high school African-American literature classes. Such an extension would provide comparative data: Do the teachers of these classes incorporate the same texts and authors as their English counterparts? With the course more than likely being an elective and not bound by tested standards, are the teachers' rationales different? Which rationales receive more subscription: those focusing on the student audience or those focusing on the textual offerings? How much do state standards for this course inform the selection of texts and, thereby, the framing definition of Black literature?

Lastly, because the research addresses the curricular story told in the classroom, it would be beneficial to include the students, who are the readers of the story. Such a study might interview students to examine how they interpret the words, actions, and text selections of their teachers. For instance, when teachers approach Black literature with certain rationales or at certain points of the year, how do the students read that? Do the Black students feel more connected with the Black literature featured in the classroom? If so, is race the reason or is it the text's enduring message (Sciurba, 2014/2015)? How do the students—Black and non-Black alike—prefer to approach the literature?



This research, and teaching in general, ultimately frames the students as the end goal and therefore should take time to consider their input. This student-centered focus is easy to see when several teachers tailor their teaching to the students in an effort to get them to see self and the world from different angles. Consequently, understanding how high school English teachers construct the curricular story of Black literature for their students is essential to this focus, and the findings in this study aim to tighten the lens.

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## Appendices

Appendix A: Figures

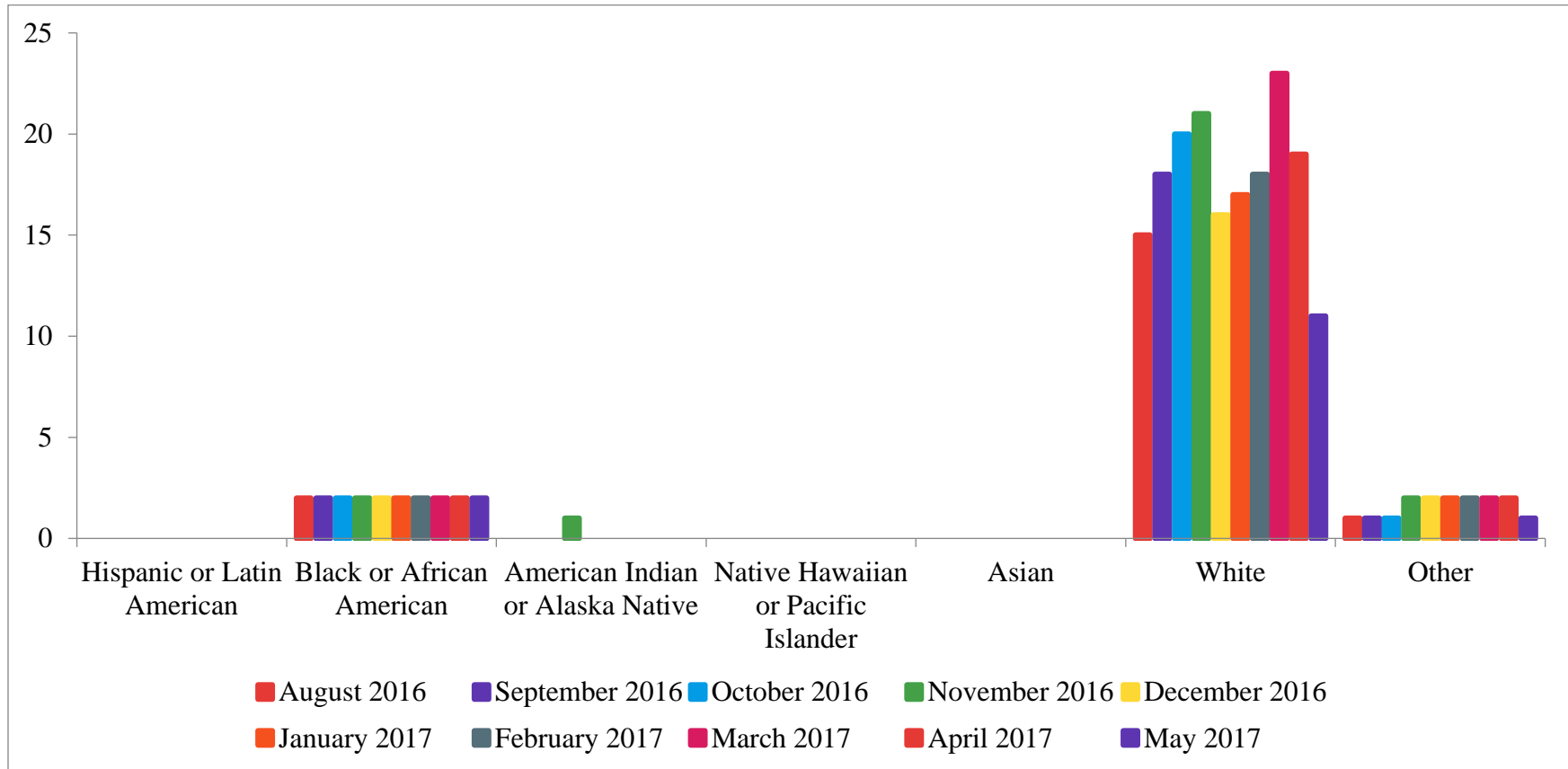


Figure 5. Teaching of Black Literature for the 2016-2017 School Year, Broken Down by Race/Ethnicity

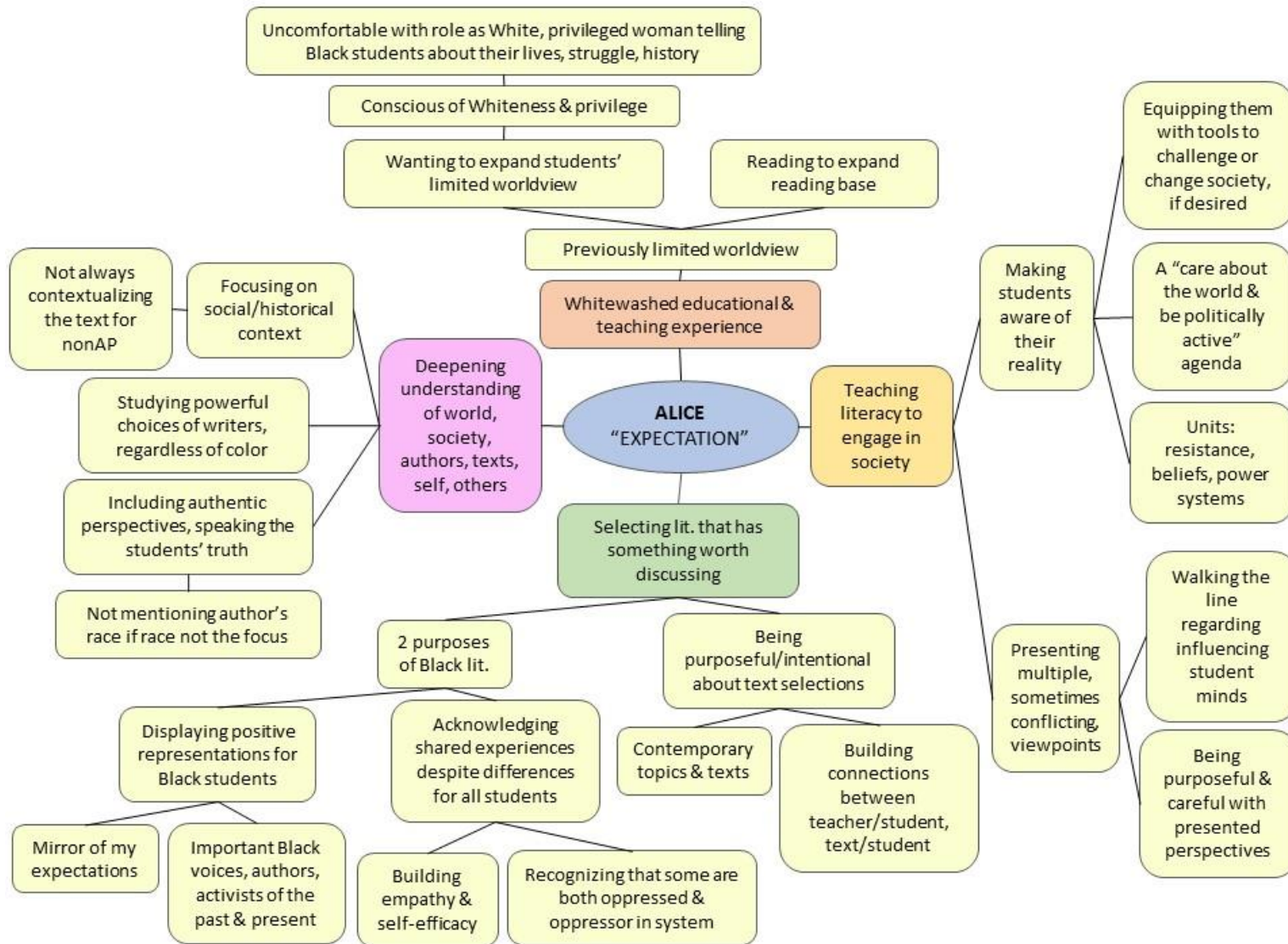


Figure 7. Pedagogical Concept Map for Alice

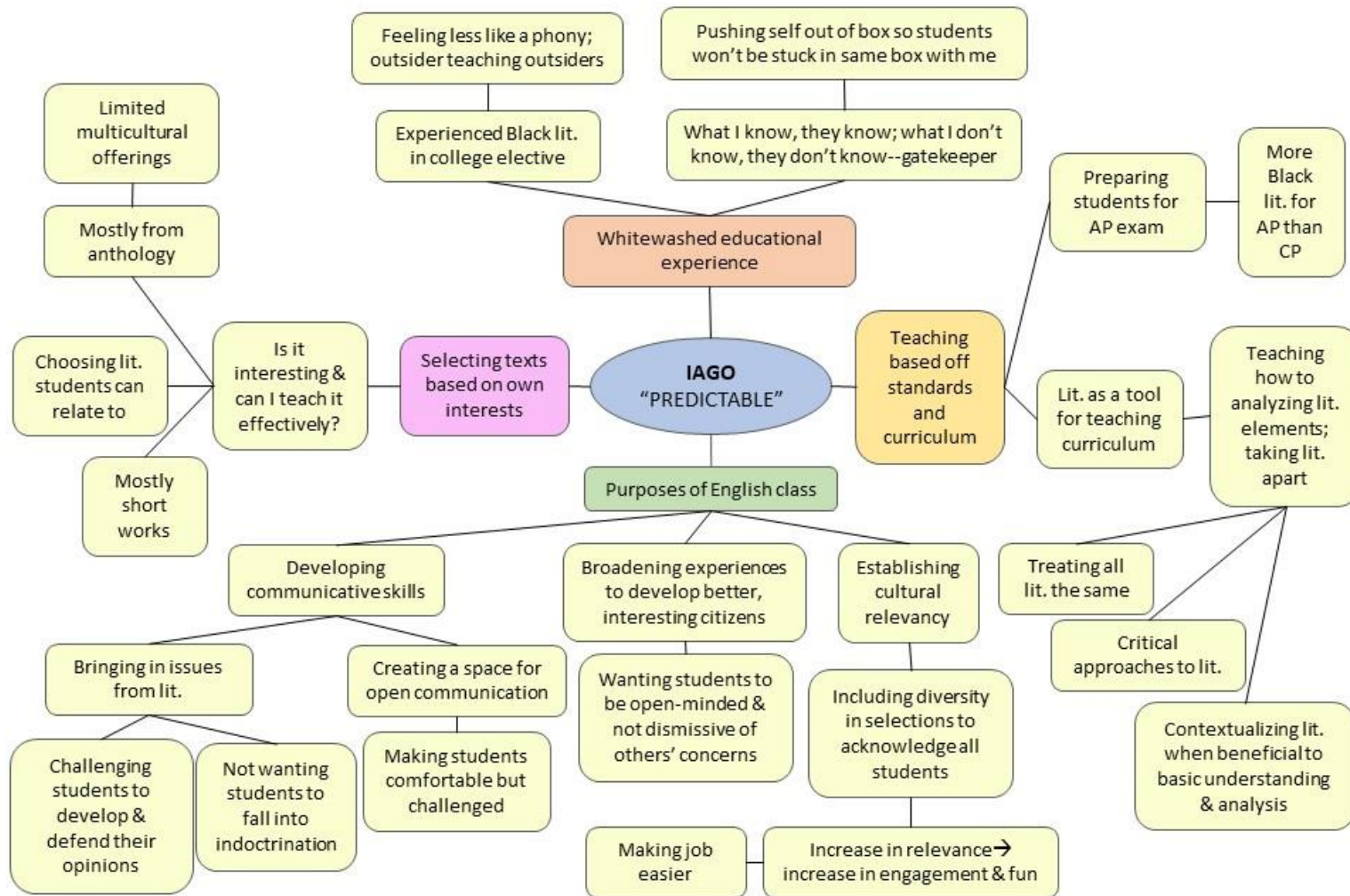


Figure 8. Pedagogical Concept Map for Iago

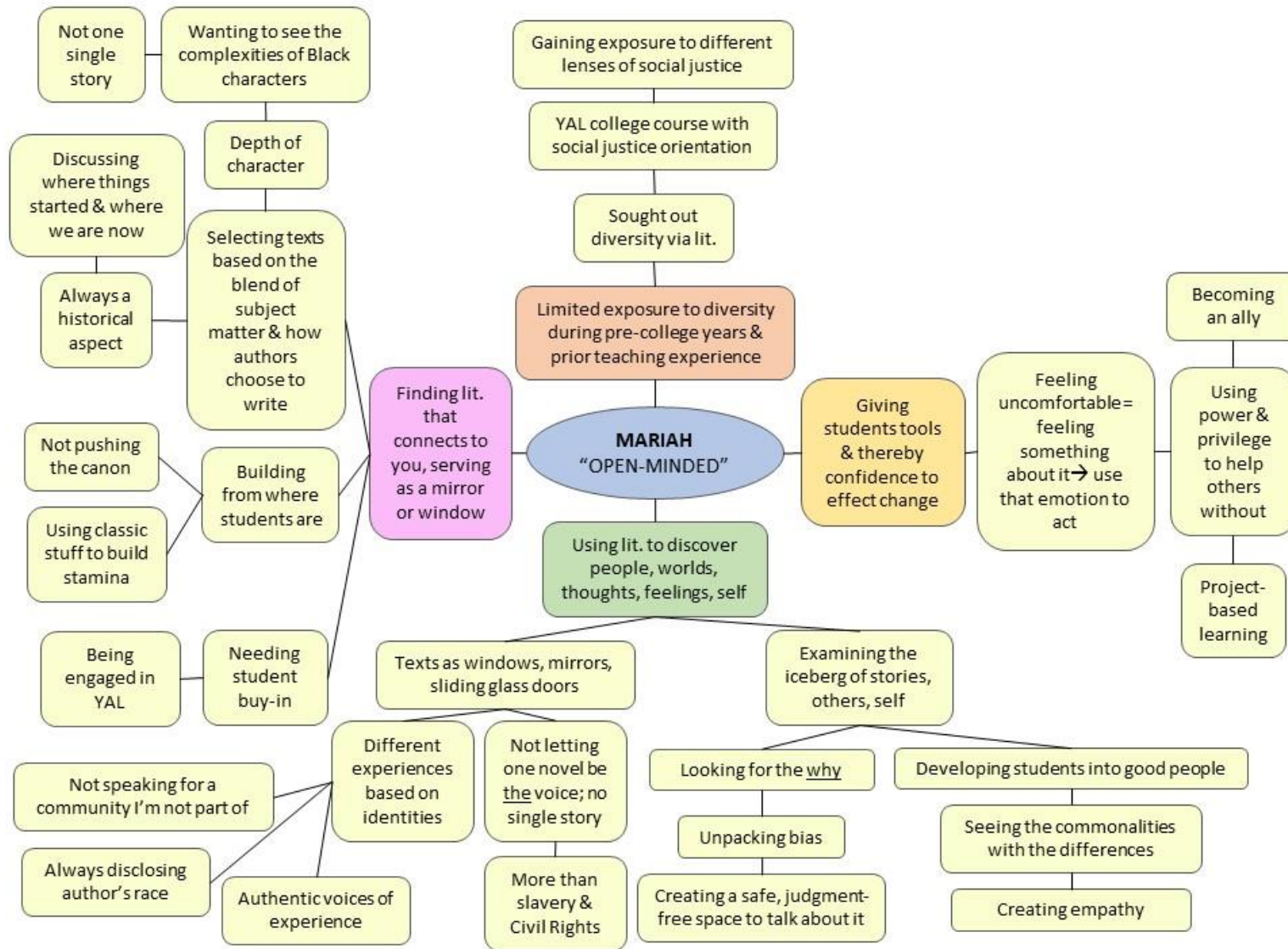


Figure 9. Pedagogical Concept Map for Mariah

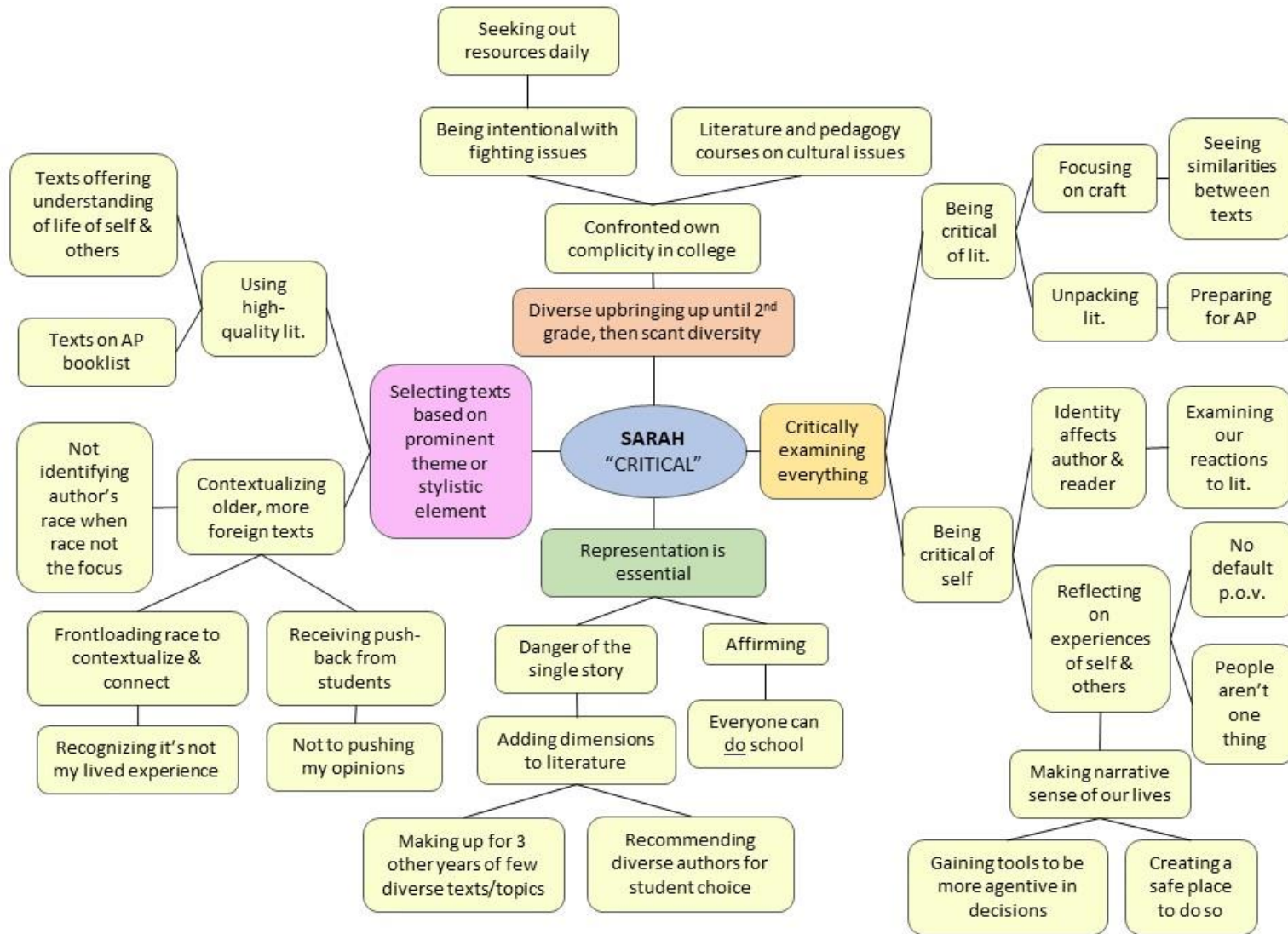


Figure 10. Pedagogical Concept Map for Sarah

## Appendix B: Tables

Table 1. Top 15 Most Frequently Studied Works

Title	Author
1. <i>Invisible Man</i> (1952)	Ralph Ellison
2. <i>Native Son</i> (1940)	Richard Wright
3. <i>Cane</i> (1923)	Jean Toomer
4. <i>Go Tell It on the Mountain</i> (1953)	James Baldwin
5. <i>Dutchman</i> (1964)	Imamu Amiri Baraka
6. <i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> (1965)	Malcolm X and Alex Haley
7. <i>Black Boy</i> (1945)	Richard Wright
8. <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> (1903)	W.E.B. Du Bois
9. <i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> (1912)	James Weldon Johnson
10. <i>Soul on Ice</i> (1968)	Eldridge Cleaver
11. <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (1959)	Lorraine Hansberry
12. <i>The Slave</i> (?)	(author unknown)
13. <i>Uncle Tom's Children</i> (1938)	Richard Wright
14. <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> (1845)	Frederick Douglass
15. <i>The Man Who Cried I Am</i> (1967)	John A. Williams

(Whitlow, 1975, p. 645)

Table 2. Past Coretta Scott King Book Award Recipients (2005-2014)

Year	Title	Author	Description excerpt
2014	<i>P.S. Be Eleven</i>	Rita Williams-Garcia	The civil rights movement is on everyone's mind, the Vietnam War is raging...and the Jackson 5 are coming to town.
2013	<i>Hand in Hand: Ten Black Men Who Changed America</i>	Andrea Davis Pinkney	<i>Hand in Hand: Ten Black Men Who Changed America</i> highlights the legacy of ten brave men who saw a need for change in the lives of black Americans.
2012	<i>Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans</i>	Kadir Nelson	The text balances the ugliness of slavery against the contributions of African Americans in the building of this great nation, proving their endurance and perseverance while striving to become first-class citizens.
2011	<i>One Crazy Summer</i>	Rita Williams-Garcia	The girls react to their new life with confidence and skepticism: who are these men in berets who visit their mother, Cecile? Why does everyone else call her Sister Nzila? What is this Black Panther day camp?
2010	<i>Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy U.S. Marshall</i>	Vaunda Micheaux Nelson	Born into slavery in Texas, Bass Reeves fled his owner during the Civil War and lived with Indians, learning all he needed to know to become a deputy U.S. marshal.
2009	<i>We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball</i>	Kadir Nelson	Kadir Nelson steps into the role of storyteller and team member in this mesmerizing narrative of the African American community's passion for and dedication to baseball.
2008	<i>Elijah of Buxton</i>	Christopher Paul Curtis	The town of Buxton, located a few miles from the Detroit River in Canada, was a community founded as a destination for slaves who traveled the Underground Railroad to freedom.
2007	<i>Copper Sun</i>	Sharon M. Draper	Classified as fiction, this page-turner is based on impeccable research of the lives of those who were captured as slaves in eighteenth-century America.
2006	<i>Day of Tears: A Novel in Dialogue</i>	Julius Lester	Lester's fictionalized account of the largest slave auction in U.S. history, held in 1859 in Savannah, Georgia, makes immediate and personal the horror of the event.
2005	<i>Remember: The Journey to School Integration</i>	Toni Morrison	Opening with images of segregated schools, the work documents the impact of the Supreme Court's decision that segregated educational facilities are "inherently unequal."

(McCollough & Phelps, 2015)



Table 6. Public School Teachers' Freedom to Select Classroom Texts

	<b>Percentage</b>
Complete freedom of choice	29.6
Must teach certain core selections	38.5
Free to choose from approved list	37.5
Can add at will to core selections	36.7
Can ask to have additional selections approved	29.0
Little or no leeway in selections	5.3

(Applebee, 1993, p. 76)

Table 7. Survey Respondent Information

<b>Survey completion</b>	<b>Race distribution</b>	<b>Years of teaching experience</b>
45 completed surveys	White: 37	Min: 0 (internship year)
2 reported not teaching Black literature	Black: 2	Max: 36
1 reported no data	American Indian or Alaska Native: 1	Mean: 10.45
42 remaining surveys	Other: 2	

## Appendix C: Survey Questions

### Q27 Consent Cover Statement

#### *The Teaching of Black Literature in High School English*

As a high school English teacher, you are invited to participate in this research study focusing on how teachers like yourself teach Black literature in their classrooms. The following anonymous survey will ask you questions examining factors surrounding your teaching of this literature and should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

Other than those encountered in everyday life, there are no foreseeable risks for participating in this survey. The valued insight gathered from your participation will contribute to a greater understanding of English teachers' pedagogical approaches to literature, specifically Black literature, and their underlying rationales. Because of this survey's anonymity, no reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to your responses. Unless you specifically give written permission to do otherwise, data will be made available only to those conducting the study.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact Vincent Price at [vprice2@vols.utk.edu](mailto:vprice2@vols.utk.edu) and 601-41-9817 or his advisor, Dr. Susan Groenke, at [sgroenke@utk.edu](mailto:sgroenke@utk.edu) and 865-974-2431. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Tennessee IRB Compliance Officer at [utkirb@utk.edu](mailto:utkirb@utk.edu) and 865-974-7697.

**Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may still withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Should you do so before completing the survey, your data will not be recorded or reported.**

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By clicking yes, I indicate that I have read the above information and consent to participate in the study's survey.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: End of Survey.

Q2 List the subjects and grades that you taught in 2016-2017.

Q9 In the rest of the survey, Black literature will be defined as poetry; novels; short stories; graphic novels; young adult literature; plays; speeches, autobiographies/narratives, and other nonfiction; such texts of Black vernacular as songs and sermons that are produced by individuals identified as Black, Negro, African American, or the like.

Q6 Did you teach any pieces of Black literature in your classes during the 2016-2017 school year?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: End of Survey.

Q7 What were your reasons for teaching the Black literature?

Q8 List the Black texts that you taught in your class(es) during the 2016-2017 school year.

Q13 Identify one Black text that you spent multiple class sessions discussing in class.

Q14 What did you focus on during the discussion of (inserted text)?

Q15 When you teach Black literature, how likely are you to focus on the following elements?

	Extremely unlikely (1)	Somewhat unlikely (2)	Neither likely nor unlikely (3)	Somewhat likely (4)	Extremely likely (5)
Writing style/structure (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Textual analysis (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading for enjoyment (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Plot (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social context (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Historical context (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q24 When you teach Black literature, how likely are you to focus on the following connections?

	Extremely unlikely (1)	Somewhat unlikely (2)	Neither likely nor unlikely (3)	Somewhat likely (4)	Extremely likely (5)
Text-to-self connections (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text-to-world connections (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Black text-to-Black text connections (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Black text-to-nonBlack text connections (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10 From where do you obtain the Black literature for your classes? (Check all that apply.)

- Literature anthology/ textbook (1)
- Classroom library (2)
- School library (3)
- Internet (4)
- Student purchases (5)
- Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q16 During the 2016-2017 school year, when did you teach Black literature? (Check all that apply.)

- August 2016 (1)
- September 2016 (2)
- October 2016 (3)
- November 2016 (4)
- December 2016 (5)
- January 2017 (6)
- February 2017 (7)
- March 2017 (8)
- April 2017 (9)
- May 2017 (10)

Q17 What is your rationale for teaching the Black literature during (inserted month(s)) ?

Q11 In general, how free are you to select the literature that you teach?

- Complete freedom of choice (1)
- Free to choose from an approved list (2)
- Can add at will to core selections (3)
- Can ask to have additional selections approved (4)
- Must teach certain selections (5)

Q12 Mark the level of influence that these factors have on the selections of Black literature that you teach.

	Little to no influence (1)	Some influence (2)	Heavy influence (3)
Personal familiarity (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text availability (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appeal to students (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recommendations from other teachers (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Literary merit (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty level (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text length (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coinciding with another course (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Censorship concerns (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q23 How many years of teaching experience do you have?

\_\_\_\_\_ years (1)

Q21 Which best describe(s) your ethnicity/race?

- Hispanic or Latin American (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (4)
- Asian (5)
- White (6)
- Other (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Q23 Additional comments

## Q28 Consent Cover Statement for Follow-Up

### *The Teaching of Black Literature in High School English*

Thank you for completing the survey and contributing to research on English teachers. I am interested in conducting follow-up interviews with a small number of participants. Here are the plans for those interviews:

Interview 1 to follow up on your survey responses and learn more about the factors influencing your teaching

Video-recorded observation of 1 lesson of your teaching a Black text to one of your classes

Interview 2 to follow up on the observation. You and I will watch the footage together and reflect on the lesson.

Possible interviews 3 and 4 if I have additional questions or need your clarification

Are you interested in participating in this second phase of the study?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q29 Please provide your name and requested information below.

Name (first, last) (1)

Email address (2)

Name of school during 2016-2017 (3)

Name of school during 2017-2018 (if different from above) (4)

Q30 Do you plan on teaching any pieces of Black literature during fall 2017 (Aug. 2017-Dec. 2017)?

- Yes (1)
- Unsure (2)
- No (3)

Q31 By clicking Submit, you are agreeing that I may link your survey responses to your name in order to use them for interview purposes.

## Appendix D: Interview Guide

### THE TEACHING OF BLACK LITERATURE IN HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH

#### Purpose Statement

By analyzing the place and treatment of Black literature in US high school English classrooms, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How do high school English teachers teach Black literature?

#### Research Questions

1. Do high school English teachers teach Black literature? If so, what is their rationale?
2. What texts/authors do they select? Why?
3. When in the curriculum or school year do they teachers teach Black literature? Why?

*Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may still withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Should you do so before completing the study, your data from this phase will be destroyed and not reported.*

#### Interview Guide Questions for Interview 1

1. What, in your opinion, is the purpose of English class?
2. How would you complete this phrase: The role of literature is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. How would you complete this phrase: The role of Black literature is \_\_\_\_\_.
  
4. You listed (titles of texts) as some of the Black texts that you taught last year. How did you come to select those particular texts?
5. Do you normally teach these particular texts each year?
6. Which Black texts do you plan on teaching this year?
7. You briefly discussed your focal points for teaching (title of text). Could you walk me through a typical discussion?
  
8. When teaching Black texts, you noted that you're more likely to focus on (certain elements/connections). Could you elaborate on why that is so? Could you provide an example of this focus in action?
9. When teaching Black texts, you noted that you're not likely to focus on (certain elements/connections). Would you care to explain why that is so?
10. How did you come to select your areas of focus for the Black works that you teach?
11. If you teach multiple class levels—e.g., honors, AP, CP, regular ed—choose a text that you teach in (class) and discuss what you focus on. Now do the same for (class).
  
12. Describe the demographics of the school's student body.
13. Would you say that your classes reflect that same distribution?
14. Tell me about the influence your racial identification has on your text selection/your focal points.



15. Tell me about the influence your classes' racial makeup has on your text selection/your focal points.
16. You briefly provided a rationale for teaching Black literature during the months of           (selected months)          . Could you elaborate on that?
17. If you have control over the selections, how do you make your selections?
18. You noted that                      greatly influence(s) your Black text selection. Tell me about that.
19. Is there anything in a Black text that you look for before deciding to teach it?

**Interview Guide Questions for Interview 2 (following observation)**

1. Before we watch the video, could you briefly walk me through the lesson?
2. How did you come to select this particular text to teach?
3. What did you intend the students to experience through or take away from this lesson?
4. How did you come to select that/those particular area(s) of focus when teaching this text?
5. Whenever you teach this text, do you typically focus on the same things as presented in this lesson?
6. Here you said                     . Could you elaborate on that?
7. Here you have the students to                     . Could you explain your reasoning for that?
8. About how many days do/will you spend on this text?
9. What text did you teach before this one? Could you explain the rationale behind this sequence of texts?
10. What text will follow this one? Could you explain the rationale behind this sequence of texts?

## Vita

Vincent Price earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in English Education and French (minor) from The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, MS. It was during this time that he also worked as a freelance columnist, having several of his articles published in *The Hattiesburg American*. He then returned to his hometown of Vicksburg, MS to teach at Warren Central High School for nearly five years. While there, he taught English (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>) and French I/II (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>) and co-sponsored the WC Literary Club, a student organization that led the school's involvement in Poetry Out Loud and printed a yearly literary magazine.

Vincent then temporarily left teaching to pursue a Master of Science and Doctoral degree in English Education at The University of Tennessee in Knoxville, TN. During his time there, he served in multiple roles. In addition to being an officer of the Multicultural Graduate Student Organization, Vincent served as a graduate teaching associate, responsible for supervising English Education and ESL-endorsement interns. He also taught an introductory course to undergraduate students that acclimated them to the skills necessary for success in a secondary school environment. It was for his work in this course that he received a technology innovation grant to incorporate video-recordings as means for student reflection. During his doctoral pursuit, he launched Price Stamp of Approval, his editing and writing tutorial service, to help aspiring writers improve their final products.

Having taught English and witnessing the scarcity of Black literature in the classroom anthology and subsequently in the classroom itself, Vincent brought this experience to graduate work. Ever focused on the English classroom, he designed his research throughout his M.S. and PhD work around the teaching of Black literature in high school English classrooms in an effort to increase its presence. Such research culminated in a dissertation that explored how English teachers do so—not to mention an article published in *Changing English*. He ended the last two years of his doctoral study excelling in 3MT competitions, winning first place on the local level and People's Choice on the regional level for his presentation "Not only...but also: Blending the binary approaches of teaching Black literature."

Upon receiving his doctorate, Vincent intends on returning to the secondary school English classroom to put his newly developed knowledge and skills into action.