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HOW READING THROUGH LITERARY LENSES IMPACTS
THE QUALITY OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' ARGUMENTS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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To Donn, for reminding me that life is short, and
To Molly, for reminding me that life goes on.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

As a young English teacher with little practical experience, I did not always have a passion for working with high-needs students — in fact, I dreaded it. I felt I lacked the tools necessary to adequately support these students in improving their reading and writing ability. However, when I was thrown into teaching this particular subset of students, many of whom were English Language Learners (ELLs) or had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), I came to appreciate the opportunity I had to genuinely impact these students' learning. Sure, they were not always an easy group to work with, but they were eager and held within them great potential for growth. As I entered my third year of teaching a course geared toward this population, I wanted to try a new approach for teaching them to become stronger readers and writers. Thus, the research question I wished to answer is this: *How does teaching high school students to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of students' arguments?* Chapter one provides further insight into the circumstances that inspired me to investigate this question for my capstone research.

My Story

In the break room. Lunchtime ought to be considered a treasured reprieve in the

daily routine of a high school teacher: thirty minutes where we can hole up in our windowless break room and dodge the otherwise endless barrage of questions, interruptions, and immature outbursts from students. The break room at my school offers a departure not only from our classrooms and our students, but also from our current millennium. Indeed, the space retains all the charm of the early 1970s, when the building first opened: orange and mustard plastic chairs surround laminate veneer tables; a faded photograph of the former English department (now all retired or dead) sits atop a metal bookcase and under 40 years of dust; the cabinets are filled with the Corelle dinner plates everyone's mom got at her wedding (you know, the thin white plates with the avocado green floral trim). If the city still employed a fire inspector, there is no way he would approve that many Cold War era microwaves plugged into one power strip. So the environment may not offer the serenity of a day spa, but nonetheless, our break room is an adults-only haven free of nagging and negativity.

That was not always the case. For my first two years in the district, two of my colleagues in the English department, Judy and Melinda (these and all names herein are pseudonyms), taught the modified version of our required American Literature course, which we call American Voices. The course differs from its mainstream counterpart in that it is co-taught with a special education teacher and is aimed at supporting our lowest reading sophomores, often English Language Learners (ELLs) or students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). At lunchtime, Judy and Melinda would enter the room with a sigh and launch into a rambling back-and-forth gripe session bemoaning their latest complaints against students in their respective classes. "It took them the whole

period to write a simple paragraph,” Judy would say. “Well not a single kid in my class turned their homework in on time,” Melinda would reply. Their commentary ranged from exasperated to mean-spirited, but not once did either have a positive word to say about any student in their American Voices classes. Certainly Judy and Melinda’s daily grievances about that segment of our student population did not foster a positive view of those students or that class for those of us listening in between bites.

I take over American Voices. It should come as no surprise then, that when, through a complex turn of events, I wound up with American Voices on my schedule for spring semester of 2015, I dreaded it. Judy and Melinda had done a fine job making the kids sound impossible to work with (at best) or like complete terrors (at worst). There I was, a third year teacher finally finding his groove, suddenly tasked with teaching the kids who (if Judy and Melinda were to be believed) were going to be frustrating, unmotivated, and incapable of learning. I did not want to become the person who squandered those precious thirty minutes in our 1970s time capsule each day complaining about how impossible those kids were! Yet, I did not have a choice — that class had landed on my lap and there was nothing I could do to change it.

And then the first day came. The kids were quiet, polite even. They listened to my co-teacher Laurie and I, leaned in, held their breath, as interested in us and what we would be like as we were in them. The period came, the period went. Everything went fine, knock on wood. At lunch, my colleague Kevin, who picked up the other section of American Voices the same semester, reported a similarly positive experience. “First day. Honeymoon phase,” I said. “We’ll see how long it lasts,” Kevin replied. The next day

came and went, once again incident free. Then the third day, and the fourth. “I’m actually loving my Voices class,” I said over lunch on the fifth day. “Right?” Kevin said, nodding. “My kids are really cool and I think we’ve got a good group.” Judy and Melinda made eye contact; with two raised eyebrows between them, they pulled us back to reality. “But I mean it’s still the first week, and everyone’s on their best behavior the first week,” I conceded.

Over the next several weeks, Kevin, Laurie, and I waited with bated breath for the carefully constructed house of cards to come crashing down. Yet, every week, our students in American Voices continued to disprove our preconceived notions of the kind of students, the kind of people, they would be. I will not pretend they were angelic cherubs; as they got comfortable with us, there were occasional outbursts, frequent distractions, and nary a time everyone turned in an assignment by the deadline, but compared with the picture Judy and Melinda had painted of them, these kids were remarkable in that they were really just typical sophomores — no better, no worse. Our lunchtime conversations evolved that year from the draining negativity of the fall semester to the pleasantly surprised optimism of the spring. The break room may have been drab, but our eyes were bright with hope for these kids whom our colleagues had written off.

The first year. As we ventured forth with these students, our primary goal was to help this cohort of students to become better readers, to prepare them for their upper level literature courses and beyond. While Kevin and I had significant experience as English teachers and Laurie, a special education teacher, had been co-teaching American Voices

for years, none of us had any particular expertise when it came to being teachers of reading. For a time, we felt at a loss: how could we best support these students when we lacked the necessary training to teach them how to read? Rather than dwell on our deficits for too long, we opted instead to focus on what we could control: building community and holding students to high standards. We were essentially walking into these classes already in progress; I picked up Melinda's group and Kevin took Judy's. The kids already knew each other well, and that was not necessarily a good thing. They did not know us in the least and we assumed that the kids' were likely as dissatisfied with their former American Voices teachers as Judy and Melinda had been with them. We had to start out on the right foot.

In order to get to know these students better and build a healthier community in the classroom, we initiated a weekly activity called "U-Teach Tuesdays." Each Tuesday over the course of the semester, two students would prepare a presentation about something that mattered to them. The only requirements were that it be at least three minutes long and that it include a visual of some kind. That first semester we had presentations about topics as varied as caring for dogs, competitive motocross, bear hunting, what it takes to be on the track team, and how to fix a carburetor. The students rose to the challenge — each and every one of them prepared information about their topic and presented about it knowledgeably and in an engaging manner. Students were riveted, tuned in and eager to ask questions about each presentation. No doubt they appreciated the departure from a typical class with the teacher at the front of the room! Over that semester, students became more comfortable with one another and with us;

together, we built community and, subsequently, saw students achieve high standards that they had seldom accomplished before.

The second year. The following fall, American Voices was the class I most looked forward to teaching. That year, we would have a new group of kids, but we would have them right from day one and all the way through to the end of the school year. They were ours to shape and mold, ours to take responsibility for. We had no preconceived notions of their ability or attitude, nor did they have any of us. Wishing to capitalize on the success we found with the routine of U-Teach Tuesdays the previous spring, we decided to maintain that tradition as well as incorporate some new ones. Each day began with a bell ringer, a brief activity to get students thinking and writing, which they began as soon as they walked through the door. At the end of each period, students would write the day's "take away" on a sticky note which would be placed on the whiteboard at the back of the room. On Fridays, we added another routine element: students would be assigned a topical or course-related article to read on a website called Newsela. Newsela is a free online service that modifies newsworthy articles to fit a variety of Lexiles (Newsela, 2016). A Lexile is "a scale for measuring both reading ability of an individual and the text complexity of materials he or she encounters" (What is a Lexile Measure, 2016). Armed with each student's approximate Lexile, as determined by their MCA-8 Reading test scores, we were able to distribute copies of an article about a single topic that would be accessible to each student. Thus, we were able to have a discussion about something all students had been able to read.

Over time, we began to push students to read at higher and higher Lexiles. We began both tracking the Lexile of their articles and having them take brief, four question comprehension quizzes at the end of each article. As students' scores on these quizzes improved, we would bump them up to the next Lexile, and over several months we witnessed substantial growth in both their reading ability and their Lexile. Not only did we have evidence of their growth from our own in-class assessments, but from their MCA-10 Reading scores as well (see Table 1). The students' MCA-10 Reading scores also reflected a significant improvement over the previous year's cohort (see Table 2).

Table 1

American Voices MCA 8 to MCA 10 Growth

American Voices Average (40 Students)	Average Score on MCA 8	Average Score on MCA 10	Average Growth from MCA 8-10	Average Percent Growth from MCA 8-10
Lexile	970	1044.05	74.05	7.63%
Score	31.07	38.84	7.77	24.96%

Table 2

American Voices MCA 10 Cohort Comparison

American Voices 2014-2015 Cohort Average MCA 10 Score	American Voices 2015-2016 Cohort Average MCA 10 Score	Average Improvement (in Points) Over Previous Year's Cohort	% Improvement Over Previous Year's Cohort
32.70	38.84	6.14	18.78%

We attributed this success to our strong, consistent community, rigorous routine, and our students' own tracking of their Lexiles and comprehension scores. Students' end-of-year

reflections echoed this; said one student: “I think that my reading is getting way better, especially after practicing with Newsela quizzes. I think I’ve really improved.” Another wrote, “I feel because I like the teachers and the other kids that I have tried harder this year than the past years. I’ve improved a lot since last year.” I felt good knowing we had helped these striving readers to make progress in their reading ability.

Advancing secondary readers. After the tremendous success we experienced with our American Voices students that second year, I was enthusiastic to be entering a summer filled with graduate courses that would be relevant to continuing to improve my practice in order to benefit striving readers. As part of my Master’s degree, I simultaneously took courses that would earn me a K-12 Reading License, something my work with the American Voices students inspired me to attain. One course in particular stood out to me as an especially meaningful course: LANG 7903 — Advancing Secondary Readers. It was this course that would guide me in selecting a focus for my capstone research. I had long known I would want to conduct my research with the American Voices students, as the class offers me greater opportunity to experiment than my mainstream classes and the students could benefit greatly from my work with them. What I was less certain of was the particular practice I wished to examine. We had achieved such great results through our work with Newsela, Lexile tracking, and our intentional routine, that I initially thought I could look to expand my research in one of those areas. However, my primary advisor urged me to study something outside of normal practice in order to gain fresh insight into another means of teaching this group of students. I mulled over her advice for several days, contemplating all I had learned about

adolescent readers over the summer. That is when it hit me.

Ever since taking LANG 7903, I have been raving to anyone who will listen about this idea that stuck out to me: “*Now, students tend to: have an idea, then go find evidence. Instead, we can teach: gather evidence, then develop an idea*” (Lehman & Roberts, 2013, p. 12). When I first read those words, I was struck with a case of severe cognitive dissonance. Almost every time a student has made an assertion about a novel we have been reading, I would respond with, “How do you know? Find evidence in the text.” With practice, students got pretty good at this. Even our American Voices students were able to generate thesis statements about *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925/2004) and support their ideas with evidence from the text (something Judy and Melinda would never have tried). Yet, their arguments, while supported by the text, remained paper thin: “In *The Great Gatsby*, Tom and Daisy don’t care who they hurt,” “Gatsby did everything he could to make Daisy fall in love with him;” “Daisy doesn’t love Gatsby; she is only using him.” These thesis statements were miles beyond what these students could have done prior to taking American Voices; each statement could indeed be supported by evidence in the text. Still, I wondered — what if we flipped the way we teach idea generation and evidence collection? What if, instead of making a broad, surface-level statement about a novel, students instead used literary lenses to collect evidence along the way and then analyzed that evidence for patterns, as Lehman and Roberts (2013) suggested, in order to develop a new understanding and make an argument? What would happen to the quality of the students’ thesis statements and writing?

A preview of the plan. In order to investigate this, I taught three books. The first was taught the traditional way I have taught before: students read the book, made an assertion, and then dug back into the book to find evidence. The second book was used to model the new method using concrete examples: students selected a character to track as they read, marked information about their character by annotating right in the text, looked for patterns, and then made an assertion. Between the second and third book, I taught students about literary lenses, which help a reader to interpret and understand a text according to a specific perspective; each lens draws the reader's attention to certain aspects of the text (Appleman, 2009; Carroll, 2006). This helped them to focus on specific details and patterns in the text. For the third book, students had to think more abstractly, selecting a lens to apply as they read, annotating as they found evidence that was pertinent to the lens, observing patterns, and ultimately making a more abstract assertion. My ultimate goal was to see what impact scaffolded instruction, literary lenses, and an evidence-first, ideas-second approach would have on the quality of the students' argumentative thesis statements.

Broader Context

I often lament that high school students seem to think only of themselves. However, teenagers' seeming inability to consider the perspectives of others may not be entirely their fault. Due to a decrease in activity in the medial prefrontal cortex area of their brains, adolescents have difficulty understanding others' perspectives. According to Blakemore (2012), "The ability to take into account someone else's perspective in order to guide ongoing behavior, which is something... that we do in everyday life all the time,

is still developing in mid-to-late adolescence” (para. 8). Using literary lenses to guide students to understand a *text* from multiple perspectives should be beneficial to the overall development of their ability to understand the perspectives of the *real people* who inhabit the world around them (Appleman, 2009; Cella, 2002; Troise, 2007; Wilson, 2014).

When it comes to writing, Applebee and Langer (2009) noted that most high school students are falling short of proficiency. To combat this shortcoming, Newell et al. (2011) recommended using reading and writing in coordination with one another. They stated that doing so “will enhance the quality of both because students’ arguments are influenced by the texts they read before writing” (as cited in Read, Landon-Hays, & Martin-Rivas, 2014, p. 471). Additionally, Graham and Hebert (2010) asserted that “having students write about the material they read *does* enhance their reading abilities” (p. 13). Troise (2007) recognized that having students use literary lenses to inform their writing about literature resulted in their ability to see that a single novel can be interpreted a variety of ways. Student writing samples collected by Troise (2007) were “more original, varied, and interesting” arguments about literature than her students were able to write previously (p. 86). My study aimed to determine if teaching my students literary theory would result in the same improvement, thus furthering the case that the literary lenses can be a useful means to improving students’ argument writing ability.

Conclusion

We view our world through various lenses; Kevin and I often joke that we are prone to seeing things through our *Office* lens, which causes us to recognize parallels

between our own lives and circumstances from the NBC sitcom of the same name (Daniels, Gervais, & Merchant, 2005-2013). People use other lenses, too, and they shape the way we interpret the world around us. In the break room two years ago, Judy and Melinda would view the American Voices kids through a deficit lens, doubtful those students could achieve more than the bare minimum. Today, when Kevin, Laurie, and I discuss the goings-on in our American Voices classroom, we view those students through a different lens — one of optimism, which recognizes the good in our students and their potential for growth. I have experienced firsthand the power of shifting my perspective; this, coupled with my passion for my American Voices students and my love of reading and writing has led me to wonder: *How does teaching high school students to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of students' arguments?* In chapter two, I discuss the body of research that pertains to my research question to better situate my research in this field. Topics addressed will include the context of struggling readers, literary theory and literary lenses, teaching literary theory to secondary students, and scaffolding argumentative writing.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Overview

I did not encounter literary theory or the literary lenses until I was a junior in college. It was then that I learned that literary lenses aid readers in interpreting and understanding a text through unique perspectives; each lens draws a reader's attention to certain aspects of the text (Appleman, 2009; Carroll, 2006). Through learning how to apply the lenses to the texts I read, I found myself discovering whole new interpretations of my reading that went deep below the surface of what I previously thought imaginable. My familiarity with the lenses has shaped not only how I view my reading, but also how I view television programming, movies, and my interactions with people. The fact that I did not experience these until college left me thinking that that is when students are supposed to learn them. It was only recently, when Deborah Appleman came to speak to the English department at my school, that I realized the possibility the use of such lenses holds for students at the high school level, particularly struggling readers. This reintroduction to the literary lenses has influenced my research question: *How does teaching high school students to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of students' arguments?*

The first section in this chapter examines the needs of struggling readers, which is the population I worked with for this study. The second section defines literary theory and literary lenses and discusses their evolution over time. The third section presents how particular literary lenses might be taught to students - particularly struggling students and English Language Learners - at the secondary level. Finally, the fourth section explores possibilities for moving beyond reading to teaching students to craft argumentative writing.

The Context of Struggling Readers

As my research study is centered on working with a population of struggling readers, it is important to explore how I can best support these students in strengthening their reading and writing. In this section, I discuss research surrounding supporting struggling readers and English language learners.

Supporting struggling readers. Allington (2013) wrote that “Struggling readers are often asked to read text that is far more difficult for them to read than the texts their better reading peers are assigned” (p. 524). Being able to read a text at his or her independent level is critical if a student is to be able to improve as a reader for, according to Adams (1990), “when a text is too difficult for children, they comprehend little, learn little, and tire quickly” (as cited in Allington, 2013, p. 525). Ferlazzo and Hull-Sypnieski (2014) likewise emphasized the importance of students reading texts that are accessible to them so that they are able to read independently or with scaffolded support.

It is not surprising, then, that skilled readers read more than struggling readers (Allington, 2013; Guthrie, 2008). Additionally, students who are struggling readers

typically get assigned more worksheets and less reading than their peers who read well (Allington, 2013). Consequently, the gap between the skilled readers and the struggling readers widens. If this is to be overcome, the trend must be reversed; students who have difficulty reading should be reading *more* than their peers. Furthermore, the type of reading they should be doing should be silent — uninterrupted by comments and corrections that often arise during round robin oral reading (Allington, 2013).

Supporting English language learners. English Language Learners (ELLs) are often a subset of the group “struggling readers”, and as a result of their unfamiliarity with the English language, they often have difficulty in language arts (Carroll & Hasson, 2004). These students require additional support; Fu (2004) went so far as to say that “regular classroom teachers have to forget the grade-level curriculum and even forget they are secondary English teachers; they must teach from where these students are and move them to the next level” (p. 8). For these students and all who struggle with reading, it is important that teachers help students connect the text to themselves, examine the elements of the text to better understand it, and extend the ideas in their reading to larger issues in the world. With this in mind, I will next explore literature that examines literary theory and literary lenses in order to determine if teaching these strategies to students is a practical strategy to help them accomplish these goals.

Literary Theory and Literary Lenses

In addition to laying out definitions of literary theory and literary lenses, in this section, I describe the evolution of literary theory and a variety of lenses that may be taught. Lenses discussed include New Criticism, reader-response, mirror, microscope,

telescope, social-class, gender/feminist, postcolonial, structuralist, psychological, and archetypal.

Definition of literary theory and literary lenses. Clarke and Whitney (2009) acknowledged that defining literary theory, which is closely related to critical literacy, is difficult to do; in their attempt to deliver a definition, they cited Jones (2006), who stated that “critical literacy is like a pair of eyeglasses that allows one to see beyond the familiar and comfortable: it is an understanding that language practices and texts are always informed by ideological beliefs and perspectives whether conscious or otherwise” (p. 530). According to Appleman (2009), “Literary theory provides readers with the tools to uncover the often invisible workings of the text” (p. 3). These tools are often referred to as literary lenses, for, like the eyeglasses Jones described, they alter the reader’s interpretation and understanding – their view – of the text; each lens will draw the reader’s attention to different aspects of the text (Carroll, 2006).

Shifts in literary theory. What is valued in literary theory has oscillated between the two ends of the spectrum: at one end stood the critics who believed discussion of a text should be centered solely on the text itself, irrespective of the reader, author, or time period; at the other stood the critics who viewed reading as a transactional exchange between reader and text and held both in equal regard. The former theory, called “New Criticism”, was held in high esteem by university professors in the 1940s and 50s, but lost favor to the latter (of which “reader-response” [Rosenblatt, 1938/1995] is the most renowned approach) in the 1960s and beyond (Lehman & Roberts, 2013). The reader-response lens is a reader-centered approach which is grounded in Rosenblatt’s

(1938/1995) transactional theory, which stated that meaning is constructed between the reader and the text. This method for interpreting literature became preferable to the New Critical approach, which fell short for students because as Moore (1997) stated, “the meaning of the text often turns out to be what the teacher says it is” (as cited in Golden & Canan, 2004, p. 42).

The shift toward the prevalence of a personalized approach to reading literature has been beneficial to both students and teachers; students are better able to recognize relevance in their reading in order to construct their own knowledge, and teachers are able to use personal connections to grab students’ attention and hook them into reading new books. In fact, it was these reader-centered approaches that first enticed secondary English teachers to bring literary theory, primarily reserved for university-level courses, into the high school classroom (Appleman, 2009; Igra, 2009).

Yet the reader-centric shift has not been without its drawbacks. The issue lies in the reality that in many secondary classrooms, this reader-centered approach to literature has become the *only* method of analyzing literature, and as it is used now, application of the lens does not require much academic rigor from students (Appleman, 2009; Lehman & Roberts, 2013; Pirie, 1997; Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998). The transaction between reader and text that is so critical to Rosenblatt’s theory has been lost; rather than students’ examining the dialogue between the author’s intent and their personal interpretation in order to create meaning, students have become focused solely on their own personal experiences, devoid of any analytical thinking about the text or the author (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998). Consequently, rather than considering multiple perspectives and diverse

possibilities for interpretation, students are confined to making meaning that is limited and egocentric. As such, rather than teach reader-response as the sole method for interpreting literature, teachers should teach “it as one of a variety of theoretical approaches” (Appleman, 2009, p. 29).

Avenues for expansion. As noted above, encouragement of students’ application of literary theory to broaden interpretation and foster discussion is relatively new to the high school classroom (Appleman, 2009; McCormick, 1995; Pirie, 1997). Still, there are numerous literary lenses that, if taught intentionally, will be accessible to students at the secondary level. Carroll (2006) advocated a particular framework of lenses for adolescents to use when approaching a text: “mirror, microscope, and telescope” (p. 74). The mirror lens is a practical place to start, as it assists students in recognizing themselves and their world in the text. In this way, the lens is derivative of the reader-response theory established by Rosenblatt (1938/1995). The microscope lens is similar to New Criticism in that it helps students zoom in on “the artistic and technical elements of a literary text” (Carroll, 2006, p. 74). Whereas the microscope lens draws students to look closely at the fine details of the text, the telescope lens requires them to pull back and consider the implications of the content of the literature in the world at large. Due to its broad nature, this lens may be useful for fostering deeper thinking about a particular issue or taking action against a social injustice (Carroll, 2006).

While these lenses may serve as a more simplified starting point, Appleman (2009) argued that high school students should be familiarized with the terminology used at the college level, such that they may be better prepared “to respond reflectively and

analytically to literary texts, both ‘canonical’ and multicultural” (p. 11). In addition to the reader-response lens outlined earlier, Appleman provided a framework for other lenses as well: Marxist (also called the social-class lens in order to distinguish it from the Communist connotations of Marxism), gender/feminist, postcolonial, and psychological.

Both the social-class lens and the gender/feminist lens implore readers to consider power and oppression as well as the “prevailing ideologies that construct the social realities in which we participate” (Appleman, 2009, p. 53). Whereas the social-class lens invites readers to look at a text with an eye for injustices brought about by a political, financial, or physical power imbalance, the gender/feminist lens allows readers to observe inequities based on sex and sexuality. Both can also be used to examine how the literature itself is enmeshed in ideological social constructs and serves to reflect or even propagate the dominant culture (Bonnycastle, 1996).

Since “history is almost always written by the victors” (Nehru, 1946), colonialist perspectives (those of “the victor”) are prevalent in much of the literature students encounter in their English classrooms. As a result, the notion that Western culture is “normal” and everything else is not has locked-in American students’ biased preconceptions and bred dangerous stereotypes. To counter this and to promote exploration of multiple perspectives in the classroom, teachers may introduce the postcolonial lens into their students’ repertoire. This lens assists readers in questioning the hegemonic culture and its prized literature (Bonnycastle, 1996) and moves them from a supposedly universalist interpretation of literature (a single, shared view as determined

by the dominant culture) to a plurality of interpretations that consider “political and historical contexts and... cultural identities” (Appleman, 2009, p. 89).

The psychological lens, also called psychoanalytic criticism, views “a work of literature primarily as an expression, in fictional form, of the personality, state of mind, feelings, or desires of its author” (Appleman, 2009, p. 147). In using this lens, readers would study the text for clues into the author’s own thoughts or emotions and use the patterns discovered in the plot, dialogue, or narration to make an informed description of the author’s personality. Alternately, if a great deal is known about the author’s personality through biographical research, readers could use this information “to explain and interpret a literary work” (Appleman, 2009, p. 147). Thus, in using the psychological lens, readers scrutinize a character’s psychology (or that of the author) in order to derive meaning.

Golden and Canan (2004) reiterated these lenses, and included structuralist theory in addition. Structuralists track patterns across several linguistic units or even several texts in order to derive meaning. Based on linguistics, readers applying a structuralist lens examine relationships between words and parts of language in order to recognize how meaning is created. On the small scale, meaning is created when a unit of speech represents a concept (e.g., mom = female parent); meaning can also occur when we recognize what Golden and Canan (2004) called “binary oppositions” (p. 42) which gives something meaning by virtue of its not being something else (e.g., +mom = -dad). On the larger scale, complete works of literature and genres also generate meaning through logical rules, or grammar. For example, in examining Russian fairy tales, Propp (1968, as

cited in Golden & Canan, 2004) “identified thirty-one functions, ‘the recurrent constants of the tale,’ which could be combined to form its typological structure” (p. 43). All of the lenses discussed above require readers to seek out patterns within the text; the elements each lens highlights, however, are different. Teaching students to be adept at using a variety of these lenses will better prepare them to respond analytically to their reading and the world around them (Appleman, 2009; Cella, 2002; Troise, 2007; Wilson, 2014).

This literature reinforced my existing knowledge of literary lenses as well as exposed me to new lenses with which I was unfamiliar. From this, I was able to determine the lenses I would teach students to use as part of my study: social-class, gender/feminist, and psychological.

Teaching Literary Theory to Secondary Students

Here I present evidence which supports using literary lenses with high school students, a relatively new trend in secondary language arts classrooms (Appleman, 2009; McCormick, 1995; Pirie, 1997) Additionally, I consider the best practices for instruction that will inform my study. At the end, I look at how to teach reading through literary lenses and writing literary analyses to struggling readers specifically.

Rationale for teaching students to use literary lenses. “Too few students are likely to have had experiences with critical literacy in high school” (Hall & Piazza, 2010, p. 91). Furthermore, Thomas (2008) lamented that secondary English teachers rarely teach students to employ a greater variety of literary lenses as they read. Rather, teachers either focus on reader-response, as Appleman (2009) pointed out, or on New Criticism, even if we do not realize we are doing so because it has become such a mainstay in our

classes. Relying solely on the text and analyzing such literary components as symbols, imagery, narrative structure, theme, and point of view has done our students a disservice. Our predilection for this focus, according to Thomas (2008), was driven by demand for accountability and adherence to standards. Still, Thomas argued that “infusing our classrooms with confrontational text and expanding students’ literary lenses through critical literacy will *enhance* our obligation to standards and testing, not detract from it” (p. 81).

According to Lehman and Roberts (2013), “Reading for evidence that reveals social issues, power, gender, and so on allows students to begin forming not just ideas, but interpretations of their texts” (p. 30). Whether using the framework of simplified lenses described by Carroll (2006) or the collection of college-level lenses (Appleman, 2009; Golden & Canan, 2004), the lenses push students to create new meaning and construct knowledge, rather than merely find an acceptable answer. Most importantly, they are empowered to consider multiple perspectives and nuanced interpretations of what they read, both in books and in their lives. Appleman (2009) put it best:

We are no longer transmitting knowledge, offering literature as content, as an aesthetic experience, or as neutral artifacts of our collective cultural heritage. Instead, we are offering our students the tools to view the world from a variety of lenses, each offering a unique perspective sure to transform how adolescents read both words and worlds. (p. 11)

While having to consider a text from a perspective that is different from their own may be challenging and uncomfortable for students, learning occurs when their assumptions and ideologies are challenged (Troise, 2007).

Best practices for instruction. Many students have been conditioned to believe that each text holds one correct meaning (Burdan, 2004; Cella, 2002; Troise, 2007; Wilson, 2014). Though that meaning may be complex, students assume it is singular. To begin to assist students in recognizing the multiple interpretations a single text has to offer, teachers should scaffold their instruction in literary lenses (Burdan, 2004; Golden & Canan, 2004; Troise, 2007; Wilson, 2014). A synthesis of best practices suggests starting by familiarizing students with the reader-response lens (Appleman, 2009; Burdan, 2004), engaging them in an activity which helps them to physically see how lenses alter our focus (Wilson, 2014), introducing the terminology, definitions, and essential questions of the literary lenses using a short story or fairy tale (Golden & Canan, 2004; Troise, 2007), and finally, applying the lenses to larger texts or novels and writing about them from each perspective (Cella, 2002). An elaboration on these best practices is detailed below.

Due to its accessibility and students' general familiarity with the concept, if not the formal process, reader-response is a practical place to begin (Appleman, 2009; Burdan, 2004). Students first need to realize that they are capable of constructing meaning and that that meaning can be unique to their transaction with the text. Yet, reader-response is not a free for all: "As teachers, we need to have students express their responses to and ideas about literature within the context of literary conventions"

(Burdan, 2004, p. 24). Students should view themselves as both an “actual audience”, wherein they fully immerse themselves in the text as a pleasurable experience, and as an “authorial audience”, wherein they “comprehend the text as a construct, and... have the historical, cultural, and aesthetic knowledge to ‘get’ what the author is trying to say” (Burdan, 2004, p. 24). Teachers should gradually guide students away from a “correct” meaning of the text to their own creative interpretations (Hall & Piazza, 2010). When students share their unique interpretation with peers, they should come to recognize that there are multiple ways to make meaning of their reading, which provides a natural segue into introducing the concept of literary lenses.

First, Wilson (2014) suggested that a concrete way to help students realize that they can use lenses to uncover patterns and meaning, a teacher should generate “lists of words that relate to two pairs of related themes” (p. 71). Each theme is then assigned a colored marker. The teacher writes all the words on a whiteboard in a discombobulated mess, with each word written using the colored marker pertaining to the word’s theme.

An example created by Wilson (2014) is presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3

List of Words Related to Themes and Assigned Colors

Nature		Society/culture	
Peace	Violence	Religion	Class
Pebble, breeze, babbling, puppy, brook, moonlight, waterfall, butterfly, etc.	Tornado, wolf, cliff, lightning, shark, swarm, drought, earthquake, etc.	Pray, parable, congregation, chastity, litany, collar, meditate, vow, praise, verse, sanctuary, etc.	Aristocracy, vote, master, servant, pay, peasant, poor, feudalism, slave, power, respect, etc.
Green	Blue	Red	Pink

Next, have students look over the whiteboard for three minutes and tell them to note any observations. Then, distribute red and blue transparent films to each student and ask them to spend five minutes viewing the words on the whiteboard through each lens, documenting new observations. The red lens will draw attention to the blue and green words, whereas the blue lens will draw attention to the red and pink words. Students may begin to realize that the words that are best visible through a certain lens are related to a theme. After five minutes, ask students to again look at the whiteboard, this time without the aid of the transparent film, and again note their observations. At this point, students may recognize that within a common theme there are more refined subtopics. At the conclusion of this activity, have students share how their observations shifted during each phase of the activity. This activity “offers a schema to which students can attach subsequent concepts and skills related to the complexities of critical literacy” (Wilson, 2014, p. 72).

After this discussion, teachers should transition to introducing literary lenses, which, when applied successfully, help particular aspects jump out of an otherwise muddled text of a novel (Wilson, 2014). In addition to familiarizing students with the terminology, definitions, and essential questions of each lens, Golden and Canan (2004) and Troise (2007) suggested using a fairy tale to get students thinking from different perspectives. While these authors used “Snow White” and “Little Red Riding Hood”, respectively, any classic fairy tale or short story could work for this exploratory activity. First, the teacher should read the tale aloud. Then, armed with their notes on the lenses, students should be arranged in groups and assigned a particular lens that they then apply

to the story. Ultimately, they should present their findings to the class, which will then discuss their observations and how they arrived at their conclusions (Golden & Canan, 2004).

To get students out of the mindset of searching for the theme of a text and instead recognizing that multiple interpretations can be correct, Cella (2002) suggested providing a list of possible themes for them. The themes should be dichotomous and pertain to the novel to be read, as they were in the activity proposed by Wilson (2014) above. For the play *The Crucible* (Miller, 1953/2003), this list might include: honesty vs. deceit; forgiveness vs. revenge; good vs. evil; mortal justice vs. eternal justice. Teachers should discuss these words with their students and generate examples. As students begin reading with these themes in mind, remind them to maintain an open mind, moving “away from ‘either/or’ thinking about this novel and toward ‘both/and’ thinking” (Cella, 2002, p. 79). Next, students should read one passage from the text, such as the first chapter or two and respond in writing to a teacher-created prompt about the passage. The prompt should require students to choose a lens and tell concisely what that lens reveals about a character or event in that passage. As students share, they will begin to see how various lenses shape interpretations of characters and the story as a whole. Such an activity lays the groundwork for a methodical system for reading and discussing texts (Appleman, 2009; Burdan, 2004; Cella, 2002; Hall & Piazza, 2010). All of these strategies support students in beginning to read through literary lenses and develop a strong understanding of the text. Armed with this knowledge, they will then be prepared to write analytically about their reading.

Teaching literary lenses to struggling readers. Teaching struggling readers to interpret texts through literary lenses is supported by research. Allington (2013) referenced Knapp (1995) in acknowledging that “when classroom reading lessons for struggling readers are meaning focused, struggling readers improve more than when lessons are skills focused” (p. 528). This supports the incorporation of literary lenses into the classroom, which is entirely centered on students making meaning of their reading.

For all students who struggle with reading, it is important that their teachers help them with comprehension. According to Wittrock (1990), students comprehend a text by actively creating meaning. They do this by connecting the text to themselves, examining the elements of the text to better understand it, and extending the ideas in their reading to larger issues in the world (Graham & Hebert, 2010, p. 13). These three means of interacting with a text are referred to as the “mirror, microscope, and telescope” (Carroll, 2006, p. 74). Carroll and Hasson (2004) offered one method as an alternative place to start working with literary lenses with a population of struggling readers. They recommend using the mirror lens *before* reading in order to explore their own thoughts about the themes that will emerge in the story; they next advocate using the microscope lens *during* reading so they may become more familiar with particular components of literature; finally, they suggest using the telescope lens *after* reading to think critically about how the issues in the text have relevance in the world at large. As this blends the reader-response (mirror) and New Critical (microscope) approaches, it may be practical to begin here with students before introducing the more formal literary lenses. Such

practice is important as it “welcomes all students to the literary community of the classroom” (Carroll & Hasson, 2004, p. 26).

Ultimately, Allington (2013) stated that if our struggling readers are to improve, it is imperative that teachers hold them to a high standard, engaging them in the work that our better readers are asked to do. This literature validated the propriety of my research; struggling readers should indeed be challenged and involved in the same coursework as strong readers. The best practices gleaned from my research in this section also informed the methods of my own study, which will be explicated in chapter three.

From Reading to Argument Writing

Supporting students in deepening their reading through literary lenses is a practical place to start, and writing about their reading is a logical next step. According to Graham and Hebert (2010), “Students’ comprehension of... language arts texts is improved when they write about what they read, specifically when they respond to a text in writing” (p. 11). In fact, “Newell et al. (2011) suggested that integrating reading and writing instruction for argumentation will enhance the quality of both because students’ arguments are influenced by the texts they read before writing” (as cited in Read, Landon-Hays, & Martin-Rivas, 2014, p. 471). Most relevant to this study, Graham and Hebert (2010) noted that writing about their reading is beneficial for lower-achieving students (p. 13). In this section, I discuss how writing instruction can be scaffolded to help guide students from *finding* meaning to *constructing* meaning as they write literary analysis arguments. I also describe how to objectively assess student writing with rubrics.

Student writing as it is now: Finding meaning. Many students have been conditioned to believe that the author has hidden one correct meaning in the text for them to find (Troise, 2007). As a result, students are missing an opportunity for deeper thinking. If a student was to read *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925/2004) and write an interpretive analytical paper about it, a typical thesis he or she might generate is some variation of “The green light is a symbol of Gatsby’s unattainable dream and the American Dream in general.” The problem with such an argument is not that it is *wrong* but that it is essentially *right* – most scholars would agree that the green light is as straightforward a symbol as they come – and therefore makes for a rather blasé argument. In part, we can thank online resources like SparkNotes and Shmoop for this phenomenon of unoriginal thought. Sites like these are grounded in the principles of New Criticism, focusing on within-text aspects of particular novels such as theme, symbols, motifs, and form. While they purport to be “a resource you can turn to when you're confuzzled” (About SparkNotes, 2016) because “learning is often too hard” (About Shmoop, 2016), they unfortunately serve only to reduce complex novels to simple summaries and paper-thin analyses. Lacking better tools for accessing challenging texts, students turn to such sites for clarification, but end up, as Troise (2007) stated, “thinking that meaning is closed, singular, static, and *findable*” (p. 85).

Reader-response has become a means to combat this reductive means of writing about a text; unlike the information provided on homework help sites, meaning generated via reader-response is inherently open-ended, plural, dynamic, and experiential. According to Peterson (1982), reader-response is motivated by the idea that “the most

fruitful study of literature arises from the desire to *make* or *compose* meanings and not from the desire to *discover* meanings in the words of the text” (as cited in Hamilton-Johnson, 1997, p. 16). It may seem that reader-response, then, is the key to generating students’ best, most original interpretive analytical writing. But reader-response is in its own way reductive, in that it is egocentric. Peterson (1982) suggested that one way to overcome this is to have students share their reader-responses in small peer groups such that they may realize “the limitations of ego-centered or self-consuming thought” (as cited in Hamilton-Johnson, 1997, p. 16). While reader-response may be a good launching pad in that it requires students to create their own meaning about the reading rather than “find” it in the text, other approaches may be more apt to assisting students in generating sophisticated interpretations of literature.

Student writing as it should be: Constructing meaning. Rather than having students *find* meaning, teachers should guide them in *constructing* meaning, as doing so deepens understanding. To accomplish this, reading and writing are two skills that can and should instead be taught in coordination with one another (Read, Landon-Hays, & Martin-Rivas, 2014). Furthermore, scaffolded instruction should “[take] advantage of the reciprocal nature of the reading and writing processes” (Read, Landon-Hayes, & Martin-Rivas, 2014, p. 476). Troise (2007) studied how teaching students literary theories supported her students in writing arguments about literature that “were more original, varied, and interesting than those [she] had typically read in previous years” (p. 86). Through their use of literary lenses and writing about the same piece of literature from multiple perspectives, students come to see that a single novel can be interpreted a variety

of ways. The key is that students must understand that a successfully argued interpretation of a text cannot be built on gut feelings; rather, it needs to be “supportable” (Hamilton-Johnson, 1997, p. 15). Ferlazzo and Hull-Sypniewski (2014), like Lehman and Roberts (2013), note the importance of gathering and examining evidence through close reading *before* making claims. Thus, to ensure their arguments are supportable, as students use the literary lenses to read their novels, they should keep track of evidence that may relate to each lens. From this collected evidence, they should then seek to tease out patterns in features of the text as they pertain to the lens (Carroll, 2006; Lehman & Roberts, 2013), for these details will lead to meaningful understanding only when the reader recognizes relationships weaving these details together (Barnhouse & Vinton, 2012).

Teaching argument writing. When students write analytically about their interpretation of the reading through a particular literary lens, they do so by constructing arguments and supporting them with evidence. Johnson and Krase (2009) pointed out that “‘argument’ is something of a loaded word” (p. 130) but has come to be defined differently in modern educational practice. Today, writing an argument has more to do with constructing a reasonable position than fighting to win a dispute. In fact, the Common Core Standards emphasize this in the first writing standard for grades 9-10; students should be able to “Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence” (English Language Arts Standards, 2017). When we teach students to write an argument, rather than helping them defend the *best* stance on a given topic, we are helping them to

draw a rational conclusion based on evidence and then “develop, extend, and refine their positions” (Johnson & Krase, 2009, p. 131).

While there are a number of models of argument which writers may employ, the most beneficial model for writing about literature is the Toulmin Model of Argument (Johnson & Krase, 2009, p. 134). In this model, the writer begins with a claim, or main point and backs it up with evidence. When it comes to writing about literature, the evidence comes in the form of examples from the text. Graham and Hebert (2010) asserted that writing about texts is a meaningful activity for struggling readers, but only when they are explicitly taught to how to do so (p. 13). When helping students to craft arguments, teachers should teach them to write claims that are “conspicuous, arguable, clear, and concise” (Johnson & Krase, 2009, p. 145). To be conspicuous means that their claim or thesis is written explicitly and placed in an obvious location within their writing. To be arguable, students must take a definite stand, even though - and perhaps especially if - others may oppose their argument. Finally, to be clear and concise, the claim should be brief and use language with precision; teachers will need to teach students to write with “clear subject-verb patterns” (Johnson & Krase, 2009, p. 146).

As students begin writing, to help them assess the quality of their evidence, Fulkerson (1996) suggested evaluating their evidence against the STAR criteria. STAR is an acronym; “to support a claim, a writer should offer a **S**ufficient number of **T**ypical, **A**ccurate, and **R**elevant examples” (Johnson & Krase, 2009, p. 148-149). Teachers should show their students how to determine if their claims are backed by evidence that meets the STAR criteria; if their evidence passes this test, their claim is likely a strong

one. This process of using evidence to craft a claim allows students to “return to the text to develop a clearer understanding” (Lehman & Roberts, 2013, p. 27). Ultimately, careful, explicit writing instruction has been shown to positively impact reading comprehension (Graham & Hebert, 2010, p. 18), and that is our goal for the students in my American Voices class.

Assessment of learning. Rubrics are an effective means for conveying expectations clearly and concisely to students and parents and eliciting quality work from students (Ross-Fisher, 2005; Saddler & Andrade, 2004). Such rubrics are most effective when they are distributed to students prior to writing, so that they may check their own work against the expectations delineated in the rubric (Saddler & Andrade, 2004). According to Ross-Fisher (2005), an effective “success rubric” includes a prompt, criteria categories, levels of success, quality indicators, and appropriate language (see Appendix A). They should also be error-free and have visual appeal. At the top of a quality rubric should be a prompt that is clearly worded and specific. One axis of the rubric should have criteria categories, which “‘chunk’ together specific components of the prompt” (p. 132), while the other axis should be segmented into levels of success, which are numbered or titled appropriately for the given grade level. Quality indicators are written, often from the perspective of the student, at the intersection of each criteria category and level of success. “Quality indicators provide specific details about what is expected in each of the criteria categories” and should be written in specific, often numerical terms to avoid ambiguity (p. 133). Making rubrics with a consistent organization will help students to develop confidence with them, and as teachers become more proficient at developing

rubrics, they should expect to see improvement in the quality of their students' work (Ross-Fisher, 2005). Finally, rubrics are valuable for students in that they "can provide the scaffolding that students need to become self-regulated writers" (Saddler & Andrade, 2004, p. 49). This scaffolding will be especially important when working with struggling readers.

Conclusion

Reading and writing achievement are inextricably linked (Applebee & Langer, 2009), and literary lenses lend themselves as the foundation for students to examine texts closely in order to develop a written literary analysis. Though once thought too difficult for high school students to learn, as literary theory has been making its way into secondary classrooms, students are proving themselves capable. Regardless of which lens for interpreting literature is used, the goal is that it sparks students' thoughtful, creative, critical interpretations of their reading. Now, when students write about reading, they tend to search the text for the "right" answer or seek evidence to backup claims they have already made. Instead, the literary lenses offer an opportunity for students to collect evidence as they read, which they can then study carefully, seeking out patterns which will inform more thoughtful arguments. Evidence shows that while struggling readers and ELLs will need scaffolded support to achieve high standards, engaging them in the same work we expect our better readers to do is essential to helping them improve (Allington, 2013). My research question, *How does teaching high school students to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of students' arguments?* will explore how shifting students' process (from making a claim prior to gathering evidence to gathering

the evidence prior to making a claim) impacts their ability to write and support arguments. In chapter three, I provide background on the the research methods I used to conduct my research.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Overview

Literary lenses are tools which assist a reader in interpreting and understanding a text through multiple perspectives; each lens will draw the reader's attention to different aspects of the text (Appleman, 2009; Carroll, 2006). Teaching students to apply literary lenses to enhance their reading and writing is relatively new to the high school classroom (Appleman, 2009; McCormick, 1995; Pirie, 1997). Yet, if taught intentionally, literary lenses will not only be accessible to students at the secondary level but make texts they are reading more accessible as well (Appleman, 2009; Cella, 2002; Troise, 2007; Wilson, 2014). With this in mind, my research sought to determine an answer to the question: *How does teaching high school students to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of students' arguments?* Chapter three details the research methods I used to answer this question in the context of my American Voices class. First, I explain my research paradigm and the rationale for my research method. Next, I provide background on the setting and participants of my study. Last, I describe instructional procedures as well as specific data collection methods and tools I used.

Research Paradigm

The research paradigm I used was a mixed methods approach, which used both

quantitative and qualitative data in order to draw conclusions and answer my research question. I selected this paradigm because it allowed me to triangulate my data so that I could more fully understand the results of my implemented curriculum (Mills, 2014, p. 104). According to Creswell (2014), mixed methods research can work by “explaining quantitative results with a qualitative follow-up data collection and analysis” (p. 218). Thus, with a mixed methods approach, I was able to collect not only achievement data (scores or grades on assessment rubrics) but student survey data as well, which clarified the reasoning for students’ results. Furthermore, the mixed methods approach supported me in “having a better understanding the need for an impact of an intervention program through collecting both quantitative and qualitative data over time” (Creswell, 2014, p. 218). Thus, the mixed methods approach provided me with the best format to collect a variety of evidence, which I then interpreted to best answer my research question.

Research Method

I have always been a very pragmatic person — I seek out practical solutions rather than theoretical ideas — so it makes sense that my research method would be inspired by the pragmatic worldview. Pragmatism is concerned “with applications — what works — and solutions to problems” (Creswell, 2014, p. 10). Furthermore, Creswell (2014) explained that “[T]ruth is what works at the time” (p. 11). Pragmatism, in considering the importance of context to understanding a research problem and results, permitted me to focus on the here and now, rather than on proving the universal applicability of my procedure. Since my intention for my research was not to determine if literary lenses would work for every student in every classroom, but rather if they would

work in this particular environment, pragmatism was a ‘pragmatic’ choice for my research method.

Setting and Participants

My study took place in a suburban school district outside of the Twin Cities. The district has a total enrollment of approximately 6,700 students. My study took place at the district’s high school, which has an approximate population of 1,500 students in grades ten through twelve. The high school employs approximately 110 faculty, including 85 teaching staff (97.4% white). District-wide, 26.8% of students receive Free/Reduced Price Lunch and 13.2% receive Special Education Services. Student demographic breakdown in the district is:

- 91.8% White,
- 3.11% Asian/Pacific Islander,
- 2.41% Hispanic/Latino,
- 1.81% African American, and
- 0.89% American Indian/Alaskan Native.

Within this broader context, my study included 18 student participants, aged 15 to 18 years old. Fifteen were male and three were female. The group included seven students who received Special Education services and one who was a foreign exchange student and thus an English Language Learner. All 18 were enrolled in my year-long, co-taught course called American Voices. The course operated as a modified version of the tenth grade required course, American Literature. Most of the students were placed in the course because they have difficulty with reading. Four were placed here after failing

American Literature. The group was comprised of 14 sophomores, two juniors, and two seniors. Due to the small class size and because it was co-taught, students received more individualized and structured support with reading. This particular class met for 51 minutes every day of the week (except for Wednesdays, when the period was only 46 minutes long).

Methods

I conducted my research during the spring semester of the 2016-2017 school year. In order to determine the impact of using literary lenses on students' analytical writing, I collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The preliminary data was collected prior to teaching students about the literary lenses and the follow-up data was collected after teaching students how to read through the lenses.

Institutional Review Board requirements. To ensure ethical research, data collection, and privacy, I obtained consent from the Hamline University Institutional Review Board. Upon receiving approval to conduct my research from these committees, my building principal, and my district's curriculum coordinator, I sent letters of consent to parents and guardians of the students in my American Voices class. The letter described my research, assured all parties of anonymity and confidentiality, detailed the risks of participation in the study, and asked for a signature of consent. This letter is available for review in (see Appendix B).

Instructional procedures. In the first unit, students were assigned a character from Hansberry's (1959/1997) play *A Raisin in the Sun*. They were charged with answering the concrete question: 'Why does [character] do what they do?' As they read,

they periodically met with peers who were examining the same character so they could document salient moments in that character's story — things they said or did, or things that were said or done to them — in preparation to write about what may have influenced a change in their character's behavior or thinking. I simultaneously modeled this process using a different character so students may be able to see what kind of details they should be picking up on (Read, Landon-Hayes, & Martin-Rivas, 2014).

Students again met with their peer group to examine the collected evidence and look for patterns in their character's behavior and what may be prompting such actions (Ferlazzo & Hull-Sypniewski, 2014; Lehman & Roberts, 2013). Based on their evidence, they then generated argumentative thesis statements to answer the given question using this format: '[Character] does [blank] because [blank].' They then wrote a short paper which argued this thesis. Students were provided with a rubric by which their writing would be assessed. As they drafted, I modeled outlining and writing a paragraph using a sample thesis based on the character I had used to model this process. I also taught students to use the Toulmin Model of Argument and STAR criteria for evaluating their evidence (Johnson & Krase, 2009). When students submitted their papers, I assessed their writing against the provided rubric (see Appendix A). This rubric was an appropriate evaluation tool, as a rubric is an assessment method that has been proven effective (Ross-Fisher, 2005; Saddler & Andrade, 2004). These results then served as a baseline by which to judge their writing quality.

At the conclusion of the unit, students self-assessed their writing against the rubric and then completed a short survey (see Appendix C). This survey (tied to their

name) focused on their own self-concept as a reader and writer as well as on what they felt was beneficial about the reading and writing process we just went through and what they felt was not. Teacher and co-teacher observations were also collected (see Appendix D).

Next, I introduced three literary lenses, for Golden and Canan (2004) recommended that a novel that will be discussed in terms of the lenses “should be finished before the theories are introduced” (p. 46). The lenses taught included social-class, gender/feminist, and psychological. Once they had a basic understanding of the lenses, I tasked students with relating their own thesis statements to one of the literary lenses, which they then discussed with their peer group. As they revisited their own thesis statements and papers, with peer and teacher support, they began to see how they were already on their way to using literary lenses to interpret their reading.

In the second unit, students were then assigned one of the three taught lenses to apply as they read the novel *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald (1925/2004). As they read, they documented details that pertained to the given lens and periodically shared those details with a group of peers who were reading with the same focus. As they read the novel, I reminded students of the importance of documenting examples in the text that answer the lens’s essential questions and then seeking out patterns from this evidence *before* making argument (Ferlazzo & Hull-Sypniewski, 2014; Lehman & Roberts, 2013). I modeled how to hone in on key details that pertained to each lens, but more responsibility for collecting relevant details fell to the students this time around (Read, Landon-Hayes, & Martin-Rivas, 2014).

At the conclusion of their reading, students met with the group of peers who used the same lens to examine their collected evidence for patterns, which they then used to generate a thesis statement using this template: ‘When viewed through the [social-class, gender/feminist, psychological] lens, the reader will notice _____.’ Students then began drafting a literary analysis paper, providing support and analysis that could prove their thesis statement. Students were again instructed on the Toulmin Model of Argument and the process for assessing their evidence against the STAR criteria (Johnson & Krase, 2009). As before, students were provided with the same rubric by which their papers would be assessed (see Appendix A). The same rubric was used in order to ascertain growth.

Again, when they submitted their papers, students self-assessed their writing against the rubric and completed the self-concept and reflection survey (see Appendix C). Similar to at the end of the first unit, this survey was tied to their name and asked them about their self-concept as a reader and writer and prompted them to reflect on how using literary lenses impacted their learning, reading, and writing. Additionally, this survey asked them to answer a variant of my research question: How did learning to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of your argument? Teacher and co-teacher observations were also taken into account (see Appendix D). All of the above data collection methods were interpreted in order to determine the impact of using literary lenses with this group of students.

Quantitative methods. Quantitative data can be measured numerically. The quantitative methods I used to conduct my research included two identical rubrics: one

students used to self-assess their own writing at the time of submission and one I used to assess their writing. Both are described here.

Student self-assessment rubric. When each writing assignment was introduced, students were also provided with a rubric detailing the expectations they had to meet in order to earn a certain grade (see Appendix A). Students self-assessed themselves against the rubric each time they submitted their written argument. I used this data to track how students felt about their own writing. This was useful for me in understanding how their own view of their performance changed after instruction.

Teacher assessment rubric. Identical to the student self-assessment rubric, this rubric is what I used to evaluate students' writing (see Appendix A). In addition to using this rubric as an assessment tool, I also used it to better understand the effectiveness of my teaching. I used this common rubric to assess two pieces of argumentative writing: one written prior to instruction and one written after instruction. In comparing the rubric results, I examined changes in the quality of individual students' writing from the first paper to the second. I also averaged all students' scores on the first paper and compared those with the average of all students' scores on the second paper. I used this data to track how individual student performance changed after instruction, as well as how the instruction impacted the class as a whole.

Qualitative methods. Unlike quantitative data, qualitative data can not be easily put into numbers. Rather, this kind of data is more open-ended and often has to do with participants' reflections and the researcher's observation. In order to more fully understand the quantitative results, I also employed qualitative methods in my research. I

used two qualitative data collection methods: student self-concept and reflection surveys and teacher and co-teacher observations. I describe each here.

Student self-concept and reflection survey. At the conclusion of each unit, after submitting their writing, students completed a survey which focused on their own self-concept as a reader and writer as well as their own feelings about the reading and writing process (see Appendix C). This was tied to the students' names, so that connections could be made between an individual student's rubric results and his or her own beliefs about him or herself as a reader and writer. To ensure honesty, the survey included a disclaimer that their answers would have no impact, positively or negatively, on their grade. The data collected provided insight into what aspects of instruction in the reading and writing process students found meaningful and what they still struggled with. This survey was administered through Google Forms.

Teacher and co-teacher observations. Recognizing the value in having two adult observers in the room, I asked my co-teacher, Laurie, to maintain a separate observation journal while I maintained my own. We each kept an observation log that we wrote in weekly. This log contained the week's goal and learning activities, observations, student comments, results, and our own reflections on what is working and what needs improvement (see Appendix D). We met weekly to share our logs with each other in order to compare our observations and reflections and refine our teaching.

Conclusion

In chapter three, I discussed the mixed methods approach and pragmatic worldview that shaped my study. I outlined the setting and general school population, as

well as the demographics of the specific participants of my study. I discussed the procedure for my study as well as the tools I used for assessment and how they were analyzed in order to answer my research question, *How does teaching high school students to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of students' arguments?* In chapter four, I detail the results of my research study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Overview

The goal of this study was to determine whether teaching high school students to apply literary lenses to enhance their reading would have an impact on the quality of their written arguments. Literary lenses are tools which assist readers in interpreting and understanding a text through multiple, nuanced perspectives. Each lens draws the reader's attention to particular aspects of the text in order to help them glean unique meaning (Appleman, 2009; Carroll, 2006). Though a relatively new endeavor in the high school language arts classroom (Appleman, 2009; McCormick, 1995; Pirie, 1997), using literary lenses can make otherwise difficult texts more accessible to secondary readers (Appleman, 2009; Cella, 2002; Troise, 2007; Wilson, 2014). Curious to see whether this newfound accessibility would translate into students' creation of more compelling written arguments, my research sought to answer the question: *How does teaching high school students to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of students' arguments?* Chapter four first provides an overview of my study and participants. I then present the various data collected over the course of my study through both quantitative and qualitative means, including student self-assessment rubrics, teacher assessment rubrics, student self-concept and reflection surveys, and teacher and co-teacher observation

journals. I then analyze and interpret this data, seeking out patterns from the collected evidence and drawing connections to my literature review. Ultimately, I conclude by summarizing my data and interpretations in order to answer my research question.

The Study

My study took place in the high school of a suburban school district outside of the Twin Cities. The school has an approximate population of 1,500 students in grades ten through twelve; 18 of these students participated in my study. All 18 students (15 boys and three girls) were enrolled in my year-long, co-taught course called American Voices. The course operated as a modified version of the tenth grade required course, American Literature. Most of the students were placed in the course because they have difficulty with reading. Four were placed here after failing American Literature. The cohort was comprised of 14 sophomores, two juniors, and two seniors. Seven were enrolled in special education and one was a foreign exchange student and therefore considered an English Language Learner. Due to the small class size and because it was co-taught, students received more individualized and structured support with reading. This particular class met for 51 minutes every day of the week (except for Wednesdays, when the period was only 46 minutes long).

My research spanned two units of study. In the first unit, students were assigned a character from Hansberry's (1959/1997) play *A Raisin in the Sun*. They were charged with collecting evidence and examining that evidence for patterns in order to answer the concrete question: 'Why does [character] do what they do?' (Ferlazzo & Hull-Sypniewski, 2014; Lehman & Roberts, 2013). Based on their evidence, they then generated

argumentative thesis statements to answer the given question using this format:

‘[Character] does [blank] because [blank].’ They then wrote a short paper which argued this thesis.

Next, I introduced three literary lenses: social-class, gender/feminist, and psychological. In the second unit, students were then assigned one of the three taught lenses to apply as they read the novel *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald (1925/2004). As they read, they again documented details that pertained to the given lens and then sought out patterns from this evidence *before* making argument (Ferlazzo & Hull-Sypnieski, 2014; Lehman & Roberts, 2013). This time around, more responsibility for collecting relevant details fell to the students (Read, Landon-Hayes, & Martin-Rivas, 2014).

At the conclusion of their reading, students generated a thesis statement using this template: ‘When viewed through the [social-class, gender/feminist, psychological] lens, the reader will notice _____.’ Students then began drafting a literary analysis paper, providing support and analysis that could prove their thesis statement. Throughout my study, I used a mixed methods approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data in order to draw conclusions and answer my research question. These tools and their results are described in detail in the subsequent sections.

Student Self-Assessment Rubric and Teacher Assessment Rubric

In order to both qualitatively and quantitatively gather data, my research included two identical rubrics: one students used to self-assess their own writing at the time of submission and one I used to assess their writing (see Appendix A). Each set of rubrics was used twice, once at the conclusion of Unit 1 (prior to instruction on the use of literary

lenses) and again at the conclusion of Unit 2. When each paper assignment was introduced, students received a copy of the self-assessment rubric. When submitting their final papers at the end of each unit, students attached the self-assessment rubric, having assessed three components of their own writing: the thesis, support, and analysis. I then assessed their papers using the same rubric in order to determine a final grade for the assignment.

Results. The data outlined in this section tracks how student performance changed after instruction, beginning with a sampling of thesis statements students wrote for each unit and the resulting scores from the assessment rubrics.

Table 4

Selected Student Thesis Statements (Unit 1)

Unit 1 Thesis Rating (Number of Students)	Sample Statements Written by Students
Exemplary (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Walter does what he does because he believes that money is the key factor in determining a person's worth. ● Beneatha does what she does because she wants to be independent and doesn't want to rely on Mama or Walter.
Exceeds Standard (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Walter does what he does because he is driven by money and is trying to make his dream come true. ● Beneatha does what she does because she wants to develop herself as a person.
Meets Standard (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Walter does what he does because he wants to support his family. ● Beneatha does what she does because she doesn't believe in God.
Partially Meets Standard (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Walter does what he does because he is greedy. ● Beneatha does what she does because she is flighty.

Table 5

Selected Student Thesis Statements (Unit 2)

Unit 2 Thesis Rating (Number of Students)	Sample Statements Written by Students
Exemplary (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When viewed through the psychological lens, Nick doesn't see himself as important as everyone else. ● When viewed through the gender/feminist lens, Daisy appears to be a "nice girl" and she manipulates Tom with that.
Exceeds Standard (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When viewed through the social class lens, Tom wins over Daisy from Gatsby because Tom is guaranteed wealth and security for a lifetime. ● When viewed through the social class lens, Tom feels self-conscious around Nick so he tries to act more manly than him through his strength, social status, and wealth.
Meets Standard (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When viewed through the psychological lens, Daisy only cares about money and herself, resulting in Gatsby's downfall and tragic death. ● When viewed through the social class lens, Tom thinks he can treat Daisy and other people poorly just because of his wealth.
Partially Meets Standard (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When viewed through the social class lens, based on the poverty that Gatsby grew up with, he was willing to do whatever it took to be rich. ● When viewed through the social class lens, all the money in the world would not make Jay Gatsby happy for he lived to love Daisy and died without her love.

The tables above indicate that the variety in quality of students' thesis statements remained wide from Unit 1 to Unit 2. The exemplary theses were insightful, unique, and drove the analysis throughout the paper. The theses that exceeded standard were effective, thoughtful, and connected to the analysis. The theses that met standard were

adequate and maintained a stance throughout the paper. The theses that partially met standard either did not have a clear stance or connect clearly to the analysis. The following tables present the breakdown of scores quantitatively in order to better understand the impact of instruction on results, which I will then interpret in the following section.

Table 6

Student Self-Assessment Rubric Data

	Unit 1 Assignment		Unit 2 Assignment	
	Score (out of 5)	As Percentage	Score (out of 5)	As Percentage
Thesis	3.56	71.2%	3.61	72.2%
Support	3.28	65.6%	3.61	72.2%
Analysis	3.17	63.4%	3.17	63.4%
Composite	10.01	66.7%	10.39	69.3%

Table 7

Teacher Assessment Rubric Data

	Unit 1 Assignment		Unit 2 Assignment	
	Score (out of 5)	As Percentage	Score (out of 5)	As Percentage
Thesis	3.61	72.2%	3.39	67.8%
Support	3.28	65.6%	3.33	66.6%
Analysis	3.00	60.0%	3.06	61.2%
Composite	9.89	65.9%	9.78	65.2%

As evidenced by Tables 6 and 7 above, students' self-assessment of each component on the rubric resulted in a range of scores between 1% under and 5.6% over my own

assessment of their work. Both composite scores as self-assessed by the students averaged higher than my own assessment; on the first paper, students' self-assessment composite score was .12 points higher than my assessment (0.8%) and on the second paper, students' self-assessment composite score was .61 points higher than my assessment (4.1%). Table 8 below presents the change in the quality of students' work from the Unit 1 assignment to the Unit 2 assignment as assessed using the teacher's rubric.

Table 8

Average Change in Assessment Results from Assessment 1 to 2

Component	Change in Points		Change as Percentage	
	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student
Thesis	-0.22	+0.05	-4.4%	+1.0%
Support	+0.05	+0.33	+1.0%	+6.6%
Analysis	+0.06	+0.00	+1.2%	+0.0%
Composite	-0.11	+0.38	-0.7%	+3.8%

On average, students showed slight improvement on the support and analysis components on the Unit 2 assignment. However, a greater decline in the quality of their thesis statements resulted in a lower average composite score on the Unit 2 assignment. Table 9 on the next page looks at the results of the teacher assessment rubric on a student-by-student basis, delineating the percentage of students whose scores improved, stayed the same, or declined from the first assignment to the second.

Table 9

Student-by-Student Score Comparison from Assessment 1 to 2

Component	Percentage of Students Earning Higher Score	Percentage of Students Earning Same Score	Percentage of Students Earning Lower Score
Thesis	16.7%	38.9%	44.4%
Support	22.2%	44.4%	33.3%
Analysis	27.8%	44.4%	27.8%
Composite	33.3%	16.7%	50.0%

Table 9 indicates that the largest portion of students (44.4%) earned a lower score for their thesis statement on the second assessment than they had on the first. Additionally, the largest portion of students (again 44.4% on both components) earned the same score for their support and analysis on the second assessment as they had on the first. Finally, the largest portion of students (50.0%) earned a lower composite score on the second assignment than they had on the first.

Interpretation. When comparing students' self-assessment rubrics with the teacher assessment rubric, students are fairly adept at estimating the quality of their own work. On each component and the composite score, students assessed their work to within 5.6% of my assessment (see Tables 6 & 7). Their proximity to my own assessment indicates that the success rubric is an effective means of setting clear expectations for students and an appropriate tool for assessment of written work. As a group, they did have a tendency to slightly overestimate their success level, especially on the Unit 2 assignment. This may indicate that students had developed a higher confidence in their

own ability to argue, support, and analyze a thesis, even if the overall quality of their work did not improve.

Despite the change in instruction, students generally did not improve the quality of their thesis statements, support, or analysis from the first assignment to the second. On the second assignment, as many or more students earned a lower score on each component as earned a higher score (see Table 9). When considering the thesis statements in particular, there may be a few reasons for the 4.4% downward shift in scores (see Table 8). One may be the fact that *A Raisin in the Sun* (Hansberry, 1959/1997) is a much more straightforward text as compared to *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925/2004), which is riddled with nuance, requiring students to understand symbolism and rely on inference. Furthermore, the thesis statement framework using literary lenses in Unit 2 ('When viewed through the [social-class, gender/feminist, psychological] lens, the reader will notice _____.') was far broader than that used in Unit 1, which was concrete ('[Character] does [blank] because [blank].'). The increased textual rigor combined with the more abstract thesis statement framework may have contributed to the average decline in the quality of students' thesis statements.

Still, the overall change, positive or negative, was arguably negligible. As shown in Table 8, the change in students' scores on each component of the rubric ranged from -4.4% to +1.2%. This ultimately resulted in a composite score on the second assignment that was a mere 0.7% lower than that of the first assignment (65.2% and 65.9%, respectively). Next, I will examine other data collected as a part of my research.

Student Self-Concept and Reflection Surveys

To complement the self-assessment and teacher assessment rubrics, one qualitative method of data collection involved two student self-concept and reflection surveys (see Appendix C). These were administered through Google Forms at the conclusion of each unit. The surveys primarily listed a collection of statements pertaining to students' self-concept as a reader and writer as well as the reading and writing process we used in each unit. Students recorded their own reactions to these statements by selecting Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree. To ensure honesty, the survey included a disclaimer that their answers would have no impact, positively or negatively, on their grade. All 18 students completed both surveys.

Results. For ease of presentation and interpretation, Tables 10 through 13 below divide these statements into categories and indicate the percentage of students responding “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to each statement. Table 10 and 11 on the next page present students' responses pertaining to the favorability of each book and difficulty of each book, respectively.

Table 10

Favorability of Book

Statement	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree after <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (Unit 1)	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree after <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (Unit 2)	Change
Reading this book was enjoyable.	61.11%	77.78%	16.67%
I will remember this book a year from now.	44.44%	66.67%	22.23%
I would recommend this book to a friend or family member.	55.56%	83.33%	27.77%
I would read a sequel to this book.	27.78%	66.67%	38.89%
I found myself thinking about this book outside of class.	22.22%	66.67%	44.45%

Table 11

Difficulty of Book

Statement	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree after <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (Unit 1)	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree after <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (Unit 2)	Change
I feel like I could read a harder book than this.	77.78%	66.67%	-11.11%
This was the hardest book I ever read.	11.11%	27.78%	16.67%

Despite students' assertions that *The Great Gatsby* was a more difficult read (see Table 11), they also found it significantly more enjoyable and memorable (see Table 10). Of the 18 students in the class, 12 of them (66.67%) would read a sequel to *The Great Gatsby* and 15 (83.33%) would recommend the book to a friend or family member. While all the changes in these categories were positive, the greatest shift occurred in the response to

the statement “I found myself thinking about this book outside of class.” While only 22.22% of students reported thinking about *A Raisin in the Sun* outside of class, 66.67% reported thinking about *The Great Gatsby*, tripling the number of students thinking about the text they are reading outside the classroom. Table 12 below includes students’ reactions to statements pertaining to the Lehman and Roberts (2013) concept of collecting evidence and examining that evidence in order to find patterns.

Table 12

Favorability of Collecting Evidence and Finding Patterns

Statement	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree after <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (Unit 1)	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree after <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (Unit 2)	Change
I would be interested in looking for patterns in the TV shows and movies I watch.	50.00%	55.56%	5.56%
I could observe evidence about the world around me and recognize patterns in that evidence.	61.11%	72.22%	11.11%
I benefited from reading a book this way (collecting evidence, finding patterns).	55.56%	72.22%	16.66%

Students’ positivity toward this method of evidence collection and pattern finding is trending upward. When first introduced to this concept in the first unit, students were split in regards to their interest, ability, and benefits of using Lehman and Roberts’ (2013) method, with between nine and 11 students responding positively to the three statements above (see Table 12). At the conclusion of the second unit, students self-reported perceptions began to trend more decisively positive, with between 10 and 13 students

responding positively to each statement. Table 13 below includes statements related to students' self-concept in regards to their ability and mindset.

Table 13

Student Self-Concept

Statement	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree after <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (Unit 1)	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree after <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (Unit 2)	Change
I don't feel any smarter than I was before I read this book.	22.22%	38.89%	16.67%
My attitude about reading has changed since the start of this unit.	33.33%	50.00%	16.67%
I feel like I accomplished something after reading this book.	44.44%	61.11%	16.67%
I feel like a better reader after completing this book.	55.56%	77.78%	22.22%
I discovered something new while reading this book.	66.67%	94.44%	27.77%

With the exception of the first statement in Table 13, all student responses are trending in a positive direction. Students are coming around to seeing the value of reading, with 16.67% more students reporting their attitude changing toward reading changing since the start of the second unit. Students reported the same growth when it comes to feeling like they accomplished something during the second unit. Whereas only 10 students reported feeling like a better reader after completing *A Raisin in the Sun*, 14 students felt like they had improved during the unit on *The Great Gatsby*. Finally, 94.44% of students report discovering something new while reading *The Great Gatsby* - all except one.

Students also had the opportunity to answer open-ended questions on each survey. On both surveys, the statement “My attitude about reading has changed since the start of this unit” was followed by a blank space which asked students to explain their response with specificity and detail. Both also included the open-ended question “What did you learn during this unit? Be specific and detailed.” Additionally, the survey at the end of Unit 2 concluded with a modified version of my research question: “How did learning to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of your argument? Be specific and detailed.” Naturally, students’ responses to these questions were varied; however, the type of response they provided can be quantified. In order to do this, I categorized students’ responses to each question. Table 14 delineates these categories and provides actual student responses as examples representative of each category.

Table 14

Categorized Samples of Student Responses to Open-Ended Questions

My attitude about reading has changed since the start of this unit. Explain.	
Positive Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “My attitude about reading has changed. Before I hated reading and now I like it because I realized that it’s not that hard if you read slowly and think about what you are reading.” ● “I feel as my reading skills has drastically changed since the beginning of the unit. If I had to read a similar book I would read it with no problem rather than before the unit I probably wouldn’t have read it or been as interested in it.”
No Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “well i like to read but i just don’t read all the time, i still feel the same about books its a 50/50.” ● “My attitude about reading is still the same. I still think it is really boring and I don’t want to do it. But If I have to do it for school then I will have to.”
Negative Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “my attitude towards reading is worse now because I have never read a book in school that I enjoy reading in class or outside of class.”

Negative Change (cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I dislike reading, in every aspect. I prefer visuals over every other form of media, and on the bottom of this list is reading. That isn't going to go up, it can only go further down.”
What did you learn during this unit?	
Significant Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “i learned about how to write good papers. To find good evidence and support from the text to back up your thesis.” ● “I learned all the different types of literary lenses. I also learned how to collect information through these lenses and get evidence. I figured out how to engage in what I am reading and pull out important parts.”
Some Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “During this unit I had learned many new interesting concepts and good life lessons from this story.” ● “When we were in the groups and you can get other peoples opinions towards the chapter or the book, so it opens your eyes a bit more.”
Little Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I didn't learn anything because I didn't try to. I'm sure there was something to learn if I looked, but I didn't.” ● “I really didn't learn anything new. It was a good story, but it didn't teach me anything. Maybe a small thing or two. But that.s just it, nothing else.”
How did learning to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of your argument?	
Significant Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “This has helped me get better arguments because I could gather more evidence in the text. It made me look for different things and get different types of evidence. This made me see different parts of the text because of the lenses. I do feel like my skills in this area had gone up by looking through these lenses. Many good examples were formed because of these because I could look more in depth in the text for examples about the lens I was looking for.”
Some Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “My argument did make more sense. It gave decent examples and prove. I'm not much the type of person who likes to analyze thing. But the literary lenses did improve my skills. If only just by a little bit.”
Little Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I already knew how. That's all I have to say.”

With these categorized examples in mind, Tables 15 through 17 below indicate the percentage of students' responses that fell into each category.

Table 15

Student-Reported Change in Attitude Toward Reading

	Positive Change	No Change	Negative Change
Unit 1 <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	38.9%	50.0%	11.1%
Unit 2 <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%

Table 16

Student-Reported Learning

	Significant Learning	Some Learning	Little Learning
Unit 1 <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%
Unit 2 <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	66.7%	27.8%	5.5%

Table 17

Student-Reported Impact of Using Literary Lenses on Quality of Argument

Significant Impact	Some Impact	Little Impact
55.6%	38.9%	5.5%

The next section analyzes all the data collected in the student self-concept and reflection surveys in order to interpret it and draw conclusions.

Interpretation. The results of the student self-concept and reflection surveys indicate a substantial mindset shift between the end of the first unit and the end of the second. Students' reactions to *The Great Gatsby* were markedly more positive (between

16.67% and 44.4% depending on the statement) than they were to *A Raisin in the Sun* (see Table 10). I can rule out the possibility that this is because the novel was an easier read, since students reported that it was actually more difficult, evidence that struggling readers still respond well to appropriately challenging texts (see Table 11). The uptick in positive responses may be due to students' greater familiarity with the concept of collecting evidence and observe patterns *first* in order to come up with ideas *later*. Table 12 indicates that students had greater confidence applying this method to the world around them and recognition of the benefit of doing so *after* Unit 2.

Students' familiarity with the process may account for the mindset shifts detailed in Table 13, in which responses to statements indicate growth in students' self-confidence in terms of reading and learning. At the end of the second unit, 16.67% more students felt accomplished and more than 75% of students felt like they had become a better reader. Inexplicably, 38.89% of students reported that they didn't feel any smarter after completing the second unit. This was the only survey question that trended negatively on the second survey as compared to the first. This discrepancy may have resulted from students' uncertainty about what it means to be "smarter" or the wording of the question. It is possible that they equated the difficulty of the task with feeling less smart. Responses to other statements, particularly the fact that 94.44% of students reported that "[they] discovered something new while reading [*The Great Gatsby*]" suggest that although students may not *feel* smarter, they did indeed learn something new.

Finally, the open-ended responses shed perhaps the greatest insight into students' learning and success with using literary lenses to collect evidence, find patterns, and

construct arguments. As shown in Table 17, 94.5% of students reported learning *something* in Unit 2; this is up from Unit 1 (66.7%). More importantly, four times as many students reported that their learning was *significant* (66.7% after Unit 2 as compared to 16.7% on Unit 1). This tells me that students not only recognized that they learned something by using literary lenses, but that they found value in what we were doing. With more students reporting a positive change in their attitude toward reading (see Table 15) and all but one student reporting some positive impact of using literary lenses to improve the quality of their argument, it is clear the students feel they have benefitted from this instruction. After looking at the results of the teacher and co-teacher observation journals in the next section, I will conclude this chapter with a section that synthesizes the evidence collected from all data tools in order to observe patterns and draw conclusions.

Teacher and Co-Teacher Observation Journals

My co-teacher, Laurie, and I each maintained separate observation journals over the course of my study. Having two adult observers in the room was beneficial in that we were able to pick up on more together than I would have been able to do alone. We each kept an observation log that we wrote in weekly. Each log contained the week's goal and learning activities, observations, student comments, results, and our own reflections on what was working and what needed improvement (see Appendix D). We met with each other weekly in order to compare our observations and reflections and refine our teaching.

Results and interpretation. Laurie and I did our best to maintain complete journals. We often met on Thursday mornings as part of our PLC (and occasionally outside of that time) to compare our notes and discuss strategies for better targeting our instruction to fit the needs of our students. During those PLC meetings, we also solicited insight from Kevin, who co-taught the other section of the American Voices class with Laurie. While the data we collected is not as clean-cut as the results on the assessment rubrics or student surveys, it nonetheless offers a glimpse into the general mood and operation of the class.

Generally, we found that students were receptive to working in groups of four on their assigned character or lens. Since we knew our students well, we were able to strategically place them in groups with people they would likely get along with and pair them with a character or lens of appropriate interest or difficulty. We documented few instances of grumbling about this group work - one to two per week over the entire course of the study. If grievances did rise to the surface, they often took the form of extended trips to the bathroom. Though the number of students' complaints we logged remained constant, one trend that emerged from our data included more positive interactions between peers. During Unit 1, we noted a combined average of 3.25 positive interactions per week; in Unit 2, that number jumped to an average of 4.71 positive interactions per week, a 44.9% increase. For example, one higher-performing student ("Blake") was in a group with another student ("Calvin"), who has autism. Though Blake could be rough around the edges when interacting with his friends, when working with Calvin, he was welcoming, encouraging, and helpful. This is just one example of many

that occurred over the course of the semester. Laurie and I both attribute this congeniality to the positive, collaborative community we had built in our classroom since the beginning of the school year.

Furthermore, we saw a greater degree of participation in whole class activities as we progressed through each unit in the study. During the average week in Unit 1, 55.5% of our students were actively engaged in daily activities. During each week in Unit 2, an average of 66.7% of students actively participated in daily activities. Students showed the greatest participation when I taught the STAR criteria (Fulkerson, 1996) and Toulmin Model of Argument (Johnson & Krase, 2009). During this activity, students were eager to guess plausible components of the acronyms and supply thoughtful synonyms for each aspect. On this activity alone, we recorded engagement from 94.4% of our students. Their enthusiasm translated into their evidence analysis and argument construction; the following day, Laurie and I observed 77.8% of students eagerly dig back into their books and documentation packets to evaluate their collected evidence against the STAR criteria. That is not to say these activities resulted in perfect engagement from the entire class. At one point, Laurie documented five students who were completely disinterested or off-task; after conferring, we were able to individually connect with these students and help them to get more actively invested in the day's learning activities. Despite these hiccups, we were delighted to find most of our students engaging to a degree previously unattained.

Finally, for each unit, we made logs in which the students could record their collected evidence. We checked these periodically and included completion results in our

own logs. The logs students completed for *A Raisin in the Sun* (Unit 1) had a completion rate of 60.5%. After we introduced the literary lenses and distributed logs for *The Great Gatsby* (Unit 2), we found that students' logs had a completion rate of 93.7%. This steep improvement echoes the positive reaction to using literary lenses indicated by the student self-concept and reflection survey results and student comments we overheard and documented. One of the most telling comments came from a student who was retaking the class as a junior. He said, "I actually *get* the book this time. Like it all makes sense and like reading it more than the first time." Over the course of the study, both Laurie and I observed more enthusiasm for the book in particular and reading in general once students had become familiar with the literary lenses.

Major Patterns

After observing the data collected from the student self-assessment rubrics, teacher assessment rubrics, student self-concept and reflection surveys, and teacher and co-teacher observation journals, I notice two major patterns - one that makes sense and one that does not.

Positive attitude shift. First, the observation logs Laurie and I completed, in coordination with students' responses on the self-concept and reflection surveys, indicate a pattern of more enthusiasm and positive attitudes after the implementation of literary lenses. At the conclusion of the second unit, our students reported more positive attitudes toward reading, a greater recognition of the value of their learning, and a higher confidence in their ability (see Tables 10, 13, 15, & 16 in particular). Students' work ethic was higher in Unit 2 (93.7% evidence log completion versus 60.5% in Unit 1) and

Laurie and I recorded 44.9% more positive interactions between peers in Unit 2 than we had in Unit 1.

I believe that this shift in attitude could be due to presenting students with a greater challenge that was still accessible (16.67% more students reported that *The Great Gatsby* was more difficult than *A Raisin in the Sun* but two-thirds of students said they could still read a harder book). It could also be due to students' growing familiarity with the concept of collecting evidence and seeking patterns within it prior to generating an argument, which was new territory for them. The trends in their surveys indicate that they felt more comfortable using this strategy the second time around (see Table 12) and when asked about how using literary lenses impacted the quality of their argument, 94.5% responded positively, with 55.6% indicating the process had a significant impact. This coordinates with their own self-confidence as suggested by their self-assessment rubrics. Students gave themselves an average score of 10.01 out of 15 points on their first self-assessment rubric (66.7%) but must have felt slightly more confident in their second self-assessment, in which they gave themselves an average score of 10.39 out of 15 points (69.3%). All in all, this pattern of evidence indicates students' growing confidence in writing arguments after learning to employ the literary lenses.

Minimal change in quality of written arguments. The perplexing contradiction then is that students' scores on the teacher assessment rubric remained essentially unchanged after instruction in the literary lenses. Only 33.3% of students improved overall, with 50.0% earning a lower score and 16.7% remaining at the same level. In fact, students' overall average score on the teacher assessment rubric went slightly down from

the first assignment to the second, from 65.9% to 65.2%. If students reported significant learning and higher confidence, and Laurie and I observed better attitudes and engagement, how is it that there was virtually no impact on the quality of students' written arguments? To answer this, we must first reflect on the research studied in my literature review.

The research indicated that teaching students to use read through literary lenses in order to write compelling arguments was sound practice. Newell et al. (2011) suggested that using reading and writing in coordination with one another would “enhance the quality of both because students’ arguments are influenced by the texts they read before writing” (as cited in Read, Landon-Hays, & Martin-Rivas, 2014, p. 471). Similarly, Graham and Hebert (2010) noted that it is particularly beneficial for lower-achieving students to write about their reading (p. 13). Troise (2007) stated that after learning to apply literary lenses, her students made “more original, varied, and interesting” arguments about literature than they were able to write previously (p. 86). Additionally, Allington (2013) referenced Knapp (1995) in acknowledging that “when classroom reading lessons for struggling readers are meaning focused, struggling readers improve more than when lessons are skills focused” (p. 528). Despite all the research, my own students did not show meaningful growth in their ability to craft higher quality arguments.

This may have to do less with the inadequacy of the process (reading through literary lenses to collect evidence, sift for patterns, and generate an argument) than it does with the inadequacy of the scaffolding. Ferlazzo and Hull-Sypniewski (2014) emphasized

the importance of students reading texts that are accessible to them so that they are able to read independently or with scaffolded support from the teacher. While students seemed to enjoy *The Great Gatsby*, one-third of students claimed they would not be able to read a book that was any harder, with 27.78% claiming it was the hardest book they had ever read (see Table 11). We know these students tended to overestimate the quality of their own work on the self-assessment rubrics (see Tables 6 & 7), so it is entirely possible they overestimated their ability to adequately read and comprehend this language-rich text.

While I feel that Laurie and I followed through on challenging our struggling readers, who, if they are to succeed, must be held to a high standard and engaged in the work that our better readers are asked to do (Allington, 2013), we may have missed the mark in scaffolding our instruction. During Unit 2, we gradually released responsibility for reading, collecting relevant details, and seeking out patterns to our students, as Read, Landon-Hayes, and Martin-Rivas (2014) recommended. However, that gradual release may not have been gradual enough; students may have shown greater growth with additional direct instruction or with a more slowly-paced introduction to the literary lenses. The rubrics we provided were valuable scaffolds for students, with the hope that they could “become self-regulated writers” (Saddler & Andrade, 2004, p. 49), but it turns out they likely needed more teacher regulation, at least temporarily, until they developed not only the confidence, but the skills to write independently.

Another possibility is that both the text and the task were more difficult and more abstract. The straightforwardness of Hansberry’s (1959/1997) *A Raisin in the Sun*, paired with the more direct thesis framework (‘[Character] does [blank] because [blank].’) may

have been more accessible to students. The depth of *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925/2004) eludes many scholars with its nuance, symbolism, and subtle implications. Pairing this with the more abstract thesis framework ('When viewed through the [social-class, gender/feminist, psychological] lens, the reader will notice _____'.) may have been a difficult step up for this group of sophomores. When accounting for the increased difficulty of the text and the task, the fact that students earned roughly the same scores as on the previous assignment may indicate significant learning that the assessments used are simply unable to reflect.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of my study and participants. I then shared the results of my research study collected through quantitative and qualitative means. This data was then analyzed and interpreted in order to determine patterns and themes, which were informed by my literature review. Ultimately, I concluded by using the compiled data and interpretations to answer my research question. In chapter five, I will reflect on major learnings as they connect to my literature review, discuss limitations of my study, and consider implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Overview

In the previous chapter, I detailed the results of my study, which sought an answer to this question: *How does teaching high school students to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of students' arguments?* In addition to presenting the quantitative and qualitative results, like my students, I analyzed the collected evidence in order to observe patterns and draw conclusions. In this chapter, I revisit my literature review and the role it played in my own study, discuss major learnings, highlight implications and limitations of my research, and identify the next steps I will take as a result of my learning.

Revisiting the Literature Review

In this section, I examine how my literature review informed my study. First, I will discuss the research surrounding the population of struggling readers with whom I worked. Next I will connect the research on literary lenses which formed the basis of my study. Third, I will revisit the research-based best practices I employed over the course of my research and reflect on the successfulness of their implementation. Finally, I will explore the literature that links reading and writing in order to ascertain how the interaction of these activities impacted my students.

My growing affinity for and desire to best serve my struggling readers spurred my research. I wanted to uncover some of the literature that would inform my instruction of this population of students who required critical support. The students in my American Voices class were placed in the course because they were not strong readers. As taught in the mainstream American Literature course, the texts they would read would be too difficult for them. Adams (1990) stated that “when a text is too difficult for children, they comprehend little, learn little, and tire quickly” (as cited in Allington, 2013, p. 525). This alone suggested that this group of students should read easier books. However, Allington (2013) also stated that if we want struggling readers to improve, we as teachers must engage them in the same work we ask our skilled readers to do. This alone suggested that we should handle these students the same way we handle the mainstream population. To rectify these competing ideas (select easier texts or maintain the rigor) Laurie and I opted to teach the same books taught in American Literature but to adjust not only the pace, but the instruction. This is where literary lenses came in.

The premise of my research was inspired by the relatively recent exploration of using literary lenses in the high school English classroom (Appleman, 2009; McCormick, 1995; Pirie, 1997). Literary lenses aid readers in seeing different aspects of a text such that they may come to understand one or more unique interpretations of the same text. Knapp (1995) argued that “when classroom reading lessons for struggling readers are meaning focused, struggling readers improve more than when lessons are skills focused” (as cited in Allington, 2013, p. 528). Thus, encouraging students to use the lenses to construct their own meaning would be a worthwhile endeavor. In order to arrive at a new

meaning in their reading, students would need to change their current process.

Previously, students had been asked to come up with an idea and then find evidence in the text to support it. Rather, a better way to arrive at meaning is to collect evidence over the course of reading, then examine that evidence for patterns, and then use those patterns to build a solid argument (Ferlazzo & Hull-Sypniewski, 2014; Lehman & Roberts, 2013).

We decided this would be the process we taught students to employ.

In conducting my literature review, I wanted to collect a variety of best practice instructional activities to integrate into my own instruction. When it came to reading, Golden and Canan (2004) and Troise (2007) recommended that after introducing the lenses, teachers have students read a fairy tale with a particular lens in mind, seeking textual evidence that reveals meaning when viewed through that lens. My students did this and we found that they were capable of making connections between the text and the lenses in order to infer meaning. As for writing, Johnson and Krase (2009) recommended using the Toulmin Model of Argument, in which students begin with a claim and back it up with evidence. Johnson and Krase (2009) also suggested that teachers should show students how to write claims that are “conspicuous, arguable, clear, and concise” (p. 145). In sharing this strategy, I found that my students were successful in writing conspicuous and concise thesis statements, but need continued work in writing theses that are arguable and clear.

With all of the above literature in mind, my research question ultimately sought to examine the connection between reading and writing. The research reiterated the “reciprocal nature of the reading and writing processes” (Read, Landon-Hayes, &

Martin-Rivas, 2014, p. 476). Graham and Hebert (2010) pointed out the positive impact of writing about a text on comprehension, especially for lower-achieving students, and “Newell et al. (2011) suggested that integrating reading and writing instruction for argumentation will enhance the quality of both because students’ arguments are influenced by the texts they read before writing” (as cited in Read, Landon-Hays, & Martin-Rivas, 2014, p. 471). Collectively, the literature suggested that results of teaching students to use literary lenses to inform their argument writing would be beneficial. At the conclusion of my study, I found a slightly different answer to my research question, *How does teaching high school students to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of students’ arguments?*

Major Findings

This section will present my major findings as they pertain to my research question: *How does teaching high school students to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of students’ arguments?* The first major finding I will discuss is the importance of success rubrics to students as they write. The second major finding answers my research question in examining the quality of students’ arguments after instruction. The third and final major finding revealed itself as a tangential surprise and has to do with the impact of this study on students’ confidence and attitudes.

Importance of success rubrics. There was tremendous value in sharing the success rubrics with students’ prior to writing their paper assignments. In looking at the comparison between students’ self-assessment rubrics and the teacher assessment rubric, students were able to assess their own score to within 5.6% of my assessment. Their

proximity to my own assessment indicates that the success rubric is an effective means of setting clear expectations for students and an appropriate tool for assessment of written work. According to Ross-Fisher (2005), students may have been successful in self-assessing because both rubrics had a consistent structure, and thus, they developed confidence with them. Though I did not set out to study this specifically, this result suggests that as I become more proficient at developing rubrics, I should expect to see improvement in the quality of my students' work.

Impact on the quality of students' arguments. Despite students' self-assessments rising from 66.7% on the first assignment to 69.3% on the second, when I assessed their papers, students generally did not improve the quality of their thesis statements, support, or analysis from the first assignment to the second. As a group, while they were still within a narrow margin of my assessment, they did have a tendency to slightly overestimate their success level, especially on the Unit 2 assignment. This may indicate that students had developed a higher confidence in their own ability to argue, support, and analyze a thesis, even if the overall quality of their work did not improve. While one-third of students earned higher scores on the second assignment than they had on the first, half of my students earned a lower score the second time around. On the thesis statement component specifically, there was an average drop of 4.4%. This ultimately resulted in a composite score on the second assignment that was a mere 0.7% lower than that of the first assignment (65.2% and 65.9%, respectively).

The essentially stagnant quality of students' argument writing is surprising, especially considering that 94.5% responded that the literary lenses had had a positive

impact on the quality of their argument writing ability; of those more than half said that positive impact was *significant*. If the students appreciated the process, and indeed felt like it had supported them in developing stronger arguments, their lack of success on the assignments may have less to do with the method of evidence collection and pattern finding than it does with the inadequacy of the scaffolding. We know that *The Great Gatsby* was a challenge for students (27.78% claimed it was the hardest book they had ever read). Yet, students responded overwhelmingly positively to the book, with 77.78% saying they enjoyed reading it. It is possible, that considering students' tendency to slightly overestimate their ability on the self-assessment rubrics, they may have slightly overestimated their ability to truly read and comprehend the book.

In having our students read this book, I feel that we followed through on challenging our struggling readers, as Allington (2013) said we must if we wish for them to succeed. However, we may have missed the mark in scaffolding our instruction. During Unit 2, we gradually released responsibility for reading, collecting relevant details, and seeking out patterns to our students, as Read, Landon-Hayes, and Martin-Rivas (2014) recommended. However, that gradual release may have been still too rushed and students may have shown greater growth with additional direct instruction or with a more slowly-paced curriculum. With the hope that our students could "become self-regulated writers" (Saddler & Andrade, 2004, p. 49), the rubrics we provided were valuable scaffolds, but perhaps not enough.

Furthermore, our instructional focus on reading may have come at the expense of enough intentional support with writing. Students were successful in reading to collect

evidence, with a 93.7% completion rate on their logs. Additionally, more than 72% reported that they benefited from reading a book this way (collecting evidence, finding patterns). However, I believe I could have focused more on helping my students transform their ideas and evidence into quality writing. In the future, I will attempt more specific writing instruction to help students make the leap from thoughtful reading to thoughtful writing. All but one student in my class reported at least some positive impact of using literary lenses on the quality of their arguments; they may have developed the confidence, but they still need more support honing the skills to write independently.

Finally, it is possible that the relatively unchanged scores on the assessment rubric mask some of the real growth students had over the course of the second unit of study. Students self-assessed their own work at higher levels (see Table 6) and 22.22% more students reported feeling like a better reader after reading *The Great Gatsby* (see Table 13). Perhaps the combined difficulty of the text and the task impacted results on the assessment more than had students read a different book or created arguments using a more concrete thesis framework. The fact that their scores are near the scores earned on the previous, more straightforward assignment may actually correlate with their higher self-assessments and self-concept survey results and be a testament to their greater learning and improved ability, even if the assessment rubric scores are unable to reflect that.

Impact on students' confidence and attitudes. Despite the lack of positive improvement in the quality of students' argument writing ability, the study yielded other results that were more positive. At the conclusion of the second unit, our students

reported more positive attitudes toward reading, a greater recognition of the value of their learning, and a higher confidence in their ability. Their attitudes toward reading made marked improvements after the introduction of literary lenses. For example, 12 students (66.67%) reported that they found themselves thinking about the book outside of class, which is triple the number that had thought about the previous text in their down time. In fact, the same percentage indicated that they would read a sequel to *The Great Gatsby*, up 38.89% from the previous unit. Remember, these are students who are notoriously poor readers and have been conditioned to hate reading. A commendable 72.22% of students said they benefited from reading the book by using the Lehman and Roberts (2013) recommendation of collecting evidence and finding patterns. This number is indicative of a positive trend, as previously only 55.56% of students found the value in this process. Fourteen out of 18 students felt like a better reader after the second unit, and a remarkable 94.44% - all students except one - said they discovered something new while reading *The Great Gatsby* through literary lenses.

The outcome on students' attitudes and confidence may not have been the focus of this study, but when considering the circumstances, the positive growth in students' mindsets is significant. Engagement, motivation, confidence, and attitude all contribute to the foundation that is essential for learning to take place. While students may not have exhibited the degree of growth in their argument writing that I had hoped, their appreciation for the process and increasing positivity give me hope that they have the potential to make greater strides with further instruction and support.

Possible Implications

Based on the conclusions I have drawn from the results of my study, I believe there is value in the continued exploration of teaching high school students to use literary lenses. Recall that teaching students to apply literary lenses to enhance their reading and writing is relatively new to the high school classroom (Appleman, 2009; McCormick, 1995; Pirie, 1997). Knowing this, we must expect a learning curve for both students and teachers. Collecting evidence and examining that evidence for patterns *before* posing an idea or argument is a complete reversal of the process our students have grown accustomed to. While implementation of this new method may not have yielded significant improvement in students' theses, support, and analysis writing, I did see substantial growth in their confidence, engagement, and attitude, all of which form the necessary foundation on which learning can take place.

Learning to see a text through literary lenses and write arguments based on the evidence collected is an arduous task, even for a top-performing high school student. Yet this challenge does not give us license to oversimplify reading and writing for our struggling students. Engaging struggling readers in the same work we expect our better readers to do is essential to helping them improve (Allington, 2013). Since we know that reading and writing achievement are inextricably linked (Applebee & Langer, 2009), if literary lenses were introduced earlier in the school year so that students had more time to practice and develop their skills, I believe we would see gradual, sustained growth in their ability to craft arguments of higher quality. Ultimately, this research suggests that struggling high school readers *are* capable of using literary lenses; this is incredibly

important in that honing this ability will allow them to read their world and see things in new ways.

Possible Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study that future researchers should be aware of. First and foremost, this study was conducted with only 18 students, fifteen of whom were male and all of whom were specifically placed in the class due to their difficulty with reading and writing. Remember that my research method was pragmatic, seeking to understand “what works at the time” (Creswell, 2014, p. 11). As such, the results of this study cannot reasonably be extrapolated to apply to all high school-age struggling readers. Furthermore, results on the self-concept and reflection surveys indicated that students overwhelmingly preferred *The Great Gatsby* over *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Follow-up questions as to *why* would have been helpful in examining the degree to which the text itself, rather than the instruction on literary lenses, shaped students’ interest and motivation.

Finally, it is important to remember that even with a well-designed rubric, there is some degree of subjectivity in assessing writing. As the assessor of students’ writing assignments, I was privy to their own self-assessment rubrics before I myself had read and assessed their papers. It is possible this observation shaped my perception of their writing. A more ideal but time consuming method for assessment would involve calibration, with multiple assessors scoring each paper using the rubric and thus reducing the possibility of bias. This rubric may have also been incapable of truly measuring my students’ learning, as the text and task of the second unit was substantially more difficult

than the first. In the future, a multimodal assessment, in which students can convey their learning in a greater variety of ways, may elicit growth that they are unable to convey in strictly written work.

Next Steps

My first order of business will be to share my findings with my colleagues in the English department and with the student participants and their families, as promised. I may wish to present my findings at a state or national conference, so that others may benefit from the results of this work. As my study did not exactly turn out to be the success story I was hoping for, I have more work to do in determining the best course of action for implementing the use of literary lenses in my American Voices classroom. Further research may include running a similar trial, but exposing students to this method earlier and extending the time to work on developing the skills needed to become more proficient in applying them. Another study could permit students to respond to literature in a multimodal format, in order to examine if students who have difficulty writing are able to convey their learning in a different way.

Despite the results on the assessment rubrics, Laurie and I still see the value in exposing our students to thinking through multiple perspectives and using textual evidence to inform their arguments. We will also strive to help our students to “develop, extend, and refine their positions” (Johnson & Krase, 2009, p. 131) in order to further improve their arguments. Greater focus on writing instruction to help students make the leap from good ideas to good writing will be a priority. Most essential to our continued endeavor to help our struggling students to succeed will be our commitment to holding

them to high standards. When we truly believe our students can do great things, they rise to the challenge. Though they may fall short, with our intentional, scaffolded support, they can continue to reach higher than many people, themselves included, ever dreamed possible.

Conclusion

Two and a half years ago, I started the journey of obtaining my Master's degree. That same month, I adopted my colleague Melinda's American Voices students. Since then, I have had the opportunity to do my part in shaping two more cohorts of sophomore students into the people they will ultimately become. These ventures have been a series of ups and downs, but as my graduate work draws to a close, I am thankful that I will be able to use my learning to refine my practice and be the best I can be for my students. Even if my students did not improve to the degree I would have liked, I have great hopes for their potential. Their survey results indicate that they are *feeling* like readers and writers; for many of them, this is becoming part of their identity for the first time. The importance of that should not be understated. Deborah Appleman inspired my curiosity in literary lenses when she visited our English department a few years ago, so it is fitting that I end with her words: "We are offering our students the tools to view the world from a variety of lenses, each offering a unique perspective sure to transform how adolescents read both words and worlds" (Appleman, 2009, p. 11). How magnificent to be in a position to empower young minds.

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APPENDIX A

Student Self-Assessment Rubric / Teacher Assessment Rubric

	Exemplary	Exceeds Standard	Meets Standard	Partially Meets Standard	Below Standard
Thesis	My thesis statement insightfully responds to prompt, takes a unique stance, and drives analysis throughout paper.	My thesis statement effectively responds to prompt, takes a thoughtful stance, and connects to analysis throughout paper.	My thesis statement adequately connects to prompt, takes a stance, and maintains that stance throughout paper.	My thesis statement is present but may not take a clear stance or fully address prompt. Analysis may be inconsistent.	My thesis statement is absent, does not fit prompt, or is not supported or developed elsewhere.
Support	I include plentiful, specific examples from text (with context), which are thoughtfully chosen to effectively support claims.	I include required number of specific examples from text (with context) to purposefully support claims.	I include required number of specific examples from text (with context) to adequately support claims.	I include some examples from text to support claims. Context may be unclear.	I include insufficient examples from text to support claims. Context is absent or misinterpreted.
Analysis	I present sophisticated interpretation of text through insightful application of specific lens to infer original meaning. My paper reveals nuanced understanding of text.	I present thoughtful interpretation of text through deliberate and accurate application of specific lens to infer meaning. My paper reveals strong understanding of text.	I interpret text through clear application of specific lens to infer meaning. My paper reveals adequate understanding of text.	I attempt to apply lens to text to infer meaning but do so inaccurately or inconsistently. My paper reveals basic or incomplete understanding of text.	I neglect to employ lens to infer meaning. I may revert to plot summary. My paper reveals lack of understanding of text.

APPENDIX B

Letter of Informed Consent

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Craig Zimanske and I am one of your child's American Voices teachers. I am currently working toward my Master of Arts in Education degree through Hamline University in St. Paul. In order to earn my graduate degree, I intend to conduct research in my classroom this semester. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of this research and seek your consent for your child to be a participant in this research. I have received approval for this study from the Hamline University School of Education and from the high school principal. My completed research will be documented in a capstone thesis paper which will be published electronically in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons. Future scholars may access this document through this system.

My research will include teaching the students in the American Voices course to use literary lenses. Such lenses are intended to assist students in considering multiple perspectives and in recognizing specific components of the books they read. I intend to study the impact of such instruction on students' ability to construct arguments about their reading in order to determine the value of such instruction with this population of students. Students will read two books during this study, Lorraine Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Both are key curricular texts in our tenth grade course. These two units of study will take place between March 3 and May 5.

Over the course of reading these texts, students will be taught to collect evidence that is pertinent to a variety of lens perspectives and analyze said evidence in order to look for patterns. They will then use these patterns to construct an argument; these arguments will be the focus of two papers they write, one about each book. Your child's papers will be evaluated against a rubric by both your child and me, and the results will be included in my research document either under a pseudonym or in aggregate (all students' results averaged).

Additionally, students will complete two surveys through Google Forms. These will have students' names attached so that I may become better aware of each child's instructional needs. Finally, my co-teacher and I will be maintaining written logs of our observations over the course of the study. Any time the individual results of these surveys or our observation notes are included in my research document, they will be posted under a pseudonym; at no time will your child's identity be published in my research.

There is little risk to your child due to participation in this research. The activities students will be involved in would be typical of our classroom instruction; the publication

of my research will be the only departure from our routine, and again, all students' identities will be presented under a pseudonym or as an average of all participants. All results will be kept secure over the course of the study and destroyed following the completion of my research. Participation is voluntary and you may decide at any point to remove your child from this study without consequence. In that case, your child would still complete the activities as a member of our class, but their results and information about your child would not be included in my capstone document.

If you consent for your child to participate, please sign below and return the bottom portion to me at school no later than Thursday, March 2. Please keep the above portion for your records. If you have any questions, please contact me via phone or email.

Sincerely,

Craig Zimanske

I have received and read your letter detailing the study you intend to conduct in my child's American Voices class. I understand that you will be collecting data from my child in the form of writing samples, assessment rubrics, surveys, and teacher observations. I recognize that there is little to no risk to my child for their involvement in this study. I am aware that my child's identity will be kept confidential and that I may withdraw my child from this study at any time. Finally, I have been informed that upon completion, the results of this research study will be published electronically through Hamline University's Bush Library Digital Commons.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

Student Self-Concept and Reflection Survey

Rating scale: Strongly agree; agree; disagree; strongly disagree

Survey questions given through Google Forms at the completion of each unit of study (*A Raisin in the Sun* and *The Great Gatsby*):

1. Reading this book was enjoyable.
2. Reading this book was boring.
3. I discovered something new while reading this book.
4. I feel like a better reader after completing this book.
5. I would read a sequel to this book.
6. I feel like I accomplished something after reading this book.
7. I don't feel any smarter than I was before I read this book.
8. I found myself thinking about this book outside of class.
9. I will remember this book a year from now.
10. I was able to write a strong argument about this book.
11. I feel like I could read a harder book than this.
12. This was the hardest book I ever read.
13. I would recommend this book to a friend or family member.
14. I benefited from reading a book this way (collecting evidence, finding patterns).
15. I could observe evidence about the world around me and recognize patterns in that evidence.
16. I would be interested in looking for patterns in the TV shows and movies I watch.
17. My attitude about reading has changed since the start of this unit. Explain this answer. Be specific and detailed. (This question provided blank space for students' responses.)

Additional survey statements/question after completing the paper for *A Raisin in the Sun*:

1. I am confident I can read with a focus on one character.
2. I know exactly what to look for about my character when reading.
3. I know how to examine my collected evidence to find patterns about my character.
4. I know how to use evidence to support the argument made by my thesis statement.
5. I would be able to write a different argument about the same book, but about a different character.
6. I learned something new during this unit.
7. What did you learn during this unit? Be specific and detailed. (This question provided blank space for students' responses.)

Additional survey statements/question after completing the paper for *The Great Gatsby*:

1. I am confident I can read using the _____ literary lens.
2. I know exactly what to look for when using the _____ literary lens.
3. I know how to examine my collected evidence to find patterns.
4. I know how to use evidence to support the argument made by my thesis statement.
5. I would be able to write a different argument about the same book, but using a different lens.
6. I learned something new during this unit.
7. What did you learn during this unit? Be specific and detailed. (This question provided blank space for students' responses.)
8. How did learning to analyze text through literary lenses impact the quality of your argument? Be specific and detailed. (This question provided blank space for students' responses.)

APPENDIX D**Teacher and Co-Teacher Observation Journal**

Week of:	
Weekly Goal	
Learning Activities	
General Classroom Observations	
Positive Student Comments	
Negative Student Comments	
Results	
Teacher Reflection	