How Can An Intermediate Elementary Educator Use Critical Literacy To Promote Social Justice Through Book Clubs?

Grace Shields Mevissen

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How Can an Intermediate Elementary Educator Use Critical Literacy to Promote Social Justice Through Book Clubs

By

Grace Shields Mevissen

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

Hamline University
Saint Paul, Minnesota
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Secondary Advisor: Katy Anderson
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Abstract

Mevissen, G. How can an intermediate elementary educator use critical literacy to promote social justice through book clubs? (2017)

The purpose of this action research is to better understand, “How can an intermediate elementary educator use critical literacy to promote social justice through book clubs?” The author researched and defined social justice, critical literacy and book clubs. After, the author administered a pre assessment, helped facilitate book clubs and a post assessment. The action research was conducted in a suburban school that is mainly comprised of white students. Two groups, having selected the same text, were chosen as a focus group. The author notes and highlights themes across all seven of the students’ experiences throughout the unit. The author discovered that one group used a social justice critical lens while reading and discussing the book and proceeded to provide a solution a problem in the text. The other group developed a critical literacy lens while reading and discussing the text.

Keywords: critical literacy, social justice, book clubs, elementary school, education and action research.
Katy Anderson and Joe Lewis
For a plethora of ideas, support and resources.

Tyler Berndt
For always questioning my perspectives.

Notorious
For planting my seeds of social justice.
We can take comfort in knowing that each moment we have with a child is a moment to improve the world.

Christopher Lehman
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

*Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.*

Mahatma Gandhi

SPLASH. This word is written numerous times throughout Tyler Quinn’s “It Starts with a Splash” blog entry. With each repetition of the word, Tyler makes a compelling point that we are capable of making a difference by doing *small* things in face of big problems (Quinn, 2016). With each small action, or small splash, we can affect big change.

This blog post was shared with me the morning after the most recent national election. How timely. We were facing big problems. I found myself fielding questions from my students that I was not prepared to talk about such as, "Will our President *really* build a wall?” or “Who will work the jobs that the immigrants are currently working if we force them to leave?”. Students were feeling confused, powerless. How do I explain something that I do not always fully understand myself? Is explaining enough? How do I provide my students with the tools and resources to answer their own questions? How will the students respond? What can be expected of 5th graders? What is my goal for them? How can I promote an environment whereby students recognize their own power to solve problems and foster their own SPLASH?

Thus, my driving question, *How can an intermediate elementary educator use critical literacy to promote social justice through book clubs?*

As I reflect on my own upbringing, I learned that we should treat others as we would like to be treated and I practiced kindness through my actions. My actions will make a difference for others. “Others” included neighbors, classmates, the penguins of Antarctica (the ice cap was
melting my brother told me). It was a large group of “Others”. I did not think of it as being fair or equitable, but just being kind. I did not label these actions as “social justice” but rather moments that made up my childhood. It was not until my college years that I came to understand that in order to achieve peace, equity and social justice I need to take action to change things. Now I understood a larger purpose for all those kindnesses I was doing as a child.

Small acts are essential to achieving social justice, but it also requires being a critically reflective person and consistently building these small acts into your daily life. As a teacher, I have a wonderful space in which to practice critical self-reflection. My understanding of social justice has grown. I further understand and see how social justice is also becoming aware of your own privileges and purposefully acting in ways that bring about equity.

When I became a teacher, I suddenly had a space to practice social justice, and I immediately saw potential for helping students learn about social justice. I began asking questions like: How can I help students become aware of their own power to change things that are inequitable? How can I bring my passion for social justice into my classroom? I now realize the importance of instilling this awareness at a young age. In hindsight, I am able to recognize all the small things that I had done to create SPLASHES in my own community and the various ways that my parents and teachers helped me to make those splashes (and see where need existed). In what follows, I recount the various steps in this process.

**Primary Years: Planting the Seeds of Social Justice**

Having grown up in a nontraditional household, social justice was something that was instilled at a young age. We just didn’t know it. My parents were firm believers in giving back, not only to our community, but other communities as well. One of my earliest memories of giving back came about through our church. It was not in a traditional financial way - asking for
money. But they did ask for something, that as a young food lover, I found just as coveted. Halloween candy. You may be thinking, really? Halloween candy? What you have to understand is this was not just a few pieces of candy. No.

Each year, my siblings and I spent days and sometimes weeks crafting the perfect Halloween costume. We were often inspired by our American Girl Magazine. The September issue, without fail, was filled with thrifty ways to create a fun costume. Halloween night our family and our family friends, the Hagens, would bundled up in our homemade Halloween costumes and would “hit” 100 houses. Do you know how many Reese's Peanut Butter Cups that is? When we got back to the house, flush cheeked, pillowcases full and body sore, we could not wait to dump our new stash of delicious goods on the living room carpet.

But before I had a chance to rearrange my chocolate-covered favorites, my mum had us draw a line through the very middle of our candy. No zigzagging - other hungry kids also enjoyed chocolate. We were handed a large paper bag to shovel our donated half into before passing it to the next sibling. The following Wednesday we would lug our bag to church where it was then donated to the local food shelf. Little did I know that this was the beginning of the notion we do not share of what we do not need or want but we share from our wants. We must be willing to be uncomfortable so others can be more comfortable.

In another example of sharing, the adults from our church lead us to decide we should continue to give back to our community. This time in a more labor intensive way. Working in the garden. I was used to working in the garden. Since I can recall, my dad had us playing and “helping” in the garden. My four siblings and I were each assigned to various garden areas around the house. The purpose was to help us learn how to take pride in and care for something that was ours. Growing up, many possessions were shared among my siblings, so this was an
opportunity for us to have something that was our own. I will never forget the year my dad simply smiled when I picked watermelons to grow. Watermelons were one of my favorite summer treats and I was thrilled with the idea of being able to harvest a surplus from my backyard. My dad simply shrugged when we discovered tennis ball sized watermelons at the end of a laborious year.

My parents offered to share our vegetable garden space in order for us kids to produce food for the hungry. Therefore, we spent one painstakingly hot summer working in the vegetable garden. Each week members of our religious education group would come over and help plant, weed and eventually, harvest a plethora of vegetables. After much deliberation, it was decided that the fruits (or rather vegetables) of our labor would be delivered to the Little Earth of United Tribes food shelf.

The lessons that we learned from this experience were not ones that could be taught in a classroom. It was clear that our bodies experienced the physical aches and pains that come with the labors of gardening, our hearts learned the art of being self-less and our minds absorbed the information that was shared about the Little Earth of United Tribes. It takes work to achieve equity in distribution of wealth. We cannot eradicate hunger but we can share our resources and allow a few to enjoy fresh picked tomatoes.

The giving of our time and talent didn’t stop with gardening. Our talents were then taken indoors; this time to the kitchen. My dad had worked at a bakery during his high school and college years and my mum was always recruiting help when preparing meals for a family of seven. Needless to say, we all knew our way around the kitchen and found great comfort preparing meals.
Each year, my dad would sprawl out his five Christmas cookie recipes, mixing bowls, ingredients and baking sheets. I would scramble to get the “good” mixing spoon. This year we would not be baking to fill our family and friends’ bellies, but rather the bellies of battered women and their children, homeless men and the lonely elderly.

We spent hours measuring, pouring, rolling and ensuring that the cookies were delicious. As we made the stop at the Battered Women’s Shelter we could not even find the door. The staff person told us the security was necessary to provide a safe space for women and their children who come from harmful situations. The shelter for homeless men was empty as it was daytime and men were not allowed through the doors until 5PM. Where were they during the day? Most did not have jobs. The elderly were just gathering for morning coffee and were actually impatient that we were late with our cookies. We are all cranky when we are hungry. Again, we were being asked not only to help with the laborious baking, but understanding and developing empathy for these men, women and children. The pain of isolation. The fence that is built to keep out evil. I was learning of pain and suffering hidden right in front of us.

**Young Adult Years: Watering**

As I transitioned into high school, time was something that became just as valuable as our much prized Halloween candy. I was learning to navigate school, sax lessons, ski club and most importantly, my social life. Between the babysitting, waxing my skis and studying for AP courses, I still managed to find myself at Children’s Hospital each Saturday morning from 9-12. This time I was giving back to my community, not because I was being told to, but rather by choice.

Like many other important decisions, this was a result of experiences that were shared by two of my older (and they would argue, wiser) sisters. Volunteering at Minneapolis Children’s
Hospital was something that my sisters and I felt was instrumental in our development of empathy and a growing sense of the inequities in our world. Little did I know when I interviewed my freshman year of high school, that I would be committed to Saturday morning 12 months a year until I graduated from high school. It was touch and go some weeks with the needles and IVs, but the hospital staff, volunteers, the volunteer coordinator and patients made it an unforgettable experience.

After two years of volunteering at Children’s Hospital I felt very comfortable. I knew which volunteer coordinators’ voices would greet me as I walked in to get my tacky red vest and oversized volunteer badge. The once overwhelming hand-sanitizer smell was becoming second nature. Most importantly, I knew which children would be ready to get out of their bed for their occasional stroll to the playroom.

Although this routine had become second nature, I still remember being dumbfounded when the nurse explained to me that the child I was playing with that week had not seen some members of her family in several days. Between working multiple jobs and taking care of other siblings, her parents could only occasionally come in for quick visits. As I watched her move the pieces of Chutes and Ladders, I could not help but think, how can a little girl who has so many barriers and little consistent family support still be so happy? I left that day with a new respect for her strength and unwavering happiness and aware of how different circumstances in a family affect how they can care for a sick child. Circumstances affect everything.

The commitment to give back was easy to develop as I moved to an all women’s college just north of my hometown. There were ample opportunities to volunteer and I quickly joined the volunteer sorority. However, it was not until my junior year of college that I realized I was looking for something more.
I was at a college run by the Benedictine order of Catholic Sisters and Brothers. We learned about the Benedictine values from the beginning. But it was not until one of my professors promoted and modelled the Benedictine values each day in class that I wanted to embrace the values myself.

1. I started to host weekly dinners to promote hospitality.
2. I educated my residents and peers about recycling to foster a sense of stewardship.
3. I joined the sisters on Sunday evenings to practice prayer.
4. Being young (and perhaps naive) I forced my friends at lunch to talk about “issue that mattered”. Although we were not always taking action, I learned from the rich conversations. Fortunately, our lunch bunch morphed into a Juniors for Justice group. I felt a part of a community that valued my opinions and questioned EVERYTHING I proclaimed. I had developed a group of friends who were socially aware and willing to take action to create equity and justice. Now it was not just about giving back. It became how to achieve justice and equity and peace.

Then I started my studies in Elementary Education. I learned one thing from Professor Borka - Elementary Literacy was not simply about reading books. It fostered critical thinking skills. We were entering a profession that allowed us to make a difference and foster critical thinking and awareness in the classroom - just as I was on my own journey of critical thinking and social awareness.

We shuffled into the classroom one morning to be greeted by a plethora of children’s books. Professor Borka wanted us to select a picture book that we would be “examining” closer. After pawing through several familiar titles, I came across a book that I had not read...or rather looked at since it is wordless. The Lion & the Mouse by Jerry Pickney found it’s way into my
hands and I held onto it tight (2011). It was not long before I became frustrated with the assignment. How was I supposed to critically analyze the text when it did not have any text? The more I read through the questions Professor Borka was asking, the more I found myself discovering the beauty of this book. Not only was I being forced to make my own inferences of theme and character, but it encouraged me to share the text with my peers and gather their insights. This was a pivotal moment in realizing the power of critical literacy - to actively and reflectively read a text to discover injustice or inequality among individuals.

The Benedictine Values (that had become a part of my own ritual and routines) and insights about critical literacy were the two items that guided me as I prepared to enter the classroom.

**Teaching: Blossoming**

Today I get to make a conscious choice of how to foster my passion for social justice and share that with my students. Reading a wide variety of literature, discussing it with friends and workmates has shaped me. I look for ways to make a SPLASH in face of larger problems. I am intentional about incorporating the Benedictine Values into my classroom instruction. To better understand stewardship, I have a gardener take care of our plants. I also have a greeter so students develop a sense of hospitality as they welcome guests into our classroom. We work on peace and equality during our morning meeting activities and mentor text discussions. Literacy and exploration, whether big or small, has encouraged me to demonstrate my creativity and autonomy. I hope to promote these same traits by introducing my students to texts with a social justice lens.

What is the legacy we are leaving for our children, nieces, nephews, neighbors or students? As a middle class white woman teaching in a mostly white suburb of the Twin Cities,
HOW CAN AN INTERMEDIATE ELEMENTARY EDUCATOR USE CRITICAL LITERACY TO PROMOTE SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH BOOK CLUBS

I am faced with the question of how to address issues in our community, our country or other nations in a way that ten-year-olds will understand. As I mentioned, following the election of our 45th President, I entered a classroom filled with mixed emotions. I wanted to facilitate a conversation, but did not feel equipped to have those conversations.

Tyler Quinn’s message started, “Toss a rock into a pond of water. Watch the ripples form. Enjoy as they slowly grow in magnitude. Revel at what you’ve done with one small pebble” (Quinn, 2016). Tyler Quinn’s blog continues as he explains our role and responsibility, as members of society, to make an impact or SPLASH.

I have a sign on my classroom door that reads, “How do you want to be remembered?” I ask my students to be mindful of their actions and how they make a SPLASH in their community. But many do not know how they can do that. Are there fewer opportunities for 5th graders to give back to the community. Is it harder to find role models for making change?

Upon reflection, I could not help but think about going back to the basics. Each year I have student led book clubs. We have a large selection of “good fit” texts. The discussions are rich and students become engaged and excited. I decided to channel that energy and provide a new purpose for book clubs: work to develop a sense of social justice in book club participants. This seemed like a natural approach because they were familiar with the book club process and would be able to discuss social justice concepts in a purposeful and respectful manner.

In Chapter One I explained how the seeds of social justice were planted in my life. Reflecting back on my life, there are several takeaways that help me make decisions today. As I mentioned with my Halloween candy, we must be willing to be uncomfortable so others can be more comfortable. From my experiences in the garden, I learned that it takes work to achieve equity in distribution of wealth. My time in the kitchen with my dad later helped me learn of the
pain and suffering hidden right in front of us. My volunteer work at the Children’s Hospital helped me realize that circumstances affect everything. As I left for college, I realized the commitment to give back was essential to develop. What was critical in each of those experiences was respectful discussion, reflection and debate, sharing values, learning from other people. Without these components I could not have developed my understanding or developed awareness of immediate and larger communities. How does one duplicate that lively interchange of ideas that contributes to developing critical thinking skills? One needs a shared experience, a shared text, a shared passion in order to have an intelligent dialogue. I had experiences and community. Classrooms have books and a community. Could a book discussion based on an issue that illustrates injustice educate and engage students enough to help them change their beliefs about their own power to make change. *How can an intermediate elementary educator use critical literacy to promote social justice through book clubs?* In Chapter Two, the literature review, I will explore and define social justice, critical literacy and book clubs. I will explain the theory of critical literacy and critical literacy framework.
CHAPTER TWO
Literature Review

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

Introduction

In Chapter One, I described my personal experiences with social justice and how I arrived at my question: How can an intermediate elementary educator use critical literacy to promote social justice through book clubs? In this chapter, my literature review, I examine various scholarly definitions of my key terms: social justice and critical literacy, and I provide working definitions for the purposes of this study. Next, I describe a critical literacy framework that can be used for engaging students, guiding students, extending students’ thinking, and encouraging reflection. Next, I explore book clubs as a specific classroom methodology, including how to implement them effectively and the potentially positive outcomes they can have on students. Finally, I justify the use of book clubs as an appropriate classroom methodology for exploring issues of social justice.

What is Social Justice?

According to Adams, Bell and Griffin (2007), social justice is not simply a goal, but it is also a process in which we need to endure to reach that goal. They argue that this goal cannot be met until the needs of all individuals within a community are met. They remind us that, “social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (p. 1). All individuals within a community need to participate in this awareness and process in order for us to meet that goal. It is through education that we are able to promote social justice and bring to light concerns such as
oppression, since social justice and dismantling oppression go hand-in-hand. Adams, Bell and Griffin also clarify that they “use the term oppression rather than discrimination, bias, prejudice, or bigotry to emphasize the pervasive nature of social inequality woven through social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness” (p. 3). Individual acts of prejudice and mistreatment are, of course, highly problematic. But social justice often involves dismantling unjust social structures that are more difficult to see than individual acts of blatant mistreatment. For example, it is easy to see the blatant prejudice and racism that pervades a neo-Nazi demonstration. But low income people of color in the United States also face disproportionate incarceration and unequal access to housing, education, and employment. These systems of inequity are largely hidden and therefore easy to ignore. Such social inequities can only be uncovered with a careful and critical examination of our nation’s history, which allows us to discover patterns of oppression and make mindful choices for the future. Individuals need to participate in uncovering and dismantling such injustices through education and action, and we need to move toward a system where all individuals are treated justly.

Similar themes are presented as we observe other definitions of social justice. Mapp (2014) reiterates the importance of equitable allocation of basic essentials. She argues that regardless of status, all humans should have their basic needs met. By exposing us to our history of human rights (or lack thereof), we are able to discover patterns of oppression. Mapp highlights the importance of committing to making change in her call to action – simply becoming aware of oppression is not enough. Like Adams, Bell and Griffin, Mapp (2014) believes that efforts must involve the entire community, but that the work begins with one person at a micro level. Mapp is writing specifically for social workers, but the social justice goals that she delineates align nicely with the ideals we hope to meet as educators.
Evans et al. (2017) have a broader and more individualized understanding of social justice, claiming that it is not a process and goal, but rather a notion. For Evans et al., social justice is often purposely left undefined because its meaning is different depending on the individual. When describing social justice, Evans et al. (2017) begin with Buettner-Schmidt and Lobo’s goal of attaining fairness and equity, particularly as relates to access to resources (material resources, educational resources, and fair opportunities for advancement). Referencing Rawls’ (2017) seminal text, *A Theory of Justice*, Evans et al. (2017) write:

> social justice usually entails the provision to all people of basic human needs including income, housing, education and health care; equal enjoyment of human rights including non-discrimination, freedom of expression and movement, the right to liberty and the right to live free from violence; and some redistribution of resources to maximise the position of the worst-off. (p. 98)

Again, we see social justice linked to basic human needs, though this definition also includes a detailed list of those needs that are considered “basic.” This is one of the first definitions I found that directly included education within the list of basic needs. Zoe Weil (2016), author of *The World Becomes What We Teach: Educating a Generation of Solutionaries*, agrees that education is a basic need. She argues that education is the key in creating solutions to today’s problems, arguing:

> We need to shift away from politically motivated side-taking and set our sights on solutions to education that are most meaningful to students and their futures; that are truly helpful to the profession of teaching; and that are ultimately best for the world our children will soon be influencing. (p. 15)
A social justice lens that emphasizes education as its core keeps us mindful of the future – changing both attitudes and practices as we move forward. It is also a logical emphasis for a school setting.

For me, social justice has a spiritual component. As I mentioned in Chapter One, the Benedictine Values have played a large role in my faith development which is grounded in Catholic social teachings. I believe in the inherent human dignity for all and preference for the poor. My faith is a hopeful approach to the work of creating equity.

In exploring the use of the term “social justice” in the classroom, I have also discovered some challenges and barriers. Social justice can be a controversial term in the classroom, because it sometimes carries the connotation of being “too political” or too “one-sided” (that is, left-leaning). I teach in an affluent, mostly-white suburb in a major metropolitan area, a community which can be skeptical of classrooms and teachers that appear to be explicitly political in their classrooms (though, of course, all classrooms are political, including those that claim to be “neutral”). For this reason, I am hesitant to use a term that may be associated with politics, rather than simply emphasizing basic human rights and empathy.

After conversations with colleagues and administrators, I have decided to use the term “humane education” for the purposes of this study. The definition that I will provide for my families and students is: “the use of education to nurture compassion and respect for all living things.” Even with our student demographics and highly-involved parents, we decided that it was difficult to argue against “compassion” and “respect” as characteristics they would want for their children.
What is Critical Literacy?

As I deepened my understanding of social justice, it only seemed natural to be purposeful with the introduction of the concepts. “Critical literacy” is one important way in which we move toward “social justice” in the classroom. It is a tool that helps readers (our students) to see the systems of inequity described above.

McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) explain in Critical Literacy: Enhancing Students’ Comprehension of Text that in order to utilize critical literacy, we must first understand what it is and its role in our classrooms. They emphasize the importance of the role of the reader and the need for a reader to be an active participant. Active reading strategies include previewing text, self-questioning, making connections, visualizing, knowing how words work, monitoring, summarizing and evaluating. By reading actively, the reader is able to “move beyond passively accepting the text’s message to question, examine or dispute the power relations that exist between the readers and authors” (p. 14). When we do this we are able to encourage reflection, transformation, and action. McLaughlin and DeVoogd’s (2004) text embodies several of the values that most educators try to embrace in their classroom.

Beck (2005), a teacher working in an all-male maximum-security provincial correctional facility in Canada, has a different lens when viewing critical literacy. When utilizing texts to promote conversation, she is reprimanded due to the intensity that ensued from the dialogue (Beck, 2005). According to Beck (2005), critical literacy is “…an attitude toward texts and discourses that questions the social, political, and economic conditions under which those texts were constructed, shows much promise in helping people ‘make meaning from the array of multimedia, complex visual imagery, music and sound, even virtual worlds that confront us each day’” (p. 392). Beck has struggled some with teaching in a prison-setting, since her approach
has sometimes led to very intense conversations with her students, for which she has been reprimanded. From Beck’s perspective, this intensity is part of the point of critical literacy, since it is evidence of the “active reading” that McLaughlin and DeVoogt describe above and also indicates real engagement on the part of her students. Beck argues that due to the student-centered nature of the instruction, it is natural for passionate conversation to ensue. It is only during passionate conversations that we get the engagement from our students that we want. This often stems from the connections that students are able to make to their own lives. In a more traditional classroom setting, Beck suggests that critical literacy, “is characterized by an emphasis on students' voices and dialogue as tools with which students reflect on and construct meanings from texts and discourse” (p. 394). Student voice and dialogue could have a face-to-face or digital platform. By providing that outlet, we are allowing students to gain new textual insights and make text genuinely meaningful to themselves.

Molden (2007) provides a definition of critical literacy that is similar to that of McLaughlin and DeVoogd. Molden reiterates the importance of critical literacy inviting readers to be participants who read with purpose. She agrees with McLaughlin and DeVoogd that we need to be mindful of reflection, transformation and action. When we develop and ask questions the reader is able to find power. Ideally, a teacher is scaffolding critical literacy through the development of questions that push the reader to think about “power” in the text – not only how power functions within the text (between characters, for example), but also how the text itself can assert power, by nudging a reader toward a particular view of the world. Molden asserts, “Using critical literacy helps pull the power away from the author and makes it an equal relationship between the author and the reader by allowing us to see the text from all angles, not
just believing what is written down” (p. 50). It is when we establish equal power through active reading that we are able to look at the text critically.

**What is the Critical Literacy Framework?**

In the following section, I will examine each step of McLaughlin and DeVoogd’s critical literacy framework in greater detail, referencing appropriate sources and describing what I have attempted in my own classroom. Specifically, I will describe the strategies I’ve used to prepare students for success with book clubs, since this study uses book clubs as its primary instructional approach. I am delving specifically into McLaughlin and DeVoogd’s critical literacy framework because I use it as an aspect of this study.

In 2004, McLaughlin and DeVoogd introduce us to The Guided Comprehension Direct Instruction Framework (see figure 1) for teaching critical literacy. Although it uses a direct instruction approach, it also encourages student-to-student interaction as well as independent work (after the students have been exposed to the strategy itself). As I explored critical literacy, I came across the critical literacy framework that I found applicable to my instruction.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explain</th>
<th>Explain what the critical literacy strategy is and how it works.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrate</td>
<td>Demonstrate the strategy using a think-aloud, a read-aloud, and an overhead projector or chalkboard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide</td>
<td>Guide the students to work in small groups or with partners to create responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Practice by having students work with partners or independently to apply the critical literacy strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect</td>
<td>Reflect on how the strategy helps students read from a critical stance.</td>
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*Figure 1. The Guided Comprehension Direct Instruction Framework* (adapted from McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 2004, p. 38)
McLaughlin and DeVoogd assert that when students are able to demonstrate confidence with the critical literacy strategies, teachers can use The Critical Literacy Lesson Framework (see figure 2). By following this framework, we encourage students to reflect and/or decide to take action after reading a text. McLaughlin and DeVoogd explain, “The purpose of the strategies is to provide direction for students as they engage in critical analysis—examining social issues and power relationships” (p. 38). One may draw connections from critical literacy to reading comprehension. In both, we are asking students to understand the text more fully and with greater nuance, moving beyond basic understanding, toward interpretation, evaluation, and potential action. The Critical Literacy Lesson Framework asks us to be mindful of this process when introducing a text.

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<tr>
<th>Pre-Reading</th>
<th>Engaging Students’ Thinking</th>
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<td>During Reading</td>
<td>Guiding Students’ Thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>During Reading &amp; Post-Reading</td>
<td>Extending Students’ Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Reading</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. The Critical Literacy Lesson Framework* (adapted from McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 2004, p. 41)

**Engaging students.** The first key component of The Critical Literacy Lesson Framework is engaging students. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) explain that before reading, it is essential to, “engage students in the lesson by activating background knowledge, motivating students by introducing the text, and setting a purpose for reading” (p. 41). There are several different tools and techniques that can be used to create student “buy in” with the text. Book talks, movie previews, reading the summary or providing a photo or role play scenarios can motivate the students to read a text. Without student engagement, it is challenging to get
students to understand the purpose of their reading. Adler and Lincoln (2014) compare reading to skiing. We have to develop the habit of reading with a specific purpose. Especially at the elementary level, it is important for students to distinguish between reading for pleasure and reading with a specific purpose or lens.

Katrein (2016), a fifth grade teacher incorporating Genius Hour into her classroom, agrees with the importance of student engagement. Katrein argues, “Right now, grit, passion, engagement, and inquiry are concepts worthy of our attention as teachers. These words are linked; they are deeply connected to authentic, relevant student learning” (p. 241). Once we have student engagement, we can be successful as we move into our next focus.

In my own classroom, I use several strategies to engage the students in preparation for our book clubs. For several weeks, I read sections of selected texts or summaries that I know would activate prior knowledge and potentially “hook” my audience. We watch book trailers together and discuss them as a class. I also encourage students to take time to review the Humane Education Book Selections (Appendix C) that I have developed for them.

Guiding students: The second key component of The Critical Literacy Lesson Framework is guiding students. This happens during the reading. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) suggest using a reading strategy to help students engage in the reading process. Think-pair-share is a strategy that is common in intermediate elementary classrooms while a teacher reads a mentor text. A teacher will pose a question for students to consider. Students have an opportunity to independently think about a question or section of the text before being invited to turn and share with a partner. After the student has an opportunity to share and clarify thoughts or ideas with a partner, they can share them with the class. Turn and talk is another strategy used to help guide students through a text. By posing a question and having the students turn and
discuss it with their partner, the student is more likely to be engaged. They are also able to monitor text comprehension with each other.

When using book clubs, teachers can provide students with specific roles to help guide their learning. As discussed in the next section, it is critical to have students feel competent in their roles. In intermediate elementary classrooms, most students still need guidance or scaffolding as to what kind of questions or conversations they should bring to a discussion. In my own setting, we have used Erin Nye (2017), who has created a Literature Circle and Book Club packet (Appendix E) that we find useful.

**Extending students’ thinking:** The third key component of The Critical Literacy Lesson Framework is extending students’ thinking. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) explain, “After reading, help the students extend their reading from a critical stance by engaging in critical discussions and taking action based on what they have read” (p. 41). The discussion after reading a text can be instrumental in helping students seek further understanding, gain new perspective and challenge students to engage in dialogue.

With book clubs, students are given many opportunities to discuss the text (in fact, this is the primary purpose of a book club – to encourage student-generated conversations). Intermediate elementary students often do not know how to begin or navigate such conversations, so preparing for book club helps foster effective conversations. To help encourage meaningful conversation and interaction, we use speaking prompts such as:

- Based on evidence from the __________, I think…
- Building on __________’s idea…
- I find it fascinating that…
- Have you considered….?
• Yet another perspective to consider is...

Not only does this help with conversations, but students may also use these frames to help prepare for written or verbal reflections.

Another aspect of extending students’ thinking is helping them take action based on what they read. Depending on the text, students may feel compelled to take action and do something about an issue or problem discussed in the text. Buchanan, Harlan, Bruce and Edwards (2016) explore the impact of allowing students to further their understanding of a text or concept through inquiry learning. They assert, “Where it is implemented, [Inquiry Based Learning] allows students to make determinations about the problems, challenges and issues they investigate, helping move students toward meaningful engagement and deeper learning” (2016, p. 2). After reading a powerful text, students may feel compelled to learn more or take action. It is important to be mindful of what that could look like in a classroom setting. After reading A Long Walk to Water, students might feel compelled to bring awareness to water accessibility. Another group read Almost Home and wanted to create care packages. They would have toothbrushes, tissues and snacks in a Ziplock bag. When families are out driving and come across an individual who is homeless, they can provide them with a care package.

**Teacher reflection:** The fourth key component of The Critical Literacy Lesson Framework is reflection. As educators, we know that this is a critical component of several tasks in the classroom. The purpose is for the teacher to, “...reflect on (a) what you taught, (b) why you taught it, (c) how you think the lesson went, (d) how students reacted to the lessons, (e) what you plan to do to continue teaching from a critical perspective, and (f) what additional observations or comments you must have” (McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 2004, p. 41). When we allow ourselves time to reflect, we are being purposeful with improving our instruction for future
lessons. Martin, Smolen, Oswald, and Milam (2016) discuss the merit of reflective practices, especially as initial teachers. They point out, “The reported benefits of reflective practice range from its potential to challenge and broaden the teacher’s perspectives to assisting teachers to solve problems in their practice to broader effects in challenging prevailing norms” (p. 36).

When reflecting on the book club process, I share thoughts and opinions directly with my students. Students are also asked to reflect on their book club experiences, as a way to help me reflect further on my own practice. This also models reflection practices for them, so they hear and see my language and thoughts as I engage in the reflection process.

**What is a book club?**

In this section, I explore the use of book clubs (or literature circles), since they are a central instructional framework for this study. I also examine why book clubs are an appropriate framework for teaching about social justice and to encourage critical literacy. For the purpose of this study I will be using the term book club as opposed to literature circles. As we develop into adulthood we may elect to partake in a book club with members in our community or online. I want students to feel empowered and understand they are creating lifelong reading habits.

Book clubs have been an instrumental part of literacy instruction for centuries, but teachers have different perspectives on what is considered “best practice” for book clubs. Gambrell and Morrow (2015) explain, “In literature circles, teachers and children use trade books or literature books, both narrative and expository, as the core for reading instruction” (p. 421). They recommend that teachers start with a large assortment of texts and ask for student preference in selecting specific texts. After gauging the general interest level for different texts, the teacher can select high interest texts that seem appropriate for the formation of book clubs. Next, the teacher is able to “book talk” the text and collect preferences from students to form
each book club. Lastly, students will be given their books and set goals for their meetings. One of the primary pedagogical goals of book clubs is to encourage a lifelong love for reading and talking about texts. By promoting book clubs at a young age, we may be seeding the idea of using book clubs into adulthood. Book clubs can be one helpful way to get readers talking about and taking action on societal challenges (water resources, poverty, abuse, global warming, etc.).

**Features of High Functioning Book Clubs**

Planning and implementing book clubs take time, energy and resources, but is critical to have engaging and rich discussions. Tracey and Morrow (2017) provide insight into ways to implement literature circles in a classroom. They point out that, “There is no single, correct way to implement literature circles” (p.139), but encourage teachers to try a variety of approaches and modifications. Book selection, group size and pacing are just a few of the decisions for teachers. Features of high functioning book clubs include: providing student choice, student led conversations and giving control to the students.

**Providing student choice:** Miller (2011), educator and renowned author, reiterates the importance of student choice throughout her text and during her presentations. She explains that it is through the power of choice that we unlock new opportunities, instill passion and foster growth in literacy. Miller believes that, “providing students with the opportunity to choose their own books to read empowers and encourages them. It strengthens their self-confidence, rewards their interests, and promotes a positive attitude toward reading by valuing the reader and giving him or her a level of control. Readers without power to make their own choices are unmotivated” (p. 1). Donalyn (2011) would argue that choice plays a major role in motivation. As mentioned earlier, McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) state, “we strive to create classroom atmospheres that encourage and challenge students to become critically literate” and “…that motivation is
essential for successful teaching and learning experiences” (p. 35). It is when we allow students to have choice that we see a direct correlation with motivation. At the same time, being intentional about providing choice is key. Just sending students into the library can be overwhelming and intimidating, especially for struggling or resistant readers, so teachers play a central role in helping to scaffold student choice. They might suggest some specific options for students, or help students to figure out what interests and motivates them, or point them toward texts that match their independent and/or instructional reading level. I feel students are constantly telling me that they grow as readers because they feel they have a voice in choices. I compiled a list of social justice books (Appendix C).

**Student led conversation:** Smoldt (2001) points out that book clubs are not only an opportunity to provide choice, but also give students a chance to teach (one of the most powerful ways to learn something in greater depth). According to Smoldt, students traditionally spend a majority of their day receiving information from teachers, and book clubs allow for student-led conversations that are student centered. Smoldt also notes that small group settings lead to more engagement from students that might be missed in a whole class discussion. “Within the hour,” writes Smoldt, “the discussion moved beyond just words, and the students participated in various activities, such as games, drawings, or crafts that further drew them into the story. The discussion format allowed readers to speak up, relate to the story, and learn more about it while having fun” (p. 10). It can be challenging for teachers to give up control, Smoldt admits. This definitely requires a positive and productive relationship with students, and most importantly, trust.

**Giving control to students:** The Great Books Foundation (2007) is a nonprofit organization that builds and provides programs for kids and adults. Their discussion programs
are founded on the Shared Inquiry philosophy. They explain that “Through Shared Inquiry™ discussions of enduring literature, we advance social and civic engagement and help people of all ages think critically about their own lives and the world we share” (p. 2). This philosophy is one that I have introduced in my classroom because it naturally leads to respectful conversations with a social justice lens. Thomas and Oldfather (1995) argue that it is through the use of shared inquiry that you allow student and teacher engagement by using the learning process to unravel intrinsic motivation. They suggest that by involving the students, piquing curiosity and fostering a search for understanding, students will be intrinsically motivated and grow as learners. When there is a shift in responsibilities, there is also a shift in relationships. By allowing the students to take control and responsibility for the planning and implementing, there is value in that gained trust. Thomas and Oldfather believe that, “As theorists, [the students] help define purposes, set goals, and make choices within the given structure, based on their own experiences, interests, and growing ability to reflect on their own learning” (p. 201).

For the purpose of this study, there are roles that are designated to students in preparation for book club each week. Having something to prepare helps guide student thinking. As mentioned earlier, Erin Nye created a Literature Circle and Book Club packet (Appendix D) that we purchased and use during book club. The roles include:

- Discussion Director
- Crazy Connector
- Super Summarizer
- Vocabulary Victor
- Passage Picker
- Artful Artist
What is the result of book clubs?

James (2003) reiterates the importance of instilling passion for reading at a young age. She explains that she has seen a shift in reading culture over her 20 plus years of teaching. With the increase in technology, students need to be entertained and they need to draw connections between what they are reading and themselves. James established a book club at her school for kindergarten through second graders and discovered, “the book club activities elicited much thought and discussion from the students. They began to relate reading to themselves and to the world around them” (2003, p. 30). The evolution of book clubs continued as James established online book clubs. The anticipated outcomes were ones shared by many educators:

- Develop an appreciation of reading for learning and enjoyment.
- Become lifelong readers with a lifelong appreciation for literature.
- Engage in shared reading.
- Make new friends and develop social skills through interaction with students from other schools.
- Learn and use technology to enhance language arts skills.
- Begin to build their own personal libraries (p. 30)

As we develop book clubs that allow for these outcomes to become reality, we must be intentional about the books we select. For the purpose of the study I wanted students to demonstrate these outcomes while reading books with a social justice lens.

Using Book Clubs to Explore Social Justice Issues

Rawls’ (2001) argument that education is a basic right brings us to the notion of equal access to education. Although we are aware that this is not something that is presently the case, it is our job as teachers to provide purposeful education. Allen (1997) examines the role of conversations around social justice and equity in the classroom and argues, “If we truly want to educate children to be critical, analytical thinkers, then I believe there is a need to encourage,
support and extend students’ awareness of social and political issues in the classroom” (p. 518). That still holds true today. In some classrooms, such conversations might be avoided because they are challenging to navigate. But if children do not learn how to develop opinions and navigate such challenging conversations thoughtfully in school, they may never have an opportunity to develop those critical skills. Martin, Smolen, Oswald and Milam (2012) grapple with social justice in our Twenty-First Century classrooms and argue that one way to promote such challenging conversations is “through exposure to [social justice themed] literature.” Such literature allows students to “gain multiple perspectives and learn about the social, political, and moral conditions under which people around the world live. They also develop respect and understanding of socially and politically oppressed peoples and learn why it is important to promote social justice” (p. 158). Teachers, of course, play a central role in guiding students to see a text through a social justice lens and to consider that text from multiple perspectives, allowing them not only to gain new insights, but to develop and demonstrate empathy.

Gove and Still (2014) explore the role of literacy in terms of concern for the environment and social justice. They argue that, “Critically reading texts could aid children as they develop reading and writing skills by helping them recognize that literacy provides an avenue by which one can make changes in their lives and in the power structures in which they live. Today, all citizens, no matter their socio-economic status, need to pursue a deeper understanding of powerful structures that manipulate information presented to the public” (p. 256). As we continue to introduce literacy in the classroom, we can also challenge students to observe the world through a social justice lens. Such mental awakening can allow us, both students and teachers, to empathize with our fellow human beings, recognize the basic needs that all humans deserve, and take action to bring about change.
Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the terms “social justice” and “critical literacy” and defined them for the purposes of this study. I have also explored a critical literacy framework that helps teachers plan for engaging students, guiding students, extending student's thinking, and reflecting. I have described book clubs and how to best implement them successfully with students, and I have justified the use of book clubs as an appropriate method for teaching with a social justice lens. In Chapter Three, I will explain in detail the action research study that I have developed to answer my central research question: How can an intermediate elementary educator use critical literacy to promote social justice through book clubs?
CHAPTER THREE
Methods

Grandfather, Sacred One, teach us love, compassion, and honor that we may heal the earth and heal each other.

Ojibwa Prayer

Introduction

In Chapter One, I explained how I was introduced to social justice at a young age and how it has come to shape my teaching career. I described how current events and my teaching experiences have pushed me to develop my research question: How can an intermediate elementary educator use critical literacy to promote social justice through book clubs? In Chapter Two, I examined the intersection of social justice, critical literacy, and book clubs through a review of current literature. In this chapter, I will lay out the action research study that I developed to answer my question. I begin by revisiting and further explaining the purpose of the study. Next, I describe the setting for my research and the general methodology I developed for this study. Finally, I share the specific tools used to collect data for the study.

Purpose

The purpose of this action research study is to examine the impact of book clubs as a tool to promote social justice. I selected this topic for three reasons: 1. as a response to the 2016 national election and my growing concern about racism, inequity, and a general lack of empathy; 2. to embed our district framework into my curriculum; 3. to experiment with book clubs with a specific thematic purpose.

The District Framework (Appendix G) was developed to foster meaning, engagement and deeper learning in the classroom. In my own class, I use literature that explores complex, rich cultural issues paired with book clubs as an instructional approach to incorporate global
perspectives and critical thinking into students’ everyday lives. I wanted to find out: Will my students learn to use literature as a means to further their understanding of global issues and develop empathy for others? Will they seek out solutions to relevant questions and prepare to act in response to injustice? Will they make a SPLASH? The question that Tyler prompted in his blog and got me thinking about pertains to my role in our community. Since I started teaching fifth grade, I have incorporated book clubs into my reading curriculum. I have seen an increase in student engagement with reading and I believe book clubs have helped to foster life-long reading skills. But I think there can be more. With this study, I want to bring a new purpose to book clubs: social justice. When students read, I want them to learn about important global issues, develop greater empathy for their fellow human beings, and become motivated to create solutions. In the short term, this could result in a reduction in school bullying, greater acceptance of diversity, and a more tolerant student body. In the long term, students might carry these new perspectives into their workplace and their communities, influencing others in leadership and contributor roles.

**Setting for the Study**

I begin this section with a description of the demographic make-up of the district, then shift into an analysis of the current curriculum.

**District:** The district is a suburban district in a major metropolitan area in the mid-west. In the 2016-2017, the district was comprised of 10,567 students, 606 teachers and 116 staff. Of the 10,567 students, 84.3% were White, 2.5% Black, 3.9% Hispanic, 5.5% Asian and 0.3% American Indian. This district’s population was 1.7% English Learners, 10.6% Special Education, 6.6% Free/Reduced Priced Lunch and 0.1% Homeless. In 2016, 96.1% of the student
population graduated high school and 0.6% (4 students) dropped out and 3.3% are “unknown” (District Report Card, 2017).

As these percentages indicate, the district is an affluent and overwhelmingly white community, with a comparatively small number of ELLs, students of color, and students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. These numbers highlight the importance of attempting a curriculum that takes up a theme of social justice, as well as the challenges that such a curriculum could pose in a largely homogenous setting.

**School:** The elementary school at the center of this study is an English/Spanish Immersion school. According to the student demographics section of the State Department of Education website, this school had 844 students during the 2016-2017 academic school year. The racial breakdown was: 87.0% White, 1.9% Black, 4.4% Hispanic, 2.3% Asian and 0.2% American Indian. This school’s population was 1.2% English Learners, 9.7% Special Education, 5.5% Free/Reduced Priced Lunch and 0.4% Homeless.

As these statistics indicate, the school largely reflects the demographics of the district. One notable difference, described further below: this school utilizes a Spanish Immersion pedagogical model, which means that students are given many more opportunities to learn about Hispanic language and culture. Also, the school has a greater percentage of teachers of color, specifically native Spanish-speaking teachers.

**State Testing Data**

Examining state testing data for the district and school, I was able to draw two important conclusions: 1. In general, the district and school score at much higher proficiency rates than other districts in the area; 2. Reading scores in particular have stayed stagnant in the past 3 years. This data suggests that students are generally well-prepared in terms of academic skills,
but that the district and school needs to continually re-assess its reading curriculum in order to best meet the needs of its students.

**Teachers and School Culture**

The elementary school in this study had 52 teachers and 38 other staff members during the 2016-2017 school year. Of the 52 teachers, 63.4% of the teachers had a Master’s Degree and 2% had a Doctorate. 10% of the teachers had special permission with their license (meaning that they did not yet have a permanent state license). In most cases, these teachers either needed to complete college course work or pass their Minnesota Teaching Licensure Examination. The school had several teachers in the Spanish Immersion program who were not native to the States and were working with temporary licenses (School Report Card, 2017).

**School history and shifting culture:** This study was conducted during my fourth year as a teacher at the school. Preparing for the study, I had several conversations with staff members, including my principal, about the shifting school culture. When my principal and a teammate started 13 years ago, it was a small, local school without much language diversity. A little over ten years ago, our Superintendent and members of the Board created a strategy to increase district enrollment numbers, which were declining, largely due to limited growth from young families. Growth is possible because the state has an “open enrollment” policy, allowing families to attend school across district borders.

As a response to the declining enrollment challenge, the district adopted three major initiatives: 1. A Spanish/Chinese Immersion program was developed at each elementary school to draw interest and increase the open-enrollment numbers. 2. A 1:1 iPad program was started at the high school and has rolled down to all students in 5th-12th grade. This program was intended to promote innovation and modernization of teaching techniques with new technology.
3. A Navigator program was established to cater to the “exceptionally gifted” students who have an IQ of 140 and above in second through fifth grade. There are two schools in the district with classrooms that cater to this unique population.

At the time of this study, the Spanish Immersion program was in its ninth year of operation. The shift to a language immersion program created both opportunities and challenges at the school. As our staff diversified in order to meet the demands of a Spanish Immersion curriculum, we also had to negotiate cultural differences among staff from different backgrounds. A new school culture had to emerge, which required us, as a staff, to seek to understand and work through some of our cultural differences. At times, this process has been rocky.

**District Curriculum**

Prior to this study, the district had just adopted a new Language Arts curriculum. We had curriculum and resources from Collaborative Classroom’s *Being a Writer* and *Making Meaning* (2011). When the Language Arts committee researched different curriculums, they had specific criteria: resources that were available in Spanish or easily translated, and resources that had daily lesson plans and a curriculum that would be uniform across the district, including lessons, assessments and rubrics. With new teachers and substitutes, the district wanted to ensure clear instruction to support individuals with different language or other learning needs. Several members of the Language Arts Committee were highly invested in *Lucy Calkin’s Units of Study* for writing, but were concerned about the lack of structure for novice teachers (2003). Prior to this adoption, there were common assessments that were posted on Skyward, a collaboration space, with supporting mini-lessons. Each teacher would augment the lessons with their own resources.
The district has officially adopted Collaborative Classroom’s *Being a Writer* and *Making Meaning* (2011). First, this curriculum offers structured instruction that is beneficial for new or substitute teachers. Second, Collaborative Classroom’s *Being a Writer* and *Making Meaning* also has differentiation resources that are easy to implement and embed into our instruction. Last, the curriculum provides lessons that were instrumental in allowing for successful book clubs. Students learn and practice skills such as summarizing, problem posing and plot development. The pacing of the lessons allows us time to enrich and practice the skills through the use of book clubs.

**My Classroom**

During the year of this study, our fifth grade team had three student rotations and homeroom, with students grouped based on their math ability. One teammate taught three sections of math and the other teammate and I taught writing and reading. I taught two sections of writing and one section of reading. I also had a homeroom class that included history, science and health. For the purposes of this study, I focused on my reading group.

**Participants:** My total reading group was comprised of 28 fifth graders. There were three students on an Individualized Education Program and two students with a 504 Plan. The fall diagnostic test scores in reading ranged from the 6th to the 94th percentile. The fall state reading scores ranged from 2nd to 90th percentile. These scores are telling for three reasons:

- It was important to select book options that meet a wide range of reading levels;
- It was important to be mindful of the needs of students with different reading abilities in forming groups and planning instruction;
With such a wide range of skills, it was essential to provide clear assignment instructions (i.e. theme, questioning, character development) to scaffold student success at all levels.

When creating book club groups for the unit in this study, I kept specific factors in mind. First, I looked at the Google Form for student preferences (Appendix D), which told me their top three book choices, from a longer list that I had created. Next, I considered the standardized reading scores and my own classroom observations for a sense of each student’s reading skill. In forming groups, I tried to be intentional about gender diversity and reading ability, to have diverse groups that still had generally the same reading ability. I also had to consider student schedules with our book club dates. One group of students received additional reading support with our reading specialist. They were pulled from the classroom for the second half of class to get small group instruction.

Creating the Humane Education Book Selections (Appendix C) was extremely challenging. I knew that I needed to find books with the social justice theme and were appropriate for fifth graders. I started with a list of books that I already had collected, then I asked colleagues, read blogs, visited local bookstores and asked the workers and even asked Donalyn Miller at a workshop. I attempted to have diverse characters and topics. Several student have pets, so I wanted to have books with animals. Knowing my population, there were students who have not been exposed to homelessness or limited access to water. I wanted to provide opportunities for students to develop an understanding or potentially become an expert on these important social justice topics.
For the purposes of this study, I observed and collected data on student experience two subgroups who read the book *A Long Walk to Water* (Park, 2017). These two groups were selected because:

1. I could compare groups who were experiencing the same work of literature;
2. Both groups contained a balance of gender representation;
3. There was a mix of different reading abilities and motivation within the groups.

Additional details about each student participant will be provided in chapter four.

**Methodology**

This study utilized a mixed-method approach to data collection, with a heavy leaning toward qualitative forms of data. My goal was to examine how book clubs impacted student learning, particularly as related to their appreciation and understanding of social justice issues. To do this, I collected pre and post-assessments for each group of participants; student written reflections and worksheets; and I took notes on my teacher observations. Because the pre and post assessments utilized open-ended questions (rather than a multiple choice format), all of this data was qualitative in nature. I have described the study as “mixed methods,” only because I consulted standardized test data (which is quantitative) for each student as an aspect of forming the book clubs for the unit.

After reading about the various types of studies that a teacher can conduct, I decided that qualitative data was the most appropriate for an action research study that attempts to learn more about student attitudes and beliefs. In school settings, action research projects often utilize qualitative research. This method allows an educator to observe and track student behavior without dramatically changing the environment for the students (Johnson, 2012). It also helps teachers to use focused observations as an important form of research. Erickson argues that,
“observation and reflection are skills that are used naturally by teachers as they monitor students engaged in the act of learning” (2012, p. 8). Qualitative research formalizes the process of observation and reflection as a way to learn more about students and, ideally, improve curriculum and pedagogy. As Johnson describes, I used qualitative research as a way to collect information, observe and reflect on the direct impact of the book clubs on students.

**Steps in Data Collection:**

I began the book club unit (and my process of data collection) by introducing the concept of humane education to the students and modeling application of critical consciousness with a lesson that used picture books. I also demonstrated the critical thinking process and how it could be applied to each book club role. Google Forms allowed me to collect preliminary book club data, including information about the students’ early understanding of humane education. Students also selected their top three book club choices using Google Forms. This allowed me to divide them into groups based on their preferences and ability. I assigned meeting dates, page numbers, and roles for each meeting. All documents and assignments were shared on Schoology to help facilitate critical consciousness. Book groups met three times a week for 2-3 weeks. To conclude the book group experience, I facilitated a whole group discussion, focusing especially on empathy and possibilities for being a “solutionary” (see chapter two for further discussion of these terms). Students took a post-assessment, again using a Google Form.

By the end of the unit, I had collected pre and post assessment data, a variety of short formative assessments conducted throughout the unit, and several hours of teacher observation of each group in the study. All of this qualitative data was analyzed for themes and patterns that helped me understand how the book club unit had impacted student learning and student attitudes. Those themes and patterns will be presented in Chapter 4.
In figure 3, I provide the specific timeline I used for the Book Club Unit.

**Process/Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Introduce the various book club homework roles by modeling using</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mentor texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:</td>
<td>-Watch book trailers (2-3 per class)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Take Google Pre-Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Complete Google book choice form</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:</td>
<td>-Meet Monday, Wednesday, Friday to discuss reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Complete Book Club Homework (see appendix) prior to meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:</td>
<td>-Meet Monday, Wednesday, Friday to discuss reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Complete Book Club Homework (see appendix) prior to meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:</td>
<td>-Meet Monday, Wednesday, Friday to discuss reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Complete Book Club Homework (see appendix) prior to meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:</td>
<td>-Complete Google Post-Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Whole class discussions of “Solutionary” next steps</td>
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</table>

**Assessment Data.** As noted, I used several different tools to informally and formally assess my students prior, during, and after our book club meetings. I used a Google Form for the pre/post-assessment. I also used a Google Form to collect book choices from the students. Schoology was the platform used to house the forms and homework resources. I used my iPad to track and house informal data during the book club sessions. Students recorded their book club discussions and “dropped” them into Schoology. At the beginning and end of each meeting, there was a worksheet or question to prompt further thought and reflection for that book club meeting.
IRB Approval and Participant Consent. I went through an IRB process and also got permission from the school and district to conduct the study. I created an informed-consent letter and distributed it to all of your participants’ parents (Appendix A). No participants were compelled to participate and they could withdraw from the study at any time. I was careful to keep all of my data safe, and I protected participant anonymity by using pseudonyms.

Pre and Post Google Survey. The Pre Google Survey (Appendix B) was created to indicate any background information for students as they started the book clubs. Most of the students showed that they did not express any prior knowledge with the vocabulary that I would be introducing throughout the book club. The Post Google Survey (Appendix F) was similar to the Pre Google Survey to track growth or development of understanding. It was apparent that the students still struggled with the vocabulary, but were able to provide examples and draw connections.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the action research study that I developed to answer my research question. This included a recap of the purpose of the study, a description of the setting for the study, and a detailed description of the methodology used in the study, including the tools used for data collection. In Chapter 4, I analyze the data collected to answer research question: How can an intermediate elementary educator use critical literacy to promote social justice through book clubs?
CHAPTER 4
Action Research

*If we are to reach real peace in this world...we shall have to begin with children.*
*Mahatma Gandhi*

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I explained how social justice and critical literacy played a role in my life. Social justice, critical literacy and book clubs were defined, along with the important role they can play in a classroom. The reader was introduced to the purpose of the study, the site of the study (district, classroom and student demographics, school culture), and the methodology used for the study (including process, tools, and timeline). In Chapter Four I will dive deeper into the action research and directly analyze the data I have collected. In what follows, I describe the data collected during the study with a particular focus on seven study participants. For each student, I offer some analysis of their reaction to book clubs that integrated social justice. I also highlight themes that I have noted across all seven of the students’ experiences throughout the unit.

We will be focusing on two subgroups from the reading class. Both groups read, discussed and reflected on the book, *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park. *A Long Walk to Water* is a short novel that intertwines a true story of Salva Dut, a Sudanese Lost Boy, and a fictional story of Nya, a young village girl who benefits from Salva’s work. Salva, a refugee from Sudan in 1985, crosses the African continent in search of family and safety from his war torn country. He endures several harsh situations including attacks by armed rebels, encounters with killer crocodiles and hungry lions. The fictional story of Nya picks up in 2008, where she is responsible for fetching water from the pond daily. Nya spends two hours walking each way to
get water from the Sudanese pond. We learn how Salva’s program “Water for South Sudan”, that he created in response to his life experiences, impacts Nya’s life in a heartfelt and powerful way.

When I compile a list of books for this book club project, A Long Walk to Water was a natural selection. There are not only important themes, such as loneliness, war, perseverance, nature, family and survival, but the book also provides a good opportunity for students to develop empathy for the characters. Nya, the young village girl, is similar in age to my students. I had hoped they would not only try to fathom her different life experiences, but also feel a need to help develop a solution. Some of McTearge and Wiggins’s “Enduring Understanding” statements that I had for my students included (1999):

Students will understand:

- that clean, drinkable water is not available in all parts of the world and that water is an essential resource that we often take for granted in the U.S. and Minnesota
- the challenges families and communities face who do not have clean water immediately available
- the specific challenges of getting water for families in South Sudan
- the impact of war on a community and some of the hardships that kids endure during times of war or conflict

As noted, students were divided into two subgroups. The first subgroup was comprised of Elsa, Olaf, Hans and Ana. Students Moana, Sina and Tui were participants in the second subgroup. In what follows, I provide background information on each of the participants, the pre-assessment that was administered to the students, my reflections on student learning during the book club discussions and post-assessment insights.
Participants

These participants were selected because they represented a diverse group based on gender. As previously mentioned, there is not a culturally diverse population. Both of these groups selected the same text. I wanted to be able to compare the two groups.

Subgroup A. Elsa is an 11-year-old White girl from a middle class family. She is the older of two children and her younger brother requires a lot of attention at home. Her mother has voiced concerns due to lack of shared attention at home. Both of Elsa’s parents work and she has received additional literacy tutoring services. Elsa is a soft-spoken student who often needs to be redirected. She can be found daydreaming in class. She is aware of this fact and we worked on strategies to stay focused. She also takes medication to address attention deficit disorder. Her parents are aware of this her off-task behavior and are supportive with finding ways to help her be successful. Elsa often needs to be coached to participate in group discussions and partner work. In addition to focusing, we are also working on confidence. Elsa’s insights are often swallowed by the louder students who exude more passion in their responses.

Olaf is an 11-year-old White boy from a middle class blended family. Olaf spends equal amounts of time with both parents in their respective homes. Clear communication was a goal that was established at the beginning of the year due to his changing households. He struggles to write down homework and frequently forgets to bring his completed work to school. His parents evaluate his performance strictly on test scores and grades, so we worked to establish better communication and routines to incorporate other factors of measuring success. Due to his small stature and gentleness, we have worked on feeling comfortable working with outgoing peers to build skills speaking up amongst others. Olaf vocalized that he does not always feel he can
connect with them. He does strive to be “accepted” by them and works hard socially and academically. Olaf seems to be particularly aware of his classmates’ thoughts and feelings; he often checks in with other kids who are quiet or may be unhappy. Olaf is a gentle soul who always is aware of his classmates thoughts and feelings. He often can be found with his head in a book. He prefers to be reading multiple texts at once. We have worked on focusing on one text at a time and completing it, but his Attention Deficit Disorder often interferes. He is a bright young man, but often struggles to come to school prepared. We have seen huge growth with his organization and confidence after working with a para. Olaf’s para does daily “checks” and helps hold him accountable for work we know he is capable of completing.

Hans is an 12-year-old White boy from an upper class household where he was accustomed to lots of material items. Han’s mother often vocalizes the struggles with finding time to read due to sports commitments. Hans is one of those students that you need to constantly encourage to “do more”. He is bright, but is often seems to be looking for the easy way to accomplish his work. Hans spends the majority of his day with me and we built a strong relationship. He enters and exits our classroom with little awareness of how his thoughts, actions and words impact his classmates. A personal goal that I had for this student was a development of empathy. I did see glimpses of this prior to the beginning of the book clubs. Hans’s closest friend was another boy of a different race and status. They both share a passion for sports and are fiercely competitive. I hope that developing a sense of empathy would help with his transition to middle school and future endeavours. Grit is another personal goal for this student. Hans has a tendency to give up if something does not come easy to him.

Ana is an 12-year-old White girl from a middle class family. Ana’s family is involved with her academics and often inquires what they can do to support her at home. Ana is a polite
and caring girl who will pick-up a book when told to do so, but not voluntarily. She is highly engaged in class discussions and is incredibly thoughtful about her insights. I have an opportunity to work with Ana during writing and reading instruction. She is social and enjoys reading realistic novels with characters she can connect with or fantasy novels. Although Ana is not as avid as a reader, she demonstrates strong critical literacy skills in the classroom. She would choose to verbalize her thoughts and options rather than write about them. Finding joy in reading and “good fit” books that she would be excited to read was a personal goal for Ana.

**Subgroup B.** Moana is an 11-year-old, White girl from an upper-class family. She was new to our school this year. She was previously at a small charter school in a neighboring community. Her parents were concerned that she was not receiving as much attention as she needed. Moana’s comprehension was impacted by visual impairments. Her mother also vocalized that she benefited from verbal instruction including in testing situations. Moana is an athletic and social girl. Although she was new to our school this year, she was able to quickly make connections socially. Moana struggles academically and often needs to be coached to share her insights. She lists several books that she has read, but when asked to dive deeper into the texts she struggles to recall the text, characters or themes. We are working on selecting “good fit” spots so she would not be distracted by her peers. She often selects texts that are too challenging to “fit in” with her peers. We are working on confidence with knowing and being comfortable with your own strengths and abilities.

Sina is an 11-year-old White girl from an upper-middle class family. Sina’s family is aware of her struggles with reading, but often feel ill equipped to support her. Due to her gymnastics schedule, her mother explains that she is too tired and does not have time to read at home. Sina is a social butterfly who can tell you about *everyone* in the classroom. She is
constantly being redirected during read-to-self time and would openly admit that she is not a fan of reading. She struggles with staying focused so we have tried setting timers to build on her reading stamina. Her family has vocalized a concern for how this will impact her long term. She has strong insights when discussing mentor texts and is not afraid to share them with the class. Sina prefers to be actively engaged in a social project rather than independently reading. Finding joy in reading and “good fit” books that she would be excited to read was a personal goal for Sina.

Tui is an 12-year-old White boy from a middle class family. Being the oldest with younger sisters he is a natural leader and caring. Tui is empathetic and sets that tone with his rough peers. He works hard to do well in class and wants to ensure his classmates do well too. Regardless of his partner, he and his partner were engaged and actively participated in our discussions and independent work. Tui was not in my homeroom, but I had the opportunity to get to know him from writing and reading switch. Due to his gentle demeanor and leadership skills, a personal goal would be that he could help his book club partners dive deeper into the text and challenge their thoughts and opinions.

Upon reflection of the group, I noticed that ALL of these students are White and come from middle or upper-class families. In other words, it’s a highly-privileged group of students. As adults, these students will most likely be members of a privileged class and have the potential to strongly influence our country’s direction. It also may make it more difficult for them to fully-appreciate the complexity of a book like A Long Walk to Water. We want them to empathize with characters in the book, but not simply pity them (which is really a form of condescension). This makes it especially important that teachers help them to build their skill of empathy and become aware of social justice issues (like access to safe drinking water). As
mentioned earlier, in the “Enduring Understandings”, a goal was to bring awareness to social justice issues. Ideally, students would develop empathy and feel called to create solutions or find ways they can help. This is also an opportunity to support the individualized goals that I had mentioned.

Pre-Assessment

To gain a sense of student understanding prior to the unit, I conducted a simple pre-assessment using Google Survey. The pre-assessment was comprised of six questions that explored the students’ awareness of vocabulary associated with social justice. As previously mentioned, I used the term “humane education” in lieu of social justice. For the purpose of this study, I am defining humane education as the use of education to nurture compassion and respect for all living things. The term “solutionary” was derived from Zoe Weil’s *The World Becomes What We Teach* (2016). Her philosophy that school is where we need to address the root of all the problems that need solutions. Weil (2016) asserts,

I believe that it’s possible to create a just, healthy, and humane world: to develop sustainable energy, food transportation, production, construction, and other systems; to end poverty; and to ensure that everyone has equal rights. I believe that we can learn to resolve conflicts without violence; to treat other people and nonhuman animals with respect and compassion; to slow the rate of extinction; and to restore ecosystems. And I believe--based on thirty years of experience--that there is a clear, practical, and positive path to achieve this vision. (pg. 3).

The last questions on the assessment survey were higher-level thinking and application questions. The pre and post assessment questions were similar. It was important to see if the students were able to define the vocabulary, and also apply it to their own lives. The quantitative
data collected in the pre assessment allowed me to plan mini lessons and create exit slips. As demonstrated in Appendix B the questions on the survey include:

- What do you think humane education means?
- What does empathy mean?
- Have you demonstrated empathy? With whom?
- What does it mean to be a solutionary?
- What kinds of solutions might we need to solve for future generations?
- How can a 5th grader in [our community] make an impact across the globe?

**Elsa.** Elsa had little to no prior background about any of the vocabulary. She explained that “[she] don’t know anybody who has [empathy].” Elsa did not have any suggestions for solutions for future generations and explained that a 5th grader can make an impact across the globe, “[by] being nice kind with no drama and more.”

**Olaf.** Olaf has minimal understanding of the social justice vocabulary. He had some familiarity of with empathy and wrote that it was “caring” and he shows empathy for his dog. He predicted that our future generations would have issues with “laziness” and that a 5th grader can make an impact across the globe, “by picking up trash.”

**Hans.** Hans has a moderate grasp of the vocabulary and an even greater idea of the application questions. He explained that “empathy means kind of like sympathy” and he shows empathy for “[his] puppy.” Hans continued to demonstrate his understanding of social justice when he illustrated that “we will need to solve pollution” to help future generations and “we can pack food for people in Africa” as way for a 5th grader can make an impact across the globe.

**Ana.** Ana had little to no prior background about any of the vocabulary. She did have some insights and explained that a solutionary “is someone who brings [their] knowledge
somewhere.” Ana also described a solution for future generations would be “to have very good education” and “they can make a goal” as way for a 5th grader can make an impact across the globe.

**Moana.** Moana showed novice understanding of the social justice vocabulary and application. She replied “I don’t know.” for almost all the questions. She did attempt a response to define empathy. She wrote “I think it means sarcastic” and “a solution” is what it means to be a solutionary.

**Sina.** Sina made no attempts at defining any of the vocabulary questions. She did assert that a solutionary, “…means to find solutions to problems.” She also explained, “…the sun is going to wipe out earth so we would have to find ways to live on other planets unless we want to wipe out the entire human race.” Sina did admit that she had “no clue, but [she’ll] keep thinking” when answering the question: How can a 5th grader in [our community] make an impact across the globe?

**Tui.** Tui had a moderate to high understanding of the vocabulary and was able to give definitions and examples for empathy. When defining empathy, he explained, “for example if u have empathy for someone you feel sad or happy for them.” He went on to explain that he has empathy for “[his] friends, parents, teacher and classmates.” He didn’t go beyond our community, but was able to give examples of individuals that he interacts with daily. He continues to explain that a solutionary “…means to create a solution” and “we could find a solution for pollution so the other generation doesn’t need to experience it.” Tui is pulling from a conversation that we had with our mentor text, *A River Ran Wild: An Environmental History* by Lynne Cherry (2013). Tui continues to think critically when responding to how a 5th grader in [our community] make an impact across the globe. He notes that “they can pick up trash or
just be kind to others.” Being kind to others is a theme that we have emphasized in our
classroom all year. Tui applied the most background knowledge from classroom mentor texts,
conversations and life experiences to this pre assessment.

Pre-Assessment - Teacher Reflections

Overall, my observation of the students is that we are at a basic understanding and most
of the students are still struggling with the terms. It is apparent that the students need to be
introduced to mentor texts that would allow them to better understand examples of social justice.
We can conclude that they are not yet comfortable talking and writing through a social justice
lens. They also need narrative examples to better understand what it means to empathize and be
a solutionary.

Book Club Meetings - Student Reflections

Elsa. Elsa struggled with the book club homework and making a point to be assertive
and vocalize her thoughts and opinions during the discussion. Elsa almost never had her work
completed in preparation for book club even after receiving verbal reminders from member of
her club and me. She also had daily reminder on Schoology for the work that needed to be
completed. Elsa’s parents also received emails from me each time notifying them of her late
work and lack of preparation for book clubs. One of the only tasks she had completed in time for
book club was her drawing for “Artful Artist”. Although it was apparent that she spent time
completing the drawing, it did not help the readers guess a scene from the novel. Elsa’s
responses to our blog discussion was often similar to her verbal discussions. It was often
challenging for me to see if she understood the text or questions that were being asked. I could
not always draw parallels to her responses. An example of this would be her blog response to
the questions: What is your understanding of empathy? Who is a character in your book that you
might be empathetic towards and why? Elsa’s response to these questions was, “Nancy Drew”.
I am aware that she was an avid Nancy Drew fan, but she does not give me any indication of her understanding of the vocabulary or connections to her book club text. During a mini-lesson to discuss and model empathy, I read the text *Faithful Elephants* (1997). *Faithful Elephants* invites us to understand the impact of WWII through the eyes of a zookeeper. John, Tonky and Wanly are performing elephants in the The Ueno Zoo in Tokyo. To keep members of the community safe, the zookeeper is asked to kill their elephants. The zookeeper hopes and prays WWII will end so he can save his elephants. Elsa again did not complete her entrance slip (Appendix F). She simply submitted a Notability slide that said, “They repeated a lot of words.” and “[her partner] said they kept saying the elephant's name”. During the discussions I observed Elsa not volunteering many responses. I struggled with this student. I had the student evaluated for additional reading intervention skills for middle school.

**Olaf.** Olaf quickly developed an understanding of empathy and was able to draw text-to-self and text-to-text connections. When asked: What is your understanding of empathy? Who is a character in your book that you might be empathetic towards and why? Olaf responded, “My understanding of empathy is feeling sad for someone.” When he was discussing this later with his group, he challenged Hans to think about how he felt when his dog died. He explained that he could not imagine how that felt, but it must have been very challenging. Olaf also went right to the text and picked lines from the text that highlighted the themes of loneliness and war. He explained that he felt bad for Salva. Olaf again was able to quickly draw parallels when I shared Wangari Maathai’s “I will be a hummingbird” (2010). WangariMaathai, a Kenyan environmental activist, shares the story of a hummingbird who gets caught in a forest fire. While all the other animals stand in shock, the hummingbird makes a proclamation that he is going to
do something and starts to carry water to the fire. When the other animals tell him that he is too small he responds, “I am doing the best I can” (2010). I asked the students to respond on our blog: Who is a hummingbird? Which character in your book is a hummingbird? Olaf replied, “We are humming birds because even though we're young we can do something big.” Although he did not address the question that asked him to draw connections to the texts, I was able to see that he was drawing connections to being a solutionary. Olaf was able to demonstrate that he extending his thinking when he meet with his discussion group. When Olaf completed his entrance slip for *Faithful Elephants*, he again demonstrated an understanding of empathy. Olaf explained that, “[he] noticed the repetition of the emotion sadness and [he thinks the author] did this to feel empathy for everybody in the story.” Olaf again identified the importance of empathy in the story and brought it to his book club discussion drawing connections to *A Long Walk to Water*. Olaf struggled to have his work completed in time for book club. The work that Olaf completed in preparation for book club was messy and it was apparent he did not put much time or effort into the work.

**Hans.** Hans demonstrated an understanding of the vocabulary and utilizes elements from the critical literacy framework. When Hans blogged his response to Wangari Maathai’s “I will be a hummingbird” he argued, “A hummingbird in my story is salva he is a hummingbird to me because he has to overcome losing his uncle and having no family with but he just keeps on moving forward.” As mentioned earlier, Hans often put forth minimal effort with his work. In this response, he was short but addressed several important literary elements. Hans made a video-to-text connection with his character. He continued to give specific examples of the plot and indirectly address theme. When responding to *Faithful Elephants*, “[Hans and his partner] both felt empathy” and further explains that “[he feels] happy and sad and many other emotions.”
When listening to Hans in his book club discussions, he often gives answers that he knows are seen as “the right answers”. Hans vocalizes concerns for Salva, but when he is interacting with his peers he does not demonstrate that same sense of empathy. Hans would have his homework completed in time for discussion, but was messy and it was apparent he did not put much time or effort into the work.

Ana. Ana exhibited novice understanding of empathy and struggled to draw connections to the texts. When reflecting on Faithful Elephants, Ana noticed that, “There were gravestones. They did tricks to get food.” When paired with a partner they were able to gather that, “[The elephants] wanted food.” and finally that “The elephants need people to take care of them.” Ana is getting at meeting basic needs that we discussed in terms of humane education, but she does not take it a step further to reflect on the impact this has on the elephants or how this must make the zookeeper feel. When listening to Ana in the book club discussions, it is apparent that she was beginning to develop an understanding, but needs more practice applying it to situations. Ana came to the book club meetings prepared but her work simply met the standards. She did not make an effort to exceed the expectations. When she was “Discussion Director” she constructed questions that touched on empathy. Ana asked her group:

- If you were in the middle of war, and separated from your family what would you do?
- She is asking students to put themselves in Salva’s position, one they are unaccustomed to. Ana goes on to inquire,
- What character traits describes how the girl feels about her little brother?
- This time she asks them to refer to specific examples in the text. Her final question,
• How would you feel if you were vomiting all night? might be one that students are familiar with and can demonstrate sympathy for Salva rather than empathy. Ana is creating questions that are emphasizing the harsh conditions that Salva and Nya endured.

**Moana.** Moana demonstrated novice understanding of empathy. When responding to the discussion question about empathy she explained that it means, “To feel like someone is very lucky or feel good for someone.” To feel good for someone you would need to understand to be able to share their feeling. I am not sure how the luck plays a role with empathy. Moana struggled to draw connections to the texts. When reflecting on *Faithful Elephants* Moana noticed that, “John was a smart animal.” When working with her partner she simply noted that, “[they] both talked about animals.” For her concluding thoughts she noted, “[They] both talked about how the elephants were smart and how the people were mean to them.” Again, we are unable to see Moana going beyond the events in the text and drawing text-to-text or text-to-self connections. While completing her Tough Questions entrance slip (Appendix H) Moana started to demonstrate depth in her character analysis. The questions that Moana developed to reveal a character’s concerns included, “Will I find my [family]?” and “Will I find somewhere to stay?” Although it was not apparent if she was aware that these questions align with major themes, she did go on to mention another notable item. Moana explained that these questions, “...Tells [her] that he’s brave.” Being able to label his efforts is key to understanding the story. The next question that she developed is a statement and her response does not connect to the statement. I do feel she started to develop some understanding, but there are still some gaps. Moana completed her work in preparation for each book club discussion. She met the standards, but did not exceed them. When Moana was “Crazy Connector” she made applicable and relatable connections. Some of her connections included:
Losing your family is scary.

Moving is confusing.

Seeing family members is fun.

Losing people is scary.

Being alone is scary.

Not knowing anyone can be scary.

Family [dying] is sad.

War is confusing.

Although Moana repeatedly utilized the words “scary” and “confusing,” she was getting at bigger issues and connections for her, the character Salva and her classmates. Moana vocalized insights during our book club discussions, but lacked confidence.

Sina. Sina exuded a developing understanding of empathy. When responding to Wangari Maathai’s “I will be a hummingbird” Sina explained that, “[She thinks] Salva is a humming bird because he is so brave when he decided to go find his parents by himself.” Sina draws video-to-text connections and continued this conversation when she met with her book club group. Sina continued to assert notions of humane education in her entrance slip. She explained that she noticed, “The trainer gave in and gave [the elephants] food and water.” Sina continued that, “All throughout the book [she] noticed the pictures being very clear and the workers were always depressed and wanted the war to end.” She paid close attention to the emotions and it allowed her to draw the conclusion that, “War should not have happened.” Whether she was aware of it or not, she was reading the text with a humane education lens. Sina continued to demonstrate her humane education awareness. When she was “Crazy Connector” she brought to light several important problems. Sina’s connections included: The effects of
war, It is not about having money, People’s lives, Not being able to eat, Losing family members, Losing friends, Being very, very tired and Having to move to different places. Part of the beauty of this list of connections is that there are some items that would be natural connections and some Sina’s peers would have to demonstrate empathy for. Some of the connections personal and some are at a global level. While working as the “Discussion Director” Sina continued to ask important questions. Sina asked questions including:

- Why did they bomb the place?
- How did they keep hope?
- If the uncle did not die. What would happen?
- What character traits describe Salva?
- How would you feel if you [were] in a bombing situation?

Tui. Tui demonstrates a strong understanding of empathy and is able to draw connections to the texts. When asked about empathy Tui explained that, “Salva [is] someone who [he feels] empathy for. [He feels] really sorry for [Salva]. He lost his house and family. He is very brave and smart.” Tui continues to demonstrate his understand of empathy and is able to provide examples. When completing our Faithful Elephants entrance slip he noticed, “That the elephants names keep on repeating.” After discussing this with his partner, they observed “That only one person has empathy.” Tui’s final thoughts on the book was, “That the trainer really loves the elephants because he fed them.” In this final reflection Tui is drawing connections between the characters and their emotions. His next step would be to put himself in the zookeeper’s place and express how he might feel. Tui came prepared for each book club discussion and it was apparent that he took his time and was intentional with his responses. When he was the “Discussion Director” he asked:
• Why did the woman leave Salva?
• How would you feel if you were Salva?
• If you were in the war, what would you do to find your parents?
• What character traits describe Salva?
• How would you feel if you were Salva?

Although he repeated a couple of questions, while leading the conversation he asked follow-up questions that forced his peers to develop empathy and logic. He would sometimes simply ask, “Why?” which again made his peers reexamine their responses. When Tui was “Super Summarizer” he was able to select key events from the plot. Several of his peers struggled with this skill. When Tui was “Crazy Connector” he brought to light several important themes. Tui’s connections included: Getting lost, War, Surviving, Moving, Adoption, Losing family, Long walks and Making new friends.

Although Tui was not able to personally connect with some of these ideas, he brought his group to higher-level conversations. Not many fifth graders in my community would have read *A Long Walk to Water* and thought about adoption. It is a major event in Salva’s life, but it is sometimes challenging for fifth graders who have never experienced adoption to be able to speak to it. Tui read the text with a social justice lens. Tui’s first Tough Questions was, “Is the business Salva starts successful?” He continues to explain that, “It tells [him] that Salva is a very nice boy. Because he gives back to his home. And [he wonders] how many times he has gone back to his home town.” When bringing this discussion question to his group, it was apparent that Tui was generally curious about Salva’s success. This conversation was a turning point for this group. This is when this group started asking questions and researching Water for South Sudan. Tui’s second question was, “How are his parents doing?” He explained, “That [Salva]
really loves his family. And he was sad that he lost them for a while. That his dad was in the
hospital and he was doing okay.” Knowing that Tui is very close with his family and talks about
them often, I know that this would be challenging to fathom a situation where he was separated
from them. These conversations led him to his Tough Questions exit slip (Appendix X). When
reflecting on their conversations and readings Tui noticed, “That Salva started his own water
company.” His partner noted, “It was a really good idea for Salva to give back to his home
country.” We are able to see that Tui really becomes invested when he explains, “This question
really makes me wonder if we could do something to help.” At this point, I had not introduced
our Project Based Learning extension problem. Tui came to this notion on his own. There is a
problem and we can help with the solution. He wraps up by emphasizing, “It tells [him] that
some people do not have enough water in the world.” Being able to draw global connections can
be challenging for this age group. Tui not only made that connection, but was dedicated to doing
something about it.

**Book Club Meetings- Teacher Reflections**

As I look over the conversations and written responses during our book club discussions I
was able to see growth with the students. We have had touched on empathy when introducing
Habits of Mind, but the mentor texts and book club selections brought the reflections and
conversations to a new level. I was not only able to see a understanding of empathy, but an
application. Students were drawing text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-global connections. The
students were starting to generate questions and thinking as a solutionary. They were purposeful
in the questions that they were asking that forced their peers to answer with textual evidence or
personal experiences. Some students are still struggling with getting the work done, which may
make it more difficult for them to move beyond novice understanding of empathy and
humaneness. Meanwhile, Tui has a personal life experience that may allow him to understand empathy and humaneness in a more nuanced way. So yes, the entire group has shown progress, but in different degrees and with different needs moving forward.

**Post Assessment- Student Reflections**

**Elsa.** Elsa demonstrated some new understanding of the social justice vocabulary. She now distinguishes humane education as “helping others.” In her pre assessment, she made no attempts at defining humane education. Although this wasn’t the exact definition, she was able to connect that we are making attempts to understand and meet the need of others. Elsa continued to show growth by not only answering the post assessment questions, but also making connections to our readings. The solution that she suggested did not correlate to her book club discussion, but to a mentor text that I used to teach a mini lesson. We discussed global warming when reading our mentor texts, *Global Warming* and *Rainforests* (2013, 2012). In addition to arguing that “we need to stop global warming” as a solution we will need to solve for future generations, we also can “sell bottled water” to make an impact across the globe. It was not until later in our discussions that she came up with the solution of selling reusable water bottles as an environmental issue and long term solution. This is when Elsa started to make connections to her book club book, *A Long Walk to Water*. She continued to draw conclusions from the text when she proposed “making wells” as a humane education issue that was addressed in her novel.

**Olaf.** Olaf already showed empathy in the classroom, but demonstrated that he was able to make connects with the text. He explained that humane education was, “helping others who need caring.” I had seen Olaf show empathy for his classmates, so I was curious to see if he was aware of this actions. He mentioned that a solution he could help with was “global warming.” In his pre-assessment he had mentioned, “by picking up trash.” Olaf is taking prior knowledge
and adding a global perspective. We have been working on broadening our scope and looking at issues from new perspectives. When responding to what he can do he added, “we can donate money to causes like Pennies for Patients or Water for South Sudan. Pick up trash and giving water.” The amount time time and effort that Olaf put into his response was growth. He was quick and did not put as much thought into his pre-assessment. Olaf was much more careful and intentional with his post-assessment.

**Hans.** Hans demonstrated growth in his understanding of larger concepts, but not with vocabulary. When writing about humane education he noted, “how some people have harder life's then others.” Although his definition did not align with our conversations, it is a major revelation that he was able to draw conclusions that were not self-centered. This has been a personal goal for this particular student. He also made a connection with our mentor texts. When he reflected on solutions for future generations he included “pollution and crime” in his response. Again, pollution and taking care of the environment was a theme that we read about in *A River Ran Wild.* Pollution was discussed in Hans’s pre assessment, but he added crime. In the book, *A Long Walk to Water,* one of the storylines is a Ugandan refugee from his war torn community. The “crime” that Hans refers could be in response to the novel. He did reference this conflict during his book club discussions. His response to how a 5th grader can make an impact across the globe was not necessarily in connection to the novel. Hans suggested that “they can pick up trash.” This suggestion is associated with his response that pollution will be a problem for future generations. This isn’t directly tied to the book club selection. His final response was vague, but again a sign of major personal growth. Hans explained that, “some people might not be as wealthy as you.” Socioeconomics was topic of discussion during a mini-lesson with the book *Yard Sale* by Eve Bunting (2017). It spurred conversations with several
book club groups. This student comes from a middle to upper class family. He demonstrates empathy for individuals who do not have as much financial wealth.

**Ana.** Ana does not demonstrate growth in response to our book clubs. She still does not have a strong understanding of the vocabulary and her response to solutions for future generations does not align with her book club book or mini-lessons. She explained that a solution for future generations is that we need to “find different planets to live on.” We do see some empathy for others with her response to “How can a 5th grader in [our community] make an impact across the globe?” She explains that we could help by “packing food for poor people. Or pennies for patients.” We talked about Feed My Starving Children as an opportunity to package food locally and help a community across the globe. There are several students who have volunteered with this organization, so they are able to understand the mission of the organization. Pennies for Patients is a school-wide fundraiser. Our Parent Teacher Association has helped with this for years and our 5th graders are extremely familiar with their mission and ways to help.

**Moana.** Moana showed growth with her demonstration of empathy. She still does not have a very strong understanding of the vocabulary, but she is able to think of ways she can be more socially aware. In the pre-assessment Moana replied, “I don’t know” for almost all the questions. During the post-assessment she attempted to answer almost all of the questions. When asked to define humane education she replied, “being kind.” Our classroom definition was, to nurture compassion and respect for all living thing. She continued to explain that she shows empathy to, “her dog.” She argued that solutions she would need to solve are, “helping people and global warming.” Moana was able to address issues that she was not aware in her pre-assessment.
Sina. Sina demonstrated tremendous growth with her conversations and was able to write about her new insights in her post assessment reflection. She struggled a little to define humane education and wrote, “education that you need to learn.” Sina understood the role of a solutionary and connected her solution for future generations back to her text, *A Long Walk to Water*. She argued that, “we need a solution for knowing how to not start a war.” War and conflict was a theme that she not only discovered and discussed with her book club selection, but also with our mentor text, *Faithful Elephants*. This was a subject that Sina became extremely passionate about and continued to research during our Project Based Learning extension. She continued to reiterate that “a fifth grader can help by knowing how not to start a war.” Although *A Long Walk to Water* addresses several social justice concerns, Sina proclaimed, “the issue in my book is that Sudan does not have easy access to water.” Sina was most passionate about helping find a solution to this problem.

Tui. Tui exhibited substantial growth with comprehension of the application to his book club book. When reflecting on humane education, Tui wrote, “I think it means how we can help other people across the globe.” He continues to explain that a solutionary means to, “think of others before we think about are self.” Perhaps at some level, to be a solutionary, you are putting other’s thoughts and needs before yourself.

**Teacher Reflections on Student Learning and Emerging Themes**

As I look over my notes from the unit and reflect on these two groups, there were major themes that began to develop. Although Critical Literacy was not a term that I introduced to the students, there were major components that they were exposed to during our mini-lessons and hearing mentor texts. Subgroup A demonstrated a stronger understanding of the elements of the Critical Literacy Framework.
Subgroup B demonstrated an understanding of the Critical Literacy Framework and applied it to their discussions, but really seemed to be more aware and passionate about the social justice concerns. As we were completing the book clubs, I started to explain to the students their role in our “next steps.” Last summer I completed a Project Based Learning training and wanted to integrate elements as the students fostered solutions to the problems in their books (2016). As described, *A Long Walk to Water* has several social justice “problems” including access to water. This group not only immediately identified this injustice, but felt compelled to take action. This was a defining moment for me as a teacher. We speak of these injustices, but I wanted the students to feel a need to help without me telling them.

Sina was one of the first to ask if we can address this issue with our greater community. Without suppressing her excitement, I wanted Sina to understand that she needed to become more informed about Water for South Sudan before she asked her classmates to donate money. In our community that is a very natural response: collect money and donate it to the cause. That was one of our first conversations: Why do you want to collect money? What will that do to help? Are there other ways to help Water for South Sudan?

Sina immediately grabbed her two book club members, their iPads and started reading Water for South Sudan’s website. As we were getting ready to “switch” back to our homeroom, Sina inquired if she could continue the research at home. To my delight, she came back the next day with not only research, but a project proposal. She wanted to sell bracelets in the front entrance and donate the money to Water for South Sudan. Naturally, our first step was to ask questions. Why bracelets? They had talked about it and they thought this would stir the most conversation and it was something that kids enjoyed having. After asking them to do some research on cost, we started to ponder if there was something that was more fitting with their
cause. Water bottles. Again, we asked questions: What time of day would you sell them? Why non-reusable water bottles? Is non-reusable water bottles helping our environment? Who is buying the water bottles? As we were starting the first steps of the Project Based Learning process, Subgroup B was not only already asking questions, but they were excited and proud of their work.

As the project progressed, they continued to put together a proposal, receive feedback from their peers, do research on companies in the area that sell water bottles (to support local businesses) and design a logo for their cause. It was exciting to see not only Sina’s excitement. Her book club project embodied her new knowledge of social justice and purpose to find a service learning project as a next step.

**Summary**

In Chapter 4 we are introduced to the action research and explored the results of the data I have collected. I started by providing you with some insight on the text and why I selected these two groups for this research. Next, I gave the reader insights on each of the participants. After that, I introduced the pre-assessment and analyzed the student data. Later, I made some conclusions based on conversations and reflections during book clubs. Next, I introduced the post-assessment and analyzed the student data and lastly, I highlight themes that I have noted across all seven of the students’ experiences throughout the unit.
CHAPTER FIVE

Reflection

Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.

Margaret Mead

Introduction

In Chapter One the reader was introduced to my capstone question: How can an intermediate elementary educator use critical literacy to promote social justice through book clubs? I explained how a social justice seed was planted in me at a young age when I participated in activities and conversations that fostered an awareness of social issues. But it was not until college that I actively sought out opportunities to make changes for equity. Further, during the course of my college studies I developed an understanding of critical literacy. In Chapter Two I defined social justice and critical literacy and explored book clubs as a pedagogical framework to help students develop empathy and critical awareness. I also examined the critical literacy framework. In Chapter Three, I described the site of my action research study and my methodology for conducting the study. In Chapter Four the two groups of participants in my action research were introduced. I presented my analysis of the qualitative data I collected from the action research. In Chapter Five I reflect on my capstone journey. I will begin by describing my major learning, then I will present implications and limitations and conclude with recommendations for further research and communication.

Major Learnings

As I reflect on my action research I confirmed the timeline of the action research seemed appropriate. First, critical literacy components had been modeled and practiced in mini lessons by the spring semester. The students were ready to apply them to their book club selections.
Second, novel content appropriate for fifth graders was challenging. I tapped into resources such as blogs, librarians, booksellers and colleagues.

This action research study suggests that:

1. It IS possible to influence student empathy through book clubs that have a social justice lens, though there is certainly more that can be done to encourage further learning;
2. Some students may be better positioned than others to develop empathy, depending on their previous experiences;
3. Social justice book clubs can create momentum for service learning projects;
4. Critical reading skills and empathy don’t always go hand-in-hand (which is to say, you can develop one without the other);
5. Students sometimes struggle with linking examples from literature to examples from their own lives;
6. Getting too caught up in “vocabulary” may prevent students from focusing on the bigger ideas of empathy and social justice.

Having completed my action research there are several components of the book club that needs to be redesigned prior to the next round of spring Humane Education Book Clubs.

1. readdress the pre-assessment and reflection questions,
2. continue to build on our book club selections and
3. be intentional about the “next steps” after wrapping up the book clubs.

Below, I describe in detail what I hope to do in each of these areas.

Recrafting Pre and Post Assessments

When creating the pre-assessment and post-assessment questions there are two problems that I want to address: short and incomplete responses.
Regarding the short responses: I did not want to have too many questions because I am concerned the students might become overwhelmed or discouraged. I also hoped the students would provide longer responses because there were fewer questions. I discovered that this did not bear out. I got short answers even though there were few questions.

Regarding incomplete responses. Another aspect of the assessments that I want to reconsider for the next round of book clubs is new and revised questions. When I created the questions I wrote them with a humane education lens. I found that asking for a definition of word or concept pertaining to humane education was more challenging than giving examples. I did not provide enough choices with their pre-assessment responses. Students have more knowledge and experiences than I provided for. When I created the post-assessment, I assumed the students would respond to the application questions with a humane education lens. When reading the responses, I realized that this was not the case. I would need to be open to the different connections or be explicit in the directions if I want a certain demonstration of understanding. I also assumed that they would make connections to their book club texts. Since I wanted to assess if and how their book club selections impacted their views on humane education, I need to restate the question to better guide the students.

A final reflection regarding the pre-assessment and post-assessment questions is my choice in wording. I was so focused on creating scaffolded questions (moving from definitions to higher level thinking and application) that I did not think about the wording of the questions. It was not until I was reading the post-assessment responses that I realized the selectiveness in my questions.
I will consider new and revised questions for the next round of book clubs. By providing students with three questions I would be able to measure growth without overwhelming the students. The three questions could include:

- What is empathy?
- When have you experienced empathy?
- What are examples of empathy in your text?

Another aspect of the assessment could include an oral component for the assessment for empathy. Clearly some students could articulate ideas better than record them in the assessments.

Expanding Book Selection

As I prepare for my next round of book clubs, I plan to continue to provide more book club selections. I continue to read blogs, listen to podcasts and speak with colleagues to enrich my text selections. I agree with Donalyn Miller that there is power in providing choice. After completing the action research, my mother came across a podcast on MPR that suggested children’s book that teach social justice. In Kayla Lattimore’s “Summer Reading for Your Woke Kid” she provides unique narratives that would be natural mentor texts for the Humane Education Book Clubs. Students reading *A Long Walk to Water* could draw connections to her suggested text, *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family’s Journey* by Margriet Ruurs and Nizar Ali Badr.

This past week I participated in a Paideia Workshop. Paideia stems from Greek word meaning holistic upbringing of a child. This philosophy is to enable students to have conversations that foster critical and creative thinking through Socratic seminar. With intentional preparation and intellectual coaching, students will be able to partake in engaging conversations that demonstrate a mastery of learning. After completing the workshop, I couldn’t
help but wonder what this would look like in conjunction with book club. Typically, in Paideia, a teacher selects a text and builds a reading guide. I am contemplating if the students could create their own reading guides for the seminar. I feel it would be powerful for the students themselves to select specific sections of the text and focus on the critical literacy skills.

**Implications**

The results of the action research indicate that there were several different conclusions that can be drawn from this action research. Keeping that in mind, there are several factors that impact those results. One of the major considerations was the student population. As noted in the participant descriptions, the student demographics was limited. The students were all caucasian and ten or eleven-years-old. Most of the students have fairly consistent home lives with supportive families. The consistency in race offered some benefits but was also detrimental.

This group was made of exclusively white students from comparatively privileged backgrounds. The limited diversity of the group necessarily limited the perspectives that students themselves could bring to the unit (through no fault of their own, of course). It might have been helpful to have more perspectives from students with cross-cultural experiences themselves. Still, I was impressed by the efforts these students made to make personal connections to the literature, in spite of their limited familiarity with the Sudan and Africa in general.

None of the students in this group had any experiences with South Sudan. I had hoped by reading this novel, it would bring awareness to issues such as access to water and impacts of war. I did find that the students were engaged during the reading of the novel and felt compelled to help after learning of “Water for South Sudan.”
Although I was delighted to find that the students were compelled to be help, it brought about some questions. What assumptions were the students now making about South Sudan? What assumptions were the students making about Africa? What assumptions were the students making about war torn countries? I have shared with the class about my African experiences. My fifth graders know that I volunteered in an orphanage in Tanzania and spent time traveling through Morocco with my parents. Although both these countries are in Africa, my experiences were extremely different. I want my students to understand that this story is not representative of all African countries. The water access can look different in various parts of Sudan and other African countries. By continuing to expose them to different stories, they can start to draw those conclusions for themselves. In the future, I plan to collect other books with different perspectives on being a refugee. Seeing the same situation from different points of view will challenge their assumptions by providing more information. The students will be able to draw some connections and come to understand that a single individual and their experiences is not necessarily a representative of their greater community or population.

McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) talk about the importance of, “examining the point of view from which a text is written and brainstorming other perspectives that may or may not be represented, challenges students to expand their thinking and discover diverse beliefs, positions, and understandings” (p. 16). When I read this I immediately had two connections: I thought of Donalyn Miller and Katy Anderson. I recently went to a Voice and Choice Donalyn Miller workshop. She explained the importance of selecting texts with various perspectives. The next person I thought of is my mentor, Katy Anderson. She starts each year with a history lesson on perspectives. This is how I connect this idea with my classroom. We talk about our history text and how it is ONE perspective. We need to think critically or gain additional resources. This led
into my thoughts on social justice. McLaughlin and DeVoogd tied those into us thinking critically.

Next Steps – Service Learning Projects

As I mentioned, after finishing the book clubs it was apparent that several of the students wanted to take action. Something to consider for future book clubs is the “next steps” within the year and future professional development. I explained that I used the Project Based Learning model to create a platform for students to reflect on their reading and create purposeful solutions.

I would like to continue to explore ways to present the project. I understand that our school has access to technology that allowed us to do further research. I also had formal Project Based Learning training. A teacher trying to replicate my project may not understand each of the steps I took to guide the students. I also want to consider the possibility of what this might look like when collaborating with fourth or sixth grade. If the students came into my classroom with some social justice background knowledge, I could potentially have multiple social justice book clubs. Some of my sixth grade colleagues have helped students create Water Walks. By exposing students to this text in sixth grade am I hurting or helping their curriculum. I would like to make a point to meet with the sixth grade teacher and get feedback about the students’ prior knowledge and how it impacts their work.

Another consideration is the text selections. McLaughlin and DeVoogd state,”when we read from a critical stance, we use questions to challenge the text—to see past the literal meaning of the text to examine issues such as what the author what readers to believe, and which gender, ethnic group, or philosophy is focused on in the text and which is missing, discounted, or marginalized” (McLaughlin and DeVoogd, p. 62). We have a reading curriculum that we use with our 5th graders. I feel the curriculum does a great job of using a variety of mentor texts and
asks questions that encourage the kids to think critically. There is usually a 15-20 minute chunk of time during the day that I am able to select a read aloud. I am notorious for selecting books that have powerful messages, themes or characters. As I read through this section, I realized that I am doing a disservice by not providing more opportunities to allow the students to read critically. I am not always asking probing questions or allowing the students to turn and talk. I am going to work on being more mindful with this literacy instruction. I want my students to develop these skills so they naturally embed them into their book club discussion.

Another aspect of my student population is the importance of identities. I am truly making a conscious effort to ensure the books on my shelf reflect the students in my classroom. I clipped an article about a girl who started the 1,000 “black girl books” drive. She was trying to find 1,000 books with characters that she could identify with. I have the clipping on my board as a reminder. McLaughlin and DeVoogd explain, “when exploring identities, readers who are critically aware read beyond the text and examine influences that shape our sense of self—who we are, what we do, how we speak” (McLaughlin and DeVoogd, p. 90). I sometimes forget how much influence or power a character from a book can have on a child. As an adult, I still find books that I read and think, “I wish I could be friends with this character or author.” We do need to be critically aware to make that connection. Depending on your student population, the book club selection books can look very different.

For me, I found that it was not necessarily that the students needed to find something in common with the characters to be able to demonstrate empathy. I have read mentor texts to different groups of students and know that this is not always the case. I plan to continue to explore empathy. What mentor texts, tools and techniques do other teachers use to introduce
empathy? How will that tie into my social studies instruction? How can I use technology to further explore characters, events or situations that provoked empathy?

I believe the following steps are necessary to create a classroom of changemakers:

● Students will create a knowledge base
● Students will form an opinion based on facts
● Students will identify the problem
● Students will empathize with characters
● Students will make inferences
● Students will understand connections between the text and their life or the world
● Teachers will support their motivation

● Teachers will provide students with tools to further their inquiry

● Teachers will ask critical questions like:
  ○ What audience is this story being written for?
  ○ Whose story is being told here?
  ○ Whose story is NOT being told here (or, who is being silenced by this text)?
  ○ How else might this story have been told?

Creating an environment where students are asked to examine a text with a social justice lens is setting the foundation for further inquiry. If students are successful with all of these things, students will move to middle school with the ability to critically reading a text and growth mindset about helping others in their community or globally. My hope for other teachers is that they continue to foster that sense of wonder and passion for social justice.
Limitations

In addition to implications, there were also several limitations. Creating a timeline for my book clubs was going to be challenging. I wanted to present the action research during the spring semester for several reasons. I wanted to ensure that I had modeled the various roles for book clubs and they had previous experience hosting a book club. The critical literacy skills that I was asking of my students had also been modeled in mini lessons by second semester. The texts that I provided had content that I felt was fitting for a more mature audience. And I knew my students would continue to be exposed to these topics in middle school. As I started to plot out the days I realized that spring testing was going to be another factor.

I tried different book club formats and I decided that I wanted the students to meet multiple times each week. I found that my students engaged more when they were able to read a lot of text in a shorter period of time. But, one of our book club rules was that you are not allowed to read ahead of the stopping points before the meeting. When we met once a week, students who wanted to read ahead were losing interest by book club meeting time. As previously mentioned, we have reading switches. On testing days we did not meet for reading switch. It was challenging to find time to meet that was semi-consistent for book club meetings.

Timing was not the only limitation that I discovered during my capstone project. I knew from the beginning that I wanted to have as much choice as possible for book selections but that was going to be difficult. I had focused on choice when writing my Stepping Stone paper. Donalyn Miller explains that, “providing students with the opportunity to choose their own books to read empowers and encourages them. It strengthens their self-confidence, rewards their interests, and promotes a positive attitude toward reading by valuing the reader and giving him or her a level of control. Readers without power to make their own choices are unmotivated” (p. 7).
As I started to dive into blogs, scour Pinterest, speak with local librarians, and even ask Donalyn Miller herself, I discovered that it was challenging to find books that provided the social justice themes and also be fifth grade appropriate.

Another limitation is accessibility to supplemental funding for book club books. It is understood that not all teachers are able to apply for additional funding for the books. I was able to purchase fourteen new text sets with funding from the Parent Teacher Association and my principal. This supplemental funding was vital for me because I wanted to have books that provided a variety of themes that connected to humane education. I did not want my students to feel limited with their book club selections.

In addition to book club selection, there were also limitations with the Pre-Assessment. The format of the Google Pre-Assessment questions were semi-open ended and allowed the students to respond but within parameters that I provided. As mentioned earlier, I would like to consider different questions that would allow me to evaluate acquired knowledge and not be biased. I might simply ask:

- How do you define social justice?
- What does social justice look like for you as a fifth grader?
- What does social justice look like for your character?

A limitation of this study that other educators need to take into consideration is the student demographics. The students that I selected were only a subgroup from our larger class population. Due to the limited scope of the study, it can be understood that not all students would respond to the text in a similar way. Students of different demographics or life experiences would have different prior knowledge and levels of empathy when reflecting on the
characters in the novel. As noted in the participant section of Chapter 4, the demographics in my school population are limited.

**Recommendations for Further Research and Communication**

There are several aspects of this study that I want to continue to research. One of the biggest issues that I continue to grapple with is terminology. As I mentioned earlier, I selected the term “Humane Education” because I strongly believed that parents could not argue that they did not want their children to have the use of education to nurture compassion and respect for all living things. The definitions for social justice aligned with this simple definition, but often went into greater detail. Since I really am trying to get at social justice and not humane education, I would like to find an appropriate way to present this to my families.

In addition to exploring terminology and I would also like to delve more deeply into critical literacy. I realize that I could have created a capstone on critical literacy. There is a plethora of research and I am just starting to skim the surface. I feel that reading, understanding and implementing more of the framework in my instruction will not only make me a stronger teacher, but reinforce my students’ instruction. I would like to focus on one of the aspects of the critical literacy framework and then build on my instruction. The scaffolding would make it an attainable goal to be mindful of the framework in my literacy instruction.

Another area that I would like to research is book club formats. I have been utilizing book clubs for several years now. My teammate and I have explored different formats with regard to pacing, selection, grouping, assignments, text selections and parent involvement. I would love to read and ideally observe teachers who have found a method and tools they really enjoy. I realize that each group of students is different, so I would like to have some choice with formatting of the book clubs.
Summary

In this final chapter I was able to share my reflections on my action research. I started with major learnings, moved into implications and limitations and wrapped up with recommendations for further research and communication. This reflection process was instrumental as I prepare for my Humane Education Book Club. Students were able to develop a social justice and critical literacy lens when participating in book clubs.

Throughout this capstone, I have quoted leaders for social justice. Some of the individuals have a spiritual take and others see this a way of life. What they share is a passion and need to create an equitable life for our human family. I am inspired and affirmed in my belief in the inherent dignity of each person. Also, I am compelled to inspire others to the same set of values. I am in a unique position as an educator to influence students. So, I choose to share and teach students to nurture compassion and respect for all living things.
References


HOW CAN AN INTERMEDIATE ELEMENTARY EDUCATOR USE CRITICAL LITERACY TO PROMOTE SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH BOOK CLUBS


What is Project Based Learning (PBL)? (n.d.). Retrieved August 20, 2016, from https://www.bie.org/about/what_pbl

Appendix A: Letter of Consent

April 18th, 2017

Dear Families,

I am writing to invite your child to be part of my capstone project. I am completing the Master of Arts in Literacy Education program at Hamline University. This capstone is a culmination and application of my understanding of literacy.

As a district, Minnetonka has been working to incorporate Global Learning and Critical Thinking into our instruction. These come from our framework to foster meaning, engagement and deeper learning. Personally, I have been working to embed humane education into our curriculum. By humane education, I mean the use of education to nurture compassion and respect for all living things. My hope is to combine these initiatives into one unit-of-learning in our class and use it for my Master’s capstone project. To do this, I have put together a series of book clubs that highlight these themes.

If you agree to include your son or daughter in the study, I will collect some of the homework assignments that he or she completes as data to analyze for my study. Actual classroom activities will not change in any significant way.

There are no significant risks to participating in this study, beyond what is typical for our school. If for any reason you are not comfortable with participating or wish to withdraw, you are welcome to do so at any point. I will use pseudonyms throughout the study to protect your son’s or daughter’s identity. I’ll do everything I can to keep my data secure and safe. As always, students have access to all social services provided by Minnetonka schools.

Principal has agreed that the study is appropriate and has the potential to help us improve our teaching.

If you have any further questions, please contact me at: or grace.mevissen@minnetonkaschools.org or, my Hamline advisor, Dr. Joe Lewis at: 651-523-2659 or jlewis06@hamline.edu

Thanks,
Grace Mevissen
Appendix B: Pre-Assessment Google Survey

What do you know about HUMANE EDUCATION?

What do you think humane education means?

What does empathy mean?

Who is someone you have shown empathy towards?

What does it mean to be a solutionary?

What kinds of solutions might we need to solve for future generations?

How can a 5th grader in make an impact across the globe?
## Appendix C: Book Club Book Selections

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<tr>
<th>Book Title &amp; Author</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Book Trailer &amp; Websites</th>
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| *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*  
By Malala Yousafzai | On 9 October 2012, as Malala and her friends were travelling home from school, a masked gunman entered their school bus and asked for Malala by name. She was shot with a single bullet which went through her head, neck and shoulder. Two of her friends were also injured in the attack.  
Malala survived the initial attack, but was in a critical condition. She was moved to Birmingham in the United Kingdom for treatment at a hospital that specialises in military injuries. She was not discharged until January, 2013 by which time she had been joined by her family in the UK.  
The Taliban's attempt to kill Malala received worldwide condemnation and led to protests across Pakistan. In the weeks after the attack, over 2 million people signed a right to education petition, and the National Assembly swiftly ratified Pakistan's first Right To Free and Compulsory Education Bill. | Malala Book Trailer  
Malala Website  
Malala Blog  
Malala’s Noble Peace Prize Acceptance Speech  
Malala’s Interview on Ellen |
| *A Long Walk to Water*  
By Linda Sue Park | *A Long Walk to Water* is based on the true story of Salva, one of some 3,800 Sudanese "Lost Boys" airlifted to the United States beginning in the mid 1990s.  
Before leaving Africa, Salva's life is one of harrowing tragedy. Separated from his family by war and forced to travel on foot through hundreds of miles of hostile territory, he survives starvation, animal attacks, and disease, and ultimately leads a group of about 150 boys to safety in Kenya. Relocated to upstate New York, Salva resourcefully learns English and continues on to college. Eventually he returns to his home region in southern Sudan to establish a foundation that installs deep-water wells in remote villages in | A Long Walk to Water Book Trailer  
Linda Sue Park Website |
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>HOW CAN AN INTERMEDIATE ELEMENTARY EDUCATOR USE CRITICAL LITERACY TO PROMOTE SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH BOOK CLUBS</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>dire need of clean water. This poignant story of Salva's life is told side-by-side with the story of Nya, a young girl who lives today in one of those villages.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **Sold**  
By Patricia McCormick |
| Lakshmi is a thirteen-year-old girl who lives with her family in a small hut on a mountain in Nepal. Though she is desperately poor, her life is full of simple pleasures, like playing hopscotch with her best friend from school and having her mother brush her hair by the light of an oil lamp. But when the harsh Himalayan monsoons wash away all that remains of the family's crops, Lakshmi's stepfather says she must leave home and take a job to support her family. He introduces her to a glamorous stranger who tells her she will find her a job as a maid in the city. Glad to be able to help, Lakshmi journeys to India and arrives at "Happiness House" full of hope. But she soon learns the unthinkable truth: she has been sold into prostitution.  

An old woman named Mumtaz rules the brothel with cruelty and cunning. She tells Lakshmi that she is trapped there until she can pay off her family's debt - then cheats Lakshmi of her meager earnings so that she can never leave. Lakshmi's life becomes a nightmare from which she cannot escape. Still, she lives by her mother's words - simply to endure is to triumph - and gradually, she forms friendships with the other girls that enable her to survive in this terrifying new world. Then the day comes when she must make a decision - will she risk everything for a chance to reclaim her life?  

Written in spare and evocative vignettes, this powerful novel renders a world that is as unimaginable as it is real, and a girl who not only survives but triumphs.  

©2006 Patricia McCormick (P)2012 Tantor |
| **Number the Stars**  
By Lois Lowry |
<p>| Ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen and her best friend Ellen Rosen often think about life before the war. But it's now 1943 and their life in |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>LOIS LOWRY</strong></th>
<th>Copenhagen is filled with school, food shortages, and the Nazi soldiers marching in their town.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Touching Spirit Bear**  
By Ben Mikaelson | After severely injuring Peter Driscal in an empty parking lot, mischief-maker Cole Matthews is in major trouble. But instead of jail time, Cole is given an alternative: a one-year banishment to a remote Alaskan island. This program—called Circle Justice—is based on Native American traditions that provide healing for the criminal mind. To avoid serious jail time, Cole resolves to go.  
While there, Cole is mauled by a mysterious white bear and left for dead. Thoughts of his abusive parents, helpless Peter, and his intense anger cause him to examine the root of his troubled ways and seek redemption—from the spirit bear that attacked him, from his victims, and from himself.  
Author Ben Mikaelson delivers a poignant depiction of the vicious cycle of violence and one boy’s journey to healing. |
| **90 Miles to Havana**  
By Enrique Flores-Galbis | When unrest hits the streets of Havana, Cuba, Julian’s parents must make the heartbreaking decision to send him and his two brothers away to Miami via the Pedro Pan operation. But when the boys get to Miami, they are thrust into a world where bullies seem to run rampant and it’s not always clear how best to protect themselves. |
### A Time of Miracles
**By Anne-Laure Bondoux**

In the early 1990s, a boy with a mysterious past and the woman who cares for him endure a five-year journey across the war-torn Caucasus and Europe, weathering hardships and welcoming unforgettable encounters with other refugees searching for a better life.

### Bamboo People
**By Mitali Perkins**

Two Burmese boys, one a Karenni refugee and the other the son of an imprisoned Burmese doctor, meet in the jungle and in order to survive they must learn to trust each other.

### The Day of the Pelican
**By Katherine Paterson**

In 1998 when the Kosovo hostilities escalate, thirteen-year-old Meli’s life as an ethnic Albanian, changes forever after her brother escapes his Serbian captors and the entire family flees from one refugee camp to another until they are able to immigrate to America.

### Deep Sea
**By Annika Thor**

Nearly four years after leaving Vienna to escape the Nazis, Stephie Steiner, now sixteen, and her sister Nellie, eleven, are still living in Sweden, worrying about their parents and striving to succeed in school, and at odds with each other despite their mutual love.
### The Good Braider
By Terry Farish

Told in spare free verse, the book follows Viola as she survives brutality in war-torn Sudan, makes a perilous journey, lives as a refugee in Egypt, and finally reaches Portland, Maine, where her quest for freedom and security is hampered by memories of past horrors and the traditions her mother and other Sudanese adults hold dear. With unforgettable images, the author’s voice sings out the story of her family’s journey, and tells the universal tale of a young immigrant’s struggle to build a life on the cusp of two cultures. Includes historical facts and a map of Sudan.

### I Lived On Butterfly Hill
By Marjorie Agosin

Eleven-year-old Celeste Marconi is a dreamer, a writer, a collector of words. But then a new whispered word trickles into her life: “Subversives.” Her beloved country of Chile has been taken over by a military dictatorship, and subversives—people considered a threat to the new government—are in increasing danger. Celeste’s doctor-parents must go into hiding to remain safe, and Celeste, heartsick, must say good-bye to them. But the situation continues to worsen. More and more people are “disappearing,” and soon Celeste herself is sent thousands of miles away, all the way to the coast of Maine—where she doesn’t have a single friend or know a word of English. How can she possibly call another country—a country where people eat breakfast out of a box, where the cold grays of winter mirror the fears that envelope her—home? Will she ever see Chile again? And if she does—what, and who, will she find there?

### Now Is The Time
When soldiers attack a small village in
| **For Running**  
By Michael Williams |
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<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe, Deo goes on the run with Innocent, his older, mentally disabled brother, carrying little but a leather soccer ball filled with money, and after facing prejudice, poverty, and tragedy, it is in soccer that Deo finds renewed hope.</td>
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| **Out of Nowhere**  
By Maria Padian |
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<tr>
<td>Performing community service for pulling a stupid prank against a rival high school, soccer star Tom tutors a Somali refugee with soccer dreams of his own.</td>
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| **Sequins, Secrets, and Silver Linings**  
By Sophia Bennett |
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<tr>
<td>Three fourteen-year-old friends with very different interests befriend a twelve-year-old Ugandan refugee whose gift for design takes off in the high-fashion world of twenty-first-century London.</td>
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| **Shooting Kabul**  
By NH Senzai |
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<tr>
<td>Escaping from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan in the summer of 2001, eleven-year-old Fadi and his family immigrate to the San Francisco Bay Area, where Fadi schemes to return to the Pakistani refugee camp where his little sister was accidentally left behind.</td>
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<td>Title</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Tangled Threads</em></td>
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<td><em>The Milk of Birds</em></td>
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<td><em>The Red Pencil</em></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Trouble</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Where I Belong</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Crossing the Wire</strong></td>
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</table>
### Farewell to Manzanar
**By Jeanne and James Houston**

In 1942, seven-year-old Jeanne Wakatsuki and her Japanese-American family were forced to leave their home and live at the Manzanar internment camp along with 10,000 other Japanese Americans. *Farewell to Manzanar* is the true story of how Jeanne and her family survived the indignity of life behind barbed wire in their own country, the United States of America.

### Illegal
**By Bettina Restrepo**

When her father leaves the family home in Mexico to search for work in the US, Nora and her mother cling to hope with every letter and paycheck that arrives from him from *El Norte*. But when the letters and money stop coming, Nora and her mother leave their home to search for him in Texas. Once they make the dangerous journey across the US-Mexico border, Nora and her mother must survive alone in a strange place.

### Life After
**By Sarah Darer Littman**

When her pregnant aunt is killed, life in Argentina falls into rapid decline for Dani. When her family emigrates to the US, Dani has to adjust to life in a tiny apartment and a school where no one knows or seems to like her. As her father sinks into depression, Dani reaches out to a boy named Jon and a girl.
named Jessica, and begins the long path towards forgiveness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| *Life, After*             | Sarah Chirer Littman    | My Name is Not Easy By Debby Dahl Edwardson
|                           |                         | Luke and his brothers leave their Alaskan Arctic home when the state sends them to a boarding school hundreds of miles to the south. At Sacred Heart School, Luke struggles with English and the self-segregation of the white, Eskimo and Indian kids at school. |
| *The Red Umbrella*        | Christina Diaz Gonzalez | The Red Umbrella By Christina Diaz Gonzalez
<p>|                           |                         | At age four, Young Ju finds out that her family is trading their small fishing village in Korea for life in Mi Gook. Young Ju is certain that her new home will be paradise. Young Ju eventually finds out that Mi Gook is America, and is about as far from heaven as one girl can get. A Step from Heaven follows Young Ju’s |
| <em>A Step from Heaven</em>      | An Na                   | In 1961, two years after the Communist revolution in Cuba, soldiers come to Lucía Álvarez’s home and turn her world upside down. She can no longer trust anyone aside from her parents and brother. When her parents decide to send Lucía and her brother to the US to stay with a host family in Nebraska, Lucía grapples with learning English and trying to fit into a place where she doesn’t want to be. |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A Step from Heaven</strong></td>
<td>Young Ju</td>
<td>Takes steps to protect her family from her father, an abusive alcoholic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Under the Mesquite</strong></td>
<td>Guadalupe Garcia McCall</td>
<td>When Lupita’s mother is diagnosed with cancer, Lupita must take over the care of her seven younger siblings as her father tries to get health care for his wife. Lupita’s only peace is found beneath the mesquite tree, where she is able to draw strength from herself to face a future without her beloved Mami.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Almost Home</strong></td>
<td>Joan Bauer</td>
<td>Sugar Mae Cole doesn’t often get downhearted, but lately it’s been a struggle to keep up her spirit. Newly homeless, Sugar, her mother Reba, and her beloved rescue dog, Shush, have come to Chicago to make a fresh start. But it seems like everything goes wrong. Pouring her feelings into letters and poetry, Sugar is honest about her fear and confusion while holding tight to her dreams for a normal life… and learns to reach for the best she’s got during the worst time in her life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Breaking Stalin's Nose
**By Eugene Yelchin**

Sasha Zaichik has known the laws of the Soviet Young Pioneers since the age of six: The Young Pioneer is devoted to Comrade Stalin, the Communist Party, and Communism. A Young Pioneer is a reliable comrade and always acts according to conscience. A Young Pioneer has a right to criticize shortcomings. But now that it is finally time to join the Young Soviet Pioneers, the day Sasha has awaited for so long, everything seems to go awry. Perhaps Sasha does not want to be a Young Soviet Pioneer after all. Is it possible that everything he knows about the Soviet Government is a lie? The moving story of a ten-year-old boy’s world shattering is masterful in its simplicity, powerful in its message, and heartbreaking in its plausibility.

### Chew On This
**Eric Schlosser & Charles Wilson**

Kids love fast food. And the fast food industry definitely loves kids. It couldn’t survive without them. Did you know that the biggest toy company in the world is McDonald’s? It’s true. In fact, one out of every three toys given to a child in the United States each year is from a fast food restaurant.

Not only has fast food reached into the toy industry, it’s moving into our schools. One out of every five public schools in the United States now serves brand name fast food. But do kids know what they’re eating? Where do fast food hamburgers come from? And what makes those fries taste so good?

When Eric Schlosser’s best-selling book, Fast Food Nation, was published for adults in 2001, many called for his groundbreaking insight to be shared with young people. Now Schlosser, along with co-writer Charles Wilson, has investigated the subject further, uncovering new facts children need to know.

In Chew On This, they share with kids the
<table>
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<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>Three Cups of Tea: The Young Readers Edition</td>
<td>This young readers edition of the worldwide bestseller <em>Three Cups of Tea</em> has been specially adapted for younger readers and updated by Greg Mortenson to bring his remarkable story of humanitarianism up to date for the present. Includes new photos and illustrations, as well as a special interview by Greg’s twelve-year-old daughter, Amira, who has traveled with her father as an advocate for the Pennies for Peace program for children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution</td>
<td>This accessible autobiography is the true story of one girl's determination to hold her family together during one of the most terrifying eras of the twentieth century. It's 1966, and twelve-year-old Ji-li Jiang has everything a girl could want: brains, friends, and a bright future in Communist China. But it's also the year that China's leader, Mao Zedong, launches the Cultural Revolution—and Ji-li's world begins to fall apart. Over the next few years, people who were once her friends and neighbors turn on her and her family, forcing them to live in constant terror of arrest. When Ji-li's father is finally imprisoned, she faces the most difficult dilemma of her life. A personal and painful memoir—a page-turner as well as excellent material for social studies curricula—<em>Red Scarf Girl</em> also includes a thorough glossary and pronunciation guide.</td>
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<td>Book Title</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Omnivore’s Dilemma: The Secrets Behind What You Eat</strong> by Michael Pollan</td>
<td>Delves into facts about food, life expectancy as it relates to consumption and global health implications resulting from food choices made by people around the world, encouraging readers to consider their food choices and eating habits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Breadwinner Trilogy</strong>, by Deborah Ellis</td>
<td>This series follows 11-year-old Parvana, who lives under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. When her father is arrested and her family is left without someone who can work or even shop for food, Parvana, forbidden to earn money as a girl, disguises herself as a boy to help her family survive. <em>The Breadwinner</em> is an empowering tale with a sharp and brave heroine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stella by Starlight</strong>, by Sharon M. Draper</td>
<td>Stella lives in the segregated south in 1932. Out, late one night, wandering around, Stella and her brother witness a Klu Klux Klan activity, starting an unwelcome chain of events in her otherwise sleepy town. With a compelling and courageous voice, Stella tells the story of how she and her community band together against racism and injustice.</td>
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<td>Book Title</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>A Little Piece of Ground</em>, by</td>
<td>Living in occupied Palestine, twelve-year-old Karim is trapped in his home by a strict curfew. Wanting to play football with his friends, he decides to clear a rocky plot of land for a soccer field. When Karim is found outside during the next curfew, tensions rise, and his survival is at stake.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Laird</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>One Crazy Summer</em>, by Rita</td>
<td>Set against the backdrop of the Black Panther movement, Delphine and her sisters visit their estranged mother in California, attend a Black Panther day camp, and discover their mother’s dedication to social justice issues. A moving, funny novel with a captivating voice, the sisters learn about their family and their country during one truly crazy summer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williams Garcia</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Sylvia &amp; Aki</em>, by Winifred</td>
<td>Sylvia and Aki never expected to know one another, until their lives intersect on a Southern California farm and change the country forever. Based on true events, this book reveals the remarkable story of Mendez vs. Westminster School District, the California court case that desegregated schools for Latino children.</td>
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<td>Book Title</td>
<td>Summary</td>
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<td><strong>Operation Redwood, by S. Terrell French</strong></td>
<td>When Julian is sent to stay with his disinterested aunt and uncle for four months, he discovers that his Uncle’s corporation plans to cut down a group of redwood trees at Big Tree Grove and decides to take a stand to save the trees. Perfect for the young environmentalists in your life, <em>Operation Redwood</em> is an adventurous and gripping tale as Julian and his friends hatch scheme after scheme to save these giants of nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced, by Nujood Ali with Dephine Mainoui</strong></td>
<td>For more mature readers, this unforgettable autobiography tells the true story of Nujood Ali, a ten-year-old Yemeni girl married off at a young age, who decides to resist her abusive husband and get a divorce. A moving tale of tragedy, triumph, and courage, Nujood’s brave defiance has inspired generations of women and young girls.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Return to Sender, by Julia Alvarez</strong></td>
<td>After Tyler’s father is injured in a tractor accident, his family hires migrant workers from Mexico to save his Vermont farm. Tyler bonds with one of the worker’s daughters and navigates complicated moral choices in this award-winning novel about friendship, cooperation, and understanding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Uprising**
*by Margaret Peterson Haddix*

Bella, newly arrived in New York from Italy, gets a job at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. There, along with hundreds of other immigrants, she works long hours at a grueling job under terrible conditions. Yetta, a coworker from Russia, has been crusading for a union, and when factory conditions worsen, she helps workers rise up in a strike. Wealthy Jane learns of the plight of the workers and becomes involved with their cause.

Bella and Yetta are at work--and Jane is visiting the factory--on March 25, 1911, when a spark ignites some cloth and the building is engulfed in fire, leading to one of the worst workplace disasters ever.

---

**Between the Lines**
*by Claudia Whitsitt*

Between the Lines tells the story of three girls who become friends during the racially-charged aftermath of the 1967 Detroit Riots. Hattie Percha is crushed when the riots start on her tenth birthday, and when she must move away from her treasured childhood home and friends, attending public school for the first time, she’s afraid her life is over. Then, she meets Beverly Jo Nichols, her first black friend, and Crackers, a fearless tomboy. Despite opposition from Hattie’s mother and a racist teacher, the unlikely friends join forces. As the self-proclaimed Dream Girls, they challenge bigotry and intolerance, willing to do whatever it takes to hold onto what’s most precious to them all, their friendship.
Appendix D: Book Selection Preference Survey

What do you want to read?

Please mark THREE books you are interested in reading!

What is your name?

Short answer text

What is your first choice?

- I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban
- A Long Walk to Water
- Number the Stars
- Touching Spirit Bear
- Operation Redwood
- Sylvia & Aki
- One Crazy Summer
- A Little Piece of Ground
- Stella by Starlight
- Red Scarf Girl
- Sachiko
- Return to Sender
- Almost Home
What is your second choice?

- I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban
- A Long Walk to Water
- Number the Stars
- Touching Spirit Bear
- Operation Redwood
- Sylvia & Aki
- One Crazy Summer
- A Little Piece of Ground
- Stella by Starlight
- Red Scarf Girl
- Sachiko
- Return to Sender
- Almost Home
- Breadwinner
What is your third choice?

- I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban
- A Long Walk to Water
- Number the Stars
- Touching Spirit Bear
- Operation Redwood
- Sylvia & Aki
- One Crazy Summer
- A Little Piece of Ground
- Stella by Starlight
- Red Scarf Girl
- Sachiko
- Return to Sender
- Almost Home
- Breadwinner
Appendix E: Literature Circle and Book Club Packet

Artful Artist

You are the Artful Artist. Your job is to draw anything about the story that you liked:
- a character
- the setting
- a problem
- an exciting part
- a surprise
- a prediction

Draw it on this page.
(Don’t tell your group what it is. See if they can guess.)

Adapted from Nye, E. (2017)
Crazy Connector

You are the crazy connector. Your job is to find 5-8 connections between the book and real life. Possible connections could be to:
- your own life
- school
- similar events in your life
- other books you’ve read
- other books on the same topic

Some things in today’s story reminded me of…

1. ______________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________
4. ______________________________________________
5. ______________________________________________
6. ______________________________________________
7. ______________________________________________
8. ______________________________________________

Adapted from Nye, E. (2017)
Discussion Director

Your job is to write down some good questions that your group can discuss. The sentences have been started for you.

1. Why _____________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________

2. How _____________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________

3. If _______________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________

4. What character traits describe ________________________?

5. How would you feel if you ________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________

Adapted from Nye, E. (2017)
Passage Picker

Your job is to look for parts in the story that you want to read aloud to your group. Some examples could be:
- a good part
- a funny part
- an interesting part
- descriptive writing
- a scary part
- important part

When you find the passages, write them here. Be sure to read the parts to your group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Paragraph</th>
<th>Why I picked it</th>
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Adapted from Nye, E. (2017)
Super Summarizer

Your job is to draw three pictures about what has happened so far in the story. Then write one sentence to go with each picture and share with your group.

FIRST

NEXT

THEN

Adapted from Nye, E. (2017)
Vocabulary Victor

Your job is to look for special words in the story. The words should be:
- new
- funny
- interesting
- strange
- hard
- important

When you find a word, write it here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>What it Means</th>
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Talk about these words when your group meets. If no one knows what it means, look it up in the dictionary together.

Adapted from Nye, E. (2017)
Appendix F: Post-Assessment Google Survey

What do you know about HUMANE EDUCATION now?

Form description

What is your first and last name?

Short answer text

What do you think humane education means?

Short answer text

What does it mean to be a solutionary?

Short answer text

What kinds of solutions might we need to solve for future generations?

Short answer text

How can a 5th grader make an impact across the globe?

Short answer text

How has your book club book changed your understanding of [humane education issue]?

Long answer text
Appendix G: District Framework

**Authentic & Real-World Learning**
Students are engaging in authentic and real-world learning when they define and breakdown student’s problems that they face in their lives or when they complete a task for which they have not received explicit instruction.

**Students Will:**
- Solve a real-world problem.
- Propose solutions to a real-world problem.
- Propose solutions to a real-world problem.
- Engage with real-world audiences in an effort to solve an authentic problem.

**Collaboration**
Students are collaborating when they work in pairs or groups to discuss an issue, solve a problem, and/or create a product; students are collaborating fully when they receive critique and conflict through negotiation.

**Students Will:**
- Work in pairs or groups.
- Share responsibility and respect each other.
- Make substantive decisions collectively through negotiation and compromise.
- Rely on each other to complete the task.

**Communication**
Students are communicating when they connect and share ideas, and when they choose the right medium(s) to express their thoughts.

**Students Will:**
- Express thoughts, ideas, and information using a selected medium.
- Persuade effectively using selected mediums, making the necessary impact.
- Interpret, synthesize, and share information to make new connections and to recognize diverse perspectives.

**Creativity**
Students are demonstrating creativity when they develop and innovate ideas with attention to originality.

**Students Will:**
- Adapt existing ideas or products in a novel way.
- Demonstrate flexibility in generating multiple ideas.
- Apply critical thinking to design original work.
- Act innovatively to impact the local, regional, or global community.

**Critical Thinking**
Students are thinking critically when they systematically relearn knowledge and apply critical, synthesis, evaluative, or creative information in ways that generate understanding that are new to them.

**Students Will:**
- Demonstrate new understanding when they identify incorrect use of specific situations.
- Analyze information from different viewpoints.
- Recognize perspectives, others, and their own.
- Explain the cultural context of their thinking, analyzing the decisions of others, and articulating biases.
- Seek logical and abstract thinking to analyze and synthesize complex information to form a unique solution.

**Global Learning**
Students are demonstrating their understandings of the complexities of culture and global issues and their ability to use viewpoints beyond their own when they leverage their experiences to positively impact the world around them.

**Students Will:**
- Analyze information from different perspectives.
- Recognize perspectives, others, and their own.
- Explain the cultural context of their thinking, analyzing the decisions of others, and articulating biases.
- Take action to improve conditions, participating with cultural competence.

**Personalized Learning**
Students are personalizing their learning when they choose an element of the content, product, and/or process for their learning, and when they set and monitor their own learning goals.

**Students Will:**
- Choose how learning will be demonstrated from among teacher-provided options.
- Self-select as element of content and/or process, analyzing the process and the decisions of others, articulating biases.
- Design a work plan to meet learning goals through personalized learning.

**Use of Technology for Learning**
Students are using technology/IML learning when they complete or part of an activity using technology and move from consumer of content to producers of knowledge.

**Students Will:**
- Use technology to process information.
- Use technology to critically understand information.
- Use technology to support knowledge exploration and rearticulate new understandings.
- Design a technology product to be shared with others.
Appendix H: Schoology Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Option</th>
<th>Materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Add Materials</td>
<td>Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>Book Recommendations</td>
</tr>
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<td>Upcoming</td>
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<td>Course Options</td>
<td>Materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Add Materials</td>
<td>Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humane Education</td>
<td>Winter Book Clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Club Book Trailers</td>
<td>What is your question about your book club book?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOW CAN AN INTERMEDIATE ELEMENTARY EDUCATOR USE CRITICAL LITERACY TO PROMOTE SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH BOOK CLUBS

**Add Materials**

- **Homework**
- **Before we begin**
- **Let's read!**
- **What did you discuss?**
- **PBL**

**Grade 5 English: Reading 503 • Book Club • Humane Education**

**Homework**

- **book club: complete first written assignment for Monday (April 24) - POST HERE**
  Due Monday, April 24, 2017 at 11:59 pm

- **book club: complete second written assignment for Friday (April 28) - POST HERE**
  Due Thursday, April 27, 2017 at 11:59 pm

- **book club: complete third written assignment for Wednesday (May 3) - POST HERE**
  Due Wednesday, May 3, 2017 at 11:59 pm

- **book club: complete fourth written assignment for Wednesday (May 5) - POST HERE**
  Due Friday, May 5, 2017 at 11:59 pm

**Before we begin..**

- **Humane Education Survey**
- **What book do you want to explore?**
- **What are your top THREE choices?**
HOW CAN AN INTERMEDIATE ELEMENTARY EDUCATOR USE CRITICAL LITERACY TO PROMOTE SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH BOOK CLUBS
HOW CAN AN INTERMEDIATE ELEMENTARY EDUCATOR USE CRITICAL LITERACY TO PROMOTE SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH BOOK CLUBS
### Appendix I: Teacher Checklist for Book Clubs

Name:___________________________________ Date:________________________________

Author:_________________________________ Title: _________________________________

Marking of a box indicates “Yes” to the task.

#### Preparation for Book Club

- [ ] Brought book to the book club.
- [ ] Contributed to developing group reading goals.
- [ ] Completed work according to group goals.
- [ ] Read the assigned pages, chapters, etc., for the goals.
- [ ] Noted places to share (ones of interest, ones that were puzzling, etc.)
- [ ] Completed group response assignments before coming to the day’s discussion.

#### Participation in the Book Club Discussion

- [ ] Participated in the discussion. Weak __  Good __ Excellent __
- [ ] Gave quality of verbal responses and contributions. Weak __  Good __ Excellent __
- [ ] Used text to support ideas and assertions. Weak __  Good __ Excellent __
- [ ] Listened to others. Weak __  Good __ Excellent __