AFRICAN-AMERICAN BOYS' RESPONSES TO MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ADDRESSING CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUES IN LITERATURE CIRCLES

By

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To all those who showed their support in so many ways

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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AFRICAN-AMERICAN BOYS' RESPONSES TO MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ADDRESSING CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUES IN LITERATURE CIRCLES

By

Mary Ellen Oslick

August 2011

Chair: Ruth Lowery
CoChair: Danling Fu
Major: Curriculum and Instruction

The purpose of this study was to examine the responses Black boys had regarding children's literature that addresses criminal justice issues. I wanted to see how students connected to diverse characters' experiences with the criminal justice system. How did these stories reflect their personal or family's experiences with punishment at school and also in the community? This examination helped illuminate local reactions to punishment and to the criminal justice system in the U.S. Specifically, I asked the research question: How do Black boys respond to multicultural children's literature addressing criminal justice issues? To better understand their responses, I asked two other questions to guide my inquiry: a) What do Black boys' responses say about their personal connections to the stories? and b) What do Black boys' responses say about their perceptions of society, specifically their understandings of how justice works in their lives and their communities?

Conducted during their Extended Day Education Program (EDEP), four African-American boys read and discussed multicultural children's literature that addressed criminal justice issues. The 'cool poses' my participants adopted during EDEP and our

discussions can be seen as reactions to the turmoil they faced in their lives and their previous knowledge of the criminal justice system. Combining social issues children's literature and critical literacy practices with the experiences of these African American boys produced important conversations. Their responses were interpreted through the method of critical discourse analysis. This stance illuminated and interrogated the ways that power and knowledge were reproduced, consumed, and transformed through the dynamic interplay of micro and macro interactions and human agency (Fairclough, 2003; Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2011, while supervising preservice teachers in their school, I experienced something that I believe makes my research so important. A Kindergarten student walked into class late and when asked about his tardiness, he very simply began to relay that his mother had been arrested that morning. His teacher immediately stopped him mid-sentence and told him (and the class) that such conversations were not appropriate for her classroom. She silenced him in that instance and set the precedent for the entire class population that matters of criminal justice (in this case, an incarcerated parent) were not to be discussed. Literature circles are important opportunities for those conversations to happen.

My study as a doctoral student in a children's literature and literacy program enabled me to examine and reflect on my previous teaching practice. I realized that although I taught heterogeneous groups of students in a variety of settings, the literature I used in the classroom was extremely homogeneous—my students and I read about experiences of white, middle-class kids. I loved starting the year off with the book, *Frindle*, by Andrew Clements (1996), but I never thought about how my students connected to the main character or to the situations described. Literature in my classroom was focused on my connections with it when I should have been using literature that connected to my students. I wondered about how my choice of literature used in teaching affected my students, especially those who struggled.

This revelation in graduate school made me reflect on my teaching experiences and those of my colleagues. As a team leader, I had served on the discipline action team at my elementary school. I remember one meeting very distinctly. Our principal

was in attendance, a middle-aged white male, and he asked each member (all female) to identify the major discipline concerns of each grade level. He then amended his question and posed it to everyone: Who gives us the most trouble at this school? Individual names were called out; I knew most of them because teachers came to me often and said, “Watch out for this one—you’ll see what I mean in ____ years.” Everyone wanted to warn me about those students coming to fifth grade.

I started to think about a pattern. What did these students all have in common? At the end of the sharing of names, I understood how they were related. All of our school-wide troublemakers were boys. They ranged in age from 5 years-old (kindergarteners) to 12 years-old (fifth graders who had been previously retained for one grade). Furthermore, most of the names belonged to African-American boys. The population of our school, though, did not warrant this overrepresentation (only 17% of our school—both boys and girls--identified as African American). Why was it that boys were always in trouble, according to us teachers? And why were most of those boys African American? Was it a problem with them or with us (teachers, staff, and administrators)? I wondered if a more engaging curriculum, especially in literacy instruction, could have made a difference with the behavior of these students. If the boys in my classroom had seen themselves, their families, and their communities represented in the books we read, would they have been more likely to participate instead of acting out and/or shutting down? If I had incorporated works by Walter Dean Myers or Jacqueline Woodson, how would they have reacted to these stories?

This meeting and its subsequent questions have had a profound effect on me. I wish I could say that I was able to reach out to all those deemed troublemakers (who

were also low performers) and not only work with them, but also with their teachers, towards an understanding and exemplification of appropriate school behaviors. I also wish I had thought of matching literacy instruction in particular with their needs. Through books, people and children especially can “gain a sense of control over their own lives and the strength to survive” (Sims Bishop, 1982, p. 1). One way I could have done this is through the use of multicultural children’s literature in my classroom. Multicultural children’s literature "represents any distinct cultural group through accurate portrayal and rich detail" (Yokota, 1993, p. 157). Knowing what I know now, I believe that incorporating texts with which students connect can have a positive impact on literacy learning. Upon entering graduate school for my doctorate, I have been able to further examine how boys learn academically and socially, especially African-American boys. I have also learned so much more about multicultural children’s literature and its benefits in the classroom. My experience on the discipline action team was not unique. Other scholars (Casella, 2001; Kunjufu, 2007; Mulvey, 2010; Noguera, 2003; Wacquant, 2000; Wald & Losen, 2003), teachers, administrators, parents, and students are concerned with my principal’s question of, “Who gives us the most trouble?” My intent is to go further with this—how can we help the literacy learning of those students? How can we work to make sure that those deemed troublemakers are not troubled by our teaching? How can we use multicultural children’s literature to help students feel in control of their lives and learning? Or as Sims Bishop (1982) said, how can we use texts to give students “the strength to survive” (p. 1)?

Problem

Boys in School

In their book, Bright Beginnings for Boys, Zambo and Brozo (2009) offered some staggering statistics about boys' achievement in school. They found that in elementary schools, boys receive more failing grades than girls, which leads to boys being 60% more likely to be retained in a grade level. Also, boys are less likely to do homework and be prepared for class, which contributes to lower grades (Kleinfeld, 2009). Boys make up more than 55% of the students who drop out of school annually and Whitmire (2006) determined that boys are more than twice as likely to be identified as having a learning disability.

African-American Boys in School

As dismal as these statistics seem for boys in general, they are actually worse for African-American boys. For example, more than one in ten Black males has repeated a grade (Kleinfeld, 2009). Corbett (2006) found that less than 4% of African-American boys are enrolled in gifted and talented programs. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for African-American male fourth graders are the lowest of any of the tested subgroups (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007). At the 12th grade level over half of Black males are reading below the basic level (Kleinfeld, 2009). This is even more significant when coupled with the fact that in 2005, 52% of Black males dropped out of school (Education Week, 2008).

Males and Punishment

When literacy learning is not addressed in the classrooms through the use of relevant texts, then male students become disengaged with school. From the beginning when entering school, males struggle with regulating their behavior (Zambo & Brozo,

2009). Focusing their attention and getting along with others are just two things that challenge young boys. Girls, on the other hand, seem to develop self-regulation earlier. They adjust easier to schedules and are able to regulate their emotions and their attention earlier than boys because of how their brains develop (Brizendine, 2006). Studies conducted by Yale University and the Foundation for Child Development reported that boys were expelled 4.5 times more often than girls in preschool (Kunjufu, 2007). Zambo and Brozo (2009) further determined that boys who cannot regulate themselves in the classroom have trouble in school because they face peer rejection, teachers who cannot necessarily manage them, and punishment in the form of removal from the classroom. As a result, boys make up 90% of the discipline referrals in schools (Mulvey, 2010).

Removal from the classroom (e.g., sitting outside in the hallway, being sent to the principal, suspension, and expulsion) can make students believe that the rewards of education are not available to them. When students believe this, then there is no longer an incentive to follow school rules (Noguera, 2003). In some cases, this cycle of antisocial behavior can be hard to break (Casella, 2001). As they get older, rule violations for boys can increase in frequency and brutality, which leads to an escalation of the forms of punishment used. “For many, the cycle of punishment eventually leads to entanglement with law enforcement and the criminal justice system” (Noguera, 2003, p. 343). In juvenile delinquency and in rates of arrest for almost every type of offense, males predominate by large margins (Kleinfeld, 2009; National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2010). Specifically, the National Center for Juvenile Justice reported that the delinquency rate for boys in 2004 was almost three times as much as the rate for girls.

African-American Males and Punishment

African-American males face a much bleaker future with regard to punishment because of the disconnect between their home lives and school learning (Delpit, 1995; Tatum, 2005). Literacy learning can be viewed as being either meaningless or hateful when an individual and his life experiences are not represented. Although this is not a physical removal from the classroom, being ignored in texts can have the same effect on students. This exclusion can lead to a lack of respect for school rules. Unfortunately, this scenario happens often enough for scholars to write about the "school to prison pipeline," the relationship between what happens to African-American males in school and their placement in prison (Wacquant, 2000; Wald & Losen, 2003). Wacquant (2000) wrote about public schools in urban areas that operate more like prisons than institutions for learning:

> Like the prison system, their recruitment is severely skewed along class and ethnoracial lines…. Like inmates, children are herded into decaying and overcrowded facilities built like bunkers, where undertrained and under-paid teachers… strive to regulate conduct so as to maintain order and minimize violent incident (p. 15).

One of the most disturbing statistics comes from Alfred Tatum (2003): "Black males are the only group to hold the distinction of having more of their number in prison than in college" (p. 623). African-American youth make up 30% of those arrested while they only represent 17% of the overall youth population (Arya & Augarten, 2009). Based on current trends, it has been projected that by 2020, two of every three African-American males will be involved in some way with the penal system (Kunjufu, 2007). This cycle of discipline problems in school leading to experiences with the criminal justice system needs to be addressed. I believe that engaging boys in critical literacy learning with multicultural literature can make a positive difference in their success

today. This inclusion of literature and forums for discussions in classroom literacy practices can greatly influence their success in the future.

Using Relevant Texts

Multicultural children's literature can be defined broadly as any book about people and their personal or group incidents, situated in the U.S. or in another country (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008). As this definition expands, Botelho and Rudman (2009) believe that, "people who have historically, ideologically, and politically been underserved and rendered nearly invisible" (p. 259) will be seen and heard in children's literature. Multicultural children's literature can benefit all students as they learn to read critically. Life experiences can be validated, children can recognize social differences, and therefore, develop feelings of empathy, respect, and understanding among cultures (Bishop, 2009; Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Cai, 2008; Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008; Norton, 1990).

Unfortunately, relevant multicultural children's literature is not always present in the classroom. As a result, students who may be at-risk for school failure are not seeing themselves in the stories they read in class. When you are unable to see a part of your life in literature, then texts can either lose meaning for you completely or portray a harmful meaning for you. In Literacy in American Lives (Brandt, 2001), an African-American man talked about his childhood experiences with literacy. He had learned through children's books and prohibitive signs that reading and writing could be sources of "negative racial images" (p. 59). Therefore, he was completely turned off from reading and writing until he realized later in life at his criminal trial that he did not understand what was happening to him. When reading and writing have no meaning or when they have such charged and hateful meanings, it is easy to see why students are reluctant to

engage in acts of literacy. Students may then resist authority by acting out and/or shutting down.

Two possible explanations for why multicultural children's literature is not always present in the classroom come from outside the control of the teacher. The inauguration of federal initiatives, such as No Child Left Behind, have left many clouded with what teachers, districts, and states must teach and/or not teach and the requirement of using specific instructional materials (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Many districts in large states have adopted a one-size-fits-all curriculum in reading instruction, irrespective of the economic, social, cultural and academic diversity present among the population. A recent survey of Florida teachers (Zeig, 2007) found that teachers' reported practices are intimately aligned with the current political mandates, which suggests that if a core-reading program is mandated, it is being used. Historically, the core-reading program or basal reader has been defined as "a sequential, all-inclusive set of instructional materials that can teach all children to read regardless of teacher competence and regardless of learner differences" (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, & Murphy, 1988, p. 7). It has now taken on the influential title of "scientifically-research based program" or core-reading program; disregarding extant contemporary research debunking the "one-size-fits all" curriculum (Cunningham & Allington, 2007). When teachers use a core-reading program, the excerpts of stories are selected by publishers most often from another state; they do not know the particular students in the classroom and therefore, the stories are not necessarily geared toward building on their current experiences and exposing them to new ones.

Another impediment to the inclusion of multicultural children's literature is the publishing industry. While great strides have been made in the field of multicultural children's literature, there is still a long way to go for authors and illustrators. Horning, Lindgran, Rudiger, and Schliesman (2006) reported that in 2005 there were only 75 new children's books written or illustrated by African Americans reviewed by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC). With 3,000 children's books published, this works out to be just 2.5% of the total, while African Americans make up 12.5% of the U.S.'s population. Horning (2009) also reported that since the mid-1980s, the percentage of children's books written or illustrated by people of color has not surpassed 5% of the total number of children's books published. These statistics are especially troublesome when considering all the benefits multicultural children's book can have for all students.

In spite of these challenges, addressing literacy development with multicultural texts that focus on the criminal justice system might be a way to both foster their academic achievement and diminish male experiences with punishment (Tatum, 2005; Tatum, 2006). Males are often the targets of schools' disciplinary practices; however, research shows that these students cannot afford to be pulled out of the classrooms and miss instructional time (Casella, 2001; Kleinfeld, 2009; Kunjufu, 2007; Mulvey, 2010; Noguera, 2003; Tatum, 2003; Tatum 2005; Wacquant, 2000; Wald & Losen, 2003). If males can see their situations reflected in the texts used in class, then they will be engaged in literacy learning and their antisocial behaviors may decrease. Not only will they be reading about their lives, but a curriculum focused on critical literacy will also let those students ask questions and challenge hegemony. Engagement,

appropriate social behaviors, and critical literacy can transform the lives of males for the better, making them successful in school and in the future.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the responses, including feelings and perspectives, Black boys have regarding multicultural children’s literature that addresses criminal justice issues. I wanted to see how students connected to diverse characters’ experiences with the criminal justice system. How did these stories reflect their personal or family’s experiences with punishment at school and also in the community? This examination can help illuminate local reactions to punishment and to the criminal justice system in the U.S. In particular, I asked the research question: How do African-American boys respond to multicultural children’s literature addressing criminal justice issues? To better understand their responses, I asked two other questions to guide my inquiry: a) What do Black boys’ responses say about their personal connections to the stories? and b) What do Black boys’ responses say about their perceptions of society, specifically their understandings of how justice works in their lives and their communities?

Significance

When preadolescent males are able to connect with characters and situations in literature, the result is engagement in literacy learning. Rosenblatt’s (1978) transactional theory of reading asserted that what the reader brings to reading a text is just as important as what the author writes. Furthermore, Probst (2002) explained that Rosenblatt’s transactional “theory suggests that each reader comes to the text with a unique history, a unique set of circumstances and abilities and inclinations, and has to take that into account as s/he shapes an understanding of the text and his/her reading

of it” (p. 31). When students read a multicultural text aesthetically, they bring with them specific social, political, and cultural factors that then influence their interactions with the story. These personal interpretations are both valid and desirable (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Instead of having to keep their lives and beliefs hidden away from the classroom, these texts can invite those important parts of their identities in, making males realize that their experiences are valued (Sims Bishop, 1982). Furthermore, Horne (2003) wrote that, “An individual without identity is like a plant devoid of nourishment, it withers and dies. Possessing identity, we feel a sense of freedom from within” (p. 32). These connections can help students nourish their identities. They can believe that the rewards of education are available to them and that they are members of a learning community. When black boys hold these beliefs, it can lead to following class and school rules. The vicious “school to prison pipeline” can be stopped when they are engaged in literacy learning.

This research can also be used to examine academic literacy development in conjunction with critical literacy development. The responses to the literature will guide teachers, librarians, and other educators in how to incorporate such texts and practices into other classroom settings. This study could enable teachers and librarians to locate and use appropriate texts and engage students in thoughtful and meaningful discussions about the way justice works in the school, community, country, and world. In addition, the study will also offer justifications for the inclusion of texts by authors like Jacqueline Woodson, Eve Bunting, Maria Testa, and G. Neri.

My study is also important because it addresses several gaps in current research. As previously stated, preadolescent males often have experiences with punishment with

the unfortunate result of being removed from the classroom (Kunjufu, 2007; Mulvey, 2010; Noguera, 2003). While there has been research conducted about reading responses to children's literature about criminal justice (Jacobs, 2006), those participants were already incarcerated when reading and responding. Studies conducted with students who have not yet entered the criminal justice system are not as easily accessible.

Furthermore, there have been many studies that address developing students' critical literacy in response to children's literature with social justice issues (for example Blake, 1999; Ching, 2005; Edelsky, 1999; Jewett, 2007; Laman, 2006; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; McDaniel, 2004; Rush & Lipski, 2009). Not one of the texts used in these studies specifically dealt with issues of the criminal justice system, which include incarcerated parents and/or other relatives, prisons, juvenile crime, and criminal trials.

Finally, the responses of the African-American boys will be interpreted through the method of critical discourse analysis. This stance will illuminate and interrogate "the ways that power and knowledge are reproduced, consumed, and transformed through the dynamic interplay of micro and macro interactions and human agency" (Fairclough, 2003; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Educators can use this information as a foundation on which to build critical literacy for all students about issues of criminal justice.

Definition of Terms

To ensure understanding, the following terms used throughout the study are defined below.

BOYS: Male children who are between the ages of 8 and 10. Their grade levels are in the upper elementary (3rd and 4th grades).

BLACK: This is the identification of race of the participants in this study. Black specifically refers to African-American participants.

MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: Literature by and about groups in the U.S. that have been overshadowed and/or disregarded by the main-stream, European-American culture (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008; Norton, 2009). These books seek to reflect the distinctiveness of a certain group's experience while providing self-affirmation for group members (Sims Bishop, 1982).

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: The system of practices and institutions of governments directed at upholding social control, deterring and mitigating crime, and sanctioning those who violate laws with criminal penalties and rehabilitation efforts.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Examining the responses African-American boys have regarding multicultural children's literature with themes of criminal justice involves looking at several components. In this Chapter, I review the research of multicultural education. I then examine multicultural children's literature in its historical context and by major topics. I explain the transactional theory of reader response and cover the specifics of its different stances. Finally, I include studies done using literature circles and employing critical literacy strategies that guided this particular study.

Multicultural Education

Banks (1992) wrote that education within a pluralistic society such as the US should validate and educate students about their home and community cultures, while also freeing students from their cultural boundaries. Focusing on just what students enter the classroom with, the understandings they bring from home, is not enough for education within a democratic society. Educators need to prepare students "to participate in civic action to make society more equitable and just" (p. 32). The challenge is for educators, administrators, and policymakers to transform curriculum. This transformation comes in the form of multicultural education, which is designed to reduce race, class, and gender divisions (Banks, 1992; Banks, 1998; Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, 2001; Banks, 2003; Copenhaver-Johnson, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Nieto, 2003).

Nieto (2003) defined multicultural education as "an anti-racist education that is firmly related to student learning and permeates all areas of schooling" (p. 7). This

means that learning about cultures does not have to be limited to certain holidays or one month of the year. Banks (1994) outlined five dimensions of multicultural education to help educators begin and examine school programs that respond to student diversity:

- Content integration (the extent to which teachers illuminate key points of instruction with content reflecting diversity);
- Knowledge construction (the extent to which teachers help students understand how perspectives of people within a discipline influence the conclusions reached within that discipline);
- Prejudice reduction (efforts to help students develop positive attitudes about different groups);
- Equitable pedagogy (ways to modify teaching so as to facilitate academic achievement from diverse groups); and
- Empowering school culture and social structure (the extent to which a school's culture and organization ensure educational equality and cultural empowerment for students from diverse groups).

Furthermore, the Multicultural Education Consensus Panel (2001) published twelve essential principles that describe ways to improve educational policies and practices related to diversity. These principles came from both research and practice and were organized into five themes: teacher learning; student learning; intergroup relations; school governance; and assessment. All of these areas are important in order to address the needs of all learners and to promote a multicultural approach that affects all aspects of school.

In the research about multicultural education, Ladson-Billings (1994) found five influential areas for students: teachers' beliefs about students, curriculum content and materials, instructional approaches, educational settings, and teacher education (p. 22). As a researcher, I am most concerned with the significance of curriculum content and materials on diverse student populations. Specifically, I wanted to examine multicultural

children’s literature. Sims Bishop (1982) quoted African-American author, James Baldwin, who said, “Literature is indispensable to the world…. The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way a person looks at reality, then you change it” (p. 1). To help students see their worlds differently and to expand those views beyond their own backyards, educators must expose them to quality multicultural children’s literature. Doing this helps accomplish the goals of multicultural education.

Several features of multicultural children’s literature contribute to its purposes in the classroom. One is that children’s literature can be viewed as ethnography (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). That is, by reading a book about a particular culture, the reader should come away with accurate knowledge of the beliefs, attitudes, and important characteristics of that culture. This can be done by an author who is from that particular culture or by an author who has researched that culture (Short & Fox, 2004).

Another way to view multicultural children’s literature is by the three metaphors: mirrors, windows, and doors (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Sims Bishop, 1990). First, literature needs to be a mirror, so that children can see themselves in books. This act helps to validate the experiences of a child: yes, there are others in the world like me and I am not the only person ever to go through this experience. On a broader note, children also need to see their families and their communities reflected in a book to achieve feelings of affirmation. Sims Bishop (1990) wrote that, “Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation…” (p. ix). Multicultural children’s literature also serves the

purpose of being a window for children. After feeling that their experiences are affirmed, children need to learn about other experiences. The key here is for children to have familiarity with a variety of cultures. Literature can help make this happen especially when classrooms, schools, or communities are homogeneous. Rice (2005) wrote about her experiences of introducing multicultural children's literature to small groups of White students from similar socioeconomic groups (mid-to-high middle class). Those students struggled to relate to stories with universal themes when the cultures of the main characters (Mexican-American) were different from their own. Rice labeled this as "aesthetic restriction" and described it as an immediate, but unconscious rejection of a text (p. 344). Students must be exposed to multicultural children's literature to combat aesthetic restriction.

The last metaphor Botelho and Rudman use is children's literature as a door. While reading about their culture and then reading about other cultures are both important acts, they are not enough for multicultural education and the pedagogy of social justice. Children also need to use books as a door. James Gee (1996) wrote that, "It is the job of the teacher to allow students to grow beyond both the cultural models of their home cultures and those of mainstream and school culture" (p. 89). This requires that children be allowed and encouraged to pose critical questions about what they read, including an examination of issues such as class, race, and gender. This is not always an easy task for educators. King (1991) wrote about her experiences with preservice teachers and their uncritical identities. She explained that these students, by not being critical of what was happening around them, were practicing dysconscious racism, which is "a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and

privileges” (p. 135). From looking at literature, educators and children can move to looking at situations in the real world.

Multicultural Children’s Literature

History of Multicultural Children’s Literature

Although multicultural children’s literature has gained some popularity in schools and in homes, this was not always the case. Nodelman (2000) wrote that the current trend in multicultural children’s literature, “exists only and exactly because the children’s literature produced in England and North America in the decades and centuries earlier was so desperately non-multicultural” (p. 8; emphasis in original). For many years, minority groups within the United States were ignored in children’s literature. If they did appear in books, their characters were stereotypical, ridiculed, and/or seen as secondary to the main characters (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008; Sims Bishop, 2007).

Multicultural children’s literature gained some recognition from the public in the 1950s. Arna Bontemps, an African-American author, was awarded the Newbery Honor for Story of a Negro; he became the first minority author to receive this prize. Other multicultural characters emerged in literature during this time that were written in a more positive light. With the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, public attention was focused on racial and social inequalities of our country. Two important works came out of these times. In 1963 Ezra Jack Keats won the Caldecott Medal for the illustrations in his book, The Snowy Day. Although Keats was white, this was significant because it marked the first picture book with an African-American protagonist to win this award (Sims Bishop, 1982). Perhaps one of the most pivotal moments in multicultural children’s literature was the publication of Nancy Larrick’s article, “The All-White World of Children’s Books” in

the September 11, 1965 Saturday Review (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). The article reflected her study on current books being published for children and the lack of diversity in the characters, the authors, and the illustrators. Publishing and purchasing habits came to be scrutinized on a large scale, and real changes started to be made.

In 1970 the Coretta Scott King Award was established to honor African-American authors and illustrators for outstanding inspirational and educational contributions. The winning titles promote understanding and appreciation of all cultures and their contribution to the realization of the American dream of a pluralistic society. The award was designed to commemorate the life and works of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and to honor Mrs. Coretta Scott King for her courage and determination to continue working for peace (Coretta Scott King Book Award, 2010). Five years after this award was established, African-American author, Virginia Hamilton, won the Newbery Medal for her book, M.C. Higgins, The Great, and became the award's first minority author. This marked a shift in publishing. Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson wrote that, "Euro-American authors were no longer as likely to win major awards for writing about minorities as they were in the early 1970s" (p. 220).

Table 2-1. Significant events in the history of multicultural children's literature

Event	Significance
Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears (1976) illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon	First picture book illustrated by an African American to win the Caldecott Medal
Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China (1990) translated and written by Ed Young	First picture book illustrated by a Chinese American to win the Caldecott Medal
Americas Award founded (1993)	Honored authors and illustrators of books portraying Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latinos in the US

Table 2-1. Continued.

Event	Significance
Grandfather's Journey (1994) written and illustrated by Alan Say	First picture book by a Japanese American to win the Caldecott Medal
Tomas Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award founded (1995)	Award focused on experiences of Mexican Americans
Pura Belpre Award founded (1996)	Honored Latino authors and illustrators
The Trip Back Home (2001) by Janet S. Wong	Won first Asian Pacific American Award for Literature
American Indian Youth Services Literature Award founded (2006)	Award focused on experiences of Native Americans
The Lion and the Mouse (2009) by Jerry Pinkney	First solo African-American illustrator to win Caldecott Medal

Compiled from Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008; Naidoo, 2008

Great strides have been made in the field of multicultural children's literature, but there is still a long way to go for authors and illustrators. Horning (2009) reported that since the mid-1980s, the percentage of children's books written or illustrated by people of color has not surpassed 5% of the total number of children's books published. These statistics are especially troublesome when considering all the benefits multicultural children's book can have for students.

Introduction to Various Types of Multicultural Children's Literature

Asian American literature

Asian American children's literature mainly encompasses the cultural and ethnic heritages of Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Korean American, and Indian Americans. However, Asian countries are varied in geography, culture, and history—"from Afghanistan to Yemen, from Hong Kong to Mongolia" (Yokota, 2009). Often the diversity of Asia and its peoples there and living in the U.S. are not captured in

children's literature. Similarly, the genres have been limited to traditional literature (folklore), realistic fiction, and historical fiction (Norton, 2009). Smaller publishing initiatives in this country (e.g., Lee & Low Books) and around the world, are currently working to remedy these limits (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008). There is also a movement to consider the use of online texts, which can be more authentic and more readily available to American children (Yokota, 2009). The International Children's Digital Library (http://en.childrenslibrary.org/) is a wonderful resource with original books scanned into its collection. Although this database can also have its own limitations (book rights must be donated), original books from Asia and beyond can be found here.

One major issue regarding children's literature as a whole is the authenticity of representation. When characters, values, and other cultural aspects are not represented accurately in books, then children (and adults) can come away with stereotypes. The Council on Interracial Books for Children (1977) compiled the following criteria for selecting Asian American children's literature:

- The book should reflect the realities and way of life of Asian American people. Is the story accurate for the historical period and cultural context? Are the characters from a variety of social and economic levels? Does the plot exaggerate the exoticism or mysticism of the customs and festivals of the Asian American culture?
- The book should transcend stereotypes. Do the Asian Americans handle their own problems or do they require benevolent intervention from a white person? Are there obvious occupational stereotypes—do all Asian Americans work in laundries or restaurants?
- The literature should seek to rectify historical distortions and omissions.
- The characters in the book should try to avoid the model minority and super minority syndromes.
- The literature should reflect an awareness of the changing status of women in society.
- The illustrations should reflect the racial diversity of Asian Americans.

Teachers and parents can use these criteria to select quality Asian American children's books. Some important authors and illustrators of these books include: Laurence Yep, Ed Young, Allen Say, An Na, Cynthia Kadohata, Linda Sue Park, and Gene Luen Yang.

Latino literature

Literature in this category can refer to the experiences of Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and others from Central and South America. As with Asian American children's literature, some subcultures are being overrepresented in literature while others have minimal exposure. For example, Naidoo (2008) found that almost half (49%) of the picture books that won the Americas and Pura Belpre honors and awards from 1993 to 2004 focused on the Mexican/Mexican American culture. Additionally, he found that 18% of the winners represented Caribbean cultures (Haitians, Jamaicans, Trinidadians, and Dominicans). The remaining subcultures were scarcely represented: Puerto Rican 4%; Central American (Costa Rican, El Salvadorian, Guatemalan, and Panamanian) 8.5%; Cuban 5.6%; and South American (Argentinean, Venezuelan, and Brazilian) 4% (p. 29).

Latino children's literature also suffers the fate of poor publication numbers, despite the fact that Latinos represent an estimated 13% of the population and account for 40% of the nation's population growth in the 1900s (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008; Norton, 2009). Because of this shortage of books and the possible stereotypes that may be found in the literature, evaluating Latino children's literature is imperative. Donna Norton (2009) offered the following criteria:

- Does the book suggest that poverty is a condition for all the people? This is a negative stereotype suggested in some literature.

- Are problems handled individually, allowing the main characters to use their efforts to solve their problems? Or are all problems solved through the intervention of Anglo Americans?
- Are problems handled realistically or superficially? Is a character's main problem leaning to speak English?
- Is the cultural information accurate? Are Mexican American, Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, or other Latin American and South American cultures realistically pictured? Is the culture treated with respect?
- Do the illustrations depict individuals, not stereotypes?
- Is the language free from derogatory terms?
- If the author portrays dialects, are they a natural part of the story and not used to suggest a stereotype?
- If the author uses Spanish language, are the words spelled and used correctly?

In many cases, these criteria can be met when looking at literature by members of the Latino culture. Some important authors and illustrators are: Alma Flor Ada, George Ancona, Francisco Jimenez, Pat Mora, Gary Soto, Pam Munoz Ryan, Julia Alvarez, Viola Canales, Yuyi Morales, and Benjamin Alire Saenz.

Native American literature

Although much has been written about Native Americans, there have been few books written by members of this culture. Again, small publishers and the push for texts written by Native Americans in the classroom may help correct this situation in the future. Themes of Native American children's literature include oppression by the White population and appreciation, celebration, and protection of nature (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008). Many books are traditional stories including myths, legends, and folktales which are rooted in the oral storytelling traditions (Reese, 2007).

Because of the stereotypes children and adults hold about Native Americans and "the belief … that Native Americans were a part of the past but were "wiped out" and

ceased to exist" (Eikstadt & Falk-Ross, 2008, p. 10), selecting quality Native American children's literature is necessary. It is also important to include contemporary portratyals of Native Americans within the range of books used. Eikstadt & Falk-Ross (2008) presented some questions that educators and parents should ask themselves when selecting Native American children's literature:

- Are Native Americans portrayed as real human beings?
- Do they appear to have coherent motivations of their own, comparable to those attributed to non-Indians?
- Do Native Americans initiate actions based on their own values and judgments?
- Are stereotypes and clichés avoided?
- Are communities presented as dynamic, evolving entities that can adapt?
- Does it avoid loaded words (savage, buck, chief, squaw) and an insensitive or offensive tone?

Another source for finding quality Native American children's literature, which also identifies books for educators and parents to avoid, is Oyate (www.oyate.org). Some important authors and illustrators in this category are: Joseph Bruchac, Sherman Alexi, Marlene Carvell, Carol Cornelius, Paul Goble, Louise Erdrich, and Scott O'Dell.

Religious cultures literature, including Judaism and Islam

Green and Oldendorf (2005) wrote that, "One of the best ways to help children and teachers understand religious diversity is through children's literature" (p. 211). In fact, in a recent graduate-level multicultural children's literature course I helped teach, one of the students admitted that she didn't know what Chanukah was and had been embarrassed/afraid to ask. Reading a children's book about the Jewish holiday had made her more knowledgeable and helped her save face. Religious cultures that are

depicted in children’s literature include Native American spirituality, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Because the US has been a traditionally Christian nation (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008), literature concerning this religious culture is the most plentiful. After that, Jewish children’s literature has been largely produced. One of the main themes of Jewish children’s literature is the horrific experience of the Jewish Holocaust in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. Some important works on this topic include: Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl, Number the Stars (Lowry, 1989), Maus (Spiegelman, 1991), Milkweed (Spinelli, 2003), I Have Lived a Thousand Days (Bitton-Jackson, 1997), Emil and Karl (Glatshteyn, 2006), Run, Boy, Run (Orlev, 2003), Someone Named Eva (Wolf, 2007). As Hazel Rochman (2006) wrote, “these authors have found a form to give voice to the unspeakable” (p. 547).

Recently, children’s literature regarding Islam has worked to teach others about this religious culture and “to address many of the misconceptions that exist about the faith and the Muslim community at large” (Khan, 2006, p. 36). Finding authentic and quality Muslim children’s literature is imperative for meeting these goals. Norton (2009) gave the following guidelines for evaluating books:

- Does the book transcend stereotypes especially in political and social descriptions? Does the depiction of characters and lifestyles lack any implication of stigma? For example, is there an image that all Muslims are brutal terrorists?
- Is the culture authentically portrayed? Is the culture treated with respect? Are the customs and values accurately portrayed without showing the culture as overly exotic or romanticized?
- Are social issues and problems depicted frankly and accurately, without oversimplification?
- If the book is a biography, are both the personality and the accomplishments of the main character shown in accurate detail and not oversimplified?

- Are the illustrations authentic and non-stereotypical in every detail?
- Does the author avoid offensive or degrading vocabulary?
- Is the setting of the book accurately portrayed whether the book is historical or contemporary?

Authors and illustrators of Muslim children's literature include: Naomi Shihab Nye, Rukhsana Khan, Eve Bunting, Asma Mobin-Uddin, Marina Budhos, Deborah Ellis, Yahya Emerick, and Suzanne Fisher Staples.

LBGTQ literature

Children's literature regarding lesbians, bisexuals, gays, transgender, and those who are questioning their sexuality (LBGTQ) is struggling to find its place in classrooms. Not only does this category have a small number of books published each year, but many of those titles are banned (Crisp & Knezek, 2010; Lamme, 2008). Several preservice teachers posed this question to their peers in my children's literature class: How can we get away with sharing such controversial books? Recent states' legislation concerning LGBTQ rights makes this topic even more heated. Unfortunately, the reality might be that many teachers are not allowed to teach this literature to a whole class. Knowledge about quality LGBTQ children's literature, however, is still an important part of preservice teacher education and on-going teacher education.

Within the category of LBGTQ children's literature, books are mostly written about families with LGBT members (usually parents or aunts/uncles) or children who are themselves LGBT or questioning their own sexuality. There are also several books that examine diverse family structures that include LGBT families. Some quality books under this category include: Totally Joe (Howe, 2005), The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Chbosky, 1999), King and King (deHaan & Nijland, 2000), Absolutely, Positively, NOT

(Larochelle, 2005), Heather Has Two Mommies (Newman, 1989), Luna: A Novel (Peters, 2005); And Tango Makes Three (Richardson & Parnell, 2005); Daddy's Roommate (Willhoite, 1990), and From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun (Woodson, 1995).

African-American children's literature

African-American children's literature has many benefits when used in the classroom that apply to all students. African-American students in particular need to be exposed to and interact with books that represent and validate their culture because of their history in the US as nonimmigrants, or involuntary minorities (Ogbu, 1999). Ogbu explained that involuntary minorities were people who were made a part of the United States against their choice through different ways, including slavery. This history has affected the way African Americans have been portrayed (or ignored) within mainstream literature. African-American scholars write of seeing happy slaves in textbooks (Banks, 1998) and other instances of negative stereotypes that stared them in the face (Harris, 2007; Sims Bishop, 1982). Interviews with African-American adults conducted by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) revealed that until they were able to find themselves in the books by recognizing and relating to characters that were like them, many did not enjoy reading or see its value.

African-American children need to read and respond to texts where they use their unique histories to help them interpret what they read. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2002) argued that, "Children's active construction of racial and ethnic meanings and attitudes occurs early and is in important ways very similar to the meanings and attitudes held by adults" (p. 189). The conceptualization of race and racial identity happen early in life, and the inclusion of quality multicultural children's literature can help those identities

develop positively. Reading authentic African-American children's literature that is culturally conscious can provide positive images, cultural understanding, and an appreciation for Black English (Harris, 2008; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; McClellan & Fields, 2004; Sims Bishop, 2007; Sims Bishop, 1982).

Horning, Lindgran, Rudiger, and Schliesman (2006) reported that in 2005 there were only 75 new children's books written or illustrated by African Americans reviewed by the Cooperative Children's Book Center. With 3,000 children's books published, this works out to be just 2.5% of the total, while African Americans make up 12.5% of the US's population. Some important African-American authors are Walter Dean Myers, Christopher Paul Curtis, Julius Lester, Jacqueline Woodson, Tom Feelings, James Baldwin, Sharon Draper, Angela Johnson, and Kadir Nelson.

When evaluating African-American children's literature, Norton (2009) offered several questions to keep in mind:

- If dialect is used, does the dialect have a legitimate purpose and does it ring true?
- Are social issues and problems depicted frankly, accurately, and without oversimplification?
- Are the factual and historical details accurate? Does the book appear to be authentic for the culture?
- Does the author accurately describe any contemporary settings and conflicts?
- Does the author avoid offensive vocabulary?
- Does the book reflect an awareness of the changing status of females within African-American culture? (p. 25)

African-American boys require more consideration regarding literature because of their differences in community and culture, as well as their experiences with educational attainment. As an educator of Black boys and now preservice teachers, Tatum (2005)

advocated that teachers address issues pertinent to African-American boys in order to prevent those issues from influencing literacy development. The table below summarizes these issues and their manifestations:

Table 2-2. Roots of Black male turmoil and responses

The roots of Black male turmoil	The Black male's response to turmoil	The ways institutions have responded to this turmoil
The effect of globalization	"Cool Pose"	Micro-aggression
Urban economic neglect	Cope with oppression, invisibility, and marginality	Psychometric warfare
Mass media and popular culture	Communicate power, toughness, detachment, and style	Misguided educational placements
Public policy regarding criminal justice	Maintain a balance between his inner life and his social environment	Barriers to learning
The persistence of racial discrimination	Cope with conflict and anxiety	Expulsion and suspension
The crumbling Black community infrastructure	Render him visible and empower him	
The lack of fulfillment of civil rights promises	Neutralize stress	
	Manage his feelings of rage	
	Counter negative forces	

Adapted from Tatum (2005)

The turmoil that African-American boys face in their lives causes a response from them individually (a 'cool pose') and from the greater institutions. When the 'cool pose' conflicts with schools, then a hostile environment emerges for all members—students, teachers, and administrators. Tatum argued that several fields of knowledge must be integrated into literacy instruction such as education, social work, anthropology, and sociology to help students cope with turmoil. Furthermore, literacy instruction should be

expanded to foster multiple literacies: academic, emotional, cultural, and social (p. 35). While the first literacy is familiar to most educators, the other three are vitally important despite being sometimes ignored in the classroom. Some important African-American authors whose works can be used to promote these literacies are Walter Dean Myers, Christopher Paul Curtis, Julius Lester, Jacqueline Woodson, Tom Feelings, James Baldwin, Sharon Draper, Angela Johnson, and Kadir Nelson. For example, Myers' book, Lockdown (2010), examined the emotions of an adolescent Black male in a juvenile detention center. The protagonist enacts the 'cool pose' in response to bullying from other inmates and suffers consequences when he will not back down from the threat of violence. Multicultural children's literature can be a foundation for addressing the issues of turmoil that African-American boys face.

Criminal justice issues in multicultural children's literature

Although many students have experiences with the criminal justice system (both in the school and community setting), there are few books that address these issues. Within this microcosm of multicultural children's literature, though, several themes have emerged. For example, there are children's books about civil disobedience, political prisoners, the witness protection program, and child characters whose parents are prison guards or executioners. There are also stories about hate crimes, child detectives who consult with the police, and teenage lawyers, as well as books in which young readers get to render their own verdicts in fictional and historical court cases. Throughout this broad range of relevant works, however, the most recurrent topics in children's books about the criminal justice system remain incarcerated parents and other relatives, historical novels about prisons, juvenile crime, and criminal trials.

Transactional Theory of Reader Response

Rosenblatt (1978) addressed two stances of reading: aesthetic and efferent. These stances determine a reader's approach to a text. An aesthetic stance is concerned with personal and experiential transactions with a text. Specifically, Rosenblatt (1978) stated that, "In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p. 25, italics in original). In efferent reading, however, the reader concentrates on extracting facts, examples, and other information from a text.

These two stances of reading are set on a continuum; depending on the reader, all or part of a text can be read either aesthetically or efferently (Rosenblatt, 1978). Some scholars have argued that this continuum leaves out the important stance of critical reading (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). The critical stance would, according to Wade, Thompson, and Watkins (1994), investigate the author's underlying messages and assumptions. It would be held as parallel to the aesthetic and efferent stances, and all three would be engaged during reading experiences.

Other scholars (e.g., Cai, 2008; Probst, 2002) have commented on this misunderstanding. While Rosenblatt's theory is a theory of reading, it does not teach a certain critical perspective. Instead, the theory "begins with the unique, individual aesthetic response, and then may extend into a vast array of fascinating questions about reader, text, author, culture, society, gender, history, and more" (Probst, 2002, p. 31). Therefore, there are many connections between aesthetic, efferent, and critical reading (Cai, 2008).

Aesthetic Reading

> In aesthetic reading, we respond to the very story or poem that we are evoking during the transaction with the text. In order to shape the work, we draw on our reservoir of past experience with people and the world, our past inner linkage of words and things, our past encounters with spoken or written texts. We listen to the sound of words in the inner ear; we lend our sensations, our emotions, our sense of being alive, to the new experience which, we feel, corresponds to the text. We participate in the story, we identify with characters, we share their conflicts and their feelings. At the same time there is a stream of responses being generated. There may be a sense of pleasure in our own creative activity… a feeling of approval or disapproval of the characters and their behavior. We may be aware of a contrast between the assumptions or expectations about life that we brought to the reading and the attitudes, moral codes, social situations we are living through in the world created in transaction with the text (Rosenblatt, 2001, p. 270).

From Rosenblatt's quote above, it is apparent that there are many ways a reader can respond aesthetically to a text. Cai (2008) described the three central modes of aesthetic reading responses: perception, association, and affection. When responding in the perception mode, the reader pays attention to things in the text that are intriguing, significant, and/or shocking. In the association mode, the reader makes connections to aspects of the story including characters, plot, and setting. Finally, in the affection mode, the reader responds by sharing emotions regarding what happens in the story.

Efferent Reading

> As the reader responds to the printed words or symbols, his attention is directed outward, so to speak, toward concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading. To designate this type of reading, in which the primary concern of the reader is with what he will carry away from the reading, I have chosen the term "efferent," derived from the Latin, "efferre," "to carry away." (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 24)

Students take an efferent stance to reading when they are faced with standardized test passages and comprehension questions. "What grade did I get? Did I pass? Will I

be promoted?" are all questions that high-stakes testing has cultivated in the minds of children as early as in elementary school (Guthrie, 2002).

Critical Reading

Critical literacy, or reading, goes beyond traditional notions of reading and writing to include critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one's world (McDaniel, 2004). Shannon (1995) gave this explanation:

> Critical perspectives push the definition of literacy beyond traditional decoding or encoding of words in order to reproduce the meaning of text or society until it becomes a means for understanding one's own history and culture, to recognize connection between one's life and the social structure, to believe that change in one's life, and the lives of others and society are possible as well as desirable, and to act on this new knowledge in order to foster equal and just participation in all the decisions that affect and control our lives (p. 83).

When reading from a critical stance, readers employ their prior knowledge in order to comprehend relationships between their ideas and those presented by the text's author (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

Many studies that use children's literature to foster students' critical literacy skills use what Cai (2008) called a transact-to-transform approach. He explained that this came from a combination of Rosenblatt's transactional approach to reading and Banks' transformational approach to integrating multicultural education (including literature) into the curriculum. The goal of the transact-to-transform approach is for students to transact with multicultural children's literature in order to possibly change their perspectives on cultural issues. Because literacy and literary practices are also social and cultural practices, they cannot be separated from issues such as power, race, class, and gender that influence how readers transact with texts (Rogers, 1999).

Critical literacy involves taking a stance towards what you are reading and focuses on several dimensions, including: (1) disrupting the commonplace; (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints; (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues; and (4) taking action and promoting social justice. (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002, p. 382).

Literature Circle Studies

The qualitative studies I inspected focused on the interactions between the participants and the observers. They center on literature circles in their varying reincarnations. The voices of the researchers, the teachers, and the students are shared through discussions and observations. Therefore, theories and findings from these studies are developed inductively. Analyses of the literature circle discussions were varied, along with the interpretations of the researchers and participants.

King's (2001) study focused on the role of talk as a way of developing student's meaningful interactions with literary texts. The literature circles were introduced in two British schools to extend children as readers in Year Five. The conversations were audio taped and then analyzed according to themes of the readers supporting each other in exploring both the texts they read and themselves as readers (p. 32). King believed that the best text-related talk, according to these qualifiers, evolved from texts that have multiple perspectives and meanings because they challenge students to think in new ways.

Including classroom observations of literature circles discussions and open-ended interviews with students and teachers, Bettis and Roe (2008) used a qualitative design because it fit their intention to understand the relationships between adolescents' female identity and their literacy practices (p. 25). When data had been collected, the researchers analyzed a subset for initial coding. This process continued as more data

were analyzed and more codes were agreed upon and expanded. Their final codes resulted in profiles that typify the girls, capture their roles in literature circle discussion, and outline the influence of the teachers' actions on the girls.

Short, Kaufman, Kaser, Kahn, and Crawford (1999) also looked at literature circle discussions, but instead of focusing on just the students as research participants, they examined themselves as teacher researchers. Specifically, they wanted to monitor their teacher talk before, during, and after the literacy event of a small-group literature circle discussion. The next phase of the research involved removing themselves from the discussion. The audio tapes of all discussions throughout the year were transcribed and analyzed using constant comparative analysis, which stems from the grounded theory of methodology of Glaser and Strauss (Mills, 2008). They identified the roles they played as teachers as facilitators, participants, mediators, and active listeners. When they were not present in the literature circle discussion groups, they found that their talk still influenced those discussions; students used 'get-going' strategies similar to the ones used by them and they acted as facilitators (p. 381).

Clarke (2007) used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to interpret a discussion of five fifth-graders regarding the book, Shiloh. She showed how the conversation actually brought to light larger discursive practices in the classroom, school, and community. Some basic qualities of CDA are explained in her research: (1) an underlying principle of CDA is to acknowledge that language is a social practice; (2) language use is always social and CDA occurs above the unit of the sentence; (3) we cannot look at language without looking at power because every discursive event is predicated on power

relations; and (4) sll discourse is ideological, and therefore by looking at language we are really looking at local examples of commonly held beliefs (p. 113).

The three-tiered analytical framework of description, interpretation, and explanation drove Clarke's data collection and analysis. I give a more detailed description of CDA in Chapter 3. The themes that arose from her research reveal an underlying ideology of male discursive power. One of her suggestions for reworking literature circles groups is to use literature that directly addresses gender issues.

Critical Literacy Studies with Children's Literature

Critical literacy goes beyond traditional notions of reading and writing to include critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one's world (McDaniel, 2004). Shannon (1995) gave this explanation:

> Critical perspectives push the definition of literacy beyond traditional decoding or encoding of words in order to reproduce the meaning of text or society until it becomes a means for understanding one's own history and culture, to recognize connection between one's life and the social structure, to believe that change in one's life, and the lives of others and society are possible as well as desirable, and to act on this new knowledge in order to foster equal and just participation in all the decisions that affect and control our lives (p. 83).

Many studies that use children's literature to foster students' critical literacy skills employ what Cai (2008) called a transact-to-transform approach. He explained that this came from a combination of Rosenblatt's transactional approach to reading and Banks' transformational approach to integrating multicultural education (literature) into the curriculum. The goal of the transact-to-transform approach is for students to transact with multicultural children's literature in order to possibly change their perspectives on cultural issues. The following studies employ critical literacy strategies when reading multicultural children's literature.

Long and Gove (2003) incorporated engagement strategies into the literature circle discussions of their study to promote critical responses of urban, fourth-grade students. Originally the researchers just observed and recorded student-led literature circle discussions, but they realized that the students did not go beyond basic retelling of the stories. The three engagement strategies were then introduced to encourage students and teachers to use their imaginations to question, investigate, and interpret particular text events (p. 351). The researchers believed that by coupling literature circle discussions with engagement strategies, students would begin to interpret from more than one point of view and be purposeful and reflective. These traits would lead to developing a classroom that promotes curiosity and questioning, and pushes reading, writing, thinking, feeling, talking, and taking action beyond the obvious (p. 350). The researchers analyzed the new and improved literature circle discussions and found that students' critical response as oral expressions led to written expressions of the same high caliber.

Jewett (2007) engaged members of a graduate-level children's literature course to use lenses of transactional literary theory and critical literacy theory to read. Her previous experiences teaching this course revealed that students were comfortable transacting with literature, but were hesitant to critically read it. That is, they had no problem connecting children's literature to their personal lives, but they resisted discussing issues of social justice and equity. Through different strategies for discussion, Jewett encouraged her students, who were teachers, librarians, and other graduate students, to "redefine their personal responses to include critical responses, to

read knee-deep" (p. 149). Specifically, she asked them to question what they read in terms of systems such as class, gender, and race.

Blake (2010) examined the critical responses of students to cultural texts written by other students during writers' workshop. Whereas before their responses had been summaries of what had been read or statements of like/dislike, their comments regarding their peers' writings were enthused and critical. They responded by reflecting on their own experiences, which validated the significance of the events in their peers' writings. Blake found that this provided more opportunities for critical response. Her recommendation, then, is to help students "critique and transform culture through their own texts and eventually, we hope, through a serious study of other meaningful literatures" (p. 242).

Critical Literacy Studies with African-American Males and Children's Literature

Williams (2008) observed and questioned the book selections of economically disadvantaged black elementary students. She found that boys most often selected books with males on their covers whereas girls were more likely to select books based on their familiarity with the topic through media. Based on this finding, she recommended that teachers and caregivers should "provide access to books that are representative of everyday culture interests, as they appear to increase the likelihood that students will be engaged in reading" (p. 60). When black boys have their choice of books, they most often gravitate towards books with male characters that reflect "a piece of their identity" (p. 60).

In a similar study, Holmes, Powell, Holmes, and Witt (2007) found that black boys in two third-grade classrooms selected an almost equal number of books with white (51.1%) and black (48.9%) characters reflected on the covers. The results seem to

indicate that African-American boys do not differentiate by race in their preference of books. However, they still argued for inclusion of books about different races. They wrote that, “reading books about dissimilar people may promote a new awareness that leads to understanding and acceptance” (p. 280).

Focusing on reader responses, Tyson (1999) read aloud contemporary multicultural children’s literature to African-American males. Her study started as a reaction to a problem she saw in her classroom: this population was not engaged with the traditional literature that was currently being read aloud (e.g., fairy tales). When students listened to the other texts and started responding to them, Tyson found that,

> They began to scrutinize and interrupt with information through cause and effect, hypothesizing ideas and predictions, inferring or deciphering character traits or identifying the author’s purpose, as well as bringing personal insight and their own experience to their literary interpretations (p. 156).

Furthermore, discussions about the texts showed that the boys were raising their awareness of societal issues. They were moved to think about and, in some cases, enact social action as a response to the texts.

Jacobs (2006) worked with incarcerated male youths to document their artistic responses to young adult literature. Unfortunately, her study does not indicate the races of the participants, but because of her literature review and stated purpose of the study, I assume that African-American males were included. She found that as the males gained confidence in their artistic skills, they “started to take risks with their artistic responses… [and] make judgments and applications, such as living in foster homes, dealing with drugs, and gang violence, to their lives” (p. 116). The implications for teaching according to Jacobs include: (1) increasing youth engagement with young adult literature; (2) including artistic response in the curriculum to demonstrate text

comprehension, especially higher-level thinking, in young-adult literature; (3) developing personal points of view rather than depending on other literature and peers; (4) transferring the positive aesthetic experiences to benefit youth attitudes; (5) providing an alternative to the traditional paper-and-pencil method of responding to questions; and (6) providing a forum for understanding individual youths' concerns and prior experiences (p. 117).

My Approach to Literature Circle Study with Critical Literacy Strategies

Patton (2002) wrote that purpose is the controlling force in research—decisions about design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation all come from the researcher's purpose. My purpose can be viewed as applied research. I wanted to illuminate a societal concern by examining the responses African-American boys have regarding multicultural children's literature that addresses criminal justice issues. Because of this purpose, I felt that a qualitative approach to gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data would be best. Qualitative design captured a way to explore the questions I had about their reactions to this microcosm of multicultural children's literature. Qualitative methods also provided me with direction for analyzing the data gathered in small focus group observations of literature discussions and individual interviews with my participants.

Although the setting for my study took the form of a literature circle discussion, it is unique from the qualitative studies mentioned previously. The group of students was fairly homogeneous: aged eight to ten; African American; and male. Greenbaum (1987) advocated for single-sex groups in his work on focus group studies because he believed that boys and girls are often hostile to each other and have differences in their interests. I chose to focus on a single-sex group because of males' susceptibility to incarceration.

Another way my study was different is because of the choice of literature discussed. Multicultural children's literature, described previously, can be viewed as a mirror, a window, and a door for students (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Sims Bishop, 2009). Books about criminal justice issues can show students that they are not alone in having those experiences, that children do interact with the justice system of cops, courts, and corrections, and that discussing these issues is a way to critically address society at large. In my pilot study at a local elementary school, twelve of the fourteen participants had had the experience of a family member going to jail. During our short and limited discussions of two picture books, Woodson's (2002) *Visiting Day* and Testa's (1996) *Nine Candles*, students made connections to the main characters and brought up issues concerning race and socioeconomic status. They were challenged to rethink hegemony, the way things are (Crotty, 1998).

Because of the nature of the books I brought to the literature group discussions, I analyzed the data according to the method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). I believe that this critical perspective, geared toward examining the subtle ways in which unequal power relations are maintained and reproduced through language use, helped me and will help others understand the responses of my participants (Weninger, 2008). In Chapter 3, I describe CDA in more detail and the particulars of my methodology.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

Educational research has taken many forms historically. The ways in which one views knowledge can direct how to approach inquiry (Creswell, 1998; Crotty, 1998; Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2002). Creswell and Miller (1997) offered several guiding questions for researchers to consider when developing their own research methodologies. What counts as knowledge? Where is knowledge found? How can we arrive at knowledge? How do we describe or write about it? How do we study knowledge?

Researchers who take a quantitative approach to research see knowledge as something external to the individual. Knowledge is therefore also seen as objective because it is not dependent on an individual's perception. Quantitative researchers can gain this knowledge "by engaging in studies that employ this 'outside' knowledge. They start deductively with a theory and attempt to test it" (Creswell & Miller, 1997, p. 35).

Qualitative researchers, however, see knowledge as something inside the individual (Hatch, 2002). These researchers place significance on how participants in a study make meaning of a situation, which includes multiple dimensions. Knowledge is therefore socially constructed through our interactions and discussions. The views and experiences of the participants are then used to form theories inductively. Furthermore, the researcher is present in the studies, with her role fluctuating between insider and outsider (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001). Creswell (1998) described qualitative research as building a complex and holistic picture.

Because in this study I examined the responses Black boys have regarding multicultural children's literature that addresses criminal justice issues, I chose a qualitative approach to research. Two primary questions: 1) What do Black boys' responses say about their personal connections to the stories? and 2) What do Black boys' responses say about their perceptions of society, specifically their understandings of how justice works in their lives and their communities? guided my investigation. In this Chapter, I will begin with the epistemological and theoretical foundations of this study. Then I will describe the research design, including the setting, the participant selection, multiple trajectories of data collection, and data analysis. Finally, I will address the trustworthiness of the study, my subjectivity statements, and the possible limitations of the study.

Epistemology and Theoretical Framework

Research begins with an understanding of "how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8), or epistemology. From this understanding, researchers can formulate a theoretical perspective and then approach a study with the corresponding methodology and methods. For this study concerning the responses African-American boys have to multicultural children's literature addressing criminal justice issues, I worked under a critically conscious epistemology, also known as critical theory. Critically conscious researchers view the material world as being comprised of historically situated structures. These structures are perceived to be real (e.g., natural and absolute), and can have an important impact on the life chances of individuals (Hatch, 2002). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), these structures are limiting and confining in the ways that individuals are treated according to race, gender, and social class. Critical

theory is a research that seeks to challenge, read situations in terms of conflict and oppression, and bring about change (Crotty, 1998).

Knowledge for critically conscious researchers is subjective and inherently political (Hatch, 2002). Furthermore, it is always “value mediated” in the sense that “the investigator and the investigated object are assumed to be interactively linked, with the values of the investigator inevitably influencing the inquiry” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). I made the assumption, according to this view, that the knowledge from my study was mediated through my own political positionings. Critically conscious researchers also use a wide range of philosophical thought to guide their work; these thoughts and perspectives are “adopted and adapted to address emancipation, liberation, social justice, and democracy” (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008, p. 3). With the exposure of historically situated structures, “comes the call for awareness, resistance, solidarity, and revolutionary transformation” (Hatch, 2002, p. 17).

Consciousness can be viewed as the state of awareness of both one’s internal and external worlds. Critical consciousness goes one step further. “What makes a person critically conscious is challenging the underlying assumptions that work in the internal and external worlds to privilege some while disprivileging others” (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008, p. 5). I briefly describe the theoretical progression of critical consciousness because it serves as a theoretical underpinning of my study.

Viewing the sociohistoric window into Western-Eurocentric consciousness offers an examination of the evolution of critical theorizing (Crotty, 1998; Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008). The 18th century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant,

sought to establish an understanding of epistemology that was separate from empirical and metaphysical thinking. To do this, he emphasized the importance and content of experience and its role in human knowledge (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008). In Kant's (1965) words, "Our knowledge springs from two fundamental sources of the mind; the first is the capacity of receiving representations… the second is the power of knowing an object through these representations" (p. 75). He implied that humans can be conscious of their thinking, their world, and their experiences in the world. This self-knowledge can also lead to an improved understanding of how to function in the world. While Kantian philosophers promote the universal appeal of his theories, others view his thinking as racist and sexist because he used a racial and gendered hierarchy to elucidate which people are human, moral, and rational (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008).

Hegel's (1977) theories are understood as a critique of Kant. Several main ideas of his thinking include:

- The individual is part of the culture in which s/he lives, and notions of selfhood evolve from experiences;
- Philosophy's goal should be to understand how this occurs in humanity; and
- There are connections between reason and history.

Hegel saw consciousness as an evolutionary process; it developed in the following stages: sense-certainty, perception, understanding, self-consciousness, unhappy consciousness, reason (nature, law, and community), ethics, religion, and Absolute Knowing (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008). True consciousness, according to Hegel, looked outward to the world and assumed social responsibility.

Marx built on the ideas of Kant and Hegel in his writings with Engels. After his earlier years as a member of the Young Hegelians, the more radical followers of Hegel, Marx critiqued Hegel as being “too abstract” (Crotty, 1998, p. 117). While he supported Hegel’s emphasis on the importance of social relations in forming consciousness, Marx felt his idea of social consciousness lacked a way to explain changes in history (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008). Marx’s theories of consciousness were outlined in his and Engels’ ideas of historical materialism. They (1980) believed that, “consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process” (p. 14). Marx also thought that consciousness, as an idea, was formed in response to social and economic contexts (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008). For example, Marx (1977) characterized consciousness within his understanding of capitalism:

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations… independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society… to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness…. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness (p. 388).

While Kant, Hegel, and Marx laid the foundation for theories of consciousness and critical consciousness, they applied these theories mainly to other White men. Many researchers struggle to get over their thinking about race/ethnicity and gender in order to address how consciousness sustains social injustices for others (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008). Current critical theorizing works to openly tackle issues of race/ethnicity and gender, moving oppression and its connection with class to the

center of criticality. Other forms of oppression (e.g., immigration status, language, sexual orientation, and religion) are also being examined by current researchers.

In 1924, the Institute for Social Research (the Frankfurt School) was established with the goal to "first and foremost to serve in the study and extension of scientific Marxism" (Wiggershaus, 1994, p. 35). The scholars affiliated with the school, however, described their work as social and theoretical materialism, critical theory of society, critical social theory, and critical theory. Their projects helped reinforce critical theorists' focus on issues of class, race, ethnicity, and gender. Bronner (2002) believed that Frankfurt School scholars re-envisioned Marxism and gave way to "a new emphasis upon 'consciousness' and the vision of radical transformation of society. A new concern with the connection between revolutionary theory and practice made itself felt" (p. 6). One of the greatest legacies of the Frankfurt School is its emphasis on questioning every institution and thought that impacts our lives (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008).

Many of the scholars of the Frankfurt School fled Germany when Hitler and the Nazi party came to power in 1933 because of the school's associations with Marxism and Judaism (Crotty, 1998). The 1950s ushered in a second generation of scholars including Jurgen Habermas. Habermas continued the evolution of critical theory through reconceptualizing and redefining the critical project (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008). His 1973 work sets forth a theory of discourse and distinguishes it from communicative actions. According to Crotty (1998), Habermas'

> Discourse constitutes an unusual form of communication in which the participants subject themselves to the force of better argument, with the view of coming to an agreement about the validity or invalidity of problematic claims. In discourse the beliefs, norms, and values that are

> taken for granted in everyday interaction are expressly thematised and subjected to critique (p. 144).

Therefore, the very structure of communicative discourse for Habermas is emancipatory (Rasmussen, 1990). Throughout his long career, Habermas focused on reason, language, communication, and a normative foundation for social critique (Crotty, 1998).

While the Frankfurt School was contributing to critical theories, so were other scholars in Western Europe. Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Marxist, who founded the Italian Communist Party in 1921 (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008). His ideas of hegemony were rooted in the writings of Marx and Engels, but they shifted over time to include intellectual, political, and moral hegemony (Forgas, 2000). Gramsci came to believe that hegemony meant any form of domination that implied power, and that hegemony was never complete, but "always shifting, changing, and adjusting to ideological and cultural struggles" (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008, p. 20). The real struggle in society, therefore, is over ideas; those who could name or define ideas or realties had the real power. Gramsci (1971) suggested that social transformation or revolution was possible when working with adversarial groups through practical work or substantive change.

Critical theory also had roots in the United States. In an effort to promote balance, I center this discussion on the contributions of African-American scholars while acknowledging the scholarship and activism of others. The first leaders of critical consciousness include Anna Julia (Haywood) Cooper, the mother of Black Feminism; W.E.B. Du Bois, social scientist and a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); and Carter G. Woodson, the father of Negro history (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008). Their activism, coupled with

their scholarship, helped to form the foundation for African Americans who were seeking transformation and social justice. Cooper (1892) wrote about the hypocrisy of the feminist movement-- while it fought for White women's rights, it ignored Black women. She also challenged African-American men who fought for the rights of African Americans, but specifically focused on the rights of men.

Du Bois believed that both their African descent and their history of enslavement in the U.S. shaped the consciousness of African Americans. Furthermore, Du Bois (1995/1903) wrote that, "the problem of the Twentieth century is the problem of the color line" (p. xxxi). He felt that in order to apply Marxist theories in the U.S., the roles of race and class oppression must also be considered under capitalism (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008).

Woodson wrote about how economic and social-relational forces shaped the consciousness of African Americans. He believed that race is central to understanding African-American consciousness and life experiences in the U.S.:

> The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of others (Woodson, 1933, p. xiii).

Woodson felt strongly that the U.S. system of education was structured to force all Americans to see African Americans as inferior to Whites; therefore, he worked to create avenues for the publication of African-American histories and books that honored African-American accomplishments (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008).

In the mid-20th century, Black and White activists demonstrated their resistance to social injustice in the U.S. Liberation theology was one of the forms of critical consciousness that arose; it is based on Christian beliefs that seek to end the suffering

in the world (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008). The activists draw support from scriptural references to help the poor and oppressed. Black Liberation Theology (BLT) evolved during the civil rights movement; it combined liberation theology with Black Power and Black Christianity, the Black religious experience, and the struggle for freedom. Advocates of BLT include: James H. Cone, Benjamin E. Mays, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Adam C. Powell Sr., and Adam C. Powell Jr. BLT continues to fight human suffering throughout the world and to celebrate African-American history and culture. According to an interview with James H. Cone (Hagerty, 2008), BLT also works to resist capitalism, poverty, and dominating ideologies that cause human suffering.

No discussion about critical theory would be complete without the mention of the Brazilian educationalist, Paulo Freire. The central idea of his work, and what he thought was paramount for social change, is conscientisation (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 1970; Shor & Freire, 1987). To conscientise means to render consciousness and so conscientisation becomes the process of awakening or increasing consciousness (Crotty, 1998). According to Freire, there are three levels of critical consciousness:

- Semi-intransitive consciousness (limited consciousness),
- Naïve transitivity (a simple trusting attitude about reality), and
- Critical transitivity (individual and critical awareness of problems, and the ability to engage in dialogue in search of solutions) (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008, p. 29).

Freire argued that in order to become free of oppression, people needed to begin the journey of conscientisation and become critically conscious. He wrote, “Being conscious … is a radical form of being, of being human. It pertains to beings that not only know, but know that they know” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 127). For Freire, there

was indivisible solidarity between humans and their world (Crotty, 1998). Thus, he believed that we needed to not only read the word, but also read the world (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Critical theory as an epistemology has evolved and is still in the process of changing. Researchers who adopt this philosophy find themselves questioning commonly held values and assumptions, challenging traditional social structures, and participating in social action (Crotty, 1998). Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) offered some assumptions that are commonly shared by contemporary critical researchers and theorists:

- All thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social in nature and historically constituted;
- Facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from ideological inscription;
- The relationship between concept and object, and between signifier and signified, is never stable and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption;
- Language is central to the formation of subjectivity (both conscious and unconscious awareness);
- Certain groups in any society are privileged over others, constituting an oppression that is most forceful when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary or inevitable;
- Oppression has many faces, and concern for only one form of oppression at the expense of others can be counterproductive because of the connections between them;
- Mainstream research practices are generally implicated (even if unknowingly) in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression (pp. 139-40).

These theorists and scholars and their documented beliefs have guided me to adopt a lens of critical consciousness in developing my research plan, methods, and

analysis. I feel that this lens is the most beneficial in examining the responses black boys have when reading children's literature about criminal justice issues.

Selection and Description of Setting

In this study, I focused on African-American boys. At first, I considered working within an elementary classroom located in a North Central Florida community for this research. I thought that my literature circle discussions could be a part of the English/Language Arts block. In my pilot study conducted during the late spring of 2010, I posed this suggestion to the classroom teacher. Even though the state mandated test for reading had already been completed for the year, she insisted that she maintain possession of her students during that time. As a guest in her classroom, I respected that desire. I was able to pull students during their computer time for literature circle discussions. Although most of the students were happy to participate during this time, several voiced that they did not like missing their computer opportunity. My guilt at taking away from this time caused me to rush through some of the discussions and leave certain topics undiscovered through conversation. I realized that if teachers were not willing to share students during instructional time, then my research would unfortunately infringe on other student activities (e.g., computer time, specials, lunch, and/or recess). I was not willing to take that time away from students. My pilot study experience prompted me to look at after-school programs for research possibilities.

Extended-day enrichment programs (EDEP), often called after-school care, seemed to be the perfect solution. These programs are located at elementary schools within the county and service their own students. The local school board subsidizes EDEPs which enables many students to attend for minimal weekly fees. My colleague, who is a principal in the community, suggested her rural school as a possible setting for

my study. She believed that my research would benefit her students, specifically the African-American boys in the third and fourth grades who had not met AYP (adequate yearly progress) according to their standardized test scores from the previous year. From this point forward, I will be using the pseudonym of Massie Elementary to refer to the setting.

Massie Elementary is located in a rural North Central Florida community. According to the Florida Department of Education website, African-American students make up 17% of the school's population. The school qualifies for Title 1 services because 52% of students are eligible for free and/or reduced lunch. In the past few years, the administration at Massie Elementary has worked hard to raise the scores of 3rd and 4th graders taking the high-stakes Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in the subjects of reading and math. In spite of these efforts, the scores for African-American males in both the reading and math FCAT have not improved that much. In the 2009-2010 school year, only 59% of African-American males scored at or above grade level in FCAT reading. Massie Elementary's school improvement plan for 2010-2011 included additional support for African-American male 3rd and 4th graders in reading and math instruction.

Massie's EDEP site incorporates extracurricular activities with scholastic components. Students have the opportunity to receive homework help, as well as play in semi-organized sports such as flag football. They are broken down into groups according to their grade levels and each group has an adult facilitator. EDEP begins each afternoon with a snack time, followed by homework/study time. Students reconvene briefly to team build through music and chants. Then throughout the school

year, various activities are introduced and students can choose what to participate in based on their interests. They rotate through up to three centers during this time. At any point in the afternoon, students can be checked out of EDEP by parents or other preapproved adults.

Our literature discussions took place in the teacher's lounge, located behind the cafeteria's stage. We sat at a small, square table, which aided in building rapport and enabling each boy to have access to the text and its illustrations. My digital recorder sat in the middle of the table and after a few minutes each session of tapping it and making sure the right light was on, everyone forgot about it (e.g., would point to pictures, instead of using words to describe them). Because we were in an area reserved for teachers, there were several distractions. Teachers would walk through the lounge on the way to and from the copy machine. Others would stop in to purchase an afternoon snack from the vending machine. These distractions would usually cause a pause in our discussions.

The semi-structured initial and final interviews took place in a Kindergarten classroom close to the cafeteria. They were completed one-on-one, with my digital recorder present on the table between us. The open-ended, on-going interviews occurred all over the campus of Massie Elementary. Most happened during EDEP in the cafeteria and outside on the playground. Several conversations were initiated by participants in the hallway and in the library during the special of media as they saw me on campus. These conversations were not digitally recorded; however, I took copious notes in my field notebook after our conversations.

Selection and Description of Participants

Researchers in the critical theory paradigm want to raise the consciousness and transform the lives of those they study (Hatch, 2002). As I looked for participants for my study, I wanted to find black boys who were willing to work with me to examine their responses to children's literature with criminal justice issues. I was also mindful of the principal's request to incorporate students who have struggled on their standardized assessments in the past.

I worked closely with the EDEP director at Massie Elementary to identify both black and white males for the study. Having worked there for five years, she was a wonderful source of information. After distributing consent forms to 15 male 3rd and 4th graders, 8 returned them with a positive response (4 white and 4 African-American/mixed race). Literature circle groups work best when there a small number of students (Daniels, 2002). This allowed for variety of perspectives and responses to a text, while still maintaining an intimate setting for discussion. I started my study with two groups of four members. My two literature discussion groups consisted of two white boys and two African-American/mixed race boys. These groups were formed this way in an attempt to not alienate either group or paint them in an unfavorable light with their peers in the EDEP.

After a trial run of reading a short excerpt from the novel, *Making up Megaboy* (Walter, 1998), I noticed that the African-American boys did not participate as much as the white boys. During an informal interview, I asked one of the African-American boys why he was so quiet and he replied that he "just didn't have as much to say as 'em" (Researcher notes, 10-28-10). I consulted an African-American male education scholar, Bernard Oliver, for advice. After our discussions and his guidance, I decided to have

two homogeneous groups for the literature discussions. While this situation was not ideal and I did worry about how the boys in each group would perceive the books (e.g., would the Black boys think the books were read to try and “fix them?”), I felt that the separation needed to happen to ensure responses from each participant. Unfortunately, having just two groups did not work either because of one student’s afterschool responsibilities (e.g., Safety Patrol). The final configuration was three literature circle discussion groups: one with four white boys; one with a black boy and a mixed race boy; and one with two black boys. The data addressed in this study is concerned with the responses of the African-American and mixed race participants.

Participant Descriptions

Alex is a nine year-old African-American male in the 4th grade at Massie Elementary School. He enjoys and excels at sports, specifically basketball and football; he and his 3rd grade sister play on Massie Elementary’s EDEP flag football team. In school, his favorite subjects are specials, which include art, P.E., and music. Alex says that he enjoys moving around during those classes as opposed to sitting down and working during other parts of the school day. Although he does not admit to this readily, he does enjoy reading when the topic is interesting. For example, he was reading a graphic novel during the study for the A.R. (Accelerated Reader) program and shared it with me.

Alex is very close with his older brother and sister, as well as several cousins who live nearby. He has two fathers (biological and step) and an uncle, who all help him learn about another of his passions: weaponry. When Alex grows up, he would like to be a professional football player or go into the army, like his uncle. I purposely chose not to examine Alex’s cumulative school folder during the course of the study and

stayed away from engaging with his current teacher in academically-focused discussions. However, I did come to know about Alex's 'cool poses,' which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 4. At the end of the study, Alex started being pulled during EDEP for reading and writing tutoring by another 4th grade teacher.

Connor is a nine year-old male of mixed race in the 4th grade at Massie Elementary. His mother is black and his father is white. During the study, Connor shared that his parents were currently separated, but "not divorced" (Initial interview, 11-9-10). Connor has a younger sister, who is in the first grade at the same school. He enjoys playing video games when he is home with his father and playing outside with neighbors when he is home with his mother. His favorite subjects at school are science and computer lab (one of the specials rotations). These interests lead to reading topics; his favorite books are informational shark books.

Connor shared with me his desire to become a safety patrol member at school. Safety patrol is made up of fourth-graders who have exemplary grades and classroom behavior. From talking with the media specialist who organizes the program and other fourth grade teachers, I found that students may apply for these positions at the end of third grade or after the first report card period of fourth grade. Connor did not qualify to be on safety patrol at the end of third grade. When asked, he said that his grades had held him back (Research notes, 11-16-10). He was anxiously awaiting the first round of report cards for the year to be issued to see if he would qualify. On November 18th, 2010, he walked up to me at the beginning of EDEP with his safety patrol belt, badge, and a huge smile on his face—he had raised his grades to A's and B's and was a new member of safety patrol.

JJ is a nine year-old African-American male in the 3rd grade at Massie Elementary. He lives with his mother, older brother, and his grandparents. During the study he shared that his father is currently incarcerated. As of 4-18-11, his father is still in prison. JJ enjoys playing sports outdoors, especially football, with his older brother, who is best friends with Alex. While he does not have a favorite school subject, JJ does well in class and is on the A/B Honor Roll. JJ and his family are actively involved in their community church. When asked about what he read, JJ immediately replied that he read the Bible every week. His church family has also been instrumental in maintaining a conversation with JJ's father (e.g., they visit him in prison and bring notes from JJ and his brother to him).

In the EDEP setting, I could tell that JJ was very popular among his peers. Other third graders were anxious to sit by him during snack time and during free play time outside, third and fourth graders claimed him for their teams to play football. While he enjoyed this attention, JJ was still very humble and quiet. He was also very respectful to adults in the EDEP setting and to me during our literature discussions.

Trishawn is an eight year-old African-American male in the third grade at Massie Elementary. He lives with his mother, step-father, and three older sisters. Trishawn enjoys playing football with his friends, although he admits that he's not quite as knowledgeable about the sport as Alex and JJ. His favorite subject in school is science because he loves doing "like a whole bunch of experiments and stuff" (Initial interview, 11-2-10). In his classroom, he says that he often gets in trouble because he talks too much. I also witnessed this during EDEP assemblies, where Trishawn was removed for

talking with JJ. Trishawn likes to read mystery books and the Discovery Kids magazines and is on the A/B Honor Roll.

Trishawn's grandmother has an active role in his life, as she works in the cafeteria at Massie Elementary. We talked on several occasions about Trishawn's behavior during our discussions; she wanted to make sure that he was not giving me any trouble and said she would straightened him out, if needed. His grandmother also checked him out of EDEP early, which sometimes infringed on our discussions (e.g., reading and discussing one book took four days). Trishawn always protested when this happened, providing evidence to his claim that he enjoyed our conversations.

Developing Rapport

Theodore Roosevelt said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." I lived by this philosophy as a classroom teacher, and I worked hard to let my students know that I cared about them. I did this by sharing personal stories (e.g., my students knew about my family life), asking for their personal stories, and making connections with students individually. For example, I learned that one of my students was extremely interested in professional football statistics. This was the vocabulary he would use to speak to his father, uncles, and any other adult males in the house on Sundays and throughout the week. When I discovered this passion, I would offer computer time on the ESPN website as a reward for positive behavior or completing assignments early. I would also use him as an expert in math lessons regarding fractions and percentages because of his extensive statistical knowledge. Other teachers (especially those who had had this student previously) were amazed at the change in his academic and social behavior.

I built rapport with the participants in my study in the same fashion. 'Getting to know you' sessions were the first meetings our groups had. It was beneficial for me to meet with participants individually at first to explain who I am and ask about their lives. Once they felt more comfortable with me, then we started meeting as two groups. Throughout the study, I also spent time with each participant individually for informal interviews.

The Study

This five-month study, which took place between September 2010 and January 2011, had three distinct phases. Both the Pre-Study and other three phases are outlined in the table below. A brief description of the three phases follows the table. Observations of and interactions with the participants occurred throughout the study.

Table 3-1. Study timeline

Pre-Study Sept. 2010	Phase 1 Sept. – Oct. 2010	Phase 2 Oct. – Nov. 2010	Phase 3 Dec. 2010 – Jan. 2011
Rapport building (cont'd in Phase 1)	Initial Interviews	Literature circle discussions	Final interviews
Site viability Participant selection	Book introductions	On-going interviews	Member checking

In the Pre-Study (September), I visited the EDEP. I met with instructors and mentors involved in the program to ask about possible participants for the study. After I received consent from parents and the boys, I began building rapport. In order to accomplish this, I was available to students to converse informally, help with homework, and participate with them in both indoor and outdoor activities. I also visited them in their classrooms throughout the day, as I fulfilled my duties as a preservice teacher supervisor on their campus.

During the first phase (September – October) I started the initial, semi-structured interviews concerning their experiences with or thoughts regarding punishment (at home, at school, and/or in the community) and the criminal justice system. I also inquired about their experiences reading and discussing issues of criminal justice. Building on this knowledge, I started presenting multicultural children's literature that addresses issues of criminal justice, including books in a variety of formats, genres, and readability levels. These book introductions were important because the boys then picked which texts we discussed in our literature circles.

The second phase (October – November) included the literature circle discussions. Daniels (2002) offered several key guidelines for incorporating literature circles in classroom settings:

- Students choose their own reading materials.
- Groups meet on regular, predictable schedule to discuss their reading.
- Kids use written or drawn notes to guide both their reading and discussion.
- Discussion topics come from the students.
- Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations about books, so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome.
- A spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room (p. 18).

These guidelines were important for me to keep in mind, even though this study was conducted outside of the regular classroom setting.

Participating in literature circles, however, does not necessarily guarantee that students will interact critically with texts. Critical literacy involves: (1) disrupting the commonplace; (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints; (3) focusing on sociopolitical

issues; and (4) taking action and promoting social justice. (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002, p. 382).

Therefore, I incorporated several engagement strategies to foster critical responses. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Long and Gove (2004) incorporated engagement strategies into the literature circle discussions of their study to promote critical responses of urban, fourth-grade students. The engagement strategies I incorporated into the literature circle discussions were dependent on the texts we read and the experiences the participants had with critical literacy. In most cases, the involved me stepping back from the conversation so that my participants could share their responses and question the texts and others.

I also initiated individual interviews throughout this phase every few weeks. It happened that the participants initiated conversations with me about their personal experiences or what we were reading. These conversations occurred in EDEP snack and free play times, as well as right before and after our literature discussions. I included these conversations as part of the data collected.

The third phase of the study (December 2010 – January 2011) included final semi-structured interviews and member checking. I asked the participants about their experiences in the study as a whole, while also revisiting some of what was expressed in the initial interviews. The other piece of this phase involves member checking. The participants were asked to evaluate the following: whether (a) I accurately rendered their experiences that were the target of study; (b) I fully captured the meaning those experiences had for them; and whether (c) my final interpretive accounts of those experiences do justice to them (Sandelowski, 2008). Member checking was a

transaction between me and the participants whereby data was played back to participants to ensure that I got it right.

Data Collection

In an effort to examine the responses African-American boys have regarding children's literature that addresses criminal justice issues, I collected multiple data sources throughout the study. I believed this was necessary because the conversations, written words, drawings, and non-verbal responses all reveal how someone responds. Each data source described in the next section aided in my understanding of their responses.

Data Sources

The table below provides an overview of the data sources and the frequency of collection. Detailed descriptions of each data source follow the table.

Table 3-2. Data sources

Type	Data Source	Purpose	When Collected	Frequency
Observations During Discussions	Literature circle discussions (20-40 min.)	Learn about individual/group responses to group-selected texts	Throughout the study	5-10 per group
Interviews	Semi-structured initial & final interviews (45-60 min.)	Learn about each boy's experience with criminal justice issues in literature/life	Beginning and end of study	2 per participant
	Open-ended, on-going book experience interviews (10-30 min.)	Learn about each boy's experience with the literature circle book	Throughout the study	5-10 per participant (dependent on how many books the group reads)

Table 3-2. Continued

Type	Data Source	Purpose	When Collected	Frequency
Researcher's documents	Researcher's field notes	Document each boy's behaviors & thoughts that were not audiotaped.	Throughout the study	Weekly
Artifacts	Participant notebooks	Document responses (drawings) to the literature circle discussion books.	Throughout the study	One per participant

Observations

There are many benefits to including observational data in a qualitative research study. Hatch (2002) described these strengths:

- Direct observation of social phenomena permits better understanding of the contexts in which such phenomena occur.
- Firsthand experience allows the researcher to be open to discovering inductively how the participants understand the setting.
- The researcher has the opportunity to see things that are taken for granted by the participants and would be less likely to come to the surface using interviewing or other data collection techniques.
- The researcher may learn sensitive information from being in the setting that informants may be reluctant to discuss in interviews.
- Getting close to the social phenomena allows the researcher to add her own experience in the setting to the analysis of what is happening. (p. 72)

Critical theory researchers believe in the active involvement of researchers (Crotty, 1998; Hatch, 2002; Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008). Therefore, I took on the role of a participant observer during the study. I actively participated in the literature discussions with the groups, to the point where I could have been be identified as a friend or colleague (Leckie, 2008). In this role, I exposed the participants to

children's literature about criminal justice issues and helped them develop their critical literacy skills with the use of engagement strategies.

Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews are conversations or speech events that can be used to explore participants' experiences and interpretations (Hatch, 2002). The stance that researchers take toward interviews and their participants is described by Spradley (1979):

> By word and by action, in subtle ways and in direct statements, [researchers] say, "I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you would explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?" (p. 34)

My desire to interview my participants stemmed from my research question of wanting to examine their responses to children's literature addressing themes of criminal justice. By using interviews in conjunction with observations, I was able to examine their perspectives more deeply.

Interviewing children

Because my participants were children and I am an adult, I took different factors into consideration as I planned and then implemented these interviews. First, my communication was adapted to the cognitive and linguistic levels of my participants (Hill, Laybourn, & Borland, 1996). I made sure that my participants knew what I meant when I asked about criminal justice issues by using familiar terminology. Secondly, I made sure that they were motivated to talk with me during interviews. Kortesluoma, Hentinen, and Nikkonen (2003) believed that it is the researcher's responsibility to guarantee that children know that they can choose whether or not to participate, as well as withdraw

from the study at any time. I explained this when I ask for their consent, however, I also reminded them of this fact throughout the study. The success of the interviews was also dependent on how well I maintained the interaction and co-operated with them (Hughes, 1989). Much of that was based on the rapport I built with the participants at the beginning of the study and then fostered throughout. Another consideration was making sure that my participants knew that there were no right or wrong answers. This reassurance took place before and during the interviews (Kortesluoma, Hentinen, & Nikkonen, 2003).

It was also important for me during the interviews to show my engagement with the participants. I did this by non-verbal interview behaviors such as nodding my head and maintaining eye-contact (Spradley, 1979). Verbal behaviors that I used included affirmatives (e.g., uh huh, okay, hmmm), as well as asking questions for clarification and better understanding. Two different types of interviews (semi-structured and open-ended) were used throughout the study. I digitally recorded each interview and then uploaded them to my computer for transcription.

Interview authenticity

I transcribed each interview using qualitative transcription conventions to ensure accuracy (Patton, 2002). The transcriptions were verbatim talk and included repetitions, self-corrections, and hesitancy markers, along with other speech elements. Because my participants used African American Vernacular English (AAVE), I needed to ensure the reliability of my transcriptions regarding written representations. Therefore, I consulted with an African-American colleague to listen to the audio recordings and then read my transcriptions. This helped with the integrity of the documentation. I also shared my

transcriptions with the participants. From this experience, I was able to make sure that they agreed that the transcripts were accurate.

Types of Interviews Conducted

Initial and final semi-structured individual interviews

Each boy participated in one individual interview at the beginning and at the end of the study. The semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection strategy where the researcher asks participants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions (Ayres, 2008). I had more control over the topics of the interview than in unstructured interviews, but in contrast to structured interviews or questionnaires that use closed questions, there were no fixed range of responses to each question. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews at the beginning to discover historical information and the males' initial experiences with the criminal justice system and children literature with those themes; at the end of the study I was interested in their reactions to the literature circle discussions and the texts.

On-going, open-ended individual interviews

Throughout the study, my participants were also involved in open-ended interviews. Open-ended, or unstructured, interviews in qualitative research involve asking relatively open-ended questions to discover their perceptions on the topic of interest (Firmin, 2008). In using this interview method, I began with vague, general questions. The participant had few clues as to my opinion of where the conversation would go. Overall, the interviewee determined the direction the interview took when using an open-ended interview. I felt that this type of interview allowed my participants to share what they thought about the books and the issues that arose in the literature

circle discussions. It also gave some a chance to communicate without the pressure of a group.

Researcher's Documents

I included field notes and a reflective journal as part of the researcher's documents. They helped me to reflect and synthesize my experiences with the groups. In addition, because qualitative inquiry typically involves a design that constantly changes or emerges through the iterative processes of data collection and analysis, it requires that the researcher make frequent decisions that can alter the course of the study (Rodgers, 2008). As a result, my records of study processes (e.g., field notes and reflective journal) were vital in providing justification for these actions. An audit trail provided a retroactive assessment of the inquiry and a way to address issues related to the rigor of the research, as well as the trustworthiness of the results. My documents also aided me in ensuring the coherence and agreement among my multiple data sources.

Field notes

Field notes are a common type of field data. These notes can be created when the researcher is observing participants and taking notes on what is being observed firsthand. The goal of observational field notes is to have a record of what was observed so that this record subsequently can be analyzed (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). There were several occasions throughout the study where I was not able to immediately record my observations. In these cases, I used the next possible moment (e.g., in my car before driving home) to document my observations.

Reflective journal

The research journal is a way for the researcher to reflect upon experiences during the process and consider how those experiences influence actions and interpretations. Many scholars have argued for an inclusion of reflective tools during the process of research to balance the potential biases of both insider and outsider inquiry (Creswell, 1998; Hatch, 2002; Le Gallais, 2008; Patton, 2002). Therefore, I recorded my biases, prejudices, and new understandings in a reflective journal throughout the study. Le Gallais (2008) found that her journal highlighted "progress from outsider to insider researcher" and pushed her "to be reflexively vigilant" (p. 151). During the research process, certain events can go by unacknowledged and their significance unrealized when they are not documented properly. An insider might be too familiar with them to notice and such events might be too foreign for outsiders to understand at that point in the research. A journal during research was a way for me to confront those issues throughout the study, while also contributing to the validity of my final interpretations.

Artifacts

In this study, the artifacts examined were researcher generated. I asked each participant to keep a notebook for use during the literature circle discussions and engagement strategies. Writings and drawings regarding the texts used and the conversations of the group were recorded in these notebooks. These notebooks enhanced the richness of the data collected.

Data Analysis

Hatch (2002) wrote that, "analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories. It

often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison, and pattern finding" (p. 148). To analyze qualitative data, and fulfill its lofty goals, I needed a systematic process for inquiry. Because of the positions of the participants, the themes that were discussed in the literature circle groups, the focus on critical literacy, and my theoretical framework, I felt that Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was an appropriate way to analyze the data from my study.

Rationale for Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is both a theory and method of analysis with a critical perspective, geared toward examining the subtle ways in which unequal power relations are maintained and reproduced through language use (Weninger, 2008). It was developed (and is still evolving) to "bring social theory and discourse analysis together to describe, interpret, and explain the ways in which discourse constructs, becomes constructed by, represents, and becomes represented by the social world" (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005, p. 366). In the last decade, educational researchers have been turning to CDA as an approach to answer questions about the relationship between language and society (see for examples: Bean & Moni, 2003; Clarke, 2007; Glenn, 2008; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Moje, 2000; Richardson, 2007; Rogers, 2002; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Rogers & Christian, 2007; Rogers & Mosley, 2008).

Critical discourse studies come from three intellectual traditions; these traditions not only overlap, but they also all emphasize the linguistic turn in social sciences: discourse studies; feminist post-structuralism; and critical linguistics (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005). CDA, based on those traditions, focuses on how language as a cultural tool is used within relationships of power and

privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge (Rogers, 2004). Gee (2004) made a distinction between the capitalized CDA and critical discourse analysis. According to him, CDA referred to the type of analysis that had been theorized and/or written about by Fairclough, Hodge, Kress, Wodak, van Dijk, van Leeuwen, and their followers. Lowercase critical discourse analysis includes a “wider array of approaches” (p. 20). These include the works of Gee, Gumperz, Hymes, Michaels, and Scollon. They are conducting critically oriented brands of discourse analysis, but these scholars do not specifically call their work CDA. For this study I used the methods of the capitalized CDA.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) gave eight foundational principles of CDA:

- CDA addresses social problems
- Power relations are discursive
- Discourse constitutes society and culture
- Discourse does ideological work
- Discourse is historical
- A sociocognitive approach is needed to understand how relations between texts and society are mediated
- Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory and uses a systematic methodology
- CDA is a socially committed scientific paradigm.

These principles are important to keep in mind, as there are no set formulas for conducting CDA (Rogers, 2004). However, while the approaches to CDA may vary, they must include ‘critical,’ ‘discourse,’ and ‘analysis’ sections to be considered CDA (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005).

Critical in CDA

The term, critical, in CDA can be interpreted in several different ways. Critical research and theory, as mentioned previously in this Chapter, reject "naturalism (that social practices, labels, and programs represent reality), rationality (the assumption that truth is a result of science and logic), neutrality (the assumption that truth does not reflect any particular interests), and individualism" (Rogers, 2004, p. 3). Within this framework, a researcher's intention is to uncover power relationships and demonstrate inequities in society. Another interpretation of critical in CDA is an effort to describe, interpret, and explain the relationship between the form and function of language (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005). CDA researchers believe that there are some networks of form-function relationships of language that are held in higher esteem in society than others. An example of this would be the lowly esteemed literacy practices of gangsta adolescents (gang-connected youth) described by Moje (2000). A final interpretation of critical in CDA refers to the action-oriented stance of researchers. Analyzing texts for power may not be enough, though, to disrupt discursive power. The researcher must also work from the analysis of texts to the social and political contexts (Rogers, 2004).

Discourse in CDA

Discourse within a CDA framework is treated in a different manner than how linguists, socio-linguists, or conversation analysts would normally treat it. CDA researchers treat Discourses as always being socially, politically, racially, and economically loaded (Rogers, 2004). Gee (1996) made a distinction between "d"iscourse and "D"iscourse. Little "d" refers to the grammar of what is being said. "D"iscourse refers to the ways of representing, believing, valuing, and participating with

“d”iscourse. Discourse also includes the identities and meanings that go along with ways of speaking. Gee (1996) offered some theoretical propositions about Discourses:

Discourses are inherently ideological…. They crucially involve a set of values and viewpoints about the relationships between people and the distribution of social goods, at the very least, about who is an insider and who is not, often who is “normal” and who is not, and often, too, many other things as well. Discourses are resistant to internal criticism and self-scrutiny because uttering viewpoints that seriously undermine them defines one as being outside of them. The Discourse defines what counts as acceptable criticism. Discourse-defined positions from which to speak and behave are not, however, just defined internally to a Discourse, but also as standpoints taken up by the Discourse in its relation to other, ultimately opposing Discourses. Any Discourse concerns itself with certain objects and puts forward certain concepts, viewpoints, and values at the expense of others. In doing so, it marginalizes viewpoints and values central to other Discourses. In fact, a Discourse can call for one to accept values in conflict with other Discourses of which one is also a member. Discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society, which is why they are always and everywhere ideological. Control over certain Discourses can lead to the acquisition of social goods (money, power, status) in a society. These Discourses empower those groups that have the least conflicts with their other Discourses when they use them. Let us call Discourses that lead to social goods in society dominant Discourses and let us refer to those groups that have the fewest conflicts when using them as dominant groups.

Analysis in CDA

Analytic procedures in CDA evoke the most dissention among scholars (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000). These are based on how the analyst views the critical and discourse components of research, as well as his/her intentions for conducting the analysis (Rogers, 2004). Methods can focus on: textually oriented approaches; the context in which the discourse arises; the historical emergence of a set of concepts or policies; language and social theory. In educational research, the two most common analytical procedures used are those of Gee and Fairclough. As I discuss Fairclough's procedures in the next section, here I focus on Gee's procedures.

Gee's (1999) analytic procedures contain a set of connection-building activities that aim to help the analyst with describing, interpreting, and explaining the relationships between "d"iscourse and "D"iscourse, which were previously addressed. The activities allow the analyst to construct meaning from discourse patterns and include: semiotic building, world building, activity building, socioculturally situated identity building, political building, and connection building. Gee provided questions to ask for each task. For example, under the task, semiotic building, Gee asked, "What signs systems are relevant (and irrelevant) in the situation?" This shows how CDA is analysis of both what is said (in the text) and what is left out (missing) (Rogers, 2004).

Critiques of CDA

CDA would not be a critical methodology if it did not address critiques of theory and method (Rogers, 2004). The three most common critiques are:

- That political and social ideologies are read into the data;
- That there is an imbalance between social theory, on the one hand, and linguistic theory and method, on the other; and

- That CDA is often divorced from social contexts (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005, p. 372).

There are conflicting ideas on the extent to which the linguistic analysis should and can be systematic. However, what researchers should avoid when engaging with CDA is an analysis that is, "a record of whatever partial interpretation suits your own agenda" (Widdowson, 1998, p. 149). According to Rogers (2004), "to be a critical social scientific method, CDA needs to reflexively demonstrate the changing relationship between social theory and linguistic structures and how this fits into evolving social and linguistic theories and methodologies" (p. 15). This was my goal as I used CDA to analyze the data from my study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Critical Discourse Analysis Process: The interviews, recorded literature circle discussions, and participant notebooks were analyzed using Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis model, a three-tiered analytical framework of description, interpretation, and explanation. These three phases will drive my data collection and analysis, while influencing how I organized my results and discussion to show the relationship between the responses of the boys and broader social contexts. Furthermore, the framework included analysis of texts, interactions, and social practices at the local, institutional, and societal levels. The figure below is a heuristic of CDA (Rogers, 2004b, p. 234).

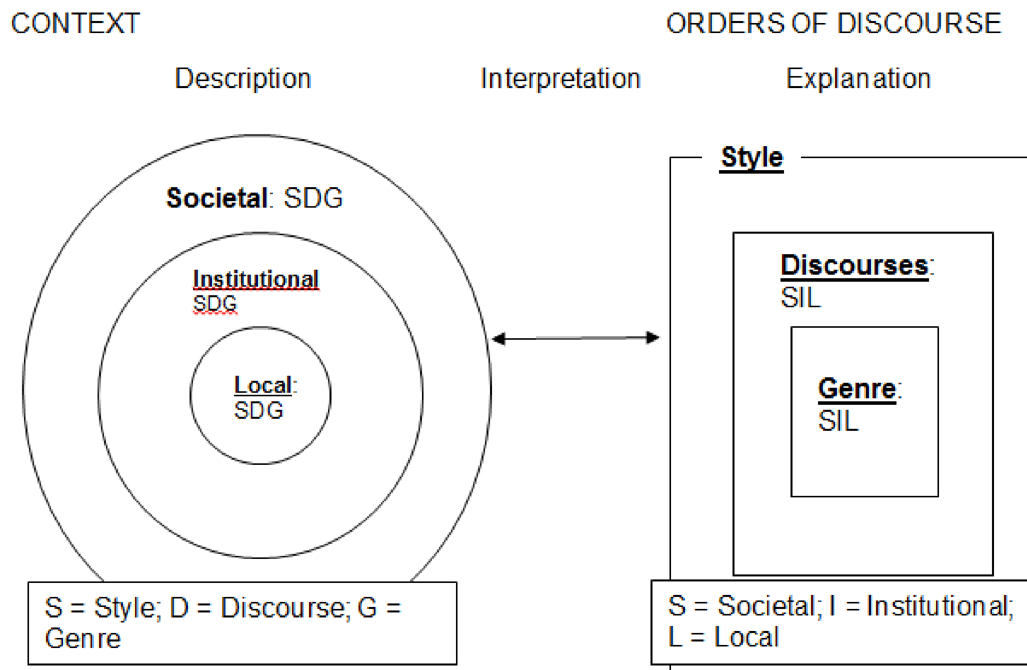

Figure 3-1. Heuristic of CDA

The first phase of CDA is textual (Genre) description. I examined my data to locate recurring themes. To establish these themes, however, I needed to code the discussions, interviews, and participant notebooks. The next step in CDA is interpretation; here I related local textual themes to larger discursive influences (Discourse). The final step of this framework is explanation. I explored the text and discursive productions within the larger social context in which they were embedded (Style). To further understand the elements of the analysis, I looked to Fairclough & Chouliaraki's (1999) interpretations of genre, Discourse, and style. These contextual variables were analyzed at the local, institutional, and societal levels. The following table offers some examples concerning the interpretations of genre, Discourse and style.

Table 3-3. Interpretations of genre, Discourse, and style

Contextual Variable	Example	Metafunction	"The Work of Language"
Genre	Interview, sermon, literacy lesson (turn taking, participant structure, theme, topic control)	Textual	Ways of interacting—Presenting messages as texts in context
Discourse	Teacher as authority, Student as passive, How the perspective is set forth	Interpersonal	Ways of representing-Enacting social relations from a particular perspective
Style	Affiliation within Discourses: modality, transitivity, pronoun use	Ideational	Ways of being—Enacting experiences of reality

In order to use this framework with my data, I went through a process of pulling apart and piecing back together what I collected. I modeled this process on the steps Rogers (2003) described as she analyzed data within a CDA framework. I engaged in multiple readings of the data set. Here I was interested in understanding or developing a sense of coherency. Then, I developed broad analytic categories which allowed me to talk about the form of the interactions between the participants and social institutions.

Next, I looked back at the data sets to find examples of each of the categories previously defined. When the categories were filled with examples, I selected powerful examples that represent "cruces" or tension spots (Fairclough, 1995). I examined these instances more closely to create critical vignettes. A critical vignette is a summative statement including the larger context and a CDA on the event. Then I took each text (interview, literature circle discussion, participant notebook) separately to broadly code them for discursive examples of linguistic codes (local level of analysis). For each text I

also looked at Discourses or ways of representing. Because this domain is concerned with the ways of representing, I looked for themes and counter themes, as well as what perspective the discourse took. I also looked for patterns of knowledge production, consumption, distribution, negotiation, and transformation connected to institutional spheres. Relationships among and between Discourse and social action are signaled by these patterns. Therefore, I read each text for the ways in which domains of knowledge were constructed and produced.

I then read each text with a focus on the voice or ideational domain of Discourse. I looked at aspects of grammar including: pronoun use, passive and active construction, modality, and transitivity. With each text, I studied the relationship between genre, Discourse, and style so that I could describe, interpret, and explain the ways of interacting, ways of representing, and ways of being connected with social practices. Finally, I looked across the texts to understand the way that the texts interacted with each other. Within the local, institutional, and societal levels of analysis, I looked for instances of similarity, difference, and tension. This helped me connect things back to the whole process of events.

Rogers (2003) explained that, “the usefulness of this framework is that it allows the analyst to look at the data, data that is often multiple and contradictory, through multiple lenses” (p. 33). The following table gives examples of the different aspects of each order of discourse.

Table 3-4. Aspects of genre, Discourses, and styles

Genre	Discourse	Styles
"the sort of language tied to a particular social activity, such as an interview"	"ways of representing"	"ways of being"
Features of AAVE Thematic structure of the text Cohesion devices (parallel structure, repetition) Wording Metaphors Politeness conventions Turn-taking structures Revoicing or "marking" narrative sequencing Call & response	Noun phrases (nominal groups) Verbs	Analysis of voice (active or passive) Modality (e.g., tense & affinity) Mood (questions, statements, demands) Transivity (e.g., action, affective state, ability, cognitive statements) Pronoun use Syntactic & morphosyntactic features (e.g., aspectual markers, negation) Phonological features

Adapted from Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Rogers, 2003

Trustworthiness of the Study

Multiple perspectives and realities are part of the assumptions behind CDA (Fairclough, 1995). Language reflects these multiple realities and so there are multiple lines of interpretation that could have been followed in my study. My intention was not to say that my interpretation was the only one (or the right one), but instead to provide an interpretation that makes sense given the data, the theoretical framework, and the analysis. Just as I accepted that my teaching would not be neutral, I understand that my research process, analysis, and interpretation are not neutral. Instead, what I strove for was to present a dialogic inquiry between myself and my participants.

The relationship between the researcher and those who are researched can have a profound effect on the outcome of a study (Bridges, 2001). Historically, it has been viewed that researchers undertaking naturalistic studies are either insiders of a group of

study or outsiders of a group of study. Both positions have their own advantages and limitations. Furthermore, there are others who blend the seemingly dichotomous roles of member and non-member into various ways for examining current research (Banks, 1998; Merriam et al, 2001). I employed qualitative methods to help overcome my bias and promote objectivity.

Many argue for an inclusion of reflective tools during the process of research (Creswell, 1998; Hatch, 2002; Le Gallais, 2008; Patton, 2002). Le Gallais (2008) advocated for the range of reflective tools to include: (1) the autobiography; (2) the research journal; (3) insider/outsider continua; and (4) attitudes, attributes and identity table (p. 149). These reflective tools can help individual researchers combat issues of insider-outsider bias.

On a larger scale, Bridges (2001) advocated for changing the nature of research to 'emancipatory,' 'participatory' or 'educative' to combat concerns disempowered communities might have about outsider researchers (p. 382). One of the first steps towards a change would be to move away from seeing research as a property and instead see research as a dialogic inquiry designed to assist the understanding of all concerned. His argument reminds me of Freire's (1970) thesis and an article about a conversation between him and Shor (1987) concerning dialogical method. The sharing of the research, either a book, an article, or a presentation, should stress the inequities of power that may exist. Likewise, the researcher has an obligation to actively work for the care and change involving the disempowered community. By presenting the participants' perceptions honestly, vividly, and accurately, a researcher can challenge or help correct the social injustices a group may be experiencing. When the values of the

researcher are made explicit, it contributes to the attainment of strong objectivity (Banks, 1998).

Another important component of research design is credibility. To confront issues of credibility, I asked these questions about the data and their representations:

- Do the data I (re)present match the intended research questions?
- Has the research had some sort of profound impact on any of the participants?
- Have I provided enough evidence that the reader is able to make counter interpretations?
- How do the multiple sources of data help to establish the consistency of my claims?
- Where are the places where the data seem to be inconsistent? How will I use these instances to help me rework the framework?
- What areas of this study are useful for making more generalized claims about the nature of literacy contexts, literacy, and language events with social institutions? (Rogers, 2003, p. 35).

Subjectivity (Prejudices)

Myrdal (1969) argued that social science cannot be neutral or simply factual in the traditional constraints of those ideas. Instead, he believed that “research is always and by logical necessity based on moral and political valuations, and the researcher should be obliged to account for them explicitly” (p. 74). In these next sections, I will be accounting for my previous experiences, current conceptualizations, and orientations.

Childhood reading experiences

As a European-American female, I was raised in a middle-class community in the southwest region of the U.S. My parents were college-educated, with my father holding an advanced degree in law. They both showed me positive examples of adults reading for both work and enjoyment. Furthermore, my aunt was a middle school English teacher who helped instill a love of reading in me. She used her extra points from

student purchases from book catalogs to supply me and my sister and brother with books. I can remember the excitement and pleasure I got from receiving a box of books from my aunt. She made sure to differentiate in her book selections by tapping in to our unique interests. For example, I was the only one to receive books from the Nancy Drew series because of my interest in mysteries and because Nancy and I shared the same hair color. I connected with certain characters right away and developed a desire to see myself in other characters, even if the connection might not be as obvious as hair color.

However, as much as I treasured these monthly packages, my sister did not share my feelings. When she was in first grade, she was diagnosed as having a reading difference (dyslexia). She struggled through school without the love of reading that I had. Her experiences and those of my parents working with her impacted my views on reading and what constitutes literacy. This led me to pursue an advanced degree in teaching, focusing on middle level reading instruction and special education.

Public teaching experiences

My teaching experiences have been situated at the elementary and middle school levels within suburban areas. I started my teaching career as a 5th grade inclusion specialist at an affluent elementary school within a diverse school district. My focus was on ten students who qualified for special education services in reading/language arts. I moved between four different classrooms to provide support for them and also pulled students out of class for brief periods to address challenges they faced. First and foremost, I wanted to help these students understand that reading could be enjoyable and also reflect their interests. I thought about my sister specifically and worked to create positive reading experiences for these students. I also used multicultural

children's literature, as my students were marginalized by the rest of their peers. I feel that those texts helped them to connect with characters and situations.

As I continued teaching and moving to different schools (four in five years because of my husband's job) and grade levels, I remained concerned about the students who others labeled struggling. I worked hard to model myself as someone who enjoyed reading and who read a variety of texts. This lead to me asking for book recommendations from students, teachers, and librarians; the student recommendations, though, were always my favorite. I also tried to make independent and self-selected reading a social event by encouraging 'testimonials' from students when they liked a book. Class time each week was devoted to those who wanted to share what they had read and encourage others to read their books. Within the curriculum, I often used literature circles as ways for students to discuss what they had read. Unfortunately, I realize now that I did not move my students to a higher level of thinking by engaging them in critical literacy practices.

As mentioned previously, I was also concerned with the male students in my schools and their propensity for punishment. During my last year of teaching fifth grade, one of my male students went through an experience that affected both him and me. His mother was sentenced to prison for two years. As the eldest of three, he had to put on a brave face for his younger siblings and kept that attitude up during the school day. However, there were a few times when he broke down in my classroom—some were provoked while others seemed random. He confided in me that he felt alone and different because of his current situation; he also felt like he didn't have anyone to talk to. My inexperience with this situation made our conversations tense. I wasn't sure what

to say because I thought that I had never had a student with an incarcerated parent. In an attempt to make this student feel less marginalized, I asked the class when he was out of the room if anyone else had had a similar experience. Over half of my homeroom raised their hands. Some offered that their parent had not been in prison for as long, but others still had a parent who was serving time. One male student said that his father had been in jail in Mexico for the past five years and he had not been to visit him at all.

I was disappointed in myself for not knowing this information about my students. On a broader note, though, I was disappointed that criminal justice issues had not been incorporated into our district-mandated curriculum. If students are having these experiences, why aren't teachers addressing them in the classrooms? Why are we making those students feel isolated and alone? And how are we preparing them for the future? Especially since research has shown that children with incarcerated parents are five times more likely to serve time in prison when they are adults compared to children whose parents have not been incarcerated (Vacca, 2008).

I did not address this issue of males and criminal justice issues during my time as an elementary school teacher, but it has been something that I have focused on in my graduate school career. As a teaching assistant for a graduate-level seminar in children's literature called Books for Boys, I researched picture books and novels with male protagonists that dealt with issues of criminal justice. Although I did not find very many texts, sharing them with graduate students affirmed my passion for including these books in the curriculum. Everyone agreed that these books were important for males to read. The students who were already teaching mentioned that they have children in their classrooms that had already had many altercations with systems of

justice in the school and within the community. Furthermore, they mentioned that many of their students had also experienced the incarceration of a close family member. These issues were again not being shared in the classrooms, which added to students' feelings of alienation.

Reading research experiences

Through my courses and work as an assistant to professors, I have been able to be a part of and conduct studies on literature circles and student reactions to literature with criminal justice issues. These positive experiences helped lead me to this current study of African-American boys' responses to children's literature concerning the criminal justice system.

I believe that sharing children's literature that addresses criminal justice issues has the power to transform a classroom. It can support children who have experienced similar circumstances while helping others understand their classmates. It can unite students and teachers in engaging in critical and sophisticated conversations about their communities and justice in our country. And it can build a bridge between what students learn about at home and what they learn about in school.

Limitations

There are limitations regarding the context of the study. Race, status, and gender could have influenced the data collected. Our conversations were affected by the ethnic, cultural, and gender differences between the boys and me, as well as the difference in status as I am a former teacher. There is also a tendency for researchers to ask questions of their participants to get certain answers. As a participant observer, I was aware of this practice and tried to limit my questions to those based on the text and clarifying questions regarding student responses. Additionally, reading abilities might

have impeded the participation of the males in the group. To combat this, I pulled together multiple forms of children's literature (including a graphic novel) that address criminal justice issues. I also varied the readability levels and read aloud stories.

There are also limitations regarding the design of this study. The number of participants and the situated location of this study may limit the ability to generalize the results. My findings, however, lead to further questions and research. Under my framework of critical theory, the knowledge from my study was mediated through my own political positionings (Crotty, 1998; Hatch, 2002; Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, & Herrera, 2008). I made an effort to match the transcription process with the analytical method to ensure that discourses were represented.

CHAPTER 4
BOOK SELECTIONS & READING EXPERIENCES

The worth of a book is to be measured by what you can carry away from it.

-James Bryce

Overview

In this Chapter, I present several ideas to enable both the understanding and analysis of the reader responses of the African-American boys in this study. I first document my process of finding and evaluating the books we read together and give short synopses of each book. As mentioned previously, Rosenblatt's (1938/1995, 1978) transactional theory of reader response contributed to my theoretical perspective. I believe that what the reader brings to reading a text is just as important as what the author writes. Furthermore, Probst (2002) explained that Rosenblatt's transactional "theory suggests that each reader comes to the text with a unique history, a unique set of circumstances and abilities and inclinations, and has to take that into account as s/he shapes an understanding of the text and his/her reading of it" (p. 31). When students and educators read a multicultural text, they bring with them specific social, political, and cultural factors that then influence their interactions with the story. These personal interpretations are both valid and desirable (Rosenblatt, 1978).In order to examine my participants' responses in the next Chapters, I provide more details about their positions in the EDEP and in the literature circle discussions, as well as their previous experiences with criminal justice issues in books and in real life.

Book Selection Process

As early as the spring of 2009, I was searching for children's books that addressed issues of criminal justice. Originally, my search began as part of my responsibilities as a

research assistant to a law professor. Dr. Russell-Brown at the Levin School of Law, University of Florida, was working on a grant project entitled “Just Children.” One of the goals of the project was to provide children with an alternative view of the justice system. I was tasked with exploring how the justice system (cops, courts, and correction) was portrayed in children’s literature. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there are several major themes within this microcosm of multicultural children’s literature: incarcerated parents and other relatives, historical novels about prisons, juvenile crime, and criminal trials.

In the summer of 2009 during a graduate course in multicultural children’s literature, I had the opportunity to examine five picture books whose protagonists had incarcerated parents. I used the model established by Botelho and Rudman (2009) of using a historical, sociopolitical, and narrative lens to problematize these texts. The combination of these factors helped me to read “knee-deep” (Jewett, 2007), which means I moved beyond my personal responses to the books and include critical responses. Questions I considered while reading included:

- What (or whose) view of the world, or kinds of behaviors are presented as normal by the text?
- Why is the text written this way? How else could it have been written?
- What assumptions does the text make about age, gender, [class], and culture (including the age, gender, and culture of its readers)?
- Who is silenced/heard here?
- Whose interests might best be served by the text?
- What ideological positions can be identified?
- What are the possible readings of this situation/event/character? How did you get to that reading?

- What moral or political position does a reading support? How do particular cultural and social contexts make particular readings available? (e.g., who could you not say that to?) How might it be challenged? (from Woolridge, 2001, as referenced in Botelho & Rudman, 2009)

These questions need to be asked of books and they need to be taught to children. Accepting the messages of an author or illustrator without questioning can be seen as taking away the power of a reader and the community of readers (Botelho & Rudman, 2009).

Two of the books I examined in this course, *Nine Candles* (Testa, 1996) and *Visiting Day* (Woodson, 2002), were used in the study. *Visiting Day* was chosen because the main characters were African-American. Although the protagonist is a little girl, I felt that the experiences Woodson wrote about (e.g., having her hair braided, making soul food) all lent themselves to the experiences of other African Americans. It would be considered culturally conscious because “elements in the text, not just the pictures, make it clear that the book consciously seeks to depict a fictional Afro-American life experience” (Sims, 1982, p. 49). *Nine Candles* was chosen because it has a Latino male protagonist and depicts a mother in prison. Historically in our society, men have been identified as the incarcerated parent, but proportionally, more women are now going to prison (Sabol, Couture, & Harrison, 2007). I thought this book could possibly be used to introduce issues of gender regarding incarceration. I chose not to use the other three books for various reasons (e.g., Caucasian families, female protagonists).

Another criminal justice theme I wanted to address in my literature choices was juvenile violence because it was an area of turmoil for many young African-American males (Tatum, 2005). I hoped that using these books would invoke responses by either

validating their lived experiences, helping them recognize social differences, and/or developing feeling of empathy, respect, and understanding (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). I used scholarly journal articles (e.g., Damico & Riddle, 2004; D'Angelo & Dixey, 2001; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2000; Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, & Vasquez, 1999; O'Neil, 2010; Pierce, 2006; Pohan, 2000; and Tyson, 1999), as well as online sources like the Database of Award-Winning Children's Literature (www.dawcl.com) and Children's Literature Comprehensive Database (www.clcd.com) to find texts. I also turned to a children's literature email listserv for appropriate suggestions. In the fall of 2010, I located and read two texts, *Your Move* (Bunting, 1998) and *Yummy* (Neri, 2010). Both dealt with youth violence as it pertains to gangs and their protagonists are preadolescent African-American males.

All four texts tackle complex issues of the criminal justice system. Scholars have a variety of names for books like these: "brave and diverse" literature (Ballentine & Hill, 2000); "critical literature" (Houser, 1999); and "risky stories" (Simon & Armitage-Simon, 1995). Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2000) called them social issues children's literature and developed several criteria for identifying them: (1) they do not make differences invisible, but rather explore how differences in culture, language, history, class, gender and race make a difference; (2) they enrich our understanding of history and life by giving voice to those who have traditionally been silenced or marginalized—we call them 'the indignant ones'; (3) they make visible the social systems that attempt to maintain economic inequities; (4) they show how people can begin to take action on important social issues; (5) they explore dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society to position people and groups of people; and (6) they help us question why

certain groups are positioned as ‘others’ (p. 10). The books I chose met at least one of the criteria. By the end of the study, my participants simply called them “good books.”

Book Descriptions

Incarcerated Parents

The books about incarcerated family members address many issues. When the incarcerated family member is a parent, the issue of where does the child live now arises. Historically, men have been identified as the incarcerated parent, but proportionally, more women are now going to prison (Sabol et al. 2007). When a father is in jail, the children usually live with their mother. When a mother is incarcerated, though, children are more likely to go live with another relative who is not their parent. These caregivers are often not prepared to care for a child in need and experience stress because of the situation (Clopton & East, 2008).

Another issue of children with incarcerated parents is visitation. Many children do not have face-to-face contact with their parent while they are in prison for different reasons. One reason is that an incarcerated parent is dependent on the current caregivers to make a visit happen (Clopton & East, 2008). For a variety of reasons, the current caregiver might not want the child to visit his/her parent in prison. Another cause for not visiting is the cost. Almost half of the parents incarcerated in Federal prisons live more than 500 miles from their last residence (Mumola, 2000). In situations like these, there are costs of travel, food, and lodging that go along with visitation. Both of these issues were addressed in the picture books, *Nine Candles* (Testa, 1996) and *Visiting Day* (Woodson, 2002).

Nine Candles

Nine Candles by Maria Testa (1996) portrays a son's sadness before, during, and after visiting his mother in prison on his seventh birthday. Raymond knows that his mother stole money from the cashier with her job as a waitress, but he still wishes it were his ninth birthday when Mama has promised to be home with his dad and him. Although he already knows the answer, he still begs for her to come home and asks when she will finally be home with him.

Details of prison life, such as the fences, uniformed people with guns or dogs, and the experience of walking through a metal detector all add to this sensitive story. Testa shows the boy's sadness and his anger (at the system, not at his mother, which isn't entirely realistic), as well as his youthful resilience in the face of family trauma. The colorful, cheerful paintings of this family are done in strong, bold strokes. This book has been described as, "a thought-provoking picture book that shows the cost and consequences of crime" (Blair, 1996). In her author's note, Testa wrote that, "Raymond's story is not unusual." She further provides some statistics regarding incarcerated parents, mothers in particular, and offers some advice for children with an incarcerated parent and children who know other children in that situation.

Visiting Day

In the same vein, Jacqueline Woodson's *Visiting Day* (2002) is about a young girl getting ready to visit her father in prison. At first, both text and artwork keep the destination a mystery, focusing instead on the excitement of the upcoming reunion. Wordless spreads depict Grandma fixing the narrator's hair and the pair climbing aboard the bus. Meanwhile, the girl imagines her father making his own preparations. Ransome portrays a handsome man in khaki shirt and slacks; a calendar on the wall marks the

days to his daughter's visit, hanging next to her artwork accented with red hearts. Ultimately, "the bus pulls up in front of a big old building where, as Grandma puts it, Daddy is doing a little time" (unpaged). Ransome shows barbed-wire atop high walls and a guard tower in stern relief against a perfect blue sky.

Told completely from a child's perspective, the narrative makes no judgment about what Daddy did or why he is incarcerated. There is also no mention of the girl's mother. A shared feeling of hope and family togetherness, however, pervades each spread, from Grandma cooking fried chicken in the morning for the bus ride, to the little girl sitting down with crayons when she gets home to make her father more pictures. Woodson provided her rationale for writing the book on her webpage (http://www.jacquelinewoodson.com/pb.shtml): “Because once a month when I was a little girl, I would go upstate and visit my favorite uncle. I remember those days well and wanted to write about them. This book isn’t completely autobiographical but there is a lot of me in it.”

I used a questioning strategy suggested by Jewett (2007) to support my exploration of these two texts: Whose Voices. For each story, I asked: whose voices are being heard; and whose voices are not heard (and what might they say). The voices heard in these stories were from the children of incarcerated parents. This gives children a unique perspective into this common situation. Another frequent voice heard was that of the incarcerated parent. When the parents spoke in the stories, they all communicated remorse for their crimes, a desire to be with their children, and a resolve to change their ways. These values seem to be consistent with mainstream culture.

When the caregiver was the other parent, his voice was heard. He tried to explain what the crime committed was and why Raymond's mother had to be in prison. Additionally, he communicated through actions and words that the incarceration was a hardship for the family. Raymond's father apologizes to his son because he cannot afford to get him many presents for his birthday. Going from two incomes to one is a burden for the family.

The voices that are not heard in the stories are those of the other family members as caregivers. The reader does not know how the grandmother feels about taking care of her granddaughter or how Raymond's father feels about the choices his wife made that resulted in a prison sentence. There is also a parent missing from a *Visiting Day* because only *Nine Candles* has both parents in the story. Where is the little girl's mom in *Visiting Day*? Why isn't she mentioned? Does she know that her child is being cared for by another relative?

Juvenile Violence

A major theme within the topic of juvenile violence is gangs. Gang violence has received much attention in recent years, even though estimates from law enforcement suggest that no more than youth ages 10-17 are gang members (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). In a 2005 survey of students ages 12 to 18, however, 37% of African Americans reported that gangs were present at their schools versus only 17% of white students (Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007). Kunjufu (2007) offered several reasons why African-American males are especially tempted to join gangs: money; power; identity; protection; fun; intimidation; shock; romance; family involvement; low self-esteem; and academic problems. The books I chose to help discuss issues of youth violence within the framework of gangs touch on many of these reasons for gang membership.

Your Move

Eve Bunting, in a noticeably different approach from some of her other books, collaborates with Ransome on *Your Move* (1998), a gripping picture book told through the first-person narrative of a boy who nearly joins a gang. One evening, while their mother works at her waitressing job, 10-year-old James takes his six-year-old brother, Isaac, along to meet up with the K-Bones, a gang to which James yearns to belong. As part of his initiation, James must spray-paint the K-Bones name over the name of a rival gang, the Snakes, on a freeway sign. After James does the task, he learns that the gang also steals for fun, and starts to have doubts about joining. Then they run into the Snakes gang, who fire a gun at the boys. Although no one gets hurt, James rethinks his association with the K-Bones and ultimately turns down membership in the gang.

Ransome's oil paintings convey the tension and looming danger of the boys' misadventure. His illustrations effectively put readers in James's shoes. The text, simple and direct, lets the message come through without being preachy. However, it may not be realistic for the gang leader to give up on his recruits and for the kids to be able to resist the temptations offered by gang membership. Damico and Riddle (2004) echo this critique in their analysis of classroom discussions about *Your Move*.

Yummy

In 1994, an incident of Southside Chicago gang-related violence captured national headlines. Eleven-year-old Robert "Yummy" Sandifer shot and killed his 14-year-old neighbor Shavon Dean. The graphic novel, *Yummy* (2010), is Neri's retelling of the events based on public records as well as personal and media accounts from the period. Neri recounts Yummy's three days on the run from police (and, eventually, his own gang) through the eyes of Roger, a fictional classmate of Yummy's. Roger grapples

with the unanswerable questions behind Yummy's situation, with the why's and how's of a failed system, a crime-riddled neighborhood, and a neglected community. Yummy, so named because of his love of sweets, was the child of parents who were continually in prison. While living legally under the care of a grandmother who was overburdened with the custody of numerous grandchildren, Yummy sought out the closest thing he could find to a family: BDN or Black Disciples Nation. In the aftermath and turmoil of Shavon's tragic death, he went into hiding with assistance from the BDN. Eventually the gang turned on him and arranged for his execution.

Neri frames the story with this central question: Was Yummy a cold-blooded killer or a victim of his environment? In one of the final panels, Roger states, "I don't know which was worse, the way Yummy lived or the way he died" (p. 94). Realistic black-and-white art further intensifies the story's emotion. A significant portion of the panels feature close-up faces which offers readers an immediacy as well as emotional connection to this tragic story. Like Roger, in the end readers are left with troubling questions and, perhaps, one powerful answer: that they can choose to do everything in their power to ensure that no one shares Yummy's terrible fate. In his author's note, Neri addresses the ambiguity of the story:

> So, was Yummy a cold-blooded killer or a victim? The answer is not black-and-white. Yummy was both a bully and a victim—he deserves both our anger and our understanding…. If you can find a way to make the choice of life, then other decisions may be easier. Choose wisely (p. 95).

In both of these stories, the voices of youth are emphasized, while other voices (e.g., parents, caregivers, and teachers) are silenced for the most part. These stories also focus on the voices of their male characters. The protagonists, James and Yummy, are caught between being young and relatively innocent and taking on the

responsibilities of gang membership. While James refuses the invitation, Yummy whole-heartedly embraces it. The readers are privy to both their concerns and their approvals of youth violence within gangs.

Parents, caregivers, and teachers may have things to say to James and Yummy, but their voices are silenced in these books. By doing this, both authors seem to draw focus on how alone and independent their protagonists are. In *Your Move*, James' father has left the family and his mother works at night to provide for the two boys. Only towards the end does James realize the significance of his possible membership in the K-Bones: his younger brother, Isaac, follows his every move and would surely want to join as well. James sees that he is not alone because his move would inspire a move by Isaac. Yummy's grandmother is his main caregiver, but her role is minimal throughout the story. Yummy turns to Monster, the leader of the Black Disciples, a father -figure, although the results prove to be deadly for him.

The table below presents a summary of important details from each of the books discussed in the literature circles, including their titles, protagonist descriptions, the major criminal justice issues discussed, and the format of each book.

Table 4-1. Book summaries

Title	Protagonist Gender	Protagonist Age	Protagonist Race	Main Criminal Justice Issue	Book Format
Nine Candles	Male	7	Latino	Incarcerated parent	Picture book
Visiting Day	Female	(Unknown—perhaps 8)	African-American	Incarcerated parent	Picture book
Your Move	Male	10	African-American	Youth violence: Gangs	Picture book
Yummy	Male	11	African-American	Youth violence: Gangs	Graphic novel

Previous Experiences with Criminal Justice System in Books & Real Life

Rosenblatt (2002) suggested that stances, or perspectives when reading, are aspects of an individual's consciousness. Furthermore, McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) wrote that, "When reading from a critical stance, readers use their background knowledge to understand relationships between their ideas and the ideas presented by the authors of the text" (pp. 57-58). This section examines the previous experiences the participants had with criminal justice issues in their lives and in the books they read. Interviews, literature circle discussions, and informal conversations provided data.

Books about Criminal Justice

In the initial interview, after some demographic information was established, I asked each participant if they had ever read any books that talked about things being right or wrong. I wanted to make sure that I gave them plenty of chances to share any books they might have read about criminal justice issues, so I had several probing questions: Have you ever read any books about people who make choices and face a consequence? Have you ever read any books about jail? Only Trishawn replied yes to these questions and told me about a hunting book he read where the protagonist has to stand up to poachers. The other three boys said they had never read books about criminal justice issues and I found this to be true throughout our literature circle discussions.

One book that was mentioned by JJ and Trishawn during our literature circle discussion about *Visiting Day* (12-9-10) was *Holes* (1999) by Louis Sachar. Their third grade teacher had just finished reading it aloud to the class that semester. *Holes* is the story of Stanley Yelnats, who along with his family, has never had anything but bad luck. Therefore, it is not really a surprise to him when he is falsely accused and

convicted of theft. Given the choice of jail or Camp Green Lake, Stanley chooses Green Lake because he's never been to camp before. Unfortunately, Camp Green Lake does not have a lake and it is not really a camp. It is a juvenile detention facility. To build character, the warden has each "camper" dig a hole five feet deep by five feet wide by five feet long every day. What Stanley and the rest of the boys do not know is that the warden is not just building character-- she is looking for the lost buried treasure of outlaw, Kissing Kate Barlow. Publishers Weekly's (2000) starred review of the 1999 Newbery Medal winner described it as a "dazzling blend of social commentary, tall tale and magic realism." Trishawn suggested we read it as a group and JJ quickly objected because they had already read it. I said that we would not have to reread it, but we could still connect it to *Visiting Day* and/or any other books we had read.

Real Life Experiences with the Criminal Justice System

In the initial interviews, I stayed away from asking my participants what their experiences were with the criminal justice system. One of the reasons why I did this was because I was not sure if they had had any of those experiences. As mentioned in the previous Chapter, my participants were recruited by the EDEP program director; they were not selected because of meeting this criterion. Another reason was because at the time of the interviews, I did not feel that I had achieved rapport with all of the participants. Asking about their experiences with the criminal justice system at that time might have offended or alienated one of them and I did not want to sabotage our future literature discussions.

Throughout the study, however, each participant shared his experiences (or lack of experiences) with the criminal justice system. Alex shared during our discussion about *Yummy* that his two, older cousins were both in jail, although he was not privy to

the details of their crimes or their release dates (Literature circle, 1-14-11). In the following excerpt, my responses are denoted by MEO and Alex's are denoted by A.

MEO: They had guns and they got in trouble for being out with guns, right?

A: And they shot one

MEO: They shot someone?

A: No, they just shot

MEO: Shot the guns? Okay

A: I don't know if they trying to shoot someone or they just shot

MEO: Just shot the gun?

A: I don't know if they trying to shoot anybody or nothing

Later in the conversation, he explained that one of his cousins was going to be getting out soon and might come live with his family.

Trishawn and JJ both shared during our discussion of *Nine Candles* that they had visited prisons (Literature circle, 11-16-10). Because his uncle is a prison guard, Trishawn had the opportunity "to go in the back, you know, and like walk around and see all the other stuff." From this experience, he could tell me emphatically that he did not want to go to prison. JJ had a difference experience; he confided to us that his father was currently in prison. He did not know what he had done and he was unsure when his father would be released.

While Connor claimed not to have any experience with the criminal justice system (no relatives in prison), he did have extensive knowledge of the system of justice and discipline that was enforced at the school because of his membership in safety patrol.

He was concerned with rules and proper procedures to be carried out by both adults and other students in EDEP and during our literature circle discussions.

Descriptive Characteristics of Respondents: Their ‘Cool Poses’

As mentioned previously in Chapter 3, rapport building was an integral part of my research. I wanted to make sure that my participants were comfortable sharing their thoughts and responses about the books I had so carefully selected to share with them. By getting to know them individually at first and then in small groups, I tried to disrupt the power relationship of student against teacher. I helped with homework, talked with them during snack time at the beginning of EDEP, and participated in indoor games and outdoor sports with them. These experiences lent themselves to observations about who the boys projected themselves to be—both with me and with their peers. As an educator of Black boys and now preservice teachers, Tatum (2005) advocated that teachers address issues pertinent to African-American boys in order to prevent those issues from influencing literacy development.

The turmoil that African-American boys face in their lives causes a response from them individually and from the greater institutions. Tatum argued that Black males respond to these roots of turmoil by enacting a cool pose where they can exude power and toughness while coping with conflict and anxiety. When the ‘cool pose’ conflicts with schools, then a hostile environment emerges for all members—students, teachers, and administrators. The table below summarizes these issues and their manifestations for individual males and the responses that schools, communities, and other establishments have.

Table 4-2. Roots of Black male turmoil and responses

The roots of Black male turmoil	The Black male's response to turmoil	The ways institutions have responded to this turmoil
The effect of globalization	"Cool Pose"	Micro-aggression
Urban economic neglect	Cope with oppression, invisibility, and marginality	Psychometric warfare
Mass media and popular culture	Communicate power, toughness, detachment, and style	Misguided educational placements
Public policy regarding criminal justice	Maintain a balance between his inner life and his social environment	Barriers to learning
The persistence of racial discrimination	Cope with conflict and anxiety	Expulsion and suspension
The crumbling Black community infrastructure	Render him visible and empower him	
The lack of fulfillment of civil rights promises	Neutralize stress	
	Manage his feelings of rage	
	Counter negative forces	

Adapted from Tatum (2005)

My experiences with the boys in both the literature circle settings and the informal settings reinforced this idea. While not all of the boys portrayed the same 'cool pose,' each one had a persona that he presented to the rest of society.

From my research journal notes and notes about the literature circle meetings, I noticed that their 'cool poses' took different forms depending on how they interacted with the criminal justice system presented in the books and within the structure of the EDEP. Each boy had his own way of manipulating how he thought about rules and laws. To help understand these positions, I placed the four boys along a continuum where an outlaw stance was at one extreme and the enforcer stance was at the other

extreme. An outlaw in historical legal systems is a person declared as outside the protection of the law. To earn this status, one might be a fugitive from the law, a habitual criminal, or a rebel/nonconformist. At the other end of the continuum, an enforcer was someone who observed, imposed or reinforced the structure of the EDEP and the criminal justice system articulated in the books we read. Throughout my observations and interactions with the boys, they moved along this continuum, depending on what we were reading and/or discussing. Therefore, the label that I give each boy is not permanent or fixed; it just happens to be the one that was most frequently enacted by each boy. The table below is an illustration of where the four boys fell along the continuum.

Table 4-3. 'Cool poses' continuum

Outlaw			***Enforcer***
Alex	JJ	Trishawn	Connor

Alex

Alex positioned himself as an outlaw to the EDEP and our discussions. During one of my first interactions with him (giving homework help), the P.E. coach (a Black male), walked by our table and told me, "He's got potential, but he'll talk himself out of it" (research notes, 10-7-10). Not knowing Alex that intimately yet, I was not sure what this cryptic message meant. As I reflect after our discussions and my observations, I imagine that the coach was referring to Alex's way of talking through situations to achieve the most personal benefit. For example, he made a habit of explaining to me and the other boys in the group exactly how he would break into the snack machine located in the teacher's lounge, a frequent spot for our meetings. Not only did he have this plan configured in his head, he also strove to convince us how he would get away

with this crime (Literature circles, 11-16-10, 11-30-10, 1-10-11, and 1-13-11). In many conversations, Alex chose not to make connections between actions and consequences. This happened when he was referring to himself and when he would put himself in the places of the protagonists of the books we were reading. I believe this detachment from the repercussions of actions could be viewed as another facet of his ‘cool pose’.

In the cafeteria during snack time and outside during free play, Alex was seen as a rebel or nonconformist. Students entered the cafeteria each afternoon after being dismissed from their classrooms. The established routine was to go through the cafeteria line for a snack (usually chips and a fruit juice) and then sit down by grade level at an assigned table. Alex consistently used this time to patrol up and down the fourth-grade table, talking to both male and female students. If the snack was good that day, he also usually tried to convince them to hand over theirs. His walk was not quick nor was it timid; Alex used this time to strut, dragging one foot behind the other and letting his opposite shoulder drop. I watched for someone (anyone) to reprimand him and force him to sit in his chair like everyone else. Throughout the study, I never witnessed the EDEP director or any of the other employees calling him out for such behaviors and making him sit down, even though they seemed to be monitoring everyone else carefully. In these instances, Alex may have been enacting his ‘cool pose’ to try to render himself visible (Tatum, 2005). Even if the authorities in the cafeteria missed it, the other fourth graders and nearby third graders saw Alex as someone who was above both the fear of consequences and consequences themselves.

Connor

At the other extreme, Connor positioned himself as an enforcer of the criminal justice system and the structure of EDEP. In his initial interview (11-9-10), Connor admitted that he sometimes got in trouble in class, but was quick to point out that it was only for things such as talking too much. He also explained to me that he was someone who would stick up for those who were new in school or those who were being picked on by others. When asked what his classmates would say about him, Connor replied:

> Well, I think they'd kinda say that I'm kind of nice to people 'cause the first day I had this friend, there was this new kid who came to school, his name was Adam. He didn't know pretty much what to do so I kinda ran him through what to do and there's also this gang who always calls him names and I told them to stop and then they stopped. (Initial interview 11-9-10)

Connor upheld the rules of the school and the classroom by standing up to those he perceived to be bullying a new student. His 'cool pose' involves "countering negative forces" (Tatum, 2005), which in this case were other boys who were terrorizing another student.

Another example of Connor positioning himself as an enforcer was his desire to become a safety patrol member at school. Safety patrol is made up of fourth-graders (the most senior grade at Massie Elementary) who have exemplary grades and classroom behavior. From talking with the media specialist who organizes the program and other fourth grade teachers, I found that students may apply for these positions at the end of third grade or after the first report card period of fourth grade. Connor did not qualify to be on safety patrol at the end of third grade. When asked, he said that his grades had held him back (Research notes, 11-16-10). He was anxiously awaiting the first round of report cards for the year to be issued to see if he would qualify. On November 18th, 2010, he walked up to me at the beginning of EDEP with his safety

patrol belt, badge, and a huge smile on his face—he had raised his grades to A's and B's and was a new member of safety patrol. He was eager to tell me about his duties, such as directing younger students to their classrooms first thing in the morning in the hallway and collecting recycling materials from classrooms after-school. Throughout the rest of the study, he took these responsibilities very seriously. He would inform me at the beginning of EDEP if he had recycling duty that day and ask to be with the second reading group (research notes, 11-30-10). Connor also shared stories with me of having to report squirrely students who were not prompt in getting to their classrooms in the mornings (research notes, 1-13-11).

Connor's 'cool pose' was also prominent in our literature circle discussions. He pushed Alex with questions and realistic situations (e.g., running out of ammo) when the other boy avoided consequences. He also pushed against one of my book choices, *Yummy*. Although he enjoyed the story, he argued that other children should not be read it because it might "inspire" them to be violent (Literature circle, 1-14-11). This statement reminded me of Tobin's (2000) experiences in research regarding children and the media. Tobin used four Bakhtinian principles about speech to guide his analysis, one of which was that the word is only half ours. This means that language is "citational, hybridized, and double-voiced" because "all speech carries echoes of the voices of others" (p. 20). One of the ways that Connor seems to enact his 'cool pose' of enforcer is by echoing the voices of other authority figures—teachers and his parents. His statements regarding the issues of criminal justice in the multicultural books we read also seem to mimic those of authority figures.

JJ

The other two African-American boys in my study also had 'cool poses', however, theirs were not as extreme. JJ positioned himself in EDEP and in our literature circle discussions as being a more moderate version of an outlaw. He seemed to be torn between following in the footsteps of his older brother, who was best friends with Alex, and being more of an enforcer. At the beginning of our discussion about *Visiting Day*, the EDEP director came over to tell me that JJ had gotten in trouble the previous day and had to be picked up by his mother. I asked what happened and JJ explained that he and some other boys (including his older brother) were tackling each other on the swings during free play time. They had been warned to stop, but they continued anyway. JJ said that he knew it was wrong, but the other boys kept yelling at him to do it.

MEO: Do you know what that's called?

JJ: {*looks at me puzzled*}

MEO: That's called peer pressure—when you let those boys talk you into doing something that you know isn't right. You know that, right?

JJ: {*nods yes*}

MEO: So did you have to go home- did she send you home?

JJ: All of us, all five of us…. And now we're not allowed to go outside until after Christmas

MEO: Seriously? Till after Christmas?

JJ: {*nods yes*} (Literature circle, 12-9-10)

From this short conversation, JJ seemed remorseful: he kept his head down, did not look me in the eyes, and his voice was quiet (Research notes, 12-9-10). Later in the

conversation, though, when another student started teasing him about being in trouble, JJ shrugged and said his mother didn't care. I pulled JJ aside after our literature discussion and he confessed that while his mother may not have cared, he did receive punishment from his grandfather, who provides discipline in his family.

Trishawn

Trishawn positioned himself as a foil to JJ; on the continuum, I would place him between JJ and Connor. For the most part, he saw himself as an enforcer. His uncle is a prison guard and his step-sister's father is a judge in a neighboring county. Trishawn was very knowledgeable in the process of corrections; he explained to JJ the difference between jail and prison and that you cannot be bailed out of prison (Literature circle, 11-16-10). He was also an honor roll student, even though he never stayed inside during free play time to complete his homework like the other three boys did.

There were several times, though, during our discussions where he positioned himself as an outlaw or rebel against me and the research process. During one of the critical literacy activities I planned, Sketch to Stretch (Short, Kauffman, & Kahn, 2000), Trishawn was extremely resistant (Research notes, 11-30-10). He refused to draw, saying that he would rather color. I gave him an alternative of just talking with me about the two books we had read and he started to wander around the teacher's lounge, examining the snack machine and the contents of the refrigerator. After several minutes of focusing my attention on JJ and his drawing, Trishawn sat back down, but still refused to draw. A similar incident occurred during his exit interview. When Trishawn gave me one-word answers to the questions, I probed him for more information. He proceeded to either deflect my probe or remain silent until I moved on to the next question (Research notes, 1-13-11). Through these interactions, I believe Trishawn was

communicating his ‘cool pose’ of power, detachment, and toughness (Tatum, 2005), which moved him closer to the persona of an outlaw.

As mentioned before, I do not wish to present stagnant labels for these boys; throughout our informal and literature circle discussions, their ‘cool poses’ fluctuated and morphed. The previous section is meant to paint multifaceted pictures of the complexities that these African-American boys encompass. I believe this information to be necessary for understanding their responses.

Summary

In this Chapter, I provided detailed descriptions of the literature circle books and the participants in an effort to frame their responses within my findings. The process of locating quality, multicultural children’s literature that addresses issues of criminal justice was arduous. After the search, though, I believe the books we read fit Lewison, Leland, and Harste’s (2000) standards for social issues books. The ‘cool poses’ my participants adopted during EDEP and our discussions can be seen as reactions to the turmoil they faced in their lives and their previous knowledge of the criminal justice system. Combining social issues children’s literature and critical literacy practices with the experiences of these African-American boys produced important conversations that will be examined in the next Chapters.

CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS

Overview

Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory of reader response guided me to examine the responses of my four participants. She argued that the transactions between the reader and a text formed lived-through experiences, invoking a sense of a reading as the creation of a dynamic, alternative reality—one that requires a performance of producing the poem that results (Rogers, 1999). Furthermore, Probst (2002) explained that Rosenblatt's transactional, "theory suggests that each reader comes to the text with a unique history, a unique set of circumstances and abilities and inclinations, and has to take that into account as s/he shapes an understanding of the text and his/her reading of it" (p. 31). My participants brought with them specific social, political, and cultural factors that then influenced their interactions with the stories we read together and discussed. These personal interpretations are both valid and desirable (Rosenblatt, 1978).

In this Chapter, I organize and examine the responses of my participants through the lens of the transactional theory of reader response and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). I developed broad analytic categories that allow me to talk about the form of the interactions while paying attention to the relationships between language and social structure (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Rogers, 2004). Then, I selected powerful examples that represented "cruces" or tension spots (Fairclough, 1995). I examined these instances more closely to create critical vignettes. A critical vignette is a summative statement including the larger context and a CDA on the event (Rogers, 2003).

Findings

Rosenblatt (1978) addressed two stances of reading: aesthetic and efferent. These stances determine a reader's approach to a text. An aesthetic stance is concerned with personal and experiential transactions with a text. Specifically, Rosenblatt (1978) stated that, "In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p. 25, italics in original). In efferent reading, however, the reader concentrates on extracting facts, examples, and other information from a text. All of my participants admitted that this was their usual stance when reading. At their exit interviews, I asked them what they did when they finished reading a book and their unanimous answer was, "Take a test." In this situation, they were referring to taking an Accelerated Reader (A. R.) test on the computer, where they can earn points for successfully answering basic comprehension questions about books they have read. These two stances of reading are set on a continuum; depending on the reader, all or part of a text can be read either aesthetically or efferently (Rosenblatt, 1978).

I analyzed the data by using Glaser and Strauss's constant comparison method, as described by Guba and Lincoln (1994) to identify categories. To start, I used categories of their stances intuitively and continued as I coded the statements within the literature circle discussions. Then, I continuously compared key words with others in the same category and other categories, which reflected any insights and connections (personal and otherwise) to the literature. Using Fairclough's (2004) orders of discourse, I analyzed each utterance for its genre (ways of interacting), discourse (ways of representing), and style (ways of being). The annotation of genre, discourse, or style

has been abbreviated as G, D, or S. The following table gives examples of the different aspects of each order of discourse.

Table 5-1. Aspects of genre, Discourses, and styles

Genre	Discourse	Styles
"the sort of language tied to a particular social activity, such as an interview"	"ways of representing"	"ways of being"
Features of AAVE Thematic structure of the text Cohesion devices (parallel structure, repetition) Wording Metaphors Politeness conventions Turn-taking structures Revoicing or "marking" narrative sequencing Call & response	Noun phrases (nominal groups) Verbs	Analysis of voice (active or passive) Modality (e.g., tense & affinity) Mood (questions, statements, demands) Transivity (e.g., action, affective state, ability, cognitive statements) Pronoun use Syntactic & morphosyntactic features (e.g., aspectual markers, negation) Phonological features

Adapted from Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Rogers, 2003

I treated Discourse within a CDA framework differently than how linguists, socio-linguists, or conversation analysts would normally treat it. CDA researchers treat Discourses as always being socially, politically, racially, and economically loaded (Rogers, 2004). Gee (1996) made a distinction between "d"iscourse and "D"iscourse. Little "d" refers to the grammar of what is being said. "D"iscourse refers to the ways of representing, believing, valuing, and participating with "d"iscourse. Discourse also includes the identities and meanings that go along with ways of speaking. Gee's (1999) analytic procedures contain a set of connection-building activities that aim to help the analyst with describing, interpreting, and explaining the relationships between "d"iscourse and "D"iscourse. The activities allow the analyst to construct meaning from

discourse patterns and include: semiotic building, world building, activity building, socioculturally situated identity building, political building, and connection building. Gee provided questions to ask for each task. For example, under the task, semiotic building, Gee asked, “What signs systems are relevant (and irrelevant) in the situation?” Therefore, I used CDA to analyze both what is said (in the text) and what is left out (missing) (Rogers, 2004).

Throughout this process, I also kept in mind the ‘cool poses’ that each of the participants enacted. As mentioned previously, Tatum (2005) wrote about the Black male’s response to turmoil of enacting a cool pose where they can exude power and toughness while coping with conflict and anxiety. My experiences with the boys in both the literature circle settings and the informal settings reinforced this idea. While not all of the boys portrayed the same ‘cool pose,’ each one had a persona that he presented to the rest of society. In the next sections, I examine the responses of Alex, Connor, JJ, and Trishawn in accordance to their ‘cool poses’ and to the themes of aesthetic and efferent stances to reading by using CDA.

Aesthetic Reading

> In aesthetic reading, we respond to the very story or poem that we are evoking during the transaction with the text. In order to shape the work, we draw on our reservoir of past experience with people and the world, our past inner linkage of words and things, our past encounters with spoken or written texts. We listen to the sound of words in the inner ear; we lend our sensations, our emotions, our sense of being alive, to the new experience which, we feel, corresponds to the text. We participate in the story, we identify with characters, we share their conflicts and their feelings. At the same time there is a stream of responses being generated. There may be a sense of pleasure in our own creative activity… a feeling of approval or disapproval of the characters and their behavior. We may be aware of a contrast between the assumptions or expectations about life that we brought to the reading and the attitudes, moral codes, social situations we are living through in the world created in transaction with the text (Rosenblatt, 2001, p. 270).

From Rosenblatt’s quote above, it is apparent that there are many ways a reader can respond aesthetically to a text. Cai (2008) described the three central modes of aesthetic reading responses: perception, association, and affection. When responding in the perception mode, the reader pays attention to things in the text that are intriguing, significant, and/or shocking. In the association mode, the reader makes connections to aspects of the story including characters, plot, and setting. Finally, in the affection mode, the reader responds by sharing emotions regarding what happens in the story. The aesthetic responses of Alex, Connor, JJ, and Trishawn are organized and examined according to these three central modes.

Efferent Reading

> As the reader responds to the printed words or symbols, his attention is directed outward, so to speak, toward concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading. To designate this type of reading, in which the primary concern of the reader is with what he will carry away from the reading, I have chosen the term “efferent,” derived from the Latin, “efferre,” “to carry away.” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 24)

Students take an efferent stance to reading when they are faced with standardized test passages and comprehension questions. “What grade did I get? Did I pass? Will I be promoted?” are all questions that high-stakes testing has cultivated in the minds of children as early as in elementary school (Guthrie, 2002). My participants, however, were not placed under the same pressures during our literature discussions. When Trishawn, JJ, Alex, and Connor read and responded to our shared texts efferently, they carried away knowledge and skills that could serve them well in the future. Their efferent responses were centered on vocabulary.

What Did They Know?

To better understand their responses under the frameworks of the transactional theory of reader response and CDA, I turned to my research sub-questions: a) What do Black boys' responses say about their personal connections to the stories? and b) What do Black boys' responses say about their perceptions of society, specifically their understandings of how justice works in their lives and their communities? The responses of Alex, Connor, JJ, and Trishawn revealed that while they had some basic understanding of how justice works (sometimes against themselves and other community members), they also relied heavily on stereotypes as sources of knowledge. These stereotypes, so prominent in media and in their communities, had been internalized. Other sources of knowledge that fueled their responses included media texts (e.g., television shows, news media, and video games) and personal experiences. The rest of the Chapter will focus on their responses and in what ways they represent what they know about criminal justice issues.

Stereotypes about inmates and gangsters via book illustrations

Picture books can be defined as "profusely illustrated books in which both words and illustrations contribute to the story's meaning" (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008, p. 91). The books for this study included three picture storybooks and one graphic novel, as described in more detail in Chapter 4. *Visiting Day* (Woodson, 2002), *Nine Candles* (Testa, 1996), and *Your Move* (Bunting, 1998) are considered to be picture storybooks because their stories are told through both words and pictures (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008). *Yummy: Last Days of a Southside Shorty* (Neri, 2010) is a graphic novel, which is a novel-length book with text written as captions or in speech bubbles much like a comic book (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008). Because all of the books we

read had illustrations, they naturally led to discussions, specifically concerning stereotypes of inmates and gangsters.

One of the ways students responded to the books was by using their visual literacy skills (e.g., ‘reading’ the illustrations). According to Seglem and Witte (2009) “using visuals is a powerful instructional tool, and because students receive information in a variety of formats, literacy must be expanded beyond traditional reading and writing to include the visual arts as one of the ways in which we communicate” (p. 217). Visual literacy is the ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from information presented in the form of an image. This ability implies that pictures can be ‘read’ and that meaning can be communicated through this process of ‘reading.’

As mentioned in Chapter 3, our literature discussions took place in the teacher’s lounge, located behind the cafeteria’s stage. We sat at a small, square table, which aided in building rapport and enabling each boy to have access to the text and its illustrations. My digital recorder sat in the middle of the table and after a few minutes each session of tapping it and making sure the right light was on, everyone forgot about it (e.g., would point to pictures, instead of using words to describe them).

I started with two literature discussion groups that consisted of two white boys and two African-American/mixed race boys. These groups were formed this way in an attempt to not alienate either group or paint them in an unfavorable light with their peers in the EDEP. After a trial run of reading a short excerpt from the novel, Making up Megaboy (Walter, 1998), I noticed that the African-American boys did not participate as much as the white boys. During an informal interview, I asked one of the African-American boys why he was so quiet and he replied that he “just didn’t have as much to

say as 'em" (Researcher notes, 10-28-10). I consulted an African-American male education scholar, Bernard Oliver, for advice. After our discussions and his guidance, I decided to have two homogeneous groups for the literature discussions. While this situation was not ideal and I did worry about how the boys in each group would perceive the books (e.g., would the Black boys think the books were read to try and "fix them?"), I felt that the separation needed to happen to ensure responses from each participant. Unfortunately, having just two groups did not work either because of one student's afterschool responsibilities (e.g., Safety Patrol). The final configuration was three literature circle discussion groups: one with four white boys; one with a black boy and a mixed race boy; and one with two black boys. The data addressed in this study is concerned with the responses of the African-American and mixed race participants.

Jail clothes: At the beginning of *Visiting Day*, both a father and a daughter are pictured getting ready for the day. The father is examining himself in front of a mirror and the little girl is getting her hair braided by her grandmother. (A stands for Alex, CO for Connor, and MEO denotes my responses. Each line of the transcript is numbered for easy reference within my interpretations. The annotation of genre, discourse, or style has been abbreviated as G, D, or S.)

47 MEO: Alright, so something happened in this story…

48 A: He got, the daddy got up and brushed his teeth and got ready for work.

49 CO: I think he might actually be, I think he might've actually got in the jail because

50 he's kinda wearing like jail clothes?

51 MEO: What do you mean jail clothes?

52 A: Jail clothes are orange.

53 CO: Oooohhhh. I thought, I thought they could be like that {*khaki in picture*}. Maybe

54 he's a fireman?

55 A: Fireman people are blue, navy blue…

56 CO: They don't have to be.

57 A: Yes, they do. They all wear the same uniform. (Literature discussion, 11-16-10)

In this example, Alex is 'reading' the illustration to tell me and Connor exactly what the father in the story has done. He is focusing on the literal meaning of the illustrations and assumes that this routine (e.g., getting up, brushing his teeth) is in preparation for the work day (G). Connor notices that this interpretation might not necessarily be correct because of the clothes that the father is wearing (S). However, he marks his observation with a rise in his tone of voice at the end of his statement in line 50 (S). He is not sure if his idea is correct. When Alex informs him that "jail clothes are orange," he starts to reconsider. Connor uses his "oh" to pause the conversation and give himself some time to think and to hold on to his turn within the conversation (G). Then he goes back to his idea of the father wearing a uniform and wonders aloud if he's a fireman (S). Even though his first thought was shut down by Alex, Connor still pursues his focus on the uniform. Alex again insists that Connor is incorrect by claiming that, "Fireman people are blue, navy blue" (G). When Connor tries to counteract this opposition, Alex asserts himself for a final time and essentially ends the conversation (G).

Connor seems to look to me for validation of his prediction, but Alex adopts a 'cool pose' of power and speaks with authority about uniforms (S). After line 50, the dialogue develops into a tennis match, where Connor and Alex respond to each other in a rapid fashion (G). Finally, when Connor challenges Alex's assumption of authority in line 54,

Alex answers back with a tough tone that stops the conversation (G). During member checking (which was done individually), I asked Alex how he knew so much about uniforms-- he just shrugged and smiled at me (G, 2-3-11). In my pilot study, other children echoed this view that inmates wore orange when they questioned what Raymond's mother was wearing as an inmate in *Nine Candles*. I asked them how they knew about this uniform color and they explained that both the media (e.g., movies and television) and their own experiences visiting people in prison contributed to this idea (G).

As we continued reading and learned that the father was "doing a little time", Connor directed his attention again to the uniforms worn by the father and the other inmates.

91 MEO: And so they all have to wear the same outfits?

92 A: No

93 CO: They're prisoners, they're all prisoners

94 MEO: They might not all be friends, but they're all prisoners, right? So you said

95 A: They're prisoners

96 MEO: that um

97 A: And they wear the same clothes

98 CO: In jail

99 MEO: Yeah, you said that earlier plus you said that that might be what he has to

100 wear in jail. But you said something else—what did you say about the uniforms?

101 CO: They're supposed to be orange

102 MEO: Have you seen that before?

103 A: Yeah

104 MEO: That jail clothes are orange?

105 A: Mm-hmm

106 MEO: So is it okay that he's wearing gray or kind of like a brown?

107 A: Maybe, maybe not (Literature discussion, 11-16-10)

In this excerpt, Connor again asserts his idea that the father is incarcerated (S). My validation this time of Connor (line 94) marks a shift in Alex's responses (G). He stops fighting against Connor and revoices elements of our conversation (G).

Connor becomes more confident in this part of our conversation. He even takes over the idea of orange uniforms as jail clothes from Alex (G, line 101), although he does defer to let Alex respond when I ask if he had seen uniforms before (G). Connor's ideas from the illustrations have been validated, not necessarily by me, but by the text. For most of this excerpt, he takes on a role of authority previously held by Alex (S). Only towards the end does Alex reemerge in this role because of his previous knowledge and his experiences of seeing inmates in orange jumpsuits.

Trishawn and JJ also paid attention to the clothing worn by the father in *Visiting Day*. From the same illustration, JJ inferred immediately that the uniform meant imprisonment (G). (As a reminder, T stands for Trishawn, JJ is JJ, and I am denoted by MEO.)

90 JJ: {*looking at the illustration*} No, wait, that's jail

91 MEO: How do you know?

92 JJ: Be-CAUSE

93 T: Because of the clothes

94 MEO: What clothes?

95 JJ: Those kinda clothes {pointing to illustration}

96 T: Yeah, those kind

97 MEO: Uniforms?

98 JJ: They're in jail

99 MEO: Other people wear uniforms. You guys have to wear a uniform to school

100 T: Yeah, but they have to wear a solid color (Literature discussion, 12-9-10)

Both boys are in agreement during this conversation (G). They use the uniform to help them understand the setting of the story. This example also illustrates the relationship that JJ and Trishawn had with each other; they were in the same classroom at school and often spent time together during EDEP. Trishawn not only agrees with JJ's idea of the father being in jail, he also supports JJ as he tries to convince me. He elaborates JJ's point (G, line 93) and he echoes JJ's assertion (G, line 96). When I make the argument that other people have to wear uniforms (similar to what Alex said to Connor in the other discussion), Trishawn comes again to the defense of JJ and his idea. In this example, it was hard for me to determine if Trishawn really believed that her father is in jail or if he was supporting JJ to oppose me (researcher, teacher, and outsider). Trishawn might have been adopting this 'cool pose' to counter my questions and my authority, while showing his allegiance to his friend, JJ (G).

In these conversations about *Visiting Day*, my participants identified a khaki uniform worn by the father to reveal their stereotypes regarding the dress of an inmate. No one assumed that the father was a lawyer, a doctor, or even a teacher. Those professions have other forms of dress and/or uniforms. Furthermore, they did not

confuse the dress of the guard depicted. By the ages of eight and nine, in accordance with their personal experiences, they could all identify what the uniform of a prisoner should be. Additionally, they also used these discussions to volley for their positions of power within our literature circles (G). Alex and Connor were at odds with each other until the text proved Alex wrong. He quickly then changed his mind and even speculated that wearing a color other than orange might not be acceptable (S, line 107). Trishawn helped to maintain JJ's idea against the perception of me opposing it. They used their combined power to push against my authority and the genre of teacher talk (G).

Why's he upset?: The boys used their visual literacy skills to examine the illustrations for emotional understanding. Zambo and Brozo (2009) support the use of picture books with positive male characters because they believe that these books can do three things:

- When boys step into a story, they step inside others' lives;
- Feeling happy or sad about a character's behavior encourages boys to become aware of their feelings and learn to label how they feel; and
- Stories help boys learn how to deal with strong emotions by letting them feel these emotions vicariously, a little at a time (pp. 7-8)

Furthermore, Rosenblatt (1978) wrote that, "As the student shares through literacy the emotions and aspirations of other human beings he can gain heightened sensitivity to the needs and problems of those remote from him in temperament, in space, or in social environment" (p. 261). Through their responses, Alex, Connor, JJ, and Trishawn showed that they were paying close attention to the emotional endeavors of the books' characters. These emotions, however, were also stereotyped. Upset was the major theme discussed, but the boys used it in two different connotations: mad or sad.

Because of these preconceived ideas regarding what emotions inmates could feel, my participants limited their own exposure to feeling emotions vicariously.

The father in *Visiting Day* commanded the most consideration from my participants while we were reading/discussing the book and afterwards by inspiring intertextual connections (G). Connor focused our conversation on the expression of the father by asking a simple question.

154 CO: Why's he upset?

155 MEO: Who? The guard?

156 CO: He looks mad

157 MEO: The guard or the dad?

158 CO: The dad

159 MEO: Why do you think the dad might be upset?

160 A: Never get to see his, her child?

161 MEO: Yeah

162 CO: He's in prison

163 MEO: He's in prison, he only gets to see his daughter once a month, right?

164 CO: And he looks like {*makes grunting noise and scrunches up face*}

(Literature discussion, 11-16-10)

Connor expands on his original thought by offering that the character "looks mad" (S). He equates upset with being angry. As I consider the transcript and my own biases, it seems to me that I pushed the concept of upset to mean sad; I felt that an upset/sad father would be more sympathetic than an upset/mad father. I wanted the focus of this discussion to be on feelings of sadness (e.g., missing family members, remorse for a

crime) and not on an angry man in prison. My actions here silence Connor's stereotype of a prisoner's emotions while supporting a different stereotype (all inmates are sad).

Alex seems to take the idea of being upset in the same vein as me (e.g., sad) and immediately said that not seeing his child would be upsetting (D). He starts with a masculine pronoun, but then swiftly changed to a feminine pronoun (S, line 160). This uncertainty could be why he raises the tome of his voice at the end of the sentence and makes his statement sound like a question (S). In his head, he could have been thinking either: never get to see his child or never get to see her. Instead, a combination of the two statements is what he articulates.

Connor suggests that he might be upset/mad because "he's in prison" (S, line 162). He takes it upon himself to mimic the father's facial expression and develop it further with the inclusion of a vocal element: a grunt (S). With his scrunched up face and grunt, Connor communicates that he believes the father is mad, not sad (S). During member checking, I asked Connor if he still felt that the father was mad and he said yes (2-3-11). Furthermore, he explained to me that it was similar to what his dad said he was feeling. Connor's parents had separated at the beginning of the research project; in his initial interview, he made sure to emphasize that they were not divorced, just separated (Initial interview 11-9-10). He told me during the member checking that his father was often mad that he could not see Connor all the time and told Connor that he acted out by arguing with Connor's mother. Because of this information, I think Connor might have been reading the father's expression in *Visiting Day* as being similar to his own father's; therefore, instead of inferring that the character of the father was sad, Connor saw him as mad (G).

Connor made an intertextual connection to *Visiting Day* after our discussion of *Nine Candles*, and stated that he liked reading both books (G). I followed up on this statement (G) and retrieved the book from my bag, which lead to a conversation about artistic depiction of the father.

276 MEO: Why? Why did you like *Visiting Day*? We read this one waaay long ago, a

277 long time ago

278 CO: 'Cause they finally see each other again. 'Cause they miss each other again

279 A: The dad looked different when he was in jail

280 MEO: Why did he look different?

281 A: 'Cause of the clothes on him and his face

282 MEO: What does he look like here on this front picture?

283 A: Like a person

284 MEO: What emotions do you think he's feeling?

285 A: Happy?

286 MEO: He looks really happy, right?

287 A: And this one looks sad {pointing to picture in the book}

(Literature discussion, 12-9-10)

Connor focuses on the emotional aspects of the story (e.g., visiting and then separation). He phrases this summary in a way that represents a cycle: "'cause they… again, 'cause they… again" (line 278). His style of language here shows that he knows the book is presenting just one instance of recurring events (S). Even though the text does not share this with us, it is apparent that the daughter has visited her father in jail

before (e.g., preparing food for the long bus ride) and that she will be visiting her father again in the future.

Alex chooses to examine the cover of the book again and calls attention to something that he finds intriguing: he believes the father looks different from the illustrations on the cover compared to the illustrations in the book (G). When I question why the father might look different (G), Alex responds by giving some physical differences: his clothes and his face. This conversation takes place after our discussion of *Visiting Day*, with its focus on the father's attire and what can be considered "jail clothes." When Alex states that the father's clothing makes him look different, he is alluding to this previous conversation (G). Alex then states that on the cover, the father looks "like a person" (line 283). Some researchers (and/or teachers) might be upset with a seemingly blasé answer like this, but after further examination, Alex is really saying that on the cover, the father does not look like an inmate (G, D). He looks like a regular person holding his daughter in a joyous way. His facial expression is not sad and the reader cannot tell if he is wearing a prisoner's uniform. When I try to make Alex pinpoint the emotion that the father on the cover might be feeling (G), he responds with uncertainty, raising his tone at the end of happy to make it a question (S). Alex articulates the emotions of the father in the book: "And this one looks sad" (line 286). Alex still uses an abstract pronoun (this) instead of being more direct with the pronoun, he (S).

Trishawn and JJ also paid attention to the father in *Visiting Day* and to what emotions he might be feeling based on their stereotypes of prisoners' emotions. Although JJ is younger than Connor and Alex, he is more comfortable talking about

emotions, which might be because of his personal experiences discussed later in the Chapter. For example, JJ immediately jumps into the mind of the father/inmate when I ask what he might be thinking.

167 MEO: What do you think this dad is thinking right here?

168 JJ: When am I gonna get out of here?

169 MEO: Yeah, I can imagine that. What about you, Trishawn, what do you think this

170 guy is thinking right here?

171 T: He's mad

172 MEO: Why?

173 T: He's maaaaddd

174 MEO: Why?

175 T: I don't know

176 MEO: What is he mad at?

177 JJ: He's mad that he's in jail

178 T: 'Cause he's in prison and his dad- his friend over there has to comb his hair and

179 stuff (Literature discussion, 12-9-10)

His response is not just a knee-jerk reaction to my question—JJ uses the pronoun "I" to show that he is answering the question as if he were the father in the story (S). In this way, JJ is stepping inside the shoes of this character and thinking from his perspective. Botelho and Rudman (2009) wrote that multicultural children's literature has the power to provide a door for students. While reading about their own cultures and then reading about other cultures are both important acts in literacy education, they are not enough for multicultural education and the pedagogy of social justice. Children

also need to use books as a door, where they can enter in and learn about others' experiences. When JJ uses the text as a door and he puts himself in the father's position, he shows that he knows the father is vulnerable and uncertain by keeping his response in the form of a question (S).

When I ask Trishawn the same question (G), he positions himself outside of the character and says that the father is mad (S). In actuality, Trishawn does not answer my question; he makes a judgment of what the father might be feeling (S). Trishawn then repeats his previous answer (G), draws out the word mad (S, line 173) and evades my question again (G). After some defiance by Trishawn, JJ interjects to say that, "He's mad that he's in jail" (S). Some time while Trishawn and I were engaged in our own dialogue of back and forth, JJ stepped out of the shoes of the father. His response here uses the masculine pronoun, he (S), to show distance between JJ and the father. JJ does not get to explain his answer because Trishawn interrupts by repeating JJ's answer and adding in a humorous jab about the inmates having to comb each other's hair (G).

The resistant behaviors Trishawn exhibited as part of his 'cool pose' happened periodically during the study and reminded me of what Tobin (2000) wrote about in his research of student responses to media. When students realize that they actually hold a lot of power in a research setting, such as mine and Tobin's, they can use that power to be defiant. At his exit interview, Trishawn displayed the most resistance by giving short, one or two word answers to my questions and saying "I don't know" repeatedly when I asked follow-up questions (Exit interview, 1-13-11). When I called attention to his behaviors, he claimed that he was not used to answering so many questions one-on-

one (G). He told me that he would have been more comfortable (and more cooperative) if JJ had been with him (G).

By focusing on the illustrations of the stories, the boys showed their awareness of visual literacy and, in certain cases, their own emotional maturity. Their responses were based on their background knowledge regarding stereotypes about the appearance and emotions of inmates. While some still struggled with empathy and sympathy, all were exposed to a positive male character whose emotions were vividly portrayed in a picture book. With further practice, perhaps all of the boys could use multicultural children's literature as a mirror for their own emotions and a door for understanding the emotions of others (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Sims Bishop, 1982; Sims Bishop, 1990).

That. Looks. Bad.: 'Reading' illustrations was also used to validate their previous experiences/understandings and to make judgments. In *Your Move* the K-Bones have a run-in with their rival gang, the Snakes. Illustrator James Ransome devotes a full-page to depicting the members of this gang. All five African-American males are dressed in dark clothing and wear menacing looks upon their faces. The gang member in the forefront has his arms crossed over his chest, while to his right, another gang member holds his fist in his hand as if he is about to use it to punch someone. This picture is very powerful, especially compared with a similar pose of the K-Bones a few pages earlier. In spite of their scowls and baggy clothes, the members of the K-Bones are still young-looking. In the text, this picture also serves as a turning point; after this run-in and the realization that the Snakes have a gun, James decides that being part of the K-Bones would be a bad move for himself and for his younger, impressionable brother. All

four boys examined this picture at length and commented on the gang members depicted there.

Before deciding what book to read together and discuss, Trishawn was flipping through the pages of *Your Move* and paused on the one of the Snakes. He nudged JJ to share the illustration and asked both JJ and me if we could read this book (Researcher notes, 11-23-10). We started reading, but I made sure to pause again on this page.

59 MEO: What do you think of this picture?

60 T: They're… adults

70 MEO: They look old, don't they? Especially compared to the other boys. Anything

71 else you notice about it?

72 JJ: They're mad?

73 MEO: Yeah, they do look mad

74 JJ: That one's mad, that one's mad, that one, and that one's kinda small

75 MEO: Yeah, you know what I noticed too? It's late at night and all three of them are

76 wearing sunglasses. Why do you think that is?

77 T: To seem cool

78 MEO: Yeah?

79 JJ: They think they're gangsters

80 T: OH! So they can't get identified?

81 MEO: Ohhhh… that could be interesting. But yeah it is, it goes along with the look,

82 too, right?

83 JJ: And they're all wearing black so the people don't see them when they come

84 MEO: So they're trying to be kinda hidden?

85 T: In solid black

86 JJ: I'd be wearing green and hiding in the bushes

87 MEO: Like camo stuff? {*JJ nods yes*}

88 T: His pants ain't right

89 MEO: Which one? He's sagging?

90 JJ: Oh yeah

91 MEO: You can see his underwear {*all laughing*} (Literature discussion, 11-23-10)

This first comment Trishawn made was about the ages of the Snakes. He used what he had already learned from the story (e.g., James was only 10 and Isaac was 6) to make a judgment on this illustration (G). During member checking, I asked Trishawn why he thought the Snakes looked like adults and he said that they looked the same age as the employees in the EDEP. In my time building rapport, I had worked with several of the employees and gotten to know the director well. I asked her about their ages— all of them were in their late teens/early twenties. Most were recent high school graduates and some were enrolled in college courses. One young man, a favorite with the boys because of the activities he lead (flag football, kickball), had just celebrated his twenty-second birthday the previous week with his fellow EDEP employees and the students. His wife had also come up to school that afternoon to deliver cupcakes for everyone. If Trishawn determines adulthood by the ages and activities of the EDEP employees, then it makes sense that he would also assume that the Snakes were also adults (G, 2-3-11). In reality, though, the text makes the assertion that they were in high school.

JJ looked at the illustration and started to read the emotions of the gang members; although when he said they were mad, he raised his voice at the –ad and turned his comment into a question (S). After my confirmation (line 73), JJ went back to the book to justify his claim by pointing to the individual pictures of the gang members (G). He stopped declaring each one to be mad when he got to the gang member on the far left side of the configuration (line 74); JJ instead offered, "… and that one's kinda small." He is the member that we see the least amount of physically and so he does appear to be smaller than the rest; his body is blocked by the wide shoulders and body of the male in front of him. Even though we cannot see much of his body, though, we do see his entire face. His expression is different from the others, too, in that he does not look as angry or as threatening. This may be another reason JJ did not feel inclined to say that this character looked mad (G). He has picked out the weakest link, the gang member who has less stature because of his non-menacing glare. By this, JJ conveys his knowledge that toughness/anger are normal characteristics of gangsters.

Trishawn comments on the characters wearing sunglasses and articulates their reasoning might be focused on promoting a lifestyle of coolness (S, line 77). He does not admit that they do in fact look cool, but specifically says that they do it to "seem cool" (D). There is a difference between actually being cool and seeming that way. JJ echoes this belief in his next comment: "They think they're gangsters" (G, D, S, line 79). This statement is important because it shares that JJ believes in different levels of gangsters. From our discussions, the levels may go something like this: K-Bones, Snakes, and Black Disciples. James and the K-Bones are viewed similar to what the text states, a club. While they are engaging in criminal activities, such as tagging a

street sign, they are not seen as being real gangsters. The Snakes "think they're gangsters," so they are seen as posers. They are dressing the dress, and scowling the scowls, but JJ and Trishawn do not perceive them as being authentic gangsters. In our discussion about *Yummy*, Trishawn and JJ immediately accept those characters as being true gangsters. When I asked them why and referred to their statements regarding the Snakes, they said they could not tell me what made Yummy a believable gangster, but there was no seeming or thinking about it. As I was transcribing our discussion of *Yummy*, I noticed that at the beginning I emphasized that it was based on a true story (G). This information may have influenced them and helped JJ and Trishawn to be more accepting of those characters as gang members.

While Trishawn may not want to admit to the coolness of the Snakes, he does recognize their status as being outlaws and why they might need to wear sunglasses at night. This statement comes out as quickly as he realizes it: "OH! So they can't be identified?" (S, line 80). Even though he raises his voice at the end, he does not mean for this to be a question as he does not wait for an affirmation or evaluation. JJ continues on with this idea and speculates that their clothing choices (all black) correlate with an escape of identification (S). They look bad and therefore, they engage in criminal (bad) activities. Trishawn then repeats both the text and JJ when he says that they're in solid black (G). At this point, though, JJ interjects with a judgment based on his experiences of growing up in a rural area; if he were in the same situation as the Snakes and really wanted to be hidden and not identified, he would use the environment to his advantage (e.g., the bushes) and match his clothing to the environment (e.g., wearing green). JJ affirms my suggestion of camouflage with a nod.

Trishawn directs us back to the illustration after this to comment on the pants of a gang member (G). He points to the male on the far-right of the scene, who held his fist, ready to punch. While JJ has been reflecting on the best way to hide and then remain hidden, Trishawn has been carefully examining this gang member and announces to us that, “His pants ain’t right” (D, line 88). We all lean in to the book and see that the gang member’s pants are hanging from his hips in a funny way. They seem to be held up by only a belt and Ransome has painted a thin stripe of green between the black sleeveless shirt and black belt. JJ agrees with me right away that he’s sagging. Trishawn has introduced the first instance of humor concerning this book and we all start laughing at this realization (G).

In my previous fifth and sixth-grade teaching experiences, I witnessed many male students sagging their pants to be stylish. Although this character was African American, my sagging students had been white, Latino, and black. They made the choice to wear their pants below their hips (and consequently show their underwear if their shirts were too short) as part of a fashion statement. I was given zip ties by one administrator to combat this style by cinching belt loops together to hold their pants up higher. In this situation, JJ and Trishawn did not recognize the sagging pants as being stylish, but instead commented on how funny it looked and laughed at the very slight showing of underwear (G). By finding something humorous in the illustration and laughing at the Snakes, Trishawn and JJ again show that they know the levels of gangsters. They diminish the Snakes’ power by making fun of them; no such humor occurred at the expense of the Black Disciples in *Yummy*.

Connor and Alex paused at the same page in *Your Move*. While they did not notice it when they were flipping through the book at the beginning, as soon as I turned the page while we were reading, the illustration became an opportunity to pause.

102 CO: That. Looks. Bad.

103 MEO: What do you mean?

104 CO: They look like they're about to pounce somebody

105 A: They're a gang

106 MEO: You think so?

107 A: Especially that dude (Literature discussion 11-18-10)

Connor makes a judgment about the appearances of the Snakes. He pauses between each word, stretching out this judgment in a dramatic way (S). For the most part up to this point, Connor has been pretty silent during this literature discussion. Alex shared several personal connections to both James and his act of sneaking out at night that will be examined more in another section of this Chapter. At Connor's exit interview, I asked if he had a favorite book and while he would not name one, he did mention that *Your Move* was his least favorite (Exit interview, 1-11-11). He stated that he "just didn't get it" (G, S) Knowing that Connor did not make a meaningful connection to this book helps me to understand why he wanted to pause and discuss this particular illustration. From my interviews and discussion with him, I knew that he was accustomed to playing an active role in the classroom and when he struggled with that diminished role concerning this book, he latched on to the picture to vocalize a stereotype (G). Furthermore, he drew out his words here to reestablish his 'cool pose' and make himself visible in comparison to Alex, who had dominated the conversation (S).

Connor is eager and happy to continue his explanation. He 'reads' the picture and states that the Snakes seem to be ready to engage in violence (S). This comment does contain an uncertainty marker; instead of saying that they are about to pounce somebody, he defers to their appearance and says that, "they look like they are about to pounce somebody" (S, line 104, italics added). By backing down from his certainty, Connor changes his role in this discussion from a confident discussion leader to someone who questions his own thoughts.

At this point, Alex is able to join the conversation to make clear who he believes these African-American males to be: "they're a gang" (G, line 105). The text previously mentioned that the K-Bones had a rival gang and James' initiation task was to tag over "Snakes" on a highway sign. I had not had a chance to read any of the text on this particular page, though, because Connor stopped me with his first comment. Alex examined the picture and inferred that this was the rival gang, the Snakes (G). When I question this idea, Alex uses the text to prove his position and refers to the gang member that JJ had called out as being small (G, Literature discussion, 11-23-10).

This one illustration of the Snakes gang was an important part of the discussion of *Your Move*. The boys used this picture to make judgments about the ages, intentions, and emotions of the African-American males depicted (D, S). The picture also served as a way for the boys to make assertions and promulgate their 'cool poses' of authority, power, and toughness (G, S). Perhaps one of the most interesting responses to this page, though, was how JJ and Trishawn used humor to minimize the power of the menacing stares and poses of the Snakes (G).

Incarceration settings

Something else that my participants found confusing (perception mode) in two of the books we read was the differences between a correctional facility, a jail, and a prison. Both *Visiting Day* and *Nine Candles* involve the protagonists going to visit their relatives who are incarcerated. The names of these places initiated an efferent response at first (e.g., What are they?), but then their responses evolved. Alex, Connor, JJ, and Trishawn used their personal experiences to determine what a correctional facility is and then to distinguish the subtle differences between a jail and a prison.

Using *Nine Candles* in my pilot study helped me anticipate difficulties in comprehension, especially concerning vocabulary. While the protagonist of the book is only seven years-old, the text is written at a much higher level; it is both verbose and complex in story and terminology. During the read aloud, students in both groups stopped me when I read that Raymond and his father had reached the Correctional Facility. No one knew what this phrase meant. I asked for suggestions and one male student offered that, “It’s where you get corrected.” When probed, though, he wasn’t really sure what ‘getting corrected’ would entail. I then asked students to use the illustration as a context clue for figuring out this new word. Finally they were able to respond that a Correctional Facility was a prison. With this new understanding, they posed the question to me about why the author had used this phrase instead of just writing prison. This critique of the author and her word choice was very sophisticated.

During the literature discussion with Connor and Alex, Connor had a different response to the term.

70 MEO: {*continue reading*} “State Correctional Facility”

71 CO: Yeah, now I know where she is

72 MEO: What is that?

73 CO: A jail

74 MEO: How do you know?

75 CO: ‘Cause correctional facility is mostly a jail, it like helps you

(Literature discussion, 12-9-10)

Alex claimed at the beginning of the story that he did not know where the mother might be, but Connor answered, “Lemme guess. She’s in uh, she’s in jail maybe?” (line 32). He lets me and Alex know that he is making a guess (G) about his answer, uses several uncertainty markers (S), and even repeats himself (G), but his guess is correct there. In this excerpt, Connor becomes more confident in his guess and uses a cognitive statement: “I know where she is” (S, line 71). His final answer shows his knowledge of the definition of a correctional facility, but Connor seems to be unclear about what happens at a jail or correctional facility. He uses the conversation builder of “like” (G, line 75) to make his assertion more appealing to me and Alex.

Jail or prison: My participants knew that a correctional facility was a place for those who had committed a crime. What they struggled with, however, were the differences between a jail and a prison. Although I had this conversation many times with both groups, each boy (and even myself on several occasions) used the terms interchangeably or concurrently. JJ and Trishawn exhibited the most significant examples of this incident. They could name specific features of a jail and of a prison based on their own personal experiences and their exposures to media. When talking about Raymond’s mother in *Nine Candles* or the little girl’s father in *Visiting Day*, though, JJ and Trishawn consistently said they were in “jail or prison.”

During our discussion of *Nine Candles*, Trishawn also brought up the meaning of correctional facility.

41 MEO: {*reading*} “Dad says it’s just a long name for a prison” So what’s a prison?

42 JJ: It’s for people who was in jail and now they’re in prison

43 MEO: What’s the difference between jail and prison?

44 JJ: Jail is like someone are not locked up behind bars, prison they are

45 MEO: Oh okay

46 T: Jail they have like, in jail don’t they like share rooms? Like more than one

47 person?

48 JJ: Yeah, if they have the bars

49 T: Yeah, but like sometimes in prison

50 JJ: I saw on TV somebody bad hurt the other person on the bottom bunk

51 MEO: Really? (Literature discussion, 11-16-10)

Asking what a prison is initiates a conversation about the differences between a prison and a jail. JJ takes the lead here, first by giving his definition of a prison and then by distinguishing between a jail and a prison. He asserts that time is one of the distinctions of the two places—a person goes to jail originally and then after some time passes, goes to prison. There is a certain order to follow. Even though JJ does not explicitly comment on the population of the prison (e.g., saying that they are criminals), he does hint at it when he says, “It’s for people who was in jail” (S, line 42). Trishawn and I are to assume from this detail that people who have committed a crime first go to jail and then prison.

JJ continues in a similar speaking pattern (e.g., Jail is this, prison is that) as to what he said before about the timeline (G). This parallel structure (Rogers, 2004) is also vaguely familiar to how students are taught to write compare and contrast essays. Observing preservice teachers in the same school JJ attends, I have been witness to many expository writing lessons that use the same rhetoric. JJ explains that in jail, people are not locked up, but in prison they are (S, line 44). He uses the uncertainty marker of “like” (S) and the singular pronoun of “someone” (S) when talking about jail; both make him seem uncertain about the validity of this argument. When talking about prison, his tone shifts and he ends his description with forceful statement about how inmates are locked up in prison (S).

Trishawn joins the conversation at this point, not as an authority as JJ has been acting, but as an inquiring mind. Furthermore, he poses his question to JJ, not me (G). As mentioned previously, JJ and Trishawn have a good, friendly relationship and they often turned to each other during our conversations for questions or support. Trishawn begins with a statement about how he thinks jails might be different, but it quickly turns into questions with the statements ending in higher pitched tones: “Jail they have like, in jail don’t they like share rooms? Like more than one person?” (G & S, lines 46 & 47). Trishawn is speculating that in jail, prisoners do not have their own rooms; instead, they stay together with “more than one person.” JJ confirms Trishawn and then qualifies the statement with “if they have bars” (G, line 48). To continue with his inquiry, Trishawn offers that sometimes inmates share rooms and they are also bars separating them from other prisoners and guards in prisons, as well. He still uses an uncertainty marker of “like” (S, line 49), and he begins to complicate the differences between prisons and

jails by saying that this can be something that exists in both places (G). Rogers (2004) wrote that, “Contradictions are a necessary part of discourses” (p. 302). As both JJ and Trishawn start to understand the distinctions between jails and prisons, they make many contradictions.

As we continue with our reading and discussion, JJ and Trishawn again come to a point where they can try to work out the differences between jails and prisons.

151 MEO: What do you think, is she gonna remember the birthday?

152 JJ: Uh, no

153 MEO: (*to T*) What do you think?

154 T: Yeah, she is and she’s just gonna get out of jail today

155 MEO: That would be good

156 JJ: Yeah! I think it is, she’s probably gonna say, “Guess what? I’m out!”

157 MEO: Why would she get out of jail?

158 T: ‘Cause she’s probably been in jail for

159 JJ: Long enough!

160 MEO: Yeah? Long enough and so they would just let her go? Are there any times

161 where they let you out of jail early?

162 JJ: {*shaking head no*} Emm-emm

163 T: Unless you get bailed out

164 JJ: Yeah

165 MEO: Can you get bailed out of prison?

166 JJ & T: No

167 MEO: You can get bailed out of jail?

168 JJ & T: Yeah

169 MEO: That's kind of a difference, too (Literature discussion, 11-16-10)

JJ is skeptical at first that Raymond's mother will remember his birthday, drawing from Raymond's own concerns discussed in the book (G). Trishawn gives the opposite response that he believes the mother will remember his birthday and further, that she will have great news to share with him: "she's just gonna get out of jail today" (S, line 154). Although we determined earlier that Raymond's mother was in prison and not jail, Trishawn still uses the noun, jail (D), to name where she could potentially be released.

JJ changes his mind during the conversation and enthusiastically agrees with Trishawn. He continues by supplying dialogue for Raymond's mother: "she's probably gonna say, 'Guess what? I'm out!'" (S, line 156). Lysaker (2006) took the transactional theory of reader response further in her article where she wrote about the development of 'self that reads.' She described this as, "a process of movement along a continuum over which a complex, flexible, dialogic self-system develops and which then influences the kind and amount of transactional relationship a reader has with a text" (p. 33). Using wordless picture books, she examined where children are on this continuum and then developed five functions of self-positions along the continuum of developing the 'self that reads':

- Reactor: reacts to the page of the book as any object in the world, often with labels;
- Observer: comments from the outside;
- Emerging narrator: participates using first person;
- Developing narrator: narrates, authors multiple characters; and
- Established narrator: narrates, authors multiple 'voiced' characters (p. 42).

According to these functions, JJ shows himself to be an emerging narrator when he gives Raymond's mother a voice and speaks for her using the first person pronoun of I (S). This is the only instance where JJ displays the function of an emerging narrator; he and the others usually either react to the story or make sometimes insightful comments about the story.

Trishawn starts to answer why she might be getting out of jail early by saying that having served a long prison sentence could be the answer. He is not sure, though, and uses the uncertainty marker of "probably" (S, line 158). JJ picks up on his train of thought and finishes, again excitedly, that she has been in jail for "long enough" (S, line 159).

When considering the situations of early release, JJ answers by emphatically shaking his head no while verbalizing his disagreement with, "Emm-emm" (S, line 162). Trishawn uses his personal experience to contradict JJ and state that someone can leave prison early when s/he is be bailed out (S, line 163). The concept of being bailed out is different from Trishawn's previous idea of Raymond's mother being in jail for a long amount of time. Later in our discussion, JJ made a very personal connection to the text and Trishawn shared that his father spent one night in jail recently. JJ asked why and Trishawn said because he was speeding. Trishawn further explained that his father was bailed out and told us that that was why he brought it up when I asked about getting out of jail early. For the second time in this excerpt, JJ changes his opinion after Trishawn expresses a differing one (D). He agrees with Trishawn that 'you' can get bailed out (S, line 164). Then Trishawn and JJ are in total agreement that a person cannot be bailed out of prison, but can be bailed out of jail.

The two terms were again used interchangeably in our conversation about *Visiting Day*, which took place almost a month later. The responses they gave when I asked about the differences between the two were somewhat similar, but they also introduced new information. Because Trishawn wanted to read the story to us, I had to jump in at certain points to check for understanding and ask questions.

70 MEO: Okay, pause for a second. They're eating on the bus-- why?

71 JJ: 'Cause they're hungry

72 MEO: That is always a good reason

73 T: 'Cause they're going to a PRISON!

74 MEO: Ya think?

75 T: Yeah

76 JJ: No, they're NOT!

77 MEO: What makes you think that?

78 JJ: They're going to a jail, they're going to a jail, a jail, a jail, a jail {*singsong voice*}

79 MEO: What's the difference?

80 T: A jail, you stay in for one or two nights or something

81 JJ: Nah-uh! You can stay your whole life in jail!

82 T: Prison you stay your whole life in, they send you to prison if you like murder

83 someone or something

84 MEO: Can be

{*T continues reading*}

85 MEO: {*correcting T's reading*} Daddy is DOING a little time, what does that mean?

86 JJ: OH! He's in jail or prison

87 MEO: Yeah

88 JJ: In jail or prison (Literature discussion, 12-9-10)

JJ responds very literally and specifically to my question about why everyone on the bus (to the prison) is eating food: "'cause they're hungry" (G). Trishawn counters with an answer that he has based on a prediction: "'cause they're going to a PRISON" (S, G line 73). When we were finished reading the book, I asked Trishawn what made him give that reply to my question about eating on the bus. He said that while he was flipping through the illustrations of the book before we started reading, he noticed a picture that reminded him of a prison. He was excited to first share this prediction with us and then to have it be correct. During this part of the conversation, though, he gave us no clues about why he answered this way. JJ interjects with an opposition (S, line 76). He emphasizes that the people on the bus are not going to a prison in a very passionate manner (S).

JJ completely changes his answer and starts to humorously sing: "They're going to a jail, they're going to a jail, a jail, a jail, a jail" (G, S line 78). As I look back on the transcript, I realize that I missed an opportunity to question both JJ's changing answer and his shift to a more playful nature. One reason why could be that the teacher in me opted to ignore his disruptive behavior in the hope of JJ self-regulating himself. I might have thought that if I did not acknowledge his singing, he would just stop. Another reason could be that the researcher in me was drawn to JJ's use of the word, jail, even though seconds before, Trishawn had used the term prison. I focused on that aspect of JJ's comment instead of looking at the multiple facets JJ introduced into our conversation with his answer and behavior shifts.

When asked again about the differences between the two places (G, line 79). Trishawn responds first and echoes his earlier statements about time being a difference: “A jail, you stay in for one or two nights or something” (G, line 80). He also brings his prior knowledge with his experience of his father staying in jail over night. Trishawn still shows some hesitation about exactly how long “you” (S) would stay in jail by ending his statement with an uncertainty marker of “or something” (S). This doubt on Trishawn’s part allows JJ to interpolate his disagreement for the second time in this discussion (G). JJ passionately argues that “you” (S) can spend your entire life in jail (line 81).

Trishawn addresses JJ’s claim by stating that: “Prison you stay your whole life in, they send you to prison if you like murder someone or something” (G, lines 82-83). Again, Trishawn draws on the argument of time; he knows that prison is where you spend more than one or two nights and the sentence can reach a maximum of “your whole life” (S). There are several other factors in this statement worth examining. First, his use of the passive voice is interesting in the second portion of his response: “they send you to prison” (S). By saying this in the passive voice, Trishawn diminishes the power of “you,” and therefore, himself. He also diminishes the power of the court system and how judges and juries impact the lives of those on trial for crimes. This is significant because of the personal experiences he has with the criminal justice system (his step-sister’s father is a judge in a nearby county), which will be examined more closely in a later section. Secondly, by applying the pronouns of “you” and “they” to his argument, Trishawn seems to put himself in the position of a prisoner and allows vague authorities (“they”) to have control. At the end of his statement, Trishawn gives an example of a

consequence that would warrant life in prison: murder (G). He repeats his earlier admission of doubt, though, when he ends with “or something” (S). In this case, JJ does not take that to be an invitation to argue against his point.

With the figurative language that Woodson employs, “Daddy is doing a little time,” JJ seems to articulate an understanding with his exclamation of, “OH!” (S, line 86). Even though he had previously agreed with Trishawn’s idea that the bus was going to a prison and we discussed both jail and prison, JJ made it seem with his response that he had been harboring questions about the validity of Trishawn’s idea. Woodson’s text, along with Ransome’s illustration of the façade of a prison, gave JJ the proof he needed: “He’s in a jail or prison” (S).

These examples show that JJ and Trishawn had some understanding of the corrections part of the criminal justice system. However, they still had many questions about what made jails and prisons distinct from each other. These questions make me wonder if they really see a difference between the two settings; perhaps they were used interchangeably so often because their experiences say that going to one (jail) automatically guarantees your place in the other (prison). Furthermore, if you are locked up, it does not really matter what you call the place. Although the purpose of this study was not to address those questions or clear up misconceptions, teachers in classrooms could definitely use multicultural children’s literature as a starting point for those discussions. Using personal experiences and ‘reading’ media, students would provide a platform for provocative examinations of the corrections system.

What can you go to prison for?

During my pilot study when I asked one group if they liked *Visiting Day*, a male student answered, “No.” I was curious about this response and so I asked him why he

didn't like the book. He proceeded to tell me that, "I didn't like this book because we don't get to figure out why he's in jail." This student was not satisfied with the ending of this book. Not only does the father stay in prison while the grandmother and daughter have to go home alone, but the reader also never learns why the father is imprisoned in the first place. He continued by saying that he doesn't like not knowing things about stories at the end and connected this to his dislike of movies that have cliff-hangers.

Whereas this student was turned off from the book because of an unanswered question, other students were intrigued by it. Several started guessing why the father was in prison and their hypotheses included:

- stealing
- got a ticket
- couldn't pay a court cost
- robbed a bank
- identity theft
- killed someone
- had a gun and shot someone
- grand theft

These speculations show that these students know a lot about the criminal justice system and what acts have consequences of prison time.

JJ, Trishawn, Connor, and Alex responded to this inquiry by considering their own ideas of crime. They contemplated why the father in *Visiting Day* was in prison and also asked why Raymond's mother in *Nine Candles* might be in prison before the text gave them a definite answer. The range of their ideas again shows that they have a considerable amount of knowledge regarding the criminal justice system.

Probably like uh breaking a law: During our literature discussion of *Nine Candles,* I paused during reading to check for understanding (G) and examine a word that Connor and Alex might not know (S).

76 MEO: "…the larceny" What's that? Do you know?

77 A: Larceny, no?

78 CO: No

79 A: Probably like uh breaking a law

80 MEO: Kinda sounds like it—larceny, law. Well let's read on and find out. What do

81 you think is a crime that someone might get in trouble for and have to go to prison

82 for?

83 A: Killing?

84 MEO: Could be

85 A: Then you spend the rest of your life in jail

86 CO: Uh definitely shooting a rocket launcher

87 A: Someone could use a tank and blow up the whole world

88 CO: Yeah {*laughing*}

89 MEO: Yeah, those could be some things

90 CO: Trying to hack into a satellite

91 MEO: Oooh yeah

92 A: Jacking money

93 MEO: Hold on to that, let's read a little further and see if that might be the answer

{*Continue reading*} (Literature discussion, 12-9-10)

Alex repeats the word, larceny, after me and asks a question by raising his tone of voice with his response of no (S). By doing this, he leaves himself open for a guess that comes right after Connor answers that he does not know what larceny is (G). Alex

speculates about the definition by using a simile and comparing larceny to breaking a law (G).

Before starting to read again, though, I ask for ideas about different crimes and what might constitute time in prison (G). Alex answers first with a correct response of killing, but again he raises his voice at the end of the word so that it comes out as a question (S). With more certainty, he explains that killing someone can result in spending a life sentence incarcerated (S, line 85). By saying this, he shows his knowledge of the severity of this crime and its punishment. It is interesting to see here that just as JJ and Trishawn struggled with interchanging the two terms illustrated in the previous section, so does Alex by saying jail instead of prison (S).

Connor goes in a different direction with his response to my question. He first uses a pause, “uh,” to break into the conversation that Alex and I have been having (G, S line 86). Then he offers with confidence (“definitely”) the response of shooting a rocket launcher (S). While Alex’s answer is more serious and connected to the real world, Connor’s seems almost cartoonish and humorous (G). If he had said shooting a rocket launcher at a building or landmark, then perhaps it could have been taken more seriously. As it happened, though, Alex picks up on the absurdity of Connor’s response and continues with his own hilarious retort: “Someone could use a tank and blow up the whole world” (G, line 87). Alex’s intent is humor and he achieves that goal with causing Connor to laughingly agree with him (G, line 88).

Connor goes on with another example of a humorous crime: “trying to hack into a satellite” (G, line 90). At this time, though, Alex steers the conversation back to reality. He proposes that a person could go to prison for “jacking money” (S, line 92). This

means to steal money. However, its definition could not be found in a standard dictionary. Urban Dictionary (www.urbandictionary.com) provides a definition for how Alex uses the term. According to the website, “jacking refers to the act of robbing or stealing and can refer to jacking one person in particular.” The example given illustrates Alex’s desire for meaning: "Did you hear what happened to Leroy Brown on the 93 bus last night? He got jacked by a group of kids... they took his phone" (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=jacking). It is unclear whether this term has roots in African American Vernacular English or if it is just a shortened version of hijack, both of which could make sense.

I wonder why Alex used the term, “jacking money” instead of stealing. One reason might be that he did not think I would know what that slang term meant. Because it’s not something that can be found in a standard, classroom dictionary nor is it a term that white, female teachers use often, Alex may have been displaying his power and authority regarding criminal justice issues. On the other hand, Alex may have just been responding to Connor’s previous statement of hijacking. Hearing that word may have triggered Alex’s own response of jacking money.

The text in *Nine Candles* reveals the exact nature of Raymond’s mother’s crime: she was stealing money from the cash register at her place of work. To again check for understanding, I asked Alex and Connor to put the term, larceny, into their own words.

96 MEO: So basically, what did she do?

97 A: Jack money

98 MEO: Or?

99 CO: She hijacked?

100 MEO: She's not hijacking anybody. What do you call it?

101 A: She stole money

102 MEO: There you go. Another word for jacking something is stealing, right?

103 A: {*nods yes*} (Literature discussion, 12-9-10)

Alex repeats his earlier statement with the authority in his tone of voice this time of knowing what larceny is (G). With trepidation, Connor asks if "she hijacked" (G). During member checking, I referred to this dialogue and asked Connor what he was trying to say here. He told me that he was still confused about what "jacking" meant, but thought that Alex was using a shortened version of the term, hijacking (2-3-11).

Alex corrects Connor's misconception of hijacking (G). At first glance this may look like me validating his background knowledge of jacking. Examining the question, however, I wonder if I may have trivialized this knowledge. By saying, "What do you call it?," I might have given the impression that jacking was not a universal term or even something that I would use, although my earlier acceptance of it was apparent. Alex nods his head in approval of my explanation and his acceptance of his role of an expert on this term (S).

Later in our conversation, Connor came back to the original question of what crimes would warrant prison time. He breaks from his usual stance of being on topic and interjects suddenly.

224 CO: Wait! I know one more thing you would go to jail for—public nudity

225 MEO: Well, you would, you would go to jail where you would spend the night but

226 you wouldn't go to prison

227 CO: Why?

228 A: What's public nudity?

229 MEO: It means you're naked, in front of everyone

230 A: {*laughing*}

231 A: You can't be naked?!

232 MEO: No, well I guess in certain places like your backyard and in your house

233 CO: Why would you go to jail for that?

234 MEO: Because you're not hurting anyone else, you're just breaking a law; usually

235 jail is where you either take something from someone else or hurting someone else.

236 So if you're just out with no clothes on, you'll get in trouble because you're not

237 supposed to be naked in the middle of wherever (Literature discussion, 12-9-10)

Connor wants to make sure that he has his turn to share and so he starts by exclaiming "wait" (G, S). He states that "public nudity" is another reason why "you would go to jail" (G). Connor seems to know that sharing this idea would receive some kind of a reaction because he pauses for dramatic effect before saying public nudity (S).

Connor questions why the act of public nudity would result in jail time and not prison time (G, line 227), while Alex enters the conversation with his own question about the meaning of the phrase (G, line 228). Asking me or Connor for clarification is not a role that Alex typically played during our discussions. As seen in the previous examples from this Chapter, Alex usually introduced new terms (e.g., jacking) and acted confident even when making guesses (S). If Connor knew what public nudity was, then I was surprised when Alex did not. When he calms down from his laughing about the definition of public nudity, Alex asks incredulously, "You can't be naked?!" (S, line 231). This is a valid question for him because understanding that law takes some

sophisticated thinking. Being naked is acceptable in certain places, but not in others because of popular decision.

In another unlikely role shift, Connor repeats his earlier question, demanding me to respond to it (S, line 233). Now that Alex understands what public nudity is, Connor goes back to his inquiry of why "you could go to jail for that." Connor sticking to his question is interesting in this situation, as well as what his question is about; he originally interrupted my reading to say that public nudity was something "you would go to jail for" (G, line 224). My explanation that public nudity would result in staying just a short amount of time in jail, but not going to prison made him doubt what he had shared. He contradicts himself by asking "why" two times (D). Both Alex and Connor acted satisfied (S) with this answer, though, and we continued our discussion of *Nine Candles*.

Trishawn and JJ also had interesting contributions to provide regarding criminal acts during our discussion of *Nine Candles*. I wanted them to make a guess about why Raymond's mother was in prison, but when they hesitated with that question, I expanded the topic.

83 MEO: You wanna make a guess to why mom's in prison?

84 JJ: Uhhhh {*long pause*}

85 MEO: Or maybe not her, why does anybody ever go to prison? It doesn't have to be

86 from the book. Why would some people go to prison?

87 JJ: For… stealing?

88 T: Abusing a child

89 MEO: Yep, those are two things. Anything else?

90 T: Stealing money?

91 JJ: I already said stealing

92 T: Robbing a bank. (Literature discussion, 11-16-10)

JJ must have felt that the question was directed to him and examining my researcher's notes from that day, I saw that he was sitting closest to me while Trishawn was farther away. He takes the lead, but only to supply an uncertainty marker and create a long pause (S). Finally, the examples they give are very serious compared to some of the frivolous answers Connor and Alex gave during their discussion. Again, JJ answers first with a pause (S) before giving his answer in the form of a verb: "stealing" (D). Even though he raises his voice at the end of the word to make his tone sound questioning (S), he seems to know that this is a prison-worthy offense. Another interesting aspect of JJ's response is that he states the crime as a verb, instead of a noun; he could have easily replied with "theft," but by answering with the verb, "stealing" (D, line 87) makes the crime an action and therefore, more powerful (Billig, 2008). This first response also sets the standard for all the others; crimes are denoted by verbs instead of nouns or nominal phrases.

Trishawn supplies the next answer of a crime with certainty: "abusing a child" (S, D, line 88). Again, this was a not response that I had heard during my previous research with students. I confirmed both JJ and Trishawn at this point and asked for other examples (G, line 89). Later when we had finished reading *Nine Candles*, I brought up his answer and asked how he knew that someone could go to prison for abusing a child. Trishawn told me that it was something he knew about from a program on television.

Trishawn responds again, but this time his answer is stated as a question: “stealing money?” (S, line 90). He seems to know that this is another crime, but he acts unsure because JJ had already just responded with the same verb (D), even though Trishawn includes an object with his verb, money (D). When JJ calls attention to this fact (G, line 91), Trishawn adjusts his answer to “robbing a bank” with more confidence (S, line 92). Both JJ and Trishawn are able to move on from what could have been a tense situation because of their strong friendship; they can call each other out on incidents in our discussion (e.g., repeating what has already been said) without hurting each other’s feelings (S), like Alex and Connor might.

While *Nine Candles* inspired some talk regarding crimes, so did the book, *Visiting Day.* My participants did not have the same angst in regards to not knowing why the father is in prison, but they still speculated on crimes that could have been committed. Connor hypothesizes that the reason why the father is in prison and why the mother is not a character in the book is because the father murdered her. Both Connor and Alex become convinced that this explanation is correct and makes the most sense. Connor and Alex go on to provide many examples of crimes. Both boys start with generalities because the question could have been answered with a yes or a no (G): “there’s lots” and “there’s plenty” of reasons why people can go to jail (S). When I specifically say, “like what?” (G), I start getting specific answers, which are listed in the table below.

Table 5-2. Summary of possible crimes, Connor & Alex

Connor	Alex
Rob a bank	Smoke weed
Travel with speed drugs	Drunk driving
Disrespect other people’s stuff	Talking back to the cops
Trying to burn down buildings	Stealing things
Assassinating	Breaking things

Both lists show sophisticated crimes, with Alex's examples seeming to be more real-world and Connor's examples seeming to come from the influence of movies and television. This makes sense when considering the personal experiences they each have. Alex admits and even later shares how his family is connected to the criminal justice system. Connor, in contrast, attributes his knowledge to video games, television shows, and movies.

All four boys could name criminal offenses when asked that ranged from what they might see in a blockbuster movie or on television to crimes that are happening in their own communities. They also had questions about crimes and their varying consequences. In a study by Thombre, Motague, Maher, & Zohra (2009) inmates told researchers that they wanted their family members to understand the law (cops, courts, and corrections), the value of education, and the harsh realities of prison life. They believed that this knowledge would prevent their family members (and others) from repeating the same mistakes. Connor, Alex, JJ, and Trishawn showed that they have some understandings, but that those all lead to more questions (Lindfors, 1999).

Media Texts

Pace (2009) defined media (plural of "medium") as mechanisms for delivering information or messages. Furthermore, mass media refers to those media—such as television, newspapers, movies, and the Internet—that are used to communicate to an anonymous audience (usually identified only by demographic characteristics). Media texts are the products of mass media. All four boys made intertextual connections between media texts and the texts we discussed. Using a Bakhtinian approach in his research with children and the media, Tobin (2000) argued that:

> We can think of children's talk about movies as not just an expression of their preexisting thoughts and feelings, but also as positions that are being tried out and developed in the course of talking about them. And we can view children's talk about the media as expressions less of their individual concerns and understandings than of the larger social concerns and understandings that get articulated by and through individuals as they speak (p. 19)

I believe that my participants' talk about a variety of media texts serves the same purpose of letting children try out and develop positions, and even their 'cool poses.'

Television

During the initial interviews, I asked each boy individually what experiences he had with the criminal justice system, including interactions with books, movies, and television shows. Then later, during our literature discussions, I encouraged them to relate those experiences to what we were reading. In some instances, though, the boys did not need any prodding from me to make those connections. Two television shows wove their ways into our conversations frequently: "America's Most Wanted" and "Dog the Bounty Hunter."

"America's Most Wanted" is an American TV show produced by 20th Century Fox's syndicated division, and is the longest-running program of any kind in the history of the Fox Television. Its purpose is to profile and assist law enforcement in the apprehension of fugitives wanted for various crimes, including murder, rape, child molestation, white collar crime, armed robbery, gang violence, and terrorism, and also many of whom are currently on the FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list. On May 2, 2008, the program's website announced its 1,000th capture; as of February 15th, 2011, 1,143 people have been captured because of the show (http://www.amw.com/). I can remember watching this show as a preteen on Saturday nights, and as graphic as some

of its content is, I also found it comforting that so many people were watching and could help catch fugitives.

“Dog the Bounty Hunter” is a reality television show on A&E which chronicles Duane "Dog" Chapman's operations at his job as a bounty hunter at Da Kine Bail Bonds. The television show follows the family's adventures in bounty hunting in Oahu, in Kona on the Big Island and also in Denver, Colorado (http://www.dogthebountyhunter.com/). Although I had heard of this show and seen previews for it on A&E, I had never watched an episode. For my own understanding and to knowledgably speak about it, I began recording and watching episodes in the fall of 2010.

Both shows center on a similar theme of finding fugitives. “America’s Most Wanted” explains the alleged criminal’s crimes and empowers the viewers at home to contribute to the search by providing information about the perpetrator’s whereabouts via phone or email. “Dog the Bounty Hunter” splits its time between hunting down fugitives and narrating the family’s drama that corresponds to their unusual line of work. Because of this split, it resembles other popular reality programs. Like JJ told me, “It’s my favorite show, but sometimes they talk too much and I like it more when they find bad guys” (Initial interview, 11-9-10).

In our literature discussions, the boys turned to these television shows to support their assertions. For example, while talking about *Nine Candles*, Alex commented on Testa’s description of two separate places for male and female inmates. She wrote that the smaller building was for the women, but Alex misheard my reading and thought that

the smaller building was for the men. He complained that men should have the bigger building and when asked why, said that more men committed crimes.

182 MEO: Alright, back to the story, so we talked about the one for the men and the one
183 for the women. I think that's interesting that you think more men commit crimes
184 than girls, that boys commit more
185 A: More men have crimes
186 MEO: More men have crimes?
187 CO: Yeah 'cause America's Most Wanted, I watch, it's like all the people on that are
188 men and I've never seen a girl on that show (Literature discussion, 12-9-10)

Alex confidently states that, "More men have crimes" (G, line 185). The order of his words here is interesting; he emphasizes that more men commit crimes instead of men commit more crimes (S). Through this word order, Alex draws the conversation to the discrepancy between the numbers of men and women carrying out criminal acts. Another significant facet of his statement is that he uses the passive verb, have, instead of an active verb (e.g., commit, do, perform, or carry out). By using this verb, he makes it seem that 'having' a crime is either benign or ordinary. When asked about his choices of word order and verb selection during member checking, Alex could not offer any explanations, but he did replicate his previous words (G, 2-3-11).

Connor jumps in to support Alex's statement by first agreeing with it and then using "America's Most Wanted" as his credible source (G, lines 187-188). He stresses that because he watches this show and he has "never seen a girl on" (G), that more men must commit crimes. Because of the documentary-like style of the show and its de-emphasis of narrative, Connor interprets it as a reputable source of information. And as

such a source, the show would also be accurate in its representation of the variety of fugitives it features.

In this excerpt, Connor links the description of the setting in *Nine Candles*, specifically the two sizes of buildings for incarcerated men and women, with his understanding of fugitive ratios from television. He supports Alex's claim that "more men have crimes" by referring to the genders of the perpetrators on "America's Most Wanted." Furthermore, being able to cite this show gives Connor authority as conveyed by his comment, "I watch" (S, line 187). He implies that because he watches this show, he knows demographic information about the fugitives in America. In our total of eight literature discussions, "America's Most Wanted" was referenced five different times, usually to provide support to an argument.

Another example of watching and therefore, knowing, came during the literature discussion of *Yummy* with Trishawn and JJ. In the story, Yummy expresses his desire to go home to his grandmother after being on the run from law enforcement for killing Shavon. I asked JJ and Trishawn to consider what they would do in the same situation. While a more detailed account of this conversation will be examined later in the Chapter, it is important to note here that JJ made a connection with Yummy's situation and based his response on his prior knowledge of the show "Dog the Bounty Hunter." Running from the police, according to JJ, would be foolish because someone like Dog could still find you and turn you in (Literature discussion, 1-13-11). By watching this show, JJ had experienced the hunt of a fugitive vicariously; he used this knowledge to comment on Yummy's possible fate and his own if ever in the same position.

The connections that JJ, Trishawn, Alex, and Connor made between what we read and the media texts of television shows were important for their aesthetic responses of association. I was surprised, though, that no one offered connections to movies. One reason could be linked to location—the closest movie theatre was 19 miles away and no one ever mentioned going to see a movie during the study. Or it could be that these television shows were more powerful to these boys because of content and/or familiarity. Connor was an avid "America's Most Wanted" watcher and JJ enjoyed viewing "Dog the Bounty Hunter" with his whole family. Overall, the associations they made between the stories and the television shows were potent ways of responding as readers.

News media

During the study, a national tragedy occurred that especially focused Alex and Connor on the news media. On January 8, 2011, a mass shooting occurred near Tucson, Arizona. Nineteen people were shot, six of them fatally, with one other person injured at the scene during an open meeting that U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords was holding with members of her constituency in a Safeway supermarket parking lot. One of the victims was a nine-year-old girl. News reports identified the target of the attack as Giffords. She was shot through the head at point-blank range, and her medical condition was initially described as "critical." A 22-year-old Tucson man was arrested at the scene. As of now, the motive for the shooting remains unclear because the suspect has not cooperated with authorities and has invoked his right to remain silent (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/arizona-shooting).

I'm a nine year-old: Five days after this tragedy occurred, Alex initiated a conversation about it during our literature discussion of *Yummy*. Alex took this

opportunity to make a connection between the text and the story he had seen on the news.

26 A: You know, you know um on the news that some twenty, twenty-two year-old guy
27 shot twenty people
28 MEO: Yeah, in Arizona?
29 A: Killed 6 of them
30 MEO: Yeah, did you guys hear about that?
31 CO: I have, Mrs. D {*the media specialist*} told me
32 A: He got one girl, one little girl and she got shot in the head
33 MEO: I know. That's messed up. She died, too
34 A: I would take a 12-gauge shot gun and I would've blew his head off. I would go
35 POW!
36 MEO: Okay, but think about this—it was at a grocery store. Do you bring your gun to
37 a grocery store?
38 CO: No
39 A: He did
40 MEO: I know 'cause he was trying to do it, but other people, regular people like us,
41 do we bring our guns to grocery stores?
42 A: There's this one person in my neighborhood, she drives her car and she always
43 has a shot gun, a 12-gauge shot gun in the back of her trunk
44 MEO: That might've actually come in handy that day, wouldn't it? You could have
45 just gone to the back of your car
46 A: Who would win—a handgun or a 12-gauge shot gun? Shot gun

47 MEO: I'd say a shot gun, too, I'd agree with you.

48 CO: I'm a nine year-old

49 MEO: Yeah, when I heard that, that's exactly what I thought. You're ten {*to Alex*}

50 but I thought about you guys 'cause that might be somebody who would have been

51 in one of your classes. That could be somebody that you know who just went to the

52 grocery store with her parents and got shot and killed. It's a lot to think about, isn't it?

53 A: Well, I meant to say ABOUT to be 10. I'm about to be 10

(Literature discussion, 1-13-11)

Alex starts off by making sure that I am interested in what he has to say by repeating the conversation builder of "you know" (G, line 26). At this point, he is not concerned with involving Connor in the conversation (G). Then he proceeds to make his connection to the news media story of the shooting. He uses specific details including the age and gender of the shooter and almost the exact number of victims (D, lines 26-27). Doing this immediately in his speaking turn (G) paints him as a knowledgeable source of information. Alex seems to know that my question does not need a response as he states another accurate detail that six people were killed (G, line 29).

Connor replies that his source for this news was the school's media specialist (G, line 31). Connor makes it seem here that he does not have as much information as Alex, perhaps because the details of the event were relayed to him through an intermediate source. Instead of connecting to the news media, Connor engaged in a talk with a teacher figure at school. Furthermore, he states that she "told" him (D), which again implies his lack of agency in regards to the news story. It is apparent that Alex

feels more confident sharing specific information here which results in him taking control of the conversation through verbal dialogue and his turn-taking (G).

Alex gives one more detail about the event, “he got one girl, one little girl and she got shot in the head” (G, line 32), before changing the focus of our conversation. It is as if he needed to set all of the facts out prior to putting himself in that situation and describing what he would do. The enthusiasm Alex showed when he became the vigilante for the victims makes me wonder if sharing this was his whole point of bringing up the shooting in our literature discussion. This shift in the conversation begins by Alex actively listing the steps he would have taken if he had been in that Arizona parking lot: “I would take a 12-gauge shot gun and I would’ve blew his head off. I would go POW!” (S, lines 34-35). By using the future verb tense, Alex implies that not only would he have blown the shooter’s “head off” in that situation, but if ever faced with a similar situation, he would do the same thing. He is passionate about standing up for himself, which he also verbalizes in other literature discussions. Using the onomatopoeia of “pow” in his final exclamation further illustrates his zeal. Alex is also very specific in this description by telling us exactly what gun he would use; he has experience with a variety of guns, but chooses the 12-gauge shot gun. Later in the Chapter, I will be examining these experiences with guns in more depth.

Alex had moved beyond the horror of what had happened (or maybe never even considered it) to a stage of action: what he would have done then and what he would do in the future. His ‘cool pose’ of being an outlaw left him with no room for hesitation or fear. Alex’s plan is flawed in one way—that he would not have his gun with him at a grocery store. Connor agrees with me by answering “no” (line 38) to my rhetorical

question, but Alex argues that back that the shooter did bring his gun (line 39). He brings up an example of a "regular" person, a lady in his neighborhood, who would have had a gun in the trunk of her car at a grocery store parking lot (lines 42-43). Again, he is very specific about what kind of gun she has, but I wonder if he knows this for sure or if his familiarity with a 12-gauge shot gun makes them all the same to him. Because of how passionate he still is and how hard he seems to be working to formulate a plan in his head, I abandon my argument and agree with him that having a gun in the trunk would "come in handy that day" (S, line 44).

Alex then moves on to contemplating the effectiveness of his gun choice: "Who would win—a handgun or a 12-gauge shot gun? Shot gun" (G, line 46). Although it seem like he directs this question to me, he actually answers himself (G) and therefore validates that his gun would best the shooter's gun. Both of these comments further contribute to Alex's dominance in this conversation and his feelings of confidence in his action plan. That is why it is interesting when Connor finally rejoins our discussion and how he achieves this goal. All Connor does is state, "I'm a nine year-old" (G, line 48). He does not offer his own grandiose plan of attack or even comment on Alex's, but instead verbalizes a connection that he has with one of the victims. Additionally, this comment seems to come out of nowhere, but I think it had been ruminating in Connor's head the entire time Alex and I were talking. Earlier, Connor explained that he heard about the tragedy from the media specialist at school and I wonder if this was something that she had emphasized or if Connor himself paid special attention to this detail. In recounting the details, Alex only says that a little girl was shot and never

makes reference to her age, so this information must have already been known by Connor.

Alex's response to my rhetorical question of "It's a lot to think about, isn't it?" (S, line 52) is out of the ordinary for him. He discards his 'cool pose' of fearlessness and admits that he has something in common with the victim, as well. When we talked about *Your Move* (Literature discussion, 11-18-10), Alex told us that he was ten years-old and would be eleven this school year. Here, he reveals the truth about his age and makes the excuse that he "meant to say ABOUT to be ten" (S, line 53). This response does several things: first, it humbles him into admitting a white lie; second, it makes him sound younger and less confident; and third, it connects him to the little girl victim and to Connor, again showing his vulnerability. Alex could have gotten away with his fib during the study and it would not have necessarily affected me or the research. It did matter to him, though, and he felt compelled to make his confession here.

After Alex's comment, we started talking about birthdays and eventually got back to reading and discussing *Yummy*. The next day when Connor tries to summarize what we have already read, he starts confusing details from Yummy's shooting with details from the Arizona shooting. Alex calls him out on this and then offers a modified plan of action:

129 In my car, when I grow up I'm gonna have a gun in my car and I want a rocket
130 launcher so bad that if I'm at Publix and somebody does that, I'll take that rocket
131 launcher out and B-LOW him up! It's a go, POW and blow everything up

(Literature discussion, 1-14-11)

The enthusiasm Alex had during our conversation the day before has returned and shows itself here where he repeats the phrase, “in my car” (G). He puts himself as the main actor in a similar situation, making reference to the local grocery store of Publix. Then, he builds from just having a gun in his car, like his female neighbor, to a rocket launcher. Unlike the sincerity of his plan the previous day, though, here Alex becomes more unrealistic with his ideas and therefore, comical (G). His emphasis on the words blow and pow serves the purpose of looking for a reaction from me and/or Connor. However, neither of us bites at this time and we go back to reading *Yummy*. I think Connor felt that Alex had had his turn with this scenario the day before and we were ready to talk about something else. While Alex dominated the discussion previously, we took control of the discussion on this day by not directly responding to Alex’s comment.

Bringing up this news event and connecting it to the plot events of *Yummy* was a very powerful association mode reader response. Furthermore, it all happened with very little direction from me. Alex introduced the topic and spent the most time discussing the details of the shooting and what he would have done in that situation. Connor very thoughtfully connected to one of the victims and drew Alex’s attention to the fact that she was their age. It is interesting to note that JJ and Trishawn did not address the shooting in their discussion of *Yummy* and that this was the only instance where news media made its way into our conversations.

Video games

Media texts also include video games and all of the boys said during their initial interviews that they enjoyed playing them. During one of our sessions together, instead of reading, I asked Connor and Alex to draw a memorable part of one of the books we had discussed. While drawing scenes from *Your Move*, their conversation turned to

other subjects, specifically video games and how to find key codes on the internet. I asked what game they were playing, which lead to a lengthy discussion about Saints Row®, their game of choice.

It's more rated than that. It's like really bad: Saints Row® is an action-adventure video game developed by Volition, Inc. and published by THQ. Set in Stilwater, a fictional city based heavily on the likes of Detroit and Chicago, the game begins with the unnamed protagonist being caught up in a war between three rival gangs. He is rescued by Julius Little and Troy Bradshaw, who lead the 3rd Street Saints, a street gang tasked with bringing an end to the ongoing gang war that has crippled the streets of Stilwater. When he is offered a position in the gang, the protagonist gladly accepts and the storyline follows the protagonist's journey as he aids the Saints in bringing down the other gangs and giving the Saints full control over the city. Saints Row® is composed of elements from driving games and third-person shooters and features open world game-play that gives players control over their playing experience. An array of land-based weapons and vehicles are included in the game and an in-depth customization system allows the player to modify the protagonist's appearance and clothes, as well as vehicles. Saints Row® also features competitive multiplayer modes and an online gang system (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saints_Row).

Alex starts by describing to Connor what kinds of codes he should be looking for on the internet to enhance his video gaming experience. For the game, Saints Row®, certain codes will allow players to obtain special guns. In this conversation, Alex becomes the expert, even compared to Connor.

98 A: Yeah, you can find guns

99 MEO: For the video games?

100 A: Yeah, so the police don't kill you

101 MEO: What video game are you playing?

102 CO: Saints Row, isn't it?

103 A: Saints Row

104 MEO: What is it?

105 A: Saints Row

106 MEO: What's that one?

107 CO: It's like Grand Theft Auto, it's kind of like Grand Theft Auto

108 A: It's more things than that, it's more rated than that. It's like really bad

109 MEO: Ohhhh

110 A: 'Cause they cuss and stuff and Grand Theft Auto don't do that

111 CO: Grand Theft Auto do cuss

112 MEO: Really?

113 A: Sometimes, but Saints Row they cuss more and then you got gangs and my
114 gang like is gonna murder everybody. All I got to do is run to my gang's house that I
115 bought and I got guns and dogs and cars and stuff that I bought. But yeah, all I got
116 to do is run to my house and then if they shootin', they try to shoot me, then my
117 gang gets up and goes {*makes gun firing noise with his mouth*}

(Drawing discussion, 11-30-10)

From the beginning of this excerpt, Alex takes control by advising Connor on how to find guns for the video game (G). He confirms my question and clarifies exactly why

Connor (or any player) would need guns for this particular game: “so the police don’t kill you” (D). Connor wants to be part of this conversation, but defers to Alex, who answers confidently as the expert here (S, line 103). Connor makes a comparison between Saints Row® and another popular video game of Grand Theft Auto® (G, line 107). Then he repeats his comparison (G) with an uncertainty marker of “kind of” (S). Connor has taken the lead by answering my question (G), but he is not confident in speaking about this game (S).

Alex jumps in to provide more explanation for Saints Row®. He seems to agree with Connor’s base description, but is compelled to share that Saints Row® is more than Grand Theft Auto®. He starts by saying that Saints Row® has “more things than that” (S, line 108). He uses “things” to mean more components to the plot (e.g., not just stealing cars). Then he says that the game is “more rated than that” (S). Alex is referring to the rating system governed by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB); this organization is in charge of labeling video games. Saints Row® received a rating of M (Mature) because it has content ESRB deems may be suitable for persons ages seventeen and older. Video games in this category usually contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language (http://www.esrb.org/ratings/ratings_guide.jsp). Grand Theft Auto® received a rating of T (Teen) because it has content that may be suitable for ages thirteen and older. Video games in this category contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language. Based on the ratings from ESRB, Alex is correct in his statement that Saints Row® is “more rated”

than Grand Theft Auto®. He ends his initial description by emphasizing that Saints Row® is “really bad” (S).

My spectator stance causes Alex to give more details about how Saints Row® is different and “really bad.” The first distinction is that the characters in Saints Row ®“cuss and stuff” (G, line 110), unlike those in Grand Theft Auto®. Alex uses the slang word, cuss, to mean using swear words (S). Connor interjects at this point to counter that, “Grand Theft Auto do cuss” (S, line 111) and by doing this, attempts to show his knowledge of video games, as well. Alex may be the expert for Saints Row®, but Connor has experience with Grand Theft Auto® enough to know that the characters “do cuss.” Alex admits that Connor is correct, “but Saints Row they cuss more” (G, line 113).

Alex then continues with a longer response of how Saints Row® is different from Grand Theft Auto® by describing the game as an insider (S, lines 113-117). He uses the familiar pronoun of “you” to start his response, but then shifts to using both “I” and “my” to denote his place as the main protagonist of the game. From his description here, he shows what Lysaker (2006) might consider the function of a developing narrator, who narrates and authors multiple characters. Alex sets up a scenario (“my gang like is gonna murder everybody”) and then provides details about how he will overcome obstacles (“if they shootin’, they try to shoot me”) and prevail (“then my gang gets up and goes {makes gun-firing noise with his mouth}”). He also lists the resources he was able to obtain: a house, guns, dogs, cars, and “stuff that I bought” (S). Alex carries the ‘cool pose’ of an outlaw here; there is no hesitation in his voice (S) when he lays out exactly how he can be triumphant against a rival gang who want him dead.

Being able to illustrate a scene from Saints Row® so accurately and precisely shows that Alex has played this game multiple times and that he is successful when playing it.

Alex's experiences with his gang and gang warfare in the world of a video game impacted his responses to the book, *Your Move* (literature discussion 11-18-10). Unlike Trishawn, he was not interested or intrigued by the illustration of the Snakes gang. He might have been more familiar with how they were represented because of playing Saints Row®. Additionally, Connor reacted negatively to the young boys sneaking out late at night to tag a street sign while Alex did not seem to see this action as a crime. Presently, one of my lingering questions is about Alex's reaction to Yummy accidentally shooting Shavon. During that discussion (1-14-11), he fought so hard against the shooting not being purposeful. I wonder how his experience with Saints Row influenced how he read that text and responded to it.

Similarly, Connor's lack of experience with Saints Row® also impacted how he responded to all of the texts, especially *Your Move* and *Yummy*. During member checking, Connor answered that he really did not play Saints Row®, but knew about it from the other boys at school like Alex (2-3-11). During our literature discussions of *Your Move* and *Yummy*, therefore, Connor was coming to them with much less background knowledge compared to Alex. He needed to be more literal (e.g., 'reading' the illustrations in *Yummy*) and he also had to echo some of my negative judgment concerning the boys of *Your Move* sneaking out late at night.

The experience of gang warfare through video games sends a powerful message to boys in general and African-American boys specifically. Kunjufu (1995) quoted Amos Wilson regarding black adolescent male violence:

> Deeds of violence in our society are performed largely by those trying to establish their self-esteem, to defend their self-image, and to demonstrate that they too are significant…. Violence arises not out of superfluity of power, but out of powerlessness (pp. 169-170).

The plot of Saints Row® encourages those who take on the role of protagonist to first join a gang and then fight back against other gangs by using their same techniques (guns, violence). For the purposes of self-esteem, self-image, and significance, this video game (and probably others) promotes violence in a subculture against the law.

Alex and Connor's talk about Saints Row® let them try out and develop positions, even their 'cool poses.' Alex had the opportunity to assert himself as an expert in this conversation. Furthermore, the association between a video game and our literature discussion text was not orchestrated by me. Alex showed here that he has extensive experiences in the fictional video game world of gang warfare and that they influenced his responses to texts and to the criminal justice system. On the other hand, not having these experiences also impacts how Connor responds to the texts and how he views the criminal justice system.

Overview of Personal Connections

Harvey and Goudvis (2007) wrote that, "Readers naturally make connections between books and their own lives" (p. 92). Some connections, however, can be superficial and not lead to a deeper understanding of a text. While those connections in common (e.g., sharing a name with a character) may be important to engagement, they can be distracting, whereas other connections can truly help the reader transact with the text. In our literature discussions and interviews, I found the personal connections JJ, Trishawn, Alex, and Connor made to the criminal justice system to be beneficial in their

understandings of our shared texts, multicultural children's literature that addressed criminal justice issues.

The table below provides a concise representation of JJ, Alex, and Trishawn's personal experiences with the criminal justice system, in regards to police, courts, and corrections.

Table 5-3. Overview of personal connections

Participant	Police	Courts	Corrections
JJ		Attended a custody court hearing	Grandfather's friend in prison for "doing cocaine" "My dad is in prison"
Trishawn		"My step-sister's dad is a judge"	Lives close to "huge juvie" "My uncle works at a prison" "My dad went to jail for a night"
Alex	"My grandpa's a police, used to be"		2 cousins in prison

Compiled from literature discussions and interviews

Most personal connections had to do with the corrections part of the criminal justice system, which is consistent with real-world statistics. In 1999, approximately 1.5 million minor children in America had a parent in prison (Mumola, 2000). That works out to be equivalent to one child in fifty who are in this situation. More than half of those children were under the age of ten. Additionally, I was surprised that both Trishawn and JJ had experiences with courts. JJ, especially, shared a detailed and lengthy description of attending a court hearing regarding the custody of his mother's friend's children (Literature discussion, 11-16-10). Alex was the only participant who shared a personal connection to cops, although Trishawn and JJ might also have had experiences with cops based on their other answers, but chose not to share.

One participant is noticeably absent from this table: Connor. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Connor claimed not to have any experience with the criminal justice system (no relatives in prison), but he did have extensive knowledge of the system of justice and discipline that was enforced at the school because of his membership in safety patrol. He was concerned with rules and proper procedures to be carried out by both adults and other students in EDEP and during our literature circle discussions. I believe these experiences helped him connect emotionally to the books we read, especially *Your Move*.

145 CO: I think it was kinda sad

146 MEO: Why?

147 CO: ‘Cause they joined the gang and uh Isaac, he kinda, he scraped up his leg a

148 lot and the Snakes had a gun and he uh he, the big brother, what was his name?

149 MEO: James

150 CO: James thought that he got shot in the back

151 MEO: Yeah (Literature discussion, 11-18-10)

At the end of the conversation, Connor offered his emotional response to the book, starting with a cognitive statement (S). Alex had just finished sharing that he thought the book was “good,” although he did not give any details as to why he thought that. Connor’s response is in contrast to that. He may have liked the book, as well, but first and foremost, Connor thought, “it was kinda sad” (S). He uses the uncertainty marker of “kinda” here and one possible reason why is because he might not have experiences with “sad” books. Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2000) wrote that, “There is a tradition among elementary teachers of protecting the ‘innocence of childhood’ by keeping

complex, unpleasant (but commonplace) issues out of the classroom" (p. 14). According to them, a potential danger of this practice is that the books being shared in the classroom are disconnected from children's everyday experiences and make the classroom seem to be a place where important issues are not discussed. Connor's emotional reaction to *Your Move* may be an indication that his previous teachers have not shared "sad" books.

Connor continues by giving specific details about the story, including using the characters' names and the name of the rival gang (S, lines 147-148, 150). Connor connects with James in his final remark and seems to put himself in James' shoes; if he thought his younger brother had been shot, he would be upset. Asking for clarification regarding the name of the "big brother" also shows this connection. This emotional response can lead to both empathy and understanding for the character of James and for others that Connor will encounter in his life (Rosenblatt, 1978; Zambo & Brozo, 2009). In spite of feeling sad at the conclusion of the story, Connor has obviously been paying close attention to the texts and our discussion.

Case studies

Having presented an overview of the personal connections the participants had to the criminal justice system, I now want to examine in greater detail two of those experiences: JJ sharing that his father is in prison and Alex sharing that his two male cousins are in prison. As I mentioned in Chapter 3 (e.g., participant selection), I was not actively seeking boys who had incarcerated family members. JJ and Alex, along with their parents, agreed to participate in the study and share their personal connections with me and the other members of the literature discussions.

JJ

JJ positioned himself in EDEP and in our literature circle discussions as being a moderate version of an outlaw. He seemed to be torn between following in the footsteps of his older brother, who was best friends with Alex, and being more of an enforcer. For example, he was often influenced by his brother and Alex to go against the behavior expectations set by the EDEP program director and other employees (e.g., playing tag). On the other hand, JJ was good friends with Trishawn and they both bragged to me that they were on the honor roll and had special seating assignments at lunch because of their high A. R. point totals. His 'cool pose' was further complicated by what he shared with me and Trishawn during our literature discussion of *Nine Candles*.

He should be getting out in like a month: Towards the end of *Nine Candles*, I asked both boys if they had ever been to a prison to visit someone. Trishawn replied right away that his uncle was a prison guard and that he had spent the day with him at work. JJ was quiet during this exchange.

212 MEO: {*to JJ*} Have you ever been {to a prison}?

213 JJ: Let me say, {*pause*} my dad is in prison

214 MEO: He is?

215 T: What'd he do?

216 JJ: I really don't know what he did (Literature discussion, 11-16-10)

JJ starts off dramatically with the phrase, "let me say" (S, line 213). With this hook, he grabs our attention and takes control of the conversation. He also pauses here for almost three seconds; he might have been debating whether to share this information or he could have been mimicking a style of pausing before revealing bad news. When he discloses that his "dad is in prison," Trishawn immediately asks, "What'd he do?" (G,

line 215). There are several ways to look at Trishawn's question. First, the bluntness with which he delivers it could be the result of his familiarity with JJ; they are good friends at school and have the same third-grade teacher. Secondly, the bluntness could be caused by the familiarity Trishawn has with other friends or people in his community who have incarcerated family members. Or perhaps Trishawn's style while asking this question was due to his immaturity in handling delicate situations, such as asking your friend about his father in prison. Regardless of his question's intent, JJ bows his head down at this point (S) and replies in a quieter voice (S) that he does not have an answer to why he father is in prison (G, line 216).

JJ then goes on to explain that he only knows a little bit of what happened from the perspective of his aunt. He contradicts himself during the retelling, first stating that his father was picked up by the cops at his place of work and then saying that the cops found him hiding at his aunt's workplace. This might be the first time JJ has had to tell this story and that could be why there are so many inconsistencies. There is also the possibility that other adults in his life (e.g., his mom or his aunt) might not be giving him all of the details and JJ has had to piece together a story for himself.

227 MEO: Oh okay. So do you ever go visit your dad? In prison?

228 JJ: Well, I went to visit him when he was in jail, but I haven't visited him yet but he
229 said this church went over and saw him

230 MEO: Oh yeah?

231 JJ: And like talked to him about his business and then the church um called my
232 grandma and said we're allowed to write notes and stuff and then they said he was
233 going to send birthday presents, I mean, uh, Christmas presents

234 MEO: Well, that's nice, but he won't be home for Christmas?

235 JJ: I really don't know {*smiles & laughs*}. He should be getting out in like a month

236 MEO: Oh okay (Literature discussion, 11-16-10)

JJ makes the distinction here that he did visit his father in jail, but has not been to visit him in prison (S, line 228). In our other conversations about jails and prisons, he could have used this knowledge to determine one of their differences, but he does not seem to reference this. When I asked during member checking why he had not visited his father in prison, JJ told me that his dad was far away (2-3-11). Unfortunately, JJ was in a situation faced by many other children. One reason they do not have face-to-face contact with their parent while they are in prison is that an incarcerated parent is dependent on the current caregivers to make a visit happen (Clopton & East, 2008). Another cause for not visiting is the cost. Almost half of the parents incarcerated in Federal prisons live more than 500 miles from their last residence (Mumola, 2000). In situations like these, there are costs of travel, food, and lodging that go along with visitation.

Although he was not able to see his father, JJ was involved in some kind of dialogue about him because of the church that was working with him and their communication with JJ's grandmother (Lines 231-233). JJ seemed excited to "write notes and stuff" (S) and he expected to receive Christmas presents from his father. The only hint of insecurity and vulnerability came at the end of the conversation. JJ gives a half smile and nervous laugh when he responds to me that he's not sure if his dad will be home for Christmas (S, line 235). He further conveys his uncertainties with the comment, "he should be getting out in a like a month" (S). If JJ does not what his father

has done, he probably does not know the timeline for his release. As of member checking in February 2011, JJ's father was still in prison (2-3-11).

Trishawn remains quiet after asking the initial question of "what'd he do?" He shows that he is listening attentively by nonverbal cues: leaning towards JJ as he is speaking and intermittently nodding his head (S). Trishawn lets JJ take control of the conversation by giving up his verbal turns and by letting me ask questions that keep JJ talking. This display of compassion might be unusual for third-grade boys, but I was pleasantly surprised by how Trishawn handled himself here.

Alex

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Alex positioned himself as an outlaw to the EDEP and our discussions. Alex was seen as a rebel or nonconformist when it came to the established norms. He was also a leader, taking control of situations in the EDEP (e.g., playing football) and in our discussions (e.g., leading turn-taking). During one of our informal conversations, he expressed some bafflement as to why he had not been selected as part of the school's safety patrol (Researcher's notes 12-7-10). Alex told me that, "all you had to do was write an essay," but he did not seem to understand how much his 'cool pose' and its repercussions had already affected his reputation at school and his chance of joining. Other teachers assumed from his pose that he would not set a good example for other students as a member of the safety patrol. Just as with JJ, his family experiences further confused how he positioned himself at EDEP and in our discussions.

I don't know if they trying to shoot someone or they just shot: During our discussion of *Visiting Day*, I ask both Connor and Alex if they had ever been to a jail or

prison to visit someone. Connor replies quickly with a “no” (G, line 111), while Alex waits but then answers with hesitation (S, line 113).

110 MEO: Have you guys ever been to a jail or prison?

111 CO: No

112 MEO: Never been to a prison?

113 A: Uh, I have

114 MEO: Yeah? Who did you go visit?

115 A: {*long pause*} Nobody, I, my cousins are in jail

116 MEO: Oh really?

117 A: One of them gonna get out soon

118 CO: Why?

119 A: They were being bad

120 CO: Why?

121 A: They got in trouble

122 CO: HOW?

123 A: One of ‘em had a gun, that’s how and one of them was doing something else in

124 Georgia

125 MEO: But they’re gonna get out soon?

126 A: One of ‘em is, the other one has to stay in about three more years

127 MEO: Oh, okay

128 CO: The one that was living in Georgia?

129 A: I think he’s coming out, I don’t know. One of ‘em’s coming out

130 MEO: Were they, were they in prison close by or were they far away?

131 A: One of them was in Georgia and one of them was in um G {*nearby college town*}

(Literature discussion, 11-16-10)

Alex pauses for a long time (9 seconds) and I almost let him off the hook by saying that he does not have to share if he does not want to. Then it seems like he might change his mind about sharing, as well, because he starts off by saying, "nobody" (G, line 115). Alex finally ends his statement by revealing that his cousins are in jail, which is another example of how the participants interchanged the two terms. Alex makes it apparent from other conversations (including this one) that he knows the difference between the two places, but he uses the tern, jail, for prison here.

Alex does continue that one of his cousins will be getting out "soon" (S, line 117), which is even more vague than JJ's assertion that his dad will be "getting out in like a month." Connor has been sitting next to me this whole time with his eyes wide open (S), watching and listening to Alex. He asks a simple, but deliberate question: "Why?" (G, line 118). Alex seems to understand that Connor was not asking why the cousin was going to get out of prison soon, but rather, why the cousins were in prison in the first place. In response to Connor, he repeats another vague phrase, "they were being bad" (S, line 119). The tone of Alex's voice is very steady and authoritative; he seems to want to placate Connor and then move on with the conversation (S).

Connor has shown throughout our discussions, though, that when he really wants to know something, he does not back down from asking questions. This instance is another example of the tenacity Connor exhibits as part of his 'cool pose.' He asks, "why?" (G, line 120) again focusing on why the cousins were in trouble and not really asking Alex why his cousins "were being bad." At this time, Connor's voice is starting to

rise in volume; he seems to become frustrated that Alex is not answering him in a forthright manner (S). This added dramatic effect gives Alex a lot of power in the conversation; he knows that he has information that Connor wants and he seems to enjoy watching Connor get so exasperated.

Alex gives another hazy answer of, “they got in trouble” (S, line 121) before Connor counters with an explosive, “HOW?” (S, line 122). Connor’s outburst was followed by a more detailed response from Alex. And yet, Alex does not have all of the particulars for why his cousins are in prison, similar to JJ’s situation. He knows “guns” (line 123) were involved for one cousin and just knows the setting, “Georgia” (line 124) for the cousin’s crime. This lack of information on Alex’s part could have made it important for him to be perceived as an authority in the conversation with Connor. He was able to carry out on illusion of knowledge (and, therefore, power) with Connor by responding repeatedly with unclear answers to Connor’s questions.

Alex clarifies that only one cousin will be getting out soon while “the other one has to stay in about three more years” (S, line 126). Still, his clarification is marked with uncertainties (e.g., “about”). Connor presses for more information and asks if the cousin in Georgia is the one who had three more years of time left in prison (G, line 128). Alex answers with a cognitive statement (S), but then says, “I don’t know” (S, line 129); he ends his answer by repeating with resignation that, “one of ‘em’s coming out” (S). Alex does have an answer to my question that one cousin is in Georgia and the other is in a nearby town, although he pauses briefly before revealing the name of the closer town (S, line 131). He also uses the past tense, “was,” when referring to where they are currently incarcerated (D). When asked during member checking, Alex could

not remember why he said, “was” and quickly changed the subject to something else (2-3-11). Using the past tense could have been an attempt to distance himself from his cousins. Even though Alex felt compelled to share this story, it is interesting that he does not use either cousin’s name and does not offer any personal information about them. He is connected to them as a cousin, but he also shows that he is distanced from them (perhaps because of another adult’s influence). Our conversation continues in a different vein when Alex shares that his grandfather is a retired police officer and we eventually make our way back to discussing *Visiting Day*.

Two months later during our literature discussion about *Yummy*, Alex volunteered more information about his incarcerated cousins, without any provocation from me or Connor.

378 A: My cousin already been in jail for ten years

379 MEO: Ouch

380 A: Two of ‘em

381 MEO: Yeah

382 A: One’s coming out this year

383 MEO: Yeah, you told me about that. Is he the one in Georgia?

384 A: I don’t know which one but

385 CO: Why are they in jail?

386 MEO: Remember we talked about this?

387 A: BANG BANG

388 MEO: They had guns and they got in trouble for being out with guns, right?

389 A: And they shot one

390 MEO: They shot someone?

391 A: No, they just shot

392 MEO: Shot the guns? Okay

393 A: I don't know if they trying to shoot someone or they just shot

394 MEO: Just shot the gun?

395 A: I don't know if they trying to shoot anybody or nothing

(Literature discussion, 1-14-11)

Alex had just asked me how many years Yummy could face in prison for killing Shavon and then proceeded to say that his cousin has already been in jail for ten years (G, line 378). Knowing the timeline, it is more understandable that Alex would not know all of the details of his cousin's crime or that he would have a relationship with him at all. If Alex is correct that his cousin has been in prison for ten years, then he went away before Alex was even born.

Connor joins the conversation with a question that mimics his curiosity from our *Visiting Day* literature discussion: "Why are they in jail?" (line 385). By doing this, it is apparent that knowing what crimes have been committed is extremely important to Connor. Alex dramatizes his response and also provides humor by saying, "BANG! BANG!" and using his hands as two pistols (S, line 387). Alex seems to be more comfortable sharing this information a second time around; his manner could also be the result of getting to know both Connor and I more intimately after two months of talking together.

Alex continues by saying that "they got in trouble for being out with guns" (G, line 388). Alex offers more information at this point which is new to our discussion of his

cousins. However, this information, like before, is cloudy; Alex makes a statement (line 389) but then has to backtrack when I start asking for more clarification (line 390). At the end of this exchange, we learn that Alex's cousins got in trouble for not only having guns, but also firing them. This revelation is more consistent with Alex's assertion that they had already been in prison for ten years. What Alex does not know (and neither do Connor or I) is what the target was for his cousins' bullets. Alex uses the pronouns, "someone," "anybody," and "nothing" (S, lines 393 & 395) as the intended marks in his explanation for his cousins' shooting, which leads us to believe that his cousins could have been shooting at inanimate objects or real people.

This personal connection for Alex of his cousins in prison was powerful enough for him to share during two different literature discussions. I was especially impressed that he made the connection himself when talking about how long Yummy might be incarcerated for and then spoke about that connection. Because we discussed *Yummy* late in the study, I have to wonder if practicing those conversations and responding to texts aesthetically aided in his thoughtfulness and confidence.

I was impressed that both JJ and Alex shared their personal connections about incarcerated relatives with me. In the spring of 2011, while supervising preservice teachers in their school, I experienced something that I believe makes this research so important. A Kindergarten student walked into class late and when asked about his tardiness, he very simply began to relay that his mother has been arrested that morning. His teacher immediately stopped him mid-sentence and told him (and the class) that such conversations were not appropriate for her classroom. She silenced him in that instance and set the precedent for the entire class population that matters of criminal

justice (in this case, an incarcerated parent) were not to be discussed. JJ and Alex may have had similar experiences in their classrooms of a teacher silencing them outright. More likely, though, very subtle cues were used to make it known to JJ and Alex (and others) that such discussions had no place in their classrooms. Our literature circles were important opportunities for those conversations to happen.

Concluding Thoughts

Because of their willingness to cooperate and share, I was able to collect amazing data in response to my research question: How do Black boys respond to multicultural children's literature addressing criminal justice issues? My inquiry was first guided by two questions: a) What do Black boys' responses say about their personal connections to the stories? and b) What do Black boys' responses say about their perceptions of society, specifically their understandings of how justice works in their lives and their communities? After careful analysis using Discourse analysis and CDA, I was able to examine their responses according to aesthetic and efferent reading stances. The broad analytic categories I developed allowed me to talk about the form of the interactions while paying attention to the relationships between language and social structure (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Rogers, 2004).

Alex, Connor, JJ, and Trishawn drew on deep reservoirs to give thoughtful responses to the four texts we read. Cai's (2008) three central modes of aesthetic reading responses (perception, association, and affection) helped me organize those responses. In the perception mode, the boys focused their attention to intriguing, significant, and/or shocking elements of these stories about the criminal justice system. In the association mode, they worked hard to intertwine the stories with media texts (including TV shows, news media, and video games). And finally, in the affection mode,

they responded by sharing emotions through personal connections regarding what happened in the story. The responses of Alex, Connor, JJ, and Trishawn also revealed that while they had some basic understanding of how justice works (sometimes against themselves and other community members), they also relied heavily on stereotypes as sources of knowledge. These stereotypes, so prominent in media and in their communities, had been internalized. Media texts and personal experiences rounded out their sources of information regarding the criminal justice system and all participants were able to use this information in their transactions.

In Chapter 6, I will examine the responses Alex, Connor, Trishawn, and JJ had that illustrated the stance of critical reading.

CHAPTER 6
CLOSER EXAMINATION OF CRITICAL READING STANCE RESPONSES

Critical Reading

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the two stances of reading are set on a continuum; depending on the reader, all or part of a text can be read either aesthetically or efferently (Rosenblatt, 1978). Some scholars have argued that this continuum leaves out the important stance of critical reading (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). The critical stance would, according to Wade, Thompson, and Watkins (1994), investigate the author's underlying messages and assumptions. It would be held as parallel to the aesthetic and efferent stances, and all three would be engaged during reading experiences.

Other scholars (e.g., Cai, 2008; Probst, 2002) have commented on this misunderstanding. While Rosenblatt's theory is a theory of reading, it does not teach a certain critical perspective. Instead, the theory "begins with the unique, individual aesthetic response, and then may extend into a vast array of fascinating questions about reader, text, author, culture, society, gender, history, and more" (Probst, 2002, p. 31). Therefore, there are many connections between aesthetic, efferent, and critical reading (Cai, 2008).

Critical literacy, or reading, goes beyond traditional notions of reading and writing to include critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one's world (McDaniel, 2004). Shannon (1995) gave this explanation:

> Critical perspectives push the definition of literacy beyond traditional decoding or encoding of words in order to reproduce the meaning of text or society until it becomes a means for understanding one's own history and culture, to recognize connection between one's life and the social structure, to believe that change in one's life, and the lives of others and society are possible as well as desirable, and to act on this new knowledge in order to

> foster equal and just participation in all the decisions that affect and control our lives (p. 83).

When reading from a critical stance, readers employ their prior knowledge in order to comprehend relationships between their ideas and those presented by the text's author (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

Many studies that use children's literature to foster students' critical literacy skills use what Cai (2008) called a transact-to-transform approach. He explained that this came from a combination of Rosenblatt's transactional approach to reading and Banks' transformational approach to integrating multicultural education (including literature) into the curriculum. The goal of the transact-to-transform approach is for students to transact with multicultural children's literature in order to possibly change their perspectives on cultural issues. Because literacy and literary practices are also social and cultural practices, they cannot be separated from issues such as power, race, class, and gender that influence how readers transact with texts (Rogers, 1999). Alex, Connor, JJ, and Trishawn employed critical literacy strategies when reading multicultural children's literature and this Chapter will present a critical examination of those responses.

According to Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002), critical literacy involves taking a stance towards what you are reading and focuses on several dimensions, including: (1) disrupting the commonplace; (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints; (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues; and (4) taking action and promoting social justice (p. 382). During some literature discussions, I incorporated engagement strategies meant to foster critical responses. As mentioned in the previous Chapters, Long and Gove (2004) incorporated engagement strategies into the literature circle discussions of their study to promote critical responses of urban, fourth-grade students. Some of the strategies

included: Investigate & Find Out; Whose Voices; and Conversations with Characters (Jewett, 2007; Long & Gove, 2004). There were also many times in our literature discussions where I did not need to implement any strategies or foster any critical reading responses; as they became more comfortable, Alex, Connor, JJ, and Trishawn took those stances on their own and communicated their critical reading responses. This Chapter will explore two of the dimensions of critical literacy and their examples: disrupting the commonplace and focusing on sociopolitical issues.

Disrupting the Commonplace

As all four participants shared during their initial interviews and later during other conversations, there were certain behaviors that were standard when they read books. If they were reading independently, at the end of a book, they were to take a reading comprehension test through the Accelerated Reader (A. R.) program. When a teacher read a book aloud to them, they must save questions for the teacher's calculated pauses and also be prepared for some kind of cumulative assessment regarding their understanding of the text. I viewed their actions that went against these established norms as disruptions for them. According to Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002), "in this dimension, critical literacy is conceptualized as seeing the 'everyday' through new lenses" (pp. 382-383). They were not required to read or respond to our texts in the same ways that they did in other academic arenas and had to take on new lenses, as well as new roles. These disruptions happened often and took many forms at the behavioral and cognitive levels. For this section, I focus on their cognitive disruptions which include arguing with the text and questioning the significance of the texts we read.

Arguing with the text

One of the ways that my participants disrupted the commonplace occurred during our literature discussions of *Yummy*. All participants felt comfortable questioning the plot elements in the text. Furthermore, Alex and JJ were both compelled during our conversations to disrupt the commonplace and start arguing with the text. It is interesting that their arguments occurred in similar spots during the rising action of the story. Yummy had just called his grandmother to come get him after being on the run from the police for murdering Shavon. At this point, all four boys believed that either Yummy would turn himself in or his grandmother would do it with Yummy's consent. Two members of the Black Disciples gang find Yummy first, though Alex interrupts me to argue against Yummy's actions in the text.

366 MEO: "Follow me."

367 A: I won't do that

368 MEO: Why not?

369 A: I'll jump outta the car

370 MEO: Why?

371 A: Is he trying to get me in trouble? I'll jump out the car 'cause you know how

372 many years he probably gonna be in jail?

373 MEO: How many?

374 A: For killing all these people? It'll be about {pause} 15-20 years.

(Literature discussion, 1-14-11)

Alex immediately jumps into the viewpoint of Yummy and expresses his opposition to following directions from the other two Black Disciples using the first-person voice (S, line 367). His choice of verb tense (D) and the agency (S) he displays in this argument

combine to challenge the authority of the author and his words (G). Alex puts himself again in the shoes of Yummy and verbalizes what action he would take: “I’ll jump outta the car” (S, line 369). Alex is rewriting Yummy’s story when he says what he would do (S).

Alex demonstrates his power here by both becoming the protagonist and by not answering my questions directly (G). He asks himself a rhetorical question of, “Is he trying to get me in trouble?” (G, line 371). The “he” (S) Alex refers to is the Black Disciple who asked Yummy to follow him to the abandoned railroad tunnel. Alex can tell from context clues that something bad is going to happen to Yummy and his next comment indicates that he believes the Black Disciples will turn him in to the police. Just as he says he will “jump from out the car” (line 371), so Alex jumps around the characters in this statement. The first “he” is the gang member, he uses the self-pronoun of “I’ when describing what he would do, and then Alex addresses how many years Yummy might spend in jail by using the pronoun of “he.” Alex is in the story as the main character until the topic of incarceration/punishment/consequence is broached. Then he switches back to Yummy being outside of him with the pronoun “he” (S).

Now Alex’s authority stems from his knowledge of prison time (note that just as discussed in Chapter 5 the term jail is used interchangeably with prison). He uses the conversation builder of “you know” (G, line 371) to draw me into a dialogue with him where he knows the answer to his own question. In this way, he seems to extract himself from the story. When he considers my question (G, line 373), however, and thinks aloud, he employs the modifier of “these” (S, line 374) instead of those. His word choice shows that he is still familiar and connected with the story and the characters—

they are close by emotionally. If he had used the word, those, then he would have been distancing himself from people like Shavon. At this point, Alex does exhibit a misunderstanding he has about the story; he uses “those” which would indicate that Yummy has killed more than one person. In the story, though, Yummy has just murdered Shavon. This misconception could have perhaps come from the many times in the story that Yummy flaunted his gun. If Alex believed that in each of those instances, Yummy had killed someone, then he would be correct in saying “those” to refer to all of Yummy’s victims. Alex ends the conversation by giving a pretty accurate estimate of how much time Yummy would spend in prison (G, line 374).

JJ also takes a critical stance with his response when the Black Disciples ask Yummy to come with them instead of waiting for his grandmother.

302 MEO: “You come with us and everything’s gonna be alright”

303 JJ: Nah-uh. They’re lying

304 MEO: What makes you think that?

305 JJ: They just are. They’re lying. ‘Cause they might have a gun and they might

306 shoot ‘im (Literature discussion, 1-14-11)

Instead of waiting for a pause, as he would in the classroom, JJ interrupts first by verbalizing his disagreement with what has just been said, “nah-uh”(S, line 303) and then with his assertion that the gang members are “lying” (G). He continues with a tone of certainty; the first part of his response, “they just are” (G, line 305), is matter of fact. JJ seems to be saying that of course, gang members would lie based upon stereotypes of gangsters discussed in Chapter 5. He repeats himself for further emphasis (G) and then gives some justification to his argument. JJ communicates that he is positive that

they are lying, but then uses uncertainty markers of “might” when he speculates about their possible weapon and action: “they might have a gun and they might shoot ‘im” (S). While JJ can be sure of their dishonesty, he is not certain why they would want to deceive Yummy.

JJ argues with the text in this example, particularly with the two Black Disciples; however this argument is from an outsider’s position. Alex gave himself the power and agency of the protagonist when he argued, but JJ seems to be content to distance himself from the story. One of the clues for this is his use of the pronoun “’im” (shortened version of him) when he contemplates what the gang members might do. JJ keeps Yummy as the main character to be observed, whereas Alex became Yummy for a brief moment. JJ could be doing the same thing when watching a movie; he might warn the characters of impending doom and talk back to them when he believes them to be deceitful. JJ may not be ready, though, to put himself in those situations.

So why is arguing with the text (and the author) significant? Both JJ and Alex gain authority and power when they shake their heads in disagreement and offer alternatives for Yummy. They are going against what has been given to them, in this case in the form of me reading aloud to them. Additionally, they have the audacity to question the narrative the author has provided based upon their convictions and stereotypes. In this way, their arguments presented their ideas about what could happen. By enacting this critical reading stance, they are thinking deeply about the text and society, while demonstrating academic and social power. Being able to question and argue with a text are important dimensions of critical literacy because they show both critical thinking skills and prior, real-world knowledge.

Why do you think we read these books?

One of the questions I asked during the exit interview required the boys to reflect on why they thought we read these four books. All of the texts were displayed on the table between each participant and me for easy access. They revealed that they were not used to be asked questions like that. Teachers usually chose the books and as students, they were expected to either read them or listen to them without argument. This one question was a break from their normal reading and responding activities and so I see it as disrupting the commonplace. As I mentioned to each boy at the beginning of the interview (and throughout our discussions), there were no right or wrong answers. I just wanted to know what they thought about the different issues that were presented in the books and our conversations. Furthermore, I purposely did not share a theme for the books or a reason for the study besides wanting to hear their responses in an effort to let them wonder (Lindfors, 1999). The answers I got were very thoughtful.

To not do stuff: Trishawn displayed the most difficulty when I asked him to answer questions outside of what he was used to in the classroom. He would often be defiant, either responding with one-word answers or opting for the easy-out answer of "I don't know." In regards to this question, however, Trishawn was more cooperative and provided an interesting perspective on why I might have chosen our shared texts.

47 MEO: Why do you think that I picked these books to read?

48 T: {*long pause*} To not do stuff, like for this {pointing to *Your Move*}

49 MEO: Oh really, for *Your Move* to not do stuff?

50 T: Not do stuff for all of these?

51 MEO: What do you mean? Like what stuff?

52 T: Like murder people, steal, don't join a gang

53 MEO: So that's what all of these books were about? Like teaching you lessons?

54 T: {*nods yes*} (Exit interview, 1-13-11)

Trishawn starts his response after a pause of four seconds in the middle of the sentence, leaving out the subject. He may have done this because of a heightened sense of closeness he got from the intimacy of a one-on-one interview (G); specifically, he may have not thought that he needed to use "I" or "me" because he was the one answering my questions. Another possibility is that he may not have used himself as part of the subject because he did not feel that the books impacted him or were directed at him (S). Regardless of the reason, Trishawn answers confidently that the texts direct readers "to not do stuff" (line 48) and then specifically refers to a text within his reach, *Your Move*. He repeats his response (G) and adds in the qualification of "all of these" to include the other texts we read and discussed (S, line 50). His voice rises at the end of the statement, as well, which could betray his lack of experience with such a question (S). He may not be certain that he is giving me what he thinks (or I think) is the correct answer. By raising his voice at the end of the statement, he opens himself up to being wrong and to not knowing. This also lets me know that he is still in a questioning stance and may be vulnerable.

Instead of telling him the 'right' answer, though, I refocus him on his answer (G, line 51) by asking him to give specific examples of "stuff." Trishawn's first response of "murder people" (G, line 52) refers to Yummy's actions. The next response of "steal" could be from both *Your Move* and *Nine Candles*, while the final response of "don't join a gang" is related to *Your Move* and *Yummy*. Trishawn had trouble imagining why the father in *Visiting Day* might be in prison, which I think may be why he does not provide a

crime that refers to that text. Then again, he may have assumed that the father did commit one of the crimes he mentioned (e.g., murder people).

After this response, I offer a synthesis of what he said about our reasons for reading these books: “teaching you lessons?” (G, line 53). My opinion is mixed with uncertainty markers such as “like” and raising my voice to signify a question (S), so that Trishawn again will not look to me for an answer. I use him as the subject of my statement, though, with the pronoun of “you” (S). He does agree with me by nodding his head yes (S, line 54).

Trishawn’s response to this question was similar to the responses I heard during my pilot study. Most of those students agreed that by reading these stories (*Visiting Day* and *Nine Candles*), children would learn not to commit crimes. None of the books we read give an explicit message such as this, but that is not to say that Trishawn might be wrong in his idea. I think his response may be the first step to reading books about the criminal justice system. His responses show that he is grappling with the meanings of these texts and might appeal to some teachers by encouraging them to share these books in their classrooms in the first place. With more experiences with these texts and more practice with critical reading, students like Trishawn can be pushed to go beyond just learning lessons. They could start to question broader ideas, such as how the criminal justice system “works” for diverse people within the U.S., based on the stories presented.

We’d like the action: Alex’s response to my questions takes a more personal stance than Trishawn’s by including himself from the start as part of the subject.

112 MEO: Um, why do you think I picked these books for us to read and to talk about?

113 A: Ummmm I don't know. Because you thought we'd like the action or something?

114 MEO: That could be part of it. So you think I picked these books because of all the

115 action in them, any other reasons?

116 A: No

117 MEO: Do you think these books had anything that was kinda in common or was

118 anything the same in all of these books?

119 A: Kind of

120 MEO: Like what?

121 A: Um guns and stuff, blood (Exit interview, 1-11-11)

Alex begins with some uncertainty at first, and claims that he does not know why I picked these books (S, line 113). Then, he frames his response by stating what I thought they would like in books: "action" (D, line 113). Earlier in the interview, he had given action as a reason when I asked why he liked the books we read and discussed. This reply is similar to what Zambo and Brozo (2009) discussed as boys' preferences for reading topics and also to what Tobin (2000) claimed was a stereotype about boys' reading/viewing preferences. I am not sure if all the books we read would be considered action-packed, but if this is what Alex believes, I wonder what trade books (if any) are being read in the classroom. With this response, Alex still includes some uncertainty markers of "or something" and raising his voice at the end to signify a question (S).

Alex is more responsive and offers the opinion that the books do have some things in common (S, line 119) such as, "um guns and stuff, blood" (G, line 121). Only *Your Move* made reference to blood when James' little brother, Isaac, fell and scraped his knee while running away from the Snakes. Alex might also have thought that *Yummy*

would include an illustration of blood, as we had not yet finished this book when I conducted his interview. The subject of guns being perceived in all of the books is interesting. Only *Nine Candles* and *Yummy* contained illustrations of guns and *Your Move* made reference to the Snakes having a gun. There was no mention of guns in *Visiting Day*, although it may have been interpreted as being part of the story because the setting includes a prison. It seems that Alex's first answer of all of the books containing action is more accurate.

Again, I do not think that Alex is familiar with answering questions like the one I posed. He has not been asked to think about a group of books critically and to offer his own interpretations of the rationale behind their selection. He does tell me that he thinks the books all contained action, guns, and blood (along with stuff). In general, these would all be things about which boys would like to read. In this way, Alex's response could be viewed as an evaluation of the four books and also perhaps as a suggestion for others (e.g., teachers and librarians).

'Cause they're mostly all the same?: JJ's response to this question evolved as he talked.

74 MEO: Why do you think I picked these books to read?

75 JJ: 'Cause they're {*long pause*} 'Cause they're not that big?

76 MEO: Yeah, they are short. Any other reasons? {long pause} But there are a loooottt

77 of different picture books out there that I could have picked. All kinds. Why do you

78 think I picked these? (Exit interview, 1-11-11)

JJ began with a superficial comment about the physical appearance of the books we read, specifically that "they're not too big" (G, line 75). This question seems to catch

JJ off guard; he pauses for five seconds (S) before repeating himself (G) and then offering his answer as a question (S). Furthermore, the size of the book is just one, small aspect of books affecting that decision. While page numbers were a factor when I chose the books for our discussions (e.g., I did not want to choose a book that we could not read and discuss in more than four 30-minute sessions), I wanted JJ to examine more thoughtful reasons and also the similarities between the books (G, lines 76-78). His next attempt at a response shows more complexity.

79 JJ: 'Cause they're almost all the same

80 MEO: Like, what do you mean?

81 JJ: Like this book, this one, wait, was it this one that had the gun, that they were

82 thinking about the gun? Like they were thinking about the gun?

83 MEO: This one had the prison guard that had the gun

84 JJ: That one's in prison and that has a gun and that has a gun, no it don't

85 MEO: Mm-hmm. They don't have a picture of it but they were talking about the gang

86 having a gun

87 JJ: And that one had a gun and that one

88 MEO: *Visiting Day* that had a gun in it? I think it had a guard

89 JJ: Yeah, the guard tower and the guard with the gun…. They all had guns?

90 MEO: Okay…. Do you think that's why I picked them?

91 JJ: 'Cause they're mostly all the same?

92 MEO: What do you mean, they're the same?

93 JJ: They each have something to do with the same thing

94 MEO: What's that same thing?

95 JJ: The guns and um the guns and prisoners (Exit interview, 1-11-11)

Restating my question and giving JJ more time to think causes him to explain that the books are “almost all the same” (G, line 79). He then starts pulling to him the books that are scattered across the table. It is interesting to note here that as much as the participants sometimes obsessed over the tape recorder (e.g., tapping it, talking directly into it, wanting to hear their voices played back to them), JJ seemed to forget that it was on and pointed to the books he was referring to instead of using their titles. JJ first points to *Nine Candles* and then turns to me in his commentary (G, lines 81-82). He originally questions whether the text included a gun and then modifies his question to if the characters in the story were “thinking about the gun” (D). This wondering out loud shows that JJ remembers many details from the stories, but that they are becoming confused in his mind.

JJ continues by tapping the cover of *Nine Candles* and elaborating on the main points of the book (line 84). By saying “that one’s in prison,” JJ is referring to the setting where most of the book takes place. He further describes the book by including “and that has a gun” (line 84) in reference to the character of the guard. Moving his finger over to *Your Move*, JJ first says that the book contains a gun and then second-guesses himself and says “no it don’t” (S). Both ideas could be right—the story makes reference to a gun even though there is not an illustration of it. JJ then points to *Yummy* while saying it had a gun in it and then to *Visiting Day*. JJ assures me that because *Visiting Day* contained a guard tower with guards, there were guns involved (S, line 89). After a short pause, he lifts his head up from studying the books and gives me a connection between the four texts in the form of a question: “they all had guns?” (S). While he

seems certain that guns were in each story, either in the text or the pictures, he is uncertain if this is why I picked these books to read and discuss. JJ maintains (although, again with some hesitation) that the books are “all mostly the same” (G, line 91).

At the end of our conversation, JJ does return to what he believes the books have in common: “the guns and um the guns and prisoners” (G, line 95). He just gives one answer at first, repeating what he had talked about earlier (G). With a small bit of wavering, he proceeds with an expansion of this thought to include “prisoners” (D). It is interesting that he never mentions prisoners in the earlier part of the conversation. In fact, he seems pretty focused on guns being the common tie for the four books. During member checking, I asked why he added this element. JJ told me that he “just realized that all the books also talked about prison” (2-3-11). *Your Move* does not necessarily refer to prison (or prisoners), but JJ may have remembered it that way because of the criminal activities in which both the K-Bones and the Snakes are engaged.

The evolution of JJ’s response shows how hard he is trying to develop a critical stance by disrupting the commonplace. My question first challenges him to compare and contrast the four books we read. Our dialogue pushes him to move beyond the answer of length for what all books had in common. It is apparent here that JJ recognizes the major themes of the books, even if he gets some of the details confused. He makes inferences by using context clues regarding the setting and the plot events to show that he knows these books include guns and prisoners. Unfortunately during this conversation he never reaches the point of bringing the stories back to him personally, like Alex did, however, he does show that he makes the connection.

Amazing stuff in it: Connor seems to be the most successful in responding to this question, not because his answer matches mine, but because he examines multiple ideas. First, he echoes Trishawn's sentiments about what can be learned from the books and then his reasoning expands to include a commentary on a message that teachers (and other adults) are sending him.

11 CO: 'Cause they all, wait, had lessons to learn, there's lessons learned, um, just
12 amazing stuff in it
13 MEO: Like what? What lessons?
14 CO: Like, never, never join gangs {*singsong voice*}
15 MEO: Okay
16 CO: Don't shoot people, don't try getting in jail so your kids won't cry when they
17 don't want to go
18 MEO: Some good lessons…. Do you think that's why the authors wrote all of these
19 books?
20 CO: Ummmm {*shakes his head yes*} (Exit interview, 1-11-11)

Connor seems to realize his thought after he starts speaking and commands me to wait for him to finish (S, line 11). The protocol of the interview makes Connor feel that he is in control when he responds to my questions and so he can make me "wait" (G). He explains that all of the books "had lessons to learn" and then turns the phrase to argue in the passive voice that this happened (S). By using this modality (S), Connor does not admit that he learned any lessons, but brings forth the possibility that it did happen, perhaps to another boy in the study. He concludes his statement with some

hesitation by saying that there is “just amazing stuff in it,” with the “it” (S) referring to the batch of books we read.

Connor does not seem to take my clarifying questions (G, line 13) very seriously, though, at first because he answers with a sing-song voice (S, line 14) that never joining gangs would be one of the lessons. The way he mocks this lesson makes me think that he has heard this several times before and thus repeating it becomes either humorous or ridiculous. I wonder if he uses this voice here to mimic what others have said, like Tobin (2000) argued based on the Bakhtinian principles, or to emphasize that this is not his first time to hear this message. Connor continues in his normal voice with more possible lessons from the books (lines 16 & 17). His first lesson of “don’t shoot people” refers to the book, *Yummy*, and it makes sense that he would bring it up. His second lesson is more confusing to me: “don’t try getting in jail so your kids won’t cry when they don’t want to go.” Connor’s word choice is interesting here; by using “try,” he seems to say that people actively endeavor to make their way to prison (G). None of the stories we read put this spin on their characters. Raymond’s mom was trying to help the family get extra cash and the reader does not know why the father in *Visiting Day* is even in prison, much less if he tried to get there or not. Even Yummy and the K-Bones are not trying to go to prison. Further, his use of “getting in jail” takes away responsibility from the characters. If this is the case and as a person you do not have control over “getting in jail” or not, then it would not matter if you tried or not. The reason behind the lesson is also perplexing; none of the characters were sad to go visit their parents in prison or showed signs that they did not want to go. Connor is only basing half of this lesson on

what we have read. I am not sure where the other part is coming from, especially since Connor shared that he had never visited anyone in prison or jail before.

While Connor took his time (S, line 20), he did answer affirmatively that the authors wrote the books with the purpose of teaching lessons. During member checking, I asked him if authors only wrote books for one purpose (2-3-11). I wanted him to consider other reasons, and also other meanings behind the four books. He agreed with me that there could be more than one reason, but had trouble imagining what those purposes might be.

Later in his interview, Connor responds differently to my question about why I chose these four books to read and discuss.

88 MEO: Why do you think I picked these books to read?

89 CO: Ummm, so we can like ‘em? A lot of boys don’t like ‘em?

90 MEO: Okay, what does that mean?

91 CO: It means that a lot of boys don’t like books, maybe?

92 MEO: Why do you think a lot of boys don’t like books?

93 CO: Umm, I don’t know, they just like video games a lot or sports

94 MEO: But you like books

95 CO: Yeah, I do

96 MEO: Sooooo, would I try to make you like more books?

97 CO: Well, I already do like a lot of books…

98 MEO: I know, I know, so why do you think I picked these?

99 CO: You thought I would like ‘em? (Exit interview, 1-11-11)

Connor is not quite sure why I have picked these books; he says “um” to show that he is thinking and to maintain his turn (G, line 89). Then instead of asserting an answer, he seems to offer a suggestion with a questioning tone (S). His response goes from the personal, denoted by the pronoun “we,” to the general when he says that “a lot of boys don’t like ‘em” (S) referring to books. Then, he simply restates that “boys don’t like books” (G) with two uncertainty markers of “maybe” and the rise of his voice in a questioning manner (S). Again, this could be a phrase that Connor has heard multiple times by teachers, parents, and/or other adults, and he is mimicking their tone here (Tobin, 2000). Connor first says that he does not know he thinks this and then counters with activities that boys stereotypically do like: video games or sports (G, line 93). He continues to speak in generalities by using the noun, “boys” (D), instead of using a personal pronoun such as ‘I’ or ‘we’ (S).

My response attempts to make his argument personal by saying that “you like books” (S, line 94). He has shared this with me multiple times and even asked to borrow one of the books that we ended up not discussing. Connor also has no problem meeting the demands of his A. R. point totals each grading period in school. In presenting this choice reason, Connor echoes the sentiments regarding the reading habits of other boys, but does not primarily consider his own habits, even though he is proud of them. He then admits casually that he does like books (line 95) and further emphasizes that he “already” does “like a lot of books” (line 97). Connor answers as if he were the only participant in the study: “you thought I would like ‘em?” (S, line 99).

Connor’s first response in this conversation is worrisome to me. It shows that he believes boys should not like books or reading based on the assertions of others. These

societal expectations can hinder the reading achievement of boys in general. Reading, even in its earliest stages, is constructed by children as an activity appropriate for girls (Millard, 1997). This becomes reinforced as children see girls portrayed more as readers in book illustrations. Girls are also more likely to receive books for birthday and Christmas presents (Millard, 1997). The image of the reader in society is shown to be closely linked to passive female identity (Bettis & Roe, 2008). Connor has internalized this view and was ready to believe that it was the reason for the study. In a sense, he was correct; I do want to examine male responses to this literature as a way to encourage literacy in general. On the other hand, neither Connor nor any of the other boys were picked for the study because they did or did not like to read. The way that Connor was able to generalize that statement to include him, instead of challenging it, was difficult to hear. Additionally, when he generalizes, he gets away from the themes of the books that the other boys emphasized.

By reflecting on why they thought we read these four books, all of the boys took a break from their normal reading and responding activities. This break can be viewed as disrupting the commonplace because they were required to think broadly and from a different viewpoint. Although their responses revealed their limited experiences with reading from the critical stance, they were nonetheless very thoughtful, ranging in rationales for my book choices from academic to thematic to aesthetic reasons.

Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues

In this dimension of the critical reading stance, JJ, Alex, Trishawn, and Connor stepped outside of what they know personally to question “how sociopolitical systems and power relationships shape perceptions, responses, and actions” (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002, p. 383). By doing this, they were able to examine the relationship

between language and power (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 1996) and engage in the politics of daily life, as seen in these texts (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). From the discussions and interviews, three themes of their response arose: race; gender; and youth violence and guns. This section will examine the complex responses JJ, Connor, Alex, and Trishawn gave under this dimension of critical reading.

Race

As mentioned previously, one of the metaphors Botelho and Rudman (2009) use concerning the purposes for multicultural children's literature is a door. Children need to use books as a door for multicultural education and the pedagogy of social justice. James Gee (1996) wrote that, "It is the job of the teacher to allow students to grow beyond both the cultural models of their home cultures and those of mainstream and school culture" (p. 89). This requires that children be allowed and encouraged to pose critical questions about what they read, including an examination of issues such as race. This is not always an easy task for educators. King (1991) wrote about her experiences with preservice teachers and their uncritical identities. She explained that these students, by not being critical of what was happening around them, were practicing dysconscious racism, which is "a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges" (p. 135). From looking at literature, educators and children can move to looking at situations regarding race in the real world.

Three of the four books I chose contained African-American protagonists and characters, while *Nine Candles* featured a Latino family. During our literature discussions, however, the issue of race was for the most part ignored. Copenhaven-Johnson (2006) offered several reasons why white adults struggle with talking about the

issue of race: (1) the subject does not come up; (2) we lack sound understandings of what race really means; (3) hiding behind the meritocratic myth; and (4) fear (p. 13).

As I reflect on our conversations, I realize that my own biases and lack of experiences could have contributed to this topic being silenced. Shipler (1997) noted that, "Most whites rarely think about race. If you are black in America, however, the chances are that you think about race every single day" (p. 447). The subject of race did not come up for me, and so most of the boys were either complacent (because I am not their first white teacher/researcher) or they were forced to stay quiet. There were two different situations that did come up and address the issue of race during our literature discussions. Both happened with Connor and Alex.

Is that Martin Luther King?: The first book the three of us read and discussed was *Visiting Day*. After brief book talks about all of the texts, they chose this one because Alex said it had the fewest words.

14 CO: I have a question

15 MEO: Yes

16 CO: Is that Martin Luther King? {*referring to illustration of the father in Visiting Day*}

17 MEO: What makes you say that?

18 CO: It just looks like him

19 MEO: You think?

{*Connor nods yes*} (Literature discussion, 11-16-10)

Connor's question was simple and forthright (S, line 16). He saw the smiling, African-American man on the cover of *Visiting Day* and immediately searched his prior knowledge to connect this illustration with something he already knew. When I asked

him to explain why he posed that question (G, line 17), Connor replies that “it just looks like him” (G, line 18). By saying this, Connor does not give a specific reason why he thinks the book might be about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but he does assert that he knows who that historical figure is and can recognize him. Connor uses the more familiar pronoun of “him” (S) to further suggest that he has background knowledge. I was surprised at the time that he would make such an observation, but after examining the picture myself, I can see why he might think that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was portrayed on the book’s cover. The smile and the facial hair are reminiscent of MLK.

At the end of our reading, I brought up Connor’s point again to see if his opinion had changed. I was also interested to see if Connor might be more willing to share why he made that observation in the first place.

170 MEO: Does he still look like Martin Luther King Jr.?

171 CO: Yes

172 MEO: Ya think?

173 A: No

174 CO: Except for that prison clothes

175 A: No, uh I don’t think

176 MEO: What do you think? {*to CO*}

177 CO: Without prison clothes, yes (Literature discussion, 11-16-10)

Connor maintains that the father in *Visiting Day* looks like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (G, line 171). Alex enters the conversation with him own negative judgment (G, line 173). This response seems to influence Connor and he qualifies his answer to reflect that the father does look like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “except for that prison clothes”

(G, line 174). Alex, Connor, and I had already discussed the father's clothing at length (see Chapter 5) and had determined that what he was wearing was a prison uniform. After Connor says this, it is apparent that Alex is trying to picture it in his mind; his brow crinkles and his eyes shift upwards to show that he is thinking (S). Even with this brief visualization, Alex still does not see the connection between the appearance of the father and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (G, line 175). He does open himself up to have some uncertainties by pausing during his answer (S) and shifting his negative response to a cognitive statement (S). Connor answers confidently that without the "prison clothes" there is a strong resemblance to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (S, line 177).

At that point the conversation shifted to a new topic, but I made sure to bring this excerpt up again during member checking. I asked Connor why he thought to compare the father to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He told me that in regards to school books, when there was a "black man on the cover, it was usually about him" (2-3-11). Connor went on to explain that his teachers had never read or shared many books with him that portrayed African-American protagonists in general, or males specifically. The only books he could remember that had black male characters were about the "black people getting rights," which I presume to mean that Civil Rights Movement. His prior knowledge and experience with African-American male protagonists influenced his thinking.

If these are the only books Connor knows to be about black males, then he was completely justified in his question and comparison (perhaps even more so because they did look somewhat alike). His question also exposed him as being new to multicultural children's literature, and not by not by his own fault. As a supervisor of

preservice teachers on his school's campus, I can affirm that teachers are not always using a variety of multicultural children's literature in their classrooms and that many of these books are absent from the library. During Black History Month in February, I did observe several readings of trade books about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. What seems to be missing from many classrooms, however, is the inclusion of literature with modern-day characters and themes that pertain to the African-American culture. One possible reason for this could be availability of such texts. Horning, Lindgran, Rudiger, and Schliesman (2006) reported that in 2005 there were only 75 new children's books written or illustrated by African Americans reviewed by the Cooperative Children's Book Center. With 3,000 children's books published, this works out to be just 2.5% of the total, while African Americans make up 12.5% of the US's population. Other reasons may include those mentioned by Copenhaven-Johnson (2006) earlier in this section.

Nigger knocking: Another opportunity for a dialogue on race presented itself during our literature discussion of *Your Move*. I brought up the idea that James and Isaac's mother would be upset and worried if she came home and they were not there because of their K-Bones initiation. Alex nonchalantly countered that his mom would not care. Alex then took this opportunity to share what he does do late at night.

48 MEO: Really? Your mom wouldn't be upset? You don't think she'd be worried about

49 you?

50 A: I'm old enough

51 MEO: To go out… after like midnight?

52 A: {*nods yes*}

53 MEO: Really? All by yourself?

54 A: With my cousins and my brothers

55 CO: Some people do manhunt

56 A: We go nigger knocking

57 MEO: What's that? (Literature discussion, 11-18-10)

Alex answers confidently and haughtily that he is "old enough" (S, line 50). Later in this conversation he would say that he was ten years-old, only to correct himself during our literature discussion of *Yummy* by saying that he was really only nine, but about to be ten. He finally admits that he is not alone when he goes out late at night (G, line 54). Connor attempts to break into the conversation here (G, line 55), but Alex and I continue on our track and ignore him. Alex reveals what he does with his brother and cousins: "we go nigger knocking" (G, line 56).

I was not familiar with the term, "nigger knocking," and so my response of a question was genuine (S, line 57). I wonder, though, how I would have responded if I had known what it was. Would I have called attention to it or just let Alex continue with his assurances of being able to be out late at night? Would Connor have asked what it was? (Connor often turned to Alex for definitions of more complex and sub cultural terms.) Or would I have gotten over my initial shock quicker and asked a deeper question, such as why do you think they call it nigger knocking?

58 A: We go knock on someone's door and run at night

59 MEO: You do that? To wake them up?

60 A: I don't know, to aggravate them

61 MEO: To aggravate them?

62 A: And I hide

63 MEO: Really? (Literature discussion, 11-18-10)

Alex's definition (G, line 58) is pretty consistent with Urban Dictionary (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=nigger%20knocking). "Nigger knocking" is when you knock on a door or ring a doorbell, and then run away before the inhabitant answers the door. The website further insists that it is "a popular teenage pastime on boring summer nights." One of the sources on the website attributed the name to the time of the Civil Rights Movement when African Americans would knock on white people's doors and run away to get them to notice their protest marches in the streets. While this is interesting information, I am not sure how credible that particular source is.

Connor joins the conversation at this time to ask who Alex does this to; as a resident of the neighborhood, I wonder if Connor has ever experienced "nigger knocking." Because he is so curious about it, I imagine that he has never done it, but he also never discloses if he had had any personal experiences as the recipient of it.

69 MEO: If you woke me up in the middle of the night, I think I'd be mad. Do people

70 get mad at you?

71 A: No, they don't see me, they don't find me

72 MEO: Oh, okay. But can you tell that people are mad?

73 CO: Where do you hide?

74 A: Hide?! Like in the bushes

75 CO: Like you actually jump into the bushes, like

76 A: No, like I go in the bushes, behind them or something

77 CO: Ohhh

78 A: Or other times I'll just run or I walk on the sidewalk like I'm normal

79 CO: I'd wear like camo clothes, so I'd blend in with the bushes

80 MEO: {*to A*} Do you wear any special clothes?

81 A: No

82 MEO: You just hide really well?

83 A: I just do stuff, they can't find me (Literature discussion, 11-18-10)

Alex's tone during this discussion is very nonchalant and matter of fact (S). Alex considers my question and answers that people do not get mad at him because "they don't see me, they don't find me" (G, line 71). In his response, he avoids taking the blame for his actions; if the person does not see him, then he cannot be mad at him.

This evasion of consequences was repeated multiple times by Alex in different situations throughout the study. For example, Alex often shared during our literature discussions that he would like to "smash" open the glass case of the vending machine that our table faced in the teacher's lounge. Frustrated by how many times he brought it up, one time Connor challenged him by saying that he would definitely get in trouble and cited the principal as being the main punisher of such an action (Literature discussion, 12-9-10). Alex claimed that he would run away, faster than anyone else, and not face a consequence. When I brought up the fact that the principal could just call his mother, Alex began to devise a plan to change his mother's phone number and continue to avoid punishment. When discussing *Yummy*, Alex also claimed that he would not turn himself in if faced with Yummy's predicament. He argued that he would keep running and protect himself with both a rocket launcher and a Desert Eagle gun, even though he added that such a gun was illegal in our state (Literature discussion, 1-

14-11). These sentiments contribute to Alex's 'cool pose' and the image of outlaw that he presents to his peers and other adults at school and in EDEP. I am not sure if they are speculations of what he would do or, as in the case of "nigger knocking," if he has had much experience with avoiding consequences.

Connor takes over the role of asking questions at this point in the conversation (G, line 73). Because he wants to know specific details and does not have a judging tone, Alex is happy to answer him as an expert on "nigger knocking." He shares that he hides in the bushes or runs to the street to walk normally after knocking on a door (G, lines 74, 76, & 78). Also, instead of wearing camouflage, as Connor hypothesized that he might wear (S, line 79), Alex wears regular clothes (G, line 81). At the end of this question and answer session, Alex ends by repeating his earlier statement to me: "they can't find me" (G, line 83). During member checking (2-3-11), I highlighted this conversation and asked if he was still "nigger knocking" with his older brother and cousins. Alex admitted to going out several times during the winter break, but said that when he was in school, they stopped. I shared with him that I thought it was dangerous and that someone might be mad (or scared) enough to pull a gun on him. Even with him smiling and shaking his head (S), I continued with my worry. As I read over this transcript, along with the others, I wonder if there is a connection between his cousin in prison in a nearby town and the cousins he goes with "nigger knocking." Unfortunately, I did not have that revelation in time to ask Alex.

As mentioned earlier, the topic of race did not come up in this conversation. In fact, besides Alex first sharing the term, "nigger knocking" it was not repeated. I know why I did not say it; growing up in the South, I learned from early on that it was a word

charged with negative connotations and emotions. Although I heard my black friends and later my black students use the word, nigger, in a different and seemingly benign way, I have never felt comfortable saying it out loud. It is interesting to note that Alex did not use nigger in either a negative or benign way; it was as if “nigger knocking” was its own entity and “nigger” was just part of the phrase. I missed a powerful opportunity to examine what that word meant to him as a young, African-American male and what that word meant to Connor, being bi-racial. Unfortunately, my fear continued into this literature discussion, to the detriment of the critical reading stance of my participants. Because I am passionate about critical literacy involving multicultural children’s literature, I must work to overcome my fears and biases. Copenhaven-Johnson (2006) offered several suggestions that I address in the teaching implications section of Chapter 7.

Gender

The issue of boys and reading was already broached by Connor in his exit interview when I asked why he thought I chose these four books for us to read and discuss (1-11-11). He alluded to a message that he had received from other adults, including teachers: boys do not like to read. The history behind this belief is extensive. In the 1990s many popular and scholarly works focused on girls’ performances in public schools (Bettis & Roe, 2008; Kleinfeld, 2009, Sommers, 2000; Whitmire, 2006). New public policies worked to help girls in educational practice and in educational programs. Many argued, however, that the data that fueled this movement were flawed and/or skewed and that actually boys were the ones in trouble (Sommers, 2000). Furthermore, the difficulties of boys were not being addressed by those with authority (Kleinfeld, 2009). In their book, Bright Beginnings for Boys, Zambo and Brozo (2009) offered some

staggering statistics about boys' achievement in school. They found that in elementary schools, boys receive more failing grades than girls, which leads to boys being 60% more likely to be retained in a grade level. Also, boys are less likely to do homework and be prepared for class, which contributes to lower grades (Kleinfeld, 2009). Boys are more than twice as likely to be identified as having a learning disability (Whitmire, 2006). Finally, boys make up more than 55% of the students who drop out of school annually.

These statistics go hand in hand with numbers concerning mental health and suicide for boys, as well as delinquency and arrests. The National Center for Health Statistics Vital Health Statistics System (2010) reported that among 15-19 year-olds, 12.5 suicides per 100,000 occurred among males compared to 2.8 among females. For younger children, 10-14 year-olds, there were 1.9 suicides per 100,000 among males compared to 0.7 among females. The report indicated that girls are more likely to think about and plan suicide attempts, but it is boys who act. Another sobering fact is that boys are more likely to die from violence and almost all other types of hazardous behaviors (Kleinfeld, 2009). The National Center for Juvenile Justice reported that the delinquency rate for boys in 2004 was almost three times as much as the rate for girls.

As dismal as these statistics seem for boys in general, they are actually worse for African-American boys. For example, more than one in ten black males has repeated a grade (Kleinfeld, 2009). Less than 4% of African-American boys are enrolled in gifted and talented programs (Corbett, 2006). At the 12th grade level over half of black males are reading below the basic level (Kleinfeld, 2009). This is even more significant when coupled with the statistic that in 2005, 52% of black males dropped out of school (Education Week, 2008). The question then arises of just who is taking the assessment

at 12th grade if so many students are dropping out before that point. The most disturbing statistic comes from Alfred Tatum (2003): “Black males are the only group to hold the distinction of having more of their number in prison than in college” (p. 623).

The literacy development of boys must include careful consideration of biological variations in language, vision, hearing, and attention. For example, speech problems affect boys six times more often than girls (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2004). That means that boys may have trouble with phonemes, the smallest sound unit of words (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). Reading is based on phonemic awareness and when that is compromised, students struggle to learn how to read (Moats, 2000). Falling behind in reading starts early for boys. Research has also shown that boys use fewer words when communicating, with neuroscience providing some explanation (Zambo & Brozo, 2009). Imaging scans show that girls have 11% more neurons in areas of the brain that process language than boys do (Brizendine, 2006). This results in boys having smaller vocabularies than girls. These biological factors impact how boys learn language and how their literacy develops in the future.

There are also societal expectations that hinder the reading achievement of boys. Reading, even in its earliest stages, is constructed by children as an activity appropriate for girls (Millard, 1997). The image of the reader in society is shown to be closely linked to passive female identity (Bettis & Roe, 2008).

We’re BOYS!: During a drawing activity, Alex commented that his sister, who is a third-grader at the same school, would enjoy our books and discussions. This brought up the topic of my research and who I was studying.

65 A: Why don’t she do this? It’s not fair

66 CO: She's in 3rd grade

67 A: I know. Why don't she do it?

68 MEO: Well, think about who I--

69 CO: She didn't return her form

70 MEO: I didn't give her a form. Think about who I gave forms to. Think about who

71 comes and reads with me--

72 A: All boys

73 CO: People who aren't, people who aren't good at reading?

74 MEO: No, that's not it at all

75 A: You playin', you playin'?! You kiddin' me?! You can't read {*directed to Connor*}

76 MEO: Y'all are good at reading

77 CO: People who are good at reading?

78 MEO: Yeah and…. What do all of you have in common?

79 A: We're all older than her {*referring to Visiting Day character*}

80 MEO: Except that JJ & Trishawn are the same age as her. What do you all have in

81 common?

82 CO: We're BOYS!

83 MEO: Yep. So that's my project.

84 CO: Helping boys read?

85 MEO: Nope, I want to know what you guys think about these books. That's it.

(Drawing discussion, 11-30-10)

Alex and his younger sister seem to have a good relationship; I was able to watch some of the EDEP's flag football games against other area schools' teams and both

brother and sister played together well. Additionally, she often played with Alex and his friends during free time outside. Therefore, it makes sense that Alex would want her included in our literature discussions and would protest that "it's not fair" that she was not present (G, line 65). Connor takes charge of the conversation (S) and responds to Alex right away with what he feels is the reason why she has not been invited: "she's in third grade" (G, line 66). He seems to have forgotten that Trishawn and JJ in the other group are also in third grade, although in a different class from Alex's sister. While Alex verifies Connor's response, he does not take it as a reason for her absence and repeats his initial question to me: "why don't she do it?" (G, line 67).

Connor eagerly shares another reason why Alex's sister is not with us. Connor knows that all of the participants had to bring back a permission form, which is much like other extracurricular activities in the school setting, and asserts that Alex's sister did not return hers (G, line 69). When I tell them that I did not give Alex's sister a form (line 70), Connor gives me a look that shows some annoyance (S). Each time I disagreed with what he had said, I was diminishing his authority on the subject, which he believed that he possessed.

Alex gives the correct answer of "all boys" (G, line 72), but Connor jumps in and goes in another direction. He starts out hesitantly (S) and even repeats himself (G) before he asks if those chosen to read and discuss with me are "people who aren't good at reading" (S, line 73). His tone of voice (S) seems to be questioning this belief: if I'm a boy, then am I not "good" at reading? I think part of Connor knows this to be untrue; he is an avid reader when he gets to choose the topic (e.g., sharks) and he does well in reading at school (e.g., maintaining an A/B average for safety patrol status). Perhaps

this is why he uses the general term of people (D), instead of saying boys or even we. Yet he still questions his reading abilities and those of other boys, in this case Alex and my other participants.

My reply to Connor's questioning of his reading ability is exactly true. I did not select participants who struggled with reading nor did I select participants who excelled at reading. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the program director for the EDEP helped recruit participants. Furthermore, I purposely chose not to peruse their cumulative folders or speak with their teachers regarding their reading abilities. To level the playing field for various reading skills, I even read our texts aloud (unless someone asked to read, as was in the case of Trishawn and JJ). Finally, although some of their efferent responses touched on vocabulary building and reading comprehension, they were not the focus of my study.

Alex has a very different reaction to Connor's idea. He starts by accusing Connor of "playin'" (S, line 75) or joking with his suggestion that both boys are not good readers. He repeats himself (G) and raises his voice (S) to portray how unbelievable this notion really is. Then Alex restates that Connor must be "kiddin' me?!" (S), before turning the negative idea back to Connor with the accusation of: "you can't read" (G). What is interesting here is that out of the participants, Alex may have struggled the most with reading in an academic setting. Although he read for pleasure (e.g., Bone), at the end of the study, he had just started after-school tutoring for reading and writing with another fourth grade teacher. None of the other participants had reading tutoring, although Connor shared with me that he was on the waiting list for math tutoring. When Connor suggests that they meet with me because they are not "good at reading," however, Alex

vehemently denies that he has any problems reading and turns the perceived insult back on Connor.

Connor switches gears and immediately asks if my study is about “people who are good at reading?” (G, line 77). I am not sure if this is a genuine guess by Connor or if he is merely restructuring my words to fit into an answer for me. Alex echoes Connor’s earlier sentiment about age when he says that “we’re all older than her {the protagonist of *Visiting Day*}” (G, line 79). When I ask again what they “all have in common,” Connor replies with exasperation, “We’re BOYS!” (S, line 81). He makes this statement more personal than what he said before by using the collective pronoun of “we” (S). Alex gave this answer earlier in the conversation, but because Connor followed it with a gendered idea about reading abilities, Alex’s comment was ignored.

Connor does not seem satisfied that the qualification for reading and discussing with me was being a boy. After my direct answer, he is still searching for more and so he offers the idea that my project includes, “helping boys read?” (S, line 83). Again, I do not feel that I gave any indication to him (or the others) that I was there to help them with their reading skills. We did not work on specifically on reading strategies and when I was with them, I did all of the reading. Even without evidence from me, Connor still believed that there must be some element of reading instruction happening in our discussions. He is holding on to the idea that boys are “not good” at reading and need help with it. Connor’s choice of words does seem to reveal some of his fight against this stereotype; he could have made my project more personal by saying helping us read, but instead keeps it more general by using the noun, boys (D).

Both boys touched on how the notion of reading abilities tied to gender. Connor was torn between believing that boys were “not good” at reading and acknowledging his own aptitude in that subject. Alex fought against that stereotype, even though in his case, it might capture his reading abilities more accurately. Gender was also examined by Connor and Alex in respect to their perceptions about prisoners. While they were puzzled over how gender related to reading proficiency, they both seemed to agree that males committed more crimes than females. Therefore, incarcerated males needed larger prison facilities than incarcerated females.

It is interesting to note that while they picked up on the issue of gender, they did not qualify it by mentioning that they were African-American boys. Connor may not have included this because of being bi-racial and his own personal alignment toward his whiteness. During my observations, I noticed that he often spent more time with other white boys, especially because many of them were in safety patrol with him. Alex could have offered up that they were both Black boys, but he does not. This could be because of several reasons, which I touch on in Chapter 7.

Not a lot of women do crimes: I briefly discussed our conversation on the subject of women in prison in Chapter 5 because Connor cited “America’s Most Wanted” as his source for information. Here I want to further examine how Connor and Alex talk about gender and incarceration.

101 MEO: “The big one is for men and the little one on the hill is for women”

102 A: WHAT?! That’s not right

103 MEO: Why not?

104 A: Women’s supposed to get the small one

105 MEO: Yeah, that's what it says. The big one is for men and the little one up on the

106 hill is for women. Why, why are women getting the small one, though?

107 A: 'Cause there're probably less people?

108 MEO: You think?

109 CO: There're probably less women because not a lot of women do crimes

110 MEO: Why not?

111 CO: 'Cause it's just--

112 A: What?! They just don't {*mocking Connor*}. But my mom…

113 MEO: What did your mom do?

114 A: Nothing. But my cousin did.

115 MEO: Your girl cousin?

116 A: No, my boy cousin, the two of them (Literature discussion, 12-9-10)

Alex interrupts me as soon as he misinterprets my words from the text with surprise (S) and a negative judgment (G, line 102). Even though he may not have understood my reading correctly, his quick response signals that he is paying close attention to the text in order to make such a timely remark. Alex reasons that "women's supposed to get the small one" (G, line 104). Alex has lost some of his conviction at this point; instead of answering with confidence, he responds by raising his voice at the end to denote a question about the smaller population of female inmates (S, line 107).

Connor interjects to support Alex's argument of the smaller number of females in prison and gives the reason that "not a lot of women do crimes" (G, line 109). His belief is based on what he sees in the media, but it is contradictory to current estimates by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Sabol and West (2010) reported that from 2000-2009, the

average annual number of females in state and federal prisons increased by 2.6%, while during this same time period, the average annual number for males increased by 1.8%. More females are currently going to both state and federal prisons for “doing crimes.” Their numbers might not be enough to make the historical difference, but Connor is mistaken with his existing belief.

When I question Connor on that fact, he starts to answer self-assuredly by using the word, “just” (S, line 111) to explain himself. Alex interrupts him this time, again with exaggerated disbelief (S, line 112). He starts to mimic Connor’s words in a mocking tone (S) and contradicts Connor. At the same time, however, he seems to contradict himself; he originally expressed his shock that women would be in a larger prison facility until he realized his mistake. He also argued that their population would be smaller than the males. Alex starts to turn on Connor and this idea when Connor brings in the concept that “not a lot of women do crimes.” Right at the end of Alex’s turn, he starts to say something about his mom (D). I anticipated that Alex was about to share details of his mother’s crime or incarceration, and so I rushed to push him to answer my question of “what did your mom do?” (G, line 113). Alex quickly denies that his mother has done anything (S) and brings up the subject of his cousin (G, line 114). Again, I anticipate that Alex might share about a female cousin (G, line 115) and thus argue against Connor’s point. In my mind, I believed that his strong reaction to Connor’s statement was because he had some personal experience that challenged it. I was wrong, though, as Alex proceeds to share about his two, male cousins who are currently incarcerated. (A more detailed analysis of this conversation can be found in Chapter 5.)

During member checking, I showed Alex this transcript and shared with him that I thought he was going to say something about his mom (2-3-11). He laughed off my idea (S) and said that he was always going to talk about his cousins. I am still not sure if I believe him. On one hand, Alex did show frustration when Connor acted as an authority regarding certain subjects. His protest of disbelief and his mocking of Connor's words could be attributed to that. Regardless of the reason for his outburst, Alex would maintain that men commit more crimes later in our conversation and he never brought up the subject of his mother again.

After Alex shared about his incarcerated cousins, we went back to the story.

182 MEO: I think that's interesting that you think more men commit crimes than girls,

183 that boys commit more

184 A: More men have crimes

185 MEO: More men have crimes?

186 CO: Yeah 'cause America's Most Wanted, I watch, it's like all the people on that are

187 men and I've never seen a girl on that show

188 MEO: Yeah, but I mean, this story's about the mom who's in jail, so obviously

189 women commit crimes

190 A: On the news, it says mostly men

191 MEO: Yeah, that's true, it's mostly men on the news, but there are women who do

192 also commit crimes (Literature discussion, 12-9-10)

As previously examined in Chapter 5, Connor uses a popular television show as his source for prison population statistics (G, lines 186 & 187). While I agree with him that probably more males are featured on "America's Most Wanted," I try to introduce the

idea that “women commit crimes” (line 189) because the example is highlighted in *Nine Candles.* Alex argues against me, and supports Connor, when he cites the news as another source for numbers: “on the news, it says mostly men” (D, line 190). Unfortunately, Alex is correct in this observation and many other researchers have expressed concern over this phenomenon (Kunjufu, 1995; Kunjufu, 2007; Noguera, 2003a; Noguera, 2003b; Tatum, 2003; Tatum, 2005; Tobin, 2000; Wacquant, 2000). Because I cannot argue with his logic and his experience, I affirm Alex, but still maintain “there are women do also commit crimes” (G, lines 191 & 192).

These two instances of gender in our literature discussions, regarding reading abilities and prisoner populations, were very thoughtful. It was also apparent to me that the three of us were not alone in the dialogue; the voices of other adults, probably female teachers and mothers, contributed to Connor’s argument for boys “not reading good.” The local news and “America’s Most Wanted” supplied information for Connor and Alex’s opinions about the female prisoner populations. These conversations again illustrated one of the Bakhtinian principles that Tobin (2000) referred to: “The word is only half ours…. Utterances are composed of the citation, plagiarism, mimicry, and repetition of the voices of others” (p. 20). Outside utterances played a major factor in our discussions about gender.

Youth violence & guns

As mentioned in Chapter 4, one of the criminal justice themes I wanted to address in my literature choices was juvenile violence. I hoped that using these books would invoke responses by either validating their lived experiences, helping them recognize social differences, and/or developing feeling of empathy, respect, and understanding (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). For many boys, the cycle of disobedience and violence

begins in the school setting. Studies conducted by Yale University and the Foundation for Child Development reported that boys were expelled 4.5 times more often than girls in preschool (Kunjufu, 2007). Zambo and Brozo (2009) further determined that boys who cannot regulate themselves in the classroom have trouble in school because they face peer rejection, teachers who cannot necessarily manage them, and punishment in the form of removal from the classroom. As a result, boys make up 90% of the discipline referrals in schools (Mulvey, 2010).

Removal from the classroom (e.g., sitting outside in the hallway, being sent to the principal, suspension, and expulsion) can make students believe that the rewards of education are not available to them. When students believe this, then there is no longer an incentive to follow school rules (Noguera, 2003). In some cases, this cycle of antisocial behavior can be hard to break (Casella, 2001). As they get older, rule violations for boys can increase in frequency and brutality, which leads to an escalation of the forms of punishment used. “For many, the cycle of punishment eventually leads to entanglement with law enforcement and the criminal justice system” (Noguera, 2003, p. 343). In juvenile delinquency and in rates of arrest for almost every type of offense, males predominate by large margins (Kleinfeld, 2009; National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2010). Specifically, the National Center for Juvenile Justice reported that the delinquency rate for boys in 2004 was almost three times as much as the rate for girls.

Unfortunately, this scenario happens often enough for scholars to write about the “school to prison pipeline,” which is the relationship between what happens to African-American males in school and their placement in prison (Wacquant, 2000; Wald &

Losen, 2003). Wacquant (2000) wrote about public schools in urban areas that operate more like prisons than institutions for learning:

> Like the prison system, their recruitment is severely skewed along class and ethnoracial lines…. Like inmates, children are herded into decaying and overcrowded facilities built like bunkers, where undertrained and under-paid teachers… strive to regulate conduct so as to maintain order and minimize violent incident (p. 15).

Based on current trends, it has been projected that by 2020, two of every three African-American males will be involved in some way with the penal system (Kunjufu, 2007).

Reading and discussing books that addressed this issue of youth violence gave JJ, Trishawn, Connor, and Alex opportunities to ask questions in a critical manner. They were able to focus on issues of incarceration and punishment, specifically during our literature discussions of *Yummy*. By asking such thoughtful and critical questions, they showed how much they know about the criminal justice system, in spite of having no formal instruction of it in the school setting.

They have a kid's jail?: As previously examined, Alex shared during our literature discussion of *Nine Candles* that his two male cousins were in prison. While he could not remember some exact details (e.g., their crime, their sentence lengths), Alex could tell us how old they were when they went to prison: 19 years-old. At that point, I made a comment about how they were tried for their crimes as adults, instead of children. This information captured Alex's interest and started the three of us on a conversation about imprisonment for those under the age of eighteen.

145 A: They have kid's jail?

146 MEO: Yeah, juvie

147 A: How long do they put you in jail?

148 MEO: It depends on what you do

149 A: What's the longest?

150 MEO: Sometimes it can be until you're 18

151 A: WHAT?! For doing WHAT?!

152 MEO: Well, there are some kids who have gotten in trouble for murdering, for

153 stealing, for doing like--

154 A: It doesn't even matter. If you have to protect yourself, you know what I'm

155 saying

156 MEO: Well, but then it's something that is illegal so they will put you--

157 A: For a kid?

158 MEO: They used to not have it for kids but then--

159 A: It don't make sense

160 MEO: But then--

161 A: You can't protect yourself, then you can't shoot a dog if the dog is trying to hurt

162 you? If a stranger is trying to kidnap you? Whatcha gonna do? You can't do

163nothing?

164 MEO: Well, there's a difference between self-defense and murder

(Literature discussion, 12-9-10)

Alex takes control of the conversation immediately (S) and directs his questions to me (G). From other literature discussions, Alex seems to have an idea of what jails and prisons are, and what crimes can have consequences of imprisonment. The information he is lacking, however, concerns correctional facilities for youth. When I mention that his cousins were tried as adults, he seems to consider for the first time that "kids" can also commit crimes, and therefore, can be punished when he asks, "they have a kid's jail?"

(G, line 145). This new revelation is matched by a sense of vulnerability by Alex when he uses the pronoun, “they” (S) to denote the outside force that imprisons children. Again he betrays some vulnerability on his part, and perhaps his conception of justice, when he uses the pronoun “they” when he asks, “How long do they put you in jail?” (S, line 147).

Alex reacts loudly and passionately with disbelief and then negative judgment (S, line 151) when he hears that prison sentences can last until you are 18. I am surprised at this because I assume that Alex knows some inmates face life in prison; if they are there for life, then staying until you are 18 does not seem so bad. On the other hand, Alex may have considered his own age of nine years and reasoned that he would have to spend a whole other life of nine years in prison if he was to be released at 18.

Regardless of why he reacted the way he did, Alex asks an important question at the end of his outburst: “for doing WHAT?!” (S). We had previously engaged in a conversation about reasons for imprisonment when we discussed *Visiting Day* (11-16-10). In fact, Alex himself had been very knowledgeable and offered several examples of criminal offenses. It is clear with this question that Alex has not made the connection between youth crimes and adult crimes. Anything adults can go to prison for, so can kids. Alex interrupts me and with his response, starts to reveal why he is having such a hard time understanding youth crimes: “It doesn’t even matter. If you have to protect yourself, you know what I’m saying” (G, line 154). From this statement, Alex communicates that he views these acts as protective measures, not as crimes. He also tried here to make his argument familiar to me by using the conversation builder of “you know what I’m saying” (G).

Without me articulating the word, prison, Alex hears it as where “they will put you” (G) and interrupts me to ask again incredulously, “For a kid?” (S, line 156). Looking at these lines particularly, it is apparent that Alex is in control of the conversation (G); in fact, with his interruptions and the way he ‘hears’ words that I do not actually say, it is as if Alex is having a conversation by himself. He asks questions (G) and pauses appropriately for me to interject (G), but I was not a true part of this dialogue.

The climax of the conversation occurs when Alex shares more about his opinion of youth crimes: “You can’t protect yourself, then you can’t shoot a dog if the dog is trying to hurt you? If a stranger is trying to kidnap you? Whatcha gonna do? You can’t do nothing?” (lines 161-163). Again, Alex asserts that crimes committed by kids are not acts of violence or greed, but rather, they are acts of protection. He gives two examples of a dog “trying to hurt you” and “a stranger trying to kidnap you.” Later in the conversation in reference to the guard dogs outside of the prison, Alex brings up a personal story about a Rottweiler in the neighborhood who tried to attack him. He credits his brother with saving him by stepping in front of the dog so Alex could run away. From his argument here, Alex seems to be saying that if he had not had his brother with him, then a logical response to the problem of a ferocious dog would be to “shoot” him. This would not be a criminal act because Alex would be defending himself. In his other example he is not as explicit concerning what he would do if someone tried to kidnap him. I imagine, though, that he would feel justified in taking the same action of shooting the “stranger.”

Alex’s tone of voice during this climax continues to rise in pitch and volume (S). He is venting his frustration at being vulnerable and not being able to “do nothing” if a

situation occurs where he feels threatened. He bases his attack dog example on a real-life experience and his stranger example on the stories he has heard about stranger danger at school (Member checking, 2-3-11). These are real hazards in his life and he becomes very upset during our conversation because he sees protecting himself not being worthy of prison time. My last comment during this excerpt acknowledges that frustration: “there’s a difference between self-defense and murder” (G, line 164). Fighting back against an attacking dog or a stranger with intent to kidnap you would not be viewed as crimes. Other youth, though, had committed criminal acts, such as murder, and there was a distinct difference between the two.

It is interesting that Connor is sitting with us during the entire conversation, but either chooses not to speak or feels silenced. The way that Alex directs the discussion (G) and his passionate outbursts (S) both work to intimidate Connor and shut down any openings for him to participate. I wondered throughout this study if it was appropriate to have Connor and Alex in the same group because of those dynamics. Connor was able to overcome many obstacles for joining in to the conversations in other instances, but it seems that he could not overcome them in this excerpt.

During our literature discussion of *Yummy*, Trishawn and JJ also had questions about characters involved in youth violence and what their punishments should be and what they really entail.

80 MEO: Can you imagine? Why might Yummy be scared?

81 JJ: ‘Cause he shot, he shot somebody and he’s scared that he’s gonna get shot one

82 day

83 MEO: Could be, yeah.

84 T: Or he gets sent to jail or prison or juvie

85 MEO: Yeah (Literature discussion, 1-6-11)

I ask JJ and Trishawn to consider Yummy's feelings for a moment (G, line 80), trying to foster their capacities for sympathy. While they both gave considerate responses, neither one jumped into Yummy's shoes, as JJ had done earlier when he argued with the text. JJ sees retribution as the main fear for Yummy; he does not allude to who might shoot him, though (G, lines 81& 82). JJ may have suspected that the Black Disciples would turn on Yummy and murder him at the end of the story. With his word choice (D) and passive voice (S), JJ hints that Yummy will not have much control in preventing his shooting. Trishawn views Yummy as being afraid of something else: punishment. He uses three terms, "jail or prison or juvie" (D, line 84), to describe the place Yummy will be "sent to." In our other conversations, we all used jail and prison interchangeably, but here Trishawn also adds in the alternative of "juvie" because Yummy is so young.

JJ acknowledges that Yummy has now been completely initiated into gang life and so must take on the possibility of being shot himself. This fear could be extreme and palpable for him. Trishawn might see punishment as something to be afraid of, but we find out later in the story that Yummy has already been to juvie multiple times, although not for murder. Yummy escapes each time and so he may not fear going again. It seems that even though JJ and Trishawn do not appear to step into Yummy's shoes (e.g., using the pronoun "he" instead of "I"), they are expressing their own personal fears. JJ would be afraid of death and Trishawn would be afraid of incarceration. JJ's own personal experiences may play into his response; with an incarcerated father, he

might not be as fearful of “jail or prison.” In an earlier conversation examined in Chapter 5, JJ even expressed hope (with uncertainty) about his father being out of prison soon. If this is his attitude towards incarceration, then it makes sense that he would imagine Yummy would be more fearful of something else.

After reading on, we pause again to examine a question that the text brings up regarding young criminals and the death penalty.

86 MEO: So, this kid is asking, is it true that kids can’t be executed? That they can’t get
87 the death penalty. What do you think?
88 T: Like when they get electrocuted in the electric chair and all that?
89 MEO: Right. Can kids get the death penalty?
90 T: I don’t know
91 MEO: Why do-- do you think some people would say yes?
92 T: Yeah
93 MEO: Why?
94 T: Like people from the families? (Literature discussion, 1-6-11)

Trishawn takes the lead and asks a clarifying question about my words of “executed” and “death penalty” (G, line 88). His tone is questioning, but also confident (S). He seems to know what the death penalty is from the details of his question: “electrocuted in the electric chair” (D). By including “and all that” (D), Trishawn also alludes to the fact that he knows that not all death penalties are carried out in the same way.

Trishawn then answers quickly with a negative cognitive statement (S, line 90). It is apparent to me that although he knows what the death penalty is, the topic of its use

with youth is not something he knows. During member checking, I asked if his parents or teachers had ever talked about kids and the death penalty and he said no (2-3-11). Furthermore, he shared that he only knew about the death penalty from movies and televisions shows, although he could not recall their titles at the time.

I start off with another question, but quickly change it to something else: “do you think some people would say yes {to kid criminal being executed}? (G, line 91). Trishawn again answers quickly with a confirmation (S, G, line 92). He cites the victim’s families as proponents of a youth criminal being executed (G, line 94). This answer is very sophisticated for such a young person, and is also accurate. Families (and their lawyers) claim many reasons such as closure and retribution as reasons for seeking the death penalty in their court cases. Although Trishawn marks it with uncertainty by using like and a questioning tone (S), he shows again that he knows about complicated criminal justice issues.

JJ rejoins our conversation at this point, although his role is minimal compared to Trishawn’s.

95 MEO: Mm-hmm. Do you think there are people who would say no to kids getting the
96 death penalty?

97 T: There would be some

98 JJ: Yes

99 MEO: Why do you think they might say no?

100 JJ: Ummm

101 T: KIDS!

102 JJ: Because they’re kids

103 MEO: So what? You're saying he's just a kid, so what? What do you mean he's
104 JUST a kid?
105 T: I don't know, well, he's small, he's an 11 year-old kid
106 MEO: I know, so…
107 T: I don't know
108 MEO: You are on to something. What do you mean he's just a kid? He's just
109 11 years-old?
110 T: He's still a person!
111 MEO: He is. So should he be killed?
112 T: Noooo
113 JJ: He shouldn't be killed, well, some people think that, but some people think he
114 should go to juvie, to juvenile (Literature discussion, 1-6-11)

Trishawn begins with a guarded statement of "there would be some" (S, line 97) who were opposed to kid criminals getting the death penalty, while JJ agrees (G, line 98). JJ is not sure about why there would be opposition (S, line 100). This gives Trishawn the time he needs to emphatically burst out with his response: "KIDS!" (S, line 101). He does not explain himself here, so JJ interjects with his interpretation of Trishawn's word (G, line 102). This pattern of working together to create responses and sometimes working against me has been repeated many times in our literature discussions.

I read into what Trishawn (and JJ) have tried to argue, but I feel that I give too much of my belief away here. I want them to consider why being a kid would possibly excuse you from facing such charges. By adding one word, "just" (S, lines 103 & 104), I

may have clouded Trishawn's argument with my own opinion. In his response to my questions, Trishawn speaks with some uncertainty about the superficial characteristics that make Yummy a kid: "he's small, he's an 11 year-old kid" (D, line 105). He is not comfortable defending his answers and tries to deflect my question by saying, "I don't know" (S, line 107). During his exit interview, after several responses of "I don't know," I asked Trishawn why he kept saying it. He told me that if he said it in class, the teacher would leave him alone and not make him answer any more questions (Exit interview 1-13-11). This strategy did not work with me.

Trishawn expresses his frustration with my badgering questions in his tone of voice, but he finally gives a reason behind his defense of Yummy: "He's still a person!" (S, line 110). This argument could apply to many protests against using the death penalty; no matter what crime someone has committed, he is still a person and does not deserve to die (G, line 112). Trishawn may have in fact used some of the same resources he cited during member checking (e.g., movies and TV shows) regarding his knowledge of the death penalty. The two sides of this argument may have come up in the narrative of one of those media texts.

JJ starts by giving his opinion, but then quickly switches to more generalized ideas: "He shouldn't be killed, well, some people think that, but some people think he should go to juvie, to juvenile" (G, lines 113 & 114). JJ believes that Yummy (and other juvenile criminals) should not be killed. He employs the verb, "killed," that I used earlier instead of executed. JJ might be drawing on the emotional charge of "killed" or he might just be repeating my word as an effort to work his way back into our conversation. With a pause and a "well" (S), JJ modifies his argument to be about what "some people think"

(D). He summarizes Trishawn's responses here, but also adds in a new thought: "he should go to juvie, to juvenile" (G). By introducing this idea, JJ gives a reasonable alternative to "killing" a kid. While he may speak in generalities at the end, he does not use multiple terms for correctional facilities here (e.g., no "jail or prison or juvie").

This conversation is an example of Trishawn and JJ using their questions (and mine) to tackle a highly-charged and emotional topic. For varied reasons, they both argued against the death penalty as it may have applied to Yummy specifically and to kids in general. Trishawn also showed some maturity when he could imagine who would be in favor of the death penalty: the victim's family members. While this conversational subject was new to them, as stated by Trishawn, they were both able to use their background knowledge to explain their opinions. The next section examines another controversial issue: guns.

That gun's not scary: Every literature discussion with JJ, Trishawn, Connor, and Alex included some conversation about guns. The text in *Yummy* and *Your Move* alluded to guns: the Snakes had one and were not afraid to use it against the K-Bones; and Yummy received his first gun from Monster, the leader of the Black Disciples. While there were no words used to introduce guns into *Nine Candles* or *Visiting Day*, the boys saw their illustrations in the depictions of the prisons and speculated what they might be. I admitted to them that I did not know much about guns, having grown up in a family who did not have them or use them. Because of my inexperience, I was curious about the frequency of the topic being brought up and I also wondered how they knew so much about guns. From our multiple conversations, I compiled the table below to organize their talk about guns.

Table 6-1. Boys' gun talk

Participant	Gun Talk	Literature Discussion
Alex	Owns a pistol	*Your Move*
	Wants a Desert Eagle, a 12-gauge shotgun, & a rocket launcher	*Yummy*
	Owns a BB gun	*Yummy*
	"My cousin had an M-16"	*Nine Candles*
JJ	"I like guns"	*Nine Candles*
	Owns a BB gun	*Your Move*
Connor	Visited a "gunnery"	*Nine Candles*
Trishawn	"I have a Red Rider BB gun"	*Your Move*

Most of their experiences with guns came from owning them. I was surprised at third and fourth graders having their own guns, but during our conversations, I learned that this was the norm for this school setting. Alex, Trishawn, and JJ assured me that all their friends had guns, at least BB guns, and brought me to their tables during snack time at EDEP so others could verify these claims. While Connor did not own a gun, he guaranteed that he would have one when he turned ten. He claimed that one of the reasons behind visiting the "gunnery" was his father looking for an appropriate firearm for him.

Alex went beyond knowing only about his personal guns; on several occasions, he included rocket launchers, 12-gauge shot guns, and the Desert Eagle in our literature discussions. The last weapon was unknown to me, but after examining the manufacturer's website, I learned that the Desert Eagle is a large-framed gas-operated semi-automatic pistol designed by Magnum Research in the U.S. Furthermore, the Desert Eagle has been featured in roughly 500 motion pictures and TV films, which have been thought to considerably increase its popularity and sales (http://www.magnumresearch.com/Desert_Eagle.asp). When I asked Alex about his

knowledge of the Desert Eagle during member checking, he shared that his uncle, who had served in the military, taught him all about guns. Alex also revealed that, "I have two dads, so I have to know about them" (2-3-11).

For these boys, guns were a part of their daily lives and therefore seeing or reading about guns in our books fostered discussion and maintained engagement. As a classroom teacher, I may have shied away from such stories and even now, my inexperience with guns makes me wary to talk about them. From our conversations, though, I realized that I did not have to—Alex, JJ, Trishawn, and Connor relished their roles of being experts and educating me on their own guns and those portrayed in the texts. Their experiences led to critical conversations about their uses by characters (such as Yummy) and their purposes in the real-world.

Summary

As seen from these multiple examples of their responses, JJ, Trishawn, Alex, and Connor were engaged in reading from a critical stance. I chose to highlight responses that dealt with the dimensions of disrupting the commonplace and addressing sociopolitical issues (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). While they lacked experiences with reading and responding to our texts in the same ways that they did in other academic arenas, they enthusiastically and thoughtfully took on new lenses for disrupting the commonplace, as well as new roles. Furthermore, in the critical literacy dimension that focuses on sociopolitical issues, they showed that they were able to examine the relationship between language and power (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 1996) and engage in the politics of daily life, as seen in our these texts (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). While occupied in this dimension, three themes of their responses arose: race; gender; and youth violence and guns. It was apparent that Alex, Connor, JJ, and

Trishawn employed critical literacy stance when reading our texts. In the final Chapter, I expound upon the benefits of reading with a critical stance and the implications for fostering this stance in the classroom.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview

For my study concerning the responses African-American boys have to multicultural children's literature addressing criminal justice issues, I worked under a critically conscious epistemology, also known as critical theory. Critically conscious researchers view the material world as being comprised of historically situated structures. These structures are perceived to be real (e.g., natural and absolute), and can have an important impact on the life chances of individuals (Hatch, 2002). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), these structures are limiting and confining in the ways that individuals are treated according to race, gender, and social class. Critical theory is a research that seeks to challenge, read situations in terms of conflict and oppression, and bring about change (Crotty, 1998).

Because of their willingness to cooperate and share, I was able to collect amazing data in response to my research question: How do Black boys respond to multicultural children's literature addressing criminal justice issues? My inquiry was guided by two questions: a) What do Black boys' responses say about their personal connections to the stories? and b) What do Black boys' responses say about their perceptions of society, specifically their understandings of how justice works in their lives and their communities? After careful analysis using CDA, I was able to examine their responses according to two reading stances: aesthetic and critical. I then developed broad analytic categories to talk about the form of the interactions while paying attention to the relationships between language and social structure (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Rogers, 2004).

Summary of the Findings

In Chapter 4, I presented several ideas to enable both the understanding and analysis of the reader responses of the African American boys in this study. I first documented my process of finding and evaluating the books we read together and gave short synopses of each book. Then, I detailed JJ, Trishawn, Connor, and Alex's previous experiences with criminal justice issues in books and in real life. Finally, I provided more details about their positions from outlaw to enforcer in the EDEP and in the literature circle discussions.

In Chapter 5, I organized and examined the responses of my participants through the lens of the transactional theory of reader response and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). After developing broad analytic categories, I selected powerful examples that represented "cruces" or tension spots (Fairclough, 1995). I examined these instances more closely to create critical vignettes. The responses of Alex, Connor, JJ, and Trishawn also revealed that while they had some basic understanding of how justice works (sometimes against themselves and other community members), they also relied heavily on stereotypes as sources of knowledge. These stereotypes, so prominent in media and in their communities, had been internalized. Media texts and personal experiences rounded out their sources of information regarding the criminal justice system and all participants were able to use this information in their transactions.

In Chapter 6, I inspected two of the dimensions of critical literacy and their examples: disrupting the commonplace and focusing on sociopolitical issues. While they lacked experiences with reading and responding to our texts in the same ways that they did in other academic arenas, they enthusiastically and thoughtfully took on new lenses for disrupting the commonplace, as well as new roles. Additionally, in the dimension of

sociopolitical issues, they showed that they were able to examine the relationship between language and power (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 1996) and engage in the politics of daily life, as seen in our these texts (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). While occupied in this dimension, three themes of their responses arose: race; gender; and youth violence and guns.

I analyzed the data by using Glaser and Strauss's constant comparison method, as described by Guba and Lincoln (1994) to identify categories. To start, I used categories of what they knew and examples of critical reading intuitively and continued as I coded the statements within the literature circle discussions. Then, I continuously compared key words with others in the same category and other categories, which reflected any insights and connections (personal and otherwise) to the literature. Using Fairclough's (2004) orders of discourse, I analyzed each utterance for its genre (ways of interacting), discourse (ways of representing), and style (ways of being). The annotation of genre, discourse, or style has been abbreviated as G, D, or S.

Throughout this process, I also kept in mind the 'cool poses' that each of the participants enacted. As mentioned previously, Tatum (2005) wrote about the Black male's response to turmoil of enacting a 'cool pose' where they can exude power and toughness while coping with conflict and anxiety. My experiences with the boys in both the literature circle settings and the informal settings reinforced this idea. While not all of the boys portrayed the same 'cool pose,' each one had a persona that he presented to the rest of society.

My participants showed that they can think critically through multicultural children's literature that addresses criminal justice issues, even though they had limited exposure

to books with these topics. I also found that adopting critical stances when reading was foreign to them because of the emphasis placed on efferent reading (e.g., reading for an A.R. test). Their powerful reading responses have many implications, especially in the classroom. JJ, Trishawn, Alex, and Connor are not unlike many African-American boys in other communities. Their lived experiences contribute in important ways to their stances of reading. Other children, male and female, of many different ethnicities and races have similar experiences, but may not have the access or opportunities that my participants had to respond. Therefore, my hope is that the responses of JJ, Trishawn, Connor, and Alex can serve as starting points concerning conversations about changes in both literature selection and curriculum.

Significance of the Findings

Engagement in Literacy & Emotional Learning

When students are able to connect with characters and situations in literature, there can be many results. One is an engagement in literacy learning. When students read and transact with a multicultural text, they bring with them specific social, political, and cultural factors that then influence their interactions with the story. These personal interpretations are both valid and desirable (Rosenblatt, 1978). From their responses, JJ, Alex, Connor, and Trishawn demonstrated their engagement in the stories from aesthetic and critical stances.

Another result of engagement is the opportunity to examine texts for emotional understanding. In particular, Zambo and Brozo (2009) supported the use of picture books with positive male characters because they believe that these books can do three things:

- When boys step into a story, they step inside others' lives;

- Feeling happy or sad about a character's behavior encourages boys to become aware of their feelings and learn to label how they feel; and
- Stories help boys learn how to deal with strong emotions by letting them feel these emotions vicariously, a little at a time (pp. 7-8)

Furthermore, Rosenblatt (1978) wrote that, "As the student shares through literacy the emotions and aspirations of other human beings he can gain heightened sensitivity to the needs and problems of those remote from him in temperament, in space, or in social environment" (p. 261). Through their responses, Alex, Connor, JJ, and Trishawn showed that they were paying close attention to the emotional endeavors of the books' characters. In some cases, they were even able to express ideas and opinions that suggest the emotion of empathy.

A powerful bit of information to note, however, is how much influence stereotypes had on Alex, JJ, Trishawn, and Connor's responses. They made assumptions about the feelings of prisoners that were not based on the text; Alex and Connor saw the father in *Visiting Day* as upset/mad because of the stereotypes of angry prisoners. Furthermore, they expressed a fear of the Black Disciples in *Yummy* and a sense of inferiority to the Snakes in *Your Move*. These stereotypes and prejudices, based on media and personal experiences, heavily influenced their emotional understanding of the characters.

Identity Validation

Instead of having to keep their lives and beliefs hidden away from the classroom, I believe that these texts can invite important parts of student identities in, making them realize that their experiences are valued (Sims Bishop, 1982). Furthermore, Horne (2003) wrote that, "An individual without identity is like a plant devoid of nourishment, it withers and dies. Possessing identity, we feel a sense of freedom from within" (p. 32). These connections that JJ, Connor, Alex, and Trishawn made (both personal and

popular) helped nourish their identities. They became active members of our learning community, even though the main purpose of this study was not to create such a community.

African-American students in particular need to be exposed to and interact with books that represent and validate their culture because of their history in the US as nonimmigrants, or involuntary minorities (Ogbu, 1999). Ogbu explained that involuntary minorities were people who were made a part of the United States against their choice through different ways, including slavery. This history has affected the way African Americans have been portrayed (or ignored) within mainstream literature. African-American scholars write of seeing happy slaves in textbooks (Banks, 1998) and other instances of negative stereotypes that stared them in the face (Harris, 2007; Sims Bishop, 1982). Interviews with African-American adults conducted by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) revealed that until they were able to find themselves in the books by recognizing and relating to characters that were like them, many did not enjoy reading or see its value.

African-American children need to read and respond to texts where they use their unique histories and experiences to help them interpet what they read. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2002) argued that, “Children’s active construction of racial and ethnic meanings and attitudes occurs early and is in important ways very similar to the meanings and attitudes held by adults” (p. 189). The conceptualization of race and racial identity happen early in life, and the inclusion of quality multicultural children’s literature can help those identities develop positively. Reading authentic African-American children’s literature that is culturally conscious can provide positive images,

cultural understanding, and an appreciation for Black English (Harris, 2008; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; McClellan & Fields, 2004; Sims Bishop, 2007; Sims Bishop, 1982).

Addressing Gaps in Research

My study is also important in addressing several gaps in current research. As previously stated, males often have experiences with punishment resulting in removal from the classroom (Kunjufu, 2007; Mulvey, 2010; Noguera, 2003). While there has been research conducted about reading responses to children's literature about criminal justice (Jacobs, 2006), those participants were already incarcerated when reading and responding. Studies conducted with students who have yet to formally enter the criminal justice system are not as easily accessible. Furthermore, there have been many studies that address developing students' critical literacy in response to children's literature with social justice issues (for example Blake, 1999; Ching, 2005; Edelsky, 1999; Jewett, 2007; Laman, 2006; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; McDaniel, 2004; Rush & Lipski, 2009). Not one of the texts used in these studies specifically dealt with issues of the criminal justice system, which include incarcerated parents and/or juvenile crime. This study combined the texts on these topics with students who have had experiences with the criminal justice system, but were not themselves incarcerated.

Critical Literacy

My research can also be used to examine academic literacy development in conjunction with critical literacy development. The responses to the literature can guide teachers, librarians, and other educators in how to incorporate such texts and practices into other classroom settings. This study can enable teachers and librarians to locate and use appropriate texts and engage students in thoughtful and meaningful

discussions about the way justice works in the school, community, country, and world. In addition, the study offers justifications for the inclusion of texts by authors like Jacqueline Woodson, Maria Tests, Eve Bunting, and G. Neri. The next section addresses these implications more explicitly.

Implications for Literacy Learning and Teaching

Reading about Social Issues

All four texts tackle complex issues of the criminal justice system. Scholars have a variety of names for books like these: “brave and diverse” literature (Ballentine & Hill, 2000); “critical literature” (Houser, 1999); and “risky stories” (Simon & Armitage-Simon, 1995). Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2000) called them social issues children’s literature and developed several criteria for identifying them:

- They do not make differences invisible, but rather explore how differences in culture, language, history, class, gender and race make a difference;
- They enrich our understanding of history and life by giving voice to those who have traditionally been silenced or marginalized—we call them ‘the indignant ones’;
- They make visible the social systems that attempt to maintain economic inequities;
- They show how people can begin to take action on important social issues
- They explore dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society to position people and groups of people; and
- They help us question why certain groups are positioned as ‘others’ (p. 10).

The texts we discussed, *Visiting Day*, *Nine Candles, Yummy*, and *Your Move*, met at least one of these criteria.

Some adults (including parents and teachers) shy away from using “sensitive” or potentially disturbing images and situations in literature, thereby practicing censorship to protect children from harsh realities (McDaniel, 2004, p. 473). Apol (1998) explained

that “adults mediate most, if not all, of a child’s reading, and that mediation is not disinterested; it is a way for adults to shape children, to promote for children a certain version of reality” (p. 45). Furthermore, Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2000) wrote that, “There is a tradition among elementary teachers of protecting the ‘innocence of childhood’ by keeping complex, unpleasant (but commonplace) issues out of the classroom” (p. 14). According to them, a potential danger of this practice is that the books being shared in the classroom are disconnected from children’s everyday experiences and make the classroom seem to be a place where important issues are not discussed. Evans, Avery, & Pederson (1999) examined the underlying system of taboo and safe text topics for social studies courses. They found that the “closer to students’ lives, the more meaningful, the more the topic is to be taboo” (p. 221).

The inauguration of federal initiatives, such as No Child Left Behind, have left many clouded with what teachers, districts, and states must teach and/or not teach and the requirement of using specific instructional materials (Ladson-Billings, 1994). This furthers complicates the inclusion of multicultural children’s literature addressing social issues, such as the criminal justice system. Many districts in large states have adopted a one-size-fits-all curriculum in reading instruction, irrespective of the economic, social, cultural and academic diversity present among the population. A recent survey of Florida teachers (Zeig, 2007) found that teachers’ reported practices are intimately aligned with the current political mandates. Even if teachers were willing to incorporate taboo books into their classrooms, a mandated curriculum from the district or state may be stopping them. The consequences of such mandates can be severe. Copenhaver-Johnson (2007) wrote that, “Curriculum and procedures imposed on teachers and

children with “empirical precision” (Kozol, 2005, p. 50) often result in ethnocentric practices that fail to account for the understandings students bring to school (Delpit, 2003) and the ways that children respond to those one-size-fits-all practices” (p. 44).

Youth violence, gangs, and incarcerated parents could all be considered taboo subjects because they deal so closely with students’ lives. The literacy knowledge and personal connections that Alex, Connor, Trishawn, and JJ shared with me about the criminal justice system are not being read about to them in the classroom. Therefore, there is a disconnection between what they value as part of their home/community literacy and the school’s literacy. Many researchers and educators have written about situations where this disconnect was an impetus for failure in the school system (Banks, 1992; Banks, et al., 2001; Banks, 2003; Delpit, 1995; Edelsky, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Luke, 2003; McDaniel, 2004; Paley, 2000; Sims Bishop, 1982; Zambo & Brozo, 2009). If there were more opportunities to connect school with what was happening in students’ lives, perhaps such failures could be avoided. I believe that sharing social issues children’s literature that addresses criminal justice matters has the power to transform a classroom. It can support children who have experienced similar circumstances while helping others understand their classmates. It can unite students and teachers in engaging in critical and sophisticated conversations about their communities and justice in our country. Finally, it can build a bridge between what students learn about at home and what they learn about in school.

Addressing Personal Biases

As mentioned in the critical reading section of Chapter 6, something that I struggled with during our literature conversations was incorporating the issue of race. For the most part, I ignored race, even though all four texts provided ample

opportunities to spark discussion. Copenhaven-Johnson (2006) offered several reasons why white adults struggle with talking about the issue of race: (1) the subject does not come up; (2) we lack sound understandings of what race really means; (3) hiding behind the meritocratic myth; and (4) fear (p. 13).

As I reflected on our conversations, I realized that my own biases and lack of experiences contributed to this topic being silenced. Shipler (1997) noted that, "Most whites rarely think about race. If you are black in America, however, the chances are that you think about race every single day" (p. 447). The subject of race did not come up for me, and so most of the boys were either complacent (because I am not their first white teacher/researcher) or they were forced to stay quiet. In spite of me and my own biases, both Alex and Connor did bring up two different situations that addressed the issue of race. JJ and Trishawn did not.

Copenhaven-Johnson (2006) wrote that:

> We need to talk to our children because children notice the messages our silences send. When we fail to acknowledge race with them, we increase the probability that white children, especially, will recognize discussions of race as off-limits with adults, will infer that whiteness is normative, and will harbor stereotypical interpretations of the cultural differences they do, in fact, observe (p. 17, italics in original).

An important implication of my study and my personal experience is for educators (and myself) to foster open conversations about race issues to prevent the dangerous silence. Sharing culturally conscious literature (Sims Bishop, 1982), as in my case, can help, but sometimes it is not enough.

Importance of Sharing

Using small focus groups was a wonderful way for each participant to interact with me and his peer in response to issues of criminal justice in multicultural children's

literature. First and foremost, I felt that JJ, Trishawn, Connor, and Alex were relaxed in this research setting. This was evidenced in the amount of responses they had to the texts and the topics of these responses (e.g., personal connections). Although I was new to them, they could also rely on a peer for encouragement and support in our conversations. I witnessed many examples of this during literature discussions with JJ and Trishawn. They would often work together to counter my questions and my authority, while showing allegiance to each other.

Additionally, I feel that it is important that JJ, Trishawn, and Alex had these stories inside of them, but could not (or would not) share them under normal classroom circumstances. Bakhtin (1986) wrote that, "each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances. These we may call speech genres" (p. 60). He went on to talk about the multitude and also the variety of all speech genres because of how many different ways humans could interact and also converse. I believe that when JJ, Trishawn, Connor, and Alex shared their responses to our four texts, they became budding experts in this speech genre of criminal justice issues. In the cases of JJ, Trishawn, and Alex, they were able to connect their previous knowledge of their experiences to what they had learned from the stories. Connor was able to enter this speech genre by his use of sophisticated questions.

Compelled to share

It was important for all of the participants to share their responses to the four texts we read and discussed. I was particularly surprised, though, with a personal connection that Alex shared and the manner in which he shared. Alex was compelled to tell me and Connor about his incarcerated cousins. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Alex positioned himself as an outlaw to EDEP and our discussions. Alex was seen as a rebel or

nonconformist when it came to the established norms. He was also a leader, taking control of situations in the EDEP (e.g., playing football) and in our discussions (e.g., leading turn-taking).

During our literature discussion of *Visiting Day* (11-16-10) Alex revealed that his cousins were in prison and that one of his cousins would be getting out “soon.” Alex did not have all of the particulars for why his cousins were in prison. He knew, however, that “guns” were involved for one cousin and knows the setting for the cousin’s crime. This lack of information on Alex’s part made it important for him to be perceived as an authority in this conversation with Connor. He was able to carry out on illusion of knowledge (and, therefore, power) with Connor by responding repeatedly with unclear answers to Connor’s questions for specific details.

Alex clarified that only one cousin would be getting out soon while “the other one has to stay in about three more years.” Still, his clarification was marked with uncertainties (e.g., “about”). Even though Alex felt compelled to share this story, he did not use either cousin’s name and did not offer any personal information about them. He is connected to them as being their cousin, but he also shows that he is distanced from them (most likely because of adult influences).

Two months later during our literature discussion about *Yummy* (1-14-11), Alex volunteered more information about his incarcerated cousins, without any provocation from me or Connor. He shared that his cousin had been incarcerated for ten years. Knowing the timeline, it is more understandable that Alex would not know all of the details of his cousin’s crime or that he would have a relationship with him at all. If Alex is correct, then he went away before Alex was even born. At the end of this conversation,

we learn that Alex's cousins got in trouble for not only having guns, but also firing them. This revelation was more consistent with Alex's assertion that they had already been in prison for ten years. What Alex did not know (and neither did Connor or I) was the target was for his cousins' bullets. Alex used the pronouns, "someone," "anybody," and "nothing" as the intended marks in his explanation for his cousins' shooting, which means that his cousins could have been shooting at inanimate objects or real people.

This personal connection for Alex was powerful enough for him to share during two different literature discussions. I was especially impressed that he made the connection himself when talking about how long Yummy might be incarcerated for and then spoke about that connection.

Silenced

In spite of the stories that JJ, Alex, Trishawn, and Connor shared with me, I have to wonder how many times I silenced them. During the early planning stages of my research design, it was suggested that my role as participant observer be modified and that I incorporate a young, Black male into my literature discussions. The challenge was to find someone who both had the time to work with me (and my participants) and who would be willing. I contacted former students from my university children's literature course; while those young men were willing, they unfortunately did not have the time because of how advanced they were in their studies. Therefore, based on reassurances from Dr. Bernard Oliver, an African-American male scholar at the University of Florida, I continued on with my plan of participating in the literature discussions with my participants.

A limitation of this situation, discussed in Chapter 3, was that race, status, and gender could have influenced the data collected. Our conversations were affected by

the ethnic, cultural, and gender differences between the boys and me, as well as the difference in status as I am a former teacher. My teaching experiences did help prepare me to guide my participants in their thinking, but I also think that there were times when I talked too much or asked leading questions because I had an answer in mind. There were several instances, especially with Alex and JJ, when I felt that these differences silenced them. Although I did not get the same feeling from Connor and Trishawn, I am sure that having a young, Black male discuss these texts with them would have provided different components to the data collected.

Future Research

Lindfors (1999) defined inquiry, "as a language act in which one attempts to elicit another's help in going beyond his or her own present understanding" (p. ix, italics in original). In my study, I elicited the help of Connor, Alex, JJ, and Trishawn to better understand my research questions. The findings of this study and my admitted biases have led me to additional questions. If I were to conduct the same study, I would pay attention to opportunities when other socio-political issues could have been raised. Although we did discuss gender, race, and youth violence/guns, we never addressed issues of poverty or class. To truly embody the message of critical literacy learning, these topics need to be discussed openly.

Additionally, I am curious about other multicultural children's literature concerning criminal justice issues. What other books might facilitate thoughtful discussions with responses that demonstrate a transaction (either from an aesthetic, efferent, or critical stance) between the reader and the text? As mentioned in Chapter 4, I used scholarly journal articles (e.g., Damico & Riddle, 2004; D'Angelo & Dixey, 2001; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2000; Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, & Vasquez, 1999; O'Neil,

2010; Pierce, 2006; Pohan, 2000; and Tyson, 1999), as well as online sources like the Database of Award-Winning Children's Literature (www.dawcl.com) and Children's Literature Comprehensive Database (www.clcd.com) to find texts. I also turned to a children's literature email listserv for appropriate suggestions. My hope is that as time goes on, there are more texts for me (and other teachers and researchers) to use.

I wonder about conducting a similar study with different participants. What responses do other students (e.g., different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, gender) have regarding multicultural children's literature addressing criminal justice issues? JJ, Alex, and Trishawn had personal connections to the stories. I wonder about the responses of students who come from backgrounds that are radically different from the characters in the texts. Research also needs to happen where students might not have had the same experiences with issues of criminal justice. Rice (2005) wrote about her experiences of introducing multicultural children's literature to small groups of White students from similar socioeconomic groups (mid-to-high middle class). Those students struggled to relate to stories with universal themes when the cultures of the main characters (Mexican-American) were different from their own. Rice labels this as "aesthetic restriction" and describes it as an immediate, but unconscious rejection of a text (p. 344). I worry that students who are not introduced early to texts like *Visiting Day, Nine Candles, Your Move,* and *Yummy* might discard them as being unrealistic or simply not their problem because of aesthetic restriction. All students should have the opportunity to read stories involving criminal justice issues because a rejection of the texts is also a rejection of the experiences many students share.

I am also interested in both preservice and in-service teacher responses to reading and then using these texts. I acknowledged my own biases, especially toward discussions of race (Copenhaven-Johnson, 2006) and unpleasant situations (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2000). How do literature discussions about these texts influence teacher practices, specifically the inclusion of such texts in their own classrooms? I am fortunate to be at a place in my life where I can examine these further questions in my research agenda.

Concluding Thoughts

My participants demonstrated to me that they have experiences with these stories from the media and from their home lives. Our literature discussions strengthened my belief that these texts should be included in critical discussions in the classrooms. I am grateful to Alex, Connor, JJ, and Trishawn for being so honest, open, and eager to read and discuss these texts. In the pre-planning stage of this study, I was worried about finding participants, their willingness to share, and perhaps even acknowledge personal connections. As safe as I thought I could make these students feel, there is always the possibility that some students might not share their responses. This can happen because of external and internal pressures. Some family members might not want children to share about their families' run-ins with the law and some students might be too embarrassed or ashamed to divulge such information. I am indebted my colleague for suggesting Massie Elementary and to the EDEP program director for soliciting volunteers. I am also lucky that those volunteers, Alex, Connor, Trishawn, and JJ, shared their responses to literature with me. While my participants each had distinct 'cool poses,' they also showed that responding to literature was important to them.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mary Ellen Oslick completed her bachelor's degree in history and humanities with a minor in English at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. She continued at Trinity University in a fifth-year program to complete her Master's in the Art of Teaching, specializing in middle grades reading and special education. She taught for five years in elementary schools in Texas' urban and suburban areas, including working as an Inclusion Specialist, serving on leadership teams, and co-teaching in a bilingual school setting.

As a graduate assistant at the University of Florida, she taught and developed undergraduate and graduate courses (face-to-face, blended, and online) in the areas of children's literature, multicultural children's literature, and reading methods (elementary and secondary). She served as a field placement supervisor for two semesters at a local elementary school overseeing pre-service teachers in an internship experience. In the spring of 2010 she was a finalist for the university's Graduate Student Teaching Award and then in the spring of 2011 she was nominated for the Madelyn Lockhart Dissertation Fellowship. After graduating with her doctoral degree, Mary Ellen accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Literacy/Reading at the University of Central Arkansas.