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Running head: TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching and Learning That Takes Place in a Diverse English Classroom  
Through the Use of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Sharon A. Dungee

Submitted for the partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

Molloy University

2023

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES**

The dissertation of **Sharon Amanda Dungee** entitled: *The Teaching and Learning That Takes Place in a Diverse English Classroom Through the Use of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the School of Education and Human Services has been read and approved by the Committee:

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**Abstract**

As the demographics of the United States continue to diversify, teachers must implement culturally responsive instruction in their classrooms to reach all students. This qualitative case study used the theoretical framework of Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) to examine how a White, Advanced Placement English teacher selected class literature, how her class of mostly 12th-grade students of color (one White student) responded to the book *Native Son* by Richard Wright, how the students saw themselves in the characters, and how they expressed their feelings during class discussions and assignments. The data collection was composed of teacher interviews, interview transcripts, classroom observations during the *Native Son* unit, student focus groups, and observational field notes. The teacher developed numerous effective teaching approaches for her ethnically and culturally diverse student body, allowing her students to make cultural connections through a variety of literary genres. The teacher felt that she chose culturally responsive literature with great care for her students. Several students believed that the teacher genuinely cared about them and took great measures to select culturally responsive literature that reflected their culture, identity, and life experiences. Still, others felt that the book selections did not represent them or their cultures because there were no authors of Latinx descent. Also, most students expressed frustration with society and what they saw as the perpetuation of systematic racism, societal stereotypes, and inequality in their community and beyond. This study's findings show implications that underline the value of adolescents perceiving themselves in literature through a positive perspective and the significance of teachers using culturally relevant practices in daily instruction.

### **Acknowledgments**

Alfred North Whitehead (n.d.) once said, “No one who achieves success does so without acknowledging the help of others. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with gratitude.” The path to a dissertation is not traveled alone. Neither are the demands and sacrifices involved made by a single person. For this reason, I must first express my gratitude to my husband, Bill, and my three children, Angelique, Jacob, and Lucas, for their unwavering support and for the love and patience they have shown me throughout this journey.

I would also like to acknowledge the numerous individuals who have influenced and supported me in the development and creation of this dissertation. I am most grateful to my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Allison Roda. Dr. Roda has been an incredible support system for me. My goals were attainable as a direct result of the words of encouragement and the continuous support that I received from her.

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**Dedication**

“You do not choose your family. They are God’s gift to you, as you are to them.”

—Desmond Tutu

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, my husband Bill, my daughter Angelique, and my sons Jacob and Lucas. Your sacrifices and understanding during the long hours spent writing, researching, and studying have made this achievement possible. I am forever grateful for your patience, kindness, and constant motivation to pursue my dreams. You are my inspiration, and I dedicate this dissertation to you with all my love.

To my mother, Mildred, and father, Herman, in heaven, thank you for raising me to be so strong and independent. To my siblings, Monica, Herman Jr., and Julio, as well as my Aunt Sandra, cousin Djanna, and my entire family, thank you for your undying support.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

It is not a new revelation that having a teacher of the same race as the student is beneficial to the student's learning, but it is still something that is not considered the norm (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Hundley, 1965; Kettler, 2017). Indeed, White female teachers make up most of the teaching force, even though student demographics have grown increasingly racially diverse. In 2020, U.S. public schools were more diverse than in 2010. Between 2000 and 2017, the percentage of 5- to 17-year-olds who were White decreased from 62% to 51%, while the percentage who were Hispanic increased from 16% to 25% (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Also, in the Fall of 2020, about 49.4 million students attended public schools from prekindergarten to grade 12. Of the 49.4 million public school students, 22.6 million (51%) were White, 13.8 million (25%) were Hispanic, 7.4 million (15%) were Black, 2.7 million (5%) were Asian, 2.2 million (4%) were two or more races, 0.5 million (1%) were American Indian/Alaska Native, and (.2%) were Pacific Islanders.

As the demographics in the United States continue to become increasingly diverse, teachers must incorporate culturally relevant instruction in their classrooms as a measure to reach all students. Teachers should instruct all students, regardless of race or ethnicity, through culturally responsive teaching (CRT) practices and provide literature that reflects their diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives (Gay, 2010). Ladson-Billings (1994) noted that culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) recognizes the significance of students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. In this dissertation, I also utilize the New York State CR-S framework for educators that provides guidance on implementing student-centered learning environments that affirm racial, linguistic, and cultural identities.

My childhood, education, and relationships influenced my desire to explore teachers' culturally relevant practices and how they choose literature for their increasingly diverse student population. I was born in the South Bronx and relocated to Long Island with my parents and older sister at 3 ½ years old. My father decided to relocate our family to seek “better” schools and a better way of life. My father, a Panamanian native, was not fluent in English. My African American mother was from Columbia, South Carolina. My parents have always emphasized the importance of education.

I attended elementary school in one of Long Island's most diverse communities. The Abbott School District (pseudonym) has long welcomed individuals of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Abbott schools remain one of Long Island's most diverse school districts today. Yet, as a child, our textbooks and curricula did not reflect diverse populations. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the only individual from a diverse background recognized and only mentioned in January. My parents realized that to understand my unique culture, they would have to teach me about it. When I returned home from a long day of kindergarten, my mother tried to smile and read to me when she was not too tired. She would tell me, “Sharon, books are your windows to the world.” Ironically, I had no idea how the phrase my mother used so long ago (“windows to the world”) would have such an impact and meaning in my life. Sims Bishop (2022) suggested that books should serve as windows and mirrors. Books as mirrors contain narratives, characters, and experiences in which you may recognize yourself. If students have the opportunity to read texts that reflect their unique diversity, they may develop personal connections to the text. Students feel seen and acknowledged after reading literature that represents their culture. A book that serves as a window provides insight into the life or experience of another individual. When teachers offer books to their students as windows and mirrors, it encourages meaningful

reflection about the texts they have read. Teachers should choose a balance of windows and mirrors for classrooms. When teachers choose diverse and sophisticated texts, their students have a tremendous opportunity to learn about the many cultures of their peers. Unfortunately, little literature reflected my culture, beliefs, or customs throughout my K-12 school experience. I believe that not being exposed to positive role models that portrayed individuals who looked like me negatively impacted my self-esteem. According to Sanders (2009),

Multicultural literature spans all literary genres but generally focuses on primary characters who are members of underrepresented groups whose racial, ethnic, religious, sexual orientation or culture historically has been marginalized or misrepresented by the dominant culture. (p. 194)

This form of multicultural literature could empower students with a depth of information that encourages a never-ending desire to learn. Multicultural literature teaches students to become more conscious and compassionate of society's ever-changing cultures (Evans, 2010). I now realize that my mother's frequent use of the phrase "books are the windows and mirrors" was a metaphor for seeing beyond my world and imagining the beautiful, diverse worlds of others.

As I prepared to begin first grade, my mother's health deteriorated. My first-grade teacher Mrs. Douglas (pseudonym) noticed that I was having academic and emotional difficulties. Therefore, she began working with me nearly every day after school to prevent me from falling behind in my core subjects. I told Mrs. Douglas that I wanted to be a teacher like her when I grew up, and she looked at me and said, "Sharon, you will." My mother died that summer, and I was inconsolable.

My journey through the remainder of elementary, middle, and high school was not easy, but I managed to make it through! I earned three college degrees and achieved my dream of becoming a first-grade teacher like Mrs. Douglas, whom I adored. Like Mrs. Douglas, I exposed my students to great literary works written by successful people with whom they could identify. My students' eyes would light up as I spoke about trailblazers such as the great poet Maya Angelou, the tennis player Arthur Ashe, the novelist James Bridges, the Civil Rights Advocate Ruby Bridges, and others from diverse backgrounds.

Many diverse cultural, racial, and ethnic groups attend school in New York; nevertheless, many students do not see themselves reflected in our schools' curriculum or literature. The curriculum taught to me as a student growing up in a diverse neighborhood and attending a diverse school was not indicative of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of our student population. The academics and support personnel heavily influenced the curriculum. The lack of diversity was evident in many aspects of the curriculum, including the dolls we played with, the faces in our textbooks, the songs we sang, and even the school meals we enjoyed. There was little to no diversity presented to my classmates and me throughout my school experiences. Instead, we experienced primarily Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy.

Gray et al. (2009) noted that literature must be genuine, realistic, and adhere to an ideology and culturally conscious message. Identifying and introducing students to literature where they may see themselves, their families, their cultures, and similar experiences can allow them to connect with the literature they read, discover literature they like, and even be inspired to write about themselves. Educators, stakeholders, parents, and society must recognize the importance of culturally relevant teaching practices and ensure that teachers offer literature that reflects our growing, diverse student population.

In this dissertation, I examined how high school students perceived themselves within their predominantly Latinx classroom in terms of the English Language Arts content, atmosphere, and instructional approaches. My research also highlighted the critical need for educators to implement culturally relevant pedagogy, the importance of how a White teacher selected her literature, how students engaged in dialogue, saw themselves in the text, and expressed their feelings about a specific unit on the book *Native Son* by Richard Wright.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The framework used for this case study was Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billing's CRP theory. It adapted educational practices to fit racially diverse students' motivational and learning demands.

#### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), designed by Ladson-Billings (1995), served as the foundation for my research on culturally relevant instructional practices and literature selection for students. Ladson-Billings suggested that students had the most significant academic achievement when their teachers respected their cultural norms and challenged the status quo by developing critical awareness. Ladson-Billings (1995) further noted that CRP is a methodology that emphasizes various areas of student accomplishment and encourages students to maintain their cultural identities. Culturally relevant pedagogy also requires that students cultivate viewpoints that question existing inequities.

In her 1995 essay, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," Ladson-Billing drew on research involving the interaction of culture and education to provide a theoretical framework that contains three major components: (a) students must experience academic success, (b) students must develop and maintain cultural competence, and (c) students must

develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

### ***Academic Success***

Academic achievement is the first pillar by Ladson-Billings (1995) when she noted that teachers' first responsibility is to nurture their students' minds. Culturally relevant teachers hold students to rigorous and precise academic standards and meet them where they are. Culturally relevant teachers understand the subject, the learner, and how to teach the subject matter. Culturally relevant teachers consider what they teach, why they teach it, and how they will teach it based on the unique characteristics of their students.

### ***Cultural Competence***

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), teachers who show cultural competency understand the culture and its significance in education and accept responsibility for their students' community. When teachers demonstrate cultural competency, the classroom resembles a room filled with mirrors and windows. As Ladson-Billings stated,

Students see themselves reflected in the classroom and are provided with the opportunity to learn about and observe the lived experiences of others. The teacher utilizes the students' culture as a foundation for learning, supporting students in recognizing and respecting their cultural beliefs and practices while gaining access to and learning about the broader world. (pp. 160-161)

Students may critically explore their identity, culture, stereotypes, and privilege to improve their educational success.

### ***Critical Consciousness***

Ladson-Billings (1995) noted that socio-political knowledge encourages teachers to educate themselves and their students on the personal and socio-political issues that influence their students, student groups, and society. Teachers should include sociopolitical consciousness in their curriculum. Displaying sociopolitical consciousness ensures that teachers encourage students to consider the present political atmosphere and see themselves as agents of social change and disrupting inequalities. Therefore, students are empowered to challenge the inequitable status quo among individuals, communities, and society through their thoughts and actions.

Recent progress has shown that critical consciousness increases young people's will to combat systemic injustice (Ginwright, 2010; Watts et al., 2011). It also improves academic success and motivation (Carter, 2008; O'Connor, 1997). Specifically, school-based programming designed to cultivate critical consciousness improves academic engagement, accomplishment (Cabrera et al., 2014; Cammarota, 2007; Dee & Penner, 2016), and enrollment in higher education (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013). Researchers have suggested that critical consciousness of repressive societal factors could replace feelings of isolation and self-blame for one's struggles with a sense of engagement in a broader collective quest for social justice (Diemer et al., 2014; Ginwright, 2010). Research also shows that a critical consciousness of racism might inspire Black students to resist repressive pressures by remaining in school and excelling academically (Carter, 2008). The desire to disprove the prejudices contained in racist institutions and structures is driven by this motivation (Carter, 2008; Sanders, 1997).

### **Statement of the Problem**

As reported in the introduction, the racial/ethnic demographics of U.S. schools have changed significantly. According to the Institute of Education Sciences (National Center for Education Statistics), by 2025, students of color will constitute the majority of high school graduates; however, teachers' practices and the literary content students are exposed to have not changed significantly to reflect the diversity in the classrooms (Acquah et al., 2016).

Youngs (2015) noted that educators should recognize the correlation between the exposure to multicultural literature, the formation of a healthy intellectual identity, and a feeling of belonging in school and society. Literary characters may offer one of the only spaces where socially isolated teenagers meet individuals who are different from themselves or have similar beliefs and feelings. In a culture that is becoming more diverse, teachers must implement culturally responsive instruction in their classrooms. When diverse students do not see themselves represented in the literature they read, they often disengage (Hughes Hassell et al., 2019). How teachers select culturally responsive literature for their students is sometimes disregarded. It may be challenging for students to learn, feel welcomed, and experience a sense of belonging when they cannot relate to the Eurocentric literature standard in many classrooms (Hammond, 2015).

Sims Bishop (1990) noted that children might negatively perceive themselves in society if they do not see themselves in books or if the images they see are inaccurate, unpleasant, or humorous. My study was essential for all educators to comprehend, visualize, and engage in meaningful dialogues about the need to teach literature through a culturally responsive lens that recognizes, acknowledges, understands, and respects our increasingly diverse student population.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This qualitative case study described the teaching and learning in an advanced-placement English high school class where the teacher used culturally responsive approaches while she taught from the text *Native Son* by Richard Wright. I chose Mrs. Smith (pseudonym) as the focus of my dissertation. Mrs. Smith is a White teacher who has taught high school English for 25 years. Throughout her tenure, she has taught various courses within her English certification. As a district administrator, I approached Mrs. Smith last year about a matter brought to my attention by a local civil rights organization. This organization was concerned about numerous works of literature that did not accurately represent our diverse student population (see Appendix A). Mrs. Smith and I reviewed the book list because I knew she would be the most knowledgeable about the titles.

Mrs. Smith appeared to be quite concerned as we reviewed the list of titles. I asked her if she had any particular apprehensions about the titles the organization had cited. She responded, “We cannot just erase the mistakes of yesterday; we must learn from them.” Mrs. Smith took the time to review the list of concerns with me, bringing to my attention a few titles that should be removed and titles that should remain, and her rationale for her recommendations (most notably, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe).

Her enthusiasm and genuine care for her ethnically and culturally diverse student body profoundly moved me. I told her that I was researching the significance of teaching practices and the selection of culturally relevant literature. Although Mrs. Smith does not have formal training in culturally relevant practices, she has attended several workshops and is on the district’s curriculum textbook committee. Mrs. Smith explained that when she selects literature for her

students to explore, she uses the district rubric (see Appendix B) to ensure that her students are represented positively in all of her text selections.

Mrs. Smith assigns *Native Son* by Richard Wright to her high school honors students as required reading each year. *Native Son* was inspired by five young African American males that Richard Wright knew as a child. The book tells the tale of Bigger Thomas, a 20-year-old Black youth living in extreme poverty on Chicago's South Side in the 1930s. During his childhood, this young man endures a multitude of barriers. Bigger was bitter and outraged at White people and the systemic oppression that kept him down. Bigger and his friends often channeled their anger inward, victimizing other Black kids. They disobeyed Jim Crow rules because they believed declaring their humanity and equality by refusing to cooperate was more important than the repercussions.

Wright believed *Native Son* would shock and horrify the White liberals who read his novel. *Native Son* was the first major American book to examine the outrage and splintering of Black identity as a result of oppression. Although the storylines are set in the 1930s, Mrs. Smith believed many of the text's themes are still relevant today. She feels it is essential to recognize the inequities in the community she teaches.

The media reports daily on incidents of racially motivated violence as the diversity of the United States continues to increase. During my conversations with Mrs. Smith about this text, she reported that she is aware that many of her students continue to experience attitudes and difficulties (e.g., segregation and racism) portrayed in the novel. Mrs. Smith believed that her honors class was emotionally and intellectually mature enough to discuss the topics of *Native Son* and knew that her classroom of mostly Latinx students could often relate to the themes in the book.

This case study occurred in a predominantly Latinx, Long Island suburban high school. The student enrollment in the district is over 8,000 students. There are eight schools in total. Students of color account for 95% of the student body, with approximately 80% Latinx, 15% Black, and 5% White. Approximately 30% of the district's students are ELL, and 75% are economically disadvantaged (New York State Education Department, 2020-21). All students in the district receive free breakfast and lunch daily. The majority of the students represent various countries of origin (Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua). The district employs over 30 administrators, 500 teachers, and 550 support staff. Most employees, including the focal teacher, are White.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question that guided this research was: What teaching and learning occurred within an advanced-placement English high school class in which the teacher uses culturally responsive practices?

### **Sub-Research Questions**

1. How does the teacher incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy while using the text *Native Son* by Richard Wright?
2. What criteria does the teacher consider when selecting culturally responsive literature for students? What considerations influenced the teacher's decision when making book selections?
3. How do students engage with the text and each other? How do students perceive their representation in the text?
4. What teaching practices does the teacher find most effective when teaching diverse students? How do those practices relate to culturally responsive pedagogy?

## Design and Methods

After careful consideration, the qualitative research design was deemed as the most effective way to explore the teaching and learning in a high school advanced-placement English class where the teacher used culturally responsive education practices in her instruction and selection of literature. Specifically, I was interested in how these factors interacted.

Gay (2022) noted that cultural differences are strengths in CRT, which uses diversity to inform curriculum design, classroom environment, and instructional practices. Culturally responsive classrooms foster a feeling of belonging, intrinsic motivation, and competence in students. I often wondered whether I would have had a greater sense of self-worth and performed better in school if I had had exposure to culturally relevant practices and diverse works of literature throughout my early education. I was fortunate that my parents and my first-grade teacher took the time to introduce me to literature about racially diverse people. Still, most of my schooling focused on Eurocentric curricula.

My data collection consisted of interviews, interview transcripts, classroom observations, focus groups, and field notes. Due to the students' schedules, I conducted classroom observations and interviews in 40-minute increments twice a week over the course of two months from November to December 2022. The unit on *Native Son* was observed for 14 class sessions (40 minutes).

My research included interviewing 18 students and their classroom teacher. On-site, inperson interviews with participants and focus groups of four to five students were used. In the classroom, students were observed formally and informally (prior parent consent was obtained). Student interactions were observed throughout classroom teaching and other shared activities.

Interactions between the teacher and her students were also observed throughout classroom periods. As an observer, I blended in with the students and monitored what occurred in the classroom. While the teacher presented her lesson, I engaged with students and participated in class discussions. I spoke with the students to find out how they felt about the text and how they saw themselves portrayed in the text.

Student artifacts and aesthetics were observed, including class bulletin boards and student work inside and outside the classroom. According to Morrison et al. (2008), aesthetics requires teachers to consider their students' feelings. Creating nurturing and collaborative physical spaces in which students are inspired to achieve their fullest potential is a fundamental principle of culturally relevant instruction.

### **Limitations**

Culturally relevant practices (CRP) from a single teacher's perspective informed the data analysis for this case study. This study offered a limited view of her classroom's culturally relevant teaching approaches because of the focus on one unit of study. Another limitation was that this was an Advanced Placement class with academically advanced students. In a mixed ability general education class, CRP may look very different. Also, I could only observe this class for 40 minutes 2 to 3 times a week. Given the high school schedule's structure, I could not extend the 40 minutes.

Consequently, observations were constrained by the limitations of the school day. The last limitation was that few student participants were willing to be completely candid with me. I tried to ease the participants' concerns, as I assured them they were in a safe and supportive environment and that the information they provided would be kept to their perceptions of the text. This was a successful strategy for developing rapport and open conversations.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

This research used the following keywords to better understand the primary ideas discussed during the study.

**Case study** – Empirical research that explores a current phenomenon in-depth and situates it within its real-world context, “especially when the line between phenomenon and environment is not easily discernible” (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

**Culturally relevant education** - “Culturally relevant education is a conceptual framework that recognizes the significance of incorporating students’ cultural backgrounds, interests, and lived experiences into all aspects of teaching and learning within and outside the classroom” (Milner, 2011, pp. 66-67).

**Culturally relevant pedagogy, or CRP**- “Empowers students academically, socially, emotionally, and politically by imparting information, skills, and attitudes through cultural references” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp. 16–17).

**Culturally responsive teaching, or CRT** – “Using ethnically diverse students’ cultural knowledge, past experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning experiences more meaningful and successful for them.” (Gay, 2010, p. 31).

### **Conclusion**

Through a well-designed qualitative case study, I explored themes associated with a teacher’s CRP and focused on how she selected literature for her diverse student body. By identifying themes in CRP and text selection, I provided critical new insights into the growing body of research on this topic. I hope that my case study will encourage other teachers and administrators to reflect on their practices and adjust their methodology and mindsets to support diverse learners.

The next chapter explores the literature that serves as the foundation for the study. The literature review framed my argument more effectively using the work of Gloria LadsonBillings. I call attention to the necessity for more educators to undertake CRT and the significance of selecting literature that reflects the increasing diversity of the nation's student body.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Educators encounter several obstacles in serving the literacy needs of racially, ethnically, or linguistically diverse students (Jones-Goods, 2019). Teachers often struggle to identify literacy materials that integrate various engaging strategies for all students. As a result, many students fall below grade level and lose interest in reading. One of the obstacles teachers encounter is identifying how to capitalize on the diversity in their classroom that will allow for the most significant impact on students' literacy acquisition. In addition, teachers' culturally relevant practices significantly impact their students' learning experiences and outcomes (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Zaretta Hammond (2015) noted that CRT is one of the most effective methods for helping students close the achievement gap. CRT, according to Hammond, is the educator's ability to recognize how a student's culture influences how they learn and make sense of things and then respond in a positive and helpful manner with teaching strategies that use the student's cultural knowledge as a bridge between what they already know and new ideas and content to help them better process information.

James Banks (2002) asserted that education must be transformative to assist students from diverse cultures and languages. Banks explained that being transformative entails assisting students in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and values they need to become social critics who deliberate over their decisions and implement them in their personal, social, political, and economic lives.

Ladson-Billings (1995a) used the phrase "culturally relevant pedagogy" to define a type of teaching that emphasizes engaging learners whose experiences and cultures have historically been excluded from mainstream settings. Ladson-Billings (1994) described culturally relevant

pedagogy as one “that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by imparting knowledge, skills, and attitudes through cultural referents” (pp. 16–17). Billings (1995a) explained that culturally relevant pedagogy is a “pedagogy of opposition similar to critical pedagogy but committed to collective rather than merely individual empowerment” (p. 160).

Ladson-Billings (2014) “remixed” her original theory in her most recent work, building on Paris’s (2012) theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy. According to Ladson Billings, pedagogy should constantly evolve to meet students’ needs, and “any scholar who believes she has arrived without continuing the work does not understand the nature and meaning of scholarship” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 82). Ladson-Billings explained that adopting culturally sustaining pedagogy encourages researchers to consider global identities, including developments in the arts, literature, music, athletics, and film, rather than focusing on only racial or ethnic groups.

Moller (2012) noted that students develop a heightened sense of social awareness and concern for others due to exposure to various forms of literature. Children must access literature that reflects their race, culture, experiences, and environment. Literature should incorporate depictions of various facets of daily life within a culture, emphasizing family and ethnic significance (Yenika-Agbaw & Napoli, 2011). Literature that enables the students to view various facets of themselves, their community, and the people they care about can serve as tangible tools that affirm their racial identity (Bishop, 1990; Yenika-Agbaw & Napoli, 2011). Ezra Jack Keats, for instance, was among the first authors of picture books to portray African American characters in an urban setting. After half a century, children still enjoy reading *The Snowy Day* (Judy Newman at Scholastic, n.d.).

The issue of literacy instruction was not raised until 1988 due to a lack of research data to support instructional literacy approaches for children of color (Delpit, 1988). According to Nieto et al. (2012), one third of all public school students are culturally and linguistically diverse; children of color will constitute a statistical majority by 2035, 57% of all students by 2050, and Whites will no longer be the majority demographic in America by 2050.

Teachers have always struggled to adapt to the diversity of students who enter their classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). According to the most recent State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) study, 82% of public-school teachers self-identified as White. This is problematic, since students are becoming more racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse.

As described in Chapter 1, this qualitative case study described the teaching and learning that occurred in an advanced-placement English high school class. The teacher used culturally responsive practices while teaching Richard Wright's novel *Native Son*. Furthermore, this study explored how the teacher implemented culturally relevant pedagogy; what she considered while selecting class literature; and how students engaged in dialogue with one another, saw themselves in the text, and described their feelings about the text.

This case study took place in a diverse Long Island suburban high school to raise awareness of the necessity of exposing high school students to culturally relevant literature. Literacy teaching approaches must adapt and develop to suit the needs of the evolving, diverse student population. Bandura (2001) noted that learning is a social-cultural act governed by language. When educators can discuss our cognitive processes, they gain knowledge. Conversational learning, also known as dialogue talk, has its roots in the oral tradition of culture.

This type of interaction allows us to organize our thoughts into coherent expressions, hear what others think, and listen to how others respond. Tharp and Gallimore (1991) noted that this instructional conversation functions as a mental blender, blending new material with existing knowledge and a student's schema. Culturally responsive literacy instruction connects the classroom to the student's reality and should be aligned with the student's cultural values while concentrating on academic performance.

### **Background on Culturally Responsive Instruction**

In the 1960s and 1970s, efforts to integrate schools resulted in a new method of educating students from diverse backgrounds. Academic literature began to include concepts such as culturally appropriate (Au & Jordan, 1981), culturally congruent (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), culturally responsive (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Lee, 1998), and culturally compatible (Jordan, 1985) in academic literature (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Sleeter, 2012). From this foundation, educational research grew in two primary ways distinct from multicultural education. One was about how teachers carry out their duties, as evidenced by the work of Geneva Gay (1975, 1980, 2002, 2010, 2013), and the other was about how to teach with cultural sensitivity. The second emphasized teacher posture and worldview, as articulated by Gloria Ladson-Billings' work in culturally relevant pedagogy (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006, 2014). While distinguishing between teaching and pedagogy, both strands embraced social justice and the classroom as a site of social transformation.

Culturally relevant education combines these various strands of research to effectively instruct students from diverse backgrounds (Dover, 2013). Over the past two decades, numerous teachers and teacher-training programs have claimed to use these principles. However, as proposed education reforms have grown in popularity, Sleeter (2012) affirmed that standardized

curricula and teaching methods have gradually replaced and displaced these methods (pp. 578579).

While culturally relevant instruction is increasing in popularity, what this method truly entails is often debatable. Muñiz (2019) noted that researchers had cautioned that educational leaders and individual teachers might embrace simplified notions of teaching in a culturally responsible way without adequate direction. Teachers and those who support their efforts must have a shared understanding of what culturally responsive instruction entails and does not entail.

Ladson-Billings' (1995a) article, "But That's Just Good Teaching!" noted that learners' diverse identities and experiences in a culturally responsive classroom should be recognized, valued, and utilized to connect challenging new learning. All students benefit from this method of individualized instruction. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings suggested that far more Black students' cultural knowledge methods are seen as impediments to learning and that their capability and potential are questioned.

Through culturally responsive instruction, students learn to think critically about other students' cultural histories and experiences. In an increasingly diverse society, all students must learn to respect their cultural heritage and the experiences of others.

### **Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction**

Culturally relevant literacy is the instruction that bridges the gap between the school and the student's world and is consistent with the values of the student's own culture, aims to ensure academic learning, and encourages teachers to adapt their instructional practice to meet the needs of all students (Collins, 2006).

The literature on culturally responsive literacy recognizes that cultural perspectives on literacy vary. A historical study by Heath (1983) examined children's literacy practices in diverse

cultures. The results showed how each group's perspective on literacy was reflected in her findings; Heath discovered that (a) White children were immersed in print from birth and (b) Black children were not generally read to but were exposed to print in social situations. Although students from varied racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds may lack the print literacy that seems essential for academic achievement, they possess literacy knowledge rooted in their lived experiences (Gee, 2000). According to Au (1995), the best way to address this issue and help students learn and succeed in school is to make literacy-learning activities more culturally relevant to students' homes. The reviewed literature supports the belief that implementing CRT approaches enables teachers to address their students' unique and diverse needs.

Instructional methods that address cultural and linguistic challenges have the most significant opportunity to assist culturally and linguistically diverse learners to become proficient readers (Beaulieu, 2002). The challenge that teachers confront today is the necessity to include more cultural elements into their lessons to enhance student learning while maintaining their cultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Teachers should remember that for culturally and linguistically diverse students to achieve their full potential, their lessons should be designed to promote the acquisition of increasingly complex knowledge and skills in a comfortable environment that fosters collaboration and positive interactions among classmates. Obiakor and Utleyn (2001) noted that these inclusive classrooms emphasize high standards and achievements for all students, including culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Significant characteristics of these settings include high expectations for all students; exposure to academically rigorous curricula and materials; culturally and linguistically responsive and appropriate strategies; instructional technologies that facilitate learning; and a focus on student regulated, active learning as opposed to passive, teacher-directed transmission. In addition to

using efficient techniques and resources, teachers should communicate effectively across cultures and develop a clear understanding of their students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (Garcia & Dominquez, 1997).

According to Block et al. (2002), research reaffirms the importance of examining teaching expertise to enhance literacy instruction rather than looking for a material solution or condemning students, parents, or economic status. Above and beyond reading programs, teaching ability is the primary factor in students' literacy achievement. To be effective members of society, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds must be fully functioning members of literate communities at home and school (Au, 1995).

### **Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education**

According to the New York State Education Department (2022), educators nationwide have served American children and families for over a century; however, a complex system of prejudices and structural imbalances is a long-standing issue in U.S. history, culture, and institutions. This system of inequity, which frequently gives advantages and disadvantages based on linguistic descent, gender, skin color, and other factors must be comprehended, actively addressed, and completely transformed. The New York State Education Department developed the Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework (CR-SE) to combat these inequities in classrooms.

The CR-SE framework supports educators in creating student-centered learning environments. These environments aim to elevate historically marginalized voices; affirm students' racial, linguistic, and cultural identities; prepare students for rigor and independent learning; foster students' ability to connect across differences; and empower students as

participants in social change (New York State Education Department, n.d.). The CR-SE framework was used as the basis of my classroom observations in this research study.

### **Framework**

In the article “Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” Ladson-Billings (1995b) built upon research surrounding the intersectionality of culture and teaching to put forth a theoretical framework she coined “culturally relevant pedagogy.” Ladson-Billings described culturally relevant pedagogy as a pedagogy of opposition, not unlike critical pedagogy, but committed explicitly to collective, not merely individual, empowerment. CRP was founded on three criteria or principles: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must cultivate and maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must be able to evaluate the status quo of the current social order critically (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

According to Ladson-Billings (1995a), students acquire academic success due to their racial identities reinforced through representation. These students are not always required to connect experiences and ideas; they lack a foundation of knowledge or a point of reference. Instead, cultural connections between past knowledge/experience and innovative ideas are developed to complete understanding. Culturally relevant teachers consider how students will perform in school over time, not just on the final exam. After later adopters of culturally relevant pedagogy began to equate student achievement with standardized test scores or scripted curricula, Ladson-Billings (2006) clarified what she meant by “student learning”: “what students know and can do as a result of pedagogical interactions with effective teachers” (p. 34).

Students who see themselves as members of the global community reflected and respected in the classroom could engage in a more robust discussion of various topics. They are

challenged to consider constructs and challenges from differing viewpoints and appreciate and understand differences. Cultural competence implies the following:

Helping students recognize and respect their own cultural beliefs and practices while gaining access to the larger culture, where they are likely to have the opportunity to enhance their socioeconomic standing and make informed decisions about the lives they want to lead. (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 36)

Students acquire a “critical awareness through which they question the status quo of the present social order” by participating in self-reflection, studying challenging literature and ideas, and navigating meaningful and often difficult conversations (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). Establishing a culturally responsive classroom empowers students of all races and ethnicities to learn and develop more profoundly, consciously, and effectively. Creating a culturally responsive classroom is important when teaching all students regardless of race, gender, language, or ethnicity. Sociopolitical consciousness requires the teacher to develop and implement opportunities for “students to recognize, understand, and critique traditional and social inequalities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 476). Teachers gain sociopolitical awareness when they recognize race, class, and gender issues within themselves and grasp their causes. Only then can they instruct on these controversial subjects.

### **Literature Review**

Raising the academic achievement of diverse and struggling students and narrowing the academic achievement gap between students of diverse and mainstream backgrounds seems to depend fundamentally on educators’ definitions, perspectives, and knowledge regarding culturally responsive education. This case study explored a high school English teacher’s view on successful culturally responsive literacy selection, instruction, and techniques to identify and

implement culturally responsive literacy teaching. The themes I focused on were professional development and teachers' perceptions, successes, and challenges of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally relevant education and English language arts.

### **Professional Development and Teachers' Perceptions**

Ladson-Billings (1995b) noted that teacher-preparation programs must accept responsibility for teachers' inability to instruct diverse students effectively. Most teachers have said their practicum preparation prepared them very little for today's diverse classrooms. According to reviews of the literature on multicultural teacher education (Grant & Secada, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1996; Zeichner, 1992), the majority of pre-service methods in fulfilling the needs of diverse students focus on individual courses and professional associations. However, no one approach or series of learning environments adequately prepare practicum students to address the needs of diverse learners. Therefore, a more holistic, all-encompassing strategy is needed.

Ladson-Billings draws on Freire's (1970) work by honoring students' cultural backgrounds and knowing ways, thereby transforming classrooms into liberation spaces. CRP has become "useful for teaching students of any race or ethnicity" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 15).

As our nation's diversity grows, today's teachers must educate students from various backgrounds, languages, and skills. Hawley (2010) noted that ethnicity and race impact teaching and learning by affecting how students react to curricula and instruction and teaching ideas about students' learning abilities. Flook et al. (2013) noted that teachers are often unaware of their students' historical assumptions. As a result, teachers are not mindful of these prejudices' possible effects on experiences with students who are not like themselves.

To challenge these views, Hawley and Nieto (2010) noted that school-based professional learning communities could improve teaching and learning and result in a fundamental shift in teachers' work (p. 70). Gay (2000) suggested evaluating culturally sensitive teaching practices and offering professional development in this area. Teachers and principals could help school systems counter perceptions that historically restrict student opportunities. It is critically important to research how professional development influences educators' day-to-day work and the leadership needed to promote and sustain CRP best practices.

Teachers' perceptions are essential when working with diverse learners with respect to their cultures and bringing those cultural elements into their students' curricula. Professional development for diverse learners could play a significant role in assisting teachers concerning culturally relevant pedagogy and structures to deliver culturally responsive instruction.

### **Successes and Challenges of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Gay (2002) noted that educational environments have changed significantly over the last few decades, becoming more diverse and challenging. The increasing influx of diverse populations from various cultures contributes to the student population's diversity. Student diversity presents difficulties for inexperienced and experienced teachers unfamiliar with CRP. According to Grossman and Thompson (2008), new teachers experience difficulties in classroom management, curriculum planning, assessment implementation, and task management, resulting in teachers leaving the field of education after a few years.

CRT is the primary instructional method advocated in multicultural education settings. Globalization and the influx of many cultures have significantly increased U.S. diversity. These diverse populations have maintained their traditions, practices, and languages, which may cause anxiety, prejudice, and racial conflict. As a result, American educational systems must develop

instructional curricula and methods that include diverse student populations. The primary instructional approach recommended in multicultural education is CRT. Gay (2002) recommended utilizing culturally diverse students' "distinctive traits, experiences, and perspectives as conduits for more effective instruction, capitalizing on students' personal and cultural advantages, intellectual talents, and prior successes" (p. 106).

According to Ladson-Billings (1995b), CRT is a pedagogy that values students' cultural aspects in all stages of learning. She also proposed the following dimensions of culturally relevant pedagogy: establishing high academic standards, providing appropriate support such as scaffolding, acting on cultural awareness through curriculum restructuring, building on students' prior knowledge, and developing relationships with students and their families. In summary, cultural responsiveness suggests that teachers should be receptive to their students using instructional strategies to build on students' cultural strengths and abilities to improve student learning outcomes. Culturally responsive teachers do not utilize the same instructional strategies and resources with all students. Instead, these teachers adapt their knowledge and training to classroom environments and individual students' unique needs and experiences (Gay, 2002; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and English Language Arts**

Acquiring cultural knowledge, such as understanding student language and communication style, is imperative if teachers harmonize their pedagogy with their lives. For example, Hefflin (2002) found that teachers who utilized their African American students' home language interaction patterns in the classroom saw increased academic success for these students. Similarly, critical scholars such as Emdin (2011) and Morrell (2008) argued for hip-hop music in the classroom. They theorize that hip-hop's verbal and gestural

language can be leveraged as powerful pedagogical tools for teaching urban youth, which can help motivate students. A student's success largely depends on enthusiasm and motivation for a given task.

An essential aspect of CRP is that it must apply to students' lives and help them develop independence. According to several studies, using culturally relevant materials in the ELA classroom increased student engagement (Civil & Khan, 2001; Conrad et al., 2004; Feger, 2006. Hastie et al., 2006; Hefflin, 2002; Morrison, 2002).

Students communicate in diverse languages and media; however, English academic structures are particularly emphasized in English language arts (ELA). According to Christianakis (2011), teachers and students in diverse urban settings struggle to make instruction culturally relevant while adhering to curricular and educational mandates that exclude hip-hop, rap, and other popular texts. Consequently, numerous students become academically disengaged from school.

Hip-hop pedagogy, for example, was one method of teaching and engaging students in societal issues affecting their communities through lyrics and content-related connections to academic content (Christianakis, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Stovall, 2006). Hip-hop can provide a forum for young people to discuss community tensions and struggles, increasing their sociopolitical awareness. The work of these lyrics can assist students in improving their cultural fluency and moving seamlessly across genres and cultural boundaries.

Prier (2012) noted that hip-hop is one of the most influential and significant urban youth subcultures used to study the cultural dimensions and interactions between race, class, and gender as they relate to African American males' school and societal experiences. Many of these

adolescents become excluded from urban schools. They cannot relate to the school curriculum. Prier believed that students—particularly African American males—could describe and create their work if they could analyze hip-hop.

Researchers demonstrated how hip-hop could help students feel more confident in ELA class. For instance, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) attempted to use hip-hop music and culture to foster a discussion among students and promote academic literacy and critical thinking. In a traditional senior English class that studied poetry from the Elizabethan to the Romantic periods, researchers used hip-hop as an example of poetry (to make the assignment more impactful to the students). If students followed the basic rules of critical pedagogy, they could engage in critical dialogue and relate to more important social and political issues. Students could, for example, draw a parallel between Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 and Nas's Affirmative Action. This study used hip-hop pedagogy as an example of how to bridge cultural gaps and see the potential and effectiveness of pedagogy based on culturally relevant education principles.

Hill (2012) applied 52 effective culturally responsive strategies in a predominantly African American high school during a literacy block as part of his dissertation research. Hill compared the practices of two highly effective teachers chosen by the principal, other teachers, and students using a quantitative survey tool and other qualitative methods. Hill performed over 20 observations and interviews with teachers and discovered that the teachers could get students more interested and motivated through culturally responsive strategies.

For instance, while reading *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 2006), students were required to choose a character with whom they could identify and compare the character's internal and

external conflicts, as written in the 1950s, to their own internal and external conflicts, which they may be facing today. This helped students recognize the relevance of books to their own lives.

Hill (2012) stated,

Students were motivated to complete the tasks assigned to them because it was expected of them and because they enjoyed working together. Students could relate and identify with the task. Students seemed to enjoy making their teacher happy based on how well they treated one another. As the students became more interested in what they were learning and how it related to their lives, their confidence in their ability to comprehend increased. Many of the lessons taught to the students were relevant to their cultural backgrounds and life experiences. (p. 150)

Students felt they had a voice and were encouraged to discuss many issues they encountered to better comprehend the material.

### **Conclusion**

According to demographic data, the predominantly White teaching population requires a high level of cultural awareness and in-depth knowledge of multicultural education, equity pedagogy, and cultural awareness to effectively address the learning needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Teachers and students bring personal histories, languages, and attitudes about cultures and ethnicities to their classrooms. Family members, past experiences, and mainstream culture all influence their perspectives. Often, teachers are unaware that their own and institutionalized views, expectations, pedagogies, learning environments, curriculum, resources, grouping tactics, and assessment systems conflict with the learning needs of a diverse population of students.

The work of Ladson-Billings is still relevant because students of color continue to perform worse on standardized tests and are disciplined more frequently, especially by White teachers. Several studies support what Ladson-Billings discovered: Culturally relevant teaching methods can help students perform better in school, be more interested in the subject, and attend class more frequently.

## Chapter 3

### Research Methods

Adolescents who do not see themselves reflected in literature are more likely to struggle with reading and are less likely to be fully engaged in classroom instruction. They may also begin to believe that they are less of a person and accept that other cultures, ethnicities, and genders are more important or valued than their own. Many teachers profess to deliver instruction to their students using culturally relevant pedagogy; however, educators must recognize the correlation between exposure to multicultural literature, the development of a healthy intellectual identity, and a sense of belonging in school and society. Literature may be one of the only spaces where socially isolated adolescents encounter individuals unlike themselves.

Teachers must incorporate culturally responsive instruction in their classrooms in an increasingly diverse society. As mentioned in previous chapters, although White students were once the majority, by 2025, students of color are predicted to outnumber White students as the majority of high school graduates (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Cultivating inclusivity and awareness of culturally relevant practices and instruction in a culturally sensitive manner benefits all students and develops acceptance of differences. It prepares students to flourish in an increasingly diverse society. Gay (2003) noted that culturally responsive instruction makes learning experiences more meaningful and beneficial for diverse students by using their cultural knowledge, past experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles. Educators should instruct all students (regardless of ethnicity) through CRT practices and provide texts that reflect their diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. Therefore, my study is critical for all educators to comprehend, envision, and

have meaningful dialogues about the need to teach literature through a culturally responsive lens that appreciates, honors, understands, and respects the growing diverse population of students.

In this chapter, I describe the research methods used to conduct a qualitative case study. This study used the framework developed by Ladson-Billings (1995) and was analyzed through the lens of CRP. This research focused on the critical need for educators to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy into their instruction; emphasized the importance of how a teacher selected her literature; and described how learners saw themselves in the curriculum, environment, and instructional practices in their classroom. First, I discussed the relevance of culturally relevant pedagogy theory and a constructivist approach to this research. I also included the role of the researcher, methodology, population, data-collection procedures, data-analysis procedures, validity and reliability, ethical concerns, limitations, conclusion, and appendices.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My upbringing, education, and relationships are attributed to why I chose to study culturally relevant pedagogy. I was born in the South Bronx and moved to Long Island with my parents and older sister at 3 ½ years old. My father decided to move our family in search of “better” schools and a way of life. Although I was too young to attend school the year we relocated, I proudly walked with my mother to the bus stop to wait for my older sister’s bus to arrive and take her to school. My father could not speak fluent English (a Panamanian native), and my mother was from Columbia, South Carolina. My parents emphasized the importance of education; they instilled in my sister and me the belief that we would have to work twice as hard for everything we wanted because we were people of color. My parents never made disparaging

remarks about anyone's ethnic origin, but they just understood that society operated under an unspoken and distinct set of standards for people of color. This saddened my sister and me, but we knew our parents would always provide us with good guidance to succeed.

I attended Laura Hill Elementary School in Bloomfield, New York. Bloomfield has traditionally welcomed individuals of all ethnic origins and is one of the most diverse communities on Long Island. According to the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development (2019), Bloomfield, NY, had 2.71 times the number White (Hispanic) population (28.7k persons) than any other racial or ethnic group in 2019. The second and third most prevalent ethnic groups were 10.6k Other (Hispanic) and 9.73k White (Non-Hispanic). Bloomfield, New York, has a Hispanic population of 69% (43.8k people).

I was very excited when I turned 4 years old and became eligible to attend Kindergarten. I loved my teacher, Ms. Rodriguez. She was welcoming, compassionate, caring, and nurturing. According to Noddings (2002), education is critical to developing a healthy, caring society. Nodding described education as a series of planned and unexpected contacts that foster development through acquiring information, skills, understanding, and compassion. Compassion is just what I needed during my kindergarten year. My mother became very ill throughout that year. Ms. Rodriguez saw that I was becoming more reclusive and depressed. Unfortunately, I was unable to express my emotions at the time, but Ms. Rodriguez greeted me each day with a kind smile and warm embrace. She was always willing to pay more attention to me than my classmates. When I returned home from school, my mother often attempted to smile and read to me when not too exhausted: "Sharon, books are your windows to the world," she would remind me. When I grew up, diverse populations were underrepresented in our curriculum and rarely in our books. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the only person from a diverse background

mentioned, and that was only in January. My parents recognized that they would have to educate me about my diverse culture if I was to learn about it.

As I prepared to start first grade, my mother became increasingly ill. My new first-grade teacher (Mrs. Douglas) was my savior. She was kind, engaging, and African American! She taught us about prominent individuals from diverse backgrounds. She recognized that I was having academic and emotional challenges due to my mother's illness. Mrs. Douglas worked with me nearly every day after school to ensure I would not fall behind my peers in my core subjects. While we were studying one day, I turned to her and told her that I wanted to be a teacher like her when I grew up, and she looked at me and replied, "Sharon, you will." My mother passed away that summer. I was only six years old and saddened beyond words.

My father remarried a year after my mother passed. My stepmother (Emma) was young and attractive but not particularly affectionate. She had a daughter (Sonia) who was a year my junior. I recently discovered wedding photos of my father and stepmother. My sister and I appeared to have been crying for weeks. It was a difficult period in our lives. I missed my mother terribly, and it seemed as if no one had noticed. My sister secluded herself in a world of books. She always appeared happy while reading *Little House on the Prairie* and the *Nancy Drew Mysteries* series. I envied my sister's ability to escape her world through literature. My sister was able to evade it all. I was not as fortunate. My stepmother was cruel toward me. I suppose I required more attention. She continually yelled at me and constantly hit me. I did not understand why she was so mean to me, but I assumed she was a young mother who had recently inherited two more children. She was undoubtedly overwhelmed (I was too terrified to tell my father about my stepmother's abuse until they divorced years later).

Elementary school was difficult for me, but fortunately, my stepmother made friends with the school's only two teachers of color. They appeared to sense my stepmother's tension and were always there to assist me academically and emotionally. I also gained support from two male teachers of color in my middle school (Mr. Green and Mr. Taylor) who also attended my church, were very kind, and always supported me throughout my middle school experience.

By the time I entered high school, my dad and stepmother (Emma) were divorced, and my father had met and married his third wife, Francis. Francis had a daughter (Kim). Francis was a kind woman, and my dad was content, making me happy. High school went by very fast, and by the time I reached my senior year, my main goal was to graduate and attend college.

I was eager to begin college to begin my studies in education. I wanted to help children like Mrs. Douglas had helped me many years ago. I attended SUNY Old Westbury College immediately after graduating from High School and obtained a bachelor's degree of science in education. After completing my bachelor's degree, I was offered a position as a first-grade teacher at Park Avenue Elementary School in Westbury, New York. I completed my master's degree in early childhood education from Long Island University and a professional diploma in educational leadership from Long Island University (formerly known as C. W. Post). After three years of teaching in Westbury, I was granted tenure. Although I enjoyed teaching in Westbury, I wanted to give back to the community that had so generously given to me. Subsequently, I applied and was hired as a first-grade teacher in the Brentwood School District.

I was excited to return to my hometown of Bloomfield to teach; however, little had changed in terms of the diversity of teachers and administrative staff since I left. Regardless of the position held, the majority of employees remained White. The community transitioned to be predominantly Hispanic/Latinx. Unfortunately, the teaching and administrative personnel did not reflect the student population. Although the teachers and administrators were sympathetic toward

their students' academic, social, emotional, and economic needs, they always seemed to blame the lack of student achievement on the parents of their students. This was very disheartening. These conversations largely occurred in the faculty room and made me feel very uncomfortable. Although my students' progress was minimal at times, I celebrated their successes. I introduced my students to successful people they can identify with through literature. Their faces always lit up as I talked about trailblazers such as the great poet Maya Angelou, tennis player Arthur Ashe, novelist James Bridges, civil rights advocate Ruby Bridges, and other successful people of diverse backgrounds. All students deserve the opportunity to have a teacher who reflects their unique identities. It will be difficult to improve education unless we make a concerted effort to recruit diverse teachers and administrators. Reflecting on those years, I should have voiced my opinion and disappointment with the conversations among teachers. I always set high expectations for all of my students. I was always proud of my students' growth and successes, even if these were minimal.

Over the years, I've realized that if we want to affect change in education, we need to provide professional development on culturally responsive practices to instruct students of all backgrounds with an approach that respects and reflects their diversity. The use of literature is an excellent way to educate students of all ethnic backgrounds about diversity. Sims Bishop (1990) noted that books might act as windows, providing views into familiar or new worlds. These windows represent the author's created and recreated world. Literature transforms and reflects our life experiences, enabling us to perceive our individual lives in the context of a broader human experience. Readers frequently imagine themselves in literature as a sort of self-affirmation.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the teaching and learning that took place within an advanced-placement English high school class in which the teacher used culturally responsive practices while teaching the novel *Native Son* by Richard Wright. This study explored the following: (a) how the teacher engaged in CRP while using this text, including her considerations while choosing class literature; and (b) how students engaged in dialogue with one another, saw themselves in the text, and described their feelings regarding the text. This case study took place at a diverse, suburban Long Island high school. CRP instruction is defined as a teaching practice “that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to convey knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp. 16–17).

### **Research Questions**

What is the teaching and learning that takes place within an advanced placement English high school class in which the teacher uses culturally responsive practices?

1. How does the teacher incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy while using the text *Native Son* by Richard Wright?
2. What criteria does the teacher consider when selecting culturally responsive literature for students? What considerations influenced the teacher’s decision when making book selections?
3. How do students engage with the text and each other? How do students perceive their representation in the text?

4. What teaching practices does the teacher find most effective when teaching diverse students? How do those practices relate to culturally responsive pedagogy?

### **Research Methods**

The methods were categorized into nine major components: (1) worldview, (2) case study, (3) school site, (4) participants, (5) role of the researcher, (6) data analysis, (7) data collection procedures, (8) data analysis, and (9) ethical considerations. These components served as a guideline for my study. The first two components were a basis for selecting the case study design. The third and fourth components represented the sample selection and context of the study. The fifth component explored my role in the process of the study. The sixth and seventh components outlined the process I utilized to complete the study and analyze the data once received. Finally, the eighth component explained the standards that upheld the integrity of my study.

The qualitative approach influenced the design of this study. After careful consideration, I believe that the qualitative research design was the most effective method for exploring teaching and learning in an advanced-placement English high school class in which the teacher used culturally responsive practices. Using a qualitative design, I described the positive impact that resulted from a teacher using culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive literature selections.

### **Worldview**

According to Creswell (2013), social constructivism is an interpretative paradigm in which individuals seek to comprehend their environment and create unique meanings based on their experiences. These interpretations are neither inscribed nor inherent in each person. Rather,

meanings are created through interactions. Creswell (2018) further noted that social constructivism refers to individuals seeking to understand the world through their cultural experiences, which I explored in my case study.

Andrews (2012) noted that social constructivists view knowledge and truth as created by the interactions of individuals within a society, which is why I explored ways to better understand a high school teacher engaged in CRP and the perspectives of her students (as it relates to the text and their lived experiences). Applying the social constructivism worldview was the most useful approach in gaining insight into the use of the CRP, curriculum decisions, and the students' views.

### **Case Study**

Yin (2009) explained that a case study is “an empirical study that explores a contemporary phenomenon carefully and establishes it within its real-world context, particularly when the distinction between phenomenon and environment is not readily apparent” (p. 18). By conducting case study research, the researcher gains a unique perspective on the subject of the study, which is typically a recent occurrence. Case study research enables the researcher to contextualize the phenomenon.

### **Population**

The participating school district in this case study was located in the suburbs of Long Island. This district comprises a diverse student body; however, the staff is primarily White. Multiple languages are spoken in this community. This district contains 8 schools and over 8,000 students. The district's students of color enrollment were 95%. Approximately 75% of students are economically disadvantaged (New York State Education Department, 2020–21). A large

percentage of the population was of low wealth, with 100% of students enrolled in the free breakfast and lunch programs. The majority of the families in this district worked several jobs.

This case study took place in an advanced-placement English high school class. The students in this class were advanced honor students, and most were from diverse backgrounds. The teacher was of White European ancestry (it is important to note that no teachers of color are in the English department at this school). During the 2022–23 school year, this class had 18 students, 6 of whom are Black, 11 of whom are Hispanic, 1 of whom is White, and 1 who is a mix of two or more ethnicities.

I selected this class because the teacher in this study (Mrs. Smith) has always been very progressive. She believes in good instruction that positively impacts her diverse student population and literature that reflects our growing diverse student body. Several months ago, an organization informed me that they would be putting forth legislation to have certain books pulled from school libraries (see Appendix B). Among the ones mentioned were the following: Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Mildred D. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

I immediately approached Mrs. Smith to discuss the issue that had been brought to my attention. Mrs. Smith informed me that, despite the frequent occurrence of the *N* word in these books, some of the text contains valuable lessons and should not all be removed from the shelves. She said she would collaborate with me to review all high school–level literature to ensure that it was culturally relevant and would positively affect diverse youth. I informed her that my research focused on culturally relevant teaching practices and teacher literature selection,

and she responded, “I would love to participate in your study!” Mrs. Smith is a very “in-tune” teacher who does her best to ensure that all her students feel valued and appreciated. Mrs. Smith’s enthusiasm enhanced the value of my research, and it is my hope that it will change the way future teachers and students think about the importance of selecting culturally relevant teaching methods and books for diverse student populations.

### **Data-Collection Procedures**

The data collection at a diverse suburban Long Island high school included interviews, interview transcripts, classroom observations, focus groups, and field notes from observations. I conducted classroom observations and interviews in 40-minute increments due to the structure of the students’ schedules.

I interviewed 18 students, including the classroom teacher. Face-to-face interviews with participants and focus groups of 6-7 students were used on-site. The *Native Son* unit took seven weeks to complete. The data collection commenced at the beginning of November 2022 and concluded in mid-December 2022. I observed two to three times per week at 40-minute intervals. Students were observed formally and informally in their classrooms (prior parent consent was requested). Student interactions were monitored throughout classroom instruction and with all shared activities. In addition, interactions between teachers and students during classroom instruction were observed. I also took field notes and photos of the class bulletin boards and student work inside and outside the classroom.

### **Interviews**

Interviews provide the “opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and explore alternative explanations of what you see” (Glesne, 1999, p. 69). Therefore, interviews were used to obtain data and were conducted over several months before, during, and following the

observational period (November to December 2022; see Interview Protocols in Appendix D-F). My interviews sought insight into the teachers' perceptions of CRT, identified the rationale for the teacher's selection of literature, and elicited further information about students' feelings about the text.

### **Classroom Observations**

Classroom observations were conducted to ascertain how teachers' desired practices were implemented. Using the CR-S framework, I looked for evidence of culturally responsive practices while the teacher instructed her students through the text. I observed and listened to students' interactions with their classmates. I focused on the teacher, her teaching methods, and her relationships with her students. The data I collected described the classroom environment, teacher practices, students, classmates, and teacher interactions. I input my field notes into Dedoose to assist with coding and gathering patterns.

### **Audio-Visual Materials**

I photographed the classroom, including but not limited to the objects on the walls and bulletin boards, and the furniture organization. These images were recorded, and the existence of culturally relevant resources in the classroom or their absence was noted. In addition, I utilized audio recordings during my interviews with the teacher and focus groups using an iPhone. I input all my findings from my data collection into Dedoose for coding, interpreting, and analyzing.

### **Data Analysis**

Prior to data collection, I obtained approval for the study from the Institutional Review Board at Molloy University. I also obtained a consent letter from the school district's board president that participated in this study. I ensured the confidentiality and privacy of my participants by storing data securely within encrypted programs and assigned all participants

pseudonyms. My data collection consisted of interviews with the teacher and student participants, classroom observations (using the CR-SE framework), and the review of documents provided by the teacher.

I conducted three interviews with the teacher participant and two separate focus group interviews with the student participants. With respect to the interview process, I organized the data into file folders on my laptop. I had all the interview data transcribed through Rev.com. I asked all participants to review the transcripts of their interviews to ensure validity. I used the Dedoose online software program to organize and analyze the data. I also used the information from Dedoose to create codes and themes (see Figure 3.1).

I conducted classroom observations using the CR-SE framework to ensure that my data collection methods were culturally relevant and appropriate for the research questions. I was keenly aware of the significance of ensuring that the classroom environment reflected the students' cultural identities, fostered positive academic outcomes, developed students' abilities to connect across lines of difference, elevated students' voices, and empowered students to become social change agents.

Finally, I reviewed classroom documents provided by the teacher. I interpreted my findings in the context of culturally relevant pedagogy and considered how my findings related to the existing research on culturally relevant pedagogy. I wrote up the findings on how they could inform future educational practices, paying close attention to the cultural relevance of my research.

### **Data-Analysis Procedures**

After the taped interviews were transcribed and the field notes were examined continuously, I also used Rev.com to assist with the transcription. The data analysis for this study

was ongoing throughout the observation period. I used Dedoose to code, analyze the data, and create themes (see Figure 3.1). I chose the use of Dedoose for two major reasons. First, while using the software during my qualitative research and internship courses, I found it user friendly and a reliable tool for analyzing data. Second, Dedoose reveals which codes are the strongest based on the number of excerpts assigned to each code.

I analyzed the teachers' culturally responsive practices using Ladson-Billings' framework for culturally relevant pedagogy. The characteristics of CRT practices served as a beginning stage for coding; as observations began, more coding was added. Within the initial weeks of my study, I conducted more data analysis after the interviews and further observations to determine the teacher's benefits and challenges in her teaching approach.

Figure 3.1. Themes



## Documents

The reviewed documents are lesson plans, curricular materials, field notes, notes from confidential focus group discussions, artifacts, and teacher-created worksheets. These items provided evidence of culturally responsive practices in case I missed such evidence during my observations.

### **Trustworthiness**

Qualitative researchers use various measures to increase their design and methodologies' trustworthiness and credibility. The application of a few strategies ensured the reliability of this study. First, I engaged in member checking, asking the participants to review the transcripts of their interviews. By reviewing the transcripts, participants had the opportunity to read everything they conveyed to me during the interview process. Next, I engaged in triangulation. Merriam (1988) noted that triangulation, or the use of various data-gathering and analysis methods, improves both reliability and internal validity. The triangulation process involved collecting data through multiple sources, including interviews, observations, and document analysis. I performed long-term and repeated observations at the research site. Following each interview, I compiled field notes and interview transcripts. I examined my field notes from the interview sessions throughout this process. The field notes offered a better understanding of my conversations with the participants. Trustworthiness was established primarily through clear, rich, and thorough descriptions that served as a solid basis for comparison for anyone interested in transferability (Merriam, 1998).

### **Ethical Concerns**

To circumvent ethical issues, I discussed my research proposal and interview questions with the teacher and the participants in my study. I entertained any inquiries that arose during the discussion. I ensured confidentiality by not identifying participants by name and using pseudonyms to describe the participants and the location. I explained the consent form and addressed any concerns that arose. Israel and Hay (2006) noted that researchers must shield their participants in the study, build trust with them, promote research integrity, defend against

dishonesty and illegality that might negatively reflect their organizations or institutions, and deal with new and difficult circumstances.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the teaching and learning that took place within a diverse, advanced-placement English high school classroom in which the teacher used culturally responsive practices. Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy framework was chosen for this case study and aligns well with my research design. This case study was significant because I closely observed a teacher's CRP, the positive outcomes of her practices, and the effects on her students. My conversations with students during focus groups and interviews helped uncover how a teacher uses CRP and how it could positively impact her students and herself.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

The racial and ethnic composition of U.S. schools has changed dramatically. According to the Institute of Education Sciences (U.S. Department of Education), by 2025, the majority of high school graduates will be students of color; however, teachers' practices and the literary content students are exposed to have not changed significantly to reflect the diversity of classrooms (Acquah et al., 2016). This qualitative case study aimed to describe the teaching and learning that took place in an advanced-placement English high school class where the teacher used culturally responsive practices while teaching the novel *Native Son* by Richard Wright. In addition, this study examined the teacher's rationale for selecting literature for her students and how students engaged in dialogue with one another, saw themselves in the text, and described their feelings about the text.

This chapter provides answers to research questions using data from the observations and interviews conducted with the teacher and her students. The objective is to inform other educators of diverse students the importance of culturally relevant practices in daily instruction. Through the story of one teacher's lived experiences and why CRP is critical for all students, this research helps to explain why culturally responsive practices matter. In their own words, the student participants and their teacher demonstrate the significance of incorporating diverse and relevant literature into the curriculum.

I examined the background of Mrs. Smith (pseudonym), what brought her to the field of education, and why she thinks teaching racially and ethnically diverse students using CRP is essential. I also examined the interviews with her students to explore how they felt about the novel *Native Son* and if they could relate to the characters in the novel. Each participant was

provided with pseudonyms for their name. I examined the teacher's responses from the interviews and analyzed them to identify common themes. Subsequently, I conducted two focus group interviews with 15 students (7-8 per group). Three students preferred to provide their responses only in written form. I met with the focus group participants in the library conference room at their high school for an audio-taped, face-to-face, 40-minute interview.

After completing the interviews, I immediately wrote field note memos outlining what occurred during the interview. These interviews were transcribed on Rev.com. Before uploading my interviews into Dedoose, I read the transcripts and analyzed and coded the interviews by hand. After performing multiple data analyses, I identified themes, subthemes, and findings through the lens of CRP.

### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part 1 introduces the teacher participant and describes her path or journey into education. I also introduce the students who participated in focus groups and a narrative of *Native Son*. In addition, I provide a summary of the findings and describe the classroom setting through the lens of the CR-S framework. Part 2 examines the teachers' culturally relevant practices in an advanced-placement English classroom, research questions, themes, and subthemes. I also examined the students' interviews to determine how they felt about the novel *Native Son* and whether or not they could identify with the characters, before concluding with a chapter summary.

### **Research Questions and Summary of Findings**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2020), U.S. elementary and secondary public-school teachers are significantly less racially and ethnically diverse than their students. Although the proportion of Black, Latinx, and Asian

American teachers has grown over the last few decades, it has fallen behind the rapid increase in the racial and ethnic diversity of their students. Dalton (2006) stated that almost two thirds of all American children are projected to be students of color by 2050. To be successful in teaching, however, a White teacher in a classroom with predominantly students of color must learn how to teach using their students' nondominant culture (Milner et al., 2011).

This study explored how a White advanced-placement English teacher implemented culturally responsive instruction with her class of 18 students of color (one White student). My dissertation offers guidance to colleagues about the multiple benefits of CRP and what might be missing in her current practice.

The major findings in my study included the CRP observed in Mrs. Smith's class. Mrs. Smith felt she chose culturally responsive literature for her students with great care. Several students believed that Mrs. Smith genuinely cared about them and took great measures to select culturally responsive literature that reflected their culture, identity, and life experiences. Still, others felt that Mrs. Smith's selections did not represent them or their cultures.

Another significant finding was that although most students felt connected to the novel's main character (Bigger), and their teacher thought she exposed her students to great works of literature by diverse authors throughout the semester, other students did not feel that same connection. In addition, most students expressed frustration with society and what they saw as the perpetuation of systematic racism, societal stereotypes, and inequality in their community and beyond.

The following fundamental research question guided this research: What is the teaching and learning that takes place within an advanced-placement English high school class in which

the teacher uses culturally responsive practices? This chapter focused on the following themes (see Figure 4.1): Varied Pedagogical Strategies, Role of Students' Cultural Backgrounds, Familiarizing Oneself with Diverse Literature, the Need for More Diverse Literature, the Persistence of Racial Injustice in Modern American Society, Cultural Connections, and Various Types of Text. The research study aimed to answer the following research sub-questions:

1. How does the teacher incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy while using the text *Native Son* by Richard Wright?

The teacher recognizes the importance of incorporating diverse teaching strategies, such as culturally responsive practices, and the significance of planning engaging activities with which her students can relate. These activities keep students engaged in the novel by arousing their interest. In addition, the teacher engages in in-depth discussions about social justice and inequities in diverse communities.

2. What criteria does the teacher consider when selecting culturally responsive literature for students? What considerations influenced the teacher's decision when making book selections?

Mrs. Smith made an effort to select books written by authors that she believed reflected her students, gave them a voice, and taught about prominent figures.

However, some Latinx students felt that their culture, traditions, and background were not fully represented in Mrs. Smith's literature.

3. How do students engage with the text and each other? How do students perceive their representation in the text?

Each student was highly engaged with the text. Most students felt a strong connection to the novel's characters. Students completely immersed themselves in the group

projects assigned by the teacher and thoroughly enjoyed the tasks because they could relate to creating newspapers, tweets, and poems about the novel's characters. Several students recognized themselves in the book, while others had not experienced the level of racism the main character experienced. The majority of students believed that racism remains extremely pervasive.

4. What teaching practices does the teacher find most effective when teaching diverse students? How do those practices relate to culturally responsive pedagogy? The teacher has established several effective teaching approaches with her diverse student population. For instance, they created comic strips of a key scene in the text, wrote poems from the perspective of a character, created a Twitter account for a character, wrote posts or tweets, and gave presentations that included a crime scene investigation. Students created a newspaper based on how the protagonist was portrayed in the media. These hands-on activities enabled students to understand the characters' lived experiences.

### **Classroom Setting**

Over several weeks, I observed Mrs. Smith's Advanced Placement English class that utilized the New York State CR-S framework. Mrs. Smith's classroom environment exhibited CR-S characteristics. The ambiance was warm and welcoming in entering Mrs. Smith's classroom. Students could be heard discussing the novel they were reading and their feelings toward it. Students discussed social justice and inequality and their plans to change the world.

The classroom desks were situated in groups so that students can work collaboratively with one another (see Picture #1). The students were reading *Native Son* by Richard Wright. Mrs. Smith's classroom reflected the novel in that her bulletin boards were transformed into a "novel

museum,” adorned with exquisite student artifacts from the many activities her students created from the text (see Pictures #2 and 3). The teacher and her students also utilized a smart board and a small teacher’s desk at the center of the classroom.

Picture #1



Picture #2



Picture #3



### **Interview Setting**

The teacher participant was interviewed during her preparation period in her classroom. The classroom was quiet and free from distractions. Each focus group was conducted in a conference room in the school library. The conference room was an isolated and quiet environment, free from distractions. Each focus group participant was interviewed during their 40-minute English class period. At the onset of the interview, I reviewed the purpose of the study, discussed the use of my audio-recording device, and provided the participants with an opportunity to ask pertinent questions.

### **Part 1: Participant Vignettes**

Mrs. Smith knew from the moment she began her teaching career in Jamaica, Queens, that assisting students from racially and socio-economically diverse backgrounds was important

to her. She also knew that the most effective method for connecting with students from diverse backgrounds different from her own was to draw from their experiences. To offer the reader insight and a better understanding of Mrs. Smith's experiences and educational background, I begin by describing her educational background and journey to becoming a teacher. Next, I introduce the participants in the two focus groups (Table 4.1). Chapter 2 demonstrated the importance of incorporating CRP in a diverse English classroom to improve the quality of student learning and outcomes. Educators can create a teaching model that builds on diverse students' knowledge, experiences, skills, values, and perspectives; develops students' critical thinking; and prepares them for engaged citizenship by following the principles of Gloria Ladson Billings' CRP. Teachers can use the CRP model to guide them through rich literature that will develop and challenge racial and cultural stereotypes and prejudices. In the next section, I describe Mrs. Smith's teaching journey to show why CRP is important to her practice, especially given the racially diverse backgrounds of her students.

### **Mrs. Smith's Educational Journey**

Mrs. Smith received her bachelor's degree from SUNY New Paltz and her master's degree from Stony Brook University. Mrs. Smith stated,

My father, who taught for 32 years until his retirement in 2007, inspired me to become a teacher. I knew at an early age that I wanted to be a teacher. In my basement, I used the playroom as my classroom. I would arrange desks and assign homework to my younger brother, his friends, and our cousins, which I would then collect and grade.

Mrs. Smith was raised in a traditional home. Her mother was a stay-at-home mom, and her father worked as a teacher. Mrs. Smith described her parents as encouraging individuals who

were strict with her because they recognized her potential. Mrs. Smith described her positive educational experience as a result of teachers who pushed her to excel.

Mrs. Smith was beginning her 28th year as an Advanced Placement English teacher on Long Island. Before teaching on Long Island, Mrs. Smith taught in Jamaica, New York, in a program for young people who had been incarcerated as juveniles and enrolled in school to obtain their General Educational Diploma (GED). Mrs. Smith also taught an adult literacy class for adults who did not know how to read or write English. Mrs. Smith does not speak Spanish fluently, but she uses ESL instructional strategies such as incorporating students' prior knowledge into her lessons, speaking slowly, and fostering classroom participation in her instructional practices. Mrs. Smith was able to meet success with her GED and adult learners by using these strategies. Mrs. Smith stated,

In Jamaica, I taught in a program for students going to school for their General Educational Diploma GED. My students were young people who had been incarcerated as juveniles. I also taught adult literacy programs. For many of my students in the GED and adult literacy programs, English was not their first language. I used a variety of strategies to instruct my GED and adult-literacy classes. By speaking slowly, using their prior knowledge, and allowing students plenty of opportunities to interact with one another, my students met success. My early experience with my GED students and the adult literacy classes prepared me for my current role of teaching diverse learners. I strive to be culturally aware. Being aware of cultural differences in my teaching is vital to me. It is crucial to ensure that my students feel respected and represented in the literature I select for them so they can be proud of the accomplishments of their culture.

When Mrs. Smith first arrived at the diverse Long Island high school, she taught Regents

English and Regents-Assisted English to 9th and 10th graders. She was assigned five sections of 11th-grade Regent's level English in her second year. After several years, she was given several sections of 12th-grade Regent's level English. Fifteen years ago, Mrs. Smith began teaching senior-level and junior-level English students Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition. Mrs. Smith's senior-level advanced-placement English class is a dual-enrollment course, and students can pay for three credits from Stony Brook University.

Mrs. Smith strives to ensure that her students know everything college professors expect them to know before enrolling in their first English class. Mrs. Smith stated,

I work diligently to ensure my students are better prepared than I was. My entire family has worked in the field of education. I have kept abreast of the latest developments in educational practices by continuing to take classes to learn the most current educational practices. Since last summer, I have had the chance to take professional development courses through our BOCES department that have emphasized and focused on culturally responsive methods for learners from diverse backgrounds. I appreciate this opportunity and intend to continue taking courses next summer.

Although Mrs. Smith has stayed current in pedagogical theory by taking courses on the most recent educational practices, she asserted that the English department is not provided with adequate professional development for teachers of diverse students. Mrs. Smith stated, Honestly, most professional development (PD) at work is not very meaningful. There isn't the time in the day to accomplish this. Our PD period is forty minutes. Not much can be done in such a short period of time. Often, the people who provide PD have not been in the actual classroom, so many practices they suggest are not realistic or helpful. I think the mentor program that started in the

last few years is exceptionally worthwhile. I wish that had been available when I was a new teacher. I mentor new teachers every

chance I can because, at this stage in my career, I want to ensure that the profession is left in good hands after I retire.

Although Mrs. Smith continued to assert that her prior experience with diverse students from Jamaica, Queens, has helped her tremendously with her current diverse English class, she continued to pursue professional development independently and through direct affiliation with their local BOCES organization. Mrs. Smith stated,

I seek professional development opportunities to help me meet my diverse students' learning needs. I started taking educational technology classes in 2018, which proved tremendously helpful when the pandemic hit. I also taught many of my colleagues how to teach digitally. I was part of one of the best and most memorable professional development opportunities in the summer of 2021. I was one of 16 educators selected nationally to be a scholar for the National Endowment for the Humanities entitled "Making the Good Reader and Citizen: The History of Literature Instruction in American Schools" for diverse learners. This was the most meaningful professional development of my career.

Mrs. Smith wished her district would provide more meaningful professional development to support diverse learners' instruction, but she remained committed to pursuing the best professional development for her diverse students.

### **Focus Group Participants**

This case study was conducted over the course of seven weeks and included two focus groups. All participants attended the same high school on Long Island in a diverse school district.

All participating students were enrolled in advanced-placement courses since ninth grade. Eight students participated in the first focus group, while seven participated in the second.

Three students chose to respond exclusively in writing. All participants were students in their junior and senior years of high school (see Table 4.1). Ten students identified as Hispanic, six as Black, one as White, and one as mixed ( $N = 18$ ). I have identified students as Hispanic (Latinx), Black, and of Mixed Race because, throughout my observations, interviews, and conversations, students consistently identified themselves as Hispanic and did not wish to be associated with the term Latinx. I respected their wishes and did not probe any further.

Table 4.1

*Participants' Name and Ethnicity*

Focus Group 1		
Jane	Female	Black
Aaron	Male	Latinx
Kate	Female	Latinx
Anna	Female	Latinx
Ana	Female	Latinx
Chris	Male	Black
Nicky	Female	White
Taylor	Female	Black
Focus Group 2		
Alexa	Female	Black
Tanner	Female	Mixed (Black & White)

Jade	Female	Latinx
Cherry Ann	Female	Latinx
Allie	Female	Latinx
Karen	Female	Latinx
Lizzette	Female	Latinx
Written Responses		
Emma	Female	Latinx
Charlie	Male	Black
Christopher	Male	Black

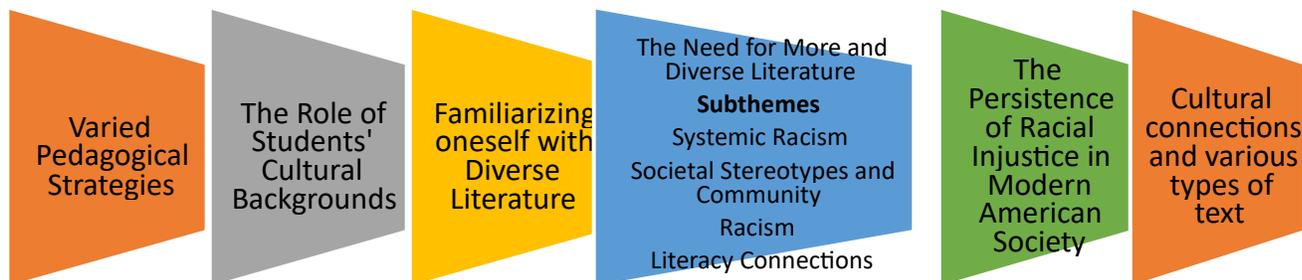
### **Narrative of *Native Son***

*Native Son* (1940) is a novel by American author Richard Wright. This book is a compilation of three parts that make up the novel. It tells the story of Bigger Thomas, a 20-year-old Black youth living in extreme poverty in the 1930s on Chicago's South Side. Bigger goes to work for a wealthy White family in Chicago. Bigger accidentally kills a young White woman and then pays the ultimate price of death. While Wright does not apologize for Bigger's crimes, he does portray a systemic cause for them. Bigger's opportunities in life are limited. This makes him fearful of death, White people, and ashamed of himself. *Native Son* touches on themes such as race and family.

## Part 2: Research Themes

Figure 4.1

### Themes and Subthemes



### Research Question 1

**Research Question 1:** How does the teacher incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy while using the text *Native Son* by Richard Wright?

#### Theme: Varied Pedagogical Strategies

Throughout the seven weeks in Mrs. Smith's classroom, a recurring theme emerged in describing how she incorporated CRP when teaching *Native Son*. This theme was Varied Pedagogical Strategies. Classroom observations showed how Mrs. Smith included CRP in her teaching of the novel *Native Son* through various instructional methods. Mrs. Smith fostered academic achievement through problem-solving assessments and group projects. She exposed her students to diverse cultures through literature to cultivate their cultural competence. She used the text to engage in meaningful conversations with her students to cultivate their critical consciousness, particularly regarding the societal inequalities faced by the characters in the novel. Karen (Latinx female) stated,

My favorite activity with my classmates was the presentations we made on the slide show. I dressed up as a detective and presented a slideshow that I was proud of. Although

I'm not particularly eager to present in front of the class, I had fun and was glad we discussed the book differently than usual.

Jane (Black female) stated,

My favorite activity having to do with *Native Son* was speed dating because it allowed us the chance to get the point of view of some of the questions we answered with our classmates and was an engaging activity. I also liked the group projects, because I found working on this creative assignment about such a good book fun.

From my observations, her students appeared comfortable assuming new perspectives and practicing empathy and critical thinking during activities such as literature logs, written summaries, silent discussions, and working on various group project activities with their classmates. As a result, I was able to infer this theme based on my observations.

While conducting my study, I observed Mrs. Smith utilizing literature logs based on the 3-2-1 writing method to incorporate CRP while teaching *Native Son*. Students completed these written logs for each section of the assigned reading. Students were required to write a three-sentence summary and two-paragraph analysis that focused on their interpretations of what they read. Mrs. Smith encouraged her students to record their ideas, emotions, and interpretations in writing. She instructed her students to consider their thoughts and feelings and how the author elicited those responses. Kate (Latinx female) stated,

The book enriched my knowledge of what life was like for African Americans in the 1930s urban South. It was incredibly unfair since the White people in authority did not want to provide the Black community with a better living due to the fact that they were Black.

Kate could relate the text to the experience of many Black people growing up in the South Side of Chicago during the time period of *Native Son*. Kate perceived and acknowledged the inequitable treatment of Blacks by the White dominant society.

Mrs. Smith also used a technique known as “silent discussions,” in which all students were required to respond to a series of prompts and write freely in the same document. Mrs. Smith provided prompts as students read the text related to cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness. For the novel *Native Son*, the prompts were as follows:

1. Sometimes, I feel frustrated and powerless when...
2. In this country, racial prejudice...
3. I've never been angrier than when... 4. When someone is convicted of murder...
5. After many years of oppression...

This strategy aligned with culturally relevant practices and enabled her students to focus on the text's many recurring core themes. These prompts reflected students' perspectives and supported their intellectual growth through problem solving and reasoning. These prompts also enable the students to exhibit their cultural understanding of the novel and to recognize, analyze, and write about the societal injustices confronted by the story's characters. To illustrate, Kate, a Latinx student in Mrs. Smith's class, chose to write about oppression for her writing prompt. She expressed the following:

Although I don't exactly identify with the systemic racism Black people had and still have to go through in America, I can understand what it feels like to feel held back by society and deal with ongoing racism against minorities. I could connect it to the same experiences I had throughout my life. Wright's wake-up call to society is prominent because we can't improve if we don't change these thoughts against people solely due to

their race. In this country, racial prejudice reminds me of the recent protests: Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate. Violence and racism still affect people of color today, so much that they must retaliate against those in power.

Although Kate could not relate to the systemic racism Black Americans faced and continue to meet in the United States, she understood what it is like to be oppressed by society and the persistent prejudice against people of color. Kate acknowledged Richard Wright's wakeup call to society and the importance of all individuals, regardless of ethnicity, supporting one another and coming together for social change. Kate understood the significance of critical consciousness and the urgent need to recognize, understand, and resolve real-world problems that contribute to societal inequality.

Mrs. Smith also had her students create "one-page presentations." She introduced her students to this activity to improve their intellectual growth, problem-solving skills, reasoning abilities, and exposure to cultural experiences from other ethnic backgrounds. Students were assigned specific text sections, and Mrs. Smith "flipped" the classroom, allowing them to take ownership and responsibility for their learning. By inverting the classroom paradigm, Mrs. Smith enabled her students to explore teaching and learning in a unique and remixed way. Mrs. Smith's students seemed to enjoy the creative CRP-related activities. During the focus group with Jane, Taylor, Kate, and Anna, they discussed their favorite activities in class:

Jane (Black female): My favorite activity with *Native Son* was speed dating because it allowed us to get the point of view of some of the questions we answered with our classmates and was engaging. I also enjoyed the group projects, because completing this creative assignment about such an excellent book was enjoyable.

Taylor (Black female): I enjoyed reading *Native Son*. I particularly enjoyed the poetry in motion activity because I enjoy describing different characters in the form of poetry and finding objects that represent characters from the book.

Kate (Latinx female): I enjoyed the hands-on projects associated with the presentation I gave to my group. We had a good time with it and pretended it was an actual court case by displaying all the evidence we brought to school for our project.

Anna (Latinx female): I enjoyed the project where we had to make a slideshow interviewing characters from the book for a trial. I enjoyed this activity because it was fun, and our group was able to draw conclusions about the fascinating aspects of the story!

The “one-page presentation” activity emphasized the importance of students sharing their knowledge and understanding and engaging in a genuine discussion with their peers about what they had learned. This practice also allowed students to identify, analyze, and find a way to solve societal inequalities and better appreciate other cultures. Students believed they created stronger connections to the text through speed dating, poetry in motion, slide shows, and other hands-on activities.

## **Research Question 2**

**Research Question 2:** What criteria does the teacher consider when selecting culturally responsive literature for students? What considerations influenced the teacher’s decision when making book selections?

Examining the teacher’s criteria and factors when selecting culturally responsive literature for her students revealed two themes. These themes were the Role of Students’ Cultural Backgrounds and Familiarizing Oneself with Diverse Literature.

Based on interviews, written responses, classroom observations, and a review of Mrs. Smith's class syllabus (Appendix A), it was evident that Mrs. Smith attempted to select literature for her students with great care and intent. During conversations with Mrs. Smith, she emphasized the importance of caring for and valuing her students, fostering a sense of community in her classroom, and recognizing the need for difficult conversations about race and culture on occasion. Mrs. Smith stated,

I adore my students. I want them to feel that my classroom is a place that is safe and that I am interested in what they have to say. My students and I are very comfortable with one another. My own children have always commented on how close my students and I are. They have expressed that they wish they were that close to their teachers. I want to share with you one of the best compliments I have ever received from a student last year: 'Thank you for the many books that have expanded my horizons and the many hours I spent reading them. As a person, you cast White fragility to the side by teaching the unfiltered truth about racism and oppression. You provide many other students and me with the hope that teachers in the future will be more understanding and willing to listen.' After reading that quote from one of my students, I cried and knew I was making a difference.

Consequently, I deduced these themes from my numerous conversations, observations, and artifacts.

The role of students' cultural backgrounds and familiarizing oneself with diverse literature are both essential when selecting literature for diverse students. Mrs. Smith stated, "cultural relevance requires awareness, understanding, and sensitivity to the beliefs, values,

customs, behaviors, norms, and habits (among other things) of a particular culture, whether racial, religious, gender- or age-based, or regional.”

To be effective members of society, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds must be fully functioning members of literate communities at home and school (Au, 1995). Callins (2006) stated,

Culturally responsive literacy instruction bridges the gap between the school and the student’s world, is consistent with the student’s cultural values, aims to ensure academic learning, and encourages teachers to adapt their instructional practice to meet the needs of all students. (Tandria Callins, 2006, p. 62)

Familiarizing oneself with diverse literature is essential for teachers to consider while instructing students in literacy. Mrs. Smith defined diverse literature as works by Black authors (or, in some circumstances, female authors of any ethnicity) that tell the story of marginalized and diverse people. Mrs. Smith believed that diverse literature incorporates the cultures of the students being taught, enabling them to maintain their cultural identities and question and criticize social and societal inequities.

In the unit that included *Native Son*— “Giving a Voice to the Voiceless,” the Black Male Experience—Mrs. Smith emphasized the Black family and the experiences of Black men in our country. Throughout this academic year, Mrs. Smith exposed her students to numerous authors who, in her opinion, represent the diversity of her student body. Mrs. Smith stated, Most books in my classroom are written by authors representing my students. These books represent the oppressed, discriminated, and marginalized populations. They highlight many different cultures and people. They are books that examine societal inequality with great candor. Books with cultural relevance must also contain realism.

They must be relevant to the students' lives. They must be interesting and reflective of the student's experiences. As cheesy as it sounds, I once heard that the books I select for my students should be mirrors in which they can see themselves.

Mrs. Smith stated that the literature she selects for her students should serve as mirrors through which they may see themselves; however, some of her students disagreed. The majority of Mrs. Smith's students are Latinx. Her course outline (Appendix A) exposed an absence of Latinx and other ethnic authors. Her course outline included literature by White authors: Charlotte Perkins Gilmore, Kate Chopin, and Walt Whitman. Khaled Hosseini is Afghan American, and Richard Wright and Alice Walker are both Black authors featured on her syllabus and part of the curriculum.

Mrs. Smith focused on topics such as "Giving a Voice to the Voiceless," "Marginalized Voices in Social Schisms Due to Racial and Ethnic Differences," "The Black Male Experience in America," "The Female Experience in America," and "The Black Female Experience in America." It is important to recognize that Mrs. Smith's curriculum did not include any Latinx authors or stories that celebrate the Latinx culture through strong Latinx representation.

Three Latinas—Kate, Ana, and Jade—did not feel represented in Mrs. Smith's selection of books. Throughout our conversations (as shown in the interview notes), they highlighted that the books they read do not represent most students. Ana (Latinx female) stated the following, I don't think I am represented personally in the text *Native Son*, given I am a Hispanic woman. Still, I do recognize the systemic racism Wright was able to portray and show how many of us are blind to reality and stuck in our communities instead of being more open to others. I don't think this literature connects to my experience because I cannot connect with any of the characters. I am neither White nor Black, and I believe there is a

lack of Hispanic representation in the literature taught in my school, which is interesting since this school is majority Hispanic. Either way, I do think this literature explains the racism people go through every day today and how a lot of us are oblivious to it.

Although Mrs. Smith exposed Ana and her classmates to diverse literature, it was not representative of her student body. Ana felt the literature she was presented with in class did not represent her culture and traditions.

Mrs. Smith asserted that diverse literature exposes students to other cultural identities, allowing them to appreciate different cultures while exploring the issues these cultural groups face, as she did while reading *Native Son* with her students. Mrs. Smith explained that seeing problems faced by different cultural groups fosters empathy in her students and, hopefully, motivates them to work to correct the inequities. Mrs. Smith explained during her interview, “By exposing my students to culturally relevant material, I am empowering them, teaching them to be lifelong learners, and encouraging them not to confine their education to the four walls of a classroom.”

Mrs. Smith noted that these factors come into play when selecting literature for her students. She mentioned there was recently a debate in her English department. A handful of teachers felt uncomfortable teaching the play “Fences” by August Wilson, an African American author. Their discomfort stemmed from the author’s use of the ‘N’ word in the text. Mrs. Smith felt that many White teachers shy away from teaching culturally relevant literature because they think it is not their place to teach them. However, Mrs. Smith believed they are wrong in thinking that. She asserted,

African American authors primarily have a White audience in mind when writing their books. They are all too cognizant of their encounters with racism and inequality, as is

their Black audience. They write novels to convey the Black community's challenges to White readers. White teachers must select, read, and teach these books because they acknowledge the plight of many of our students and allow them to see us as allies in their lives.

Mrs. Smith made an effort to include literature that demonstrates cultural, ethnic, genre, and social diversity in her curriculum. Despite her efforts to include diverse authors, she has neglected to recognize her Latinx students and their need to be recognized and represented in her literature selections. However, as shown in the next section, some students—particularly Latinx students—did not feel a connection to the *Native Son* text and did not feel that other texts in the class represented their culture or ethnicity.

### **Research Question 3**

**Research Question 3:** How do students engage with the text and each other? How do students perceive their representation in the text?

Two themes emerged when describing how the students interact while reading the text and how they perceive their representation. Included among these are the Need for More Diverse Literature and the Persistence of Racial Injustice in Modern American Society. In addition, the following subthemes emerged: Systemic Racism, Societal Stereotypes and Communities, Racism, and Literacy Connections.

During my observations, students in this class displayed a high level of mutual respect; were attentive to the text; and seemed to be very interested in learning about the characters, plot, and, most importantly, the social injustices appearing throughout the text. When asked how they saw themselves in the text, some students identified with Bigger's character and other students from different racial or socioeconomic backgrounds did not identify with him. All students,

however, realized that the racial stereotyping and racist policies from the past continue to inform the present.

### **Systemic Racism**

Systemic racism was an apparent and prevalent theme in the following excerpt from the student focus group with Aaron, Jane, Allie, and Charlie. Aaron identified as Hispanic and spoke about the lack of systemic racism in his daily life but how its existence in society “irritates” him and is “very wrong.” Jane identified as Black and expressed her disappointment that in 2022, people of color in the United States are still not treated fairly or equally. She also spoke about her personal experiences with systemic racism and how Bigger “had it worse than her family.” Allie (a Latinx female) and Charlie (a black male) had similar concerns about systemic racism and the unfair treatment of people of color.

Aaron (Latinx male): *Native Son* irritates me because society views minorities as less than others. I cannot relate to Bigger because I have never been in a similar situation. I enjoy the luxuries of a good home, education, and job. In my personal life, I am not confronted with systemic racism. Many of the residents in my neighborhood have experienced systemic racism, but my closest friends and family have not. I see systemic racism in the stories I read online and on the news, but not in my daily life. Systemic racism is still very wrong.

Jane (Black female): Because I am an African American, I have encountered racism and societal stereotypes. I can relate to the characters in the books I read at school. I firmly believe the character Bigger had it much worse than my family and I have. The harshness of society can turn anyone into a murderer. After reading *Native Son*, I realized how negatively many still think of people of color. It makes me extremely upset that not

everyone in the United States receives equal treatment, and it is 2022! Not everyone in the United States enjoys the same constitutional protections. *Native Son* describes how people were treated based on race, ethnicity, religion, or age. *Native Son* describes how my school and society think and act toward people of color. Racism has existed and continues to exist in our country. *Native Son* connects to my past because I have also experienced systemic racism on a smaller scale. When I apply to colleges and jobs, I encounter systemic racism. Unfortunately, some people are happier with members of their race.

Allie (Latinx female): Because I am a Hispanic person living in America, where racism is still prevalent, and segregation is still very much alive, I see myself represented in the story. I relate to Bigger's character because he lacks responsibility for his actions. I can identify with the characters in the book because, like Bigger, I frequently make poor decisions based on how I think those in authority will react to my choices. Many students in my school frequently make poor decisions and do not take responsibility for their actions. The story of *Native Son* provides a perspective on the realism of society today—a society filled with continued racism and injustice for people of color. *Native Son* represents my classmates and me because the book stresses the difficulty of making White people understand the psychological damage it does to be racist. I often feel judged because I am Hispanic. That is just not fair!

Charlie (Black male): As an African American male, I can relate to Bigger's inconveniences and feelings. I have had similar experiences to Bigger. Societal norms and systemic racism are very real. Bigger is altered in a way and has to act differently in certain situations because of his race. Why should I feel uncomfortable if I am the only

Black kid in a store? We are all humans and could be great potential friends, but due to past and present happenings, we are made to feel unwanted or that we are doing something wrong. Do you know how scary that is? I do! For example, Bigger's character feels very uncomfortable around White people and changes his tone, demeanor, and facial expressions whenever he is around them. I totally understand how Bigger must have felt. I often feel the same way.

Aaron, a Latinx male, stated that he did not experience systemic racism, possibly due to his economic privilege, intact family, and educated family members, which may have shielded him from what Bigger experienced. Perhaps he does not leave his community as frequently as other students who have experienced racism and discrimination or heard stories from family members living in other parts of the country.

As the class discussed the main characters in the book and how they dealt with racism daily, Mrs. Smith explained to her students that although she is White and receives more privileges due to her race, she recognizes that this is unfair. She explained to her students that she will use her White privilege for as long as it takes to ensure that they enjoy the same positive experiences and privileges that she did.

It is important to acknowledge that systemic racism exists and affects people of all races, including Latinx individuals. Although an individual Latinx student may not have personally experienced systemic racism, it does not mean that the issue does not exist or that others within their community have not been impacted. It is important to listen to and validate the experiences of those who have faced systemic racism and work toward creating a more equitable and just society for all.

The need to confront systemic racism, personal attacks, stereotypes, and perceptions due to race and ethnicity was strongly articulated through these students' interviews. Bleich et al. (2019) noted that people of color frequently experience racial and ethnic discrimination daily, such as when seeking health care, purchasing or renting a home, applying for jobs, and interacting with law enforcement.

### **Societal Stereotypes About Communities of Color**

Alexa, Taylor, Karen, and Lizzette believed that societal stereotypes and their effects on their community are still a part of today's world and impact their daily lives.

Alexa (Black female): *Native Son* is relatable to me because, like Bigger, I am looked down upon when I reveal where I live. When I reveal that I attend Central Islip High School, it is assumed that I am not the most intelligent or will not be the most successful due to societal stereotypes of districts like Bloomfield and Baywood [districts with predominantly Latinx student populations] and the people in my community. Like the book's main character, Bigger is looked down upon because he is from the Black Belt of Chicago. People assume he will not accomplish anything. I identify with Bigger. Like me, Bigger aspires to become a pilot. I believe Bigger would have been more successful if he had a more supportive family structure and environment instead of being stereotyped because of his race and where he comes from.

Taylor (Black female): Often, I recognize myself in the books I read for this class due to societal issues involving gender or race. The books I read in Mrs. Smith's English class address issues I observe outside school. After reading *Native Son*, I am convinced that the United States of America must do a much better job addressing inequality-related issues. Minority groups continue to feel disadvantaged, like how Bigger felt in *Native Son*. In

*Native Son*, the Black community was forced to live in deplorable, health-threatening housing conditions. It was shocking to consider how recently the Black community had endured this. I actually see my older family members in the book due to the discrimination and oppression the Black community still faces today. I am, after all, a Black woman, and I clearly feel and see how society stereotypes people that look like me. Like Bigger, I've been treated differently because of my race. I have had many conversations with older family members about the novel. They expressed to me that they could relate to the racism and isolation experienced by the characters.

Karen (Latinx female): I can think more critically due to *Native Son's* profound, relevant, and engaging subject matter. I see myself in many of the books I read in school. Like some characters in the literature my classmates and I have read, society looks down upon us because of our community. When people hear where I live, they assume I live in a community full of gangs and bad people, which is unfair, disheartening, and a terrible assumption to make. They believe I am a bad person and probably won't even attend college. I am often looked down upon for being Hispanic. Racism is still ingrained in our society's institutions, and it is crucial to discuss the matter to address it. The books I read in her English class give me a better perspective of how other people live in society.

Richard Wright gave his readers a first-person view of what it was like to live in the Black Belt of Chicago. I now have a deeper understanding of Black people's daily lives living in the Black Belt. I will always advocate for the Black community and fight for equality alongside them. *Native Son* spoke directly to me!

Lizzette (Latinx female): I am thrilled that my teacher selects authentic books that provoke students to think critically about society. Many teachers are too hesitant to share

the truth about the world. They would prefer that their students were unaware of events outside their bubble to avoid difficult conversations. I see myself in the literature I read in Mrs. Smith's class. Due primarily to where I live, many people judge me, my family, and my friends. They assume I am a bad person who does drugs and associates with gangs. It makes me feel terrible and angry to be judged by ignorant individuals. Even the news consistently portrays my town very negatively.

When it comes to stereotyping, adolescents face a significant obstacle. According to Alexa, Taylor, and Lizette, stereotyping contributes to preconceived notions and expectations of individuals, their communities, and their school environments. They expressed their frustration with how they are treated and the pervasive stereotypes in their neighborhood. They believed that because they are from a predominantly Latinx community, society had the misconception that they were less educated, involved with gangs, or would never attend college. My interviews with Alexa, Taylor, and Lizette revealed that they were disappointed, offended, and angry about the assumptions made about their school and community.

## **Racism**

The perception of racism in our society emerged as a recurring theme in my interviews with Jade, Cherry Ann, and Kate. These students shared heartbreaking stories of what they perceived to be racism related to their own family's history of slavery in the South and the current conditions facing their community today.

Jade (Latinx female): The book *Native Son* made me angry because of how society treated Black people in the 1930s and how it continues to treat them today. Although I cannot relate entirely to Bigger's character, I sometimes exhibit similar behavior and regret it later. However, I feel connected to the *Native Son* because of my family's

history. My great-grandparents were from the South, and while they did not experience the same type of racism the same way that Bigger did, they did have negative racist experiences because of the color of their skin. I have been impacted by racism because my great-grandparents have told me about their experiences. My great-grandparents emphasized the importance of consistently advocating for what I believe in and making the world better for myself and others.

Cherry Ann (Latinx female): The story of *Native Son* relates to my experience because racism is still prevalent in society today, particularly in my community. Racism is everywhere. It may not be as direct as in *Native Son*, but it is there. It has changed throughout the years, making it less and less noticeable, yet it is there.

Kate (Latinx Female): After reading *Native Son*, I now notice how much hardship Black people had to endure to get to where they are today. Even now, society still treats Black people and people of color negatively solely because of their race. Like the character Bigger, I could understand what it feels like to have been called names and ridiculed. My experiences may not have been as brutal as Bigger's or Hassan's in *The Kite Runner*, but it does not mean other people don't face violence today. I understand why Bigger acted the way he did because of his innate fear of White people, and he wanted to be finally free and break from the chains of White society. *Native Son* gave me a better understanding of life for Black people in the urban South during the 1930s. It was incredibly unfair because the White people in power were in charge and didn't want to give the Black community a better life simply because they were Black. I know many people are still impoverished and deal with racism daily. The recent Black Lives Matter protests give a wake-up call that we could still do so much better as a society not to treat

minorities poorly and judge them because of their race. Wright's wake-up call to society is prominent because we can't improve if we don't change these thoughts against people solely due to their race.

Kate, Jade, and Cherry Ann agreed that racism in the United States is still a significant escalating problem. Reading a diverse range of literature that reflects the students' cultural identities and encouraging them to solve problems, learn about other cultures, and think critically about societal inequalities by expressing their feelings, fears, and potential solutions are beneficial and should be encouraged.

### **Literacy Connections**

Chris, Tanner, Christopher, and Ana made connections to the selected literature. Tanner and Christopher all commented on the similarities between themselves and certain characters in the book. Christian emphasized the significance of self-control for improved future outcomes. Ana presented an interesting opinion about the literature selected for her English class.

Chris (Black male): *Native Son* presented a broad concept and a glimpse of the future world. This book will hopefully open the eyes of this year's graduating students to the cruelty of the real world, regardless of their race or background. Bigger was an impoverished young Black man who lived in a crowded area with little privacy. This novel relates to my economic situation. My parents are not well off, and I have to work. Bigger's transformation into a dynamic character reminds me of my growth. At times, I feel trapped. Everyone is a product of their environment. It is up to us to make the most of the conditions imposed by our environment. Bigger did not try his hardest, which teaches the reader what can occur when one does not exert effort.

Tanner (Mixed-race female): I feel comfortable and eager to learn about the literature Mrs. Smith introduces to our class. I enjoy the class discussions about the books we read because it makes the literature more relevant and exciting. I recognize myself in some books I read in school, particularly in Mrs. Smith's English class. Mrs. Smith chooses diverse authors who shed light on aspects of society that appear to be concealed. The book *Native Son* has opened my eyes to the societal challenges Black people faced in the early 1900s and continue to face today. I see my mom and me in the character Ms. Thomas, the mother of Bigger. She is constantly struggling and making no progress.

Christopher (Black male): *Native Son* impacted me so much that I felt part of the story. I felt like I was portrayed in the story. Like Bigger, a Black teenager living in a White dominated America. I am also a Black teenager living in a White-dominated society. Like Bigger's mom, my mom is extremely religious and wants me to have a prosperous future. Unfortunately, I get frustrated, similar to the Black characters in the book, because of the unequal opportunities afforded Black people. I hope I can one day contribute to changing the status quo.

Ana (Latinx female): Every book chosen for this class has been engaging and has addressed the social consequences of historical events. Not only do I enjoy what we are reading, but I am also learning about topics rarely discussed in history classes. Although I cannot relate to Bigger because I have never felt what he has felt or experienced what he has experienced, I can, however, better understand Bigger. However, I find it a little upsetting, given that my school is predominantly Hispanic, not to read more books about Hispanic people and their contributions to American society.

Chris, Tanner, Christopher, and Ana's intellectual development, moral growth, and problem-solving skills were evident in how they navigated the text and its highly complex issues. Educators must include texts from a wide range of cultures in a society that is becoming increasingly diverse and multicultural. The increase in diversity includes students of various religions, socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientations, gender identities, and linguistic backgrounds. Educators must recognize the significance of inclusivity in all aspects of instruction, especially literature.

#### **Research Question 4**

**Research Question 4:** What teaching practices does the teacher find most effective when teaching diverse students? How do those practices relate to culturally responsive pedagogy?

#### **Themes: Cultural Connections and Various Types of Text**

A common theme emerged when describing what the teacher found most effective in teaching diverse students and how those teaching practices relate to CRP. This theme was Cultural Connections and Various Types of Text. Throughout the teaching of the novel, the teacher introduced various hands-on projects and activities that students were required to work on individually and in a group setting. Mrs. Smith found this method of instruction highly effective because it allowed her to observe her students' interactions with one another and individually. She also discovered that students of color could better comprehend complex and delicate situations through hands-on instruction, which allowed her students to converse with their peers as they learned about often very tragic historical events. Mrs. Smith stated,

It is crucial for students from diverse backgrounds to believe that their interpretations of the text merit consideration. I never convey the idea that one interpretation is superior to

another. I asked them questions about how they arrived at the interpretation and asked for evidence to support their conclusion.

Cultural Connections and Various Types of Text were common themes prevalent in Mrs. Smith's practice of CRP. For instance, after the first chapter of *Native Son*, students completed group assignments that included creating a comic strip of a pivotal scene, writing poems from the characters' perspectives, creating a Twitter account for a character, writing tweets, and writing flash fiction.

After book two of *Native Son*, students gave presentations that included a Crime Scene Investigator (CSI) team assigned to the novel's case. Students created and brought to life the newspaper from the novel. Students focused on how the protagonist was portrayed in the media and how the media contributed to society's racist perceptions.

Mrs. Smith concluded the study of the novel by discussing how the novel is not outdated by the depictions of how Black males were once treated (and continue to be treated) in this country. As their final assignment, students wrote a paper in which they chose two critical lenses to view the novel and used them to provide interpretations. The Reader Response lens created by Louise Rosenblatt was one of the lenses students were required to use to respond to the text on a personal level. Mrs. Smith posed the following brainstorming questions to her students:

- How does the literature connect to the reader's experience?
- What does the literature mean to the reader?
- What does the reader learn from the literature?

Mrs. Smith believed that students from diverse backgrounds must believe that their interpretations of the text are valid. She never told her students that their interpretation is

inaccurate. She repeatedly inquired how they arrived at their understanding and asked them to offer supporting details.

### **Chapter Summary**

Data from the notes of several classroom observations were presented with accompanying analyses of the teacher and student interviews. Data for this case study were taken from one Advanced Placement English teacher and her 18 students in a diverse school district. This case study was analyzed by one overarching question and four sub-questions representing the teachers' culturally responsive practices, the students' engagement with the text and each other, and the students' perceptions of the text.

Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the results presented in this chapter. This analysis is presented as a discussion, with conclusions drawn from the findings of each research question. In addition, Chapter 5 discusses the implications of these findings for practice and future research.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

This chapter presents the summary of the study, the findings related to the literature, unexpected outcomes resulting from the findings, and the conclusions. The study summary provides an overview of the previous four chapters and reiterates the problem, purpose statement, research questions, methodology, major findings, and discussion of the findings as they pertain to the theme, existing literature, and the theoretical framework. Finally, I discuss the contributions to the theory, the limitations, recommendations for future research, surprise findings, and conclusion.

### Summary of the Study

At a diverse Long Island high school, I explored teaching and learning in an advanced placement English class where the teacher used CRP while teaching Richard Wright's *Native Son*. I addressed the teacher's rationale for selecting literature for her students, how students engaged in dialogue with one another, how the students saw themselves in the text, and how the students described their feelings about the text.

In Chapter 1, I discussed how my first-grade teacher Mrs. Douglas (pseudonym/African American), who taught me using CRP, encouraged me to pursue a career in education. In addition, I presented the context for this study as well as my educational journey. I discussed how the population of the United States is becoming more ethnically and racially diverse, as well as how the demographics of American schools are changing. In Chapter 2, I reviewed the literature on the significance of students of color having access to teachers of color and the significance of teachers using CRP in their instruction. I applied Gloria- Ladson Billing's theoretical framework of CRP to this study to understand and emphasize the importance of using CRP in the classroom

and when selecting literature for instruction. I also explored the importance of implementing CRP in U.S. classrooms for the increasingly diverse student population. Chapter 3 described in detail the method used to conduct this qualitative study. After considering alternative approaches, I explained why the case study design was most appropriate for this research. Using a case study design, I conducted in-depth interviews with the participants and observed the classroom environment through the lens of the CR-S framework. I analyzed the participants' responses and extracted themes from them. In Chapter 4, I discussed the significant findings that emerged from the participant interviews and analyzed them using the CRP frameworks. I utilized CRP to demonstrate how the teacher instructed and selected literature based on the three components of CRP (academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness).

### **Problem**

The racial and ethnic composition of U.S. schools has evolved significantly. As reported in the Institute of Education Sciences (U.S. Department of Education), by 2025, students of color will make up the majority of high school graduates; however, teachers' practices and the books they choose for their students have not evolved to reflect the diversity of today's classrooms (Acquah et al., 2016). When diverse students do not see themselves reflected in literature, they often become disengaged (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2019). Exposure to authentic texts is associated with forming a healthy intellectual identity and a sense of belonging in school and society (Youngs, 2015). Students must see themselves reflected in the literature, and teachers must be mindful of cultural differences and instruct through a lens that reflects the cultural diversity of their student body.

Adolescents who do not see themselves represented in the literature they read are more likely to struggle with reading and are less likely to be fully engaged in classroom

instruction. They may also begin to believe that they are less of a person and accept that other cultures, ethnicities, and genders are more important or valued than their own. Literature may be one of the only spaces where socially isolated adolescents encounter individuals unlike themselves. Teachers must recognize the correlation between being exposed to multicultural literature, the development of a healthy intellectual identity, and a sense of belonging in school and society (Youngs, 2015).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the teaching and learning that took place within an advanced-placement English high school class in which the teacher used CRP while teaching the novel *Native Son* by Richard Wright. This study also explored how the teacher engaged in CRP while using this text, including her considerations while choosing class literature and student perceptions of the *Native Son* unit of study.

### **Research Questions**

This study answered the following overarching question:

What is the teaching and learning that takes place within an advanced-placement English high school class in which the teacher uses culturally responsive practices?

These were the four sub-research questions:

1. How does the teacher incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy while using the text *Native Son* by Richard Wright?
2. What criteria does the teacher consider when selecting culturally responsive literature for students? What considerations influenced the teacher's decision when making book selections?
3. How do students engage with the text and each other? How do students perceive their representation in the text?

4. What teaching practices does the teacher find most effective when teaching diverse students? How do those practices relate to culturally responsive pedagogy?

### **Review of the Methodology**

The research questions of my dissertation study were answered by utilizing a qualitative case study methodology. Using a social constructivist worldview, I conducted classroom observations, interviewed the teacher, and conducted one 40-minute interview with two focus groups. My data collection began in November 2022 and was completed in December 2022. Interactions between the teacher and her students were also observed throughout classroom periods formally and informally CR-S framework, which allows teachers to create student centered learning environments that affirm racial, linguistic, and cultural identities. CR-S prepares students for rigorous and independent learning, cultivates students' abilities to connect across lines of difference, gives a voice to those who have been silenced in the past, and empowers students to be agents of social change.

The collected data consisted of interviews, interview transcripts, classroom observations, focus groups, and field notes. My research included interviewing 18 students and their teacher (3 of the 18 students chose to respond in writing). I transcribed the interviews using Rev.com. I analyzed the data and developed codes and themes to answer my research questions.

### **Major Findings**

In Chapter 4, I presented explanations for the research questions. Below, I summarize the findings related to each research question. With regard to the first research question, the teacher recognized the importance of incorporating diverse teaching strategies, such as CRP and the significance of planning engaging activities with which her students could relate.

Regarding the second research question, despite the teacher's efforts to select books written by authors she believed reflected her students, give them a voice, and teach them about prominent figures, some Latinx students felt that their cultural traditions and backgrounds were not reflected (or ignored) in the literature selections. The teacher had no books on the syllabus that reflected her classroom's largely Latinx student body.

Regarding the third question, students acknowledged a strong connection to the novel's characters and showed a high engagement level with the text. Students demonstrated a strong sense of student learning, as evidenced by their problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, while they immersed themselves in the group projects assigned by the teacher. Students thoroughly enjoyed the tasks because they could relate to creating newspapers, tweets, and poems about the novel's characters. Several students recognized themselves in the main character, while others had not experienced the same amount of racism. The vast majority of students regarded racism to be extremely prevalent in society.

Regarding the fourth question, the teacher had developed several efficient teaching strategies for her diverse student body. For instance, students drew comic strips depicting a pivotal event in the text, wrote poetry from the perspective of a character, made a Twitter account for a character, wrote posts or tweets, and presented crime scene investigations. Students produced a newspaper based on the media's portrayal of the protagonist. These hands-on exercises allowed students to comprehend the characters' lived experiences, demonstrate their problem-solving skills, and better appreciate another culture's traditions.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

In this section, I discuss the dissertation's findings in terms of existing literature. I examine it in relation to this study's CRP theoretical framework (student learning/success,

cultural competence, and critical awareness). I elaborate on how these findings add to the existing research within these sections. This study focused on four research questions to address the primary inquiry, and themes were identified from the data. The following themes emerged and were utilized to answer the research questions: Varied Pedagogical Strategies, Role of Students' Cultural Backgrounds, Familiarizing Oneself with Diverse Literature, the Need for More Diverse Literature, the Persistence of Racial Injustice in Modern American Society, and Cultural Connections in Various Types of Text.

### **Varied Pedagogical Strategies**

Tandria Callins (2006) noted that culturally responsive literacy instruction intersects the school and the student's world. It is consistent with the values of the student's culture, ensures academic learning, and encourages teachers to adapt their instructional practices to meet the needs of all students. Lynch (2011) noted that culturally responsive instruction is a student centered approach to education that identifies students' unique cultural strengths and is fostered to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being regarding the student's cultural place in the world.

Mrs. Smith understood the importance of implementing CRP and various instructional methods into her daily instructional practices, and she did this through her use of technology that students enjoyed and connected to and through her use of varied assessment practices that pushed students' thinking beyond standardized tests. The White teacher also validated her diverse students' ways of knowing through her cultural sensitivity approach.

Through the use of technology, Mrs. Smith incorporated CRP into her lesson with the text. I observed how Mrs. Smith's Google Classroom was utilized for "silent discussions." Silent discussions encourage all students to write and collaborate on a single Google Document. Mrs.

Smith provided her students with text-related prompts for this activity. Mrs. Smith used the following writing prompts during her instruction: (1) Sometimes, I feel frustrated and powerless when... (2) In this country, racial prejudice feels... (3) I've never been angrier than when... (4) When someone is convicted of murder... and (5) "After many years of oppression..." This lesson allowed her students to focus on the book's most important concepts and themes. After selecting and entering their chosen writing prompt into the Google Classroom forum, students worked in small groups to discuss their thoughts on the prompt. Many students were eager to share their work and discuss their selected writing prompt.

It was evident that Mrs. Smith continued to use CRP and varied pedagogical strategies during her assessments of the text. She explored multiple alternative evaluations while using the novel. Mrs. Smith's use of multiple assessments aided her students' intellectual growth and moral development. It also assisted with her students' problem and reasoning skills. At the end of the first section of *Native Son*, for example, students completed group tasks in which they created a comic strip of a pivotal scene, wrote poems from the perspectives of characters, created a Twitter account for a character, and wrote posts and tweets related to the characters. Students worked collaboratively to recreate and present evidence in the murder trial depicted in the novel by developing a Crime Scene Investigative (CSI) team. The CSI team brought to life the novel's newspaper, focusing on how the protagonist was portrayed in the media and how the media contributed to societal racism. As an assessment, Mrs. Smith concluded the activity and lesson by discussing how the depiction of the treatment of African American males in this country has not changed significantly over the past several decades. I observed most students agreed with their teacher and one another. While some students appeared to be taken aback by this information, others did not appear to be the least bit surprised.

Ladson-Billings (2009) noted that empowerment through validation is crucial to CRT because it restores students' hope. Mrs. Smith asserted that regardless of the class discussions, it is essential for diverse students to believe that their interpretations of the text are valid. Mrs. Smith explained she encourages her students to trust their emotions and continuously validates their perspectives. As a teacher, Mrs. Smith's cultural sensitivity was evident to me. I observed that her instruction was student focused, pedagogically varied, and culturally responsive.

### **The Role of Students' Cultural Backgrounds and Familiarizing Oneself with Diverse Literature**

Jones-Goods (2019) noted that teachers face a number of challenges in meeting the literacy needs of students who are racially, ethnically, or linguistically diverse. Teachers frequently struggle to find literacy materials that incorporate a variety of engaging approaches for all students. One of the challenges teachers face is determining how to capitalize on the diversity in their classroom to have the most influence on students' literacy acquisition.

Two themes emerged when I examined the criteria and factors that Mrs. Smith considered when she selected culturally responsive literature for her students: The Role of Students' Cultural Backgrounds and Familiarizing Oneself with Diverse Literature. Mrs. Smith emphasized the importance of acknowledging students' diverse backgrounds, cultures, languages, and life experiences as strengths when she selects literature for her diverse student population. Mrs. Smith stated, "It is important that the literature I choose for my students is a positive reflection of my students so that they can imagine themselves in the story in a favorable way."

During the interview, Mrs. Smith emphasized the importance of ensuring that the literature she chooses for her diverse student population values their diverse backgrounds, cultures, languages, and life experiences. However, some Latinx students did not see themselves

in the books they read, and one student criticized the class for not including any literature written about Latinx characters.

Since Mrs. Smith began her teaching career, she has always used the methodology from *Literature Exploration* by Louise M. Rosenblatt, the developer of the Reader-Response Lens. Rosenblatt (1933) noted that the study of literature can have a genuine, and even central, relation to points of growth in the social and cultural life of a democracy. Rosenblatt considered literary study as an essential civic experience or ‘transaction’ and advocated for student-readers to identify with diverse points of view and debate interpretations. Rosenblatt asserted that the classroom could be a laboratory for democracy and humanistic values.

During the observations, Mrs. Smith attempted to demonstrate CRP when she selected books for her students. Mrs. Smith claimed that the books she chooses for her students should serve as mirrors through which they can see themselves; nevertheless, some of her students disagreed. Mrs. Smith’s students were predominantly Latinx. Her course outline revealed that Latinx authors are missing. Although Mrs. Smith has no authors of Latinx descent on her class syllabus, some of her books were written by authors who are representative of some of her students’ demographics. Her books represent the oppressed, the discriminated against, and the marginalized. They highlight a range of cultures and individuals. They are books that examine societal inequalities candidly and highlight a diverse range of cultures, people, and traditions.

Some of Mrs. Smith’s books align with Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1995b) three major components of CRP: (a) focusing on student learning and academic success, (b) developing students’ cultural competence to assist them in establishing positive ethnic and social identities, and (c) supporting students’ critical consciousness or their ability to recognize and critique societal inequalities. Hammond (2015) noted that when planning for CRT, culture is not the only

factor to consider. The sociopolitical context also shapes the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. When selecting culturally responsive literature for her students, Mrs. Smith expressed that she not only considers if the text is representative of her student body but also considers the societal inequalities and challenges of social politics. Mrs. Smith asserted that culturally relevant books must be realistic and relatable to the students reading them. They must be engaging and reflective of the experiences of the students.

At the beginning of the school year, Mrs. Smith provides each student with a detailed eight-unit syllabus. The first unit is titled “Marginalized Voices and Social Schism Due to Racial and Ethnic Differences.” *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini is the first book assigned to students for this unit. Unit two is titled “The Black Male Experience in America.” For this unit, students read Richard Wright’s short story, “The Man Who Was Almost a Man,” and his novel *Native Son*. The third unit is titled “Female Experience in America.” For this unit, students read Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Kate Chopin’s works include “Desiree’s Baby,” “The Story of an Hour,” and *The Awakening*. Unit four explores the “Black Female Experience in America.” Students read Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use” and *The Color Purple*. The fifth unit is titled “Global Marginalization and Oppression of Women.” Students read Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* for this unit. Poetry is the sixth unit, and Mrs. Smith attempted to select authors who are representative of her diverse student population for this unit. Mrs. Smith prepared her students for assessments in unit seven. Mrs. Smith concluded the year with unit 8, “Reflections as a Senior, Giving Myself a Voice.” Students write their senior memoir books during this final unit.

Moller (2012) noted that exposure to diverse literary genres increases students’ social awareness and concern for others. Students must access literature that reflects their ethnicity,

culture, experiences, and environment. Literature that allows students to see various aspects of themselves, their community, and the people they care about can be meaningful tools for affirming their racial identity (Bishop, 1990; Yenika-Agbaw & Napoli, 2011).

In the selection of literature for diverse students, the role of students' cultural backgrounds and familiarity with diverse literature is critical. Despite excluding works by Latinx authors, Mrs. Smith tried to include literature that represents the oppressed, discriminated, and marginalized populations. She appreciates literature that offers her students a voice and teaches them about notable people from diverse backgrounds.

### **The Need for More Diverse Literature and the Persistence of Racial Injustice in Modern American Society**

Two themes emerged when describing how the students interacted while reading the text and how they perceived their representation. These include the Need for More Diverse Literature and the Persistence of Racial Injustice in Modern American Society. Moreover, the subthemes of Systemic Racism, Societal Stereotypes and Communities, and Literacy Connections emerged.

Hammond (2015) asserted that instructional conversation is one of the essential tools for a culturally responsive teacher. Ladson-Billings (1995) recognized this type of instruction in her components for CRP. Enhancing the student's intellectual growth, moral development, and problem-solving skills is essential. Ladson-Billings emphasized student learning, cultural competence, and critical consciousness as crucial factors in all students' development, growth, and success.

In observations and conversations, students appeared to enjoy the assignments, as Mrs. Smith made the tasks relatable for them. Students related to creating newspapers, tweets, and poems about the characters in the book. Some students connected to the main character in the

book, while others could not because they have “never been mistreated because of their race.” When given the opportunity to express themselves, most students believed racism persisted, and many identified strongly with the book’s characters. On several occasions, I heard Black students comment to their Latinx classmates that they were glad their teacher spoke openly about racism and inequality.

According to Ladson-Billings (1995a), students acquire academic success due to their racial identities reinforced through representation. Moller (2012) suggested that students develop a heightened sense of social awareness and concern for others due to their exposure to literature in which these topics are discussed. In the exploration of how the book *Native Son* impacted students’ perspectives on society, housing, school policies, and the criminal justice system, most students expressed that they understood why the main character in the book (Bigger) often acted impulsively. The focus group interviews showed that most students felt represented in the book through circumstances and the main character.

Students acquire a “critical awareness through which they question the status quo of the present social order” by participating in self-reflection, studying challenging literature and ideas, and navigating meaningful and often difficult conversations (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). Subsequently, each student felt a connection to the text personally or through a family connection represented in the text. Each student was highly engaged with the text. Most students felt a strong connection to the novel’s characters. Students completely immersed themselves in the group projects assigned by the teacher and thoroughly enjoyed the tasks because they could relate to creating newspapers, tweets, and poems about the novel’s characters. Several students recognized themselves in the book, while others had not experienced the level of racism the main character experienced. The majority of students believed that racism remains extremely pervasive. Several

students remarked, for instance, that they are judged based on the community in which they reside and attend school. Students commented that people assume they are unintelligent, will never attend college, and are likely gang members. Subsequently, students perceive that people outside their community have deficit-based views of schools in low-income and/or communities of color (Comber, 2015).

### **Cultural Connections and Various Types of Text**

Ladson-Billings (1995) observed that a common misunderstanding regarding CRP is that effective teaching is primarily about what to do. However, Billings argued that effective teaching mostly depends on how teachers view their students, their communities, and broader social contexts while also considering the curriculum, instruction, and roles as teachers.

Mrs. Smith believed that making cultural connections and exposing students to various types of literature is the most effective way to teach students from diverse backgrounds. She stated that “diverse literature will expose students to various cultural and social groups, preparing them to be better community members.”

Mrs. Smith concluded the novel by reiterating that the book’s depictions of Black men’s treatment in this country are still prevalent today. She posed brainstorming questions to her students as an assessment, and students were encouraged to discuss and respond to the following questions in small groups. I observed and felt the students’ genuine passion as they discussed these extremely sensitive yet significant questions:

- How does the literature connect to the reader’s experience?
- What does the literature mean to the reader?
- What does the reader learn from the literature?

Mrs. Smith found several teaching practices, routines, rituals, and behaviors most effective when instructing her diverse students. She asserted that she encourages her students to document their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations regarding the literature they read; she instructs her students to consider what they thought and felt about the events in the book and how the author influenced their feelings and emotions. Mrs. Smith always required her students to compose one question prompted by the reading. She found “silent discussions,” in which all students write freely in the same document and respond to a series of prompts, to be highly effective. Mrs. Smith could better understand what her students know and how the literature affects them by reading about their feelings, experiences, and interpretations.

Mrs. Smith has developed several successful teaching strategies for her diverse student body, which have benefited her students in developing cultural connections through various literary genres. Several of Mrs. Smith’s hands-on activities allowed students to understand the characters’ life experiences. Mrs. Smith attempted to include culturally relevant practices in the text and her instruction so that most students felt represented, valued, and included.

### **Contributions to Theory**

The findings of this research contribute to the theoretical framework of CRP by Gloria Ladson-Billings. In Ladson-Billings’ (1995) article, “Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” she examined studies on the intersectionality of culture and instruction. The teacher in this study made great efforts to incorporate CRP while she taught to from the text, developed and assigned activities to her students, and administered her assignments. Mrs. Smith’s use of CRP developed her students’ intellectual growth, moral development, problem-solving ability, and reasoning. Her students also acquired skills in cultural competence, which allowed them to affirm and appreciate their culture; develop fluency in other cultures; and have the ability to think critically

to identify, analyze, and solve the multitude of current societal inequalities that many people are facing.

### **Culturally relevant pedagogy**

The findings of this research support CRP theory by Gloria Ladson-Billings. This study exemplified Ladson-Billings' (1995) key pillars of academic success, cultural competency, and critical consciousness. Culture is crucial to education. Students' cultures and backgrounds aid in teaching and learning while impacting how they interact and learn while expressing their ideas and points of view. My research, which used various methodological approaches, demonstrated how an advanced-placement teacher used CRP to motivate and engage her students.

### ***Academic Success***

Academic achievement is the first pillar of Ladson-Billings' CRP theory, which highlights the significance of a teacher's primary responsibility to cultivate the minds of their students. Mrs. Smith set high academic standards for her students and met them where they were academically while encouraging them of their immense potential.

Mrs. Smith used technology to instruct her students while using the text. She was able to pique her students' interest through the use of technology, allowing them to appreciate and absorb valuable information from her instruction. Students expressed their appreciation for the activities that Mrs. Smith had planned for them. Mrs. Smith's strategies helped students grow intellectually, and their ability to think and resolve challenges arising from the story's main character evident. Mrs. Smith was well aware of how critical it was for her students to experience a sense of being cared for and achieve academic success in her class.

Culturally relevant teachers consider what they teach, why they teach it, and how they will teach it based on the unique characteristics of their students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Mrs.

Smith very carefully planned out each lesson as it pertained to the text. One of her students commented, “Mrs. Smith is always prepared and ready as soon as we enter the classroom.”

### ***Cultural Competence***

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), teachers who show cultural competency understand the culture and its significance in education and accept responsibility for their students’ community. When teachers demonstrate cultural competency, the classroom resembles a room filled with mirrors and windows; Ladson-Billings (1995) noted that students see themselves reflected in the classroom and are provided with the opportunity to learn about and observe the lived experiences of others. While Mrs. Smith provided her students with many windows, she could have done more to provide them with mirrors. However, Mrs. Smith utilized her students’ culture as a foundation for learning, supporting them, and recognizing and respecting their cultural beliefs and practices while gaining access to and learning about the broader world through the text *Native Son*.

### ***Critical Consciousness***

Ladson-Billings (1995) asserted that socio-political awareness motivates teachers to educate themselves and their students on the personal and socio-political issues that impact their students, student groups, and society. Mrs. Smith incorporated sociopolitical awareness into her curricula. She demonstrated sociopolitical awareness and inspired her students to evaluate the current political climate and view themselves as agents of social change and inequalities. Mrs. Smith’s instructional practices empowered her students to question the inequitable status quo. Mrs. Smith engaged in deep conversations with her students about the text to ensure that they understood the context and could engage in dialogue with their classmates about societal injustices that impacted the main characters in the text. Mrs. Smith’s students explored their

identity, culture, stereotypes, and privilege to improve their understanding of critical consciousness.

In summary, my research has added to the classroom's practical application, demonstrating what CRP looks like according to the teacher's instruction from the literature *Native Son*. All of the teacher's lessons, activities, and class discussions were well received by her students. As students engaged in group projects and interacted with one another using technology, the classroom buzzed with energy.

No student should ever feel ignored or excluded in the literature discussed in their classroom. As Bishop (1990) stated, "When children cannot perceive themselves in the books they read, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society to which they belong" (p. 8). In addition, it is essential that all students, regardless of their ethnicity, have access to teachers that value their individuality, stimulate their intellect, expose them to other cultures, and engage in discussions that confront social concerns of inequality.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the data I collected and analyzed, as well as the themes and findings of the study, I propose the following recommendations for future research and possible areas to pursue.

#### **Teacher Selection**

In Chapter 1, I emphasized the significance of providing all students access to teachers from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, since students, particularly students of color, perform better in classes taught by teachers of their racial and cultural backgrounds. Although the teacher in this study possessed a wealth of literary knowledge and skills, it would be beneficial to conduct a similar study with a teacher of color to evaluate whether observing the students'

interactions with the text, activities, and student-to-student and student-to-teacher dialogue would have led to better student outcomes. I recommend conducting this study with an African American or Latinx teacher to explore such outcomes.

### **Class and State Demographics**

Eighteen students and their teacher from a diverse Long Island high school participated in this study. The majority of the students at this high school were Latinx. It would be beneficial to conduct this study with students from a different demographic to obtain a more profound knowledge of CRT and how a teacher selects literature for her students. I would also recommend conducting a similar study in a place like Florida, where the governor actively opposes the teaching of African American history for advanced-placement students. It would be fascinating to observe how Florida students react to the text *Native Son* and how they might contribute to the issue of injustices in the Black community in the future.

These recommendations can create numerous opportunities for future research. First, it may be beneficial to study teachers of color to determine whether their instructional practices, literature choices, and student interactions differ from those of the White teacher in this study. Second, it would be helpful to explore and understand the demographics of students across different states and how they might respond and react to the injustices confronting the United States. Third, it would be helpful to explore and understand the demographics of students in different political areas of the country and how they might respond and react to the text in relation to their intellectual growth, cultural awareness, and inequalities.

### **Surprising Finding**

When I was questioning students about their thoughts and feelings regarding the text, Ana, a Latinx female, made a comment that caught me off guard. Ana stated, “I find it a little upsetting, given that my school is predominantly Hispanic, not to read more books about Hispanic people and their contributions to American society.”

Ana made an excellent point concerning the lack of Latinx literature in her school, despite a substantial number of students being of Latinx descent. This struck me as a significant and intriguing insight, and it is something that the district’s English department should immediately address because students need mirrors in the literature they read.

### **Key Takeaways**

One of my primary takeaways was the importance of having accurate representation in core academic classes. For example, having only four Black and Latinx males enrolled in AP English does not accurately represent the school’s student body.

Another key takeaway was that for Charlie (a Black male), the text reflected the world he lives in, whereas, for others, it did not; therefore, we need more mirrors in literature so students can see their worlds reflected.

Although Mrs. Smith intentionally identified her White privilege and actively engaged her students to improve their education and place in society, she still believed she was covering gaps in the curriculum. Mrs. Smith could include a reflection at the end of each semester in which she asks students which books best represented their experiences and which books they wish had been included so that she can use this information to inform her teaching.

Finally, I would recommend that teachers be provided with professional development relevant to CRP and that these sessions be facilitated by someone within the district knowledgeable about the student population.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative case study explored how a teacher implemented CRP while teaching from the book *Native Son* by Richard Wright. The research also explored what texts the teacher considered when she selected class literature for her students. I observed how students engaged in dialogue with one another. Through interviews, I explored how students saw themselves in the text and described their feelings about the text. I observed students engaging collaboratively in hands-on activities with their classmates. When asked about their perceptions of their representation in the text, all student participants felt they could directly relate to the story or make a connection through lived experiences. Through her activities and selection of literature, the teacher in this study attempted to demonstrate CRP.

All educators would benefit from being aware of the significance of teaching all students through the lens of Gloria Ladson-Billings' CRP in which cultural relevance encompasses other aspects of student and school culture beyond language (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2022). Thus, culturally relevant instruction preserves student culture and transcends the adverse effects of the dominant culture. Adverse effects include, for instance, not seeing one's history, culture, or background represented in textbooks or curricula or seeing such history, culture, or background distorted.

Hammond (2015) noted that the teachers' perception of themselves and others is an element of culturally relevant instruction. Too frequently, educators have a negative view of themselves and their profession. In contrast, Ladson-Billings (1995) noted that teachers who use

culturally relevant methods view themselves as professionals and identify strongly with teaching. This was the case with Mrs. Smith, a White educator, who teaches a predominantly Latinx student population. The research showed that regardless of teachers' racial background, they can implement CRT practices that should enable students to become successful members of the increasingly diverse society in the United States.

Recently, CRP has come under fire by the Florida Department of Education, (the decision may have been influenced by the current state governor) which is perceived to be attempting to eliminate culturally relevant courses, texts, and practices and thereby erase the history of a diverse population. Educators must forge ahead despite all efforts to eradicate culturally relevant texts, practices, and courses. It should be ensured that every aspect of history is taught to all students, not just the majority. It is unfortunate that the Florida Department of Education does not recognize the significance of offering a diversified curriculum to its students. For example, students in Florida will no longer be able to take an advanced placement course in Black history because the state's education department has banned it for "lacking educational value and historical accuracy" and allegedly violating Florida law.

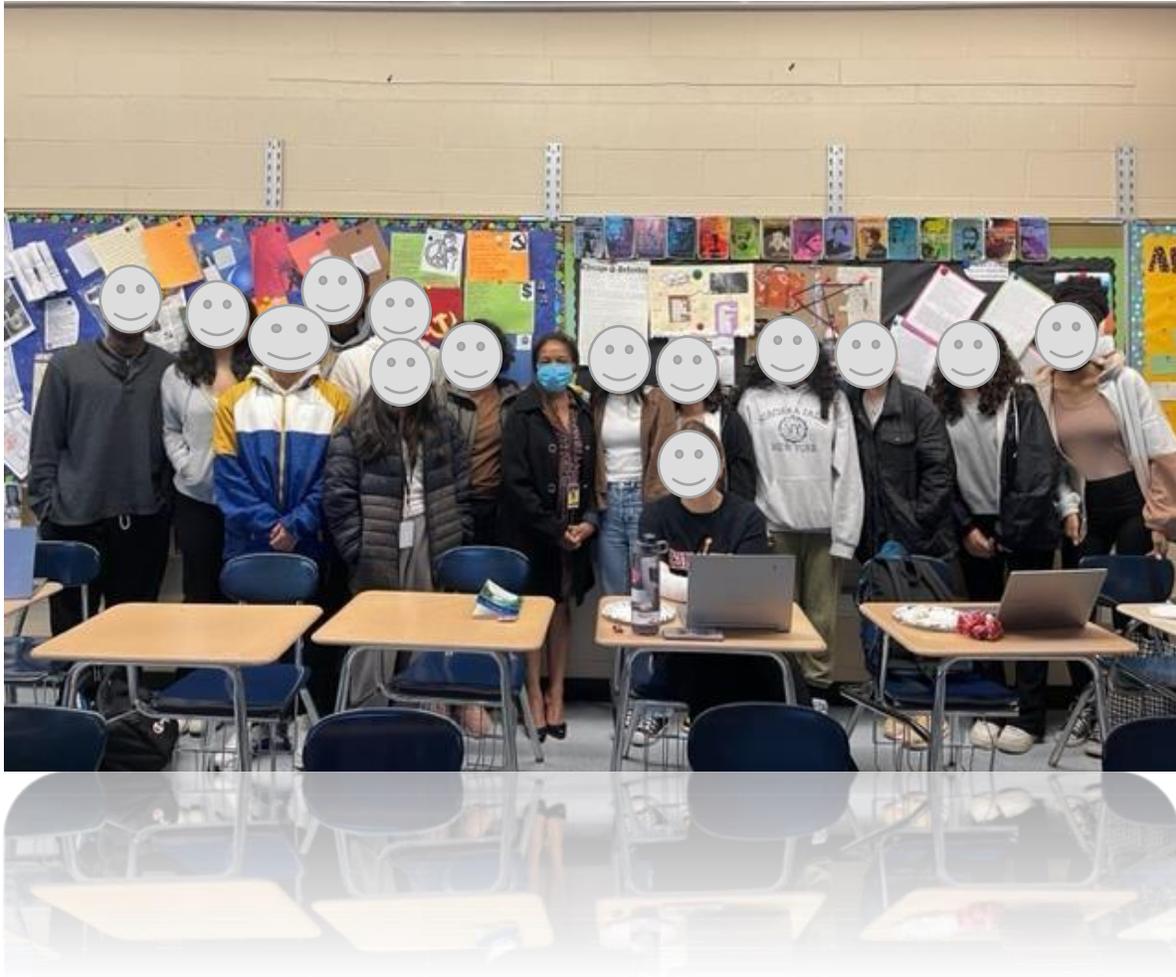
On January 12, 2023, the Florida Department of Education informed the College Board about its decision to ban the pilot Advanced Placement (AP) African American Studies course from high schools. The department's Office of Articulation sent a letter that stated,

The substance of this course is seemingly contrary to Florida law and lacks meaningful instructional value. If the College Board is willing to return to the table with legally permissible and historically accurate content, FDOE will always be willing to reopen the discussion.

After the decision to cancel the class, the College Board issued a brief statement explaining their reasoning. The College Board (2023) stated that it had undergone “a rigorous, multi-year trial period” during which feedback from teachers, students, researchers, and policy makers was gathered, and the decision was made to cancel the AP African American history course.

My study contributes to the empirical literature regarding CRP practices and student experiences. CRP is a framework that has received positive reviews from researchers, but there is still much to learn from teachers in the field about their successes and challenges when implementing CRP and putting theory into practice.

Educators have an ethical and moral responsibility to prepare students for their roles as engaged citizens in our society. Part of that includes knowing how to communicate with individuals of other backgrounds and experiences. If students are not given the opportunity to participate in culturally responsive ELA courses to learn about our great diverse nation, we will be doing them and ourselves a great disservice.



*Mrs. Smith's Class November 2022*

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**MOLLOY  
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 T: 516.323.3711

**DATE:** November 15, 2022

**TO:** Sharon Dungee, Edu  
**FROM:** Molloy University IRB

**PROJECT TITLE:** [1985372-1] The Teaching and Learning that Takes Place Through the use of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

**REFERENCE #:**  
**SUBMISSION TYPE:** New Project

**ACTION:** DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS  
**DECISION DATE:** November 15, 2022

**REVIEW CATEGORY:** Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Molloy University IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations. However, exempt research activities are subject to the same human subject protections and ethical standards as outlined in the Belmont Report.

**You may proceed with your project.**

This acknowledgement expires within three years- unless there is a change to the protocol.

Though this protocol does not require annual IRB review, the IRB requires an annual report of your exempt protocol (Expedited and Exempt Research Protocol Annual Report Form) which is available on the IRB webpage.

If there is a proposed change to the protocol, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to inform the Molloy University IRB of any requested changes before implementation. A change in the research may change the project from EXEMPT status and requires prior communication with the IRB.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Patricia Eckardt at 516-323-3711 or [peckardt@molloy.edu](mailto:peckardt@molloy.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Patricia Eckardt, Ph.D., RN, FAAN

**Appendix A**  
**ACE/ AP Literature and Composition**  
**Course Syllabus 2022-2023**  
**School**

**Fall Semester 2022 & Spring Semester 2023 Fiction: The Art of the Story (also offered as EGL 192, an ACE class through Stony Brook University)**

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**Instructor:**  
**Instructor email:**  
**Class Location:**  
**Mode of Delivery:** In-person instruction

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\*\*\*This syllabus is subject to change.\*\*\*

**EGL 192 Fiction: The Art of the Story**, Stony Brook University ACE course **For more information, visit: [stonybrook.edu/ace](https://www.stonybrook.edu/ace)**

### Description

This course is designed to engage students in careful reading and critical fiction analysis. Through close reading of selected texts, students will deepen their understanding of how writers use language to provide meaning and pleasure. The reading in this course is both broad and deep. In this course, we will focus on the short story separately and in the collection, the novel, and literary research. Much attention will be given to close textual analysis. We will also explore other ways of reading, including biographical/historical, gender, and social power theories.

### Learning Outcomes

This course satisfies the Stony Brook University Curriculum requirement for HUM with the following learning outcomes:

- Understand the major principles and concepts that form the basis of knowledge in the humanities.
- Understand the theoretical concepts that undergird one or more of the humanities.
- Develop an awareness of the contexts (historical, social, geographical, moral) in which these issues emerged.
- Develop verbal and written skills to articulate valid arguments on these issues.
- Read texts closely with attention to nuances of language, content, and form; such texts include published works and student writing drafts for peer review.
- Write focused, organized, and convincing analytical essays in clear, standardized English prose, making use of feedback from teachers and peers.
- Locate, evaluate, synthesize, and incorporate relevant primary and secondary source materials into thesis-driven, interpretive essays of increasing length and complexity.

- Understand conventions of literary study, including familiarity with literary terms, genres, and devices; knowledge of poetic, dramatic, narrative, and rhetorical forms; awareness of literary criticism and theory.\*
- Participate in discussions by listening to others' perspectives, asking productive questions, and articulating ideas with nuance and clarity.
- Communicate complex ideas in formal presentations through speaking, writing, and digital media.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, Room 128, 631-632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation are confidential. <http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/dss/index.shtml>

**Academic Integrity:** Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty are required to report any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. Plagiarism is academic dishonesty and will be punished accordingly. You will receive a zero on the assignment, and your parents will be contacted. A second offense may mean removal from the class. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at [http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/academic\\_integrity/index.html](http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/academic_integrity/index.html)

**Critical Incident Management:** Stony Brook University expects students to respect other people's rights, privileges, and property. Faculty are required to report to the Office of University Community Standards any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn. Further information about most academic matters can be found in the Undergraduate Bulletin, the Undergraduate Course Schedule, and the faculty-employee Handbook.

### Big Ideas and Enduring Understandings

The big ideas are the foundation of the AP English Literature and Composition course, enabling students to create meaningful connections among course concepts. They are threads throughout the course, and revisiting and applying them in various contexts helps students develop a deeper conceptual understanding. Below are the big ideas of the course, along with the enduring understanding associated with each one:

#### 1. CHARACTER (CHR) SET, STR, NAR, FIG, LAN

**Enduring Understanding:** Characters in literature allow readers to study and explore a range of values, beliefs, assumptions, biases, and cultural norms represented by those characters.

#### 2. SETTING (SET)

**Enduring Understanding:** The setting and its details depict a time and place and convey values associated with that setting.

### 3. STRUCTURE (STR)

**Enduring Understanding:** The arrangement of the parts and sections of a text, the relationship of the parts to each other, and the sequence in which the text reveals information are all structural choices made by a writer that contribute to the reader's interpretation of a text.

### 4. NARRATION (NAR)

**Enduring Understanding:** A narrator's or speaker's perspective controls the details and emphases that affect how readers experience and interpret a text.

### 5. FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE (FIG)

**Enduring Understanding:** Comparisons, representations, and associations shift meaning from the literal to the figurative, inviting readers to interpret a text.

### 6. LITERARY ARGUMENTATION (LAN)

**Enduring Understanding:** Readers establish and communicate their interpretations of literature through arguments supported by textual evidence.

## Course Planner

September - November

\*Please note that this may be subject to revision in relation to the course's needs and concerns.

### Pre-Course Assignment (Summer Reading)

Assignment #1 was to email me your personal information.

Assignment #2: *How To Read Literature Like a Professor* by Thomas C. Foster. Assignment

#3: Read *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini

## UNIT ONE:

*Giving a Voice to the Voiceless:*

*Marginalized Voices & Social Schism Due to Racial and Ethnic Differences*

**STARTING WITH THE SUMMER ASSIGNMENTS UNTIL WEEK 4**

## November - December

**Week 1: November 14-18** \*Introduction

to the course

\*Submission of question packet for *How To Read Literature Like a Professor* by Thomas C.

Foster

\*Setting Boot Camp

**Week 2: November 21-25**

\**The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini

\*Characterization Boot Camp

Week 3 & Week 4 November 28 –

December 2

\**The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini

\**The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini

\**The Kite Runner* assessment paper is due (3-5 pages)

UNIT TWO:  
Giving a Voice to the Voiceless  
The Black Male Experience in America  
WEEK 5 TO WEEK 12  
December

Week 5 & 6: December 5- 9

\*"The Man Who Was Almost a Man" by Richard Wright

\**Native Son* Book 1 analysis and discussion

\**Native Son* Book 1 analysis and discussion \*Book One group tasks

Week 7 & 8: December 12 -16

\*Continuation of Book one tasks

\**Native Son* Book 2 analysis and discussion

\**Native Son* Book 2 continued

Week 9 & 10: December 19-23

\**Native Son* Book 2 continued

\*Book 2 group tasks

\**Native Son* Book 3 analysis and discussion continued \*Discussion of the epilogue "How Bigger was Born."

**\*Native Son assessment paper (3-5 pages)**

### UNIT THREE

## Giving a Voice to the Voiceless The Female Experience in America WEEK 13 UNTIL WEEK 18

January - February

#### Week 13:

\*"The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilmore  
\*"The Story of an Hour" and "Desiree's Baby" by Kate Chopin \*Begin  
*The Awakening* by Kate Chopin

#### Week 14:

\*Continue *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin  
\**The Awakening* by Kate Chopin \*Literature  
Logs for *The Awakening* due

#### Week 15:

\*Continue *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin  
\*Literature Logs for *The Awakening* due

#### Week 16:

\*Continue *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin  
\*Literature Logs for *The Awakening* due

#### Week 17:

\*Discussion of the novel as a whole  
\*Final activities

#### Week 18:

**\**The Awakening* assessment essay due (2-3 pages)**

\*Discussion of the novel as a whole.

**UNIT FOUR**  
**Giving a Voice to the Voiceless**  
**The Black Female Experience in America**  
**WEEK 19 TO WEEK 22**

**January - February**

\*\*\*\*\*SBU Final exam paper/CIHS midterm will be assigned.\*\*\*\*\*

**Week 19:**

\*"Everyday Use" by Alice Walker

*The Color Purple* is a series of letters/journal entries written by the protagonist. Students will respond to Celie's letters...write back to her in their Literature Logs for 12 entry logs. Students will also be presenting sections of the book to the class for a grade and as an assessment of accumulated literary analysis skills. \**The Color Purple* Groups 1-2 presentations

**Week 20:**

\**The Color Purple* Groups 3-7 presentations

**Week 21: REGENTS TESTING WEEK**

\**The Color Purple* Group 8 presentation

**Week 22:**

\**The Color Purple* Groups 9-12 presentations

\**The Color Purple* assessment

**UNIT FIVE:**  
**Giving a Voice to the Voiceless:**  
**The Marginalization & Oppression of Women Globally**  
**WEEK 23 - Winter Break**

This unit is subject to change as we may use these weeks for extra AP Review.

**February**

**Week 23:**

\**A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini

**Week 24:**

\**A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini

**Winter Break:**

\**A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini

UNIT SIX  
 'The voice discovers the poet's ear' -Dylan Thomas  
 March Madness Poetry  
 WEEK 25 UNTIL WEEK 29

February - March

Week 25:

- \*Poetry Boot Camp
- \*"Author to Her Book" by Anne Bradstreet
- \*"Ars Poetica" by Archibald MacLeish
- \*"Mending Wall" by Robert Frost

Week 26:

- \*"I Sit and Look Out" by Walt Whitman
- \*"Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" by William Carlos Williams

Week 27:

- \*"Grief" by Elizabeth Barrett Browning
- \*"I Died for Beauty" and "I'm Nobody, Who are You?" by Emily Dickinson \*Poetry Multiple choice practice

Week 28:

- \*Cardinal Wolsey's Soliloquy Q1 Practice Essay
- \*AP m/c poetry practice
- \*#TeachLivingPoets: a selection of contemporary living poets and exploration of the On Being Project.

Week 29:

- \*#TeachLivingPoets: a selection of contemporary living poets and exploration of the On Being Project \*March Madness Final Round.

April - May

UNIT SEVEN  
 AP Exam Review  
 WEEK 30 TO WEEK 34



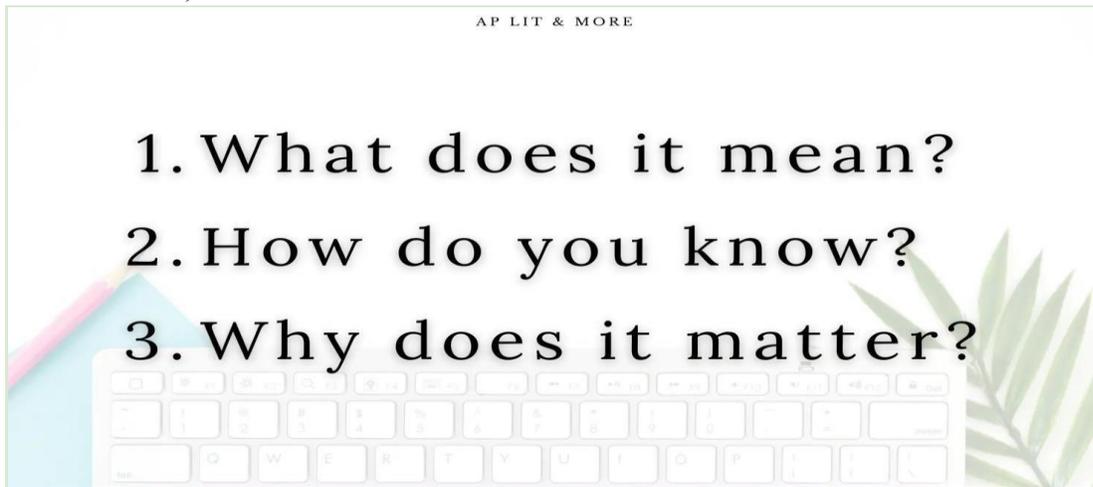
"So here comes my statement: Literature is a verb, not a noun. That is to say that "literature," as I understand it and practice it, is actually about what texts do and what we do to texts instead of something based on content (or something that could be on a list). Years ago, I stumbled across a poem by Archibald MacLeish. These are the last two lines: A poem should not mean But be.

I've probably spent most of my life trying to understand and practice that. I think it means that literature's power lies in this remarkable "conversation" between the author, the text, and the reader. The author has "done" things to create a text. The text "does" something that even the author does not fully control. And readers—well, readers "read." And that means they strive to understand a text and how an author works to construct meaning. The tools that readers use are "analysis" (the identification of the bits, the building blocks, that make up a text—both words and structures AND the understanding of how those building blocks fit together into a larger whole) and "synthesis" (the ability to take the information learned in various contexts and apply it to new texts and contexts).

That is a rather involved answer. But the summation might be this—there isn't a "canon" of literature per se. While there are works that are more complex and, therefore, more interesting to occupy one's reading and on which to practice the work, the truth is that nearly any creative text aimed at an adult audience. . . .can be "literature"—that is, it can be read, analyzed, discussed, and readers will find themselves rewarded for trying to understand how it "works."

Learning literature teaches us to handle and understand complexity in many forms." -

**David Miller, Chief AP Lit Reader**



**Week 30:**

AP Exam Review

**Spring Recess:** There will be review assignments over spring break. Plan accordingly.

**Week 31:** AP Exam

Review

**Week 32:**

AP Exam Review

Week 33: AP Exams

\*Last-minute AP exam review and debrief

\***Wednesday, May 3 at 8:00 a.m. AP English Literature and Composition Exam** \*How did the exam go? Bring in exam tweets and memes!

Week 34: AP Exams

\*Netflix and Chill...class votes to watch favorite AP book that was made into a film

UNIT EIGHT  
Reflections as a Senior Giving Myself a Voice  
WEEK 34 TO WEEK 39

May - June

Week 34:

\**Oh, My! The Places You'll Go* by Dr. Seuss

\*Senior Class Balloons \*Children's Book project

Week 35:

\*Children's Book project Week

36: \*Senior Memory Book

Week 37:

\*Your Final Mark

\*Senior Memory Book

Weeks 38 & 39: REGENTS EXAMS 6/14 - 6/23 \*Senior Memory Book due

HAPPY GRADUATION...Congrats, Class of 2023!

*Course Evaluation*

\***Essays/Projects/Presentations/Papers** will account for **30%** of your grade.

\***Literature Logs** will account for **15%** of your grade.

\***Classwork** will account for **25%** of your grade. All class activities/assignments will be checked for completion and collected for a grade.

\***Assessments** such as quizzes and tests will account for **20%** of your grade.

\***Class Participation** will account for **10%** of your grade. You are required to participate and contribute during class discussions actively.

### Grading

All coursework and overall grades will be determined using a 100-point scale.

A+ 100 – 97	A 96.9 – 93	A- 92.9 – 90
B+ 89.9 – 87	B 86.9 – 83	B- 82.9 – 80
C+ 79.9 – 77	C 76.9 – 73	C- 72.9 – 70
D+ 69.9 – 67	D 66.9 – 63	D- 62.9 – 60
F Below 60		

**The final semester grade** is based on the grades for the first two school marking quarters.

**Late Work Policy:** Work is considered late if it is not submitted during **the class period that it is due**.

Handing an assignment later in the day is still late! Unexcused late work, such as papers and projects, is unacceptable and will encounter an initial lowering of one grade letter. The assignment will lose a letter grade per day it is late. It will not be accepted once it receives an F.

**Absences:** Students are responsible for getting missed assignments and for making up classroom activities. Excessive absenteeism is a major impediment to a student's gaining a good grade.

#### *Essays/Projects/Presentations/Papers*

Formal guidelines will be given in class for each essay/writing assignment. You will have ample time and opportunity to draft, revise, and discuss these assignments. You will receive a minimum of two in-class AP-style essays and two short papers. Additionally, you will receive projects, either individually or in a group. You will present the class material for an assigned section for *The Color Purple*. For *The Kite Runner*, *The Awakening*, *Native Son*, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, you will complete group tasks such as projects, presentations, and papers.

#### *Literature Logs*

Because you must read the books to be able to write about them and discuss them intelligently, all students must keep a literature log for the novels. You must respond to assigned chapters or pages in your literature log. Entry logs must showcase evidence of active reading. Rather than tell what happened, react to what happened and then analyze the literary devices and rhetorical strategies the author used to elicit those reactions from the audience. You should build upon

concepts and ideas discussed in class. Provide textual evidence of theme or symbolism development. Look for motifs. Explore characterization. Analyze both internal and external conflicts. This course component aims to deepen your reading comprehension and strengthen your ability to respond in your own words. You will be following the 3-2-1 method of writing for the literature logs. This method utilizes a three (3) sentence summary, a two (2) paragraph analysis, and one (1) question that the reading left you with. We will go over this in class. Additionally, you will take notes on the class analysis and discussion in the literature logs. USE OF ONLINE STUDY GUIDES: SUCH AS LIT CHARTS, SPARKNOTES, SCHMOOP, ETC. IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED. EVIDENCE OF THIS IN YOUR LIT LOGS WILL BE PUNISHED WITH ZEROES ON ASSIGNMENTS WITH NO CHANCE TO MAKE THEM UP. REPEATED OFFENSES WILL RESULT IN REMOVAL FROM THE CLASS.

### *Classwork*

For many of the shorter works of fiction, you will receive analysis questions and group assignments that you will be required to complete. All the work done in this class WILL be graded; therefore, EVERYTHING we do must be done well. You will receive 1QQs (one question quizzes) on the assigned reading for class.

### *Assessments*

You will receive a written assessment of all the longer fiction works. Additionally, you will receive quizzes on shorter works of fiction.

### *Class Participation*

You should come to class prepared to discuss the reading for that day. Each class session will be a mixture of informal lectures and discussions; thus, your questions and comments are essential to the success of the course. Participation involves an attentive, respectful, and engaging *presence*. I am looking for consistent and thoughtful responses to our reading assignments. I am also looking for your sustained effort to make the classroom environment a place of sincere and respectful intellectual discourse. It goes without saying that arriving late, doing other work, and dozing off will adversely influence your participation; I notice these things. Once again, you must be here and want to be here to do well. *Do now activities*

Warm-up activities often begin the class and serve to review, introduce, or remediate. These will be completed in google classroom. You will respond to a quote, question, or idea. In this manner, you can build argumentation skills; engage in defending, challenging, or qualifying opportunities; or initiate discussion about a theme that will be introduced in class. The activities are graded for content and depth of idea with little emphasis on grammar, usage, or mechanics.

This activity also serves as practice for the AP Exam's timed writing, as students are given limited time to consider the topic and respond. Some activities will contain multiple entry points allowing you to select which one you want to do. **These will be submitted daily but graded**

after a set number have been submitted. These activities *will be assessed mostly by completion.* When an assignment calls for a "paragraph," please check your work against the paragraph criteria below:

### *Stand-Alone Paragraph Evaluation Criteria*

Use these criteria to evaluate paragraphs that are not part of a longer piece of writing.

1. The first, second, or last sentence contains the main idea and keywords from the question or assigned topic. (The first sentence is usually preferable.)
2. Paragraph contains one to three explanatory sentences.
3. Paragraph contains two to four sentences about specific details.
4. Details are colorful, interesting, and appropriate.
5. Paragraph ends with a good closing sentence that refers to the main idea without repeating it.
6. Paragraph contains no run-ons or sentence fragments.
7. Paragraph is free of errors in agreement.
  - Subject/verb—singular or plural
  - Pronoun selection correct—singular or plural
  - Pronoun selection correct—subject or object
8. Free of punctuation errors.
9. Free of spelling errors.
10. Handwriting is easy to read.

**Stylistic and Rhetorical Analysis**—As the backbone of the course, students will learn and practice daily the language of stylistic analysis, including:

- SOAPSTone (speaker, occasion, audience, purpose, subject, tone)
- DIDLS (diction, imagery, details, language, syntax)
- SPACE CAT (speaker, purpose, audience, context, exigence, choices, appeals, tone)
- Literary Terms
- Detailed Analysis of Tone
- Detailed Analysis of Diction
- Detailed Analysis of Syntax
  
- OPTIC (overview, parts, title, interrelationships, conclusion) ● Color Marking

### *Course Grading Rubrics*

#### Presentation Rubric

**\*A range (90-100):** These presentations show focus and clarity. The presenter is well-prepared and works with good notes. The delivery is effective, and an effort is made to engage the class.

**\*B range (80-89):** These presentations are less focused and/or clear. The presenter is adequately prepared, works with notes, and makes some attempts to engage the class.

**\*C range (70-79):** These presentations show minimal effort in preparation and delivery. The presenter does little to engage the class.

#### Literature Log Rubric

\***A range (90-100):** These logs cite appropriate text and comment on the depth of thought and genuine intellectual curiosity.

\***B range (80-89):** These logs cite appropriate text and make insightful observations but are less developed or complete.

\***C range (70-79):** These logs are incomplete in one or more ways. They may not make specific textual references or offer shallow or undeveloped comments.

### Class Participation Rubric

**A range...90 – 100 (authentic engagement) Student:**

- Is engaged almost all the time and prepared for class with appropriate materials (text, pen, journal).
- does the required reading and journal work on time
- frequently contributes to class discussions
- actively listens to what others are saying
- participates actively in small group and partner work

**B range...80 – 89 (ritual engagement) Student:**

- is less fully engaged and usually prepared with appropriate materials
- sometimes contributes to class discussions
- is less actively involved in group or partner activities
- It may be strong in one category (e.g., discussion participation) but weak in another (e.g., preparedness)

**70 – 79 (passive compliance) Student:**

- is involved in the class but more passively than those in the higher groups
- is often unprepared regarding appropriate materials
- occasionally or rarely contributes to class discussions

**D range...65 – 69 (retreatism) Student:**

- is minimally engaged
- maybe frequently late, absent or unprepared
- rarely contributes to discussions
- does not keep up with journal and reading assignments

### Miscellaneous

#### **Class Heading**

All work submitted to me must have the following heading in the top left-hand corner:

Full Name

Period/APE 11

Assignment Title

*This applies to everything: homework, class work, class and lecture notes, essays, etc...*

## Required Course Materials

### Class Supplies

- Post it notes
- Highlighters
- Index Cards
- Pens & pencils
- Indestructible folder for all reference sheets
- Literature (whichever piece of literature we are working on that day must be brought to class as extra copies will not be available to you)
- Computer/laptop/device is highly recommended

### *Books/Novels*

Advanced Placement students are encouraged to purchase copies of the major works we read throughout the school year. Copies will be provided for you, but purchasing copies will make this easier as you need to annotate as you read. Use of Post-it notes will be required to annotate school-owned copies. This year I will collect and grade annotated novels. If we are using ebooks, I will grade your annotations electronically.

### *Writing Instruments*

Students must submit all written work in black or blue ink and on white paper. This includes handwritten work such as in-class essays and typed assignments. Most of our assignments will be completed on the class laptops in Google Classroom. Typed assignments must be in twelvepoint font and double-spaced. ALL ANSWERS IN ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE IN A DIFFERENT COLOR THAN THE QUESTIONS.

**Please join the Class Remind:** Text the code **@romoape12** to **81010**. You will receive reminders about coursework. You will also have the ability to text the instructor. Visit Remind to view instructions for joining with an email if you cannot participate via text.

**Please join the class Quizlet to study the literary devices:**

<https://quizlet.com/join/n2zA4R9TG>

### **COVID-19 Protocols While Present In School**

- Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Sanitize your hands frequently.
- Let's work together to make this a healthy classroom that does not get quarantined.

**Appendix B**  
**"N" Book Titles of Concern**

<b>"N" Book Title</b>	<b>Book Author</b>	<b>Book Copyright</b>	<b>Number of N Words</b>
To Kill a Mockingbird	Harper Lee	1960	48
Of Mice and Men	John Steinbeck	1937	16
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn	Mark Twain	1884	212
Uncle Tom's Cabin	Harriet Beecher Stowe	1852	109
Their Eyes Were Watching God	Zora Neale Hurston	1937	31
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry	Mildred D. Taylor	1976	18

**Appendix C**  
**Comprehensive Reading List Rubric for Culturally Responsive and Diverse**  
**Books**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Comments
The literature or informational text includes main characters who are Black, Latinx, Native American/Indigenous, Asian/Asian American, Middle Eastern, and/or Muslim.						
The literature or informational text includes main characters who identify as LGBTQ.						
The literature or informational text includes main characters with disabilities.						
The literature or informational text is written or illustrated by a Black, Latinx, Native American, /Indigenous, Asian/Asian American, Middle Eastern, Muslim people, etc.						
The literature or informational text features a Black, Latinx, Native American/Indigenous, Asian/Asian American, Middle Eastern, Muslim, etc., on the front cover.						

<p>The literature or informational text features contemporary diverse characters and storylines.</p>						
<p>The literature or informational text features a</p>						
<p>range of family structures and family configurations.</p>						
<p>The literature or informational text setting is in a diverse world region. Please list the region (Asia, Africa, Europe, Central/South America, Oceania, Native/First Nations/Indigenous regions, etc.).</p>						
<p>The literature or informational text explores different socioeconomic backgrounds.</p>						

## Appendix D Classroom Observation Protocol

**Date:**

Interview Observation

**Researcher: Field Notes**

Other:

**District:**

**Observations**

**Reflections/Write-Up**

<b>Person(s) Present:</b>	
<p><b>The Components of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:</b></p> <p><b>Student learning and academic performance (a)</b> a focus on student learning and academic performance.</p>	<p><b>Reflections</b></p>
<p><b>Cultural competence</b> (b) the development of students' cultural competence to aid in the formation of positive ethnic and social identities.</p>	

<p><b>Critical consciousness</b> (c) the encouragement of students' critical consciousness or their ability to notice and critique societal inequities.</p>	
<p><b>Space</b> (Describe the classrooms, artifacts, worksheets, diverse educational posters, student writing displayed on bulletin boards and halls, etc.)</p>	<p><b>Reflections</b></p>
<p><b>People</b> (Student/Teacher Relations)</p>	<p><b>Reflections</b></p>

<p><b>Actions and Interactions</b></p> <p>(Cultural relevant practices, selection of literature process, students' reaction to the text, teacher delivery of the text, student/teacher interaction, student/student interaction, and discussions to foster differing worldviews and diverse perspectives from all students).</p>	<p><b>Reflections</b></p>
<p><b>Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework (CR-SE) for Classroom</b></p> <p><b>Observations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirm cultural identities.</li> <li>• Foster positive academic outcomes.</li> <li>• Develop students' abilities to connect across lines of difference.</li> <li>• Elevate historically marginalized voices and empower students to be social agents of change.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Reflections</b></p>

**Appendix E**  
**Teacher First Interview Protocol**

**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Setting:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction**

Please state your name, present position, and education-related experience.

**Educational Background**

1. Where did you attend school?
  
2. How many years of experience do you have in education? What specific grades and subjects have you taught?
  
3. How has your background shaped your view of yourself as a teacher (e.g., cultural experience, professional knowledge, etc.)?
  
4. What are your students' most pressing needs, learning and otherwise (e.g., academic, behavioral, personal, etc.)?
  
5. How do you draw upon your personal and professional experiences to help meet your students' learning needs? What are some examples?
  
6. How are teachers trained (via preservice or staff development) in responding to students' learning, behavioral, and personal needs? Please share some specific examples.
  
7. How would you describe your educational experience? Positive and negative?

8. Can you share a story that would signify your most memorable experience as a student?
9. Who was your favorite teacher, and why?
10. What, if anything, would you change about your educational experiences and why?

### **Teaching History**

1. Tell me about why you became a teacher.
2. What path did you take to become a teacher?
3. Did you have a particular teacher or mentor that inspired you to become a teacher?
4. Was it important to you to teach diverse students? Why or why not?
5. How long have you been a teacher? How long have you worked in this school/district?
6. Did you feel prepared to teach diverse students? Why or why not?

## Appendix F

### Teacher Second Interview Protocol

**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Setting:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Current Practices**

1. Tell me about your current teaching assignment.
2. What grade/subject do you teach? How long have you been teaching this particular grade/subject?
3. How does your knowledge of diverse students influence your teaching (pedagogical decision-making)?
4. What teaching practices, routines, rituals, and behaviors do you find most effective when teaching diverse students?
5. What culturally relevant texts do you include in your classroom or curriculum?

#### **Culturally Relevant Practices**

1. What does the term cultural mean to you?
2. What does the term culturally relevant mean to you?
3. Would you say you have a cultural collection of texts in your classroom library?
4. What makes a book culturally relevant?
5. Do you have or use other books for instruction that are not in your classroom library?
7. Did you feel prepared to teach diverse students? Why or why not?

**Appendix G**  
**Teacher Third Interview Protocol**

**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Setting:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. When you first selected the novel *Native Son*, how did you think it would relate to your students and their cultures?
2. Has the way you select books to read with your students changed since the start of your teaching career? If yes, how has the practice of selecting books changed?
3. Has anything changed in how you think about and select books to read?
4. What has become more important to you when selecting and reading books?
5. What has become less important to you when selecting and reading books?

**Relationships**

1) Tell me about your relationship with the diverse students in your classroom. 2)

How do you perceive that your race and gender influence relationships with diverse students?

3) How do those relationships relate to academics and social-emotional learning (behavior, engagement, empowerment, sense of racial and cultural pride)?

**Reflection**

1) What are the most significant experiences you have had during your teaching experience?

2) How do you want your diverse students to remember you?

**Grand Tour Question**

- 1) What advice would you give other educators teaching diverse students?
- 2) Would you like to share any additional stories regarding your educational experiences and current teaching practices that were not included previously? Are there any questions that I should have asked but didn't ask?

**Appendix H**  
**Student First Interview Protocol**

1. What is your favorite subject?
2. What books do you like to read? Why?
3. How do you feel about the books you read in school?
4. Do you see yourself in the books that you read in school? (If the answer is yes, ask how?  
If the answer is no, ask why not?)
5. How would you rate the reading material in this class?

**Appendix I**  
**Student Second Interview Protocol**

1. What does the term culturally responsive mean to you?
2. What was your favorite book that you read in this class? Why?
3. If you could make a suggestion about the text that you read, what would it be?
4. Would you recommend these books to a friend?
5. What book would you recommend to the teacher?