This study used a narrative inquiry model to examine how students in a senior honors English high school classroom engaged with literature and closely considered their strategies for understanding and meaning making with texts. The study draws upon the narrative voices of the participants from the classroom while they engaged in both class-based reading and personal, out-of-course reading processes. This study takes the perspective that the reading process mirrors social interactions and constitutes an exchange of “shared voices.” The study examines how textual engagement may draw upon the reader’s accumulated personal experiences and meanings as well as the collection of dialogic voices that constitute the act of meaning making in a chain of active responses toward the ontologically oriented development of one’s being in the world. Data were collected over the course of an academic semester and included class observations, multiple individual interviews with participants, and artifact collection from class assignments. The findings suggest that one of the primary ways of making meaning with texts is through intersubjective encounters that allows for recognition and recontextualization of the text between the text’s world and the reader’s lived world.
READERS IN TEXT WORLDS AND LIVED WORLDS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY STUDY
OF UNDERSTANDING AND MEANING MAKING WITH LITERATURE IN A HIGH
SCHOOL CLASSROOM

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to

the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro

2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am immensely grateful to my dissertation committee for their unwavering support and guidance throughout this process. Without them, this study would not have been possible. Thank you, Dr. Fairbanks, Dr. Vetter, Dr. Cooper, and Dr. Thein. And, Dr. Cooper, thank you for planting a seed many years ago that has flourished and come into maturity with the completion of this study.

Thank you to Ms. Young, Alyse, Ava, Grace, Jacob, Kendall, Logan, Marcus, and Matt – and all of the students in Ms. Young’s classroom – for their kindness, openness, and willingness to accept me into their lives for five months.

I am also immensely grateful to the colleagues who supported and encouraged me along the way as well as provided the opportunity and space to complete this work. Thank you to Omar Ali, Jerry Pubantz, Becky Muich, Angela Bolte, Sarah Krive, Maria Hayden, Julie Boyer, Portia Harris, and Eric Toler.

As a teacher, there were so many people who deepened my knowledge of learning and student development. Thank you to many of my own students who helped me along – I am grateful to each of you. And, thank you to Betty Harrington, Max Kirks, and Fern Regan for your full support in the classroom and for my own development as a student and teacher.

Thank you to Tierney Hinman and Allison Jones for the many, many ways you were always present and supportive, even when it all felt impossible.

And, finally, I am forever grateful for the love and support to pursue this work provided by my family: Adriana, Lucas, Beckett; and my mother and father. You are the immovable rock of love, connection, and belonging on which everything else is built.
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CHAPTER I: CROSSING THE BOUNDARY – AN INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

“Vygotsky’s formulations...direct us to attend to people’s collective ability to imagine themselves in worlds that may yet be scarcely realized, and to the modest ability of humans to manage their own behavior through signs directed at themselves.”


Introduction

Current literacy research has reconsidered the activities and practices of reading, and literacy more broadly, from an individual, autonomous skills perspective toward a broader conception of literacy as a dynamic, dialogic activity in which understanding is fundamentally co-authored and achieved through relational experience (Bloome & Beach, 2019; Linell, 2009; Popova, 2015). Texts are a form of organizing, thinking, and communicating the world. The meaning-making processes reader engage in the reading process may produce a broader sense of inwardness for readers as well as inform identity and future action. Just as Bakhtin (1981) writes, “The word in language is half someone else’s… [and] becomes one’s ‘own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word” (p. 293), reading a narrative text can be understood as the experience of a shared social world in which the reader is transformed by the voice of others and incorporated into a form of shared agency (Galda & Beach, 2001). From this perspective, readers experience the social world through the literary texts with which they engage as a relational, social experience. This reading experience can have a profound effect on readers’ social understanding of themselves.

Literary fiction, as well as creative nonfiction, mirrors the social experiences of the real world and provides a reader with a more complex understanding of social relationships (Mar &
Oatley, 2008). Texts can offer readers social information and knowledge of the world that is at times impossible or too difficult to access, or too dangerous or risky to experience on one’s own (Vermeule, 2010). Texts may also access human consciousness in a unique way that supports intersubjective understanding of social others (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). Through the experience of reading, readers are offered a deeper self-understanding of being in the world and a greater potential for empathy (Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009). As the writer and poet, Garth Greenwell (2020), has written, “Literature is an extraordinary technology for the transmission of consciousness” (p. 63). And, while each of these attributes of reading may access experiences and skills for living in a social world, they may also provide long-term effects on readers’ dispositions, behaviors, and perspectives for future activities in their lives. Simply put, texts provide ways for readers to see themselves more clearly by mediating between the textual and lived worlds.

Through qualitative, narrative inquiry research, this project gains a deeper understanding of adolescent literacy practices as specific to the individual experience of readers as well as to the school and broader community of study. Narrative inquiry aims to listen to and gather the voices of the research participants to share story-making events (Lipari, 2014). As Schaafsma, Pagnucci, Wallace, and Stock (2007) note, in quoting Douglas Coupland, “Composing stories requires us to see a world that ‘we didn’t even know was going on inside us’” (p. 282). While understanding that not all texts have similar impacts on readers, this project assumed that all readers carry some texts with them beyond the textual page and that those texts work to organize understanding, to develop thinking, and, potentially, inform future activities and behaviors.

As Neil Mercer (2019) writes, “Language is a tool for building the future out of the past” (p. 111). The “languaging” tools of social interaction and, equivalently, reading are always
situated toward future goals. The study takes the perspective that texts may be viewed as the words that are printed on the page as well as the “shared voices” and narrative stories of others which constitute a relational framework of language that is constructed through the values and practices of the wider society. In understanding these textual engagements and literacy practices, the project contributes to a developing knowledge about individual readers, their interactions, and meaning making with texts and to ELA classrooms as academically productive, knowledge-building communities.

The overall goal of this study was to examine and understand how adolescent readers interact with and make meaning with literary texts. In this context, the study examined the broader literacy practices of a rural high school classroom, how students interact with texts and potentially orient themselves toward future possibilities, along with understanding the socio-economic-historic impacts of those activities as constructed within the specific geographic space of the school and surrounding environment. In the following sections, I provide an overview of the research study by stating how it fills the gaps of current research and offers a significant contribution to current educational studies. In addition, I provide the guiding research questions for the study, definitions of significant terms used in the proposal, and an overview of the work to be implemented as part of the dissertation.

**Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Research Study**

Theories of reading and of readers have been shaped significantly by Rosenblatt’s (1965, 1978, 1985, 2004) *transactional theory* which shifted literary studies from text-centered approaches toward more reader-centered approaches, and this focus has had a significant impact on ELA teaching approaches over the past 40 years. Transactional theory understands textual interpretation as the transaction between the words on the page and the lived experience that
readers bring to the reading process. For readers, their previous experiences in the world are viewed as being brought forward, or activated, as needed when reading to shape how they understand and make meaning of texts. Rosenblatt’s work recognizes that meaning does not reside in the text itself or within the reader but rather between the two through the act of reading, an interaction between text and reader which Rosenblatt called an “aesthetic response.” Recent approaches to reading (e.g., Lysaker & Wessel-Powell, 2019; Popova, 2019) build upon Rosenblatt’s theory and further develop this idea of reading, interpretation, and meaning making as a fundamentally embodied, relational human activity that is equivalent to other social interactions.

From this perspective, narratives and narrative understanding are not static and unchanging artifacts but rather fluid, dynamic forces equivalent to that of a conversational participant. Textual engagement, in this way, may draw upon one’s accumulated personal experiences and meanings as well as the collection of dialogic voices that constitute both the act of meaning making in a chain of active responses and the ontologically oriented development of one’s being in the world. Popova (2019) writes, “[R]eading a narrative can be understood as a way of letting one’s own agency be transformed by the enacted presence and voice of another and subsumed into a form of shared agency” (p. 160). Textual interactions may be internalized and carried forward beyond the act of reading toward an embodied entanglement of the reader and text. This entanglement can then be enacted in ways that affect the reader’s future behaviors, making possible perspectives that would not exist if the reader had not encountered the text.

Recent studies (e.g., Newell, Thanos, and Kwak, 2019) have investigated “languaging” approaches – a perspective that looks outside of individual activities toward the interactive, dialogical, in-between meanings that are constructed through social interactions across time –
that consider teaching and writing in the classroom; however, reading, meaning making, and

textually-related behavior change remains a gap in the literature.

In addition to reading in general, readers’ identities are integral to the reading and
meaning making process. Recent education research examines ways in which a reader’s identity
is a form of experience that shapes literary understanding (McCartney & Moje, 2002; Moje &
backgrounds are shaped by socioeconomic and cultural forces that influence their meaning
making activities (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Lee, 2007; Thein, 2009). All of these activities are
further molded by the broader literacy practices that inform ways of reading and understanding
within communities and cultures (Brandt, 2001, 2011; Heath, 1983). Research on readers and
reading has tended to focus, rightly so, on what readers bring to texts as part of their identity
backgrounds yet, it is important to note, that encounters with texts do not end once the reader has
closed the book. This project aims to consider how reading may add to the accumulation of
dialogical voices readers encounter and, in addition, how those readers may enact those voices
outside of the text.

Gaps persist in research and understanding of how texts may become internalized,
shifted, and transformed for real world purposes in the lives of readers. Texts and language are
carried forward by readers and can function as mediating devices that lend themselves to the
enactment of relationships across textual and social worlds. Lysaker & Wessel-Powell (2019)
write, “Relating with and within narrative worlds is not only about knowing but also about being
and becoming; it is ontological work” (p. 174). Reader’s interactions with textual worlds extend
beyond the page and against the lived worlds of the reader in the ways that texts organize
thinking and reflect ways of being. Lysaker & Wessel-Powell (2019) note how readers come into
a deep intersubjective interaction with “others” within texts as a means of constructing meaning and understanding. This dissertation fills this gap by examining how readers continue to interact and think about literary texts after the act of reading.

This research is significant because it extends our understanding of the reading and meaning making process. In understanding reading and meaning construction as a social process, the study will offer a deeper knowledge of how adolescent readers continue to think about, shift, negotiate, and use texts. In addition, the study provides some sense of how texts may shape future behavior and thinking. Within the high school classroom, literature has often been enacted as a static artifact from a previous time for analysis, yet this study views literature as a form of social interaction and a tool for thinking and being. Bruner (1986) suggests that, like Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, literature may provide the tools and resources to recognize issues and perform solutions to them where readers would potentially not be able to accomplish these tasks on their own. Within the context of schools, I adopt Bloome and Beach’s (2019) understanding of the purpose of schooling as to foster language growth “associated with students’ adoption of dialogic, alternative voices and perspectives over time…” (p. 15). Viewing how adolescent readers take up language and textual worlds helps justify the teaching of literature beyond the socially conservative, overly prescribed morals-driven underpinnings of some classroom environments.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how readers engage with texts and how meaning making is an on-going dynamic process that may have a future orientation. In addition, this study examined the broader literacy practices that inform reading and meaning making as well as the situated, social-historical structures that guide those activities. In doing so, the study
collected data in a senior honors English Language Arts (ELA) classroom at Brookside High School in Farmville County, located in the southeastern Piedmont region of the United States. The study interacted with and collected data from participants over the course of five months, with a narrowed attention on the classroom teacher and eight focal students. The data consists of classroom observations of reading and discussion of texts through multiple and continued exchanges as well as individual interviews with students as they read and reflected on their own reading practices. The study was guided by three primary questions:

- What are the literacy practices of students in the ELA high school classroom under observation? And how do those literacy practices support interpretation and meaning making of literary texts?
- How do students’ literacy practices and engagement with literature and their interpretations shape both current and future discourses and activities?
- What environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic elements shape the meaning making and interpretation of texts that students are making?

Using a narrative inquiry approach, these three questions form the basis of the three “Acts” in Chapter IV which provide the findings of the study. Through the attempt to (re)construct a narrative of the classroom and the students’ lives, Chapter IV is organized through a series of stories, often voiced by the students, that respond to and attempt to answer these research questions.

**Definition of Significant Terms**

The following section defines some of the major terms used throughout the study. These definitions are intended to provide guidance in understanding both the theoretical background and practical applications of the work.
**Culture:** The dynamic web of relationships among a group of people forming the “recurring social practices and their artifacts that give order, purpose, and continuity to social life” (p. 139, Smagorinsky, 2001). The “recurring social practices” within a culture reflects Bourdieu’s (1980) concept of *habitus* that itself forms pre-established ways of “making sense” of and acting in the world. Importantly, Vygotsky (1962, 1978, 1981, 1987) argued that culture provides the “tools for intellectual adaptation” and development in a society. Situated within socio-historical contexts, these tools inform the understanding and orientation of the self toward the world.

**Environment:** The social contexts and spaces in which humans live and operate. Similar to culture, the environment is the context and space of lived experience which helps to construct meaning and provide the resources for social action. Vygotsky (1962, 1978, 1981, 1987) claimed that human environments are developed by social practices that guide human action toward cultural goals. Within these environments are the tools and resources that are integral to achieving goals (Moll, 1990; Smagorinsky, 2018).

**Experience:** The concept of experience is central to John Dewey (1916/2018) and Bruner (2002). For Dewey, experience is the holistic idea of human interaction between others and the world constituted from the communicative actions, the historical positions, and the cultural experiences of humans. Dewey considered experience to be fundamental to education and learning. Bruner, drawing upon Dewey, viewed experience through a narrative lens, stating that experience is a “library of stories within the individual…and stories are what gives sense to our lives” (pp. 3-4).

**Identity:** The situated and multiple ways in which people present various ways of being viewed by themselves and others as directly related to their present context (Gee, 1999).
Identities are viewed not as static and fixed but rather as fluid and multiple. Holland and Lachicotte (2007) argue that identities are social and cultural products through which people learn to manage their behaviors and organize themselves. This project also uses Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain’s (1998) work to view how people use narratives to understand their identities as well as to potentially change their future behaviors.

**Literacy:** The way we interact with the world, how we shape it and how it shapes us. While this definition guides this study, a more formal definition from Knobel and Lankshear (2006) more adeptly echoes this by stating that literacy is the “socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in Discourses or as members of Discourses” (p. 64). Further, Gee (1989) argues that literacy practice is tied together with identity in which these Discourses reflect one’s “identity kit” tied to shared histories and shared stories, bodies of knowledge, values, norms, and beliefs.

**Meaning Making:** The joint activity, construction, and accomplishment of shared experience among people, readers, and texts in which they occur (Smagorinsky, 2001). Just as meaning making takes place through social interaction, readers among other readers in interaction as well as readers with texts constitute the primary focus of meaning making within this study.

**Narrative:** The “best way of representing and understanding experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18). Narratives are organized constructions of human experiences in the world, and narratives form the dominant means by which humans represent, order, and make narrative meaning of those experiences for themselves and others. Narrative here may relate to
the texts that are read while it also corresponds to the stories human tell themselves about who they are and how they behave (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998).

**Positionality:** The way one’s subjectivity – power, agency, gender, social identity, etc. – orients them to the world, influences their understanding, and shapes their responses (Davies & Harré, 1990). One may be positioned through social interaction as well as through textual interactions in which texts address readers in particular ways.

**Texts:** The configuration of signs understood by a receiver as having a codified cultural significance (Gee, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2001). This study will use the term “text” mainly to reflect language read and understood within their specific contexts.

**Section Summary**

Texts, especially, literary texts can impact readers’ lives in significant ways. This study addresses current theories of reading as relational, dynamic and on-going social interactions. The study provides evidence of the process through which meaning is made with texts as well as how the reading process may extend beyond the page toward new understandings of future behaviors for the reader. Data collection for the study in a high school ELA classroom persisted over the course of five months in which an examination of the activities of the particular classroom and its readers were analyzed along with the broader community’s perspectives on and practices with literacy. This research is important because it provides qualitative analysis of new perspectives and will provide an understanding of classroom activities in which teachers may maximize the interactions with content, texts, and students.

In the following chapter, I provide a literature review that examines the literature and research studies that inform this work. Following Chapter II, I lay out the research methods and theoretical framework that supports and guides the study in Chapter III. Following this, Chapter
IV provides the findings of the study, organized in a semi-narrative construction that moves through the literacy practices of the students in the study as well as the socio-cultural impacts of their reading practices and modes of understanding. The final chapter, Chapter V, offers a discussion of the findings as embedded in the literature and ideas aimed at thoroughly considering the outcomes of the study, along with potential future implications for readers, teachers, and classrooms.
CHAPTER II: SOURCES OF ILLUMINATION – A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“Man is so in need of such symbolic sources of illumination to find his bearings in the world because the non-symbolic sort that are constitutionally ingrained in his body cast so diffused a light.”

- Clifford Geertz (1966)

Introduction

This study examines the practice of readers and reading from a sociocultural perspective grounded in the work of Vygotsky (1962, 1978, 1981, 1987) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986) which recognizes how humans internalize both social interactions and social voices in order to construct and reconstruct their storied worlds. From this perspective, this literature review examines the literature of the theoretical approaches and research studies constructed from this framework. The review considers the sociocultural perspectives of readers and reader response theory as a basis for coming to understanding new perspectives that examine reading as an embodied process that structures readers textual experiences as shared social interactions. Through these interactions, readers develop understanding of texts and themselves. Further, these procedures are acknowledged as embedded in social, economic, and historical structures that produce both forms of identity and social capital that assist readers potentially with future endeavors. The review moves through this literature to understand the findings in Chapter IV and to provide a discussion of those findings, as understood through the literature discussed here, in Chapter V.

The Sociocultural Perspective

Concerned with human development, Lev Vygotsky located higher mental functioning in social life (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991) as opposed to developing in isolation inside the individual. Through this shift in understanding, human learning and development were not
dependent solely on individual cognitive functions but rooted rather in social contexts (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Through social interactions, humans construct knowledge both of others and of themselves within the historical, cultural, and social structures of their environments. As Wertsch (1991) writes, “…in order to understand the individual it is necessary to understand the social relations in which the individual exists” (p. 26). Primary to Vygotsky’s configuration of the individual in social life is the role of internalization (Vygotsky, 1981). Through interaction with the social world, individual development moves from external processes to internal processes. Leont’ev (1981) notes “the process of internalization is not the transferal of an external activity to a preexisting, internal ‘plane of consciousness’: it is the process in which this plane is formed” (p. 57). Humans internalize external activities as part of their developmental becoming, shaping both cognition and identity simultaneously. Relationships to others as well as cultural objects and resources, such as literary texts, within the environment become internalized within the individual as forms of thinking, learning, communicating, and being. One’s identity and one’s being in the world, from this view, is constituted by the actions and activities of human’s lived spaces.

Wertsch (1991) describes Vygotsky’s social understanding of human development as extending one’s mind “beyond the skin” (p. 14). Here, mind is suggestive of the relationship of human cognition to socially shared understandings as a form of social imagination and intersubjectivity (Bertau, 2014; Lysaker, 2014). Social imagination, like narrative imagination, is a response to the external world toward the construction of interiority and inwardness that structures personal understanding and identities that are both formed from the external interactions while also being specific to one’s sense of self and lived experience. The social activity of internalization is formed from the concept of mediation. Vygotsky viewed human
action, both socially and individually, as mediated by tools and signs (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Vygotsky emphasized the significant impact of cultural resources on human cognition, recognizing the power of these resources in shaping human action and thinking in essential ways. Through mediated action, human consciousness is directed toward objects and those objects likewise constitute human understanding directed back at the self (see Figure 1). Central to these social and cultural resources is language (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978, 1987; Wertsch, 1991, 2000). Human language is the preeminent tool allowing humans to directly interact and co-exist (Bertau, 2014b). Wertsch (2000) notes that Leont’ev (1978) distinguishes between Vygotsky’s sense of inner and outer speech. He writes that we use inner speech to formulate communication directed toward the resolution of external tasks, so that one accumulates resources from the sociocultural resources, such as signs and texts, to successfully complete future tasks.

Inner and outer speech are mutually constitutive so that one cannot exist without the other, forming a notion of the dialogical self that is developed further by Bakhtin (1981). This dialectical way of being becomes a means to view how humans construct themselves and their identities in the work of Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998). In addition, reading forms a similar process in which texts operate as mediating devices and tools that orient the reader in ways related to identity, positionality, and potential future behaviors. As noted above, humans internalize the languages and texts of their social environment in ways that are mutually constitutive.

Figure 1. Vygotskian Conception of Language Use (adapted from Mercer, 2019)
It is important to note here that Vygotsky’s understanding of internalization and mediation as formed through social life counters Piaget’s beliefs about stages of human development aligned to human biological benchmarks (Wells, 2000). Schools structure themselves on these Piagetian stages without always structurally recognizing the constitution of learning environments and its impact on learning and development. In addition, Piaget’s perspective closely aligns with a more fixed, essentializing notion of identity located within the person. The sociocultural perspective, grounded in the work of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, underlie the contemporary belief of identity as fluid social negotiations dependent on historical and social contexts (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007).

Vygotsky’s emphasis on the environmental aspects of learning, and consequently, identities, are shaped in his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP) that he defines as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Important to note here, Vygotsky emphasized that human development and the educational process were grounded in everyday culture which mirrors John Dewey’s concept of experience as nearly synonymous terms (Glassman, 2001). This connection between Vygotskian culture and Deweyian experience is important for the ways that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) draw upon Dewey’s notion of experience toward their framework of narrative inquiry methodology.

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of community of practice recognizes the importance of the environment in learning as well as on identity development. They note that identities are formed out of becoming a member of the sustained practices of the community, shaped by ways of being, knowledges, and interactions. Community membership, senses of belonging, and
mutual recognition are formed within these same processes. More recently, Smagorinsky (2018) re-translated Vygotsky’s work on ZPD toward a broader understanding that Smagorinsky calls the *zone of next development*. For Smagorinsky, Vygotsky’s ZPD focuses humans environmentally in a learning process that is always oriented toward the future. Smagorinsky (2018) writes, “[Vygotsky] was primarily concerned with how human environments are established and perpetuated through social practices designed to guide action toward cultural goals” (p. 71, emphasis added). These concepts are oriented to future human work and being, aligned with an act suggestive of Bakhtin’s *ideological becoming* (Bakhtin, 1981; Freedman & Ball, 2004).

Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) contributions here are also significant and worth taking a moment to address. Nielsen (2002) describes Bakhtin as starting with a simple, central question: “How should I act…knowing that each act or deed is an instance of my whole life history acted out with others who can answer back?” (p. 6). And, for Wertsch (1991), Bakhtin consistently questioned texts for “who is talking?” which Wertsch reconfigures to “who owns meaning?” (p. 67). These questions reflect the ways that Bakhtin’s work in literature and literary theory maintained an awareness of the social “other” so that his literary theory performed a sociological analysis of the lived world. For Bakhtin (1981), human consciousness seeks to choose a language for itself as he writes, “consciousness must actively orient itself amidst heteroglossia, it must move in and occupy a position for itself within it, it chooses, in other words, a ‘language’” (p. 295). Bakhtin’s concept of *heteroglossia* recognizes the many voices contained in human speech as well as in novels of literary realism. The “other” and forms of “otherness” in both spoken and written language is essential to one’s understanding of themselves and to internalized structures that are turned back toward the lived world. The words of others are never neutral, containing
ideologies and positions of the speaker’s intentions. Language is a primary tool for this form of self-and-other construction. Holquist (1990, p. 84, emphasis added) writes,

> It will be remembered that the time of the self is always open, unfinished, as opposed to the time we assume for others, which is (relative to our own) closed, finalized. And yet, in order to be known, to be perceived as a figure that can be “seen,” a person or thing must be put into the categories of the other, categories that reduce, finish, consummate. We see not only our selves, but the world, in the finalizing categories of the other. In other words, we see the world by authoring it.

Bakhtin’s work reflects Vygotsky’s insistence on language as the primary tool of human mediation with the world. Vygotsky’s inner and outer speech are echoed in Bakhtin’s concepts of internally persuasive discourse, language of one’s own experience that is “backed up by no authority” and authoritative discourse, language of religion, politics, and “the word of a father, of adults, and of teachers,” that “demands that we acknowledge it” (p. 294). In addition, Bakhtin identifies a further nuance within forms of speech that draw attention to the tension-filled tendencies of utterances. Bakhtin (1981) writes, “Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear” (p. 272).

According to Maybin (2001), “Centripetal forces produce the authoritative, fixed, inflexible discourses of religious dogma, scientific truth, and the political and moral status quo which are spoken by teachers, fathers, and so on. This authoritative discourse is associated with political centralization and a unified cultural ‘canon’” (p. 65). Centrifugal forces, consequently, represent discourse directed away from authoritative centers to the periphery and is often constructed of diverse voices, unauthoritative worldviews, and organic creation of and openness to meaning and understanding. Bakhtin describes these on-going, opposing forces in the world as those that both
push to construct order and meaning while simultaneously decentering or disrupting that order and understanding (Compton-Lilly, 2011; Ives, 2012).

Bakhtin ties these concepts directly to human development in his notion of *ideological becoming*. Bakhtin (1981) writes, “The ideological becoming of a human being...is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others” (p. 341). Bakhtin’s work is indicative of current understandings of identity as developed out of a sociocultural framework. Language is fundamentally the primary resource that allows us to interact successfully with others while simultaneously acting upon us and our own understandings of who we are. This calls up Holland, Lachicotte, Jr., Skinner and Cain’s (1998) famous line, “People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are” (p. 3), Our sense of who we are is shaped out of the dialogical nature of Bakhtin and Vygotsky’s work constructed in the social life of language and interaction with the voices of others.

We can see these theories in action with Knoeller’s (2004) case study of a twelfth-grade English class. Knoeller uses Bakhtin’s theories as a framework to observe and analyze classroom discourse, including Bakhtin’s concepts of *voicing* (the utterance or partial utterances that are attributed to two speakers at once) and *textual voicing* (voicing the language of authors or characters either verbatim or in paraphrase). These concepts, again, reflect and give flesh to Vygotsky’s (1978) and Wertsch’s (1991) notion of mind as socially distributed. Bakhtin’s analysis of consciousness recognizes how it is shared with others and orients itself toward a position that is socially and historically situated. In Knoeller’s study, the act of students speaking through the voice of the author or character from the text provides both an identity and positionality through which the students speak. Further, Knoeller demonstrated how these
interactions function to construct and develop meaning with texts and others. The social aspects of meaning making and textual understanding become critical as it becomes recognized as co-constructed through these social contacts.

In Ivey and Johnson’s (2015) study, who we will return to, they observed students engaged in reading fiction and write, “Living inside a character’s head provides the experience of a different self (subject), and of others, which many students find transforming” (p. 311). Texts, in this view, become strategies of thinking and speaking that allow students to articulate positions they may not have initially inhabited as well as adopt new language for themselves in order for to manage and envision new behaviors. These studies, like Knoeller’s and Ivey and Johnson’s, find that through dialog with and about texts students shift and evolve in their understandings of the meanings that texts offer, suggesting that meaning does not reside in the text but within an in-between, dialogical space between text, reader, and others.

In Jerome Bruner’s (1986) *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, he draws from the framework of Vygotsky to say that “most learning in most settings is a communal activity, a sharing of the culture” and is part of the “negotiating and sharing…en route to becoming a member of the adult society in which one lives out one’s life” (p. 127). From this perspective, Bruner further recognizes the role of literature as a means of social interaction and social sharing that helps structure thinking. He considers the activity of reading and reflecting on Shakespeare’s *Othello* as a deep way of entering the consciousness of others through intersubjectivity and gaining a greater awareness of the human condition. These activities are ways of constructing and constituting the world and viewing possibilities for different paths forward in how we move and develop. Reading is an activity aimed toward cultivating a capacity to think for yourself, for self-
knowledge and self-understanding. This act of development travels through the consciousness and voices of others.

**Reader Response Theory, Transactional Theory, and Social Interaction: From Transactions to Social Interactions in Reading**

Texts serve many functions: from the transmission of information to representing an aesthetic form of art. Through the 20th century, approaches to literature have ranged from text-centered approaches that locate meaning exclusively in the text (such as formalist and structuralist theories) to reader-centered approaches which are constituted through theories of reception such as Iser’s (1978) *reader-response criticism* and Fish’s (1970) *affective stylistics*. Many current sociocultural perspectives on reading derive from Rosenblatt’s (1978) *transactional theory* of interpretation in which the reader is viewed as having a transactional experience with a text.

Reader-response theory brings forward and situates the reader in an interactional process that intertwines both text and reader. During the reading process, the reader actively constructs the meaning of the text through his or her individual histories (Brandt, 1998; Fish, 1980; Iser, 1978; Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1965, 1978). Rosenblatt (1965, 1978, 1985), who is foundational to reader-response theory, argues that reading constitutes a *transactional* experience for the reader. The act of interpretation is negotiated between the text and the reader, and this process is reliant upon the knowledges, experiences, and histories a reader brings to the text. Rosenblatt (1995) writes, “A novel or poem or play remains merely ink spots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols” (p. 24). The text’s “meaning” then is neither within the text nor within the reader but rather constructed from the symbolic exchange between the language on the page and the experiences of the reader. Rosenblatt argues that reading is not only a cognitive activity of constructing meaning but one too of a reader’s whole
life experiences that includes affective understandings (Dressman, 2004). With this perspective, Rosenblatt (1965) writes, “The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings” (p. 24). Texts, in this sense, are constructed, negotiated, and navigated by the reader as he or she come to understand its meaning.

For Rosenblatt, the reader draws upon the set of life experiences, identities and positionalities, and memories to construct meaning from the text. In Rosenblatt’s (1965) term, these experiences are “activated” through the interaction with the text (p. 57). With this activation of background knowledge and memories, the reader further constructs meaning based on the world-making narratives provided in the text. In acts of interpretation, the reader reconstructs the plot through the symbolic material of the text to create the meanings that exists in neither the text nor the reader, but rather form “worlds” of its own through the interaction (Bertau, 2014b; Nünning & Nünning, 2010; Ricoeur, 1978). While she does not go this far in her own analysis, Rosenblatt (1978) does acknowledge how the reader draws upon his or her own culture and the embedded meanings within it to make meaning of a literary text. Texts represent and structure language worlds that are mirrors of society, social structures, and human nature that become resources for readers. As readers construct the meanings of texts, those texts consequently provide subject positions that may also act to construct readers.

Hancock’s (1993) study of four sixth-grade readers and writers uses Rosenblatt’s reader-response theory to explore the meaning-making strategies students use in the understanding of four books of realistic fiction. The study views each student as accessing and understanding the text individually in different ways by framing reading as an individual transaction with the text. Hancock derives three primary categories of analysis: immersion, which reflects the readers
attempt to make sense of the emerging plot and characters; *self-involvement*, which reflects the readers’ personal involvement with the characters or plot; and *detachment*, which indicates the readers’ move away from the text toward making a statement of evaluation or to contemplate their perspective on the reading. Through the analysis of a reader’s self-involvement with a text, Hancock considers the degree to which the reader identifies themselves with the text at the level of character and plot. From this perspective, Hancock notes how one student in the study, Ellen, made meaning of the texts through identification and assessment of the characters in each of the texts encountered. “Her immediate involvement from the first page of the book continued throughout the text,” Hancock writes, and further states, “Ellen maintained character comprehension by *being the character* and by *weighing the character’s behavior against her own values*” (p. 359, emphasis added).

Hancock’s study suggest ways in which narrative boundaries are crossed between the reader and text so that readers bring their past experiences into the act of textual involvement while simultaneously being acted upon by the text. While the lens of Rosenblatt’s transactional reader-response theory defines how this study understood students’ activity with texts, a broader perspective may understand the readers involvement in texts at the level of social interaction. Understanding, interpretation, and meaning making with texts, from a sociocultural framework, are actively constructed through social experiences.

Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1988) extends Rosenblatt’s account of the reading process in significant ways. Approaching texts in a way that combines phenomenological description and hermeneutic interpretation, Ricoeur describes reading as a dialectical process that completes the meaning of the text. Ricoeur (1984) writes when the world of the text and the reader confront each other “only then does the literary work acquire a meaning in the full sense of the term, at
the intersection of the world projected by the text and the life-world of the reader” (p. 160).

Further, he claims that this confrontation between the two offers the capacity to transform human action. The activity of reading, as Bruner (1986) argues, “recruit[s] the reader’s imagination” and “initiate[s] performances of meaning” that are equivalent to speech acts whose “intention is to initiate and guide a search for meanings among a spectrum of possible meanings” (p. 25). Like literary texts, Ricoeur argues that “life has a pre-narrative structure, which is changed into a narrative structure by the plot of a story told about it” (Coombs, 2012, p. 86) so that one may organize the events of experience into a narrative whole called *emplotment*. The act of emplotment pulls together the various events of a story to form meaning and is central to, Ricoeur argues, understanding (Ricoeur, 1984).

Ricoeur derives his understanding of text worlds from Aristotle and the Greek world’s consideration of *mythos*, the act of emplotment that pulls together texts into a whole (Dowling, 2011). For Aristotle, and consequently Ricoeur, texts worlds were always in relation to lived worlds through forms of *mimesis*, or imitation and representation. Narratives, as imitative constructions of the world, are considered a chain of causal actions and events with telic directions oriented to what Aristotle call *anagnorisis* or recognition. For Aristotle, anagnorisis represents the moment of clarity in the text for characters in their journey from not knowing to knowing within the narrative world. This action of movement to clarity and “knowing” is mirrored, according to Ricoeur, in the reader’s experiences as well. Dowling (2011) describes Ricoeur’s encounters with narrative understanding for readers as a “struggle or contest between opposing spheres of reality, a confrontation between what he [Ricoeur] calls the fictive world of the text and the actual world of the reader” (p. 14). Because both worlds, Ricoeur argues, are
rooted in language, the action of texts must impact the reader’s experiences of the lived world and vice versa through the reader’s alteration of consciousness from the reading experience.

The activity of emplotment by the reader, according to Ricoeur (1984), is part of the meaning-making, interpretative process connected to his notion of *mimesis*, reflective of the ways in which textual worlds are reflective representations, as we have noted, and imitations of the lived world. Ricoeur organizes his understanding of mimesis, however, into three stages: mimesis$_1$, mimesis$_2$, and mimesis$_3$. In Mimesis$_1$, the reader uses the symbolic resources of the text, built from the language and discourses of the social world, as a space of interaction and acknowledgement. Here, one might recognize the sociocultural foundations of Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986) that demonstrate how both the symbolic tools of society are internalized and structuring of inner and outer worlds. Social meanings and rules of interpretation are foundational to this process. In this stage, Ricoeur includes his concept of “temporal character” that recognizes the temporal nature of narratives extending from the past into a future. In the following stage, Mimesis$_2$ bridges “pre-understanding” in mimesis$_1$ toward full understanding in mimesis$_3$ by including the activity of *emplotment* in which the reader pulls together the events, activities, connections and linkages of the plot into an organizing understanding or comprehension. This process of emplotment and its importance will be addressed further below in relation to the concept of *configuration* and *refiguration*, an activity of the reader which moves closer to merging text worlds and the reality of human worlds into a meaningful whole.

In Ricoeur’s final step of meaning make in Mimesis$_3$, the reader brings all of his or her preconceptions and experiences into the wholeness of the narrative to imbue it with meaning. Ricoeur (1984) writes, “I shall say that mimesis…marks the intersection of the world of the text
and the world of the hearer or reader; the intersection, therefore, of the world configured by the
text and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality” (p. 71). In
this stage, we see a concept of the full hermeneutic circle that includes the active role of the
reader as contextualized within the real, outside-of-the-text world in which he or she lives.

In this act of pulling together these connections, a narrative identity is formed as a means
of making subjective sense of the text while positioning the reader in the ways intended by the
text. For example, Thein and Sulzer (2015) analyze the ways in which young adult (YA)
literature positions its readers around issues of adolescent abilities, needs, and desires. These
positions can essentialize an adolescent stage of life as a fundamentally developmental one; yet,
the authors provide a heuristic that opens spaces for readers to challenge, explore, and respond to
those positions of “adolescence.” While the authors here do not utilize the concept of narrative
identity, we can come to see how the activity of constructing meaning in the plot creates
identities for the reader that is intertwined with the text and the reader’s lived experiences. The
act of positioning and then re-positioning oneself through social interactions or through the
process of reading aligns with Bakhtin’s (1981) sense of self authoring as well as Holland,
Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain’s (1998) telling stories that reflect one’s identity and organizes
one’s behavior and way of being within the narrative act. In describing narrative identity,
conceive of identity generally: “Narrative identities represent the coming together of the stories
individuals tell, as well as those told about them by collectivities and by others” (p. 82).

In a study of how narratives and identities change over time, Bansel (2013) takes up
Ricoeur’s notion of narrative identity as it intersects with Ricoeur’s concept of refiguration.
Bansel argues that Ricoeur gives an account of identity that is unstable as a result of temporal
experience. Ricoeur’s refiguration is composed of three interrelated and interacting processes of *prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration*. Briefly, *prefiguration*, according to Bansel (2013), “refers to the understanding we have of those everyday practices through which identities are constructed in and by narratives of what is normal, permissible and acceptable (and what is not)” (p. 5) *Configuration* “refers to the emplotment or ordering of events, memories and experiences, and the ways in which relations between and among them are coordinated into intelligible and coherent narratives” (p. 5). *Refiguration* “refers to the practices through which narratives become embodied as the life of the human subject” (p. 5). Within this notion of refiguration, we can see, again, how identities are embedded into narratives that account for more than just stories but rather act to shape, position, and construct experiences of being (Bansel, 2013; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998).

Ricoeur’s development from Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reader response may be developed further through the work of Popova (2015, 2019). In her understanding of the reading process, Popova (2015) addresses the activity of reading and interpretation as an act of *participatory sense making*. Popova argues that narrative is defined as both a dynamic causal structure and a form of participatory sense-making in which the reading process with narrative functions as an active form of interaction between the reader and text. Stories then are not static, cultural artifacts as we may see in, say, Rosenblatt’s work, but rather for Popova stories become “expressions of intersubjective meaningful action and participatory sense-making between tellers (narrators) and readers” (Popova, 2015, p. 75). Literature offers readers from this perspective the opportunity of intersubjective exchange toward not only both a deeper understanding of others and of oneself but also the prospect to change one’s behaviors for future interactions. More directly, Popova (2015, p. 76) writes that
...when we read written narratives, we complete them; we invest them with a speaker that we treat as a conversational participant; we become willing partakers in their worlds, but they also become part of ours....[w]hen we read, we re-create a situation, a moment, an act, in order to understand it. This understanding is shared, yet also personal and dependent on many factors such as gender, knowledge, verbal expertise, and experience, among others. Between us and the story a constitutive relation is formed.

Popova takes up an enactive approach that mediates a perceiving consciousness and the represented world of the text into a participatory interaction that reflects both the lived and narrative worlds. Stories do not take place in minds, she notes, but rather in between minds (p. 4). Through this concept, we can theorize how readers may interact and change within narrative spaces of texts as well as retranslate those texts into real-world spaces in which the reader enacts and embodies the narrative characteristics. Ricoeur (1988) addresses this notion as allegorization, in which readers translate the meaning of a text into another context, yet he does not push this any further.

Popova’s (2015) theory leans heavily on the concept of intersubjectivity. Just as Bakhtin argued that individuals assimilate the words of others, current research demonstrates how language can mediate and structure the understanding of others’ minds through an intersubjective process (Fernyhough, 2008; Inghilleri, 2000; Lysaker, 2014). Intersubjectivity can be defined as “the capacity for shared or coordinated experience within episodes of joint activity” (Mascolo & Kallio, 2020 p. 4) and “the sharing of experiential content (e.g., feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and linguistic meanings) among a plurality of subjects” (Zlatev, Racine, Sinha, & Itkonen, 2008, p. 1). This capacity for shared experiences begins at birth and is considered a precondition for social interaction.
in which meanings are shared and constructed (Mascolo & Kallio, 2020). While we may consider intersubjectivity as a process between humans, we can further understand how texts offer the opportunity for readers to interact and directly participate with both characters and forms of consciousness in order for readers to become, as Popova writes, “willing partakers in their worlds…[while also becoming] part of ours” (Bertau, 2014a, 2014b; Cohn, 1978; Goldie, 2012; Ivey & Johnson, 2015; Lysaker, 2014). Intersubjective engagement provides an analytical lens through which to gain deeper understanding of adolescent development specifically related to literacy practices and their encounter with the reading process and literary texts.

In addition to subjectivity, Popova (2015) and Bertau (2014a, 2014b) further build upon a concept of participatory sense making through the ways that consciousness may be shared in a manner of “presence-absence” (Bertau, 2014b, p. 451). “Making present what is otherwise un-conceivable,” Bertau writes (2014b, p. 448), “is the very accomplishment of language.” Through the function of displacement, consciousness can be shared through the joint reference and sharing of attention onto an object. This concept of displacement in language and narrative defines how humans through social interaction can share consciousness and navigate each other’s experience (Bertau, 2014b; Chafe, 1994). Chafe (1994) argues that a displacement of self creates the “ability to be conscious of events and states that are originated in the consciousness of someone else” (p. 200). This sharing allows readers to experience what others think, believe, and feel, reflective of a Vygotskian sense of “mind” that extends beyond the skin while also offering the possibility to transfer that perspective into one’s own internalized way of being and acting upon the world (Lysaker, Tonge, Gauson, & Miller, 2011; Wertsch, 1991).
Through these theories of reading, we can view the process as one that is complex and tightly connected to our own participation as readers and as people in the world. Literature from this perspective is not about an essentialized search for a hidden meaning or about an aesthetic form of art that resides outside of human experience. Rather, reading offers the reader the capacity to experience the lives of others and take on identities and positionalities outside of their own immediate environments. Vermeule (2010), for example, argues that readers engage with the minds and consciousness of textual characters in order to experience social risk and, consequently, learn how to manage one’s behavior in socially constructed and appropriate ways. Through literary reading, readers gain deeper, more complex knowledge of social interactions and social values with their interactions with texts. In addition, the text worlds of literary fiction function as potential mirrors of lived worlds and offer the reader a deeper self-understanding of being in the world, a greater potential for empathy, and more extensive knowledge of the cultural lives of others (Bishop, 1990; Keen, 2010). Echoing what has been mentioned earlier, the writer and poet, Garth Greenwell (2020), has written, “Literature is an extraordinary technology for the transmission of consciousness” (p. 63). From this perspective, literature may further provide opportunities of producing and developing inwardness and consciousness in readers.

In Ivey and Johnson’s (2015) study, the authors note that engaged reading allows readers to get inside the heads of characters. Their study finds that this experience of reading, of engagement and living within the text’s characters and text world, changes the experiences of reading altogether. They write, “Living inside a character’s head provides the experience of a different self (subject), and of others, which many students find transforming” (p. 311). Important here, Ivey and Johnson (2015) write that the students engaged in reading at this level changed their orientation to reading and self-understanding as an object (or subject) of that
reading. In addition, it is worth quoting in full a passage from Sugarman and Martin (2011) that Ivey and Johnson (2015, p. 284) are directed to:

The capacity to make ourselves intentional objects and describe ourselves psychologically creates a space of possibility for self-interpretation, of constructing relations with ourselves, so to speak. In the process of enacting psychological descriptions of ourselves as certain sorts of persons, we become the kinds of beings we are . . . this is . . . an active structuring of existence.

In their study, Ivey and Johnson (2015) note that the students’ process of engaged reading included solitary individual reading but also significant discussion and talk with others as well. What they considered “substantive transformations of the subject” and the becoming of “the kinds of beings we are” occurred through a community of readers and around dialog about the text. In the study, the classroom under investigation understood reading and meaning making as shaped by the more expanded and diverse constructions of spaces between people in interaction, solitary readers, and the lived environment.

Understanding identities, positionalities, and ways of being in the world is central to the work of reading and responding to literature in the ELA classroom (Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015). Students may not only gain greater empathy and experience non-consequential social risk, but may also discover improved relationships with peers, more clarity in their perceptions of self, and greater self-regulation (Ivey & Johnston, 2015). Reading and participatory sense making is, ultimately, the activity of discovering new ways of being. Vygotsky (1978) proposed this possibility through his notions of play and improvisation (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007; Holzman, 2017). Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) write that “[b]y modeling possibilities, imaginary worlds can
inspire new actions” (p. 49). And, Bruner (1986) writes that “many worlds are possible…meaning and reality are created and not discovered…negotiation is the art of constructing new meaning by which individuals can regulate their relations with others” (p. 149).

**Identities and Readers**

As Holland and Lachicotte (2007) note, identities are social and cultural products in which people learn to manage their behaviors and organize themselves. These identities can shift through interaction with others and social activity as people take on new roles and social positions. We might then further understand identities as a form of social action of the self within the social world.

Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) outline how people frame their identities using the narratives around them. They provide the example of people in Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) who transform their self-stories about themselves through the narrative that the AA organization provide them. AA members are recruited into a new *figured world* that offers them new understandings of their lives. The authors describe these figured worlds as epistemologies and worldviews that structure ways of being in the world. These epistemological narratives create webs of meaning and understanding. In becoming members of AA, people are encouraged to reconstruct their own stories of themselves in their lives through the genre of AA that positions them in the context of recovery. In understanding the internalization of narratives as a means of structuring and restructuring the self, Holland and Lachicotte’s (2007) write, “We actively internalize a sense of our own behavior as compared to the behavior of others acting in related roles and positions... At some point, however, the self takes itself as the object of the gesture. The self comes to use the signs, once directed to others or received from others, in
relation to the self” (pp. 107-108; authors emphasis). Narratives, from this perspective, are ways of organizing knowledge and the stories of lives that structures how meaning of lived experiences are understood and continued. In negotiating these stories, people position themselves to certain ways of being and as a way of aligning their abilities to interpret the signs directed at them and from them through those stories. In understanding ourselves, we also come to understand others.

Davies & Harré (1990) outline the concept of positioning. Positioning differs from identity in that it more specifically constitutes an orientation to the world and a way of viewing or being viewed through it that defines relationships, composed of histories, powers, and hierarchies, to others as well as to texts and discourses. “Positioning,” Davies & Harré (1990) write, “is the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (p. 48). A person may position him or herself in certain ways, similar to the AA members who embed their personal narratives into the AA storyline. People may also be positioned by others, such as authoritative discourses that position one as a “subject” of and to authority. These positionalities are constructed in narratives of power and entitlement or, consequentially, in positions that lack power so that they become subjected to it.

School settings are influential spaces related to positioning and positionality. Students can be positioned as good or bad students, as strong or weak readers, as engaged or disengaged, as college-bound, or as athletes or bookworms, each of which forms an identity behavior that may be acted out in order to fulfill the expectations of the positionality (Becnel & Moeller, 2015; Glenn & Ginsberg, 2016; Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Kirkland, 2011; Moje & Luke, 2009; Sciurba, 2014, 2017). Vetter’s (2010) study considers the power structures of a classroom and
how student and teacher positions construct agency and belonging – or a lack of those elements – in those spaces. Classrooms, we understand, are powerful spaces that strongly impact how students see and understand themselves. Zacher (2008) intersects the concept of positionality with the theories of Bourdieu to conceive of how students may position themselves or be positioned in order to increase cultural and symbolic capital for themselves in the space of the school. Further, in the context of reading, literary texts themselves may orient and position readers in particular ways and to certain perspectives in the world. Teachers should be concerned with how texts and their teaching of texts may provide agency or limit it through their language.

Within the context of literary texts and reading, readers can also assume a subject position through transactions with texts. As Broughton (2002) argues, readers may take up a comfortable subject position assigned to the reader through the engagement with a text. This position may align with the reader’s identity and his or her social position outside of the text. Yet, readers may also take up subject positions outside of their group memberships and have experiences within that position that work toward a construction of the self in society. Pahl (2008) and Sciurba (2014, 2017) argue that literary texts are embedded with frameworks for larger cultural identities and positions that are reflections of the societies in which they were produced. In taking up and aligning themselves with characters whose social position is outside of their own, readers may discover and “try on” identities and subject positions that were unavailable to them through their communities. By engaging these subject positions, readers may identify new ways of being through an epistemological shift toward shifting constructions of self-identities. Or, as Holland et al. (1998) write, “By modeling possibilities, imaginary worlds can inspire new actions…” (p. 49).
Identities are developed and shaped through social interaction and from the broader cultural representations in which a person lives. While some studies have considered how adolescents from particular identities read texts, such as Becnel & Moeller’s (2015) study of rural students and their reading practices, other studies have warned against generalizations about reading identities. Sciurba (2014, 2017) explores assumptions made about aligning literary texts with readers based on particular genders or racial backgrounds. Sciurba challenges the notion of “literature for boys” as a certain type of writing, typically understood as action oriented or “adventure” novels. As she notes, readers read for various and complex reasons related to interests, desires, and identities (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Ivey, 1999; Sciurba, 2014; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Wilhelm, 2008). The relevance and level of engagement in texts for readers is individual and uniquely based in individual experiences.

Further, Thein (2009) uses a cultural model framework (Gee, 1999, 2012) to examine how the practices of textual interpretation are linked to larger cultural models of identity and positionality as embedded within the community, specifically working-class families and experiences in the study. Thein follows a high school junior, Molly, and her reading and interpretative practices throughout an academic year. Molly was not motivated to engage in the typically selected texts about adolescence, but rather Molly found herself connected to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s (1850) *The Scarlet Letter*. Molly’s interpretative strategies pulled upon her own identity position as a sympathetic, helpful person who responds actively to difficulties that confront her. Thein describes Molly’s reading strategies as “linked to cultural models that help her navigate the unpredictable worlds of her changing working-class neighborhood, and a changing global economy” (p. 304). These strategies suggest that readers may align themselves
to ways of understanding the world that teachers may not immediately know or be able to see in
the classroom, yet these strategies also open possibilities for exploring the positionality of others.

Finally, in returning briefly to Vygotsky (1978), we can see how he viewed behaviors as
being capable of change over time. As an observer of children’s play, Vygotsky (1978)
considered how children operate in imaged and imaginary worlds. Children create imaginary
situations to fulfill needs to liberate themselves from constraints as well as to grow and develop.
Imaginary play shapes identities and positionalities that children inhabit in order to voice and re-
voice themselves in multiple ways. In this way, Vygotsky observed that play entered into the
symbolic where children could transform ordinary objects by taking on roles within the play
activity. “Our analysis accords symbolic activity a specific organizing function,” Vygotsky
(1978) writes, “that penetrates the process of tool use and produces fundamentally new forms of
behavior” (p. 24). It is in this context that we understand Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and
Cain’s (1998) view of identities being used for improvisational purposes. Reflective of this, these
authors write, “Vygotsky’s formulations, in short, direct us to people’s collective ability to
imagine themselves in worlds that may yet be scarcely realized...they both enable the creation of
new worlds and new identities and make us appreciate who figured (objectified) identities
become important tools with which individuals and groups seek to manage one another and their
own behavior” (p. 281, emphasis added).

As we come to understand identities and positionalities, we also recognize them not as
fixed roles that diminish agency but, rather, tools through which agency may be increased.
Through social interaction, as well as textual interactions, one can expand agency for themselves,
enabling them to succeed in tasks which they could not accomplish without those relational

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interactions (Popova, 2015). In this way, we can see how identity is fluid and multiple, and how these positions may offer new behaviors oriented for future use.

**The Socially and Culturally Embedded Nature of Reading and Literacy Practices**

As Street (1984, 1995) notes, literacy practices are ideological and culturally situated. Through the literary transaction, the reader is not an autonomous individual reader who constructs meaning with the text but rather is a social subject whose construction of meaning occurs within a social, ideological understanding of the world. As a social subject, texts and discourses work to position readers in particular ways and around certain identities (Brandt, 2011; Compton-Lilly, 2011; Thein, 2009; Thein & Sulzer, 2015). Further, texts, identities and positionalities, and literacy practices arise from the social structures and values of the communities in which the reader lives. Understanding the adolescent reader in this context is central of this study.

Reading and interpretation are practices embedded within lived communities and extend beyond the context of schools that draw upon resources of common knowledge and common language to build a shared frame of understanding. Yet, school literacy practices and home, or community, literacy practices may not align. Tensions between classroom and home reading practices are highlighted in Shirley Brice Heath’s seminal work, *Ways with Words* (1983), in which she shows through ethnographic research the differing approaches to literacy, texts and making meaning within the contexts of two small communities embedded in the textile belt of the Carolina Piedmont region. This work demonstrates how approaches to texts and interpretation are embedded within cultural values and practices. In her study, Heath (1983) outlines the history of Piedmont North Carolina, the economic development of agricultural and textile industries and their connections to family lives and cultural practices. Appropriate to this
context, Deborah Brandt (2001) writes, “Literacy learning is conditioned by economic changes and the implications they bring to regions and communities in which students live” (p. 42). Embedded within economic systems, literacy practices are developed within the context of the material conditions surrounding it and the historical factors of the community. Context, text, and interpretative strategies are all interlinked and cannot be untangled from each other (Moje, Dillon, & O’Brien, 2000).

In addition, Carol Lee’s *Culture, Literacy, and Learning: Taking Bloom in the Midst of the Whirlwind* (2007) further considers literacy practices within the relationship between communities and schools. Lee “examines what youth know from everyday settings to support specific subject matter learning” (p. 15). Calling upon students’ tacit knowledge asks them to pull from those knowledge structures – those ways of thinking and being – embedded within their out-of-school communities and cultures. Lee demonstrates the power and knowledge that is part of African American English (AAE) to talk about and deconstruct literature. Through talk, students are asked to explore their own ideas in the texts with each other while the teacher actively reconfigures and revoices (Bakhtin, 1981) student positions. As students learn to acknowledge their own voices as well as revoice ideas through the position of the teacher, Lee emphasizes here the essential role of the teacher in being aware of the cultural resources utilized by the students. Labov (1972) argues that the devaluation of AAE and other “non-standard” language practices in schools leads to the rejection of schools and view of those speakers to reject the educational system, yet Lee was able to bridge the distance between school and home literacy practices to empower students to draw from their own experiences and learn new, school-based ways of thinking.
Rural Students and Literary Practices

Moje, Cirox, and Muehling (2017) argued for the importance of recognizing how adolescent cultures influence and impact literacy engagement and the value of bringing students’ funds of knowledge, deep interests, and life experiences to classroom practices. These perspectives are valuable for all students but are essential for the engagement of rural students who have been shown to have declining engagement with with literacy practices and literary texts (Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009). Studies (e.g., Rampey, Dion, and Donahue, 2009) show low academic reading performance in rural school students as well as a decline in voluntary reading. In conducting interviews with rural teens about the role of reading, Rothbauer (2011) found that these adolescents described reading as highly important to their lives. In her study, Rothbauer found four major themes related to adolescent rural readers: 1) autonomy and independence; 2) habit and comfort; 3) experience; and 4) knowledge. “Many participants discussed reading in terms that emphasized a sense of independence and autonomy,” Rothbauer writes, “especially from school assigned reading and from teachers’ evaluations.” Rural adolescent readers also viewed reading both as a way to alleviate boredom and, alternatively, as a way to understand the experiences of others.

Cantrell and Rintamaa (2020), in their research study, recognized similar issues and found rural adolescent readers motivated by three areas: 1) academic attainment to goals beyond high school; 2) relative reading self-confidence; and 3) relevance as a primary motivator. “Engagement,” they write, “was characterized by students’ agency as manifested through students’ interest in texts, particularly when they liked the novels that teachers selected for study, and through students’ desire for relevance” (p. 314). While all students, rural and urban, desire engagement with relevant texts, rural students find increased motivation to engage – or not
engage – based on the perceived relevance of the required readings. Further, Cantrell and Rintamaa’s study found that the students positioned themselves as desiring to be recognized by others, wanting to appear knowledgeable and to gain social capital through their reading capabilities. With relevant, interesting texts, readers gained these elements and developed further agency for themselves.

In a study of an elementary school in North California, Zacher’s (2008) case study of a fifth-grade classroom highlights many of these issues. Zacher examines the gender, racial, and class identities of the room using Bourdieu and Bakhtin. In quoting Bourdieu, Zacher writes that she views the classroom in general as “a site of struggle; students are always ‘clash [ing] over the meaning of the social world and of their position within it’” (p. 14) in which students use social capital to impose their position and understanding of the world onto others. Through this awareness, Zacher proposes that teachers should find ways with their students to negotiate between the social values and structures imposed from and by texts. This would allow students the opportunity to examine and discuss their own positionality as a contrast to those imposed on them by texts and others. While an unexamined view of both the classroom and the texts read in the classroom space may limit a reader’s agency, Zacher acknowledges how through language students can maneuver through text meanings, peer influences, and their own personal experiences and backgrounds to find deeper meaning and a sense of agency moving forward.

The Sociocultural Environment and Bourdieu

Students are impacted by their social environment as all humans are. The environment can affect reading ability and outcomes, motivations, identities, and future outcomes. As suggested by the studies above, social capital functions to shape and situate students in particular ways toward others. From this perspective, Pierre Bourdieu’s three primary questions and
theoretical work, as noted by Grenfell (2012a), may help bring further understanding to this discussion: “What is this phenomenon that is a student?; How are they formed?; and What are the social forces acting upon them?” (p. 52).


Bourdieu developed a structural view of social activity that understands human actions as part of a social practice constituted by politics and contested power relations (Albright, 2008). His work sought to collapse the distinction between subjectivism and objectivism that recognized human actions, similar to Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986), as both constructing self and society simultaneously. In this way, Bourdieu (1980) understood the world as created through the embodied understandings of self and interactional relationships with others. Grenfell (2012a) elaborates this idea by saying, “when we direct thought at anything, intention is involved which creates a structural relation between the thinker (subject) and the object of their thought” (p. 64, emphasis added). Human activity here is shared socially and constituted with symbolic power and hierarchical structures. These concepts form ways of being and understanding oneself and the social environment as well as positioning identities with forms of background resources
and positionalities. To understand these ideas, I will develop them further below in relation to Bourdieu’s primary concepts of *habitus*, *field*, and *capital* (cultural, social and economic capital).

One of the central ideas of Bourdieu’s theoretical analysis is the concept of *habitus*. Bourdieu (1980) defines *habitus* as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (p. 53). This notion of durable and structuring dispositions recognizes the dialectical nature of human activity. These dispositions are written upon the body, so to speak, through social interaction and are simultaneously constitutive of the interaction. Bourdieu understands the concept of *practices* in his definition as those ways of acting in the world by individuals as well as those institutional practices that offer sets of expectations for behaviors and ways of being. In further understanding how habitus is developed, Carrington and Luke (1997) write that habitus begins at birth and becomes the result of social and cultural interactions in specific contexts that “develops distinctive class, culture-based and engendered ways of ‘seeing’, ‘being’, ‘occupying space’ and ‘participating in history’” (p. 101). While humans take on these dispositions and habits of being within their environments, Bourdieu warns of viewing humans as overly constrained by a social role that restricts behaviors outside of the expectations of those roles (Cole, 1995).

Habitus is entangled with the concepts of identity and positionality as it forms a distinctive way of being and seeing in the world that both orients and positions people in social contexts. In recognizing how identities are produced, Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998), write, echoing Bourdieu’s concept, “One’s history-in-person is the sediment from past
experiences upon which one improvises, using the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded one in the present” (p. 18). These subject positions provide ways of making meaning and acting on the world; however, these positions may also be intertwined with forms of social and symbolic power – or, consequentially, positioned away from those powers. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus here is helpful in viewing individuals within social contexts and the school environment, offering an analytical lens in which to understand how one’s behaviors are shaped by the social environment.

These environments, for Bourdieu, are not empty, neutral spaces, but rather structures of a web of relationships called fields. A primary analytical concept for Bourdieu, field is defined as “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 97; Grenfell, 2012b). Further, fields are semi-autonomous, structured spaces created through social activity and discourse that form relationships and social positions between the interacting humans (Carrington & Luke, 1997). Equivalent to Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain’s (1998) concept of figured worlds, fields are the logics of shared meanings, values, narratives, and connections among groups of people in organized ways. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain’s (1998) explain fields as ways of making social meaning and organizing identities that further expose and emphasize aspects of power, hierarchy, and social status where figured worlds do not (p. 58). From this, we can view how fields structure a space and produce values and capital within it. The intersection of field and habitus generate, what Bourdieu (1986) calls, cultural capital through the values, authority, and power they bestow. Carrington and Luke (1997) write, “Individuals and institutions are distributed within, and move through, fields according to relative accumulations of capital, each predisposed to pursue social power and a degree of control over their moves and exchanges within and across these fields” (p. 100).
Schools represent perhaps the most powerful fields in society. As fields, schools structure identities into specific relationships between active humans in the environment (students, teachers, administrators) and position them with the particular ideological values of the field. In addition, classroom spaces may themselves constitute a field that holds specific disciplinary values related to discourse and ways of being. In the ELA classroom, for example, ways of speaking, reading, and interpreting may present values that do not align with the values students bring to that space. Further, schools operate in society by conferring markers of status (social capital), such as graduation, from its institutions that permeates the values of the broader community. In using Bourdieu’s lens of field as an analytic unit, researchers can more deeply uncover the values of the school and the classroom while also recognizing how these institutions constrain identities and social positions (Grenfell, 2012a, 2012b).

These values of the field are acknowledged through Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of three inter-related forms of capital: cultural, social and economic capital (DeStigter, 2015). These forms of capital refer to the competencies and expectations of the field in question, and they function to organize hierarchies within it. Cultural capital refers to the specific cultural competencies that one is expected to embody, such as appropriate ways of behavior, of linguistic skill, and cultural knowledge. Social capital refers to the network of people and institutions through which people have access to gain skills. Fairbanks and Ariail (2006), in quoting from Stanton-Salazar (1997), write that the resources of social capital “include the ‘institutional agents’…whose ‘power also comes from their ability to situate youth within resource-rich social networks by actively manipulating the social and institutional forces that determine who shall ‘make it’ and who shall not’” (p. 11). And, Bourdieu’s concept of economic capital entails financial resources and anything that can be exchanged for it (DeStigter, 2015).
Bourdieu (1986) considered economic capital to be the central core of his theory to which cultural and social capital were responsive (DeStigter, 2015). Each of these areas forms an analytical unit that provides a view of the constitution of society and its members. Bourdieu’s work extends the theories of Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986) to show a more complex social activity that is embedded with social values and layered with ways of making meaning within social contexts. For Bourdieu, this also explains methods of domination and subjectivity that could be created in society as he viewed schools as spaces of potential domination and social marginalization (DeStigter, 2015; Grenfell, 2012a).

Important to an understanding of the ELA classroom and school environment in general, Bourdieu (1977, 1991) understood language to be a powerful system of symbolic exchange analogous to economic capital. Here, Bourdieu (1977) extends our understanding of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) by locating this analysis of capital within the concepts of dialogic exchange. As Bakhtin (1984) notes, “truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person; it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (p. 110). Within the process of exchange, Bourdieu locates forms of capital that are produced and changed in the process. Bourdieu (1977) writes, “[T]he power of words is never anything other than the power to mobilize the authority accumulated within a field” (p. 649). Bourdieu’s “marketplace” of language suggests the nuance of social and cultural values tied to class and social hierarchy. Through discourse, the intentions of a speaker or text position its receiver in ways that both define and identify the “subject” and – considering Bourdieu’s work – provide access to, or consequentially limit it, to the resources of capital embedded within the utterances of interaction and exchange (Davies and Harré, 1990). These identities are social products replete with social values that enable people to move into positions of authority or to be
socially marginalized by the positions of others (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). Using the theoretical work of Bourdieu (1977, 1991) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986) in this way, researchers might come to see the speaking “subject” more clearly positioned into the social fabric of society.

Through each of these concepts from Bourdieu, we gain a deeper knowledge about the complexity of human activity while also understanding the intricacies of identity and positionality in social spaces. The fields of activity are spaces of human performances in which people use cultural resources and social narratives to enact identities (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998). These concepts are powerfully at work in the school environment. Fairbanks and Ariail (2006) write that “Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of social, economic, cultural, and symbolic capital, thus, helps us unravel the various combinations of resources and resistances that mark students for institutional recognition” (p. 349). Their research demonstrates how students are positioned in ways that may increase or decrease their social capital while the students simultaneously act to negotiate and re-position themselves using the resources available. Ehret and Hollett (2014) further extend Bourdieu’s theories to note that habitus is affectively embodied so that emotion and “felt” experience become part of a way of being and understanding in social spaces. As such, they argue that schools and ELA classrooms overlook the affective qualities of cultural resources, and they suggest more attention to the nature of literacy as related to “moving, feeling bodies” (p. 428).

Further, these “felt” experiences of the classroom have been re-conceptualized through a specific-language lens by Bloome and Beach (2019) in their conceptions of languaging. These authors draw on languaging as specifically a relational and affective activity between humans in interaction as they move back and forth to share and construct meaning while simultaneously
absorbing the underlying values of the exchange. Within language exchange, Bloome and Beach argue, resides an emotional/affective nature, related to mood, attitude, and emotion, that is always present within the exchange. In the moment-by-moment development of sense-making interchange, language is formed by attitudes and emotions that are also fundamentally embedded within the histories of those contextual interactions. “The meaning of the utterance,” Bloome and Beach (2019) write, “echoes a history of utterances in previous events and portends the potential use of utterances in future events” (p. 4). Because the social world of the past and future are always present within languaging exchanges, Bourdieu’s recognition of social, economic, cultural, and symbolic capital provides significant forms of potential analysis to consider the various elements of exchange that operate to position, identify, and re-position others in the act.

In Heath’s (1983) groundbreaking work in understanding community-based literacy practices, she demonstrates how certain literacy practices and ways of being, or habitus, along with languaging activities arise from the specific communities in which they occur, providing forms of knowledge and sociocultural resources of value which function to bring community members into relationships with each other (Cuffari, Di Paolo, & De Jaegher, 2015). The languaging practices may get valued and privileged in ways that align with standard school practices and provide cultural and economic capital for some students while other students, whose community-based knowledges are not valued, are excluded from these valued perspectives. In this way, fields become “mutually reinforcing and regulatory social relationships...[which are] highly complex” (Carrington & Luke, 1997, p. 100). The identities and positionalities that get enacted in school spaces become often determinate of greater social values that impact and produce dispositions and structures that further lend themselves toward being accessible to certain students for future-oriented behaviors and performances (Broughton,
Bourdieu (1986) writes that symbolic struggles occur within the daily routines “where what is at stake is the very representation...of the social world and, in particular, the hierarchy within each of the fields and among the different fields” (p. 723). Bourdieu’s project is helpful at uncovering and making explicit the codes, values, and structures that are taken for granted in social life within social fields (Luke, 2004).

Finally, in considering literacy practices and reading processes, we might also consider the ways in which texts are cultural resources that can supply capital as well as ways of being. Kate Pahl (2008) argues that habitus can also be found not only in lived social worlds but in the world of texts. “Habitus can be used to trace ways of being and doing,” Pahl (2008) writes, “[that] settle into texts, as traces of social practice” (p. 191). A person’s habitus works to position a person within specific contexts that construct a cultural and social understanding that is both part of the making of that person and practices that make up the person’s lived experiences. In reading, forms of habitus may be modified as readers interact with textual worlds. These modifications may serve to develop already existing forms of value, deepening them toward greater forms of social and cultural capital as well as orient the reader in new directions that were not present for the reader outside of the text (Bartlett & Holland, 2002). The production of meanings and ways of understanding are always intertwined with Bourdieuan habitus and ways of being. In this respect, it is worth quoting Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 124), which Pahl (2008) draws upon as well:

I could mention the chapter of Mimesis entitled, “The Brown Stocking” in which Eric Auerbach (1953) evokes a passage of Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse, and the representations or, better, the repercussions that a minor external event triggers in Mrs. Ramsey’s consciousness. This event, trying on a stocking, is but a point of departure which,
though it is not wholly fortuitous, takes value only through the indirect reactions it sets off. One sees well, in this case, that knowledge of stimuli does not enable us to understand much of the resonances and echoes they elicit unless one has some of the idea of the habitus that selects and amplifies them with the whole history with which it is itself pregnant.

In quoting this section at length, it is valuable to acknowledge how reading practices and meaning making arises from and are initiated by the reader’s historically positioned background and present positionality as structured by their specific contexts. In this way, events, actions, and characters in textual worlds may elicit responses, interactions, and modifications that are knowable only through the reader’s perspective. In the context of the ELA classroom, students may react to particular scenes or characters where these resonances arise for them and operate as one of the central entry points for making meaning and understanding from the text. Because of the individual nature of this response to reading, this instance of meaning making may also remain outside of the teacher’s knowledge and awareness. Through these moments of recognition and modification, readers open up to new dispositions, forms of conscious interiority, and future orientations that stem from textual exchange.

Section Summary

The literature reviewed through this section aligns with the sociocultural framework of the study and recognizes the ways that language and texts are a central part of learning and development. Education is a dialogical, cultural process engaged in knowledge-building communities such as schools and societies. The current research on reading and meaning making reveal gaps in the extent to how these activities happen and are extended into the lives of those involved, potentially impacting thinking, organizing, and behavior toward future goals. Thus, this research will attend to that gap in scholarship by considering how readers engage with texts.
as a form of social interaction and exchange that may modify the reader’s behavior and orientation toward the future in significant and meaningful ways. Through a relational understanding of the reading process, we come to see how readers make meaning through texts that may be shifted forward into their own lived experiences and lived worlds. This work will support ELA classroom teaching and deepen our understanding of these processes. The following section, Chapter III, offers a specific outline, research methods, and narrative inquiry methodology of the study.
“We think in narrative and...it is that narrative that helps us think.”
- Yanna Popova (2015)

**Introduction**

Qualitative research aims to gain a deep understanding of specific events, activities, organizations, objects, or people in their natural environment by rigorously structuring a method of observation, data collection, and data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2005; Stake, 1995). Narrative inquiry offers an analytic approach for comprehending human experience through the stories people tell themselves and others. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasize the role of Dewey’s concept of experience as central to the narrative inquiry framework, a concept that parallels Vygotsky’s emphasis on culture and environment (Glassman, 2001). Of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write, “if we understand the world narratively, as we do, then it makes sense to study the world narratively” (p. 17). Using narrative inquiry methodology, this study focused on how meaning is made in the context of a high school ELA classroom and the community in which it resides. The classroom and community functioned as the inquiry space for the project (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

**Research Methods and Design: A Narrative Inquiry Approach**

Using narrative inquiry methods and research design, the study captured how adolescents in the research context make meaning about texts, about themselves (especially in relation to texts), and about their future directions with emphasis on capturing the students’ voices through their own reflections of these practices. As humans, we are story-telling creatures who construct knowledge through narrative structures. Our sense of self and our social positions are deeply embedded in the narratives we tell ourselves and are impacted by the narrative “others” with
whom we come into contact through texts. The following section provides the research questions for the study; the research design that was implemented; the research context; data collection; data analysis; potential limitations of the study; and researcher positionality and student vignettes that introduce the context and findings (in Chapter IV) for the study.

**Research Questions**

This research was conducted in an ELA high school classroom in the Piedmont region of the southern United States, and the study was guided by three primary questions:

- What are the literacy practices of students in the ELA high school classroom under observation? And how do those literacy practices support interpretation and meaning making of literary texts?
- How do students’ literacy practices and engagement with literature and their interpretations shape both current and future discourses and activities?
- What environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic elements shape the meaning making and interpretation of texts that students are making?

**Research Design**

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research design that aims to understand and present the lived experiences of the research participants through their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2000). The approach of narrative inquiry seeks to capture the stories that people tell themselves and others toward the rich description and exploration of the meanings of these stories. Czarniawska (2004) writes that narrative inquiry is a specific type of qualitative design in which “narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected” (p. 17). This form of research method amplifies the voices of the participants, often voices that remain silent and may go unheard in the
classroom through daily activities. This method of emphasizing the voice aims to illuminate the personal meanings and stories of those involved. Further, and most importantly, voice – spoken human voices in interaction and interviews along with textual voices encountered by readers through the reading process – serves as a primary focus of the study through its examination of the exchange of the collection of dialogic voices and how readers might take up and enact the voices of others in their daily lives and future work. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) understand this approach’s temporality, viewing personal narratives as embedded within past, present, and future experiences. They see experience through a Deweyian lens that examines experience and continuity as both personal and socially situated through both the activities and resources of communities of people and is similar to Vygotskian ideas about culture, environment, and internalization (Glassman, 2001). Ultimately, Connelly and Clandinin (2000) write that “narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (p. 20) and Schaafsma, Pagnucci, Wallace, and Stock (2007) state, “stories are how we think” (p. 293).

Narrative inquiry aims to tell the stories of its participants as a means of ordering, organizing, and sense making that is set within their personal, social, and historically lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). A central element of narrative research features the re-storying of the data into a story structure. As Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) note, “The process of re-storying includes reading the transcript, analyzing this story to understand the lived experiences and then retelling the story” (p. 330). Narrative study assumes that culture is embedded and embodied into the lived experiences of humans who make sense of their lives through narrative accounts (Clandinin, 2020). Much like ethnography, narrative inquiry requires the researcher to understand both the participants and the larger group or groups in which they operate in order to both interpret and tell their stories in appropriate ways.
This study used narrative inquiry methodology to understand a high school ELA classroom and the students’ reading experiences. The study focused on 8 students within the classroom as representative student participants based on their reading practices and backgrounds. Data collection for the study took place in the fall of 2021 through the full semester (5 months) of the particular 12th-grade, honors ELA high school classroom. While focusing on literacy practices of the classroom, the study collected school-based artifacts, teacher interviews, and classroom observations that would inform the research questions. In order to get to know the students, they were asked to complete a literacy survey early in the semester (see Appendix C). The survey helped to identify participants whose engagement in reading and whose backgrounds would be responsive to the research questions. Interviews and classroom observations were audio, and when needed video, recorded for transcription. In acknowledgement of the role of the researcher, I completed continuous field notes throughout the study to capture activity not in interviews and not captured in recordings as well as to begin to ask questions and raise issues with the observations, most especially as related to my own participation in those events.

Overall, data collection and analysis focused on using the data to re-story the experiences of the students’ reading and meaning making activities into a meaningful re-telling that responded to the research questions in a narrative form (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Data analysis centered on Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional space approach which considers issues of interaction, continuity, and situation in the analysis of data (see Table 1). These processes are discussed below in more detail.
Research Context

The study took place at Brookside High School (names of all places and participants in the study are pseudonyms) located in the Piedmont region of the southeastern United States. Like much of the Piedmont, the area is comprised of rural agricultural farmland, primarily former tobacco farms. Many of the small towns in Farmville County were sites of textiles mills that arose in the 19th century and persisted, until their closures, in the late 20th century. Many of these mills and textile industries have closed and remain as empty buildings in the small towns through the county. In 2016, the county’s largest private employer, a large factory, closed, ending many of the available well-paid jobs and leaving a tax gap in the county that, during the time of the study, went unfilled. The Great Recession of 2008 greatly impacted the work environment for the county as well. The median household income in 2020 for Farmville County was $45,697 (the U.S. national median household income in 2020 was $67,521 as a site of comparison), based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Table 1. Farmville County Demographic Profile by Ethnicity/Race

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<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more races</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brookside High School is located in the town of Oakville. In 2019, the population of Oakville was estimated to be 2,730 with 953 households with a median household income (in 2019 dollars) of $58,938, higher than the average in the county as a whole. The community college is located in Oakville and serves as the county seat with the county’s courthouse and other
governmental offices. It is often described as a “one-stoplight town” surrounded by rural farmland.

Brookside High School is one of four public high schools in the county, a county with 25 public schools and just over 12,000 total students. The high school campus, established here in 1952, sits off the main, two-lane road behind a wooded area that secludes the site. Oakville Middle School resides further into this area along the main road to campus so that school mornings become congested along these thoroughfares and requires a sheriff’s deputy to direct traffic at the main intersection. Brookside has a population of 927 students (see Table 2 for demographics), according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for 2020-2021. According to 2019 state review of schools, three of the four high schools in the county had a C performance grade, with Brookside scoring a B grade. From an economic perspective, over 26.4% of the BHS students are considered economically disadvantaged (defined by the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch), which is lower than the state and county averages.

Table 2. Brookside High School Demographic Profile by Ethnicity/Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more races</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BHS’s most recent achievement statistics from state performance reports indicate that Brookside is performing at or higher than the county and state averages, except in Biology and
English II performance (See Table 3). In English II Performance, 49.1% of BHS students were considered grade-level proficient compared 58% across the state as a whole.

Table 3. BHS Subject Proficiency Rates for End-of-Course Exams (adapted from 2018-2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Brookside High School</th>
<th>County Schools</th>
<th>State Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade Level Proficiency (Levels 3-5)</td>
<td>Career &amp; College Ready (Levels 4-5)</td>
<td>Grade Level Proficiency (Levels 3-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology Performance</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English II Performance</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math 1 Performance</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math 3 Performance</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Selection

Miles and Huberman (1994) state that participant selection is one of the most crucial aspects of qualitative studies. The decisions made with participant selection places limits on the conclusions drawn and the confidence in those conclusions. For this project, I used purposeful selection of research participants (Creswell, 2013) with the goal to inform my research questions most clearly thoroughly with participate activities and responses. Creswell (2002, 2013) notes that there are many reasons to use purposeful selection, but there are five primary reasons: 1) achieving representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected; 2) to adequately capture the heterogeneity in the population; 3) to critically test the theories of the study; 4) to establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between
settings or individuals; and 5) to select groups or participants with whom you can establish the most productive relationships. In many ways, this study hits upon each of these five reasons for purposeful selection. The selection of a research site is additionally integral to the selection of participants for the study. In selecting Brookside High School, the research assumptions recognize the relationship between the broader context (the county, community, and school) and the individual participant in the study. This framework envisions the individual, as a sociocultural approach demands, as embedded within a larger social context that is important to understanding the data.

In locating the classroom, I talked with multiple teachers in the school. Ms. Young’s classroom of 12th-grade, honors English students were the most potentially responsive to the research questions. Ms. Young’s classroom structure and openness to student discussion in the class along with their focus on reading literary texts as part of their semester offering the greatest potential for response to the study. This group of students focused on British literature, as meeting state standards for English IV, as well as worked on a Senior Capstone Project as part of the school’s graduation requirements. In addition, seniors were most likely to articulate their own on-going stories related to their reading experiences and their direction toward the future after graduation.

Appropriate to qualitative research, this study was conducted with a small sample size (N=37) that allows in-depth study and analysis to be completed on the group. In the study, 37 participants officially agreed to participate in the study and allow data to be collected (See Table 4 for Participant Demographics). All participating students completing a required consent form along with receiving parent or guardian consent as well. There were 8 focal students, plus the teacher, from this set of participants who constitute the primary focus of the study toward the
research questions. During class and group discussions, all participating students’ responses became part of the data analysis and inform the findings of the study.

Table 4. Ms. Young’s Senior Honors English Class Demographics for Participating Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Race/Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more races</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All students in the classroom were asked to participate in the study. There were only two students out of 38 total who did not return consent forms, providing a 95% participation rate among those in the class. Data was not collected on the two students who were not participating. To determine the focal students for the study, all participating students completed a literacy survey (Appendix C) that provided a general overview of their reading engagement and how they might interact with texts. In addition, I observed students during classroom discussions as well as during work periods for their engagement with each other and with reading processes. Through interviews and field notes, I narrowed the focus of the study to eight students. Some of these students were strong readers who readily reflected on and articulated their experiences with reading, such as Grace, Marcus, and Alyse. Other students represented varying degrees of engagement with texts but provided over aspects of the process that informed the study findings. Matt, for example, was reluctant to read, especially outside of class, but he demonstrated a strong verbal ability to articulate plot, raise questions about texts, and generally motivate peers throughout the class. Matt’s activities arise from his athletic leadership roles throughout high
school where he was often looked to for motivation and leadership from his peers and adults. In his articulations in class, he very often was able to stitch together the narrative directions that I assumed most students may have been thinking but were not saying in the class. Other students, like Jacob, were not readers and depended on others in the class to help them be successful. Kendall did not like to read but would do so in order to get a good grade. Kendall also represented both the motivated student who resisted textual engagement and felt unsure about herself and her future. And, Logan used media resources, such as music, movies, and internet resources, as primary aspects of his literacy practices but described himself as too lazy to always meet the expectations of the class. Students selected to serve as focal students (see Table 5 for demographics of these students) in the study were representative of the classroom in general and are representative of many of the various types of students from the broader students through gender and levels of reading engagement. In the following sections of this chapter, a more nuanced description of the students will be provided.

**Table 5. Focal Student Demographics of the Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alyse</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

The study collected multiple types of data from the inquiry space through the research process. Data collection came from various sources: field notes; a literacy survey of students; observational protocols and classroom audio/video recordings and transcripts; interviews; and
classroom, school, and community artifacts (See Table 6 for a crosswalk of data). In using narrative inquiry as a research methodology, each of these elements of data were used to construct and re-story the narrative of the primary, focal participants.

The study moved through three main phases of data collection (See Table 7). These phases were implemented across five months of observation in the classroom (See Table 8). The following provides information about the data collection for each element of data.

**Table 6. Research Question Crosswalk to Data Collection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Literacy Survey</th>
<th>Interviews with Key Informants (Teachers)</th>
<th>Interviews with Students</th>
<th>Observations and Transcripts</th>
<th>Collection of Classroom and Community Artifacts</th>
<th>Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the literacy practices of students in the ELA high school classroom under observation?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And how do those literacy practices support interpretation and meaning making of literary texts?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do students’ literacy practices and engagement with literature/interpretations shape both current and future discourses and activities?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic elements shape the meaning making and interpretation of texts that students are making?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Field Notes**

Field notes were written and maintained over the length of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2013). These field notes captured general observations, ideas, and theoretical implications, as well as sought connections throughout the process between theory and observation and across student participant and researcher. These notes served also to document classroom practices toward an understanding of literacy practices within the class and through the school. These notes assisted in the data analysis process as they function as the first place to observe and recognize emergent themes and connect strands of ideas that arose during data collection.

**Classroom Observations and Transcriptions**

During each phase of the study, classroom observations were conducted (See Table 6 and Appendix D). During Phase I, these observations served as an introduction to the classroom toward getting to know students, the culture of the class, and the methods of reading in which they were engaged. In addition, this phase became the space to observe students, interview them, and narrow down participants toward a focal group.

More formal classroom observations began at the end of Phase I and were carried out throughout the study. An observation protocol was used to align observations with the research questions and to ensure that the collected data helped gain a greater understanding of the narrative being constructed. These formal observations primarily occurred in the classroom itself during the class. Later in the semester during the reading of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, smaller groups of students constituted discussion groups in the library about their understanding of the novel. Observations moved from the classroom to a more isolated, quiet space in the library in these situations. The formal observations served to gather data about the
interactions of the classroom and the processes in which reading and interactions took place.

These observations were completed with the observation protocol, field notes, and were recorded for later transcriptions. In situations where students were specifically reading and discussing texts in class, observations were video and audio recorded in order to fully capture the activity and appropriately identify the speakers for transcription. All observations sought to understand how meaning was created from texts as well as how students were positioned. These observations across each phase served as one of the primary data collection points in the study. In addition, individual study interviews with focal students were conducted near these points of classroom observation to hear and capture how students understand and re-tell their experiences.

**Literacy Survey**

During Phase I of the study, students in the classroom completed a Literacy Survey (See Appendix C). This survey collected both Likert-scale data and responses to open-ended questions related to reading practices, identity, and general student perceptions of their school and community environment. The survey primarily helped in the initial understandings about how students engaged with reading and directly served to select students for initial individual interviews and potential selection as focal students in the study.

**Table 7. Phases of Data Collection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases of the Study</th>
<th>Data Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Phase I             | - Literacy Survey  
|                     | - Observations of Classroom and School Environment  
|                     | - Field Notes  
|                     | - Collection of Classroom & School-related Artifacts  
|                     | - Teacher & Administrator Interviews |
| Phase II            | - Individual Student Interviews (1-4) |
Student and Stake Holder Interviews

Individual interviews with students and teacher were conducted throughout Phase II and III of the study during strategic times related to the unfolding lessons and activities in the class (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Dyson & Genishi, 2007; Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Stake, 1995) (See Appendices A, E, & F). Writing about interviews, Kvale (1996) notes, “The qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge. An interview is literally an inter view, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (p. 2, emphasis in the original).

Each of the interviews offered insight into student – or teacher – thinking and provided the narrative stories each told about their activities in the class. I conducted semi-structured interviews that were guided by an interview protocol (See Appendices A, E, & F), but I allowed the conversation with participants to be guided by and respond to the topics that arose at during the class or in their communities. The formal interviews primarily aimed at capturing the thoughts of students as they engaged in reading and understanding of texts. During class discussions, I also walked around and conducted informal interviews that captured immediate reactions to class activities or to their own engagements in reading, their capstone projects, or
their plans for the future. All interviews, formal and informal, were recorded and transcribed toward the primary data source for the study.

Table 8. Month-to-Month Data Collection Structure and Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>CLASSROOM OBSERVATION, INTERVIEW &amp; DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| August | ➢ Classes begin on August 23rd  
          ➢ General observations of the classroom & classroom practices during the first two weeks of class  
          ➢ Send and collection parent and student consent forms for participation in the study |
| September | ● Implementation of Phase I:  
                   ➢ Have students complete the Literacy Survey  
                   ➢ Observations of classroom practices during first encounters with texts  
                   ➢ Observations and recording of classroom-based discussions  
                   ➢ Teacher & Administrator Interviews  
                   ➢ Collection of classroom & school-based artifacts  
                   ➢ Field Notes  
                   ➢ Identification of focus students for the study |
| October | ● Implementation of Phase II:  
                  ➢ Continued observations of classroom reading and encounters with texts  
                  ➢ Continuing general observations and recordings of classroom-based discussion, specifically related to texts and reading  
                  ➢ Individual interviews with students (at least two interviews with each student participant during October)  
                  ➢ Formal observation & recording of classroom discussions with texts  
                  ➢ Collection of classroom & school-based artifacts  
                  ➢ Continual Field Notes |
| November | ● Continuation of Phase II:  
                   ➢ Continued observations of classroom reading and encounters with texts  
                   ➢ Continuing general observations and recordings of classroom-based discussion, specifically related to texts and reading |
➢ Individual interviews with students (at least two interviews with each student participant during November)
➢ Formal observation & recording of classroom discussions with texts
➢ Collection of classroom & school-based artifacts
➢ Continual Field Notes

| December | • Implementation of Phase III:
|          |   ➢ Final individual student interviews
|          |   ➢ Formal observation & recording of classroom discussions with texts
|          |   ➢ Collection of classroom & school-based artifacts
|          |   ➢ Continual Field Notes |

In Phase I, I conducted interviews with Ms. Young, as the classroom teacher, and other stakeholders in the school (See Appendices A & B). These interviews provided the authoritative perspectives and expectations of the classroom as well as offered information about the values of the classroom and school. During Phase I, I also conducted informal interviews with students in the attempt to get to know them and to build a sense of community between research, student, and context. In Phase II and III, I conducted individual student interviews. With multiple interviews with the same students across the semester, patterns of understanding and meaning making emerged within individual students and across students. In addition, series of interviews allowed for the observation of change during the course of the study, documenting, for example, how Grace came to love reading while finding her interest in psychology and the human mind intertwined in the reading process.

**Classroom and School-Based Artifacts**

Throughout each phase, I collected relevant artifacts produced by the school or students that provide information on literacy, literacy practices, and identities (Creswell, 2013). The material culture of the study provided a data element that helped inform the practices and values of the developing themes and narratives. These artifacts include students’ college application
essays (a class requirement), essays in response to literature, and their short responses to particular texts of focus based on Ms. Young’s lesson for the day, such as the motivations of Iago in *Othello* or their understanding of Big Brother in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. With these artifacts, I collected classroom handouts, such as reading guides and literary terms, along with college preparation workshops held by the school. Each of these assisted in informing the data toward the construction of a narrative about understanding and meaning making.

**Data Analysis**

Kim (2016) argues that “narrative data analysis and interpretation is the act of finding narrative meaning…[and] a meaning-finding act through which we attempt to elicit implications for a better understanding of human existence” (p. 190, emphasis in original). The activity of finding narrative meaning comes through reading and reading transcripts as well as the inductive and deductive development of codes and themes toward the act of re-storying. Initial data analysis of the study took place during classroom interviews and observations through the field notes in which I began to understand the stories being told. The formal data analysis phase, however, began after data collection concluded at the end of the semester to provide the opportunity to re-analyze and consider the themes and narratives.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain the data analysis process as the researcher initially spending many hours reading and re-reading the transcripts in order to “construct a chronicled or summarized account of what is contained within the different sets of field texts” (p. 130). This initial process began during data collection and aimed to construct issues such as character, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator, context, and tone. Through re-reading the data of the study, I began to develop themes and codes which provided a deeper
understanding of the particular texts of the class and identified relationships between various elements of the data.

In coding within narrative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) offer three analytic tools: broadening, burrowing, and storying and restorying. Broadening is the attempt to look for the context of the narrative and how the participant is embedded in that context drawing upon the participant’s character, values, and social, historical, and cultural background and experiences. In burrowing, the research focuses on specific areas of data in which to more deeply consider and analyze. In this process, Kim (2016) says the researcher should “pay attention to the participants’ feelings, understandings, or dilemmas, or a certain event’s impacts on the participants or the surroundings…[also asking] questions about why and how the happenings have influenced the lived experiences of our participants” (p. 207). In storying and re-storying, the researcher retells the participants experiences in their own voices across time and place. Each of these processes offers ways to engage with the data toward understanding what happened and how the story across the semester evolved within the classroom.

In analyzing data, I also focused on Clandinin and Connelly (2000) three-dimensional space narrative structure (See Table 9). This framework guided both the data collection process and the data analysis phases. From this framework, the researcher considers themes across participants related to past, present, and future temporal periods, social and cultural interactions, and contexts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe this analytical tool as a “lathe” which is “useful to different people, at different times, in different contexts” (p. 26). This metaphor describes a way of working at understanding how participants are impacted, constructed, and oriented within the study. In this study, each of these dimensions provided a means to examine the data and narratives from the data collection toward a richer understanding of the inquiry.
space and helped to frame the study’s findings through the narrative “acts” in which they are structured. Each of the narrative components of the findings, as you will see, attempt to align with Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) framework toward the entanglement of participants and contexts with past, present, and future understandings.

Table 9. The Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure (Adapted from Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Continuity</th>
<th>Situation/Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions</td>
<td>Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view</td>
<td>Look backwards to remembered experiences, feelings, and stories from earlier times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis process proceeded through three major phases (See Table 7). As the goal of analysis is to understand and make meaning from the data collected in the study toward a full response to the research questions, the theoretical framework guided that work. Through coding and Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) structure, the data was collected in categories related to literacy practices, present and future discourses, and environmental impacts on the context toward the act of re-storying the narrative of the participants in a meaningful way. MacIntyre (2007) writes that “the unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest” (p. 219); the re-storying process aims to bring unity to the study and deeper understanding of the research questions.
Table 10. Data Analysis Process and Structured Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHASE</th>
<th>DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase I:</strong> &lt;br&gt;Analysis during Data Collection (September – December)</td>
<td>• Researcher memos  &lt;br&gt;• Development of initial themes reading and re-reading the data  &lt;br&gt;• Review of the theoretical framework and research questions as a guiding source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase II:</strong> &lt;br&gt;Analysis after Data Collection (December-January)</td>
<td>• Review of the theoretical framework and research questions as a guiding source  &lt;br&gt;• Continued researcher memos during coding  &lt;br&gt;• Use Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional space narrative structure as analytical tool to refine themes and codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase III:</strong> &lt;br&gt;Writing Up the analysis of data for the study (January-March)</td>
<td>• Refine themes from data analysis to ensure clarity of understanding across participants and context  &lt;br&gt;• Storying and restorying process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Researcher Memos**

Qualitative research requires a reflective nature of the researcher (Kolb, 2012). During each phase of data collection and analysis, I used memos to reflect on, explore, and process the data as part of the process (Glaser, 1978). Research memos act as a researcher’s ongoing ideas, understanding, meaning making, and organization of ideas during the research study. These memos were used as part of the analysis process to for coding and developing themes.

**Coding**

Coding in narrative inquiry is the act of using inductive and deductive methods to identify themes with specific participants and across participants and contexts of the study. This study used Connelly and Clandinin’s (1990) analytic tools of *broadening, burrowing, and storying and restorying* to consider and develop themes along with using Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional space narrative structure during this process to structure
understanding of those themes. Coding for themes began with data collection in Phase I and moved through Phase III during the re-storying process. During these coding activities, a particular focus was given to the data from classroom discussions about literature and to individual student interviews. During each of these stages, I aimed to understand how students were making meaning of their reading and how they incorporated the language, voices, ideas, meanings, and processes of reading into who they are and toward their future engagements.

**Data Saturation**

Data saturation refers to the point at which the information that informs the study becomes redundant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Kolb (2012) argues that reaching the point of data saturation is important to ensure adequate information has been gathered and participant perspectives have been covered. In this study, certain aspects of literacy practices were viewed over and over in the classroom and through individual methods. This repetition of practices helped to solidify particular views and themes of the data as they came together in the re-storying process.

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

Polkinghorne (2007) argues that the “purpose of the validation process is to convince readers of the likelihood that the support for the claim is strong enough that the claim can serve as a basis for understanding of and action in the human realm” (p. 476). Qualitative researchers aim for understanding data toward a level of “credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (p. 246, Creswell, 2013). While the findings of qualitative research are not intended to be generalizable, the goal of rigorous qualitative studies seek strong credibility, verisimilitude, and trustworthiness. In addition, Riessman (1993) argues that the traditional methods of qualitative research validation in narrative inquiry are “slippery.”
Trustworthiness is the key issue in narrative work. Riessman offers four ways of approaching validation in narrative study: persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic use.

**Persuasiveness**

Through persuasiveness, the study aims to offer strong plausibility of the data with supported evidence from participants. This is achieved through the rich data that represents the long-term involvement and collection of “thick” portrayals (Bloome, 2012; Geertz, 1973) from the comprehensive and thorough observations and interviews throughout the study (Maxwell, 2013). The rich data of the study provides a full picture of the situation and reveals actual literacy practices in which students engaged. Many of these practices, especially as provided in Act I, are persuasive in the commonness in which they may occur in other contexts. Yet, through meticulous observation and awareness of detail, the movements of students into intersubjective understanding with texts seeks a rich, thick portrayal of student engagement as entangled within the classroom, textual worlds, and the outside lived world.

The intensive, long-term involvement with the research site also supports persuasiveness. Maxwell (2013) writes, “long-term participant observation provides more complete data about specific situations and events than any other method” (p. 126). These data were collected across the length of the academic semester in the high school from September to January, providing a deep experience within the context, with the data, and with re-storying the data into a persuasive narrative.

**Correspondence**

In correspondence, a researcher can take results and analyses back to participants, which is described as “member checking” in traditional qualitative work. Throughout each stage of data collection and analysis, I often went back to students to clarify what they had said or to gain
additional meaning into their understanding. In addition, I returned to Ms. Young over the course of the semester and afterwards into the following semester after the data collection had concluded to ensure that I had interpreted certain student moves with texts in the appropriate way to the context.

**Coherence**

Coherence refers to the ways interpretation and understandings are created across data to create plausibility. Coherence in this study is structured by allowing participants to speak in their own voices in the narrative and, hopefully, is matched to the tone of the narrator of the study. Also, coherence in the study is reflected by how meaning is made of the actions and events across participants and contexts of the study.

**Pragmatic Use**

Riessman (1993) notes that pragmatic use is formed when the study corresponds with and builds upon other research studies. With this awareness, the study is aware of and weaves together the various elements of the theoretical framework, literature review, and data analysis together to form a rich understanding within the context of education studies.

**Limitations**

There are several areas of limitation identified with narrative inquiry.

**Managing Large Amounts of Data**

Because this study extended over several months and collected data from a range of activities and repeated observations and interviews, there was a very large supply of data to consider. In order to manage the data, I used an on-going, constant comparative method that aimed to process and analyze data through the data collection phase. In doing so, this reduced the
amount of data to be considered as a whole at any one time and facilitated the building of a narrative understanding.

**Researcher Positionality**

One of the primary concerns of qualitative research methods and narrative inquiry is research bias (Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 1993). Researcher positionality plays a key role in validating the analysis of the study (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I was very aware of my own sense of identity, positionality, and assumptions about the data. In addition, I recognized my own close connection to these communities as a place I where grew up and taught. Ultimately, Miles and Huberman (1994) note that the researcher seeks to create a coherence in the study that, as Creswell (2013) says, can be accomplished through “rich, thick description [that] allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability” (p. 252). In addressing this issue of bias, I provide a researcher positionality statement below that responds to Holmes’s (2020) three primary ways of finding positionality: 1) locating the researcher in the subject; 2) locating the researcher among the participants; and 3) locating the researcher within the research context and process. Each of these are addressed below in the positionality statement. This statement occurs with vignettes of Ms. Young, the teacher, and the focal students in the study. I hope to include my voice with theirs in recognition of how our own narratives are enmeshed and entangled in the construction of this story.

**Research Design and Methods Summary**

This research study fills the gaps of our current knowledge about reading and meaning making among adolescents. In doing so, the study engaged in the inquiry space of a high school ELA classroom with respect to its literacy practices both within the classroom and how those practices are impacted by community forces. In addition, the study focused on how adolescent
readers make meaning of texts through classroom dialog and how the meaning making process may extend beyond the singular act of reading on the page. Through this level of textual engagement, readers may carry agencies that readers incorporate and internalize into their own lives toward managing future behaviors. The study is grounded in a qualitative, sociocultural framework that will use narrative inquiry methods of data collection and develop out of Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional space narrative structure, which serves as a tool for data analysis. Ultimately, this study contributes to the literature on adolescent literacy and reading processes that will impact high school teaching and, more broadly, our full understanding of how texts are carried forward beyond the page into students’ lives and their communities.

**Turning to the Site of Study: The Voices of the Researcher, the Teacher, and the Students**

The following section aligns with the research methods and design for narrative inquiry by recognizing the various voices that constituted the site of research for the study. The teacher and the eight students selected as focal students are represented below through their own voices as they were spoken or written by them in the study. In addition, a researcher positionality statement provides my voice, as researcher, to locate my own values and position toward how meaning is created within this context (Holmes, 2020). This section serves to respond to the methods and design section above as well as function as a bridge to move the reader into the study findings in the following chapter. This section concludes with a point of departure from the research methods to an arrival at Ms. Young’s classroom, the site of data collection, observations, and lived world of the students.
Researcher Positionality Statement

As a cis-gendered, white male and former high school ELA teacher, I entered this project with the residual desire of seeking meaning in texts through the search for hidden symbols and textual structures, constituted by the traditional hermeneutic process, in which one finds meaning in the text itself. As I have come to view more clearly through the research project, this Platonic form of understanding diminishes the way readers’ identities and sociocultural positionalities are integral to the meaning making process with texts. Observing these activities in Ms. Young’s classroom, I see more clearly how readers interact with texts in significant ways toward the possibility of constructing one’s own sense of self and identity. As a white male, I acknowledge my own textual understanding is constructed through this lens and orients me to the world in specific ways that often blinds me from being fully aware of the ramifications of this perspective as my own identity aligns with a socially dominant point of view (Lewis, Hagerman, & Forman, 2019). Knowing this, I have attempted to attend to the students in Ms. Young’s classroom with an awareness of how one’s perspective is constructed from one’s past identities and experiences, elements of self that I may not have experienced myself. Through this, Grace and Marcus, in the study, may be misconstrued as interacting with texts in similar ways in the study, yet their gender and racial differences as a white female and black male (respectively) suggest that their own intersubjective strategies with texts aim at goals directed by these lived experiences. A sociocultural research perspective demands that the researcher acknowledge these perspectives and to be open to differences where one may not initially perceive them.

This perspective is important to me most especially because I grew up in one of the small towns in Farmville County and entered this study with a presumably insider perspective. I thought I understood how Farmville County shapes its citizens from a working-class perspective toward
an idea of pragmatism, practicality, and efficiency while also embedded within the historical legacy of the county’s racial segregation and slave-owning farms from its past. The habitus of being shaped by this community structures particular forms of “common sense” (Crehan, 2016), which I carry with me through my own life experiences. Yet, this understanding as an insider acknowledging these particular forms of dominant perspectives leaves me vulnerable to misunderstanding or not seeing certain aspects of students’ lives through the study.

In addition, I taught high school English/ELA at one of the neighboring schools in the county. As an emerging researcher from a university, however, I was viewed by Ms. Young and the students in the classroom as an outsider to the school and county. I believe this dual identity supported more robust responses from students as I may have been perceived as having mannerisms similar to their own, yet they often described their experiences in the county more explicitly to me in interviews because they assumed I may not know specific locations or activities in the area. This dual identity persisted too into the ways that the county has changed in its socioeconomic structures due to shifting global economics and the closing of many mills and factories in the area that were a vibrant part of the region when I was a child. Both the clearly rural and working-class perspectives of students, as they are embedded within their own family and community structures, were not present in my experiences of the Farmville County and, therefore, became significant elements of consideration.

Growing up Catholic in the Farmville County and the American South, I found my encounter with texts in my youth most often occurred in the context of the church. These textual experiences, however, were very different from the more dominant Protestant experiences of those around me and very clearly contributed to my sense of a traditional hermeneutic process. In addition, I was not a reader when I was young. My earliest memories of reading, as they return to
me now, actually involved the activity of being read to. My mother read Margery Williams’s (1922) *The Velveteen Rabbit* multiple times to me, often expressing her love and enthusiasm for the book. As I reflect on those experiences, I find it difficult to remember the plot of the story but find that I have carried with me my mother’s expressions of happiness with the text. My encounter with the text was mediated through her, and what sustains that narrative is her talk and affection for it; I have borrowed from her this affective sense of the text without remembering an actual interaction with it, suggestive of how relational experience shape our reading experiences.

My own experiences and identities entangle me in the web of lives at Brookside High School in multiple, complex ways so that my own past experiences do significantly figure into how I make meaning of this research experience. In acknowledging this, I hoped to have brought an awareness of these perspectives to bear in the analysis and interpretation of data and presentation of the findings. This background inevitably orients the narrative I tell here. We all tend to tell stories about ourselves and about each other, stories constructed out of our personal experiences and our family backgrounds and the media with which we engage, that inform who we are and how we orient ourselves to society and to our futures. The enormous cultural changes in our society during the 2010s shifted my realization about the value of those stories we tell especially when those stories function as counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) to more dominant social forces. With this sociocultural framework, I entered Ms. Young’s classroom at Brookside as both insider and outsider.

**An Introduction to the Participants**

**Ms. Young**

This is my 27th year in education. Right out of college I went to Japan to teach conversational English for two years, and then I came back mid-year so I spent some time
volunteering at a school – kind of like at an alternative school – and took some classes for college, and then I came out to one school and taught for three years, then took some time to finish my Master’s Degree, and then I’ve been here since 1999, so it’s my 23rd year here.

I grew up going to Catholic schools. All of my 8 brothers and sisters went to Catholic Schools, and most of my brothers and sisters send their kids to Catholic schools. I’m kind of the outlier because I believe in public education so much, and I have loved my time in public education. I’ve loved it! I love the fact that public education is anybody’s opportunity to rise. I think my freshmen year in college I got this calling to be a teacher and I loved English literature, and I thought that teaching is one way I can work with high school kids who I want to work with and still study English Language Arts. And, I love that English Language Arts also has the creativity along with that logical side of grammar. And I love teaching seniors because I love being part of that moment in their lives where they are about to embark on a greater independence and responsibility. I love being part of that experience.

My philosophy is such that – this has developed over time, and I’ve had to because I started out as maybe some young teachers do too much as a teacher because they’re not doing enough – but I recognize that I stop where my responsibilities stop, and you need to do your part. I promise you I will do all of my part, but you have to do your part. That’s kind of helped me not burn out and even empower them because it won’t do my students any benefit at all if I’m doing what they’re supposed to be doing. It defeats the whole purpose. Figuring that out has helped me a lot, and I’ll preach that as a kind of refrain in my classroom.
I figured my teaching goals out a few years ago. I have it on our online platform and I used to have it up there on the wall of the classroom. There are four “I Can” statements. I can understand what I read, see, and hear, like consumers of information in various formats. I can think intelligently about it. I can formulate an educated opinion. And the last one is I can communicate that educated opinion effectively. So that’s kind of how I see our end-goal. I can be literate. I can understand it, I can think independently about it. I can formulate an educated opinion, and I can communicate that educated opinion. That’s kind of what I see.

As a teacher, I think the relationship piece is crucial for effective education. Luckily, I really enjoy getting to know them. That doesn’t seem like a burden to me, that seems like a natural and cool part of the job. When that happens, when that relationship is made, it makes everything else that much easier. Relationship, respect, and rigor. I think if you have the relationship then of course you have the respect and understand how to create the rigor based on their interests, passions, and abilities.

Grace

A lot of people say I’m too nice. I probably am and I kind of let people walk all over me. I do. Outside of school, I like to read and hang out with my friends and family. Whenever I’m passionate about something I always talk about it a lot to my family members and friends, and I’m really passionate right now about *Othello* because it is really such an amazing book. Like, just how everything fits together so intricately is so intriguing, and the psychology behind it and the way everyone interacts with each other and just a look into that time period. It’s just fascinating. I’m also really into psychology and, I’m a really hardcore feminist. In this book, I see equality and women coming into their own and
not being just someone’s property, like her husband’s property. That’s basically at the time just what you were. When you were married, your husband owned you. We have come a long way. But I would just, it’s just, I don’t know, it’s just like us coming into our own and being our own people and being equal, you know.

I talk about [the play] with my Mom a lot because we’re both hardcore feminists. She never really pushed feminism on me, but when I grew up, I got into it and we really started talking about it. So that was another thing we bonded over. My mom never let me see how much she was struggling to keep a roof over our heads and food in our stomachs. There were nights she would go without eating anything just so I had a meal.

I like to read. I have a lot of books that I want to read. But the first romance book that I ever read that really got me into romance is called *Serenading Heartbreak* [by Ella Fields]. It’s really sad, but it’s so good. It’s an amazing book. It shows a love triangle with both of the boys she falls in love with, and it’s like you can feel everything she’s feeling. And then you get to the end, and, ugh, it tore me apart. If I was ever in that spot, I don’t know what I would do. It was just so realistic. Sometimes I like reading those books because they make you feel good, but this book was just so well written, and the characters were so well written that you felt like you were in the book and you felt like you were the characters. So, that’s why it’s my favorite book.

I think about books and characters from books all the time. All the time. I don’t really know how to explain it. It really just kind of pops in my head, like something will remind me of a book that I read and I’ll think about it, or someone will say or do something that reminds me of a character that I read and I’ll think about it.
**Kendall**

I’m very outgoing. I like to talk to people, and I’m caring and generous. I’m very positive. I guess I have a positive outlook. I am a cheerleader and am part of the group of cheerleaders in the class. We’ve all been good friends since at least sixth grade. After school, I cheer and I have a job. That takes up the majority of my time. I work at the grocery store like 20-ish hours a week. Not too much. But pretty much every day is filled up. After Ms. Young’s class I leave school and I don’t come back until 2:05, so that’s when I get my chance to go do what I want. Me and Nora, we’re both cheerleaders and have the same school schedule. We’ll go out to eat or whatever. But on my off days I hang out with friends or go shopping.

I don’t like to read, no, not really. I mean, I read in class, but I don’t read anywhere else. I don’t have a favorite book. There was this one book I liked in middle school, but I can’t remember it. We were in 8th grade and we watched the movie but I can’t remember it. In Ms. Young’s class, *Beowulf* was okay. I liked it okay because I can imagine it and I can see it. I can read it and imagine this big monster and those type of things. Reading books like that help me, I think, when taking tests like the ACT or any type of exam. But I liked *Othello* better because [Desdemona] was like, although like I said earlier I am this outgoing, talkative person, I have this very sensitive side to me and so did she. She was like sheltered and innocent. I related to her because of her sheltered, soft-spoken sensitive side.

After high school, I thought about nursing but I’ve kind of gone away from that, more to like a physical therapist. I know I want to help somebody do something, but I don’t know what yet. I don’t know what I’m going to do though. That’s where I’m stuck. I don’t
know. To me, I feel like if I stay at home I’ll miss out on opportunities. Not opportunities, but the experience. The dorm life and the college and the meeting people. I don’t know what to do.

Marcus

I’m a carefree guy, real lazy at times. I love to read. I like to read about philosophy, don’t get me wrong, but I mean fantasy books are just way cooler to me. If you gave me a philosophy book and a fantasy book, I’d probably choose the fantasy book. ‘Cause you know, it’s just sending me off to some place. It’s not trying to get me to look at the real world, the real world kinda sucks, if you haven’t noticed. But a fantasy world is totally me. I love it. [With philosophy.] I heard about Aristotle, and I liked his name and I looked him up more and I was like, “Aristotle was kind of a G, right?” And then I got into philosophy from there, kept getting deeper and deeper into it until I got to modern day philosophers, Nietzsche and Ayn Rand and all that. You know, all the big names.

I have a favorite book series, I haven’t read many books, but my favorite is probably Percy Jackson. I’ve read through that whole series except for the last book. It’s in the library but I don’t think I’m going to finish it because I don’t remember anything from it. I really loved Greek mythology back in the day. Like, I was obsessed with it. Ever since, I’ve been in love. I also like Game of Thrones. The character Tyrion Lannister, I love the guy! All he has is his brains, so he uses what he’s got. He’s arguably the smartest character in the book. He manipulates, he does what he has to to come out on top. That’s what I’ve always loved, taking advantage of the only thing you’ve got. I love intellect. I aspire to be an intelligent person, that’s why I constantly try to have my brain expanded.
The isolation [of the global pandemic] was good for me. I was like never alone leading up to quarantine. I was always doing something with somebody or hanging out with the boys or what not. And then quarantine happened and I was by myself except for my parents and my brother occasionally showing his face. Then I was wholly by myself, and I think I needed it to figure out who I was. Being with the boys all of the time was kind of like influencing me to be more like them and less like me. And being by myself let me think about what I wanted and how I reacted and what my values were. And I was like, okay, this is me now, and here I am.

Alyse

I like to think of myself as hardworking and as a role model. I work with a lot of little ones at my dance studio. I assist there. I’m with little kids all of the time so I try to be the best role model and be positive. I try to be optimistic most of the time, even at football games as a cheerleader when the team is losing. I dance a lot. I’ve been dancing since I was three and dancing competitively since I was 8. It’s kind of my life. I don’t want to do it as a career though. In college, I want to try and dance as a way of getting involved in college. And I feel like with dance, I can share it. It’s such a big part of my life and I feel it would be easiest to do that with other people who have the same interest.

I like to read, but not non-fiction. I like stories, like where they tell a story. Even if it were non-fiction but more of just like a story-telling thing where you get to go on somebody’s journey. Plays are easy to follow with that because it sets that scene, all of that. One thing I really like about reading fiction is that I can picture it the way that I read it and the way that I interpret it. I like that, just being able to put my own spin on how I see a character and all of the other details.
I don’t read all of the time, but one of my favorites was reading the *Hunger Games*, because I never watched the movies before. I read the first book when I was younger in school. I was in a very strong phase of the *Hunger Games*. I really liked the suspense because something would happen, and a chapter would end, and we wouldn’t continue reading at school. We’d have to stop, and I would be like, “What is happening?” I was still at school so I couldn’t keep reading, but it made me anxious. And then when we were watching the movie, it kind of frustrated me because after reading the book, there were so many details and things that were missing that were in the book, and that just kind of made me appreciate the book more.

This year reading *Othello* made me realize how easy people can lie and be manipulated. Especially today with the whole social media thing. Things get twisted just by a little bit and changes the whole meaning of something, and people are so quick to lie. I think it’s just human nature to lie, but that book really made me see how people – even though it’s a play and it’s not real – how people they’ll do that for certain things that they want so it’s just kind of scary in a way.

Right now, I want to go into the health field after high school. I want to go into Occupational Therapy, try and get my master’s and go that route. I’d rather get it over with and not try and go back because Mom says it harder to turn around and try to go back. She said you’re not going to want to.

*Matt*

I would say I’m very energetic. I’m a people person. I love to talk, and I love to hang around my friends. I’d say just very energetic and fun to be around. During football season, I don’t have that much time so on the weekends I usually chill, watch football with
family, hang out with friends. That’s what it is. I watch my favorite NFL team, but they suck right now. They’ve lost three or four straight.

I do not like reading. I don’t, but if it’s something that I pick out then I’ll read it. If it’s something that I’m passionate about, then I’ll read it. For class, I will not want to read it, but I will because it’s Ms. Young’s class and she tells me to. But I wouldn’t have picked up *Beowulf* outside of school and said “let me read this.” I wouldn’t have done that. Probably the most recent book I read, it’s been awhile, was a book called *The Ten-Minute Retriever*. I’ve got a dog, and me and my dad like to duck hunt a lot. I think I was in like 7th grade or 8th grade, and it was a book about how you train the dog two-times a day for ten minutes. You read the book and it tells you exactly how to train the dog all the way through it for like a year and half. I read through it. It’s a good book. I liked it because I had my dog, and I could read it and I learned with her.

My favorite movie is probably *Red Dawn*. The old one. The new one’s trash. That’s what I thought about with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. They put all the people that were a threat in that movie, all the people who were a threat like the young males, the teenagers, some of the females, they put all of them in a camp and they let everybody else run around the city, but it was patrolled heavily. There were tanks going around. Stuff like that.

After high school I want to play football somewhere in college. If I like it good after that and make some connections, I might try to go out there and be a coach, a college coach. That would be a bunch of traveling, I mean, they switch jobs like crazy. Head coach comes in, they fire everybody. If that doesn’t work out, I might try to do that for a few years be a student coach and work on my master’s or something and then go, my dad’s a state trooper, so I want to do that too.
Logan

I like music a lot. I’m not technically talented at music because I’m self-taught but I know a little bit and I’d like to pursue that whether it be like production engineering or something like that. I play Guitar, bass, ukulele, piano a little bit, that type of stuff. When you see me, you’ll notice I wear exclusively band t-shirts and basketball shorts. It’s just what I wear.

I’m an extroverted introvert. I like being around people, but when I get home I just go to my room and shut my door, take a nap. You know, I would just prefer to be secluded after, especially after the last year [during the global pandemic], it’s just like a lot to take in when you’re around people. And I do theatre. We’re doing a production now so it’s a lot of physical contact and you have to be extremely close to people at all times so when I get home I just want to chill. I’ve been doing theatre all of high school. I didn’t really think it would stick with me, I didn’t really think I’d have anything I graduate high school to think, “Oh, that’s something I did.” But it’s stuck with me. I’ve done it every year.

I am not one to give like self-compliments, but maybe, I might be smart. I used to score pretty high on my comprehension tests, I made like a 100 in my 7th grade year. But I’m a really bad procrastinator. My grades aren’t the best because, you know, it’s a self thing. Laziness is kind of like a gene that gets passed down. My dad was like that where he was smart, but he didn’t apply himself to his fullest potential and I really struggled to combat that in myself.

I like to read; I don’t read a lot though. I enjoy it if I have a book that I find I really like, I’ll read it, but the last time I really sat down and read a book of my own accord and interest was probably in 7th and 8th grade with Steven King’s It. I really love that book, but
it’s a lot! I’m not going to lie, it took me like 6 months to read it. It’s because I read it and
stopped, read it and stopped, read it and stopped. It’s like his second longest book. After
that, I was like, “You know, I’m just not going to read for a little bit.” And now I’m here.
Now it’s senior year and I still have not read something that I want to read! I have books
at the house that I want to read, but you know.

I joke about not liking this school, but I’m happy where I’m at. My dad wanted me
to come here because the school was better, so I switched over here in middle school and
I wouldn’t change it. I wouldn’t go back and do anything different. I have so many close
friends here, it’s like a part of me now. Dad passed away like three years ago, and I live
with my grandparents now. I didn’t want to have to change schools after that happened, so
we use [my aunt’s address] so I can stay here.

Ava

I’m smart, I guess, but I hide it well. I’m more motivated than my friends. If they
have a question about something school related, they always come to me. I think they think
I’m more put together than I really am, as if I know what I’m doing but I really don’t. I
play tennis and I run track on the school teams, so I do a lot of that. I like hiking and I like
a lot of waterfalls and things like that.

I like to read but I don’t have time for it. I guess I could make time for it if I wanted
to. I don’t have a favorite book, but I liked Beowulf and Othello pretty well. I feel like it’s
good to be exposed to different types of literature, like it’s better to understand things that
are more challenging. I really liked Nineteen Eighty-Four too, but the ending, made me a
little upset honestly. I was hoping he would escape the party or whatever but he didn’t.
With that book, I can relate to feeling like you can’t tell everyone everything, you know? It was nice to see someone else go through a similar situation. It’s kind of like you don’t really know what other people are going through. That was kind of representative of the book. You felt like he didn’t have anybody really to relate to. It kind of made me realize I ought to be a little bit more open to others so that they don’t feel how Winston did, you know? The book had kind of a bad ending though.

After high school, I’m not sure what to do. I don’t really want to go to college but my parents are making me so I don’t know. I’d like to travel, maybe go to Greece. Ideally, that’s what I would do. More realistically, I’ll probably go to college, get a degree in something, and get a job. I think I’ll probably major in Nursing, and I think I’m going to minor in Spanish. I’m kind of nervous about that.

Jacoby

I’m not sure how to describe myself. I like to be outside. I couldn’t sit in an office all day that’s why I don’t really like school. I’ve liked it more this year. I took most of my hard classes when I was younger. This is pretty much my only class, then I’ve got weightlifting and then mechanics. I’ve kind of enjoyed school more this year than I ever have. I’ve got English and I actually like this class because I like Ms. Young. It isn’t that bad this year.

I hate reading. Well, it just depends on what kind of book it is. If I like it, I’m engaged with it. If I don’t like it, I… It’s either I’m all the way or I’m not. There was this book I really liked called *Big Red* [by Jim Kjelgaard]. It’s about a dog. I really like dogs. Anything about dogs, I like it. I think it was like a 5th grade book, it was a long time ago. Actually, I went back and read it a couple of years ago. It’s a young book. It’s not really
on my level, but I still really like it now. It kind of reminded me of myself. It was a boy, a young boy, and he had a dog that was supposed to be a show dog, but he took him out hunting and stuff like that. It wasn’t actually his, he couldn’t afford him because he was a really expensive dog, but the guy who owned him just let him use him or whatever. It just kind of reminded me of myself. I like hunting and stuff like that.

After high school, I don’t know what I’m going to do. I wish I did know. I’m going to go to college for sure. I’ll go to the community college to take the core classes until I know what I’m going to do. I don’t want to waste my time. I don’t want to just pick something and then waste my time on it, so I’m trying to figure what I want to do so that way spend my time going back to do something else later. I want to be done with school, but I also want to have a good job and be able to enjoy myself when I get older.

**Crossing the Boundary: Arriving at Brookside High School**

When I arrived at Brookside High School in the early fall, the cars along the two main, rural roads bordering the school moved slowly. These two roads intersect at a single stop light near two distinct main entrances to the school, and, at these entrances, sheriff deputies direct traffic standing on the yellow lines down the center of the road. Parking in front of the high school, I watched as students arrived and stood in groups among the cars or along the wide sidewalk in front the school talking until class started. Bordered by a grassy lawn with a single magnolia tree in the middle, the broad sidewalk to the glass doors of the entrance of the school was painted with large cat paws for the Brookside Wild Cats. Inside the building, I turned down the first corridor toward Ms. Young’s classroom, the senior honors English class where I would be observing for for the next 5 months. Instead of a traditional English hall with consecutive classrooms for each English teacher, I found classrooms for business lined with desktop
computers, which included signs for a sports marketing class, Allied Health Sciences, and an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training. A CPR training dummy rested on a table by the classroom door. Before Ms. Young’s room at the end of the hall, there was a large display of college pennants from schools across the state next to the doors into the library. The hallway was noticeably quiet as I entered Ms. Young’s room and found my chair near the corner. Grace, who had arrived uncharacteristically early this morning, sat alone in the room reading Penelope Douglas’s (2015) novel, *Corrupt*, waiting for class to begin. She was so absorbed in the thick romance novel that she did not notice me enter the room.

Voices in the hall began to rise. Ms. Young stood in the hall near her door greeting students as they arrived. As Matt reached the door, she asked him about the football game on Friday night. Matt was the school’s quarterback, who has been talking to recruiters all summer about playing college football after graduation. After Matt puts his bag down at his chair, he stands at Alyse’s desk to chat with her. Kendall and Adelle come in and join their conversation. Marcus arrives wearing a light jacket hung across his shoulders and Logan follows behind him in a Prince’s Purple Rain t-shirt. They laugh about something and begin to interact with other people. In his desk, Jacob’s legs stretch from his desk into the leg space of the desk next to him. He talks with the guys around him, joking about something that cannot be heard from my corner. Just before the bell rings for class to start, the room was full of talkative energy. Ava enters with Ms. Young, describing how she had been explaining parts of *Beowulf* to her friends from this class in the car this morning.

For me, the school represented a boundary I had crossed which was full of students’ “constellation of trajectories” (Massey, 2008, p. 151) formed out of the social network of their lives and their own evolving stories. I was entering into networks long formed to which I was
hoping to understand. As Crevani (2019) writes, “A trajectory is a story-so-far developed in relation to other trajectories, but also the process of change in a phenomenon itself” (p. 391). For the students, their “story-so-far developed” found daily communion through their on-going social networks and their participation in a common situation. Their relationships created among many of them were the resources for shared experience and shared identification. After the global pandemic of 2020-2021, the students had returned to normal school days in which lessons were not primarily online or staggered between alternating days of class times. The pandemic had been difficult for some of them, socially isolating, yet it also impacted their encounter with texts and shaped their ways of making meaning in the world.

In their senior year, these students were on the cusp of a transition into a seemingly unknown future. For them, the boundary of school represented a form of normal relationships, the reestablishment of the daily structured interactions between each other after a period of upheaval. Yet, the boundary of the school also constituted what Bakhtin (1981) calls a “contact zone,” which are spaces in which we “struggle against various kinds and degrees of authority” (p. 345). In the English classroom, students encountered opportunities for textual interactions with others beyond their social networks and communities that may intersect or re-direct trajectories of change for any of them who were open to it. Through reading and the process of meaning making, students could move between actual and vicarious social settings, between text worlds and lived worlds, through the dialogic process of the “exchange of voices and positions” (Bertau, 2007) toward the ontological work of being and becoming (Lysaker & Nie, 2017).

**Section Summary**

This research study is structured from a sociocultural framework grounded in the works of Vygotsky (1962, 1978, 1981, 1987) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986). Using a narrative inquiry
research methodology, the study focuses on the stories students and teachers in the classroom tell themselves and others about who they are, most especially as the come into contact with texts and textual others with whom they interact. Through rigorous, structured inquiry, the study collected data across the span of 5 months in a senior honors English class in rural Farmville County in the southeastern United States. Through a three primary research phases, data was collected and analyzed in an act of meaning making to provide a narrative understanding of the research site during this time. The following chapter provides the findings of the study.
CHAPTER IV: TOWARD AN ENTANGLEMENT WITH TEXTUAL WORLDS – PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

“...that’s why I’ve always loved books...the writer could put that to words, a feeling that I’ve had could be put to words so concisely and beautifully and in a conversation so nonchalantly like it’s nothing.”

- Marcus, study participant

Introduction

This study examined the literacy practices that support literary interpretation and meaning making, as well as the ways in which those processes shaped current and future discourses, within the cultural and socioeconomic contexts of the classroom and community under observation. In this section, I provide the findings of the study as they respond to the three research questions. Throughout this chapter, the findings of the study are shaped by the methods of Narrative Inquiry in which I endeavor to tell the already-in-progress stories of the focal students from the classroom as they encounter narrative voices and the shared experientiality between reader, texts, and others that are formed by their web of on-going social interactions. These stories are shaped not only by the texts the students encounter but also by the daily activities of their lives and the history of their experiences. Entering into a classroom constitutes one act of movement in the study, yet the activity of reading and the engagement with the voices of others, especially through literature, works toward another movement that is both external (socially, dialogically constructed) and internal (toward the production of one’s own consciousness). For engaged readers, texts may work to produce consciousness and internalization.

In the following sections, I arrange the findings in a narrative that loosely follows the telic storylines of the class. The specific findings to each research question are provided in the
form of an “act” as a means of narratively organizing the data. As a whole, the findings presented in this chapter take on the structure of a theatrical play as a means of acknowledging and responding to the ways in which humans organize knowledge and understanding of themselves and others through narrative. As Popova (2015) writes, “…narrative [is] a form of social understanding…[that is] the very foundation on which all human knowledge is based” (p. 5). I use the term “act” to create a subsection for each research question in this chapter in order to both organize the material but also to highlight the word’s etymological, Latin background: *actus*, “a doing; a driving, impulse, a setting in motion; a part in a play,” and *actum*, “a thing done.” Through the “acts” below, including the interludes, this chapter uses narrative elements to develop some of the stories of the classroom and the stories along with exposition to respond most directly to the research questions. In doing so, the arc of the chapter develops tension in a narrative way to contrast various literacy practices of the classroom and students’ personal lives with their own developmental directions across time during the semester toward their impending graduation and a future they are attempting to construct for themselves out of their literacy skills and strategies.

The findings as they respond to the research questions below are presented as:

- **Act I**: What are the literacy practices of students in the ELA high school classroom under observation? And how do those literacy practices support interpretation and meaning making of literary texts?
- **Act II**: How do students’ literacy practices and engagement with literature and interpretations shape both current and future discourses and activities?
- **Act III**: What environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic elements shape the meaning making and interpretation of texts that students are making?
In each of these “acts,” my goal is to provide the findings of each research question by highlighting students’ voices as they were spoken through classroom discussions, conversations, and interviews. Along with subheadings directly related to the research questions, additional narrative sections are included in order to develop the story of classroom and student life across personal and social interactions, forwards and backwards across time, and across the various situated contexts in which students’ lives take place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

An Opening Scene: Coming to the Text in the Classroom

Over the length of the semester, students read literature from a British perspective – as mandated by the state curriculum standards – and learned about British literary time periods from Anglo-Saxon literature to the Modern era of the 1940s. The students read Beowulf, sections of The Canterbury Tales, Othello, various Romantic-era poems, Jonathan Swift’s “Modest Proposal,” and concluded with George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four. Each of the literary units were introduced by a PowerPoint presentation and brief lecture on the time period around which the central readings occur before engaging with the literature. On this particular day in the middle of the semester, students approached the end of Othello, which they had been reading together in class.

As a day started in the first part of the semester, students talked in small groups crowded around desks before class officially starts. Alyse, Kendall, and Adelle, whose desks are by the main door, discussed the status of their college applications. Rachel told Ashley about her plans to shadow a doctor in an emergency room as part of her research project and to help her, she noted in an individual interview for the study, figure out what she wants to do in the future. Matt, whose desk is across the room from the main door where he can easily watch as people arrive, called out the character names for students who had been reading particular parts of Othello in
previous days. Seeing Logan walk through the doorway, Matt announced, as if for the whole class to hear, “There’s Othello! Go get ‘em, Othello! Today’s your day.” Logan smiled making his way to his desk on the far side of the room. When Grace entered, Matt said loudly, “There’s Emilia! You better watch out today, Emilia!” And, as Marcus entered, Matt said, “You’re going to be Iago again today, aren’t you? You know it!” Marcus stopped for a moment and held out his arms out in recognition of his role as Iago before shuffling through the rows of desks to his place.

Matt, using his leadership skills as a student athlete and football quarterback, often verbalized the activities of the class aloud, asking questions, and making connections. Here, his recognition of his classmates in relation to the characters in *Othello* goes beyond their relationship as peers toward a way of entering the text world of the play through literary imagination. The calling out of names acknowledged a form of shared activity as a group. In noting their character names, the readers’ identities became briefly transformed in the class through this act of recognition. Even before starting to read, the drama of the play was acknowledged as embodied through this activity and shared relationality among the students. The readers, and listeners alike, might take on character identities as a means of understanding and interacting with both the text and the world. In crossing the boundary into the text, the action of the play and the voices of the characters merged with the lives of these readers in which they each became participants in this shared situation of the classroom.

Through this opening scene, I aim to provide an entry for the reader into the narrative spaces of the classroom and voices that were present and available to take up for the students at any moment. Having crossed into the room, the following section begins to respond to the
research questions of the study and offers a more expositional narrative that both highlights student voices and narrates the findings of the research focus.

**Act I: Literacy Practices and the Activities of Understanding & Making Meaning**

The focus in Act I is first on the literacy practices of the classroom and how those practices support interpretation and meaning making of the literary texts in which students engaged. The Act further offers the specific engagements students made with texts toward intersubjective understanding that highlights the movements of placing oneself in the text as well as using texts as a lens through which to view and understand the lived world. This section has three subsections that develop these practices: 1) Approaching the Text, 2) Recognition of the Self in Text Worlds, and 3) Moving from Text Worlds to the Lived World. These areas highlight the constructed meanings and textual relationships where meanings were negotiated, co-authored, and shared with both others in their environment and the others in texts. As in the opening scene, Matt’s naming of the characters from Othello acknowledged the presence of those character interactions as part of the construction of meaning in the class, enabling the potential for students to negotiate their own identities differently in those moments. In these ways, the reading process may both serve in the production of inwardness as well as provide individuals resources to carry forward into their future.

**Approaching the Text: The Literacy Practices of the Classroom**

The activities of the class were structured most days starting with the study of grammar, followed by the reading of the focal text with which they were engaged at the time, and followed then by student-led time to work on questions from their reading guides, their research papers, or other class-related tasks. This structure helped form the movement of the class meetings, but most often these were disparate activities so that, for example, grammar and literature study were
disconnected and unrelated. In reading for class, students mostly read the required texts together as a whole during the class period. Once during vocabulary review as part of the grammar section of class, Matt tied the word chicanery to the role of Iago in Shakespeare’s play, saying enthusiastically for the whole class to hear, “Chicanery, Iago has got some of that.” With *Othello*, the play was read during class meetings with students reading assigned characters throughout the play. Other texts, such as *Beowulf* and Orwell’s *Nineteen Eight-Four*, for example, were read aloud to the class by Ms. Young. A few chapters or short readings were assigned to students for completion outside of class for the following day. Yet, students relied on the supports of the classroom practices to make sense of the readings and to deepen their knowledge. These activities, as we will see, helped students move closer to textual understanding and construct shared meanings.

Several overt literacy practices defined how students engaged with the readings throughout the semester. These direct practices included: a lecture and PowerPoint presentation on the political, social, and economic dimensions of the historical period for when the text to be read by the class was written; reading guides, which included specific questions throughout the plot of the narrative that students were expected to answer in order to support understanding of the action; class-based reading and discussion of the texts, guided by Ms. Young; and, a culminating essay students submitted on their reading. These practices supported individual understanding of the readings yet were often also mediated by a broader social awareness of concepts and their presence for the reader’s life. These social spaces of textual engagement provided opportunities for meaning making and shared understandings.
Lecture Notes & Essays

After reading *Othello*, students wrote and submitted analytical essays on the play based on their knowledge of the text. While writing her essay, Alyse drew upon ideas from Ms. Young’s initial lecture about the time period around Shakespeare’s play, in which Ms. Young emphasized the impact of Queen Elizabeth I on the role of women, to connect to Emilia’s role in the narrative. In a conversation with Ms. Young about her essay while working on it during class, Alyse referred to this lecture and echoed Ms. Young’s own words and ideas:

ALYSE: When I looked back in the notes about [Queen Elizabeth] that we took in class, it said that one of the things that she was really known for was just keeping peace where her sister didn’t keep peace. She didn’t want to instigate wars. With Emilia, it’s like how she resembles Queen Elizabeth by how she stands up for herself and showing that her opinions are her own and standing up for honesty and for women basically.

MS. YOUNG: Yes, right. She also refused to sacrifice England. I think she would have bowed up if she had been attacked, but she was so expertly diplomatic with others. A lot of European countries sent their most eligible bachelors to Queen Elizabeth and she handled them expertly also. In Act 5, Emilia handles the men in the story. There’s clearly evidence in the play for her sticking up for herself and sticking up for women.

ALYSE: [looking at her laptop screen where she has been writing] I’m going to look more at Emilia’s stand for justice in the play. I can show how Emilia’s standing up for Desdemona and other women too. I could talk about justice and righteousness.
MS. YOUNG: Yes, yes, she does stand up for women’s rights when she defends women’s capacity for adultery as equal to men’s because they both have the same affection and weakness. [Looking at Alyse’s laptop screen and directing her attention to a particular area] You could do a paragraph on each of these. You can also add her to the paragraph about standing up for truth and justice. When she stands up for Desdemona, it could go into either paragraph, wherever you think it might belong.

The language from the lecture and this conversation between teacher and student entered into and became part of Alyse’s essay describing Emilia as potentially based on the figure of Queen Elizabeth. In addition, Alyse was able to use Queen Elizabeth as a type of model for Emilia’s position in the play and her relationships to others in the story. Importantly, Alyse’s continuing understanding of Emilia, by way of Queen Elizabeth, was socially situated in Alyse’s own understanding of herself. During an individual interview with Alyse later in the study, Alyse described her response to the play as centering on the role of Emilia and her status. Alyse said:

I think about the idea that back in that time era that women were not significant. They were not equal to men, and they had to do as they were told, and throughout the play you just saw her grow to become this very independent woman who stood up for herself. She lost her life doing it, she was standing up for herself and Desdemona who was killed. It kind of inspired me in a way to not let anyone push you whether they are male or female, not to let them push you around and stuff like that. She was more of a positive and standing-up-for-herself kind of character.

While Emilia is a complex character in the play, Alyse’s understanding of her at first derives from Ms. Young’s lecture of Queen Elizabeth and the queen’s actions of standing up for herself,
for women, and for country. This understanding of Emilia further became a means for Alyse to see herself in her immediate environment outside of the play through recognition and recontextualization: “It kind of inspired me in a way to not let anyone push you whether they are male or female, not to let them push you around and stuff like that.” The activity of making meaning took place in moving across these various experiences toward an embodiment and coordination of certain forms of behavior, in this case, of the characteristics of Emilia toward Alyse’s real world. Alyse enters into a selectively participatory relationship, a form of sympathetic co-experiencing and literary imagination, with the character so that the Emilia on the page functions as a person with whom Alyse interacts and from whom she aligns attention and borrows some sense of agency. These types of relationships will be explored later, but this scene represents not only the function of the lecture and PowerPoint presentation to the class but also the dialectical ways meaning continues to grow through conversation and reflective relationships with texts.

**Classroom and Individual Discussions**

For each major text, Ms. Young provided a reading guide with both plot-based and analytical questions related to the text. While these questions primarily served to ensure students understood the basics of the plot, the questions also instigated discussion into deeper spaces of the text. On the day which students were beginning to read Act Five of *Othello*, Ms. Young began the transition to the text by reviewing questions from the reading guide for the end of Act Four.

**MS. YOUNG:** [Reading a question from the reading guide aloud to the class] Why does Othello order Desdemona to dismiss Emilia?

**LOGAN:** Because he’s going to kill her?
MATT: Maybe he doesn’t want anybody there if he does.

JACOB: He’s going to kill Desdemona?

MS. YOUNG: Yes, he’s going to kill her, and he wants privacy for that.

As Ms. Young posed questions from the guide, students responded aloud in the class until Ms. Young confirmed the correct answer. As she did, many students wrote the appropriate answer onto their reading guide sheet. These sessions, as we see from above, allowed students to add their understanding of the actions of the play to the class’s knowledge toward a broader construction of that understanding. Both Logan and Matt contributed to a response that is clarified and restated as a more complete answer by Ms. Young. It also allowed readers like Jacob, whose knowledge of the play often came from the discussions in class and with peers around him, to gain a general sense of the plot.

Continuing with the review, Ms. Young asked the next question on the reading guide for a class response.

MS. YOUNG: [Continuing to read from the reading guide] How does Desdemona reveal her childlike innocence?

MATT: Because she says that it’s okay if she dies or whatever.

MS. YOUNG: No.

MATT: I don’t know then.

AVA: She asks if women really do all this stuff.

MS. YOUNG: Do women really cheat on their husbands.

ALTON: And she cannot say the word.

MS. YOUNG: She can’t say the word ‘whore.’

AVA: What? She can’t say ‘whore’?
MS. YOUNG: “Am I really, Iago, that which he calls me?” she would say.

The Socratic process here worked toward refining answers that students provided and by negotiating the meaning of the text toward a developing understanding of it. The dialogical interaction functioned to co-construct meaning as they moved as a group toward the clearest response.

For Matt, the negation of his answer guided him toward the correct response that was voiced by Ava. Yet, Ava’s response here was further refined by Ms. Young with more precise language that offered a clearer answer while also modeling how students might provide more specific words to their responses. At the end, Ms. Young stepped into the voice of Desdemona in order to direct students back to the text. Her voicing of Desdemona demonstrated, however, the social elements of the questions as they seek, ultimately, an understanding of human nature and human relationships to others. She briefly voices Desdemona’s position at this point in the story as an opportunity for students to take on – or reenforce – a form of perspective taking that allows for understanding of the text and, in particular, to embody this view as it contrasts to Emilia’s position. Ms. Young’s movement to speak in Desdemona’s voice may have been a natural interpretative method as a reply to Ava’s momentary disbelief about Desdemona’s perspective. “Am I really that which he calls me,” demonstrated the avoidance of the particular word in question while emphasizing the entangled relationship of these characters. This complex, dialogical activity works toward a process of interpretation that captures plot knowledge and approaches the boundaries of deeper character knowledge.

In writing their answers on the reading guide, Alyse, Kendall, Emma, Nora, and others in their group passed their written responses to each other to confirm their own responses and to support each other as a group. On this day, Alyse used her phone to capture a picture of Nora’s
study guide before passing it back. She then placed the phone, turned horizontal, on her desk and copied the notes onto her own sheet. These activities afforded multiple social dynamics and interactions toward constructing an understanding of the text. Kendall described their sharing later in an individual interview as a way of “sharing information and helping each other out.” In addition, Nora described the reading guides more generally in saying, “[Othello] was definitely hard, but we had Ms. Young who breaks it down with us, the questions, the packet, it definitely helps a lot more than just reading it and doing a test on it like some English teachers do. But Ms. Young helps with a lot of it, reading it and just digesting it. She helps a lot.”

Outside of the classroom, the texts became focal points for student discussions as well. Several students said they talked about the book with their family and their friends. Ava, who was regarded as one of the only readers in her social group, said she often sat in the parking lot in a car with her friends before school started, several who were students in the class, to discuss the readings. In an interview, Ava described a morning before school in the car when reading Othello in which she said: “One day we were all sitting in the car trying to help each other understand what was going on. Someone wasn’t there [the day before] so we were all trying to catch her up on the story.” These conversations, she described, were most often ones that attempted to provide the plot of the narrative. On this morning, Ava said, “It was talk about how everyone was being manipulated [by Iago]. I liked hearing other people talk about it too, like, I didn’t think about it that way, you know.” While Ava did not provide details of where their conversations went after the specific discussions of the play, we will see later how these texts can provide a lens through which readers can view their own worlds and how texts serve as a starting point for those discussions.
Drawing on Previous Knowledge and Experiences

As part of the interpretative and meaning-making process, students pulled from previous knowledge and experience. This construction of the text with the class most often pulled from popular media sources as well as their historical knowledge. While there were incidents of this across the semester, this process is viewed most clearly during their reading of Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. During class, Ms. Young read the novel aloud as students read along in their own books. Periodically, she paused to describe what had taken place in the story as a means of re-narrating the story in her own voice for students. With these re-narrations in her own words, she would raise questions from the text or ask questions from their reading guides. As students responded, they pulled from what they know toward making textual meaning. While reading chapter one of the novel, Ms. Young paused and said:

MS. YOUNG: Have any of you heard of the term Big Brother before?

MATT: The TV show!

JACOB: It’s cameras.

[Many other students simultaneously respond as well]

MATT: [repeating himself] The TV show!

MS. YOUNG: The TV show. What’s the TV show about?

MATT: The people be watching each other. [pauses briefly] I don’t even know.

MS. YOUNG: Yeah, they’re in a house with cameras watching them all of the time. So that was a take of this original phrase which refers to government as Big Brother. They’re always watching, which is depicted in this poster that’s all over the place. What is the face of the poster?

AVA: Hitler.
MS. YOUNG: It reminds you of Hitler of Germany or who in Russia?

ALTON: Stalin.

MS. YOUNG: Stalin. Both are kind of, what?

MATT: Mean!

ELLIOTT: Dictators.

MS. YOUNG: Dictators, right? So that would have been readily available to [Orwell’s] readers at the time. In the book it’s just that Hitler and Stalin are never named.

It’s just the face that readers are able to make the association.

Ms. Young’s initial question elicits a response related to the popular television show. She uses this knowledge of the show to transfer into the context of the novel and emphasized the idea of the violations of privacy and constant surveillance. Students also drew from their historical knowledge about this time period, with Ava immediately connecting the poster in the novel to the historical figure of Germany’s Adolf Hitler, and Alton added the name of the Soviet Union’s Joseph Stalin, both names they had learned in their history classes and through Ms. Young lecture before the start of the novel.

The following day, Ms. Young continued reading the novel to the class. The issue of privacy became one of the topics students continuously discussed among themselves. In drawing from popular media, Matt raised his hand during a brief pause in Ms. Young’s reading and asked:

MATT: What does Winston think about [Big Brother]?

MS. YOUNG: He hates Big Brother. Why does he hate Big Brother?

MATT: He despises him because he’s always looking at him.
MS. YOUNG: He’s always looking at him, exactly! He feels overly controlled, his privacy is invaded. Can he show that?

MATT: No, Big Brother will get him.

MS. YOUNG: What will happen if he shows his hatred?

AVA: He’ll disappear.

LAURYN: He’ll be vaporized.

MATT: Basically, he’ll die.

LOGAN: The government’s going to kill him.

MATT: You ever watch that movie Red Dawn? That’s what this reminds me of. When they’re taking over everything.

Throughout the semester, Matt continuously related readings to his knowledge of film and television contexts and its characters. This form of understanding was one of Matt’s central ways of connecting to texts. For him, this knowledge functioned to make meaning of the current text by drawing the two situations and contexts into analogy with one another. In an interview with Matt toward the end of the semester, he returned to this particular viewpoint when being generally asked how he understood Orwell’s novel. Matt responded by returning to the movie Red Dawn and its context:

They put all the people that were a threat in that movie – like the young males, the teenagers, some of the females – they put all of them in a camp and they let everybody else run around the city, but it was patrolled heavily. There were tanks going around. Stuff like that. That’s what I thought of, that’s what [Nineteen Eighty-Four] reminded me of. Like those camps and all, and how they just came in there and took over just like that [snaps fingers]. It happened so quick; nobody knew what was going on. It took a few people, like
the Brotherhood or whatever, I guess that would be the teenagers, to take over the town.
They called themselves the Wolverines. Hey, if it went down like that, every man for
himself, I could see me and some of my friends surviving, we’d be alright. I’m not saying
we’d defeat a whole army, but we’d take out a few of them.

Matt’s way of understanding the novel through connections stands out as a means of how
students may connect already existing models of narratives and narrative contexts, such as
literary and film genres, through intertextual knowledge to make sense of new contexts they
encountered. This layering of contexts upon each other forms a particular way of making sense
of text worlds that may be used as a strategy as well for understanding lived worlds as we will
see below.

**Recognition of the Self in Text Worlds**

The teaching of literature often aims for students to gain an understanding of a particular
text as a complex whole piece of writing, one embedded in the specific contexts and situations of
the times in which it was written and in recognition of its particular forms of aesthetic response.
This goal supports how readers come to comprehend the long arc of history and how humans are
rooted in complex webs of knowledge and socio-economic-political relationships that inform the
present. As we will see in Act III, texts provide a platform from which to think about the present
and attend to current situations and conditions of the lived world. As a primary literacy practice
as observed in this study’s context, however, readers often constructed meanings with texts
through selecting elements of the narrative in which they see themselves or parts of themselves.
Recognition of self in the text functions as an activity of meaning making where the reader enters
into the text world toward an engaged, dialectical relationship. Through this activity, readers in
the classroom drew from other texts as well in which to see themselves and to understand the
reading. In becoming subjects to textual spaces, readers interacted intersubjectively with the presence of the “other” toward an activity of co-authoring the text in ways that create new texts from this interaction, formed from the specific context and situations of these relationships.

**Addressivity, Recognition, and Intersubjective Involvement**

Bakhtin (1986) considered *addressivity*, or response, as the “quality of turning to someone else” (p. 99) and noted that meaning emerges and comes about when two or more voices come into contact with each other. This dialogic engagement, as Lysaker & Wessel-Powell (2019) write, connects to readers’ “specific response to a text in which readers bring forward some aspect of self-experience into the reading event as they perceive it to be called upon by the text” (p. 179, emphasis in original) as the act of *recognition*. Within this particular literary process of turning to another and bringing forward aspects of one’s self, students often additionally moved into an intersubjective context as a way to understand and make meaning. In entering into a moment of intersubjectivity, the reader “steps over to the other but then returns back into the self” (Nielsen, 2002, p. 38) toward an act of taking the position of and sharing consciousness with the text’s characters and social environment. The literacy practices considered above in Ms. Young’s classroom involved these activities as already embedded into the moves the readers made for understanding and constructing textual meaning for themselves.

As a class, Ms. Young acknowledged in individual interviews that her broad goals were to expose students to reading material that they might not otherwise choose for themselves and acknowledged the value of relating to texts in meaningful, personal ways. Later in the semester, Ms. Young further emphasized the value of relating to other characters in texts, recognizing that students had connected more deeply to the characters in *Othello* than in *Beowulf*. Reflecting on her teaching of Beowulf, she said, “I just wasn’t explicit enough about it, but his struggles with
pride are universal.” Ms. Young, in contrasting their reading of Beowulf with Othello, recognized how students naturally directed their attention to characters with whom they felt some connection to their own lives and added, “I think they saw more of themselves with Othello because of the relationships and jealousy.” Her comments acknowledge the teacher’s role in directing students’ attention to particular elements of their reading and in how students attend to and make meaning of those elements.

Marcus recognized, for example, aspects of himself in Shakespeare’s character of Iago, responding specifically to Iago’s skills in intellect. As Marcus noted later when asked about playing Iago, he said, “I like Iago because he was smart with it. I love intellect. If I ever have a girlfriend, she’d have to have the brains. You know what I mean?” Marcus laughed at himself and then continued, “I aspire to be an intelligent person. That’s why I constantly try to have my brain expanded, and that’s why I read a lot.” In his reflection, Marcus viewed and engaged these aspects of himself toward the character of Iago through a recognition himself within Iago as a form of embodiment of the textual character. Similarly, he came to be recognized by others in the class in relation to Iago’s character, demonstrated by Matt’s naming of him as he entered the classroom. Marcus brought forward his “love of intellect” into participatory engagement and intersubjective interaction with the textual Iago in imaginative activity that invited him to see himself in these ways, making real a connection between the two which is carried into Marcus’s lived world. This relationship to the textual character emphasizes the text’s relational form from which students, like Marcus, might engage.

Over the semester in the class, readers naturally “turned to” the “otherness” of characters in the texts as a practice of making meaning for themselves. Yet, these forms of recognition were not as readily available in all of the texts. The epic structure, for example, of Beowulf left many
readers in the class less responsive to the text. When asked about her reflections on the Beowulf narrative, Kendall said, “It was okay. I can read it and imagine this big monster and those types of things, [but] with Beowulf, he’s just Beowulf. He’s this big strong dude.” Kendall’s response here was indicative of other student reflection on the text. Kendall said the story was helpful for her to read as an experience with older language, as she described it, but found herself less engaged in it than in other texts. Grace had a similar response. She said, “[Beowulf] wasn’t my favorite. It wasn’t just it being unrealistic. I love fiction, but it just wasn’t my type of book. It totally didn’t speak to me.” Grace’s reflects a certain desire to be recognized in the text through her last comment in saying the story “didn’t speak” to her. Students, like Grace, responded more to texts of literary realism in deeper and more complex ways.

In reading Othello, Grace found many points of entry into the text world. Similar to Alyse’s response to the story, the echoes of self-experience for Grace resonated in her description of reading the play. In talking about the text, Grace positioned herself by saying, “I’m really into psychology and, I’m a really hardcore feminist.” She continued by identifying the specific characters in the play who drew out these elements for her and, consequently, with whom she found herself involved in textual interaction. Grace said:

Bianca, she is just amazing. I love her character so much. She is an outcast to society, but she doesn’t care because she’s her own woman. She’s independent. She doesn’t follow the rules that someone else sets for her and, you know, she has her own life. And, even though she is called a whore and a strumpet, she doesn’t care because she’s happy. And it’s just so good. I love it. I think, okay, this might sound weird, but in my opinion, she just represents true feminism.
In stating about Bianca that she “is her own woman” who is “independent,” Grace interacted and voiced the text and character through a means of understanding derived from her own sense of self. As a quiet, unassuming student in the classroom and the school, Grace embodied the voice of Bianca in her description that, in turn, were elements of herself that were not always apparent in class. Grace’s recognition of self through Bianca allowed for this reader-text entanglement where Grace had become involved in these characters interactions. In her college essay, Grace’s language about Bianca resonates in what she wrote about growing up with a single mother, writing:

She is the strongest and most reliable woman I know, and she inspires me every day to be the best version of myself I can be, to follow my dreams, and to make her proud…[she] never let me see how much she was struggling to keep a roof over our heads and food in our stomachs. It was in a conversation with my mom about my dad, who never paid his child support, and that I realized my mom and I were one step away from being homeless.

Grace’s relationship to Bianca offers her supportive interactions that mirror her image of strong women in her own life. This involvement further extended to Grace’s relationship to Desdemona in the play, with whom Grace interacted as if Desdemona were present in her life. Of this, Grace said:

Desdemona, she is so frustrating, but I understand her, and I relate to her because it’s really hard to go against what everyone else wants you to do. And it’s just hard to break that mentality that you were raised with to obey and just do whatever your husband wants. It’s hard to stand up for yourself. And so even though it’s so frustrating and you just want to go into the book and shake her, I understand her because I relate to her in some aspects because it’s just hard to stand up for yourself, especially when it’s someone you love.
Grace’s desire to “shake” Desdemona brings her into immediate relationship with her in making the character present in the moment of Grace’s world. In addition, Grace had moved into an intersubjective understanding of Desdemona, articulating the character’s consciousness through her own understanding of the interrelated web of interactions in the play. Grace’s statement, “It’s just hard to break that mentality that you were raised with,” is a recognition of her own experience in the world that she brings into the play as part of the meaning-making process.

Moving from Text Worlds to Lived World

As readers engaged the texts of the classroom, they often used those texts as a means of examining themselves and their lived social worlds. The narrative situations of the readings provided opportunities to envision themselves in specific textual contexts as constructed by the narrative as well as opportunities to transfer those contexts into their actual real world. Some of the students in the class, through group discussions, used the classroom texts as a lens through which students investigated their sociocultural environments while others, individually, assumed textual agency for themselves that they could carry beyond the texts to enable action in their own social interactions.

Recontextualization

As part of the intersubjective reading process, students sometimes entered the text through the activity of addressivity and recognition toward an act of recontextualizing the text. By doing this, readers moved the text into their current context, as an act of displacement, and interpreted it within that perspective. Through that activity, readers came to actualize the meaning of the text from the positionality of the new context in which it was transferred, constructing new meanings that could carry between both text and lived spaces.
In Matt’s reflection on the movie Red Dawn, for example, he made present the context of the movie world in his own life by indirectly imagining an invasion of Farmville County in saying, “[I]f it went down like that…I could see me and some of my friends surviving…I’m not saying we’d defeat a whole army, but we’d take out a few of them.” Matt’s response served as an affective, embodied response to the movie’s narrative context. His language placed him directly in the situation of the film and, importantly, in the role and perspectives of the film’s central teenage characters who fight back against the Soviet invasion of the U.S.A. Meaning is constructed by Matt’s embodying the character’s perspective through the interactive presence of a textual other. In addition, in reflecting on Orwell’s novel after finishing it, Matt focused singularly on Winston’s perspective in the narrative as his way of understanding the whole story. In being asked what he thought of the book, Matt said, “I wanted him to escape and save the world or something, but he didn’t though.” Matt’s use of this understanding helped him understand Orwell’s text and Winston’s position in the narrative (one of opposition to, or “combat,” against the state). This statement draws directly to Matt’s placement of himself in Red Dawn so that meaning making for him became an intertextual, participatory, and embodied experience that moved between text worlds and lived worlds toward an activity of understanding.

The activity of recontextualizing texts into the lived world happened throughout the semester in various ways. While Matt’s comments above are one of the ways this happened, recontextualization also took place in small group discussions, such as when Kendall, Nora, Adelle, and Alyse had a break-out session to discussion the Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four after reading in class one day. Their conversation represents the ways in which they used the text to think about their current lived experiences. After talking about the specifics of the plot of the
novel, the students drew back to imagine themselves living in a world as represented by the story and then moved that world model into their own.

KENDALL: It kind of like opens up my eyes. I think what would happen if I was laying in my bed asleep and a timer goes off and, what was it, 7:30 and you’ve got to get up and do these workouts, wondering what it would be like in real life if somebody was always watching me with how I acted and what I did. Even if you were trying to take a shower, someone watching you so that you don’t do something wrong.

NORA: I think about it more with how I can go about my life, like, how can I be a better person and stand up for myself, my beliefs and thoughts. And, when I get older, making those decisions of who I’m going to vote for or who will make my country a better place, who I know is not going to make it a dictatorship.

ADELLE: And trying not to be influenced by the media, because I think that’s a very big part.

NORA: I relate to this book in real life. I feel like it portrays the world like it is right now.

KENDALL: Us!

NORA: How brain washed we are from the government.

ALYSE: It’s just like an exaggerated version.

NORA: Yeah.

ADELLE: It is possible, how they actually are brainwashing us. It is possible for the world to become that.

NORA: I just think the government controls a lot that we don’t know about.
These students placed themselves in the world of the text and compared it to the lived experiences of their lives as a way of participating in and experiencing the text world. In doing so, they were able to understand the context of the novel, such as through Kendall’s wondering how she would act if she were being watched all of the time, like the characters in the story. And then Nora shifted the context into speculating about her future. Through their conversation and textual interactions, they move into thinking about the role of their own government as well. Through these textual movements, the students overlaid elements of the novel onto their world as a means of thinking about and contemplating their present life and how they may move into the future.

**Recontextualized Textual Agency**

In certain circumstances, students used their participatory experiences in narrative worlds to borrow or share the agency created from those spaces for themselves. In these circumstances, readers take up the agency of the narrative character to use in their own lives, making it possible at times to do more than they were initially capable of doing on their own. In some ways, Nora’s recognition of being more away of how she votes or how she might be a better person stems from a general agency she has borrowed from the Orwell’s text in her comments above. We have also encountered this for literacy practice in Alyse and Matt.

In relating to Emilia in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, Alyse participated in the text in such a way as to interact with Emilia and Desdemona so that elements of Emilia’s own agency transferred to Alyse’s life. As noted before, Alyse said of Emilia, “She lost her life doing it, she was standing up for herself and Desdemona who was killed. It kind of inspired me in a way to not let anyone push you whether they are male or female, not to let them push you around and stuff like that.” The agency Alyse gained from the text positioned her toward being more like
Emilia in certain contexts and, when needed, to stand up for herself and others. While Alyse may have been very capable of these forms of action, it was clear that the text Emilia further supported her self-knowledge and potential future activity.

Similar to Alyse, Nora reflected on the character of Othello in the play to deepen her own understanding of herself and to take up agency from the play that may be enacted in the future. In a conversation with Nora, she described her interactions with the text as she focused on Othello by saying:

In the beginning he was very calm, loyal, even tempered, and he seemed to have faith in others, which are all traits I possess, but he could also be very naïve and easily tricked. The play helped me see how manipulating people, like Iago, can be and the effect it can have on others, like Othello. I don’t want to be like that...[in the future] I’ll be aware of how people can manipulate others and I’ll be more cautious for myself.

Nora’s recognition of elements of herself in Othello allowed her to adopt and take up a form of narrative agency for herself that she intends to use in future interactions of others in her lived world. In voicing her future awareness of the manipulations that stem from the text, she potentially carries with her a form of the text that allows her to be more aware and cautious of being impacted by these devious actions.

These forms of textual interactions may be temporary, or they may persist through the ways in which readers come to both embody textual voices and carry those voices forward with them into future contexts so that textual experiences from the past may emerge to assist the reader in present, real world situations. The range of literacy practices and textual interactions displayed throughout the semester demonstrate the very real ways that texts may expand awareness, knowledge, and understanding of inner lives and the nature of social interactions –
both in text worlds and lived worlds – that impact who readers are. Yet, it is important to acknowledge here that not all reading experiences in the classroom elicited a broadening, intersubjective interaction with the texts, at least not as was observable. Individually, students reacted differently to aspects of texts across the semester. These findings highlight a few of the particular instances of those forms of interaction. With Beowulf, for example, students tended not to make personal connections to the text or the characters from the text, perhaps illustrative of the epic mode of the writing. Additionally, students appeared to make no connections to texts, like the Romantic-era poems and Jonathan Swift’s “Modest Proposal” that they encountered, when those students were covered to highlight particular aspects of the time period and to offer students a sample of the writing from that time without being guided by the teacher to examine aspects of the text that may open up particular ways of experiencing the texts as readers.

At the close of Act I, we shift our attention to another aspect of the classroom’s activities over the semester. The following section, Interlude I, continues to build upon the literacy practices and engagements of students while drawing from their focus as high school seniors. An enormous amount of energy was directed by both students and the school to prepare the students for a successful graduation and toward their future endeavors. The following section narratively considers, while highlighting specific students from the focal group, their preparation for college and how their literacy strategies assisted them toward this goal.

**Interlude I: A Constellation of Trajectories in Preparing for the Future**

On a Friday early in the semester, Matt entered the class wearing shorts and his football jersey. The sleeves were rolled up to his shoulders where his backpack straps supported the load of books and laptop on his back. Not long after this, the cheerleaders arrived together dressed in their cheer uniforms in preparation for the home game that evening. The room clamored with
noise as groups of students talked until the bell sounded to signal the start of the day. Ava entered in a hurry just before being officially late to the class. In one corner of the white board at the front of the class, Ms. Young had written, as she always did, the agenda for the day and the general focus of work for the week. On this day, they would replace their daily grammar lesson, which typically is the first activity of each class, with a discussion of how to do citations and a bibliography for their research project, and then they would continue reading in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. After finishing a conversation with a student, Ms. Young arrived at the front of the room and announced this agenda. “Also,” Ms. Young added, “Ms. Pittman will visit us for about 30 minutes at some point to talk to you about college applications.”

Ms. Pittman, the college advisor for the school, arrived before Ms. Young could start the lesson on research citations. A recent graduate of the state’s flagship university, Ms. Pittman was a tall, athletic woman who entered the room with a stride. Before she reached the front of the class, she asked how many students intended to apply to the flagship school. A quarter of the students’ hands went up. Matt sounded a loud “boo” at her question. Everyone knew that he was being recruited to play football at smaller, private schools across the state. Then, as if to make amends, Matt asked, “You ran track in college, right?” Ms. Pittman confirmed that she did, adding that her primary sport was shot put. “You should coach here,” Matt added. “You’re a division one track star.” Always vocal in the class, Matt had a way of creating conversation with the teacher, or whoever was present in front of the class, that acted in many ways as speaking for the class as a whole.

In her presentation, Ms. Pittman provided a checklist for the college application process from a PowerPoint slide, then talked about important workshops—such as the FAFSA workshop—offered at the school, posted general application deadlines, and ended by providing an
electronic appointment calendar link for students to meet with her about their questions. Ms. Pittman was in the hallway before Ms. Young fully realized that she was finished. “We could have planned to do citations, bibliography work, and grammar today if I had known she would be here for only a few minutes,” Ms. Young said. “Since you’re thinking about college applications, I’ll give you some time in class right now to either do research on schools or to work on your college essay that is due to me soon.” Throughout the semester, Ms. Young consistently articulated expectations that students would continue their education in some form after high school and required students to submit a college essay as a class assignment. Students completed the essay around mid-semester, yet many continued the application process and research on areas of studies throughout the fall.

The following section draws from students’ preparations to apply to college throughout the semester. The structure of the following section focuses on four of the students (Kendall, Jacob, Marcus, and Alyse) in the activities and attitudes that shaped their focus after graduation. This section particularly highlights the literacy strategies students use and decisions they make toward these goals. These strategies do not necessarily align with the intersubjective processes in Act I, but they are still considered for their relational qualities in how both texts and others shape the thinking about the future. In addition, this section builds upon the narrative context of the classroom and the tensions students experienced in thinking about the end of their high school experiences. Based on Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional space narrative structure, these stories develop the interaction, continuity, and situation of the data that deepens our understanding of the students and their practices at Brookside High School while indirectly responding to each of the research questions of the study.
Facing the Future: Graduation and College Applications

Life after high school occupied the concerns of most of the students throughout the semester. Their plans ranged from attending a four-year university to attending the local community college, even when some of the students were unclear about goals beyond higher education. The close-knit community in the county suspended the imaginations of some students about what life might be like beyond its borders. Many students wished to stay within Farmville County because of family and the network of friends which were a major part of their lives, although others were ready to leave. Through the semester, I felt a tension among the students that I attributed to their status as seniors on the cusp of change. In noting this tension, especially in relation to students who were undecided about a college course of study and not sure about leaving their community, Ms. Young told me:

That’s a conversation I have a lot, or a conversation I hear a lot, because they don’t know what they don’t know at this age. I observed this several years ago that at the beginning of the year these seniors are excited to be seniors, and then somewhere along the line when they realize the work of applying to college, the pressure of making difficult decisions that will affect the rest of their lives, and how their relationship with their parents gets a little rocky because of this place in their lives, their faces change, and they become more stressed.

In thinking and making decisions about their lives after high school, students drew from three primary sources to assist their thinking: 1) the internet, especially focused searches of college websites and career pathways; 2) friends and family; and 3) their personal life experiences. Within the context of the classroom, students engaged in socially participatory conversations in which they shared their knowledge and experiences with each other in ways that supported the
application process and helped others navigate the process. The sub-sections provide the stories of Kendall, Jacob, Alyse, Logan, and Ava as examples of these various trajectories.

**Kendall**

Kendall’s desk resided in the middle of her group of friends, all of whom are cheerleaders. As a group, they discussed the college application process and their current plans. On this day, speaking to the whole group, Kendall turned to them and asked, “How will we know if we get accepted to the colleges we’ve applied to?” Importantly, Kendall uses an inclusive, plural pronoun here to include everyone in the group, indicative of their close relationships within the group. Alyse, who sat in an adjacent desk behind her, replied, “You’ll know from your portal, just check your portal for the school after you apply. It will say there.” Frustrated, Kendall responded, “But I haven’t created a portal,” and she looked back at her laptop screen and continued looking at the application page for one of the regional state universities.

Kendall’s direction was full of uncertainty. She was uncertain about her career directions and uncertain about leaving home. In talking about this process, she said:

I’m persuaded to look at this one university because of Nora. We’re really good friends, and she was talking about this school, but ever since I was old enough to think about college I was just like, I just want to stay at home, I don’t want to go away from my family. I thought I would go to the community college. I never really thought about it until one day we were sitting at lunch and Nora brought up the idea that we could be roommates because we both kind of want to be the same thing. We want to help people. She said, “We could be roommates and go to college together,” and I was just like, “That sounds fun.” And I as I was thinking about going off and having that independence and growing up on my own
without having my parents right here with me, it’s just kind of like what made me apply to these other colleges too.

This conversation demonstrates the tension Kendall felt about her future. The ideas she has about college arise from discussions with her friends, especially Nora, and are constructed particularly as social desires in which they have the same goals (“we want to help people”) and will follow similar paths (“I’m persuaded to look at this one university because of Nora”). Envisioning her own future, Kendall enters into and comes to share the vision Nora has for herself. Nora’s own direction, however, seems to give Kendall the ability for herself to consider other potential directions at the end that do not involve Nora (“it’s kind of like what made me apply to these other colleges too”).

Kendall thought about pursuing physical therapy, nursing, or dental hygiene. “With nursing I’m still kind of iffy about it because I’m waiting until I take the Nursing Fundamentals class next semester to really see how I like it,” she said. “My aunt is a dental hygienist. That’s who I was talking to about this career. She was telling me that they have good hours and good pay.” Kendall recognizes that she has limited experiences, especially those experiences that would help her to know which direction would be best for her. For her, these experiences come directly from work in the field, in this case, a course offered through the school, or from the experiences of others. Kendall further says:

I was thinking about physical therapy, but my Dad said that it looks like the college I’m looking at for it only has a doctorate in it or something like that. I was looking and it says that you have to have an undergrad degree [she reads quickly on her computer screen] in one of a bunch of related areas. So, you have to like major in that and then you have to do this program for three years. I was just thinking about it.
Kendall paused here to think to herself, and then she continued in a tone of frustration, “I don’t know what I’m doing. I don’t know. My options are open.” While having to narrow and decide on areas of study and career directions, Kendall is also conflicted about the potential of leaving home. In reflecting on leaving home, she said, “I know some people who are like, ‘I want to leave, I want to get out of here.’ And other people are like, ‘No, I’m just staying.’ I want to leave but I don’t. It’s a tough decision to make.

So, I’m just like in the middle. That’s where I’m stuck. I don’t know.”

As noted earlier, Kendall does not like to read. She reads for assignments required in class, she said, but she does not read outside of school. The experiences above are indicative of how Kendall was deeply embedded in social contexts that guided her interests and directions.

**Jacob**

Jacob sat on the other side of the room from Kendall, leaning back in his desk with his jeans and dirt-encrusted work boots extended into the aisle between desks. Instead of working, he sat and talked to Brock and Ava during the time Ms. Young provided to work on college applications. For Jacob, he is unsure of his future after high school. “I don’t know,” he said, “I wish I did know.” He said that he does not want a job where he sits all day. Following up on this, he said, “That’s why I don’t really like school. I’ve kind of enjoyed school more this year than I ever have. I’ve got English and I actually like this class because I like Ms. Young and stuff. It isn’t that bad this year.” He easily admits that he does not like to read (except for his reading of Jim Kjelgaard’s (1992) *Big Red*, which he returned to read several times) or sit still for very long. He would rather be in a field hunting with his dog.
In thinking about life after high school, he said:

I’m going to go to college for sure, the community college. I guess I’m just going to take the core classes until I know what I’m going to do. I don’t want to waste my time. I don’t want to just pick something and then waste my time on it, so I’m trying to figure what I want to do so that way when I do do it I won’t have to spend my time going back to do something else later. I want to be done with school, but I also want to have a good job and be able to enjoy myself when I get older.

The previous two years have made it difficult for Jacob to have experiences to help him determine his direction. He and his friends did not talk about their plans together, and the global pandemic limited the opportunities school could offer in developing skills. Where students like Kendall used the internet and her friends to help narrow her prospective direction in college, Jacob relied on his experiences. He took Agricultural Mechanics and Auto Mechanics last year, he said, but these courses were both online. Of the Agricultural Mechanics class, he said, “I had the class last semester online but I never went into class. It’s not really hard but you don’t really learn anything when you’re online. The teacher tried her best but you’re really not going to get much out of it.”

In the spring semester, Jacob intended to take a welding course at the community college through dual enrollment with the high school. It is a skill, he suggested, that might lead to a job or toward helping him figure out what he wants to do. Of the students participating fully in the study, Jacob was the least social and appeared to not have a strong network of friends. As mentioned before, Jacob would engage with the texts for class but did not read outside of class. In reading Othello, he noted, “I liked Othello because we read it together. I liked the way we read it. It wasn’t my favorite, but it was enough to keep my attention.” Jacob suggested that the
books read for class lacked characters that he could understand or feel any shared sense of connection to.

**Marcus**

Marcus was often hesitant to share his work on his research project as well as his future goals. In describing himself, he said, “I don’t know. I’m a carefree guy, real lazy at times. Probably need to pick it up, reel it in. What can I say, I’m just a man trying to make his way in the world.” He’d often admit to not reading for class, but he could be found reading other books often, like Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*, Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah’s *Friday Black*, or George R. R. Martin’s *Game of Thrones* book series. He had been an active participant in the school’s drama program, and he often embodied aspects of the characters, like Iago, for example, whom he came into textual contact. He described himself as a type of Tyrion Lannister character from *Game of Thrones* in saying, “All he has is his brains, so he uses what he’s got. He’s the smartest, he’s arguably the smartest character in the book. He manipulates, he does what he has to do to come out on top. That’s what I’ve always loved, taking advantage of the only thing you’ve got.”

In the classroom, he socially engaged with the guys around him, often playing a shared video game on their phones in the middle of class assignments. His tenth and eleventh grade years, during the global pandemic, were difficult for him. “I didn’t talk to anybody for awhile when we were doing school online,” he said. “So, like I was wholly by myself,” he said of that time, “and I think I needed it to figure out who I was.”

When asked about his plans after high school, he said he was unsure of what he would do. “Definitely, yeah, definitely going to college,” he said. “I have to fill out the residency forms right now because I still haven’t done that.” Throughout the semester, his plans as he described them in our interviews, were unclear until later in the fall when he began saying he would most
likely attend the Farmville County’s Community College for two years in order to figure out what to do. “I’m probably going to there and then switch it up to a four-year college. That’s the main plan right now unless something changes. I’m really into computer animation, so I’ll probably go to some arts school somewhere. And that’s probably why I’m going to the community college to get some time to figure it out. Some extra time. I’ve kind of been slacking, I’m not going to lie to you.”

As an active, engaged reader of the texts he selected for himself, he often drew from those texts to explain himself and his ideas. Yet, for college, he said he had not researched college majors and routes to computer animation or other areas of interest at all, saying that he hoped the community college would help him figure those things out.

**Alyse**

As part of the group of cheerleaders in the class, Alyse moved in a strong social network of friends. They sat together in a group and conferred with each other on every class assignment. Colleges, majors, and college applications remained a consistent focus of their conversations during down times in class throughout the fall. With parents who were both college graduates, Alyse served as one of the most active toward the college process and one to whom her friends often asked question of about it. Alyse had a clear idea about her transition to college and her future directions. Even during Ms. Pittman’s brief presentation, Alyse switched between two browsers open on her laptop computer looking at college applications and a university webpage on occupational therapy. When I talked with her, she said, “I’ve already applied to [a college at the coast] and to the same school Ms. Pittman attended. I’ve got three more applications going, and I’ve been writing lots of essays for those.” Later, Alyse said:
I like to help people. Right now I want to go into Occupational Therapy, try and get my master’s and go that route. I’d rather get it over with and not try and go back because Mom says it’s harder to turn around and try to go back. She said you’re not going to want to. My grandmother was a nurse. And my great aunt and uncle, I’m really close with, my great aunt was a nurse, and my great uncle is a retired doctor. I grew up going to his office and things like that. And my brother went to an occupational therapist, the same one I’m interning with now. As I got older, I realized I wanted to do something like that because it’s not so mediciny. It’s more physical and helping people with stuff that they have lost.

Alyse’s direction into the helping professions was clearly structured by a social web of others around her and informed by her experience in dance. There is a clear family history of working in healthcare, offering Alyse not only opportunities to experience the medical environment (“I grew up going to his office”) but also to accumulate the voices around her about the field. Through conversations with her mother, Alyse rearticulates her mother’s advice about pursuing this path (“…it’s harder to turn around and try to go back”).

When Alyse was applying to the state’s flagship university, she was stumped initially, she said, by the required essay prompts. “They were a bit difficult,” she said, “because they had very specific topics.” One essay asked her to respond to a quotation from a former student. “It was about describing something about history and how history shapes you or something,” she said, “so I tried to go as specific as possible.” The other prompt was less specific. She said that the prompt “started with ‘I believe…’ and then you fill in the rest.” Alyse described feelings of frustration because the prompt did not provide clear directions on how to respond. She turned to the internet, she said, to research how other people had responded. On Google, she found that people generally described the prompt, in her words, as “a way for them to get to know you in a
short, like, show your humor or whatever.” In seeing what others had posted and shared online, Alyse modeled her own essay reply to prompt in a similar way. “I did something that had a good moral aspect to it,” she said, “and decided to put a little spin on it, to put something that’s personal to me.”

Alyse’s literacy skills become apparent by her strategies to utilize her past experiences and the internalized voices of others, like parents, toward her focused navigation of university websites and the crafting of her writing to respond to the expectations of the school’s prompts. Alyse’s search for what others said and wrote for these prompts represents a means of entering into the consciousness of others, embodying – if only briefly – the voice of other who she has found online, in order to mold her own writing and her own self in that moment toward being – perhaps becoming – what is needed to be identified as a potential university student. Similar to what Brandt (2001) demonstrates about how literacy practices are embedded into larger social practices, Alyse demonstrates how these practices are rooted into her own family practices and her past experiences.

This interlude is woven with both the literacy practices of the classroom and the literacy strategies gained by students in their school and personal lives, responding generally to the research questions of the study as it considers these literacy practices of students, how they may direct them to the future, and how they may be impacted by the specific context of the school and community. The movement from literary texts to informational texts – as well as the textual voices of others – serves to direct these students in particular ways toward their future goals. From here, this interlude concludes to transitions us back into the particular world of two students who draw upon both classroom texts and the personal texts they discover for themselves. Act II moves deeper into the literacy activities students make with texts, especially
those texts that illicit from them a strong sense of recognition that more deeply develops their sense of self and their directions for future self-understandings.

**Act II: Text Worlds and Future Directions**

Act II provides the study’s findings for the second research question: How do students’ literacy practices and engagement with literature and interpretations shape both current and future discourses and activities? This section focuses on two students from the class, Marcus and Grace, who were both active, engaged readers of texts and interested in talking about their reading. Drawing from literacy practices in Act I, both of these readers demonstrate forms of intersubjective engagement, recognition and recontextualization, and the borrowing of textual agency toward their own lived worlds. Highlighting the voices of these two students, this Act provides three sections that respond to the research question: Understanding Self through Textual Others; Understanding Self Toward Lived Worlds; and Orientations of Self to Future Discourse. For each of these subsections, the Act presents the findings for both Marcus and Grace under each heading. Through these practices and presentation of findings, Act II aims to consider how reading may add to the accumulation of dialogical voices readers encounter and how those readers may enact those voices outside of the text in the present moment for readers and how those readers may carry those voices forward to the future.

**(Re)Introduction to Marcus and Grace**

Both Marcus and Grace were active, engaged readers in the class throughout the semester. Marcus admitted, however, to not always reading the required texts for class. Because of the structure of the class in which Ms. Young would read and summarize the readings for the whole class, Marcus found that he could understand the texts just as well by listening and participating in class. He often read books that he had found and selected himself. “I love to
read,” he said. “Just recently, I’ve gotten two books from Ms. Young, two Ayn Rand books, *Fountain Head* and *Atlas Shrugged*. And then I got two from the school librarian. She also got me two books from Amazon or somewhere, Two from the *Game of Thrones* series.” Teachers from around the school recognized Marcus as an active reader and would purchase and recommend books to him. He liked to read the classics, he said, as a way of positioning himself as a reader who could pull from literary sources as needed, but he rarely searched for contemporary texts just out of his own interest. For Grace, she too read all of the time, she said. She read all of the books for class and spent her nights reading either romance novels or psychology articles on her phone before bed. She would also use social media to find books that she might want to read. “There’s this whole side of YouTube that’s dedicated to books, romance books. I go on those and they describe them a little bit and so I was interested by that,” she said, and she continued, “I go there a lot! It makes me happy watching those. I can’t really describe it. I just love watching the videos.”

**Understanding Self through Textual Others**

**Marcus**

During a group discussion with Marcus, Alton, Logan, and two others about Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* late in the semester, the conversation toward the end of the class period devolved into sharing about their time together in high school. “You’ve got to see this,” Logan said to me. “I’ve got this recording of Marcus in our first year here turning into Thanos.” Thanos is a supervillain from Marvel Comics and their popular movie series. As Logan pulled out his phone and found the video, Alton added, “Marcus literally became Thanos with his infinity drip which was the jewel that he had obtained. Using it, he absorbs all of the energy and power he can to erase half of the life in the universe.” Logan laughed. In the video, Marcus had dressed like a
superhero with a cape and glasses, holding a set of rings in both hands. He bends over as if to gather himself and then he rises in a powerful scream, one that echoed down the hall and nearly got him, Marcus described, suspended from school. The video had become a part of the history the group of students shared with each other as they all had seen it many times and attempted to tell part of the story.

In asking Marcus later about the video of him as Thanos, I asked if he often embodied characters in this way. He said:

I understand exactly what you’re saying, but I don’t know. It’s kind of hard to tell because I switch a lot. I act completely sophisticated one moment and I’ll be wild the next, so I switch between a lot of different modes, but they’re all Marcus. Or, at least, I’d like to say they are anyway. They’re all me. They are all different parts of me that I switch between depending on the situation or if I just feel like it. I would like to think that I try not to act like anyone I see, but I know I’ve already told you that I have a character that has influenced a lot of who I am too, my character from *Game of Thrones*.

Marcus’s engagement with reading and narrative texts, especially where he found elements of recognition of himself, became embodiments of those characters that Marcus carried with him. He shifted his voice register often to revoice characters even during individual conversations as if drawing upon others to share in social interactions and make engagement with others possible. His awareness of this practice was clear from his response above, but he equally was reluctant to view himself as influenced by others as it suggested to him, he intimated, a lack of authenticity in himself.

As the reader of Iago in Shakespeare’s *Othello* with the class, Marcus recognized elements of himself, as we have discussed, in the Iago character. This self-recognition was
mirrored by the recognition of his peers in the class who addressed him at times through the character’s name rather than Marcus. When reflecting on his role as Iago again, Marcus drew upon his desire to be viewed as intelligent (“I aspire to be an intelligent person. That’s why I constantly try to have my brain expanded,” he said), he added:

That’s why I read a lot. Books are information no matter what form they come in. Like, they’re teaching you something new every time. So that’s why I like reading. Basically. For the most part. Otherwise, it’s just having an escape every now and again. Iago was a character who was completely logical. He only failed because he didn’t understand other people and I think that’s also a form of intelligence in and of itself. But I would hope I wouldn’t relate too much Iago because, you know, he was kind of a jerk. You know, like any good character is going to be written in a relatable way. So sometimes I do find myself relating to like different stuff and like reflecting because of a book.

Much of Marcus’s reading was engaged with philosophy and fantasy books, but he preferred fantasy because he said, you know, it’s just sending me off to some place. It’s not trying to get me to look at the real world, the real world kinda sucks, if you haven’t noticed. But a fantasy world is totally me. I love it.” In understanding himself, he said he often drew upon the character of Tyrion Lannister in the Game of Thrones series. Also known for his intelligence, Tyrion echoed Iago through is ability to manipulate others. About the character of Tyrion, Marcus said:

I love the guy. The book version of him is a little more detestable [than in the film version]. He is a bit of a jerk in the book. In the film, they didn’t portray him right because you can’t make Peter Dinklage [the actor] ugly. He’s just a handsome guy. But the Tyrion in the book is ugly and he’s a dwarf. He doesn’t have anything that his brothers or his sister have. He’s small, he’s weak, and he’s ugly. He can’t get anywhere with his looks, he can’t get
anywhere with his strength. If you have weaknesses in one area, you’ve just got to make
sure your strengths outshine them. That’s one of the characters that has inspired me.

Marcus’s description of Tyrion here at the end turns to a full recognition of himself through the
shift to “you” language that reflects Marcus’s own position between the lived world and the text
world of the book. This language also reflects the values of the social world that Marcus views as
important to his own sense of success. For Marcus, he appeared to carry these various forms of
textual characters with him as social resources from which he could draw upon as needed. In
addition, these characters seemed to function as a means of constructing inwardness and social
awareness for him that may not have been present or possible without these textual experiences
and interactions.

**Grace**

As part of her reading practice, Grace often looked for aspects of texts that were
reflective of characters and their psychological makeup. The characters in books offered her a
way of understanding both herself and others. Grace connected strongly with Shakespeare’s
Desdemona and Emilia and recognized aspects of herself and her own background in them. Her
views of feminism connected her to the role and treatment of these textual woman as she
described their social positions in Elizabethan England at the time: “In this instance in the book
(Othello), equality, women coming into their own and not being just someone’s property, like
her husband’s property, it’s basically at the time just what you were. When you were married,
your husband owned you.” These elements of women’s social positions resonated with Grace’s
experience in the world being raised by a single mother with an absent father. Through these
forms of recognition and interaction with these textual characters, Grace more generally
described reading as a search for and recognition of the other who helps you understand:
Seeing people written and getting a look at how they think, when you can’t do that with people around you, which, I mean, most women if asked if they could read minds for a day, would they take it or not, we would say yes because we just want to know what others are thinking. Seeing the thought process of the people in books and getting an understanding of them can not only help you understand other people, they can help you understand yourself. You can see attributes of yourself in these characters. But I do think by seeing these characters and the way that they think and their actions that you can put it to other people in your life and how they act in similar ways to specific characters. Seeing these characters in books might mean that the people they are similar to in life might have similar thought processes.

This experience with texts helped Grace have deeply intersubjective interactions with the characters she encountered in her reading. In reflecting on Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four, she was deeply affected by the relationship between Winston and Julia in the novel. As she reflected at the end of the semester after finishing the book, she focused on the section in which Winston is forced by O’Brien to give up Julia near the end. Grace’s experience with this scene was one in which she moved into an understanding with Winston and then shifted that knowledge to herself. In her reflection, Grace said:

I think it’s really interesting because their thoughts are so raw. Like how Winston was thinking about Julia, I thought that was just so interesting because we would like to think that we wouldn’t make that decision, but we don’t know because in that moment when you’re experiencing that much pain, you would like to say that you would experience that pain than the one you love but in reality you don’t know how you would react. You hope that you would take the pain away from someone else, but you don’t really know that in
that moment because when you’re in pain, when you’re afraid, you’re not thinking really. You’re thinking about your pain and you’re thinking about how you want that pain to stop. I’m sure some torture happens now that we don’t know about, that’s covert, that’s not talked about, to get information out of people because pain, it clouds your judgment. And it’s just real interesting to think about that, because I’ve always thought, you know, I would much rather take the bullet for someone else I love, but I don’t know that. In that moment, you don’t know how you’re going to react.

In understanding Winston’s situation, Grace placed herself in his position. Her understanding of this context came from her embodiment of Winston’s experience in which Grace came to articulate herself from that position: “I’ve always thought, you know, I would much rather take the bullet for someone else I love.” Grace further moved to generalize this particular experience toward acknowledgement of the human condition that speaks both of herself and of others: “…you would like to say that you would experience that pain than the one you love but in reality you don’t know how you would react.” Here, Grace probes her own sense of commitment and love for those close to her through the activities expressed in the novel with Winston and Julia that gains for her a deeper, more complex sense of self understanding. Meaning making in this respect was an embodied activity constructed from the textual social relationships that she entered into through the novel.

Although Grace would call herself an active reader now, she had not always been one. In an interview late in the year, she recalled her earliest memories of reading in saying:

My first memory of reading was in elementary school when we had to read those books, and I hated it. I was really far behind in my grade. Reading was really hard for me, and also I didn’t want to. I’d rather just go and play instead of reading but my mom made me
do it. I remember that I hated it. I never found books that I was interested in until last year.

Now from these books I really want to read Virginia Woolf.

During the global pandemic of the previous two years, Grace discovered a love of reading through romance novels. As we will see, these novels offered her greater understanding of others as well as the beginnings of a language to think about issues in psychology that had developed for her.

**Understanding Self toward the Lived World**

**Marcus**

Similar to the other students in the class, Marcus did not connect with *Beowulf* in any significant way. Like others, his discussion of *Beowulf* became critical of the text and its representation of the epic genre. When asked about it, he very directly responded by saying, “*Beowulf* was kind of trash. The character Beowulf, it felt like he was inconsistently written at times. I don’t know if that was on purpose or if it was something that the author didn’t think about at the time. It was a folktale that became written, so I’m sure stuff got embellished and stuff got lost in translation, and stuff like that.” This was Marcus’s response when being asked about the text earlier in the semester. Later in the term, his response to it had developed and becoming more complex by his intertextual connections to it made through other sources. In absorbing his reading and understanding of Ayn Rand’s works, he often found himself drawing from Rand’s voice to make sense of other texts. In his later reflection on *Beowulf*, he said:

*Beowulf*’s greed at the end, if you want to call it that, is that he wanted a tower built in his name, not a tower built in God’s. But sometimes a man is entitled to the sweat of his brow, you know what I mean? I feel like there’s an Ayn Rand quote in there somewhere. I feel like reading about her lately has been influencing me. Sometimes a man just wants to be
remembered, you know what I mean? Like, Beowulf is not going to be forgotten, that’s the last thing he’ll be. But you know, sometimes you just want that little extra bit. He was dying. He wanted one last thing before he died, and I feel like people mistake that for being greedy, and I think that any one thing can be misinterpreted about Beowulf and that also goes into how inconsistently written it is where sometimes he’s courageous, sometimes he’s arrogant, and sometimes he’s just brave. I feel like you can get a lot from it personally.

What would you call that? Universal, I guess.

In this response, Marcus shifts between voicing elements of the Beowulf text, Ayn Rand’s general perspective, and his own positionality in the lived world. “Sometimes you want that little extra bit,” reflects his negotiation of these multiple texts to voice his own developing position in the world. When asked about his drawing forward of Rand’s voice into this response, Marcus recognized this way of making sense for himself but was reluctant to embrace it because it suggested, for him, too strong of an influence on his authentic sense of self.

Yeah, sometimes it’s a realization that, like, “Bro, I’m talking like this guy.” It’s kind of cringe. It’s like, is this something that I am saying or is this something I heard that I liked and so I’ve adopted it? You see it in daily life all the time. Your friend will say something a lot and you’ll end up adopting it because you’re always hanging out. It’s not uncommon. But, like, it’s not a bad thing to be influenced by what you read, at least I don’t think it is anyway. But I don’t want to be influenced to where I adopt a personality that isn’t my own, and that’s what I get afraid of sometimes.

The voices that Marcus embodied were a way of being in the world and with others, most directly though this practice signaled a means of understanding himself. Because these voices were so prevalent for him, Marcus may have been less certain about his own identity as it
positioned him toward others. Yet, this practice of reading and taking up the voices of others served to locate him in the shared experiences he had in the lived world.

**Grace**

“Okay, I’m still on a reading journey,” Grace said about herself in relation to her discovery of romance novels during the pandemic. She found romance books, she said, through social media sights that review and makes recommendations for books. “I know that a lot of us are on TikTok which is a bunch of other readers,” she said. “There’s this whole other section of TikTok, and they talk about books, and same thing on YouTube, and I’ve gotten a lot of recommendations from there. We all have a common interest in this, but we’re all different.” Grace’s use of inclusive pronouns indicates the level of social belonging that she feels toward these resources. When asked if she knows any of the people on these sites or if she contributes to them herself, she said no. Yet, Grace attributes her love of reading to the recommendations and posts on these platforms.

Finding romance books helped her during the isolation of the pandemic. Thinking back on this period and the books she encountered, she said, “Sometimes I like reading those books because they make you feel good, but some books are just so well written, and the characters were so well written that you felt like you were in the book, and you felt like you were the characters.” Grace used these intersubjective interactions with the text to realize and develop her interest in psychology, an act of gaining inner awareness and knowledge about herself and others. In reading, she further described the experience as, “it’s just like a wow moment. Like, oh my gosh, because most of the time when I’m reading I find there are emotions I’ve felt that I never knew how to put into words and so it just gets me.”
While these acts of recognition helped Grace to experience deeper self-understanding, the reading process also turned her toward others in the lived world and different types of reading. Describing her reading of romance novels during the pandemic, she said:

The first romance novel I ever read the author was interested in psychology, and she hinted at it in her books. The main character was talking about how she was curious about how people worked and how they thought, what they thought, and how they process things, and I was like, “I’m like that.” And that just peaked my interest in psychology, so I just went online and started doing research on my own. I was just curious about how the brain worked and how childhood trauma affects cognition and reaction and the limbic system. Also, this is really cool. I have this theory. From the reading, I think childhood trauma affects the cerebellum, brain stem, and limbic system generally speaking.

Grace’s reading journey took her from romance novels to the texts for Ms. Young’s class where she readily engaged with Shakespeare’s characters in *Othello* and the character relationships in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. She admits she would not have been interested in these texts if she had not started reading romance novels before that point. The psychological interest in romance, in addition, had opened her to reading non-fiction texts as well. Partly for her research project but, in many ways, out of self-interest, Grace said she would find e-books and articles online in the evenings to read about psychology and psychological research. She attributed her ability to focus on and understand these texts to her reading of romance. She said:

Maybe there are some really slow parts, you just have to read through that to get to the good parts. And so that taught me patience, that I could get through it, and that’s helped me to read this [psychology book]. The boring parts, I just read through it and understand
it even more. And those boring parts, even though it sucks, they are a big part of helping me understand better.

While Grace does not adopt voices from the texts as directly as Marcus did, her relationships within texts and the ways in which these texts direct her back into the lived world remains a significant process. Over the course of the semester, Grace deepened her reading practices to expand into non-fiction reading and, potentially, change the direction of her future after high school graduation.

** Orientations of Self to Future Discourse  

*Marcus*

In the last days of the semester, students were mainly working on their presentations for their Senior Capstone Project. On one of these days before the holiday break, Marcus sat on top of one of the tables in the back of Ms. Young’s room reading while others worked. He was absorbed in the book when I approached him to ask what he was reading. He turned the book over to show me the cover: Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah’s book of short stories called, *Friday Black.* “Where did you find this book?” I asked. Marcus paused and close the book as he looked at me and said, “Okay, there’s a YouTuber I watch a lot and he makes video essays on a bunch of different stuff, and he mentioned this book. He mentioned the last story in particular, “Through the Flash,” and I was very interested. The person who posted on YouTube, I learned, made philosophical videos online primarily about video games. “I know the basic premise of “Through the Flash” and such, but I didn’t know what the actual collection was about. It’s a social commentary on racism in America, on the downfalls of capitalism, on a bunch of stuff. It’s really nice,” Marcus continued. In describing the stories he has read, he said:
The stories I liked the most are both “Zimmerland” and “Friday Black.” “Zimmerland” is like the simulated park, it’s like a theme park, I guess you could say. In the park customers can come and do justice. It’s supposed to be like a choice in decision making thing, but what actually happens are situations or simulations. One is where you have to find one out of these three people who could be a terrorist planning to bomb the store, and they’re all of Muslim descent. It’s very, you know. And then “Friday Black” is a commentary on consumerism, and how capitalism and greediness just turns people into monsters. It’s set during Black Friday, and you see it through this guy, I can’t remember his name, but it’s his fourth Black Friday. On the first Black Friday, he got bit by a customer. The customers are like rabid animals. As soon as the gates rises up, they become fiends. It’s Black Friday and 128 people died. It’s an exaggeration, but not so exaggeration that it’s not true. So, he gets bit and from there he’s been able to speak a Friday Black, which is the language that people who have been taken over by the Black Friday fever speak. He’s bitten by a random customer and he’s foaming at the mouth and then he can speak the Friday Black. It’s a very interesting take on it. And, it’s really a thought-provoking book so far. I still have five stories to go.

The author, Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, writes from a Black American perspective on social issues, such as consumerism and greed. Marcus was excited to describe these stories, going easily into detail about them with me. After some description, he paused and reflected a moment before returning to talk about the book as a whole while bringing his understanding of Ayn Rand into it.

Ayn Rand is a wholly selfish, well, her whole philosophy. Ayn Rand’s objectivism is wholly selfish in nature. This book encourages you to care for other people and to be a
good person. Ayn Rand is more of a ‘be your own person even if that’s not a good person.’ This encourages you to care, to care for others and stuff like that, to care for your fellow man and look out for you and yours and such. And Ayn Rand is just look out for you. It’s a bit of a shift.

Then Marcus said that the story, “Through the Flash,” would be his favorite of the book. “I don’t know the nitty-gritty, but I know the basic premise of it, the basic story, I don’t know how it ends, actually,” he said. Marcus begins to recount the plot of “Through the Flash,” saying:

There’s this girl named Ama who lives in this town and everyday at I think it’s 7 o’clock the town gets nuked and the day starts over. Everyone in the town remembers the loops. They have parties for people waking up and realizing they’re in a loop and such. A lot of people have decided to become the best of them that they can become, and Ama goes, “Okay, I’m going to become the absolute best murderer I can.” So she goes on this spree, and I think there’s a line in here somewhere, I don’t know exactly where it is. She explains her fastest run, her fastest run through a town. It was two-and-a-half hours, I think. Eventually, Ama figures out that she’s not getting any more satisfaction from killing and so she’s like, “Okay,” and she goes on the path to find nirvana. She’s become a better person now and she has this talk with this neighbor, her neighbor, Mrs. Nagel. Mrs. Nagel is an old lady, and she’s one of the few people who aren’t afraid of Ama after her little stint as knife queen, that’s what they called her.

Marcus stopped for a moment in his retelling of the story. He said, “This is the exact conversation that stuck with me” as he turned to the specific passage in the book where the conversation between Ama and Mrs. Nagel occurred. Marcus began to read this section out loud to me while he also added his commentary into the text:
“I feel like maybe I like the old me better.” This is Ama. “The old Ama. It was easier. And maybe the new Ama isn’t doing anything.” Mrs. Nagel says, “What’s the difference between the two?” And, Ama trying to see the difference as well was like, “The old me did everything in one way. And only through about one person. Now I try to help everyone instead of killing them…I used to be afraid, and I know I can’t take it back, and I know I’m the worst person who ever lived. I know that. I’m not afraid anymore. I’m only scared of me.” And, Mrs. Nagel takes a moment and she says, “I see, and that means you’ve been two different people?”… Mrs. Nagel tells her, “I think you’ve done a fine job… And it’s true in the past you were a terrible witch… I think there’s only one Ama. And I think I’m talking to her.”

Marcus excitedly stopped, looked up, and said:

I’m actually amazed that the writer could put that to words, a feeling that I’ve had could be put to words so concisely and beautifully and in a conversation so nonchalantly like it’s nothing. And, that’s why I’ve always loved books. People much smarter than me put my own ideas into words better than I could. I love seeing that.

For Marcus, the issue in the text directly captured his experience of being multi-voiced in the world, raising questions about who he is and the solidity of his own identity. In reflections after this, he connected this reading to issues of wanting to be remembered in the world by others and expressed a fear that his life would not matter. Mrs. Nagel’s questions for Ama above are what Marcus continued to return to as a note about how one’s past and present all compose who a person is. Through these texts, Marcus was able to articulate himself more clearly as well as encounter voices for him to embody that helped to solidify his identity in stronger ways.
During a conversation with Grace at the end of the semester about Orwell’s novel, she talked about the transference of emotions, specifically using the language of “transference” from one character to another. She had unknowingly used psychological terminology in how she talked about the activities in the book, a new “voice” that found its way into her conversation and analytical reflections. The following day, I asked her about this word and its origin. She said:

To be completely honest with you, I know a lot of words and I don’t remember where I learn them from. I pick them up from reading or hearing someone talk about it, or at night when I get bored, and I look up psychological stuff. That’s how I got on the whole childhood trauma thing. I couldn’t go to sleep, so I just looked it up on Google. I learned a lot of words from that and then it’s just in my brain.

Grace returned to the connection between her reading romance novels and her interest in psychology. Her reading of psychological research and e-books through the evenings, as she noted, were a means of research for her paper and investigations into knowing more about herself. In reflecting on this, she said:

It originally started because I was just curious about myself, because of how I reacted to things, why I procrastinate so much and why react so much to moderately stressful situations as if it’s a high-stress situation. I was just curious about this so I looked it up and I found out all of this information, and I started applying it to my friends and family members and myself. It just really peaked my interest. That’s how it got started.

The path Grace followed into literary texts had complicated her thoughts about life after high school. She initially described herself as wanting to pursue a career in nursing at the start of the semester. As the semester continued, in the middle of the fall, she seemed less sure of herself and
her direction after graduation. She had started to consider psychology as a path forward and said, “I’m probably just going to figure it out when I get to college, and probably do internships and volunteer stuff and see how I like my classes, because I’m going to take both classes.” At the end of the semester, she described a conversation with her mother where her mother said, according to Grace, “I think that psychology is the thing for you.” And then her mother added, “Grace, you don’t like blood. You don’t like the sight of blood.” Grace laughed at relaying the conversation and said that her only reply to her mother was “You’re right, you’re right.” Grace’s direction after school had become more complex and more nuanced toward elements of self-knowledge and self-understanding because of the activities of reading through the global pandemic and through Ms. Young’s English class. In addition, reading provided for her voices from others that were not present in her own lived environment. These voices offered her ways of both developing and modifying a deeper sense of interiority and consciousness about the lives of others and about herself while additionally offering her cultural resources for future activity.

On one of the last days of class for the semester, I asked Grace if she thought she had changed. She thought for a moment and said confidently:

I do think this class has peaked my interest in the literature aspect more than romance novels because before I hated reading. I couldn’t read anything. And then it was only romance novels. And now, like I’m exploring more and I want to read more novels other than just strictly romance, and I think my writing has improved. I feel like I’ve learned a lot from this class, even from history. It’s really cool.

In the last days of the semester, Logan and Grace were chatting during part of the class when I walked by. Seeing me passing, Grace grabbed my attention. “I’ve got something I wanted to
share with you,” she said. “I think you’ll like it.” Grace shared how over the weekend she had watched a movie online that, she said, was full of Virginia Wolfe quotations. She added:

It’s really sad, but it’s such a beautiful film and they quote Virginia Woolf a lot and it just adds to the poetry of the movie, and it just makes the movie 100 times better. But, I really want to read Virginia Woolf because just from hearing those quotes in that movie I was just like “Wow, that’s insane.” But there’s one quote that really struck me. It’s from The Waves. I’ve got to order that book now.

Grace couldn’t remember the quote in that moment but said she would look it up and save it for me. The following day, she handed me a piece of paper with the quotation on it from Woolf:

My own brain is to me the most unaccountable of machinery - always buzzing, humming, soaring roaring diving, and then buried in mud. And why? What's this passion for?

Act II focuses on two students in the class, Marcus and Grace, who became representative of the ways students might interact with texts. These students demonstrated the movement of general literacy practices as showcased in Act I but were further able to shift their own practices into their lived worlds. These textual interactions demonstrate how sharedness becomes present with texts through forms of displacement, where readers move interactions within textual worlds and shift those interactions back toward their lived experiences, having been reshaped, modified, or reoriented in the process. Marcus, as well as Grace, revealed the ways that their worlds are full of the voices of others and how they navigated, took up, and resituated textual voices in strategic ways specific to their own identities and directions. At the close of Act II, the narrative here shifts back to a second interlude that returns to students’ literacy practices directed toward a Senior Capstone research project within the school and how their practices supported their activities.
Interlude II: Demonstrating Literacy Skills through the Senior Capstone Project

Brookside High School retained a once county-wide requirement for students to complete a senior capstone project, composed of three central parts: 1) a research paper; 2) a product, which can take the form of a service activity, an event, or the demonstration of a skill learned in connection to the research; and 3) a culminating presentation. Ms. Young serves at the primary coordinator of the capstone project at the school. She says of the capstone project, “I am a huge advocate, and I worked hard to keep it alive at this school.” Other schools in the country ended the project because of the lack of school support for it. The project offers students opportunities to develop and demonstrate various forms of literacy skills through this project. Each of the aspects of this project demonstrate how literacy skills are intertwined between textual knowledge development and social activities among others, the way that literacy becomes a potential form of practice. This section draws up the research projects of several students and how the students draw upon literacy practices. Similar to Interlude I, the following section highlights several students (Matt, Grace, and Logan) and their literacy practices as directed toward this school-based research project. While these literacy practices are not directly related to the literature that students engaged with in the class, the textual experiences here further highlight the relational activities students make for themselves as they work to accomplish their goals. These experiences further develop the narrative aspects of the study (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) to show how literacy practices are not isolated but are instead used in multiple ways and for differing purposes.
Matt

Matt knew quickly what the topic of his senior project would be. His father, a state highway patrolman, sees it all of the time, he said. The issue of drinking and driving among his peers at school was an issue as well, he included. His research paper focused on youth alcohol abuse and the subsequent issue of driving while impaired, a topic developing from the relational position to his father and from his leadership at the school as the football team quarterback. For the research paper, Matt used the internet to identify sources and data for his writing. “Mostly just Google,” he said. “If I see something that might be good, I’ll stop and read it.” Matt readily admits that he did not generally enjoy reading but used these textual skills to identify stories and statistical data to support his paper.

For his product, Matt acquired a pair of alcohol impairment simulation goggles through his father and, using the school’s two golfcarts, sponsored an afternoon of impaired-driving simulation to students and teachers at the school. After the event, Matt said, “My project went great. We had a bunch of kids come out there. It was a good little thing to do.” This event represents the direct relationship between the activity of research, the written research paper, and the simulation activity in which the activity emerges from textual engagement. Further, the event was a form of shared experience, one in which meaning is accomplished directly through shared activity which arise out of Matt’s textual experiences, that extends the knowledge created from the research texts toward becoming socially distributed among the participants.

As the class prepared for the presentation of their work later in the semester, which would be conducted in front of a panel of three people from the community, Matt raised the question with Ms. Young about how to do this. “What exactly will we need to do for our presentation?”
he asked Ms. Young in class during a discussion on the topic. As a response, Ms. Young said, “This is the deal. I’m just going to do a real quick one.” Ms. Young proceeded to model the presentation using Matt’s information as an example. Speaking in Matt’s “voice,” Ms. Young said:

My name is Matthew Johnson and I did my senior capstone project on drunk driving among teenagers and what a terrible problem it is. I choose this topic because I have known people, teenagers, who have died behind the wheel because of drunk driving. It is catastrophic. It is a terrible problem, so I decided to do my capstone project on this topic that I care a lot about…Exposing the terrible, traumatic, devastating effects of drunk driving on teenagers so that the devastating effects are cemented in their brain so that they will choose not to drink and drive. Let me tell you about my product. For my product, blah-blah-blah. Got that?

As an example of how to do the presentation for the whole class, Ms. Young embodied the voice of Matt that offered a model for all of the students to follow. In doing so, Ms. Young entered into an intersubjective moment in which she and the students were able to take on the consciousness and positionality of Matt toward offering a type of performance for the presentation. While this intersubjective event is not constituted through a text, it provides an example outside of a text in which the class comes into a particular form of shared experience oriented toward future action. This intersubjective movement becomes more prominent, as we will see, through the reading of literature. It is important to note how this action constitutes a form of literacy practice.

Grace

The process of considering what to study in college and the senior capstone project merged into a singular activity for Grace. Up until mid-semester, Grace had described her future
goal as becoming a registered nurse. Yet, because of her family background and her active reading habits, Grace’s future goals had become less clear for her. Through reading romance novels, Grace found the blending of interests between reading and understanding others. Describing this intersection of interests, Grace said, “There’s this one author, she writes romance but in a lot of her books the main character that she’s writing is interested in the way people work. When I was reading, it clicked with me, and I realized that’s how I’ve always been.” This interest in the psychology of others opened her to new possibilities while making her direction less clear.

When asked about her senior capstone research, Grace said, “It’s about how childhood development effects cognitive development. And it’s really interesting and I love reading about it.” Because of the limited availability of books in the school library on the subject, Grace used Google Scholar as a primary resource to identify online books and articles to learn more on this topic. She described herself as reading these books on her phone at night before sleep, learning more about the brain and the impact of trauma on development. Over the course of the semester, Grace’s language became more specific as she learned greater details about these processes. In conversation about her research at her desk during class, she had one of these books open on a browser tab on her laptop, and she said, “This is the one that starts out saying childhood trauma, it compares it to a virus. And it just tells how childhood trauma effects the cerebellum, the brain stem, and the limbic system. And I’m mainly focusing on the limbic system because that’s where you see most of the effects, if that make sense?”

Through her reading of romance novels, Grace described how her reading skills had changed over the course of the semester. “Reading [romance novels] helps me read this,” she said as she pointed to the psychology e-book on her laptop. “I don’t know how to explain it,” she
said. In returning later to this topic, she described how her reading romance novels directly impacted her ability to read non-fiction texts:

Maybe there are some really slow parts, you just have to read through that to get to the good parts. And so that taught me patience, that I could get through it, and that’s helped me to read this psychology book. The boring parts, I just read through it and understand it even more. And those boring parts, even though it sucks, they are a big part of helping me understand better. And it’s also broadened my vocabulary and it’s helped me write. I see the grammar and punctuation in books and I take from that.

The effect of reading fiction and non-fiction intertwined in Grace’s activities so that each of these practices developed the other.

While reading romance novels initially formed a type of escape for her during the global pandemic, these fictional texts that explored the psychology of others oriented her toward learning more about herself and her family. “It originally started because I was just curious about myself, because of how I reacted to things, why I procrastinate so much and why react so much to moderately stressful situations as if it’s a high-stress situation,” Grace said. “I was just curious about this, so I looked it up and I found out all of this information, and I started applying it to my friends and family members and myself.” While never being too explicit, Grace described her mother as being impacted by a childhood trauma which Grace thinks is connected to her obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) as an adult. Through reading novels and psychology books, Grace developed her connections about how the brain works:

I was just curious about how the brain worked and how childhood trauma affects cognition and reaction and the limbic system. So, I have this theory: childhood trauma affects the cerebellum, brain stem, and limbic system, generally speaking. And OCD is caused by
miscommunication by the frontal part of the brain and the orbital cortex, and the orbital
cortex is connected to the limbic system. If childhood trauma disrupts the limbic system, it
could cause miscommunication between the orbital cortex and the frontal part of the brain.
It’s possible for OCD to be a side effect of childhood trauma. Isn’t that amazing? That’s
just insane! I thought about it one night, I already knew about OCD and about the limbic
system, and I was curious so I looked up to see if the orbital cortex was connected to the
limbic system, cerebellum, and brain stem, and they are.

Grace’s excitement at making this connection is clear. And, it is clear here how the language of
the texts she had been reading became part of her own language she used in understanding and
describing what became a way of understanding herself and her mother. This knowledge and
understand, too, made Grace’s direction toward nursing more complicated for her as she
described being more passionate about psychology than nursing. “I don’t know what to do,” she
said, as she thought about the relationship between the knowledge she had developed in her
research and her past vision of herself going into the healthcare field.

Grace’s literacy practices demonstrate how reading fiction may open spaces for the
reading and understanding non-fiction. As Grace noted herself, her reading and writing skills
were all improved through the intersection of these texts. In addition, while Grace’s reading of
romance novels was not immediately connected to the social environment, her engagement with
characters from the narratives allowed her access into the minds of others as a means of thinking
and understanding the way the characters do. This intersubjective activity became a social-
directed practice as Grace then took on agency offered through these textual interactions toward
gaining deeper psychological knowledge of herself and her family. Grace’s cognition was
connected to her reading of the texts so that these texts became both a social form of thinking and an orientation for processing future knowledge.

**Logan**

Logan struggled to pin down his research topic. Students at Brookside High School were required to complete an eleventh-grade research paper, from which some students simply added reproduced and added onto for their senior year project. Logan said he did his paper on representations of death in the media. When asked to be more specific, he said, “I talked about the band, My Chemical Romance, and their album on death. It’s an album about dying. I thought it was a cool topic. It was really out there. I thought it was cool.” Logan viewed himself as a musician and enjoyed writing music in his spare time. “I’m not technically talented at music because I’m self-taught,” he said, “but I know a little bit and I’d like to pursue that whether it be like production engineering or something like that.” He described his earlier paper though as not being able to be developed any further, so he searched to find another topic that he could use for his Capstone Project. Drawing on his theatre experience, he decided to write about the impact of theatre in schools. This personal experience would inform the majority of his content he said.

Logan often used YouTube and Google as resources for knowledge. He could not find any useful information about theatre for his paper on Youtube, he explained, but he had used Google. “I’m just Googling,” he said of his research. Through this process, he found an e-book entitled *American Audience for Theatre* that he had been reading. For Logan, his literacy practices were primarily mediated through media and technology sources except where he could pull forward his personal experiences in the theatre world. He liked reading, he said, but he did not make connections between reading and his experience in theatre. This lack of connection
between the two fields may have impacted his struggle to finalize and successfully carry out his research.

At the close of the second interlude, we see how these various student experiences with the research project are impacted by their general literacy practices and, often, by their experiences with certain types of texts. The strength of the literacy practices in Act I may impact the ways these students move toward and implement successful practices in other areas, such as within the Capstone Project. While skills sets from one field do not necessarily automatically transfer to another, an intentional awareness of these practices may support the transition. In the final Act of the chapter, we move into the environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts of the meaning making process for students in the classroom.

**Act III: The Webs of Constructed Understanding and Shared Experience – Environmental, Cultural, and Socioeconomic Impacts on Meaning Making**

The final act of this chapter provides the findings for the last research question: What environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic elements shape the meaning making and interpretation of texts that students are making? Again highlighting the voices of the teachers and students in the school, this Act offers a glimpse into the socioeconomic background of the students and families of Farmville County, a look at the impact of the global pandemic on education and reading practices, and a consideration of how students view their future going forward. In each of these sections, student voices are highlighted as they were captured through class discussions and interviews.

**Embedded Histories in Farmville County: The Socioeconomic Background**

Located in the Piedmont region of the southeastern United States, Farmville County has a legacy of tobacco farming and textile mills. Through much of the 1980s and 1990s, tobacco farming declined as a result of diminished cigarette sales. Cotton mills in the county closed, the
last one shuttering its doors in 2001. One of the largest private factories in the county closed in 2016. The Great Recession of the late 2000s and the struggling rural economy all impacted the nature of Brookside High School. During an interview with Ms. Young, she addressed some of the economic issues in the county and its impacts on schools and students. She said:

When the big factories left, all of that tax money left and a lot of jobs left, and that meant that students’ economic need became greater, and it’s frustrating in the home and desperate and sad to have parents in the home who are not working. There’s a whole slew of avalanche effects of that. How do those parents handle that frustration? Do they start drinking or drugging? Do they get divorced? All of those are kinds of intangibles. We used to have 11 teachers in this department, now we have 6. I think that’s economic related. Big companies left this county. It’s just the way things go sometimes.

With 38 students in the class, Ms. Young attributed the larger size to these economic issues. With fewer teachers in the department, she has taken on more students and more work. In addition, the school had experienced increased behavioral issues as well. While these issues were not present in the classroom under observation, Ms. Young said these economic issues were present and impacting students. Ms. Young reflected on this:

When we were writing their college essays, many of them realized, well, Nora realized, “So many of us have divorced parents. I don’t want to write about that because it’s so common.” I don’t know if that’s related, I wouldn’t be able to say. I do know that in some other classes, we are seeing a lot of students who are the products of parents and homelives that lack structure, discipline, maturity, respect, effective communication…yikes. Now is that related to economics? Probably.
The students in study described themselves as immune to many of larger issues in the school, such as the behavioral concerns. During a conversation, Adelle said most of the issues stemmed from the freshmen who had not been in school for a while because of the pandemic and who were having difficulty making the transition to high school.

The rural nature of the county made it possible for many of the students to grow up together. Many of the students said that they have known each other since elementary school and often described their relationships as being partly like family. In this context, Ava said, “The community is small, like everybody knows everybody.” Alyse, Kendall, Nora, Adelle, and others in the class planned a Thanksgiving party for themselves in November, spending part of their time in class deciding who would bring specific dishes and what they would do together. When asked how long they have known each other, Alyse said, “Since elementary and middle school. I met Adelle and Kendall and Nora in middle school, and then others went to elementary school with me. Me and Emma though, we’ve been friends since we were like itty-bitty. We’ve known each other a while.” These deep relationships with each other remained a theme throughout the class in talking with students, but the economic impacts may have been always present without their acknowledgement of it.

Logan lived with his father when he started high school, but his father passed away later that year. Moving in with his grandparents, Logan had to move across the county in another area but he maintained his father’s address so he would not have to change schools. The economic situation of the county arose during one of our interviews, and Logan connected his understanding of it to a popular movie he had seen. Reflecting on the movie, Logan said:

[The movie] has just become this huge thing. A South Korean storyteller made this story in 2008 or 2009 and it has just become the biggest story in the world right now and
everybody is talking about it. It’s that type of impact, the effects of capitalism. It’s pretty much the underlying theme of rich versus poor, and the way that capitalism can really beat down a section of a community up until they are willing to break certain moral codes. Not to get into politics or anything like that, but I would say that working-class people and people who may not be as fortunate as others have a certain sense of desperation when it comes to who they vote for and who they think represents them on a governmental level.

Logan articulated many of the tensions that shaped students’ activities throughout the semester and impacted their meaning making practices. During a small group discussion about Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, students drew up on the economic and political tensions to further understand the novel. They expressed anxiety about their personal privacy and about the manipulation they felt in their media experiences. Comparing the technology in Orwell’s novel to his own experience with technology, Logan said, “Deep-fake technologies and that sort of thing in a political context is really terrifying to me.” Alton added to this statement, saying:

> You can see it politically anywhere where you’re having a lot of angles being shown supporting one side and then later on their supporting the completely opposite, when neither of them are completely right instead of focusing on the main issue. Everything that has happened recently has seemed to become so political and so driven to separate, which I think fits with this book a lot, that instead of it being a concern with humanity itself it’s just been, “Oh, this is political now and we’re going to use it.”

These student experiences in understanding and meaning making became more pronounced when students were pulled into smaller groups for discussion. They recognized many of the social tensions in their environment to make meaning of the texts they encountered, especially in
the context of Orwell where they believed the text world more closely represented their own lived experiences.

The Global Pandemic

During the global pandemic related to Covid-19 from 2020-2021, schools moved to online learning formats or hybrid formats for social distancing. Brookside High School went online for the first half of the pandemic and then oved to hybrid during the second half of the academic year. Many students, however, elected to remain online only. These experiences left an impact on students, often described by their social isolation and the anxiety they felt. With reading, Matt said he had not read a book over the past two years before Ms. Young’s class. He said, “It’s hard to read a book online. In online school over Zoom it’s hard to read a book. When we were online, I could do all of my work in one day, and I had a job too. So really school was like 3rd or 4th down the line on my priorities because I was doing other stuff that I like to do.”

Being outside of the structures of the school environment allowed students to pursue interests of their own, which were not always academic connected to their in-class experience. The social isolation and the lack of structured experiences, like reading texts and sharing textual experiences together, may have had an impact. In describing her experiences and views of this impact, Ms. Young said:

I feel like I cried once a month last year. Gosh, it was so hard. I felt like there was a group of students, and I’m going to be objective about this, that self-reported anxiety, depression, that I just felt like I couldn’t push them because I didn’t want to be the one to have it all crumble. Their physical, mental, and social well-being is more important than their grades. It’s that kind of paradox: do we have more mental health issues because we’ve said it’s okay and it’s more in the news, or do we have more mental health issues because we’re
exposing a very real problem? I’m not the one to say. But the pandemic caused a lot of problems. Being socially isolated in this maybe not so great environment, not having that structured social interaction with peers and teachers. It was horrible. I know they’ve all struggled because of it. Grace has struggled, I know.

During the pandemic, Grace turned to reading as an escape. It was during this period that she found her love of reading and discovered novels that delve into human psychology. She said, “I think that the pandemic had a big part to play in why I wanted to read. It’s just an escape. Everyone suffered, everyone’s mental health suffered.”

In reading *Friday Black*, a book of short stories by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, Marcus recognized some of his experiences mirrored in the story of “Through the Flash.” As a time-loop narrative in which each day repeated over and over, Marcus reflected on how the pandemic affected him. In part of that reflection, he said:

It certainly did feel like the days were repeated. I don’t know. The pandemic was, well, I won’t say difficult time. I was taken out of my daily life, the one that I was used to, and I was put into isolation basically. It did feel like some days repeated and repeated and repeated and repeated. But I feel like it would be unfair to call it a time loop because the lack of consequences is just not there. If I didn’t go to a Zoom call, I’d get marked absent and they’d call my parents, and they would yell at me for like two hours. There were still consequences during the pandemic. I think the pandemic, during the quarantine specifically, it affected me. I really went antisocial during that time. I didn’t talk to anybody. Am I a different person now than when I was in quarantine? Yeah. I’m not going to lie to you, I got a little bit depressed during quarantine. I was always by myself. I had
nothing but my thoughts and, like anyone stuck with their thoughts, they thought about everything and nothing at all.

The class-based discussions of *Beowulf*, *Othello*, and even *Nineteen Eighty-Four* rarely reflected the impact their past experiences had had on their understanding of texts and meaning making experiences. Student remained within the boundaries of the shared experiences within the context of the class in the ways they made sense of those texts. Yet, outside of the larger group discussions, students used the texts to speculate on the meanings of both the texts and their experiences in the lived world. In Marcus’s description above, his own isolation during the pandemic becomes viewed through his reading of the particular short story that hints at the ways the text world and the lived world come directly into contact with each other. Marcus’s statement about consequences reflected his own experiences with the story’s protagonist of Ama who has no consequences and is attempting to figure out who she is. These storied worlds become for students forms of social interaction that impact their understandings of self and others in significantly meaningful ways that they may carry forward with them into the future or may use as temporary experiences in the moment.

**Textual Interactions as a Lens to Talk about the Present and the Future**

These narrative experiences suggest that they work to construct or add onto student identities and student voices that are always directed to present conditions and potentially toward future activities. These practices also function as a means of expanding a sense of inwardness and self-knowledge that provides greater experiences from which to draw on. As teachers, we would like to believe that these textual experiences help to create opportunities for readers to change the world in positive ways that mirror the text worlds they interact in. Yet, many of these potential changes, as viewed through this study at this particular site, suggest gradients of change
that are not always visible but are potentially present. As noted in the both Acts I and II, students were drawn into text often by those spaces of resonance and recognition. These spaces may segment texts in ways that students draw from particular elements while disregarding or ignoring other aspects of the text at hand. Marcus, for example, could take up characteristics of Iago that aligned with his own sense of himself while ignoring other, less favorable aspects of the role. As is noted below, elements of texts and texts worlds can be taken up and used as a lens through which to view the present and potentially the future as well.

In reading Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the small group discussions with students produced conversations drawn out of the narrative that functioned as a lens through which students viewed their present world. In these situations, the narrative helped to structure thinking and provide a means of measuring and understanding present situations. Logan, Alton, Heath, and Marcus highlighted ways Orwell’s text helped them to think about their lived experiences and how society was constructed. After discussion of the text in more detail, they narrowed their focus on the character of Julia and her role in the novel.

LOGAN: [Julia] probably the most interesting character.

ALTON: She’s aware that what’s happening is not right, but she doesn’t know anything different. With everything happening in today’s world, we know what’s happening is not right but what’s there to do about it, you know?

HEATH: How Ms. Young made the contrast between smart phones and stuff, that’s a big thing for us. But before that, we wouldn’t know how it would be not to have them. We’ve always had them. She doesn’t realize there’s a different world out there.
ALTON: Well, I think it goes beyond cell phones to being blind to the truth. We don’t know, especially like the stuff that happened in Michigan, we’re like, “Welp, there goes another one.”

Alton refers to the mass school shooting on November 30, 2021 in Michigan in which four students were killed and seven people were injured. The students move through issues of privacy with cellphones toward society’s structures of knowing and the moral implications of living together as a community. In doing so, the students shift the focus from Orwell’s text onto the experiences of their own lives as a means to make sense of both. Continuing their conversation, they said:

LOGAN: When it gets to the point where something doesn’t even make the news, something to that scale, it wasn’t as big as some shootings but still three children are dead.

ALTON: Four.

LOGAN: It’s scary for that not to make nearly the top of the news headlines now. It just happens, you know.

MARCUS: What happens, happens.

ALTON: Like with Nineteen Eighty-Four, it’s really just that we’ve been desensitized to the fact that it happens so much. Like, she’s been desensitized to all of these people being vaporized and all of the bombings. It’s the same concept but just a different thing happening.

MARCUS: One thing that this book has kind of awakened in me is a certain fear of the falsification of history. Like, how do I know that Alexander the Great existed?

LOGAN: Yeah, like you weren’t there!
MARCUS: I wasn’t there. Someone could have just written it down.

LOGAN: And what’s even scarier is how in the book that time between falsification and the present day is shortening when, like, Julia mentioned something that happened four years ago, but she didn’t even remember it.

HEATH: We live in a free country. As I was saying earlier, we have the ability to sit here and talk about this right now. We live in America. Yeah, it has problems, but we don’t live in…

MACRUS: …North Korea or China.

ALTON: I think the same thing with that is that we don’t know a world that is different. You know the freedoms you have, and I’m not saying that the freedoms aren’t bad, but we don’t know more freedom or less freedom. This is all we know.

LOGAN: Well, we’re not 100% free. We gave consent to have those freedoms taken away for our own sake. It sounds bad to say, but under consent of the governed we agree to have laws so that we don’t have the freedom to do anything that we’d like to do. But I get what you’re saying. Now, there are people who feel like they can abuse the freedoms they have now, that’s how you get shootings that happen. They feel like they can just do it and not suffer any consequences.

From the social issues related to governmental power and control in the novel, students examined aspects of their own society. Their conversation considered the tension of a free society in relationship to the consequences of having individual freedoms. This discussion also weighted the moral dimensions of social freedom, such in Logan’s “they can just do it and not suffer any consequences” that recognizes certain limitations to society’s forms of control. As students, this conversation also positions them directly in relation to these mass shootings,
echoing the aspects of the novel that they draw forward in saying that “[Julia has] been
desensitized to all of these people being vaporized and all of the bombings” as he noted how
these situations of the novel and life are parallel to each other: “It’s the same concept but just a
different thing happening.” These statements underscore the vulnerability of their social
positions in the world, in a society where schools are sites of violence, marking a way of life that
impinges on their literacy practices so that these issues come forward for them when recognized
in texts.

In addition, the question the limits of knowledge and knowing within a society as a
means to understand what is happening and how it might construct relationships within it were
also part of the students’ conversation. These were powerful issues about their current lives as
directly related to the novel. Marcus raised the question of knowledge by stating: “One thing that
this book has kind of awakened in me is a certain fear of the falsification of history.” While this
“fear” may have existed before reading, the textual world of the novel highlighted (or,
“awakened”) the issues of knowledge and knowing through the ways it is controlled by outside
forces in such a way as to deepen this fear within him and others. This aspect of truth was also
part of the current political environment of the late fall during the study so that students drew
upon these larger social conversations to make sense of both the novel and their lived world.
Their experiences and their understandings of the novel intertwine and form a web of
relationality, or intertextuality, that was mutually informing of both the text and the social world.

These types of discussions with students outside of the teacher-guided conversations
about the texts within the classroom lead to forms of dialectical thinking that moved between
texts, others in the conversation, and the lived world for the students. In a similar but separate
situation, Alyse, Nora, Kendall, and Adelle raised related concerns about their own
Positionalities based on reading Orwell’s novel. Their small-group discussion also occurred outside of the classroom during extra time where they could openly reflect on their reading and how they made sense of it.

**ALYSE:** I think this book teaches you how to be grateful for your freedom and all that you allow, because they don’t get to express themselves. It makes people learn to understand each other because it could easily happen that everyone just goes tunnel-visioned and believes what they want to believe and not be open. That creates a world of manipulation, which is kind of how I see that their party has done. They are manipulating everything that they have always known, and they want them to see it this way only and they don’t want them to express who they are and what they believe in. I feel like this book is a warning to that. It only takes one person to manipulate it that way. I think this is a warning to remember to always just be open minded and be grateful for freedom, I guess.

**NORA:** I feel like at this age it’s kind of a weird situation because I’m 18 and I’m an adult, but I’m still in high school and I still live with my parents. It’s like they want to give you that freedom but at the same time they can’t when you can’t actually have it. We’re all at this age where you’re becoming an adult and you’re having to take on those responsibilities, but certain people already have them while they still live with their parents. It’s complicated to know right now what you’re allowed and what you’re not allowed to do.

**KENDALL:** There are days when my mom is very lenient and other days when she’s not. Not only is it hard to know the boundaries with that freedom but also it’s like it depends on your parents’ moods.
ALYSE: Sometimes I think parents forget that we’re about to leave and be on our own, and they want to keep the reigns as long as they can, but it really starts to sever the relationship because you need to learn how to do certain things. If you don’t allow us to go and learn and make mistakes, we’re just going to not know what to do.

NORA: Like Alyse was saying, if you don’t make the mistakes before you’re out on your own then when you’re out on your own, those mistakes are going to be 10 times worse.

ADELLE: I don’t know why but I feel like parents think kids our age have no opinion and they’re always wrong.

Similar to the conversation among Logan and others, these students focused on the issues of freedom in the novel while redirecting their understanding of it from the text back into their own world. Nora connects these ideas of freedom to her own sense of being an emerging adult on the cusp of graduation and the tensions of being a certain age while still in high school and living with her parents, which drew upon the constraints the students experienced from this position. For Alyse and others, the social control of the novel is directly mirrored by their own lived experiences with their parents at home. As Alyse recognizes, the relationship with family becomes more difficult as they begin to express their own ideas, voice, and agency within that context. In continuing this discussion, the students turned to the issue of voice and agency as they noted that they often felt unheard.

NORA: At this time, you could have an opinion or you could think something and just because someone else doesn’t have the same opinion, you’re wrong. I feel like higher authorities and parents think that we’re young and we can’t have a voice or we can’t have a say in things. I feel like they often manipulate our feelings or
put stuff in our head just so they can say that something’s true, but in our minds we know that it is not. We can’t speak up because they have such a higher authority.

ADELLE: Like with my parents, when I respond they think I’m talking back and I’m being disrespectful.

ALYSE: But then they want us to stand up for ourselves when we are on our own.

ADELLE: I just don’t say anything anymore, I just don’t talk.

KENDALL: If something happens and I’m upset about something, like if my mom did something, and I try to tell her, she threatens to take stuff away. But then she’s always told me that, ever since I was little I’ve always been a baby and I’m just very sensitive, and she’s like, “You just need to stand up for yourself.” But then when I do stand up for myself, it’s wrong and I get in trouble.

ALYSE: I’m not bashing my parents, they’re great, but parents aren’t perfect. They make mistakes. But it’s like sometimes they think they don’t have to learn from them so then you have to take the blow for it and it just kind of sucks sometimes.

NORA: Like you were saying in this school, if you wanted to voice your own opinion or be yourself, there are so many negative things that could happen. You can get bullied online and people will talk about you. So many things can happen if you voice your opinion here. It’s not even just here, it’s everywhere, and that’s a constraint on everybody’s opinion.

The students expressed the feelings and experiences of lacking agency and voice in social spaces with adults in their lives. The students further connected this issue with both parents and adults, including many teachers, in the school. They lacked places, they said, where they could be heard
as well as recognized for their own opinions. These expressions of experience were filtered directly through the reading experiences of the students as they encountered situations in the texts that called forward these affective contexts in their own world. While the students may have already felt these limitations for themselves, the text supported how they attended to those feelings, and, while this particular novel does not offer a model for how they may navigate these difficulties, it does provide an intersubjective understanding of the characters in the novel and of each other that may assist with how they think and structure those feelings going forward.

These smaller, non-teacher-led discussions allowed students to connect to texts in different ways, but ways significantly different than in the classroom during a full class discussion. Students connected texts to their lived experiences as a means of understanding and illuminating their own lived worlds. The conversation with the Logan and others above takes a very different tone then with the Alyse and her group here, yet each drew out similar themes from the text to understand their own positionalities. As these conversations occurred at the end of the study as the class’s semester was ending and the students would be moving on to other classroom settings, it was unclear how much of the texts these students would carry with them into these new settings. Yet, it is clear here how these texts served to modify and deepen their understandings of both the text and themselves in these moments. Orwell’s novel may continually persist and serve, in this respect, as a link in their knowledge about the nature of freedom and individual agency in the world.

At the close of the final Act, we see the wide breadth of literacy practices of the classroom and the individual students as the interact with and making meaning with texts. These practices display the potential actions that students in ELA classrooms may make in the context of the class as a way of constructing understanding about text worlds and lived worlds. Each of
these literacy moves offers the potential for sharing intersubjective knowledge both with textual characters and with lived others and shifting textual understanding into forms of agency and resources for future behaviors. At this point, we also have a complex understanding of these literacy practices as ways students become entangled in texts toward supporting their thinking and development. This general narrative of the semester considers these complexities through Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimension space narrative structure that moves inward and outward in students’ lives; across past, present, and future; and located in the particular place of Brookside High School at this period of time in the socio-political context of this rural county.

**Epilogue: Marcus and the Recognition of the Importance of Voices**

At the end of the academic semester as the class was ending and the students were preparing to present their projects, the students were looking forward to their future opportunities. Grace had been accepted to a university in driving distance from home where she would major in psychology, at least to start her experience in higher education in order to see if she liked it or not. Matt had been in negotiations with a small private college to play quarter back for the school’s football team starting in the fall. Ava had been accepted to study nursing at a school in the mountains. Marcus was still unsure of his direction except that he would start at the community college and that he would finally read the Ayn Rand novels. For Marcus, his project for his Senior Capstone had been shaped by the journey of the semester. He changed the topic multiple times and finally pursued an investigation on the role of memory. “It’s the importance of memory and the importance of being remembered,” he told me, echoed from his reading of *Friday Black* and other areas of his reading throughout the semester. He continued on and said about his project:
My paper was really just pretense to do my project. I made a bit of a poor grade on it because I didn’t really care about the paper. It’s the project that I really wanted. The project is just an attempt to make sure that everyone I know, everyone that I love, is remembered in some way. I’m just taking interviews and collecting stories and I’m going to put them up on a website. Hopefully, that website is going to live there forever. So, say, one thousand years from now, someone accidently clicks on a link and finds our stories. I just want us to be remembered in some way. In the interviews, the overarching question is just, “Tell me your story.” And from there they tell me the most defining life events they can. They tell me about their lives from as far back as they can remember to the present day, and I ask them questions in between to get more details and such, and that’s really it.

Marcus articulated the value of telling stories both about himself and about others, the people he loves in this case. The arc of Marcus’s experiences throughout the semester were always a process of working out and working through questions he had about himself and his own place in this community that was supported through his reading experiences. This snapshot of Marcus, and all of the others, was only an image of a work in progress and that continues into a future beyond the boundaries of the school and the semester of data collection for this study, suggestive of how reading has future orientations and becomes tools and resources for the construction of future selves and future activities.

In addition, I recognized through Marcus’s description that my presence in the room had also had an impact on how meaning is constructed and shared with others. Entering the room as a researcher with a voice recorder in my hand, Marcus had asked me earlier in the semester where he could purchase a recorder like mine. He was already thinking about how to capture the voices of his school peers, how to collect and preserve their stories, and how they might be sustained.
through time. Marcus’s direction toward this can be viewed through his own embodiment of the voices of others and his textual interactions across the semester from *Beowulf* (“...sometimes a man just wants to be remembered, you know what I mean? Like, Beowulf is not going to be forgotten...”) to Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah’s book of short stories and Mrs. Nagel’s question in “Through the Flash” in which she asks, “I see, and that means you’ve been two different people?” Mrs. Nagel’s question resonated with Marcus, he said, because solidified for him an ongoing question that he had been wrestling with about the nature of being a whole person caught in time and for whom one’s actions in the world had agency and consequences. For Marcus, these texts served as a way of constructing himself as a human in the world.

While the literacy practices of the classroom were important to demonstrate how students move into texts, recognize aspects of themselves, and shift those texts into their lived experiences, the meaning making opportunities were expanded when students had the opportunity to draw upon the ways of knowing and being in the world that existed outside of the classroom. Students deeply explored their sense of self and the meaning of the socio-economic-political world around them using these literacy practices. Importantly, the texts provided a variety of “others” with whom they encountered and, at times, absorbed voices from for immediate use or potentially future resources to carry with them forward.
“Making present what is otherwise un-conceivable is the very accomplishment of language.”

- Marie-Cécile Bertau (2014)

**Introduction**

The turn in literacy studies toward New Literacies Studies (Gee, 2000, 2012; Cazden, et. al., 1996; Street, 1995, 1996) and a sociocultural perspective in the 1990s highlighted the ways that reading practices are more broadly involved with social activities than with the previous conceptions of literacy skills developed by individuals and texts in isolation. We now know how textual understanding and meaning making are constructed by textual interactions that draw from the reader’s involvement with the wide social contexts of communities, their ideologies and histories, and the abiding power social structures that provide resources for interpretation and knowledge. Popova (2015) highlights how narratives are an act of organizing knowledge and social identities as they position readers toward an activity of intersubjective sense-making that is often deliberate and goal directed. In addition, Moje and Luke (2009) argue that literacies and narratives construct identities and selves toward shaping ways of being in the world by directing one’s attention, as they quote Bourdieu (1990, p. 53), to “things to do or not do, things to say or not say, in relation to a probably ‘upcoming future’” (p. 423). Drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, Moje and Luke (2009) argue that the self is constructed by the effect of embodied practices that links past experiences to present action. This construction of self, importantly, uses the cultural resources that have been internalized as forms of agency for oneself toward new ways of being and understanding the world. Through this activity, humans carry cultural tools
and resources with them that orient them toward certain futures and, at times, modifies those resources in order to re-orient themselves in other ways.

This understanding of the reading process impacts how students in the ELA classroom move forward with their encounter with texts. Teachers, as will be addressed, may more intentionally draw connections for students between text worlds and lived worlds, especially as these texts offer characters for direct interaction and engagement and provide opportunities for recognition and recontextualization. Further, this knowledge of reading occurs in a time of social change, questions of knowledge, and climate breakdown. As the writer Richard Powers (2021) has noted, developing “fictive kinships,” relationships of kinship with fictional others, may be vital in how humans successfully navigate and move into the future with so many uncertainties. Powers suggests that readers develop kinships with fictional characters who can provide ongoing relationships and models of social change that are sustainable in uncertain times. Fictive kinships are a directly useful concept in this study as the relationships offer intersubjective knowledge that supports greater self-development and a widening of one’s perspective on social environments.

This research study has focused on how adolescent readers in a rural high school classroom use literacy strategies to make meaning of the texts they encounter and, at times, interact with textual characters as a way of understanding texts, selves, and their communities and lived world. Through the interaction with social voices not immediately present in their environments, readers were able to interact with and embody voices and perspectives that enabled a production of inwardness that may be used as a resource for future activities. As suggested by Moje and Luke (2009) and Bourdieu (1990), readers may unknowingly negotiate textual meanings with invisible social dynamics, made up of the social histories, political forces,
and economic issues of their world, that impact those activities of understanding. This chapter aims to discuss the findings of the study as presented in the previous chapter to better understand these literacy practices and dynamics. The following sections address the findings of the study, discuss potential implications of those findings, and provide a conclusion to the study as a whole.

Discussion of Findings

While Vygotsky (1987) recognized that language is the primary tool humans use for development, interaction, and understanding, it is Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) work that specifically examined humans *languaged* interactions with texts and others, highlighting the sociological relationship between humans and the literary world. As Bakhtin (1986) writes, “All of each individual’s words are divided into the categories of his own and others’, but the boundaries between them can change, and a tense dialogic struggle takes place on the boundaries” (p. 143). Literary texts, as Bakhtin claimed, are dialogic and multivocal in nature as they contain the voices of others along with the potential for readers’ interaction with otherness in the reading process. Texts, therefore, constitute the boundaries which individual readers cross into toward interaction and exchange with those voices. As Nielsen (2002) writes of Bakhtin’s perspective, “In interpersonal relations the subject steps over to the other but then returns back into the self” (p. 38). This movement of stepping into relationship with textual others and then back to oneself is viewed multiple times in the study, but may be highlighted in Alyse’s interactions with Shakespeare’s Emilia and with Grace’s interactions with Desdemona. Of Desdemona, Grace said, “She is so frustrating, but I understand her, and I relate to her because it’s really hard to go against what everyone else wants you to do.” For both students, these characters function like forms of kinships in which they interact and see parts of themselves mirrored through the other. In stepping toward the characters, both Alyse and Grace interact with these fictional roles but
return back to themselves. In this movement, they return to themselves with more language and experience of the social world than they had before the interaction, providing models of voices or behaviors which may modify their own through the process.

These experiences demonstrate how knowledge of subjectivity, through social interactions and the social exchanges of reading, emerge through co-experiencing. In this context, Popova (2015) argues that reading is social interaction, akin to human interaction, as readers encounter texts and textual others in an exchange of shared voices and co-constructed meanings. Much like a dance between two people, Popova explains, these interactions are forms of joint attention and joint intentionality that coordinate bodies – real and textual – in shared exchange. Meaning is constructed through that coordinating activity, across the span of interaction, and takes place in-between bodies in the joint experience of the shared dance (Bertau, 2014c; Lysaker, 2018). “Our human world,” Popova (2015) writes, “is a social world, and it takes place in large measure outside of our brains, in the common shared activity that is life” (pp. 54-55). While many studies over the last twenty years have examined these language experiences through the frameworks of Vygotsky and Bakhtin from a sociocultural perspective, this study reconsiders these frameworks through an understanding of shared social interaction and the co-construction of meaning in this process of reading and encounters with texts.

Ms. Young’s classroom and its students represent the voices constructed through their various histories and social experiences in the rural Piedmont high school of Brookside. The boundary of the school, as we have suggested, signifies the crossing into potential zones of contact with voices that affirm social meanings within the community of students and teachers. Students, as readers, may also come into contact with voices residing outside of those immediate contexts of place and time offering new perspectives or challenges to the seemingly solidified
meanings they hold. Drawing on Bakhtin, Pratt (1991) describes contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 34). The reading experiences in the class provided opportunities for students to interact with and, potentially, struggle against these boundaries of textual others. These interactions, as we have viewed, often enter into coordinated co-experiencing with the textual other, like with Alyse and Grace, that served to position and orient the reader in particular directions in their lived world. As was noted, the senior honors English class read texts from British literature between *Beowulf* and Orwell’s Nineteen *Eighty-Four*, a focus from this perspective that is required by state standards, during the semester. This study focused on the major texts that the class read because that is where the students spent the most time with reading and interpretation. Because of this, those experiences offered the most potential for insights into their reading practices.

**Encounters with Literature, Textual Worlds, and Textual Others**

The study identified various means of interaction and meaning development which were identified as literacy practices in the class. The findings reviewed the supporting literacy activities structured within the classroom practices, with a focus on three primary areas: 1) lecture notes and essays; 2) classroom and individual discussions; and 3) drawing on previous knowledge and experiences.

With each text the class encountered, Ms. Young structured the experience through lectures and PowerPoint presentations on the era in which the text was written in order to locate the text’s potential meanings within social orders and ideologies of the period. In addition, she provided reading guides, which were a series of both concrete plot questions and abstract thematic questions about each text. Often, as we saw, these questions provided a focus for
students to guide their reading of the text and to offer a way making meaning of the material. Ms. Young used these guides to interrupt the reading process and to explain important passages. These interruptions became moments characterized by the Socratic method in which Ms. Young raised questions from the reading guide and students responded until they had reached, often with her support, the correct answer. These instances also provided many of the points of class discussion around the texts, guiding students to the central themes and issues where they may continue conversation in smaller settings, when available to them. Drawing from previous experiences and from other texts, like both books and movies, supported student-led discussions and their meaning-making activities. For example, we saw how Matt very often understood narratives through his index of movies and by his activity of bringing the action of one text (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for example) into comparison with the action of the other (such as *Red Dawn*). Each of these methods of developing understanding around the text being studied presented students with the potential to further build understanding and meaning with the text. In each one of these forms of support for the text intersubjective and relational co-experiences of understanding often became a way of interacting with the text for deeper understanding and meaning construction.

With Shakespeare’s *Othello*, for example, Ms. Young provided a range of issues from the Elizabethan Age in her initial lecture before the reading of the play started. In the Findings, we saw how Alyse connected the information about Queen Elizabeth’s life and her rule of England to Alyse’s understanding of the play, which became the main focus of her paper concluding the Shakespeare unit. Ms. Young’s presentation mentioned how the queen “handled” the royal suitors of Europe who were sent to court Elizabeth while she simultaneously worked to protect the integrity and sovereignty of England. This information about the queen, which was part of a
broader lecture on the times, was notably focused on the queen’s relational experiences in her role and positioned her as a woman who had to “stand up to” men to substantiate her status as the national leader. As we saw, Alyse’s links to this knowledge served as a lens for her own understanding the play and, in particular, the role of Emilia. On the surface, this way of meaning making appears as a transference of knowledge from one situation to another, an essential practice for students in general and one viewed within the classroom multiple times over the course of the study. Yet, our knowledge of Alyse through the continuity of the semester helps us understand that these connections informed how she brought her own subjective positionality into relation with both the queen and the character of Emilia as a means to more deeply understand herself and her own positionality in her lived environment.

Alyse responded to the play’s role of women through her connection to Queen Elizabeth in stating, “I think about the idea that back in that time era that women were not significant.” Yet, her knowledge of the queen, as gained through the lecture, helped her to view the agency and strength of women in the play and consider how the women were represented as enabled to “stand up” to the men in the narrative. Alyse’s reflection on these positions notably considered how the women changed throughout Othello and the impact it had on her as a reader: “[The women in the play] were not equal to men, and they had to do as they were told, and throughout the play you just saw [Emilia] grow to become this very independent woman who stood up for herself…It kind of inspired me in a way to not let anyone push you whether they are male or female, not to let them push you around and stuff like that.” When reading Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four, Alyse used this understanding of women’s positionality again as she considered Julia and Winston’s relationship in the novel. More generally, she said, “I think this book teaches you how to be grateful for your freedom and all that you allow, because they don’t get to express
themselves,” reflective of the power or powerlessness that women may experience. Yet, for Alyse, she understood her own position and her agency as a female adolescent on the cusp of adulthood as being diminished by her environment and her relationships with others. “I think parents forget that we’re about to leave and be on our own,” Alyse said, “and they want to hold the reigns as long as they can, but it really starts to sever the relationship.” Like Emilia in the play, Alyse articulated a desire to embody her own voice and agency so that she could experience relationships where she is acknowledged and heard. Speaking of her parents, she added, “[T]hey want us to stand up for ourselves when we are on our own,” recognizing her emerging, but unrealized, position as an independent adult. Through these textual events, Alyse recognized herself through these texts and sought to gain agency from this textual knowledge about her own positionality in the world. While Alyse may or may not be cognizant of these connections that she worked through in relationship to these texts and the characters, these textual relationships leave a trace of these social practices (Pahl, 2008) within her that may be used as resources for future behaviors as they orient her toward a sense of independence and social strength for herself. These activities, additionally, may modify one’s habitus, that way of being formed from birth to integrated forms of community interaction so that Alyse’s own positionality as an emerging adult and a woman may find new forms that are counter to those available to her within her community.

We can view Marcus’s experiences with texts across the semester in similar ways. Where Alyse took up the perspective of the characters with whom she engaged in texts, Marcus often took up both the perspectives and the voices of those in which he interacted. His role as Iago in the class became a way for him to embody a specific disposition directed both to his peers and toward himself. During the class reading of Othello, he was often referred to as Iago even outside
of the act of reading. For him, Iago represented forms of social intelligence and characterizations of superiority over others in which the role displayed strong social agency. “I like Iago because he was smart with it,” Marcus reflected on the character, and he added, “I love intellect.” As a reader, Marcus readily drew from his past reading of Game of Thrones and found himself strongly connected to the character of Tyrion Lannister, a character Marcus described as similar to Iago. About Lannister, Marcus said, “All he has is his brains…he’s arguably the smartest character in the book. He manipulates, he does what he has to do to come out on top. That’s what I’ve always loved, taking advantage of the only thing you’ve got.” Marcus’s comments reflect how he feels a lack of social capital (“taking advantage of the only thing you’ve got”), and how social capital may be gained through his interactions and revoicing of these textual characters.

Marcus’s own utterances re-voiced these character roles through his conversation with others and in the study interviews. His love of intellect positioned him toward the reading of philosophy. Marcus was viewed by others as a reader interested in philosophical writing, and both Ms. Young and the school’s librarian bought Ayn Rand books for him to read. These forms of address from others align with Holland, Lachicotte, Jr., Skinner and Cain’s (1998) statement in which they say, “People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are” (p. 3). Marcus used the voices and positionality of these characters as a form of social and linguistic capital in the school, gaining value and recognition for himself by aligning his identity with those characters from whom he could transfer and borrow agency and capital for his own use.

In the situation for Marcus as one of only two black students in the classroom, the books assigned in class were from a British perspective, where even Othello’s identity in the text was never clearly addressed in the class. From this view, Marcus’s reading activities may function as
mirroring his reflections on Lannister’s character in which he said, “That’s what I’ve always loved, taking advantage of the only thing you’ve got,” so that Marcus may be capitalizing on ways to gain recognition where his own position may be socially marginalized by the broader functions of the schooling institution. These issues were never addressed by Marcus or others within the class, perhaps as a manifestation of how these issues go unaddressed as they are not perceived as potential issues by the majority of people in the community. In an interview with Grace when asked about the nature of the school community, she described the school’s racial demographics and the subtle forms of racism she had witnessed, from the perspective of a white woman, as an issue. These elements reflect forms of institutionalized habitus that allows a domination of certain perspectives and values.

At the end of the semester, Marcus started reading Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah’s (2018) *Friday Black*, a book of short stories from a specific black perspective on American society. He read this book on his own in the back of class one day while others worked on assignments, a text that clearly drew him into it. The ideas and the characters provided for him a counterweight to the texts he had encountered through the semester, even pushing him to reconsider the philosophical position of Ayn Rand who he readily voiced throughout the semester. Adjei-Brenyah’s writing focuses on community support and how the individual arises out of community activity, a perspective counter to Rand’s philosophical view. As a site of struggle at these social borders of centrifugal and centripetal forces (Bakhtin, 1981) of meaning, Marcus used these texts to encounter the voices of others who were not present in the texts of the classroom and took up those voices for himself as a means of recognition within the school environment and as a way to position himself as resistant to dominant forces. In addition, these texts served Marcus as a way of producing and expanding forms of consciousness and
inwardness about the lived world and its social relations. Over the arc of the semester, Marcus wrestled with understandings of himself using the texts that he encountered, arriving at the end of the semester at his goal of capturing the voices and stories of all of his friends in the school as a way to be remembered. These literacy activities and strategies suggest the entanglement of identity and the development of that identity through the social navigation of the school and indicates these experiences are always, like narratives, future directed. Marcus’s experience over the semester, additionally, may be viewed through Ricoeur’s use of Aristotelian *anagnorisis* in which Marcus himself comes to a moment of clarity and “knowing” about his life’s narrative experiences (Dowling, 2011).

Through the work of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, we come to understand how the voices and interactions of others produce and structure an internal sense of self. Just as humans internalize external activities as part of their developmental becoming that shape cognition and identity simultaneously, acts of reading – as mediated, social interaction with otherness – shape both the inner and outer speech that constitutes the dialogical self. Considering Bakhtin’s emphasis on interiority, Nielsen (2002) writes, “The subject is always becoming itself by entering or choosing to enter into translinguistic communication, or aesthetic acts of communion” (p. 60). Further responding to Bakhtin’s contributions, Thompson (1981) noted how Ricoeur highlighted that “the text possesses an inherent plurivocity that allows it to be construed in more than one way” (p. 53), providing multiple ways of understanding and meaning creation of a text by individuals and by the same person over and over again. With Alyse and Marcus, as well as many of the other participants in the study, we can see how the reading process operates as an intersubjective exchange, in what Bakhtin calls a “transgredient outsidedness,” in which a reader takes on aspects of the other while remaining oneself (Nielsen, 2002). Readers do not lose their
autonomy, as some have questioned of the reading experience, but rather through Bakhtinian transgradient relations readers interact with texts as social experiences in which shared meanings and aligned co-experiences together create intersubjective understandings that may produce and expand a reader’s sense of inwardness. These productions of self are manifested in how readers direct their attention to the lived world, such as Alyse’s awareness of social relationships in which she may need to “stand up” for herself or Marcus’s immediate activities in which he engaged with students and teachers in the school as someone interested in philosophy and intellect.

Because these activities of reading and social interaction become internalized and enter into one’s structuring sense of self-organization and inner/outer speech, they consequently also become the internal resources which a person carries within them as potential ways of being and strategies for future activity. Across the span of the semester and from her reading activities during the global pandemic, Grace exemplifies the multiple ways students might enter into and interact with texts. Grace claimed that she did not like reading very much until she discovered romance novels while a high school student. The plots of these romance novels, as she described, were relationally structured and showed how people think and feel in the world. “[W]hen I’m reading,” Grace said, “I find there are emotions I’ve felt that I never knew how to put into words and so it just gets me.” In articulating the relationship between language and embodied feelings, Grace described how putting words to experiences shapes who she is, offering possibilities for deeper understanding of self and others responsive to the lived world. Grace further described her experience with a particular romance novel by saying, “The main character was talking about how she was curious about how people worked and how they thought, what they thought, and how they process things, and I was like, ‘I’m like that’.” In this statement, Grace recognized
herself ("I’m like that") in the textual other of the novel’s character in a way that further produces and constructs an interior self. Related to this reflection, Grace said that she was interested in psychology, a field she purported to have not understood well before reading these novels. Her interest in “how people worked and how they thought, what they thought, and how they process things” directed her own engagements toward research on psychology in general and childhood trauma in particular. As she researched for her capstone project, Grace deepened her knowledge about psychology which further influenced her later reading in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when she described, in psychological terms, the *transference* of emotions between Winston and Julia. Grace’s language use across the semester, and from before in her experience with romance novels, shaped the ways she was able to describe herself and her lived world, constructed by means of the dialectical relationship between the reader and the text. As her future goals of pursuing psychology in college, instead of nursing, shifted, we might further acknowledge how her reading activities constructed an identity and positionality that reoriented her to a future that would potentially not have been available to her without those experiences. As Holquist (1990) writes, “We see the world by authoring it” (p. 84).

Even within the focal group of student participants, not all students had these experiences. Jacob admittedly only understood the readings through the interactions with those around him as he was reluctant to directly engage in the reading process himself. From interviewing him, Jacob referenced reading Jim Kjelgaard’s (1992) *Big Red*, a novel about the relationship between a boy and a dog, mirroring his own experiences with his dog. This relational perspective clearly had an impact on Jacob as he returned to re-read the novel several years after his initial encounter with it in middle school. Like many of the adolescent males in Smith and Wilhelm’s (2002) study, Jacob saw no practical value in reading as, in many ways,
Beowulf, Othello, and Nineteen Eighty-Four provided no direct reference to or relevance of his own lived experiences. These texts, all from a British perspective, provide forms of social capital within the context of the school environment, yet this capital may not be recognized and taken up by students like Jacob where a more pragmatic, relevant consideration of texts holds more value. From what Jacob offered in interviews, it is unclear if his lack of reading may stem from a lack of relevance in the texts he encountered in school or the social impact of reading ability and confidence that he viewed in many, like Ava, around him. Instead of reading, he turned to peers to gather the gist of the text in order to complete assignments for class. From the sociocultural perspective as well as what we have viewed from the small group discussions in the study, the voices of peers within the environment serve to mediate and support reading practices for him. Jacob took up the voices of students like Ava who described the plot of the stories to him as a strategy to successfully complete assignments and display an adequate competence of the class material.

In addition, Matt was also a reluctant reader both inside and outside of the classroom. Yet, Matt drew from a wealth of knowledge that he derived from watching movies and television. These alternative “texts” offered him knowledge of characters and narratives that he brought forward to understand the texts of the classroom. While reading Beowulf, Matt compared the class’s reading of the book to his viewing of the movie version of it, relating that Grendel’s mother is not represented in the movie as she is in the book. For him, Grendel’s mother functioned as a hybrid between his understanding of the movie and his involvement within the class with the narrative text. When reading Nineteen Eighty-Four, he often referenced the Hunger Games movie as well as Red Dawn. As we discussed in the previous chapter, Matt used these texts as intertextual knowledge to make meaning of the reading activity. Orwell’s novel,
for example, was viewed through the lens of his textual knowledge of *Red Dawn*, in which armies from the Soviet Union attacked the United States and a group of youths must fight back. His understanding of resistance to governmental forces became the basis for his knowledge of Winston’s positionality in the novel. In addition, we witnessed how Matt shifted the text world of *Red Dawn* into his own lived experiences so that he could recognize himself and his friends as prepared to battle with an invading army, if needed. Farmville County became the potential space of resistance against an invading army. Again, we are able to see how these available perspectives and voices are taken up in various ways and used as strategies for future encounters. Matt’s experiences with watching movies oriented him toward particular types of responses to reading and making meaning of the activity so that he revoiced those perspectives he carried with him.

Bertau (2014a, 2014b, 2014c), Lysaker (2014, 2018), and Lysaker and Wessel-Powell (2019) consider the ways that humans, drawing upon Vygotskian symbolic resources and linguistic means, are able to experience shareness and co-experience across various spaces and times. For example, Bruner (1986) imagined being transported by reading Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* to the site of Elsinore, the castle in Denmark where the play takes place. He understood this experience as being central to understanding in the reading process as it shaped the ways in which individuals may recognize future possibilities for themselves. Chafe (1994) argues that a displacement of self creates the “ability to be conscious of events and states that are originated in the consciousness of someone else” (p. 200). Bertau (2014b) considers displacement as a mutual navigation in which, through language, two or more people in interaction are able to share consciousness and “navigate” the other into spaces that are not present to the context of the exchange, such as the ways texts may navigate our awareness of the world to fictional spaces in
Denmark or of post-war Britain or the landscape of Red Dawn. As Bertau (2014b) writes, displacement allows “speakers/listeners to see and think something in the world which would be neither seen nor thought by them without the mediation of language, although within the limits of ‘a certain fidelity’ to reality,” and, further adding in this context, she states that “Making present what is otherwise un-conceivable is the very accomplishment of language” (p. 448).

Through an act of displacement therefore, we are able to understand how students both come into states of recognition with texts in which they recognize aspects of their own character, perspective, or understanding of the world through the mediation of the textual world and its characters. And, at times, readers in the classroom were able to recontextualize their understandings of the text back into their own world. It is ultimately this movement between reader and text that allows for readers, like Alyse for example, to say she was inspired by Shakespeare’s Emilia and then able to enact aspects of Emilia’s character in her own world. Or, for Marcus to embody Iago in the classroom and to utilize Tyrion Lannister’s use of intellect as a tool of navigation in his own social spaces of the school. This ability to make possible what was initially not available to them in the classroom is the consummation of the sociocultural perspective of Vygotsky and Bakhtin as readers use languaging tools to construct themselves and their worlds.

The Production of Relational Identities

As is already clear, narratives function in many ways, including the support for the construction of identities. Through acts of recognition, readers come to see aspects of themselves in textual others as well as build upon those elements of self, such as how Grace put words to her feelings through the act of reading. These experiences position readers in particular ways as they view the world through the perspectives of the text and, at times, assume the desires and
positionalities of the text through the text’s creation of expectations and ideological views. Through his own narrative means, Marcus was able to produce an identity that others in the school recognized related to his reading interests and his world-making strategies in embodying and voicing of textual others. In this way, as Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain’s (1998) writes, “Narrative identities represent the coming together of the stories individuals tell, as well as those told about them by collectivities and by others” (p. 82). Kendall’s identity remained stable throughout the semester through her desire to help others, which she enacted within her social group with Alyse, Nora, and other friends around her in the class. Yet, through the college application process and in conversation with her group, her sense of a future self was divided between one who went to college and gained experiences and one who stayed home and remained connected to family and community. The narrative she told about herself through the interviews was one of indecision and lack of clarity. These narratives represent forms of Bakhtinian (1981) self-authoring in which these students tell their own stories, at times using the voices of others, to navigate and create directions for themselves.

We see most clearly through Grace’s story how the students might position and reposition themselves across the semester to shift and construct new identities for themselves through the mediation of textual resources. In defining relational identity, Bertau (2021) recognizes the presence of otherness and other voices, in what she calls the process of “calling voices of different types belonging to a common field” (p. 174) that humans must encounter as a means of recognizing one’s own sense of self and self-identity. For Grace, this reflexive activity was mediated through her recognition of self in romance novels that enabled her to read and recognize herself in the female characters in Shakespeare’s Othello. Through each of these
engagements, her identity – as she tells it – developed from a non-reader to someone who activity reads and who developed greater curiosity about human nature through the process.

As readers construct identities through narrative processes in encounters with narrative texts and by telling their own stories, Popova (2015) adds to this perspective in arguing that readers can gain agency in the process as well. As she notes, agency is “typically defined by identifying the intention of an agent to achieve a specific goal” (p. 48). Agency, then, is the way humans embody the power to direct themselves toward and potentially achieve self-selected goals. As narrative functions to position readers in certain ways, these narratives additionally lend forms of agency to the reader toward that position to achieve goals that may not have been within one’s original view or intentions. Again, we can view how Grace’s journey enables her to slowly move from one goal to another, and how those goals slowly shift to future possibilities that she pursues after graduation. While her story is indicative of significant potential change over the course of a semester, the other students in the focal group equally demonstrated their own abilities to tell their stories for themselves, an act that makes their futures more possible. Jacob’s orientation, as well as Logan’s, to community college and a decision to “figure it out there” enables him to act on this future direction.

It is important to note, however, that many of these activities for readers were personal and not always on display within the full activities of the class. Not all readers connected to the same things in their reading activities. Consequently, some readers may have formed no connections to texts throughout the semester. When possible, however, teachers may make more explicit the aspects of characters in texts and how those elements of character may be seen outside of the text in the lived world. Grace’s movement into more complex literature in which started with romance novels and, within a year or two, she wanted to read Virginia Woolf’s *The
Waves on her own, may be anomalous and not generalizable to other readers’ experiences, but she does provide an interesting model for how students navigate literary texts as a way of moving deeper into textual worlds while gaining greater understanding of themselves and others.

**The Power of Literacy Practices Within Social Fields**

Moje and Luke (2009) demonstrate the connection of identities to Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*. Albright and Luke (2008) described *habitus* as “a complex system of generational and intergenerational exchanges of *capital*, the ongoing interplay of positions and position-taking in relation to the structuring fields of school, workplace, civic, and media cultures” (p. 3). In the discussion above about the nature of reader identities and positionalities, we now come to recognize how those identities and dispositions are involved in a network and ongoing interplay of positions within structures of social power. The students’ dispositions at Brookside High School are formed out of their shared environment within the school and county and its historical contexts. Ways of being, ways of seeing the world, and expectations for one’s lives are pre-structured through this interplay of fields, histories, and economic situations.

These dispositions are impacted by the social history of a place, so that we might consider in this study the relationship between learning and the socioeconomic situation, as well as other factors, of Farmville County. While teachers of Brookside actively supported the literacy-skill development of their students, students most often in the study valued literacy activities for the direct relevance these experiences provided. Similar to Cantrell and Rintamaa’s (2020) findings with rural students, relevance generally played a central role in how students in Ms. Young’s classroom viewed literacy practices and strategies. Kendall, for example, considered reading for class as directly beneficial to her performance on standardized tests: “Reading books [such as *Beowulf* and *Othello*] like that help me, I think, when taking tests like
the ACT or any type of exam.” Standardized exams, like the ACT, served to confer social capital onto students as they viewed these exams as forms of access to successful graduation and admissions to college as well as a marker of a particular form of school-based competence. This relationship of literacy skills to forms of cultural, social and economic capital stem from the economic situation of the region where the loss of stable work in mills and factories have created instability in lives of its citizens. Ms. Young connected student dispositions to these economic issues, especially noting the disparity of structured support and expectations between home and school as she said, “[W]e are seeing a lot of students who are the products of parents and homelives that lack structure, discipline, maturity, respect, effective communication.” These aspects are directly related to the economic conditions of the county.

Student and community values and dispositions arise out of these conditions. As a result of this economic situation, greater social capital was gained through forms of action and activity over what was viewed as the solitary practice of reading and knowledge attainment. Matt’s position in the classroom, for example, was regarded by this status as an athlete, a quarterback being recruited by colleges, valued for his ability to take action in specific situations. His position in the class was shaped by his activity as one who often narrated what happened in class, so that speaking aloud and interacting with others for him was accepted and valued as a part of the class’s practices. Both the social capital he carried, and his confident voice of leadership allowed him to act in ways that were not available to other students. During the class, the teacher and other students accepted Matt’s ability to announce and name the Othello characters as they entered the room as well as his consistent responses to teacher questions that were accepted by his peers even as his answers were not always correct. His capstone project showcased a driving simulation during the school day, which all students at the school could participate in, so that the
emphasis on one’s activities, especially those that were shared with others and potentially able to confer forms of capital in the process through participation and proximity to Matt, were viewed as more successful, or at least garnered more social talk, than those projects that concealed these types of movement and action.

Students may have experienced issues of misaligned recognition of their literacy skills in the school as well. School functions to produce particular types of literacy skills directed toward particular forms of futures. Yet, students like Logan often resided outside of the acknowledgement of school’s valued practices. Describing himself as potentially smart but also an uninvolved student in the structures of school, Logan said, “Laziness is kind of like a gene that gets passed down. My dad was like that where he was smart, but he didn’t apply himself to his fullest potential and I really struggled to combat that in myself.” Logan further described himself as a musician who liked to write songs and as someone who spent a lot of time on YouTube and other internet sites learning about various issues in which he was curious. Logan could quote popular songs and could provide a “close reading” of song meanings, yet these skills were never brought forward and utilized in the activities of the classroom.

While these ways of developing literacy skills using social media are becoming more prominent, these activities most often take students outside of the classroom by placing them into spaces, through forms of displacement, beyond their own communities. The economic and social conditions of the rural county make it possible for a dispersion of activities across various means of engagement that do not correspond to school-related activities and remain unnoticed and untapped. As Falk (2001) argues, “learning is embedded in the individual, but its benefits are only transferable to the wider society by mechanisms of social capital, and it is these mechanisms that sustain benefits and circulation of knowledge and identity resources” (p. 322).
School-based values recognize certain forms of behavior but not others. Like the economic impact of the resources available to people within the county, these ways of finding individual meaning are constrained by the histories of participation and the values placed on them within the community.

Central to this study, Bourdieu (1990) theorized how habitus is “embodied history, internalized as second nature” (p. 56) in connection to forms of bodily knowledge and affective experience in which “the body becomes an active source in the unfolding of social relations and is permeated everywhere by the historical” (Zembylas, 2007, p. 448). This unfolding of social relations within textual worlds offers the coordination between texts and bodies that has opportunities to then become active in lived worlds. While we might take up a discussion of the texts read in Ms. Young’s classroom as a means of providing social capital through the experience of reading *Beowulf* and Shakespeare, Bourdieu argues that capital derived from cultural goods is less about what the resources are and more about how those resources are used and consumed (Holm, 2020). Through these textual engagements, we can see how Alyse and others come to experience the regime of subjective relationships in ways already structured by outside social forces. For Alyse, the experience of “standing up” to gendered others was always already in action within the experiences of her lived world from childhood to the classroom’s present through the ways that gender structures social relationships and interactions. For Alyse, encountering Queen Elizabeth and Shakespeare’s Emilia served as a recognition of these social structures as already existing, for drawing her attention to them, and for providing a form of response to it.

In similar ways, Marcus’s broad reading experiences between *Othello, Game of Thrones,* and *Friday Black* offer an account of how his identity as a black male in a predominantly white
school and community structures his responses to an Iago-like character who depends on intellect as a primary social strategy for himself. Because of the telic qualities of narrative, Marcus’s own reading enacts a movement toward knowing and knowledge about the world in which that knowledge offers a type of social capital that positions him to navigate social difficulties with greater success than without these textual experiences. Marcus’s reading and textual activities mark him for what Bourdieu calls an “aesthetic disposition” that carries forms of capital in the school context, recognized by Ms. Young and others, and allowing him to act in ways that may not be available to others.

While various forms of capital are conferred on students in the school, a relational form of reading that offers opportunities for intersubjective exchange along with acts of recognition and recontextualization for readers act as ways for students to co-author and co-create shared experiences with both textual and lived others toward gaining great social value. Marcus, for example, used his reading experiences to shape his identity. At times he was Iago and other times he was the Marvel character of Thanos, yet each of these provided resources from which he could draw to be recognized within the school by others. He borrowed agency and social capital from these characters to demonstrate an identity that sanctioned specific, valued behaviors which other people could tell stories about. In less obvious ways, Grace’s experiences with reading followed a similar journey as Marcus except her expressions of identity were not performed as publicly for her peers but were recognized by the institutions where she applied for college and was accepted as a psychology major. Significantly, we can measure Matt’s lack of need for these forms of capital related to texts, as compared to Marcus and Grace, presumably because his position as an athletic conferred an abundance of capital for him. For Matt, texts may have lower value because what they offered him remained insubstantial to his status as an athlete and

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quarterback. His intertextual strategies in the classroom functioned to demonstrate the academic success he needed within that context. For others, like Marcus and Grace, social capital is accrued through the agency and power that comes from activities as one positions themselves within social and historical networks of texts to continue the “chain of responses” through the voices encountered there for one’s future behavior.

**Implications**

The study aimed to construct meaningful narratives based on the classroom students and the stories they told about themselves, others, and their reading experiences. As a narrative inquiry study, this project highlights these voices as the site of inquiry to understand student reading and their meaning-making practices with texts. The findings feature the moves students can make with reading that very often goes unnoticed and unattended to in the classroom as well as the relationship between in-class and out-of-class reading practices. While teachers cannot attend to each student’s individual experiences with texts, teachers can be aware of the potential of textual relationships and potential fictive kinships that construct forms of inwardness as well as provide models of behavior that students, through social interaction and joint attention with textual others, may use for future action.

In the particular classroom in Brookside High School, Ms. Young described herself as a relational teacher, saying, “I think the relationship piece is crucial for effective education, and luckily, I really enjoy getting to know [the students].” Yet, Ms. Young’s training as an ELA teacher viewed the teacher-student relationship as separate from the potential textual connections readers can have in the reading process. In sharing the ways students in the class understood *Beowulf*, Ms. Young was surprised at students’ lack of personal connections to the story. This insight only emerged through my sharing students’ responses in interviews about the texts. In
being aware of how students might recognize elements of themselves within texts as well as how they may use texts to think about their own lived experiences, teachers can structure their own talk about texts in ways that help to support this activity. In doing so, teachers may more intentionally discuss the characteristics of characters in narratives and seek their own connections to them as models for how students themselves may assume this practice of reading. In addition, teachers may also connect stories to the lived world as a lens to make sense of social interactions and ideologies. When given the opportunity for small group discussions outside of the more formal structures of the class, students often shifted text worlds into their own when those moves were easily made, like with Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Further, an awareness of how classrooms and texts are full of voices may assist with teachers bringing forward an appreciation of how those voices produce and construct various potential ways of being for students and readers. In several instances, Ms. Young adopted the voice of characters, once of one of Shakespeare’s female roles and another time Matt’s voice as he prepared for his presentation. This activity offered students the opportunity to take up and embody characteristics of others that enable them to act in ways that they could not without those voices. These activities support the completion of a task such as a presentation, but more complexly they may additionally help students reposition themselves with great power and agency in ways that strengthens their sense of becoming in the world in general. This recognition of others in texts and enaction of voices serves as a means of bridging between text worlds and lived worlds. If we use narratives to organize our lives, to produce identities, and to think about and understand our experiences, these supportive actions help make these textual moves more clear and more likely to be available to readers as they may need them.
As the findings demonstrated, not all of the students in the focal group shared the same reading experiences. Jacob, for example, participated in class discussions and reading activities while remaining reluctant to read himself. His understanding of the texts in the class were mediated through the voices of others and may have suggested a surface experience with the texts. Yet, in his interview, he discussed reading and re-reading the book, *Big Red*, as he reflected, “It just kind of reminded me of myself. I like hunting and stuff like that.” Even as a reluctant reader, Jacob acknowledged ways he found forms of recognition in texts. In addition, Matt’s reading was mediated through his understanding of media sources, like movies, which he would draw up for comparison. And, Logan made similar moves in his reading but often did not use his previous experiences to bring forward for understanding of the textual encounter for the class. In each of these situations, these young men may be open to these forms of relational experiences with reading, just as Jacob was with *Big Red*, when they have texts with which they can more easily make these moves.

Textual representation remains an important issue. Through representation, readers come to see elements of themselves in texts. Bishop (1990) uses the metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors as a way of acknowledging how readers recognize themselves in texts. Finding texts that provide for a broad range of characters and forms of representation are vital to how readers experience their encounters. As an active reader, Marcus identified aspects of himself in various texts through the semester, but Adjei-Brenyah’s (2018) *Friday Black* provided a specific kind of mirror though which he could see aspects of himself that may not have been visible before. It is, ideally, the world of the ELA classroom where texts are always present and available for students to encounter them on their own or through the requirements of the course,
as these experiences function as potential boundaries to be crossed into and new voices to here
and interact with.

Beyond the ELA classroom, these types of experiences in reading may be vital to how
society is able to successfully move forward as a whole into the future. The writer Richard
Powers (2021) argues that reading offers the chance at identifying with others and building
relationships with textual characters who become “fictive kinships.” In considering these forms
of relationships between readers and textual others, Powers suggests that kinship is the ability to
see each other’s fate as intertwined and entangled with each other, and it is stories that reveal our
shared future. Through reading and the experience of stories, new possibilities for being open up
so that new futures may be possible. From this view, stories and the potential connection to
fictive kin become a potentially transformative, yet nuanced and at times invisible, experience,
and one supported by how readers through their development into adulthood find the care and
support to read, think with, and talk about those textual worlds.

Conclusion

In crossing the threshold between self and text, readers come directly into contact with
voices not their own: a conversation already happening and on offer through the chain of events
shaped by history, economics, and culture. It is the entering into a relationship with these
dialogic voices that sets up the opportunity for a response, or a series of on-going responses, in
which readers may internalize new voices and reproduce them in ways that help readers do
things they would not have been able to do without them. Reading texts is the entering into a
And my entire life is an orientation in this world…” (p. 143).
This study implemented qualitative research methods from a narrative inquiry perspective to investigate the reading experiences of a classroom of high school seniors in a rural Piedmont classroom. The findings highlight the voices of the students as they themselves interact, tell stories of themselves and others, and read narratives for the class and for themselves. In this context, students experienced texts as social interactions, as encounters with others with whom they exchanged identities and positionality through a dance of joint attention and joint intentionality that shape and reshape who they were. The study also demonstrated how the meaning making practices of students are shaped by forces outside of the classroom that impact how they understand and interact with others. In identifying gaps in the literature, the study attempted to show how the voices of others from texts become internalized and, consequently, carried forward through body in order to be drawn from as a resource for future action. Lysaker & Wessel-Powell (2019) write, “Relating with and within narrative worlds is not only about knowing but also about being and becoming; it is ontological work” (p. 174). Narrative is always teleological, directed to future purposes and goals. Because our lives are lived through narrative understanding, these telic directions are always unfolding and offering new opportunities as we move forward.
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Books Referenced from Classroom and Student Reading


APPENDIX A: TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

OPENING SCRIPT
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of my study is to consider the literacy practices of adolescents, the various factors that support literacy both in-school and out-of-school, and how identity development may play a role in the reading of literature. With your permission, I’d like to record our conversation, but your responses will remain completely confidential. The recording will help me to focus on the interview and allow me to review your responses after our meeting. Do I have your permission to record our interview? This interview will last approximately 30. The questions will range from your experience as a teacher to your knowledge of the experience of the students. In addition, some questions are about the school more generally and the surrounding community. You may choose not to answer any questions or you may stop at any point for any reason. Thank you again for taking the time to participate in these interviews. Do you have any questions for me before we begin? (Make sure consent and assent forms have been collected prior to interview.)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
RQ1: What are the literacy practices of students in the ELA high school classroom under observation? And how do those literacy practices support interpretation and meaning making of literary texts?

RQ2: How do students’ literacy practices and engagement with literature/interpretations shape both current and future discourses and activities?

RQ3: What environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic elements shape the meaning making and interpretation of texts that students are making?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
What do you teach? And how long have you been teaching? Have you taught in other schools/locations? (RQ3)

Would you describe yourself as a reader? What do you like to read? (RQ3)

Do you have a favorite book? Has this book changed how you see the world?

How would you define literacy in your classroom? (RQ1)

What role does reading play in your classroom? What role does writing play in your classroom? (RQ1)

What are the goals of your grade level? (RQ1)

Tell me about your class; Who are your students? (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3)

- Backgrounds, stories, reading levels, reading practices, literacy experiences

How would you describe your students as readers? As writers? (RQ1)

Do you think your students read on their own…non-school required reading? At home? During the summer? (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3)

Do your students write? If so, how do they engage in writing? (In-school writing, out-of-school writing, etc.) (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3)
Tell me about novels you’ve taught that went well? Novels that didn’t go well? (RQ1)

What approaches do you take in teaching literature? (RQ1)

Are some students more successful than others this different approach to instruction? (RQ1)

Have there been specific experiences as a teacher that has helped you better understand how adolescents read? Write? (RQ1)

In reading literature, do you have discussions about characters? Motivations? (RQ2)

Are there characters in literature that students tend to more strongly identify with? If so, why? (RQ2)

How would you describe the community outside of the school? (RQ3)

Outside of the school, what opportunities exist for students? (RQ3)

What does success look like for students after they graduate? (RQ3)
APPENDIX B: GENERAL STAKE-HOLDER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

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<td>How would you define literacy? (RQ1)</td>
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<td>Would you describe yourself as a reader? What do you like to read? (RQ3)</td>
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<td>Tell me about a reading experience that was significant to you. (RQ3)</td>
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<td>What role do you think reading plays or should play in education? Writing? (RQ1)</td>
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<td>Do you have a favorite book? If so, what is it? What affect would you say this book has had on you and why?</td>
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<td>Tell me about the students at Rockingham County High School (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3)</td>
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<td>- Backgrounds, stories, reading levels, reading practices, literacy experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>How would you describe the community outside of the school? (RQ3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think reading and writing skills are valued in your community? (RQ3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside of the school, what opportunities exist for students? (RQ3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does success look like for students after they graduate? (RQ3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: STUDENT LITERACY SURVEY

LITERACY QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire. The following are a series of short-response questions about your reading and writing experiences. Please respond specifically as possible in the space provided. Responses to these questions are for use in a research study and will have no effect on your grade in this class. The responses will not be shared with anyone except for the researcher and the research team. Your participation in this questionnaire is voluntary and you may choose to not answer any or all questions.

PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING

This first group of questions asks you to respond from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Please circle the number that corresponds to your best response to the statement. The questions following this section provide space were you might elaborate on some of these statements.

1. I like to read.

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<thead>
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<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral (Neither Disagree or Agree)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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2. I am a strong reader and feel like I fully understand the texts I engage with.

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3. I like reading for my high school English class.

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<td>Agree</td>
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4. My community (the people in my town) values reading.

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5. I like reading for my high school classes other than English.

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<td>Neutral (Neither Disagree or Agree)</td>
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6. High School requires a lot of reading.

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7. I like reading books that I select myself.

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<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral (Neither Disagree or Agree)</td>
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8. I struggle to understand what I read in my high school English class.

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9. What I read in high school directly applies to my life.

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10. I like reading on my own outside of school.

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11. There are novels or fictional stories that I love.

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12. There are characters in novels or fictional stories that I relate to.

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13. I understand myself better when I read literature.

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</table>
14. My community has a strong sense of culture.

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15. There are books in my house.

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16. The people I live with like to read.

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17. Reading literature helps me understand other people better.

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<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral (Neither Disagree or Agree)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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18. I think strong reading skills are important to my future success.

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</table>

19. I talk to my friends about what I have been reading.

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20. I want to be a better reader.

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<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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</table>
21. Reading is a life-long skill.

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22. My school values reading.

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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<th>Agree</th>
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23. When I read some books, I feel like I get to know characters very well.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral (Neither Disagree or Agree)</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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</table>

24. A friend has recommended a book to me before that she/he really liked.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<th>Neutral (Neither Disagree or Agree)</th>
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25. Some books are so vivid that I can imagine myself engaged with the characters as if in real life.

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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</table>

In this next section, please respond to the question with as many sentences as you need. If you need additional space, add the response to your own paper and make sure the question number is clear.

1. Do you like to read? Why or why not?
2. Do you like to write? Why or why not?

3. Do you read at home? If so, what do you read? How often? When & Where do you like to read?

4. Do people in your family read? If so, what do they read? How often?

5. Do you have friends who like to read? If so, what do they like to read?

6. Do you write at home? If so, what do you write? How often?
7. Describe your best reading experience? This may be a time when you were really engaged with what you were reading.

8. Do you have a favorite book? If so, what is it? And why do you like it?

9. Have you ever had a character that you liked or loved? If so, describe that character (including who it is and the book they are from)?

10. If you’ve had a character that you liked or loved, do you think this character has had an impact on you? For example, has the character changed the way you view the world, changed your understanding of yourself, and/or made you think that a certain direction in life is right for you?
11. Have teachers in past school years done anything that made you interested in reading a certain book? What was it?

12. Do you talk with anyone about the books you read? Who do you talk to, and what kinds of things do you talk about?

13. How would you describe yourself? (What’s your “identity”?)
14. Who or what do you want to be in the future?
APPENDIX D: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION & DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

Observation Date: _______________________
Start Time __________________
End Time __________________

Pre-Observation Teacher Dialogue with Class:

Our discussion today about our reading of ___________________ will be observed by Chris Kirkman as part of the research study. The discussion will be audio recorded as part of the study, but no identifiable information about you as an individual will be collected. Also, Chris may ask questions about the texts or participate in the discussion. The main focus of the discussion will be about the characters in ___________________ and their actions. You may wish to not participate and, for this discussion, your participation will not impact your grade in the class.
## I. Context of the Class and Classroom Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observable Classroom Demographics</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Discussion Content (text(s), discussion focus, etc.)</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Goals</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Format</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher &amp; Student Roles</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understandings of Reading/Reading Process</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
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</table>
## II. Observation Details

<table>
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<th>Observation Notes</th>
<th>Observation Reflections</th>
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## III. Preliminary Thinking

### Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1: What are the literacy practices of students in the ELA high school classroom under observation? And how do those literacy practices support interpretation and meaning making of literary texts?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observational Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ2: How do students’ literacy practices and engagement with literature/interpretations shape both current and future discourses and activities?</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ3: What environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic elements shape the meaning making and interpretation of texts that students are making?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – INITIAL INTERVIEW

OPENING SCRIPT
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of my study is to consider the literacy practices of adolescents, the various factors that support literacy both in-school and out-of-school, and how identity development may play a role in the reading of literature. With your permission, I’d like to record our conversation, but your responses will remain completely confidential. The recording will help me to focus on the interview and allow me to review your responses after our meeting. Do I have your permission to record our interview? This interview will last no longer than 30 minutes. In addition, some questions are about the school more generally and the surrounding community. You may choose not to answer any question or you may stop at any point for any reason. Thank you again for taking the time to participate in these interviews. Do you have any questions for me before we begin? (Make sure consent and assent forms have been collected prior to interview.)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What are the literacy practices of students in the ELA high school classroom under observation? And how do those literacy practices support interpretation and meaning making of literary texts?

RQ2: How do students’ literacy practices and engagement with literature/interpretations shape both current and future discourses and activities?

RQ3: What environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic elements shape the meaning making and interpretation of texts that students are making?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How would you describe yourself? How would your friends/teachers/parents describe you? (RQ2)

What do you like to do outside of school? (RQ2)

Do you like to read? Would you consider yourself a strong reader? Why or why not? (RQ1, RQ3)

Would you consider yourself a strong writer? Why or why not? (RQ1, RQ3)

Do you read at home? Does your family read? If so, what do you tend to read? (RQ2, RQ3)

Tell me about your favorite book? (RQ1, RQ3)

Have you ever had a character that you liked/loved? If so, tell me about him/her? (RQ2)
Do you think this character or book has helped you understand yourself better? If so, how? (RQ2)

Have you read something this year that was so memorable that you keep thinking about it or you told someone else about it? (RQ1)

Have other people this year helped you decide to read certain books? Who? What did they do or say to make you want to read? (RQ1, RQ2)

Do you talk with anyone about the books you read? Who do you talk to, and what kinds of things do you talk about? (RQ1, RQ2)

How would you describe this high school? (RQ3)

Tell me about the community you live in? (RQ3)

Where do you see yourself in 5-10 or 20 years? (RQ3)
## OPENING SCRIPT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of my study is to consider the literacy practices of adolescents, the various factors that support literacy both in-school and out-of-school, and how identity development may play a role in the reading of literature. With your permission, I’d like to record our conversation, but your responses will remain completely confidential. The recording will help me to focus on the interview and allow me to review your responses after our meeting. Do I have your permission to record our interview? This interview will last no longer than 30 minutes. In addition, some questions are about the school more generally and the surrounding community. You may choose not to answer any question or you may stop at any point for any reason. Thank you again for taking the time to participate in these interviews. Do you have any questions for me before we begin? (Make sure consent and assent forms have been collected prior to interview.)

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What are the literacy practices of students in the ELA high school classroom under observation? And how do those literacy practices support interpretation and meaning making of literary texts?

RQ2: How do students’ literacy practices and engagement with literature/interpretations shape both current and future discourses and activities?

RQ3: What environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic elements shape the meaning making and interpretation of texts that students are making?

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about the text you’ve been reading in class. (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3)

Tell me about the class discussion you had about the text. (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3)

Was there moment since reading the text that you changed your mind about your first thoughts on it? (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3)

Since you’ve read the text, have you thought about it outside of the classroom environment? If so, how? Tell me about it. (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3)

Are there characters in the text that have stayed with you since reading it? Or, are there situations in your life that make you think of these characters, the language, and/or images from the book? Tell me about it. (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3)