A Thematic Approach to Self-invention and Coming-of-Age within Diverse Backgrounds

A Teaching Unit for Chicago Suburban Public School Freshmen at Grade Level

  Ryan Arciero

Dr. White

Adolescent Literature

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EPIGRAPH

Remember, dear reader,

“Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counselors, and the most patient of teachers.” – Charles W. Eliot

“A good book should leave you… slightly exhausted at the end. You live several lives while reading it.” – William Styron

“Books are friends that never leave you, and take you to places only your imagination may venture.” – Author unknown

DEDICATION

To all readers, lovers, and future teachers of the written word,

 You have undoubtedly already unlocked the great gifts that books have had in your own lives, and have thus become leaders of integrity, knowledge, and passion. Now lead the way for others to discover the wondrous world of books for themselves.

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 A classic (1967) young adult realistic fiction novel

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 A contemporary (1993) science fiction novel

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 Experiencing Activity: Small group discussion on symbolism before class sharing

 Responding Activity: In small groups create the next chapter in the novel either in written form or in comic book/graphic novel style

*The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank

 A classic (1949) nonfiction (historical) autobiography

 International/Multicultural: Jewish, Female

 Evaluation…………………………………………………………………….….

 Experiencing Activity: Student/Class Read-aloud

 Responding Activity: Timeline/Newspaper Article—students will make a timeline or newspaper article based off of the major events in Anne’s life

*The Circuit* by Francisco Jimenez

 A contemporary (1997) collection of short stories

 Multicultural: Mexican Migrant Workers, Male

 Evaluation…………………………………………………………………….…

 Experiencing Activity: Group discussions on context and meaning of works

 Responding Activity: Characteristics Matchup—throughout the short story, the readers are able to see the unique characteristics that Francisco exhibits; review the events in the stories and match them with Francisco’s corresponding characteristics

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 Evaluation……………………………………………………….………….........

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Introduction: The Process of Growing Up and Coming into One’s Own

 Being an adolescent in today’s day and age is no easy task. There are numerous responsibilities, peer pressures, and expectations placed on young adults in modern society, all of which unfortunately cause stress and confusion. However, there are still ways for students to find that essential guidance and support in their lives—one of these ways is through reading. Reading opens new doors of opportunity for young adults and allows them to explore new worlds of imagination and information. Although “change” is indeed one of the greatest aspects of adolescent life, and a time when support is needed in the face of hardship, “all of this support can be found in good stories for young adults” (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 3). As a prospective English teacher, it is one of my primary goals to inspire my students with a passion for reading through my academic curriculum so that they too may discover more about themselves through the works they come across. Thus, I feel that students who are already avid readers or even perhaps resistant readers will greatly benefit from this particular unit because it appeals to readers of all different levels and demonstrates how books offer young adults insight into reinventing themselves and growing up.

Young adult literature may be defined as “literature written for young people ages 11 to 18 and books marketed as ‘young adult’ by a publisher” (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 4). Young adult literature is absolutely vital to adolescents because it provides them with the sense of leadership and inner strength to face the challenges of the teenage years and find out who they are as maturing individuals in the world. In the same vein, it is not right or fair for us educators and “adults” to decide which texts adolescents can or cannot read. As a future teacher, I intend to spread a belief in non-censorship, or the idea that students should have the chance to read the texts they want to and in the process learn from them at the same time. Censorship should always be discouraged in schools because not exposing students to works that will potentially influence them for the better is a great disservice and violates their “intellectual freedoms” (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 234). I also believe in encouraging reading among all kinds of students and readers. Today’s classrooms contain a variety of students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds; it is my duty as a multicultural educator to embrace all students and introduce them to the prominence of American diversity by presenting them with an assortment of multicultural works (like *The Circuit* or *The Diary of Anne Frank*). By offering students texts of different genres from fantasy to nonfiction, works that appeal to both resistant readers and advanced readers, and possessing personal knowledge of multicultural and international texts, I will be doing my part in encouraging students to read and guiding them on their paths to adulthood. Presenting adolescents with a balanced collection of both new and old works will help them develop as experienced, erudite individuals, too. For example, a smoothly integrated blend of both classic and contemporary works of literature that contain “topics and themes that years ago might never have been conceived” will help students mature into active thinkers and thus learners (Kaplan, 2005, p. 11).

This thematic teaching unit is intended for Chicago suburban ninth graders (freshmen) spanning between the ages of 14-16 years and of average reading ability. The particular topic and theme I selected for this unit is “Self-invention and Coming-of-age within Diverse Backgrounds.” There are several reasons explaining why I settled on this teaching range and theme. Once I graduate from Lewis University and begin to teach, I intend to stay within the suburban Chicago area. Furthermore, my Secondary Education degree will enable to me to teach English from the 6th grade level to the 12th grade level, meaning that I will have the experience to teach in both middle school and high school. I decided to create a thematically approached unit for freshman specifically because I felt it was a good balance between the two opposite ends of my teaching spectrum, and the included texts could be adjusted without too much difficulty for whichever grades I end up teaching. Both males and females from Latino-American, African-American, and European-American heritage and of mainly middle-class social backgrounds would likely mature and benefit from this unit. Although many of the works within this unit are for readers of average skill (thus the majority of the students I will be teaching), I have numerous additional texts of varied topics and interests to appease and engage all of my prospective students. In teaching these varied texts, I intend to help my students become more educated, knowledgeable individuals who forge their own paths in life and deliberately choose to travel “the road not taken” (Frost, 1916, line 1).

 I believe that each of the texts included in this unit help support my overlying theme, “Self-invention and Coming-of-age within Diverse Backgrounds.” Because the time of adolescence can be challenging at times physically, socially, and mentally, it is reassuring to know that books (expressly the works from this unit) can be used as a reference for my young adult students. Each of my included texts contain primary protagonists that reinvent themselves in one way or another for the better, becoming new individuals in the process. For example, Ponyboy in *The Outsiders* learns that that he does have a place among his family and friends, and it is his innocence that enables him to “stay gold” (Hinton, 1963, p. 148). At the same time, the teenage years are of course a period of growth and development, in which adolescents do “come-of-age” in a sense; I also chose to emphasize this concept in the unit because it is so applicable to all young adults. For example, in *The Circuit* Francisco comes to America as an illegal immigrant and is forced to greatly mature in a short amount of time, yet his challenging experiences are what enable him to truly “come of age” (Jimenez, 1997, p. 47).Because I am aware that my future classrooms will of course contain many students from distinct pasts and cultures, I also wanted to make sure that my unit accommodated “diverse backgrounds” by incorporating both male and female authors from different cultures and time periods, such as *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank. I feel that if I prove to my students that reading has had a positive impact in my life and enabled me to grow up and reinvent myself into something new and greater than before, then they too might realize that reading will leave a lasting imprint in their own lives—“to be a successful promoter of reading, you yourself must be a reader” (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 242).

I believe that I have learned very much about literature in general as well as about young adult literature. Literature is truly an art of written works, a combination of millions of texts that each offer unique themes and messages to those that read them. Young adult literature, in particular, is a collection of works specifically intended not only to please adolescents through likeable protagonists or engaging plotlines, but to inform teenagers and provide them with the resources and knowledge they need to overcome any obstacles in their lives. I believe that I have personally changed as a reader by learning about the many genres of literature available, as well as understanding the significant perspectives that multicultural works have to offer. As a future teacher, I must always strive for choice, variety, and balance when selecting books and presenting them to my prospective students. A vital factor as well is exposing students to the great multitude of multicultural literature, or “books about people and their individual or group experiences… often focusing on communities that have been overshadowed and to various degrees disregarded by the dominant Euro-American culture” (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 147). If I can learn to be familiar with the many genres of literature, from realistic fiction to poetry, I will better be equipped to lead my students in the right direction for books that would pique their interests and help them develop as firmly grounded young adults. The most important advice I can personally take from what I have learned is to appreciate all literature that I encounter and “to first learn to truly enjoy it myself” (Kutiper and Wilson, 1993, p. 34).

 Because of the many advantages that reading offers and the wide-reaching, educational benefits of a self-invention/coming-of-age-based compilation of works, I believe that this thematic unit would be very interesting and helpful in instructing my future students in an English classroom. The ultimate goal of this unit is to enable my students to read and actively experience and respond to the literature though a variety of activities. Their objective is to make personal connections to the texts and apply those connections to their own lives and other works they come across. All young adults need to learn to promote and participate in free and diverse reading because doing so allows them to grow as experienced, innovative individuals. Reading fantasy books, for example, encourage students to raise their “conceptual thinking” abilities by creating images of imaginary figures or settings in their minds’ eye; similarly, reading historical fiction will provide them access to notable events in the past and offer new perspectives to become more open-minded and independent people. Ultimately, we as a civilization read for pleasure, to learn information, and to “support the notion that some knowledge of our cultural heritage” (or who we truly are as human beings), can be discovered in the extraordinary world of literature (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 237). As an aspiring teacher, I want to inspire my students to find a joy and sense of learning in reading that culminates toward one essential goal—having my students learn to love it. When the day comes that I have a student come up to me saying that he or she now loves to read because of my class or feel that they have grown or changed themselves because of it, I will know I have done my job well. Therefore, I believe that my multicultural and diverse collection of works included here will make this thematic sourcebook unit on “Self-invention and Coming-of-age within Diverse Backgrounds” an educational success.

“The Road Not Taken”

By Robert Frost

Source Information: Ideas gathered from previous student (Tamyka Kimbrough), with writings and examples of activities completed by Ryan Arciero and inspired by the Tomlinson text

“The Road Not Taken”

By Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

“The Road Not Taken” Evaluation

This poem by Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken,” is very appealing to young adults, especially because it is easy to read yet still open to diverse interpretations. At face value, it is merely a poem about an individual standing before two separate paths in a wooded area; the speaker decides to take one of the trails, wondering if his or her choice will make a difference in the future. The poem’s main theme is that one is often faced with alternatives throughout life, and those decisions will have consequences and impact that person’s life down the line. It particularly applies to adolescents, who are faced everyday with choices that may have serious and significant outcomes.

“The Road Not Taken” is a classic, four stanza poem that has been frequently misinterpreted. As a narrative poem concerning decision-making and coming-of-age, it has been popularly perceived in the past as inspirational and individualistic. In this sense, the poem’s speaker is presented as a daring and a free spirit. He or she chooses to take the “road less traveled by” (19), meaning the speaker selects the more difficult, yet ultimately most rewarding, path. However, the last two lines of the poem may contradict this specific reading; while the speaker states that “it has made all the difference” (20), that does not necessarily mean the decision was a positive one.

Another very interesting (and perhaps even more probable) interpretation of “The Road Not Taken” is a more pragmatic, retrospective approach. This analysis of the poem poses a compromise between the two lines, “Had worn [the paths] really about the same” (10) and “I took the one less traveled by.” It suggests that although in the future the speaker claims to have taken the path less treaded, there was little distinction between the two anyway. Each road was equally fateful, but the speaker finds solace in believing his or her chosen path was the “right” one. Whether his or her “sigh, ages and ages hence” (16-17) is one of satisfaction or regret is left to the reader’s individual interpretation.

This poem is likely intended for (even resistant) high school males and females of all cultures roughly in the 14-17 age group. Though relatively simple to read, “The Road Not Taken” holds deep profundity and insight for young adult readers, encouraging them to take the “paths” in life they believe hold the most promise for themselves. Iambic tetrameter, a rhyme scheme of ABAAB, the visual imagery of autumn woodland and the slow, flowing rhythm (much like tentative footsteps) all lend themselves well to the poem’s theme of life’s inevitability and passing. Indeed, the figurative symbolism of life’s choices being represented by diverging paths promotes all those who encounter this poem to live life without regrets and to take the “road less traveled by.”

The following is supplemented by Tamyka Kimbrough:

“The Road Not Taken” Experiencing Activity: Teacher Read-aloud

 Source: Tomlinson text and previous student idea (Tamyka Kimbrough)

 Audience: Individually spoken by teacher, then further discussion with whole class

 Rationale: I believe that a teacher read-aloud of “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost would be a good experiencing activity for this poem. Not only would it give me the opportunity to introduce the poem to the students in a clear and interesting way, but it also allows them to hear it from a passionate speaker. After I have read it verbally to the students a couple of times, I will then wait for student questions or insights before delving deeper into an informational analysis of “The Road Not Taken.”

“The Road Not Taken” Responding Activity: Journal Entry

 Source: Tomlinson text and previous student idea (Tamyka Kimbrough)

 Audience: Individually completed by student

 Rationale: I believe that an effective responding activity for “The Road Not Taken” would involve having my students write a paragraph-length “journal” entry for their thoughts on a personal decision they made in their own lives. Since this poem by Robert Frost talks about making self-affecting decisions in life and reflecting on where those decisions have taken us (particularly wondering what would have happened had we made an alternative choice), I think that this activity helps students apply the meaning of “The Road Not Taken” in an individual context. Students will have the opportunity to use their writing skills to briefly write about how a significant decision in their lives may have changed them, as well as considering what other options may have resulted had they selected a different “path.”

“The Road Not Taken” Responding Activity: Journal Entry Example

Directions: Describe a time when you had to make an important decision. How did you feel? Were you happy with the outcome? Do you ever wonder what could have been? Write at least one solid paragraph to hand in to me answering these questions and using correct grammar and punctuation.

 One small but very memorable decision I recall from my younger years was when my 7th grade class was having its Valentine’s Day dance. There was a girl I really liked for quite some time and had wanted to ask to dance with me—Cindy Porter. Even though I wanted to ask her, I remember being very nervous at the same time and afraid that she’d say no if I did. On Valentine’s Day during our class party, I saw her dancing with her friends. I was again really anxious about standing in front of everybody to ask her —so anxious, in fact, that I never got up the courage to do so. Of course, I was never really happy with the outcome because nothing happened and I don’t know what could have. To this day, even though I haven’t seen Cindy in several years, I still wonder what may have happened had I asked Cindy to dance with me that day during the party. I guess the moral of this decision is that I always want to take my chances and “go for it” in life; that way, I can say I lived well and look back with no regrets.

*The Outsiders*

By S.E. Hinton

Source Information: Ideas, writings, and activities completed by Ryan Arciero and inspired by the Tomlinson text

**Young Adult Literature Materials Collection:** EVALUATION & CHART

TITLE: The Outsiders
S.E. Hinton, New York: The Viking Press, 1967:
CLASSIC/ **CLASSIC YA**/ YA

|  |
| --- |
| **Genre:** Realistic Fiction **Subgenre:** Coming-of-Age/Family/Peers **Topic:** Friendship, Gang Violence |
| **Protagonist (s)/ Name, Age, Gender, Microculture:** Ponyboy Curtis, 14 years old, male, white, lower/middle class |
| **Simple plot** (progressive or episodic; main action/conflict): Progressive: Greasers vs. Socs; When Johnny stabs a Soc, he and Ponyboy are forced to run away.  When the church they hide in burns down, they are forced to return home and deal with the issues they left behind.  When Johnny dies in the hospital due to the burns he suffered in the fire, Dally commits suicide and Ponyboy comes to the realization of the dangerous path he is on and decides to change.  He writes his experience, which results in this book.   |
| **Length & Format** (# of chapters; how divided; letters, etc.): Divided into 12 chapters, Roughly 15-20 pages per chapter, No inner graphics, pg. 77 Robert Frost Poem, 2 letters within (1 from Sodapop [p81] 1 from Johnny [p178]) |
| **Readability** (address chapter, paragraph, sentence length, sentence type, difficulty of vocabulary and/or concepts/issues, use of white space): Longer chapters, simple language, moderate sentence length, period lingo (but explained within text, simple and compound sentences, issues with class, age, sex, appearance, drug and alcohol use, gang activity, very little white space |
| **Recommended audience** (microculture, gender, age, ability, resistance, interest): Microculture: white adolescent males from the poor class / gender: male / age: 12-20 yrs / ability: average reading ability, at risk youth / resistance: to violence, gangs, the poor class / interest: being a part of a group, hanging out in community   |
| **Other factors or features** (illustrations, cover art, other inside front/back matter, banned/challenged rating, prizes, film adaptation): No illustrations within; cover: chest of Greaser in leather jacket and white tank top, Interview with the author at end of book, Was banned repeatedly (#47), There is a film adaptation |
| **Overall quality: your rating 1 (low) to 5 (high) 5/5** (how/what does this text please and teach?)  An excellent book, in my opinion. This was my first time reading it, and I think it is a great choice for young adults with its solid “friendship” topic. Its simple writing style, often humorous tone, and meaningful commentary helps the reader realize that while “fitting in” may seem necessary at the time, it is just as important to maintain one’s integrity and innocence. Overall, a fast, action-packed read with a decent variety of likeable, well-described characters and protagonist in Ponyboy. This text pleases and teaches by appealing to teenagers’ feelings of angst in adolescence and pressures growing up, as well as the significance of peer support and belief in oneself. |

*The Outsiders* Evaluation

*The Outsiders* is a novel about a boy named Ponyboy Curtis, who is part of a gang known as the Greasers. They are at odds with the Socs, a high-class, rival “gang” of privileged adolescent boys. Ponyboy lives his with brothers, Darry and Sodapop, and considers his fellow Greasers to be friends and allies, though he sometimes feels he is a burden to the group. Ponyboy is leaving a movie theater one night when he is suddenly threatened by some Socs, but the Greasers save him in the nick of time. He soon meets Sherri “Cherry” Valance, a pretty and confident Soc girl, and realizes that the Socs may not be that different from the Greasers. While the Socs are more affluent and snobbish, they still go through the same adolescent problems that the Greasers do.

One night Ponyboy is walking with his buddy Johnny, a young and sensitive Greaser. They are jumped by a small number of drunk Soc boys, and when Ponyboy is nearly drowned by one of them, Johnny stabs Bob (actually Cherry’s boyfriend), killing him. The two boys are helped by an experienced Greaser, Dally, who instructs them to hide out for a few days in a nearby abandoned church. They eventually find out that tensions between the rival gangs have reached a pinnacle after Bob’s death, so Johnny prepares to turn himself in. However, as he and Ponyboy are leaving, the church catches on fire—with several children stuck inside. Ponyboy and Johnny rush to save them, and are successful, but Johnny critically injures himself in the fire. During his short time in hospital, Ponyboy’s brothers visit him and break down in tears, and Ponyboy realizes he really is loved and accepted.

 A final fight ensues between the Greasers and the Socs, and the Greasers are ultimately victorious, though the grievances on both sides can hardly be called a victory. After a heartfelt goodbye, Johnny dies in the hospital, and Dally allows himself to be shot down by police, unable to cope with Johnny’s death. Ponyboy is devastated by the loss around him and begins to comprehend that violence yields nothing, but that he still has a positive future ahead of him. Johnny’s last words ring in his head—“Stay gold, Ponyboy. Stay gold.” The novel closes with Ponyboy writing an English essay to improve his failing grade, and the paper he writes is about the experiences he has undergone and the lessons he has learned.

Assessment Criteria:

Yes, this novel contains a well-developed, round and dynamic protagonist in Ponyboy Curtis. Ponyboy initially feels he does not fully belong with the Greasers, that he encumbers his older brothers, and that the Greasers’ rivalry with the Socs (a wealthy rival gang) is to be expected. However, as the book progresses, Ponyboy begins to grow as both an individual and as a character, learning lessons that could certainly apply to other young adults. He first realizes through his conversation with Cherry Valance, a Soc girl, that the Socs are actually more comparable to the Greasers than they appear; the Socs similarly struggle with the adolescent search for acceptance. Through Johnny’s death, Ponyboy comprehends that violence truly does taint the innocent and leads to only more pain and destruction. Lastly, Ponyboy comes to realize that his brothers do love him and care for him, and that he has potential to succeed in life if he stays the good person he knows himself to be.

The plot is certainly well-crafted, with meaningful conflicts and fast-paced, suspenseful occurrences. From the very first chapters with Ponyboy being threatened by the Socs, the tensions between the Greasers and the Socs are made apparent. Though things seem to settle down for a time, the rivalry is renewed through the flirtations between Dally and Cherry, as well as the strain Ponyboy feels about being a burden to his brothers. Tensions reach an apex with Johnny surprisingly killing Bob, and the gripping scene of him and Ponyboy saving the children from the church fire. Conflict and suspense are thus blended throughout the novel and keep the audience wanting to continue reading. Johnny’s death is especially tragic and foreshadowed by his injuries from the fire, while the clash between the Greasers and Socs is not nearly as dramatic as initially thought. The very ending lines of the novel are also well-crafted, as the reader comes to realize that the “writer” of the book is actually Ponyboy himself composing the essay.

There are most definitely a few embedded themes that can be found throughout *The Outsiders.* Perhaps the three most prevalent morals that arise from the novel are to empathize with others, to understand that violence is never a solution, and to believe in oneself. Ponyboy learns to empathize with others through his interaction with Cherry Valance near the beginning of the novel. Both of them “see the same sunset” and love to read, despite their socioeconomic differences. This is so meaningful to Ponyboy because it is at this point he first grasps that the Greasers and Socs may not be as opposite as they make themselves out to be; both groups still have the same need for approval as teenagers. The futility of violence is observed in the final fight between the Greasers and Socs; many on both sides are seriously injured—for little to no reason at all. Ponyboy realizes that these rivalries are the source of most of the problems the gangs face, and is in effect part of the cause of Johnny’s death. If a Soc boy, Rob, had not attacked Ponyboy, Johnny would have never accidentally killed him in an attempt to save his friend, thus losing his sense of innocence. Lastly, Ponyboy is beginning to believe in himself and find his true place as a potential member of society by the end of the novel. As he writes an essay to salvage his English grade, he reflects that his brothers love him and want him to have a bright future, and that he can actually have one with an education and a morally good character.

There is a cause for optimism in *The Outsiders,* as well as a sense of humor. As previously stated, it is likely and hopeful that Ponyboy will use the lessons he has learned to “stay gold.” He is actively writing the essay which will allow him to pass English and pursue further education, often an important route to success. Though the deaths of Johnny and Dally are heart-wrenching and unfortunate, their deaths caused important character growth in Ponyboy. In addition, a Soc boy comes forward before the big clash and says that he is tired of the fighting between the two groups, revealing that perhaps the violent rivalry of the Greasers and Socs will eventually come to an end. While not a humorous novel, *The Outsiders* nonetheless includes some humor and dialogue between characters, mostly from Ponyboy’s adolescent perspective and interpretation of events. For example, one funny scene occurs when Dally is pestering the attractive Soc girls. After amusingly barking at Dally to leave them alone, Cherry turns to Ponyboy. His first thought of all things is simply “Gosh, is she pretty.”

Though there is quite a bit of violence in *The Outsiders,* I did not find any of it to be inserted gratuitously. All of the fights and fierce encounters (including Johnny stabbing Rob, the rescuing of the children from the fire, and even the mentioned clash between the rival groups) are included because they further the plot along and act as an impetus for Ponyboy’s personal growth. None of the violence is described in gruesome or affirmative detail, and Ponyboy’s depiction of such scenes (like Dally being shot) is devastatingly sad and regretful. There is no inclusion of any sexual scenes either, and the only possible “flirtatious” moment with Dally harassing the Soc girls is not inappropriate.

I found *The Outsiders* to certainly be believable and thus realistic. Though some scenes are a bit contrived or far-fetched (such as a church suddenly catching fire while children are trapped inside), all of the action throughout the novel could potentially happen. Again, while it is unlikely that Ponyboy would have no parents either, everything throughout the book could occur in real life and is certainly possible. Though I have never experienced gangs myself, I have seen in movies and on the news how prevalent and dangerously real gangs can truly be. Thus, *The Outsiders* is worthy of being a realistic fiction novel and contains practical, dynamic characters, real-life social situations, and takes place in the actual city of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Supplementary Information

1. Hinton, S.E. (1967). *The Outsiders.* New York: Penguin Group Inc., 1995.
2. This novel has won several awards, including the Media and Methods Maxi Award in 1975, the ALA Best Young Adult Book in 1975, and the Massachusetts Children’s Book Award in 1979.
3. This text would be considered a classic text because it was written in 1967 and has stood the test of time, becoming a popular and emotive young adult novel.
4. Two examples of connecting texts would be Graham Salisbury’s *Island Boys: Short Stories* and *Bucking the Sarge* by Christopher Curtis. *Island Boys: Short Stories* similarly deals with the subgenre of peers in realistic fiction and concerns peer pressure and bullying; *Bucking the Sarge* also involves a coming-of-age theme and family relationships (p. 52, 54).
5. The genre of *The Outsiders* is a realistic fiction novel, and it subgenres include coming-of-age, peers, and social challenges. One of the story’s particular topics is the development of Ponyboy Curtis’ character; he matures and “comes of age” in a sense through his experiences in the book.
6. *The Outsiders* is a novel that introduces “Ponyboy” Curtis, a thirteen-year-old member of his lower-class group, known as the Greasers. The Greasers have always been at odds with the pompous, affluent Socials, a rival group of youths in the area; tensions escalate dramatically when one bullying prank goes too far, and someone is killed. As the novel progresses, Ponyboy learns about life and how socioeconomic status affects all young adults, realizing that the grass is not always greener on the other side. A key quotation is stated by Ponyboy when talking to Cherry Valance, an attractive “Soc” (Social) girl. He says, “It’s okay… We aren’t in the same class. Just don’t forget that some of us watch the sunset too” (46). I chose this quote because not only does it reveal Ponyboy to be intelligent beyond his years, but that there is a certain likeness between him and her. Even though he is of the lower-class Greasers and she is of the upper-class Socs, they still live in the same world with the same sun—people cannot and should not stereotype others because of their social status.
7. The required literary elements for realistic fiction can all be found in *The Outsiders.* According to Tomlinson, some of these criteria include well-developed characters and plot, “adverse and discouraging social situations,” moral values, believability, and are also often “presented as though by one of the characters” (42-43). This novel presents a wide array of characters, most of whom undergo difficult experiences and thus personal growth. Two major examples are Ponyboy Curtis and Johnny Cade. Ponyboy feels at first that he is an embarrassment to his older brothers and that he has little chance of ever becoming more than a lowly Greaser. However, as the story continues, he learns about life and the troubles all teens face (not just himself); he becomes defiant to society’s class prejudice. Johnny Cade, an anxious and sensitive Greaser, is initially seen as weak and helpless without the others. But when Ponyboy is threatened with violence, Johnny has the inner courage and decisiveness to protect his friends, even to the point of being just as aggressive. Challenging social situations are also seen in *The Outsiders—*evidenced by the cruel threats between the two groups to the fierce, final skirmish at the end of the book. Ponyboy wisely realizes that if these disputes are ever to end, there must be compromise between the Greasers and the Socs; they must accept their similarities instead of their differences. This understanding leads to the important moral values found in the story. Focusing on the elements of camaraderie, empathy, and honor among the “anarchic,” *The Outsiders* reveals to the reader that all people, despite their disparities, have the same basic needs and wants. It is wrong and fruitless to label someone for their socioeconomic status or social affiliations. Lastly, this novel is very believable and is indeed communicated by a character. The happenings between social groups are certainly plausible in everyday life, and the story itself is “written” by Ponyboy while working on his extra credit assignment.
8. This novel is interesting and well-written enough to be read by people of all ages, but it is mostly intended for young adults. *The Outsiders* is best suited for average to advanced readers beginning with early adolescents (age 12 and up), so roughly 6th grade and beyond. The diction and syntax are easy to understand, though slang is used rather heavily throughout. There are quite a few characters as well, so memorization or at least familiarity with the many names (and nicknames) is a must when reading this book. While it can definitely be read by both males and females, boys may be more drawn to the novel because a majority of the main characters are male. In addition, the content itself (including gangs, some violence, runaways, and social boundaries) is likely more engaging to a male-oriented audience. *The Outsiders* would be appreciated by those who are perhaps going through similar struggles as Ponyboy; that is, they feel oppressed by socioeconomic status, violence, or peer/family issues. This realistic novel would be a potential candidate I would advise to any of my reluctant reader students, as it could introduce them to the genre. It is a relatively short book at only 180 pages, with brief, fast-paced chapters and adequate use of white space (214-215). *The Outsider’s* dialogue and narration are especially appealing because they are told from the adolescent protagonist Ponyboy’s point of view, making the events and descriptions more approachable. Lastly, the action-packed plotline snares any reader, reluctant or not, into delving deeper into this poignant book.
9. *The Outsiders* was censored and even banned at points in high schools for its mentioning of drug and alcohol abuse, portrayal of violence, and offensive language/slang. According to the American Library Association, it was ranked number 43 among the top 100 banned books of the century in the 1990s. The use of this novel in the classroom would be helpful for teachers introducing students to the realistic fiction genre or trying to appeal to young, diverse, (even resistant) male readers. *The Outsiders* expressed significant themes to young adults in both middle and high school, including the power of friendship, determination, and the belief that socioeconomic boundaries can be overcome if people are willing to look past externalities and stereotypes. While the story has been challenged for its aforementioned content, I would argue that it provides students with clear insight into the consequences bigotry and violence can lead to. Though the book is considered a classic, the concepts of camaraderie and understanding it encourages are still applicable today in the classroom and outside of it.

*The Outsiders* Experiencing Activity: Small Group Scene Role Play

Source: Tomlinson text

 Audience: Performed in small groups before presenting in front of class

 Rationale: I believe that having small group role plays would be an excellent experiencing activity for *The Outsiders.* Because the novel is so adolescent-centered and brimming with tension-filled scenes between the young adults, having the students role play and act out certain character parts would certainly help them further learn and connect to the text. In doing so, the students will also have the opportunity to “put themselves in the shoes” of some of the main characters (such as Ponyboy or Johnny), and thus relate to the experiences and emotions these protagonists are going through in the work. This activity also allows students to get out of their seats and actively participate in their learning; by reading the dialogue of the characters, the students will hopefully grasp the emotive concepts and underlying themes of *The Outsiders.*

*The Outsiders* Experiencing Activity: Small Group Scene Role Play Example Scene

Directions: Pick a particularly moving scene that we have covered so far in *The Outsiders* and act it out in your small groups. Some of you may choose to be specific characters, while others may need to voice Ponyboy’s thoughts. Make sure you include important gestures when you speak and think of how your group will situate themselves, as you will eventually be presenting your role play in front of the class. Good luck and have fun!

*The Outsiders,* pg 147-148*:*

The cop left us at the hospital as Dally pretended to help me out of the car. The minute the cop was gone, Dally let go of me so quick I almost fell. “Hurry!”
We ran through the lobby and crowded past people into the elevator. Several people yelled at us, I think because we were pretty racked-up looking, but Dally had nothing on his mind except Johnny, and I was too mixed up to know anything but that I had to follow Dally. When we finally got to Johnny’s room, the doctor stopped us. “I’m sorry, boys, but he’s dying.”
“We gotta see him,” Dally said, and flicked out Two-Bit’s switchblade. His voice was shaking. “We’re gonna see him and if you give me any static you’ll end up on your own operatin’ table.”
The doctor didn’t bat an eye. “You can see him, but it’s because you’re his friends, not because of that knife.”
Dally looked at him for a second, then put the knife back in his pocket. We both went into Johnny’s room, standing there for a second, getting our breath back in heavy gulps. It was awful quiet. It was scary quiet. I looked at Johnny. He was very still, and for a moment I thought in agony: He’s already dead. We’re too late.
Dally swallowed, wiping the sweat off his upper lip. “Johnnycake?” he said in a hoarse voice. “Johnny?”
Johnny stirred weakly, then opened his eyes. “Hey,” he managed softly.
“We won,” Dally panted. “We beat the Socs. We stomped them – chased them outa our territory.”
Johnny didn’t even try to grin at him. “Useless… fighting’s no good….” He was awful white.
Dally licked his lips nervously. “They’re still writing editorials about you in the paper. For being a hero and all.” He was talking too fast and too calmly. “Yeah, they’re calling you a hero now and heroizin’ all the greasers. We’re all proud of you, buddy.”
Johnny’s eyes glowed. Dally was proud of him. That was all Johnny ever wanted.
“Ponyboy.”
I barely heard him. I came closer and leaned over to hear what he was going to say.
“Stay gold, Ponyboy. Stay gold…” The pillow seemed to sink a little, and Johnny died.

*The Outsiders* Responding Activity: Crossword Puzzle

 Source: Genre Packet Samples

 Audience: Individually completed by student

Rationale: I selected on a crossword puzzle as my responding activity for *The Outsiders* for a couple of important reasons. First, the words within the puzzle will help “test” the students’ basic knowledge of the text, and review their memory of major characters, places, and events. The puzzle will also integrate a visual means of learning as well as incorporate a fun and enjoyable activity for the students to complete instead of a usual quiz. Just as the Ponyboy is “searching” for his place in the world and approval from his brothers and the other Greasers in the novel, so too will my students be “searching” for important words from the work.

*The Outsiders* Responding Activity: Crossword Puzzle Sample
Directions: Please try to solve the crossword puzzle. Don’t worry if you can’t solve all the words. You may talk quietly and use each other for help. Good luck and have fun!

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|  **The Outsiders Crossword Puzzle**

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| **ACROSS** 1. Two-bit's prized weapon; dangerous4. The oldest Greaser; a flirt and a jokester5. The oldest brother; tough, but loves his siblings7. The thing that both Ponyboy and Cherry like to watch9. The main protagonist; youngest brother11. Soc cheerleader; Bob's girlfriend14. The "gang" group that Ponyboy belongs to15. What Johnny saves the children in the building from17. The toughest Greaser; protective of Johnny18. The title of the novel | **DOWN** 1. The middle brother; handsome and easy-going3. The most sensitive Greaser; sadly dies in the end6. Soc who tries to make peace and end the violence8. The opposite "gang" group; rich and scornful10. Cruel Soc who attacks the greasers and wears rings11. What the Socs proudly drive around12. The bond that forms between the Greasers13. What Ponyboy and Johnny read while in hiding16. The thing that the Greasers pride themselves on |

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*The Outsiders* Crossword Puzzle

Answer Key

1. Across: Switchblade / Down: Sodapop
2. None
3. Down: Johnny
4. Across: TwoBit
5. Across: Darrel
6. Down: Randy
7. Across: SettingSun
8. Down: Socs
9. Across: Ponyboy
10. Down: Rob
11. Across: Cherry / Down: Cars
12. Down: Friendship
13. Down: Literature
14. Across: Greasers
15. Across: Fire
16. Down: Hair
17. Across: Dallas
18. Outsiders

*The Giver*

By Lois Lowry

Source Information: Ideas gathered from previous student (Tamyka Kimbrough), with writings and examples of activities completed by Ryan Arciero and inspired by the Tomlinson text

The following is supplemented by Tamyka Kimbrough:

*The Giver* Experiencing Activity: Small Group Discussion on Symbolism

 Source: Tomlinson text and previous student idea (Tamyka Kimbrough)

 Audience: Small group discussion, then presented in front of the entire class

 Rationale: I believe that small group discussions (and eventually presentations in front of the class) would be an excellent experiencing activity for *The Giver.* Just as the primary protagonist Jonas is beginning to understand that there truly is a deeper meaning to life in the novel, so too will students have the opportunity to converse in small groups about the symbolism within the work. In this activity, students will have the chance to actively learn and discuss about the potential significance of different objects and characteristics from the text. For example, the color red (which Jonas begins to see after recalling distant memories) may represent passion and intensity, while the “light eyes” of Jonas and the Giver may symbolize the “clarity” of truth. After finding their information, students will then present what they have discovered to the class; if several groups come up with similar information, then students will realize they too can observe and ultimately “learn” about life in distinct yet comparable ways.

*The Giver* Responding Activity: Next Chapter of Novel

 Source: Tomlinson text and previous student idea (Tamyka Kimbrough)

 Audience: Small groups to collect and collaborate on shared information and thoughts

 Rationale: I believe that having the students create a potential next chapter in either written form or graphic novel style to *The Giver* would be an interesting and effective way of assessing their understanding of the novel. Because the work ends on such a mysterious and open-ended note, having the students imaginatively expand on its closing would enhance their creative writing skills and comprehension. Students might write about Jonas’ further journey down the hill into a world of “light and color,” or alternatively might choose to draw it out in several scenes like a comic book would. Either way, doing so would enable students to reflect on the meaning and future insights of the novel without having to take a test or write a tedious essay. Because this activity would likely require more than one class setting to thoroughly complete, I might allot ten minutes or so at the end of each class period for a week before having students present the gist of their succeeding chapters in front of their peers.

*The Giver* Responding Activity: Next Chapter of Novel Beginning Sample

Directions: Write out (or draw) what might happen in the next chapter of *The Giver,* if there was one. You may choose to do so in your small groups either as a written narrative or as a drawn graphic novel or comic book. Be sure to use correct spelling and grammar, and try your best to connect your previous knowledge of the novel into this new chapter you’re devising! Be creative and have fun!

 Jonas could barely keep his eyes open as he sped faster and faster down the snowy hill. The air had become even chillier than before, and bits of snow and rime kept flying into his eyes. The sled that he was on was moving so quickly he could barely keep sight of the trees and ice that he passed by. The bright red color of the sled was the only thing he focused on so he didn’t get sick. And yet, Jonas remembered, he was so grateful for the brilliant hue of scarlet on that sled, for just months he ago it wouldn’t have looked more than a dull shade of gray.

At long last, his furious speed downhill began to slow. The slope evened out, and Jonas was able to wobbly take his first steps off the sled. After steadying his balance, he looked up ahead. There were several evergreen trees in the way, but beyond them were strange sounds and flickering lights. Stepping forward in the crunchy snow, Jonas saw that there was a village before him. What was he going to do? He couldn’t see any people, but the Giver had told him to take courage and find a new life. Yes, he wanted to experience life—experience the emotions, senses, and beautiful “realness” of life. Heaving a deep breath, Jonas took his first steps into the snowy village…

Etc.

*The Diary of a Young Girl*

By Anne Frank

Source Information: Ideas gathered from previous student (Kristina Justice), with writings and activities completed by Ryan Arciero and inspired by the Tomlinson text

**FULL OUTLINE EVALUATION OF:** *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank

1. Frank, Anne. *The Diary of a Young Girl.* (1947). New York: Random House, 1993.
2. *The Diary of a Young Girl* is a moving and influential novel that exposes readers to the personal life of Anne Frank, a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl who was forced to hide in Amsterdam with her family during the Holocaust of World II. I believe it is an excellent book to provide for adolescents in the classroom because it offers a primary account of Anne’s maturation as well as a glimpse into what it was like for a Jewish teenager during that time period. This book is an (auto)biographical, multicultural nonfiction work that concerns female challenges and coming-of-age, and it includes the topic of discrimination toward Jews in hiding during the Holocaust. *The Diary of a Young Girl* was also awarded the YALSA Excellence for Nonfiction Book Award in 1947.
* The required literary elements for multicultural, biographical nonfiction can all be found in *The Diary of a Young Girl.* Yes, this novel contains a well-developed, round and dynamic adolescent protagonist in thirteen-year-old Anne Frank. She is both likeable and human in that she readily comments on the faults of those around her while also pointing out her own. It is impressive that despite the dire circumstances she and her family are in (hiding for their lives from the Nazis in a building’s annex), she remains relatively cheerful and open-minded. Anne relates as a typical teenager because she finds herself slowly attracted to Peter Van Daan, the adolescent son of the other family with whom they share the annex, and experiences numerous arguments with her sister, Margot, and her mother. However, Anne certainly transforms as a protagonist throughout the diary as it progresses; she soon becomes less critical of those around her and is simply grateful she has her family to rely on for support during such a trying time.
* There are significant additional characters and elements in *The Diary of a Young Girl* as well. Anne goes into heavy detail describing her surroundings and the people she is living with. Since they are hidden on the top floor of a factory, the Franks and the Van Daans must remain completely quiet during the day while others are working downstairs. Only at night are they allowed to move about and have a small sense of freedom. It is evident that Anne is not the only one maturing and growing during her forced confinement. Her mother and older sister Margot act as character foils for Anne with their distant personalities and cause her to feel isolated; the two are very close, making the author feel estranged from them. As the diary progresses, however, Anne slowly comes to understand the own difficulties they face and forms a special, if fragile, bond with the other females in her family. She is on extremely good terms with her kind and caring father, whom she deems most like herself. Her love interest, Peter, is often fickle and callous, but sometimes shows genuine affection for Anne, as described in one diary entry as he sits by her bedside while she is sick.
* Being a historical, nonfiction diary, the time and place of the work are of course realistic and suitable to the storyline. *The Diary of a Young Girl* is authentic because it takes place in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, during the Holocaust of World War II in the early 1940s. Anne’s entries begin on June 12, 1942, and do not end until August 1, 1944, well within this time frame. Much of the author’s diary was written as she and her family were hidden away in the annex of a factory, only accessible through a secret staircase (behind a bookshelf) on the lower floors. Factual black-and-white photos provided within the book reveal the trapdoor and staircase, and even show a picture of the small, flat annex in which the Franks and Van Daans were concealed in. Anne’s innocent, smiling face on the front cover of the work is further evidence of her existence and what life was like for her before the Holocaust.
* *The Diary of Anne Frank* is an autobiography and thus does not contain a fictional or contrived plot. However, there certainly still is a realistic “plot” of entries and an underlying conflict. The underlying, ubiquitous threat throughout Anne’s diary is that despite her adolescent concerns of budding sexuality, relationships with her family, and prospects for the future, she and her family are still in hiding from the Nazis. If found, they will be captured and likely sent to concentration camps (and ultimately their death). While the young author’s progressing entries note her personal growth and her hopes on what will come after her forced confinement, her deep-seated fear of being discovered or inability to leave the annex (perhaps subconsciously) pervade her writing. A key quotation from this text is, “[The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be.”](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/the_best_remedy_for_those_who_are_afraid-lonely/144946.html) I find this quote so significant because this is one of the many things that Anne could not safely do while in hiding. A testament to her wisdom for her age, Anne realized the sorrow and fear (that she was enduring) are best defeated through enjoying fresh air outside and appreciating God’s beauty in nature. It is comforting to know that Anne is now able to enjoy these simple gifts and find peace in Heaven.
* There are certainly important naturally arising, embedded morals to be found in *The Diary of a Young Girl.* Perhaps a couple of the most prevalent themes (“main points”) are that virtually all adolescents go through similar experiences of budding sexuality and angst toward friends and family, and that even in such frightening circumstances as hiding from the Nazis, life still does indeed go on (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 97). Throughout her entries, Anne continues to grow up and writes about her confused feelings for Peter Van Daan; though he is rude and sometimes aloof, the author cannot help but feel herself drawn to him simply because he is the “unexplored” male sex. Similarly, Anne gets into quite a few heated arguments with her mother and sister, who think she is spoiled by Mr. Frank and too pensive. The author, on the other hand, finds her mother and sister to be unfeeling to her teenage needs as they exclude her from their close bond. Several times later in Anne’s entries, however, she begins to realize that the females in her family do honestly love her and are of course going through situation-related struggles of their own. In addition, life and people keep on moving, as Anne notes in her journal about her relationships with her family and her growing sense of self-definition and expression. A more wide-reaching idea of the work is the atrocities and wrongness that can come from social injustice and war. If the Holocaust had never happened, Frank might have been able to write a much happier, less troubled diary, and would have likely lived to a ripe old age adding to her personal journal.
* There is a cause for optimism in *The Diary of a Young Girl,* as well as a (slight) sense of humor. The ultimate fate of Anne Frank is a very sad one—she ultimately dies in the Nazi concentration camps. Her mother and sister also perish there, leaving her father, Otis, to be the only survivor of the family. Even with this bleak outcome, there is still hope to be found. Although Anne died during this horrible time in human history, her belief in the positives of the world and the goodness of the future can be found in her diary. She often wrote how beautiful nature was, as well as the joys that family and friends can bring. Her personal struggles and poignant life story live on in present-day minds through the vivid memories she left behind in her entries. Although this is most certainly not a “humorous work,” it is heartwarming to sometimes come across a few of Anne’s jokes about her family or normal adolescent troubles. For example, she often calls her sister a “nosy busybody” for always trying to sneak a peek of her diary, and her attraction to Peter Van Daan is rather obvious despite her numerous protestations in the journal itself.
* While *The Diary of a Young Girl* does not contain any (gratuitous) violence, it does contain quite a bit of controversy—especially considering the content itself. Many view the work as too depressing or difficult to talk about in a classroom setting, as it exposes how truly terrible it was for Jewish people in hiding during the Holocaust. Others have condemned the work because of its sexual references. Although I find this next point to be absolutely foolish, some people have even said that the diary is contrived, despite all of the photographical evidence to the contrary.
* *The Diary of a Young Girl* clearly fits the criteria for the multicultural (nonfiction) genre. It is certainly believable and realistic, as it concerns an autobiographical account of Jewish Anne Frank’s life while hiding in an annex from Nazis during the Holocaust. It is a “socially conscious” multicultural text because it honestly reveals what many Jewish families had to do in order to survive in Europe during World War II. Since the diary is entirely from Anne’s point of view, it offers an authentic (if subjective) perspective of her family’s overall positive, if argumentative, dynamics. Again, the work also provides an excellent historical view of the time period through not only Anne’s entries but even the black-and-white included photographs. To actually see the secret stairs and the annex in which the Franks and Van Daans were located (hiding for their lives) for approximately two years is truly eye-opening. Being young and innocent, Anne avoids any considerable negative stereotyping of the Nazis and instead focuses on her own life and thoughts, such as “the world outside” and her goals for the future. Some other elements of multicultural nonfiction include structure (consisting of sequence and description), theme, and style (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 97-98). Since the work itself is a diary, it certainly follows a chronological structure. Anne Frank made many entries (some daily, others weekly) that “organize the information” into a sequential manner (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 97). Anne finds solace and comfort from writing in her diary, and it is this thinking and writing that allows her to “escape” while in her forced confinement. Lastly, the author’s style, or way of “expressing [herself] in [her] respective media,” is very personal and honest (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 98). Since this is Anne’s private diary (and thus probably not meant for widespread reading), she writes bluntly of how she feels about her family, situation, and sexuality. There are numerous times throughout the diary that she openly writes negatively about her mother and sister, as well as her interest in Peter. At the same time, this style enables the reader to truly glimpse into the author’s very mind and opinions. The audience is able to see that Anne truly is a thoughtful young girl doing the best she can in such dire circumstances and trying to live a normal, hopeful life.
1. *The Diary of a Young Girl* was censored and banned several times in both middle and high schools for its mentioning of sexuality and negative content and commentary. It has been criticized for its references to menstruation, sexual feelings toward others, and harsh remarks about Anne’s description of her sister and mother. In 1982, the author’s journal was challenged in Wise County, Virginia for “sexually explicit passages.” It was again challenged in 1983 by the Alabama State Textbook Committee simply for being “a real downer.” The American Library Association has also considered it censored and banned because it has been excluded from several libraries across the United States. I personally find these challenges to be invalid; this was Anne’s personal diary, after all. She had every right to speak however she wished about her family, especially considering that angst toward family members is common among adolescents, as is confusion about puberty. This nonfiction work is interesting and clear enough to be read by people of all ages, but is especially appealing to young adults. *The Diary of a Young Girl* is best suited for average to advanced readers beginning with beginning adolescents (ages 15 and up), so approximately 7th grade and beyond. The diction and syntax are fairly easy to understand. It is important to note that many of Frank’s entries should be read in one sitting, as a good majority of them are connected to prior entries and may be confusing if encountered at a later time. There are not very many “characters” (family members or those hiding with the Franks), so it is not very difficult to remember “who’s who.” Although *The Diary of a Young Girl* can be read by both males and females, females (especially those of Jewish descent or interested in World War II) may be more drawn to the book because it is written by a girl and has many thoughtful, emotional insights. This (auto) biographical nonfiction might be a potential candidate I would advise to any reluctant readers I come across as a teacher. While it is not necessarily a short text, I believe it could be used to introduce resistant students to the nonfiction genre. *The Diary of a Young Girl* presents a realistic, honest portrayal of a girl who endured one of the great horrors of world history (the Holocaust), and continues to live on through her words. As the “protagonist” is a young adult female, many readers might be able to put themselves in her shoes with the situation, as well as relate to the feelings of budding sexuality, problems with family, and growing sense of self she experiences. The insightful writing and heartrending circumstances surrounding Anne Frank enthralls most readers, reluctant or not, into reading entry after entry. I think this autobiographical account would have great use in the classroom. It would be extremely helpful to teachers introducing students to the nonfiction genre or appealing to young, diverse (even resistant) female readers. *The Diary of a Young Girl* expresses common, significant themes that young adults can certainly relate to, from conflicts with friends and family as well as budding sexual feelings. The work reveals that even in such misfortunes as the Holocaust, adolescents of the past still underwent many of the struggles and experiences that teenagers do today. Confronting social challenges, this text also provides insight and understanding to current society’s students about the horrors and tragedies of World War II and the threat of Nazism. While *The Diary of a Young Girl* has been argued against for the aforementioned reasons, I would argue that this classic book’s concept of personal growth is still applicable today and reveals to young adults that freedom is indeed a blessing.
2. *The Diary of Anne Frank* would be considered a classic young adult text because it was first written in 1947. It has stood the test of time and remains a tribute to a young girl’s experience of hiding from Nazis in World War II. Two examples of connecting texts would be *Night* by Elie Wiesel and *Zlata’s Diary* by Zlata Filopovic. *Night* is a similarly poignant account published in 1960 and can be considered a young adult novel. It depicts the author’s memories of being held in Nazi concentration camps during the Holocaust of World War II. *Zlata’s Diary* is an autobiography about a young girl’s trials and experiences as she witnesses the Bosnian wars of the early 1990s.

*The Diary of a Young Girl* Experiencing Activity: Student Read-aloud

 Source: Tomlinson text and previous student idea (Kristina Justice)

 Audience: Spoken individually by students in a group classroom setting

 Rationale: I believe that a class read-aloud of passages from *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank would be an excellent experiencing activity for this text. Because the work was written by Frank when she too was a young adolescent (likely around the age of the students I will be teaching this), reading her words out loud will help her “voice” come to life through the words of the students. After having the students get into small groups to select a particular piece that struck a chord with them, I will have each group member read a section of the work to the class that they found especially meaningful or insightful. I feel that doing so will again help further connect my students to the diary they are reading (thinking as if these were there private words being spoken decades from now), and thus hopefully truly enable them to experience the book.

*The Diary of a Young Girl* Responding Activity: Timeline/Newspaper Article

 Source: Tomlinson text and previous student idea (Kristina Justice)

 Audience: Small groups will congregate together to complete project

 Rationale: I believe that having the students create a brief timeline or newspaper article for Anne Frank’s life during World War II would be an interesting and effective way of having them respond to the *Diary of a Young Girl.* The students would work together in small groups to research some background information on Anne Frank and create either a timeline or newspaper clip to reveal how World War II progressed and how Anne’s life “fit” into the shattering events happening around her during that period in history. In doing so, the students will hopefully reflect on not only how tragic and frightening it must have been for Jews to live in Germany during that time, but they will further consider how personally difficult it must have felt for Anne to try and survive. Students will also have the opportunity to connect the history of World War II to the text’s subjective description of the time period and how it might have affected Anne and the life of the Frank family. Since this activity would most likely require more than a single class setting to complete, I might give this assignment as a homework task for students to complete outside of class with their peer group settings.

*The Diary of a Young Girl* Responding Activity: Sample Timeline

Directions: You are going to have the chance to research some information about Anne’s background life! Join in your small groups and work together to create either a brief newspaper article about Frank’s life or a timeline about what was happening during World War II along with significant dates for the Frank family. While doing so, make sure you think about how Anne must have felt while all of these traumatic events were going around her, and how her diary may have been a source of escape for her. Be creative and have fun!

*The Circuit*

By Francisco Jimenez

Source Information: Ideas provided by previous student (Terran Wertz), with writings and activities completed by Ryan Arciero and inspired by the Tomlinson text

The following is supplemented by Terran Wertz:

Full Outline of *The Circuit*

*The Circuit* Experiencing Activity: Group Discussion on Context and Meaning of Works

Source: Genre Packet Samples

 Audience: Class discussion with all students included

 Rationale: I believe that having a group discussion on the context and meaning of *The Circuit* by Francisco Jimenez would be a useful experiencing activity for this text. *The Circuit* is a collection of short stories of a Hispanic migrant boy named Francisco and how he and his family came to America. They arrived in this nation as illegal immigrants and had to work hard manual labor for many years, while Francisco himself suffered from personal challenges like the language barrier, perceived mental disabilities, and racism. Just as important pieces of Francisco’s life are presented in *The Circuit,* so too could students discuss personal parts of their life that have remained with them today in a class-based conversation. I might also lead the discussion in asking students to reflect and comment on how difficult life still is for illegal immigrants like Francisco, and how these 12 short stories in the text have an impact on the lives of some Mexican-Americans today. This activity allows students to think about distinct parts of someone’s life that shape what an individual becomes, as well as think about the particular life of Francisco and how his story applies to general society today.

*The Circuit* Responding Activity: Characteristics match-up

 Source: Genre Packet Samples

 Audience: Individually completed by student

Rationale: I selected a characteristics matchup for Francisco as my responding activity for *The Circuit* because I felt it further reinforced the emotional aspects of this text and would keep Francisco’s life and ordeals present in the students’ minds. Despite all of the difficult events Francisco went through coming to America from Mexico as an illegal immigrant, he still displays very human qualities and displays positive emotions in the face of adversity. Having students associate some of the important points in Francisco’s life with the characteristics he exhibited then will help connect their own personal feelings to the text and hopefully consider what they would have done in that situation. I will also have the students write a couple of reflective sentences after completing the match-up to further review their knowledge of the work and prove to me with evidence why they chose the answers they did.

*The Circuit* Responding Activity: Francisco’s Characteristic Matchup
Directions: Reflect on Francisco’s life and the events and challenges he went through. Next, match some of the situations listed here in Francisco’s life with some positive attributes he demonstrated then. Lastly, write a couple of sentences for each question explaining why you selected that characteristic, using evidence from the text.

1. Francisco deciding to leave with his family to America, 1. Determination

despite his uncertainty in abandoning his way of life.

1. Francisco’s first day of school, as he perseveres despite 2. Kindness

his inability to do the “simple” tasks the other children do.

1. Francisco’s giving a portion of his small meal after a hard 3. Courageousness

day’s labor to another young Mexican immigrant boy.

Etc.

1. I chose courageousness as Francisco’s characteristic for the first question because even though he is afraid to leave Mexico, he knows that going to American will give his family and him the best chances in life. He is brave in leaving his old way of life behind.
2. I chose determination as Francisco’s characteristic for the second question because even though the other students laugh at Francisco for struggling with writing some “easy” English words, he does not give up. Even though he is saddened by their meanness, he is determined to make his way in America.
3. I chose kindness as Francisco’s characteristic for the third question because even after a hard day of manual labor in the fields, Francisco still gives some bread to another hungry boy. He is kind enough, despite all that’s happening to him, to share with others.

Etc.

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* By Lewis Carroll

Source Information: Ideas gathered from previous student (Tamyka Kimbrough), with writings and examples of activities supplemented by Ryan Arciero and inspired by the Tomlinson text

Full Evaluation of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll

The following is supplemented by Tamyka Kimbrough:

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* Experiencing Activity: Class Discussion on Symbolism

 Source: Tomlinson text and previous student idea (Tamyka Kimbrough)

 Audience: Full class discussion with all students included

 Rationale: I believe that having a class discussion on the symbolism within *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* would be a great experiencing activity for this text. This particular fantasy book is very supernatural and imaginative, but within Alice’s magical journey are important pieces of symbolism and hidden meaning. Just as Alice meets a variety of unexpected people and cannot always see things for what they truly are, so too will students try to decipher just what some people or situations mean through a class discussion and relaying ideas off of their peers. For example, Alice often changes sizes throughout the work, from taking pills to growing very tall and at other times shrinking to a very small stature. Though this may seem merely a paranormal phenomenon at first, a deeper examination may reveal that these alterations allude to girls’ bodies changing during puberty, thus leading to Alice’s confusion and frustration. The discussion and students’ insights should all lend themselves to an interesting, experiencing activity for this text.

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* Responding Activity: Cereal Box Creation

 Source: Previous student idea (Tamyka Kimbrough)

 Audience: Individual student project

 Rationale: I believe that having the students create cereal boxes for this text will help them creatively express their ideas in an imaginative manner (just as *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is such a zany and vivid work). The students will individually create a cereal box report based on the novel. This activity again allows students to respond to the novel in a creative way. The report focuses on the entire text with a brief summary and a description of characters. It also highlights one important event, a critique of the novel, as well as a logical change in the story’s plot. The students are forced to pay attention to detail and truly analyze the novel’s main ideas. The report can be adapted to include or focus on setting, symbolism, theme, or other literary elements.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING CHOICES: Annotated Bibliographies

Collins, S. (2008). *The Hunger Games.* New York: Scholastic.

This is a contemporary YA, futuristic science fiction novel that explores the story of sixteen-year-old Katniss and Peeta, a girl and boy who find themselves selected for the risky and dangerous Hunger Games. In this ultramodern world where only the elite class has luxuries and everyone else is dying from starvation, Katniss and Peeta must survive the Hunger Games in order to not only appease the haughty upper echelons, but to save their own lives. Examining the topics of survival, peers, and coming-of-age, Collins encourages young adults to stay strong in the face of adversity, and to rely on the support of loved ones to cope through life’s difficult challenges. According to Tomlinson’s *Essentials of Young Adult Literature* and a *Good Reads* book review website, this novel is best suited for both male and female readers 13-16 years old at grade level, though it has been challenged for its included violence on an impressionable audience. I believe that this would be a solid supplementary choice for *The Giver* because it too is a contemporary, futuristic science fiction novel. *The Hunger Games* would be an excellent alternate reading choice for readers looking for a more advanced level than *The Giver.* I also think it would ultimately add to my unit because its adolescent protagonists, Katniss and Peeta, offer both an interesting, reinvented male and female perspective, and both must learn to work together and come into their own as they fight for their lives to survive.

Glenn, Mel. *Class Dismissed! High School Poems.* Photographs by Michael J. Bernstein. Clarion, 1982.

 This is a classic YA, realistic specialized poetry book that contains seventy poems detailing the emotional experiences of high school students. Two examples are “Love Hurts,” which describes a boy’s unrequited crush on a female peer, and “Growing Older,” a poem about a girl’s conflicts with her friends, family, and self as she matures. Though no longer considered temporary, the themes included in these poems are heartfelt and poignant; they would certainly apply to students today. Exploring the topics of peers and coming-of-age, Glenn encourages young adults to realize that they are not alone in their adolescent struggles and to ultimately be themselves. According to Tomlinson’s *Essentials of Young Adult Literature* and *The Assembly on Literature* *for Adolescents Review (ALAN)* online poetry article, this book is best suited for male and female readers 12-18 years old at grade level. I believe that this would be a solid supplementary choice for the poem, “The Road Not Taken” because it is a collection of young adult poems that chronicle their emotional experiences. The work would serve as an additional SSR choice for “The Road Not Taken” (and even for resistant readers) because the poems within are all very directly presented and relatively easy to understand. I also think *Class Dismissed! High School Poems* would ultimately add to my unit because it is extremely relatable for adolescents, describing the confusing and sometimes daunting experiences that all young adults go through while growing up and reinventing themselves in the process.

Johnson, Angela. *The First Part Last.* Simon & Schuster, 2003.

This is a contemporary YA, realistic and African-American (multicultural) novel that explores the story of sixteen-year-old Bobby, a promising Black boy who suddenly finds himself a father. Although his girlfriend, Nia, wants to give the child up for adoption, Bobby ultimately decides to raise his daughter himself, realizing in the process how difficult it truly is to be a young parent. Examining the topics of teen pregnancy, societal standards, and coming-of-age, Johnson encourages adolescents to be strong in the face of family hardship, and that dedication and hard work can yield great rewards. According to Tomlinson’s *Essentials of Young Adult Literature* and a *TeenReadsReview.com* website, this poignant novel is best suited for both male and female readers (perhaps particularly male) 12-15 years old at grade level. I believe that this would be a solid supplementary choice for *The Outsiders* because it is also a realistic fiction novel and additionally offers a multicultural perspective for students. The text could possibly act as an alternate choice for the challenged *The Outsiders* because it does not include any explicit violence and provides a strong message of perseverance despite adversity. I also think *The First Part Last* would ultimately add to my unit because it reveals that great obstacles in life, such as an unplanned pregnancy at a young age, can still serve as ways for adolescents to further mature, step into their own and become new people, and prove that they have what it takes to be an adult.

Ryan, Pam Munoz. *Esperanza Rising.* Scholastic, 2000.

This is a contemporary YA, historical fiction novel that investigates the story of twelve-year-old Esperanza Ortega, a relatively affluent Mexican girl who suddenly finds herself without a home or money during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Over the course of the novel Esperanza and her mother escape to the United States for a new chance at freedom and life, and truly learns the meaning of “never being afraid to start over.” Exploring the topics of family, social challenges, and coming-of-age, Ryan encourages young adults to rely on their loved ones and their inner strength in times of hardship, and to remind audiences that there is always hope and promise in tomorrow. According to Tomlinson’s *Essentials of Young Adult Literature* and a *Good Reads* book review website, this novel is best suited for particularly female readers 9-14 years old at grade level. I believe that this would be a solid supplementary choice for either *The Diary of a Young Girl* or *The Circuit* because it offers a poignant view into a young Mexican girl’s life who ventures to the United States (echoing *The Circuit)* as well as her choices and emotions in the face of adversity (echoing *The Diary of a Young Girl).* The text could potentially serve as an alternate choice for the challenged *The Diary of a Young Girl* because it lacks its sexual references or as a resistant reader choice for students who liked *The Circuit* because of its easy dialogue and likeable single protagonist. I also think that *Esperanza Rising* would ultimately add to my unit because it again offers a multicultural perspective for (particularly Hispanic) diverse students in my class, and shows that even at a young age, the opportunity for constant reinvention and self-growth are always possible and beneficial.

Sachar, Louis. *Holes.* New York: Farrar, 1998.

This is a contemporary YA, realistic fiction mystery novel that investigates the story of an adolescent boy named Stanley Yelnats, whose bad luck of always being in the wrong place at the wrong time has gotten him into trouble again. Stanley is accused of stealing a famous athlete’s prized shoes, and thus spends a year solving his family’s strange curse and the mystery surrounding his juvenile detention center, Camp Green Lake. Exploring the topics of family, peers, and coming-of-age, Sachar encourages young adults to stand up for what they believe in, and that friendship and determination can overcome an “unfortunate fate.” According to Tomlinson’s *Essentials of Young Adult Literature* and a *Reading Matters* book review website, this novel is best suited for (particularly) male and female readers 11-15 years old at grade level. I believe that this would be another solid supplementary choice for *The Outsiders* because it similarly focuses on an adolescent male protagonist who must learn to cope with and eventually figure out where he fits into the tenuous society that surrounds him. The text could possibly serve as an SSR reading choice for students who enjoyed *The Outsiders* because it is on a comparable reading level and is a more contemporary realistic fiction novel that depicts the sometimes shaky, yet strong relationships that exist between teenage friends. I also think that *Holes* would ultimately add to my unit because it shows how the primary protagonist, Stanley, overcomes the challenges in his life by having to reinvent himself at the harsh Camp Green Lake; along the way, he slowly steps into his own as he makes a name for himself among the other callous adolescent boys in the detention center.

Stroud, Jonathan. *The Amulet of Samarkand.* Hyperion, 2003.

This is a contemporary YA, quest adventure fantasy (fiction) novel that explores the story of fourteen-year-old Nathaniel, an apprentice magician who summons the witty, fabled demon known as Bartimaeus. Though the two bicker and vie over whom is truly the one calling the shots, Nathaniel and Bartimaeus form an unlikely friendship as they work together to locate an elusive and powerful amulet. Examining the topics of magic, camaraderie, and coming-of-age, Stroud encourages adolescents to use their imaginations in everyday life and know that great accomplishments can be made by even those who are young. According to Tomlinson’s *Essentials of Young Adult Literature* and a *Teen Book Fanatics* review website, this novel is best suited for (particularly) male and female readers 12-16 years old at grade level. I believe that this would be a solid supplementary choice for *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* because it is also a fantasy novel with vivid characters, a wild turn of events, and an adolescent protagonist trying to discover who he or she is in a magical world. The text could potentially act as an alternate reading choice for advanced readers because of its slightly more intricate plotline, high-end vocabulary, and variety of interesting characters in a fantastical setting. I also think that *The Amulet of Samarkand* would ultimately add to my unit because it reveals how the main protagonist, Nathaniel, desires to become something more than a mere magician’s servant by reinventing himself, and how he grows into a more mature young adult through his breathtaking experiences.

SECONDARY RESOURCES: Annotated Bibliographies

Allington, R.L. (2002). You can’t learn much from books you can’t read. *Educational Leadership, 60* (3), 16-19.

In this article, Allington examines the consequences of having overly difficult textbooks in classrooms, and how it is negatively affecting students’ capacity to learn. Though many young adults in middle school are beginning to be taught abstract concepts, these “mismatched textbooks thrust such advanced ideas upon them with few precursors” (p. 16). The author argues that while exemplary instructors are able to “overcome this problem” (p. 17) through their successful and creative ways of conveying information, not all students have these outstanding teachers. I believe that as a future educator I could use this insight to make sure the textbooks (and supplementary books) I use are at a readable level for my students. I want them to be challenged, but I do not want them to feel overwhelmed; thus, I will do my best to be involved in the selection of books that are chosen for my classroom curriculum. I believe that this article connects well with my texts and student population. No matter what secondary grades I teach in English, I need to be aware of the cognitive abilities and reading levels of my students and then accommodate them; for example, if I have quite a few students in my class who struggle, then I need to make sure the texts I use (like *The Giver)* are not overly difficult for them to comprehend and relate to. I will also use this source as evidence to support my selections for the choices of texts I teach in class. Again, if a majority of the students in my class have trouble reading, then I will need to make sure that the works I am having them read are not too challenging for them; I might also provide additional, more complex texts for advanced students.

Kaplan, J. (2005). Young adult literature in the 21st century: Moving beyond traditional constraints and conventions. *ALAN Review, 32* (2), 11-18.

In this article, Kaplan looks at the technologically advanced culture adolescents find themselves in today, and how it affects the ways in which literature is read in the classroom. While many older “classic” young adult novels may still apply in current society, students are now reading content containing “topics and themes that years ago would have never ever been conceived” (p. 11). The author notes that while these books still have an important place, schools cannot forget this “new world of cyberspace” (p. 18) presents modern subjects that must be addressed in the literature provided for young adults. I think that as a future teacher I could use this information to make sure the novels my students read are interesting and applicable to their own lives. I will do my best as an educator to stay up-to-date with important matters concerning teens (from angst to romance), and encourage them to read books that contain such relevant issues. I believe that this article connects well with my texts and student population. Because the students I teach will of course be heavily influenced and aware of modern trends and concepts, I will need to make sure that some works I incorporate into the curriculum are still applicable to them (like the topics of friendship and social acceptance from *The Outsiders*). I will also use this source as evidence to support my selections for the choices of texts I teach in class. In addition to some of the classics I teach (like *The Diary of a Young Girl),* I also need to make sure that I am integrating contemporary texts (such as *The Circuit)* to appeal to my current students’ needs and interests.

Kutiper, K., & Wilson, P. (1993). Updating poetry preferences: A look at the poetry children really like. *The Reading Teacher. 47(*1), 28-35.

 In this article, Kutiper and Wilson examine which types of poetry young adults favor over others, as well as reasons explaining why. Their analysis of students’ preferences revealed that most adolescents chose structured, humorous poems “with experiences relating to them,” like limericks and narrative poems (p. 29). On the other hand, the least popular poems were those containing abstract imagery or figurative language that did not rhyme, such as haikus and free verse poems. The most important advice the authors offer for professors trying to teach poetry to students “is to first learn to truly enjoy it themselves” (p. 34). I believe that as a future teacher I could apply this information by initially learning as much as I can about the different forms of poetry to fully appreciate them. In the classroom, I could then ask my students in a poll which poetry types they like best or want to experience most. Though I intend to expose my students to at least a bit of all the poetry types, I will try to emphasize and spend additional time on the poems the students are interested in, hopefully encouraging them to read more of it. I believe that this article connects well with my texts and student population. Just as I will expose my students to many poems that relate to them growing up and making important, personal decisions as they traverse adolescence (expressed through poems like “The Road Not Taken”), so too do I need to verify that the poems I am incorporating into class are up-to-date and experientially applicable. I will also use this source as evidence to support my selections for the choices of texts I teach in class. I will be sure to include works like *Class Dismissed! High School Poems* (which discuss relatable social and emotional experiences of adolescents) into the curriculum that will hopefully be poems that are not only useful for my students, but also ones that they enjoy and appreciate.

Samuels, B.G. (1989). Young adults’ choices: Why do students “really like” particular books? *Journal of Reading, 32*(8), 714-719.

 In this article, Samuels examines the beloved books of young adults, as well as the reasons why they are so widely appreciated. She analyzed over 2200 written ballots for “The Young Adults’ Choices List,” in which adolescents “indicated which books they voted for as their favorite works” (p. 716). Novels such as *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret* and *The Outsiders* were very popular; most of the highest-rated books were those that included teen protagonists and were considered “problem novels,” such as *Go Ask Alice*. The author argues that students should have more access to selecting books their peers have suggested; organizations like “The Children’s Choices Program” do just this and are “designed to figure out which books teenagers choose to read” (p. 714). I believe that as a future teacher I could apply this information by keeping up-to-date with popular young adult books and having copies available for students. I also hope to have a small “library” of assorted works at the back of my classroom; I can then hopefully purchase some of the most popular books on the reading lists and add them to my collection to encourage teen reading. I believe that this article connects well with my texts and student population. As a prospective teacher, one of my goals is to not only teach my students the content, but make sure that I am giving them works that they derive pleasure from reading; for example, incorporating young adult books with teen protagonists (like *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*) will help fulfill this requirement and hopefully engage my students. I will also use this source as evidence to support my selections for the choices of texts I teach in class. I need to make sure as a prospective teacher that I stay current with popular books that modern teens enjoy reading (like *The Hunger* Games) and perhaps integrate them into potential units as well; in doing so, I will ensure my students are reading texts they “really like.”

Sullivan, M. (2004). Why Johnny won’t read. *School Library Journal, 50*(8), 36-39.

In this article, Sullivan explores why so many adolescent males have become resistant readers, as well as what can be done to reverse this downward spiral. In addition to the effects of gender roles, another possible cause is in fact the literature curriculum in schools. “According to reading interest surveys, the books boys prefer (adventure, tales, war…) have been severely downplayed” to choices that attract female readers, namely relationship-based stories (p. 37). In order to overturn the statistic revealing that young readers have “plummeted from 55 to 43 percent” in overall book reading over the last several years, the author argues that more boy-oriented books (with male role models as protagonists) be integrated into school curriculums (p. 38). I believe that as a future teacher I could apply this information by making sure that the books I am using in the classroom and have available in my own “library” might pertain to resistant male readers as well. Having adventure novels such as *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen would be excellent choices for the boys I teach; perhaps I could post a list of ideal stories for them outside the door to provide options. Hopefully, by having knowledge of books for both males and females, I can direct any student searching for a certain genre to the right place, thereby promoting them to read what they love. I believe that this article connects well with my texts and student population. Since I will undoubtedly have many young males in my future English classes that may be resistant readers, I will need to make sure that I appeal to them as well; I believe I can do so by incorporating works that are relatively easy to read and contain interesting male protagonists (like *The Circuit*). I will also use this source as evidence to support my selections for the choices of texts I teach in class. Since there is such so much saddening proof revealing that adolescent males are not reading enough, I will make it my duty as a teacher to do all I can in class to encourage them to pick up a book unashamedly and enjoy it; I will also remember to integrate male-oriented books (as well as works intended for both genders) into the curriculum in order to appeal to all.

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