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Exploring Student Thinking in an Urban Setting

BY SUSAN V. PIAZZA

All too often, striving readers sound fine during oral reading assessments, but when we look more closely at comprehension and all of the ways teachers can either support or fail to support thinking, we begin to problematize narrow definitions of reading. Some definitions of reading focus on automatic application of skills applied to text (Samuels, 1994; Stanovich, 1990), while other definitions embody more complex sociological factors (Gee, 2000; Lankshear, 1997; Luke, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1938/2005). Teachers' definitions of reading determine what they see and value when choosing texts, instructional strategies, and assessments. As well, decisions about how to choose materials and interpret assessments depend upon teachers' beliefs about how readers construct meaning.

Reading policy in the U.S. favors linear definitions of reading that emphasize the consumption of print in a bottom-up automatic process that remains constant regardless of the text or reader (Purcell-Gates, 2002). The linear perspective on reading typically begins with letters and sounds; proceeds to word identification, vocabulary knowledge, and fluency; and finishes with comprehension of text. One of the most popular examples of a reading assessment from this model is the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (Good & Kaminski, 2002). DIBELS purports to be a quick and easy way to measure readers' abilities to understand texts. Its comprehension measure consists of a one-minute timed, oral reading fluency test followed by a one-minute timed retelling, which analyzes quantity, speed, and accuracy. In an effort to hold all things constant, variations in text structure or the lives of children are not considered relevant in the measurement of thinking.

On the other hand, sociocultural and transactional views of reading focus on readers' prior knowledge and life experiences as important parts of the process. These sociological factors influence all levels of reading, including skill development, knowledge of letters and sounds, and word recognition. The Michigan definition of reading represents a transactional perspective and states that reading is "...the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language and the context of the reading

situation" (2002). Vygotsky long ago argued that language is more than the assimilation of letters and sounds, or symbols and objects to construct meaning; but rather, language and intellect grow together simultaneously (1978). Creatures of their culture, children form their intellect using the language practices to which they are exposed. Understanding the direct relationship between language and one's constructive thinking process is critical as it relates to text comprehension. From a sociocultural and transactional perspective, this article will present a cross-case analysis of how three readers think about texts varied by social, cultural, and linguistic features.

Non-Linear Perspectives on Reading

Sociocultural and transactional views of reading recognize that every child has a unique and individual perspective when reading. Goodman (1994), Kucer (2005), and Rosenblatt (1938; 1978; 2005) define reading as a transactional process between readers' lived experiences and the texts they read. Rather than linear views that claim singular meanings within a text, transactional views of reading emphasize that neither the reader nor the text have primary influence; instead, they act on one another in a recursive nature. "We cannot make sense of our experience of literacy without reference to social practice" (Lankshear, 1997, p.14). Rosenblatt's (1938; 1978; 2005) transactional theory describes reading as an event in time that a reader

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assigns meaning to, as well as takes meaning from. The readers' responses and thinking about texts in these case studies were analyzed for personal connections, experiences, and how they thought about certain characters, events, or concepts within a particular story. For this reason, it is essential to consider each reader's sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds when evaluating their thinking about texts.

James Gee (2000) presents a review of sociocultural studies in reading and points to the interdisciplinary nature of this kind of research. Luke (2003) argues for a sociological approach to literacy research that is interdisciplinary and critical in its stance regarding race, ethnicity, gender, class, community culture, and identity. He believes strongly that "[a] science of literacy...that restricts itself to the efficacy of classroom method and that attempts to control against the variance of...economies of cultures is, indeed, a naïve science—at best decontextualized, at worst part of a long ideological effort to remove reading and literacy forcefully from its complex social, cultural, and economic contexts" (p.140). Therefore, in order to study how readers construct meaning in a naturalistic way, we must consider the various textual features that influence thinking as they relate to lived experiences.

Due to a disconnect between what we know about reading transactions and the linear assessment tools that are often used to measure comprehension, it is a challenging task to examine sociocultural influences related to making meaning with texts. Retellings are recommended as a credible and responsive way to evaluate how readers think about texts (Brown & Cambourne, 1990; Feathers, 2002; Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005; Leslie & Caldwell, 2005). As well, simply talking with children about their thinking is a naturalistic approach to seek insight from readers' perspectives. So often, teachers and researchers make the mistake of measuring thinking from our perspective rather than the child's. Retellings and student-teacher discussions will be used to examine the ways three young readers were transacting with texts in this study.

Study Participants

After supervising a year-long after-school urban university reading program that served self-selected struggling readers, three boys were invited to par-

ticipate in a series of reading sessions with me as a teacher-researcher. These boys were fourth-grade African Americans who attended the reading program the previous year. They agreed to join me for five individual reading sessions during the following summer. They understood that I was interested in studying how children make sense of texts and were happy to participate because of our prior relationship in the reading program.

The three boys selected their own pseudonyms: Pablo, Andre, and Tony. Andre comes from a working middle-class family that moved up the social ladder, as garnered from his textual connection to his "old dangerous" urban neighborhood to an outlying area he described as "safer and nicer." He was knowledgeable about violence, guns, and drugs from his previous community experiences and also because his father is a police officer. His parents are both very supportive and Andre has a great attitude and sense of humor. What impressed me most was his ability to think deeply about the readings and how easily he connected his own experiences to the texts.

Pablo is a very soft-spoken boy from a working-class family that demonstrates great interest in Pablo's academic success. He is mild mannered and has a remarkable need to please adults. I was cautious in my questioning with him in order to elicit his own thoughts rather than what he thought might be "correct." It was Pablo who most strongly identified himself as the avid reader and good student. He did not reveal as many of his lived experiences in relation to each text compared to Andre and Tony; however, his was very detail-oriented and had lengthy retellings.

Tony is from an aspiring working-class family. His parents are separated, but both appeared to share the responsibility of bringing Tony to the reading program and the research sessions. Tony struggled between identifying himself as an academic who is able to read and understand texts well, and other times, resisted an intellectual identity in order to maintain his social status of "being cool." Tony was enthusiastic about issues of race elicited by the texts, and he had a no-nonsense approach during the interviews. He also had a stronger version of African American dialect than the others. He often used his sense of humor about our discussion questions. He provided candid remarks, which made his thinking about the texts more transparent than the others.

Instructional Materials

The two texts, from a larger study, are included in this report and were carefully chosen according to gender, cultural background of characters, linguistic format, themes, and setting. As well, the Flesch-Kincaid reading ease and readability formula was used to determine comparable grade level and reading ease. Table 1 displays each text and its sociocultural features.

Table 1. *Sociocultural Features of Text*

Literature	<i>Enemy Pie</i> (Munson, 2000)	<i>Three Wishes</i> (Clifton, 1992)
Traits		
Characters	Boy & Boy	Girl & Boy
Culture	Dominant Culture	African American
Linguistics	Standard English	AAVE
Themes	Friends/Enemies Father-Son	Friendship Luck-wishes
Setting	Suburban	Urban

Enemy Pie (Munson, 2000) is a story about a boy who begins the summer perfectly until a new boy named Jeremy moves in next door to his best friend. The story is set in a suburban, middle-class, white neighborhood. The illustrations portray larger, single-family homes with sidewalks, basketball nets on driveways, trampolines in the yard, and white fences. The new kid on the block becomes his number one enemy. His father tells him about an enemy pie recipe that included a plan to get rid of enemies. However, it requires spending a day with the enemy first. He ended up having a great day with his enemy. Before the old enemy/new friend could eat the pie, he yells out that it's poison. His father and the friend were both enjoying the pie, so he decided to join in and it turned out to be delicious.

Three Wishes (Clifton, 1992) is a story about an African American girl and a boy named Nobie and Victor who were best friends. She discovered a lucky penny on New Year's Day and it had her year of birth on it. Her friend insisted she could have three wishes. She did not believe in wishes, and they disagreed about whether or not three wishes could come true. During their argument she wished he would go away, which caused Victor to storm out, and she lost her second

wish. Through discussions with her mother and some self-reflection, she discovered the importance of friendship and wished things back to normal. Just then, her friend came walking down the street toward her. The story was written in a version of African American dialect and had illustrations that challenged traditional gender norms. There was not a lot of activity in this book; instead, the characters dialogued about their friendship rather than demonstrated it.

These two texts show a significant contrast in the boys' thinking: 1) the boys' favored text, *Enemy Pie*, and 2) their least favored text, *Three Wishes*. In the original study, four texts were ranked by the boys in the following order:

- 1) *Enemy Pie* (Munson, 2000),
- 2) *The Best Friends Club* (Winthrop, 1989),
- 3) *Heroes* (Mochizuki, 1995), and
- 4) *Three Wishes* (Clifton, 1992).

There was one exception, Tony ranked *Three Wishes* second to *Enemy Pie* because he expressed an appreciation for "dark skinned characters" in that story. Tony's discussion data will address his keen sensitivity to issues of race.

Procedures

During each reading session, we began with an audio recording of each text while the student held the book and followed along. Since the focus of this study was thinking about texts rather than oral reading proficiency, the books were each audio recorded by an African American male voice for added relevance to the boys. This helped control any oral reading differences and ensured that the text written in dialect was delivered authentically. Immediately after each reading, I asked for an open-ended retelling without probing questions (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005) followed by these discussion questions for each text:

- 1) Tell me what interested you (or not) about this story. Anything else?
- 2) Tell me what you thought about the language used in this story.
- 3) Tell me about the message in this story?
- 4) Tell me about any experience you may have had similar to the events in this story.
- 5) Describe why or why not you think this story

represents how kids in real life, your own neighborhood, get along. How is getting along similar or different in your life?

- 6) Describe what was familiar to you in this story.
- 7) Describe anything unfamiliar to you in this story.
- 8) Describe the main character in this story. Can you tell me anything else about the main character?
- 9) Describe the other characters in the story.
- 10) How would you compare yourself to the characters in this story?
- 11) If you were the author of this story, would you change the characters in the story? If so, why? How? If not, why not?
- 12) Where did this story take place? What kind of neighborhood?
- 13) How is this neighborhood similar or different from your own neighborhood?
- 14) If you were the author, would you change the neighborhood and activities in this story? If yes, why? How? If not, why not?
- 15) Using your own words, how would you tell your friends about this story? Don't hold back.
- 16) Would you recommend it to them or not?
- 17) Is there anything else you would like to share about this story?

Data Analysis

Discussions

While each individual case was analyzed, this paper focuses on a cross-case analysis in order to build a general explanation that triangulates across each boy's thinking, even when some of the details within each case may vary slightly (Yin, 1994). The boys' transactions with texts during the discussions were analyzed according to Spradley's (1980) thematic analysis. He recommends an inductive approach that requires multiple readings of the data until themes begin to emerge. There were a total of six interview transcripts included in this analysis. As I began to look at the data holistically, the boys' responses fell along some traditional patterns regarding characters, settings, and activities. These larger themes served as my entry point from which I began to recognize sub-themes and contrasting categories. For example, if one participant commented about gender and racial issues, it was cross-referenced in both categories. Table 2 presents an overview of two levels of themes and sub-themes included in this analysis along with an example of each. There is a more comprehensive table of themes presented in the original study (Author, 2006).

Retellings

The form of retelling assessment used in this study was the Goodman, Watson, & Burke (2005) RMI retelling guide that focuses on story structure and events. There are six sections in a typical

Table 2. Discussion Themes and Sub-themes

Themes/Sub-themes	Definition	Example
People		
• Masculinity	Comments made about the gender of themselves or the characters	"Well, if Victory was her sis-(sic) brother, that's the only questions" (TW, Pablo).
• Language/Dialect	Discussion about the kind of language used in the text and perspectives about language	"No, it didn't sound like anyone in [city]." (TW, Tony).
Activities		
• Conflict Resolution/Violence	Ways to resolve conflicts and talk about violence.	"You might not know somebody, but they keep messin' with you" (EP, Pablo).
• Interests	Activities and events that are referred to as interesting	"And you could make his tree house fall out of the tree just to make it a funny story." (EP, Andre).

RMI retelling guide: 1) character identification, 2) character development, 3) theme statements, 4) plot statements, 5) events, and 6) an optional subtleties category that credits additional inferences that were not included in the guide. This approach to evaluating retellings results in a percentage score. The protocols and scoring used in this study were checked by inter raters for reliability and were found to be 99% reliable.

Findings from Discussions

Overall, the discussions provide important insight regarding how the participants were transacting with each text. In turn, these transactions offer a rich context for the retelling analysis in the next section. In the cross-case analysis, the themes that emerged most often in all three boys' discussions were in the following four areas: 1) issues of masculinity under the theme of physical or emotional character descriptions, 2) interests and activities under the theme of activity, 3) conflict resolution and violence, also a sub-theme of activity, and 4) language and dialect under descriptions of people or characters. The following section demonstrates the boys' transactions with *Enemy Pie* and *Three Wishes* in these four categories.

Issues of Masculinity

Three Wishes had many social, cultural, and linguistic features, such as racial identity, use of dialect, and an urban setting, that I initially thought would be very supportive to these readers. However, across all three cases the most common transaction with this text focused on issues of masculinity. The boys' were not connecting with the male character's behavior, appearance, or dialogue with his female best friend. The illustrator portrayed the male character with soft physical features, character traits, and with a pink hat and scarf. As indicated by a higher ranking of *Three Wishes*, only Tony shared his appreciation for the "dark-skinned" characters and explained his thinking about issues of race (Author, 2008). Nevertheless, all three readers clearly shared their thoughts about gender issues in this text.

When asked if he would change the characters in any way, Pablo said, "I'd change that boy to a girl cause he look like one...the light eyebrows and eyes, how they look [pointing to the curve in Victor's eyebrow]...and you know how girls be hangin' out together and stuff...." Tony said, "...he kinda

look like me. No he don't [he's wearing pink]...well, Zenobia, she got the same color stuff as me, blue." The boys made it clear that they do not hang out with girls talking about dreams or wishes. They seem to believe that doing so is stereotypical of girls' behavior. Andre revealed, "I didn't like it very much...the part where they always talk and stuff. And they didn't do anything fun."

Interests and Activities

Enemy Pie is arguably more interesting, complex, and activity-based, according to Andre, Tony, and Pablo. They commented several times about how they appreciated the fun games, humor, and interesting story line. Andre said, "Sometimes the books I read are boring. I like the books with fun activities." He also indicated he would recommend this story to friends because it was good. Pablo liked the "part when they missed at hitting the girls [with water balloons]." All three boys commented on the humor of throwing water balloons at girls, even though it is something they have not personally done. Andre said, "They were playin' with girls and throwin' water balloons...they [the girls] didn't get mad that they were throwin' balloons at 'em." It appears that the boys in this study think it is okay to provoke girls rather than befriend them. Regarding the plot to rid the enemy, Tony said, "It is interesting to me because, how you gonna make enemy pie? It might get poisonous and it might make him die or something like that or it might give him rabies." All three were fascinated with the devious nature of poisonous pie and throwing water balloons at girls.

In contrast the boys' felt that *Three Wishes* had a lack of activity and complained that the characters did too much talking. For example, Pablo said, "They talked too much...[and]...they didn't do anything fun." Andre suggested a change to the book, "I would've made them have more fun, like being outside... 'cause the pictures in there are now boring, they talk too much." Three discussions with each participant confirmed their preference for stories in which characters were engaged in outdoor play and activities.

Violence and Conflict Resolution

Andre talked about his old neighborhood and compared it to his current neighborhood when he connected with the trampoline jumping in *Enemy Pie*, "[In my old neighborhood] kids didn't play together sometimes...but sort of in the back, out of the way..."

there was always shooting guns on the forth of July, which is really dangerous" and, he added, "[kids] played dangerously. They jumped off garages onto a trampoline." Andre mentioned crack-heads in his old neighborhood and that kids would shoot firecrackers and throw rocks at people's houses. Andre is reminded of these prior experiences in his old neighborhood, which demonstrates the uniqueness of each reader's transactions with any text. The object, a trampoline, elicited a detailed account of violence he remembers in his old neighborhood. He says, "[Now] we have houses, trees, kids that play together, have friends, throw stuff at each other and play...And [we] got sidewalks." When discussing his old neighborhood, he used "they" to indicate a real separation between himself and "other." He is not claiming the violent behavior; however, he is quite familiar with it. He said these things do not scare him because he is used to it, but he thinks that it is "nasty" and violent." He commented that now he can play in front of the house without fear of guns or violence like in *Enemy Pie*. Andre's views of his old neighborhood are fitting with stereotypical views of urban lower socioeconomic spaces.

Other discussions of violence and conflict resolution occurred when Pablo and Tony both separately addressed the issue of bullying. Tony indicated that when boys act wimpy they are more likely to be bullied. Pablo said bullying can be prevented through negotiations and "some talking." Pablo shared a story about two boys who were insulting each other in which one had more power over the other. He approached the boys, and used his negotiating skills to help them reach an agreement. Pablo's thinking about conflict is to be proactive and communicative when you witness or are part of a bullying situation. Andre's thinking about conflict resolution focused on one's size and behavior. He indicated that his size prevents him from being bullied.

Language and Dialect

In addition to not appreciating the story line in *Three Wishes*, all participants indicated no identification with the dialect during our discussions. The author of *Three Wishes* is Lucille Clifton (1992), a Distinguished Professor at St. Mary's College in Maryland. Her version of an educated African American dialect presented in written form, and presented on tape by a local African American male voice, did not elicit personal connections. However, all three boys are familiar with their own version of urban African

American dialect spoken in the local community. Indeed, they spoke it naturally throughout their discussions. Why then did they see the dialect presented in *Three Wishes* as "other"? It appears that Andre and Tony may have accepted the notion that the dialect they heard on tape is incorrect given their affronts to "country folks," "Texans," and "older people" that sound "like that." Delpit says, "Glorifying Standard English as a superior mode of expression is intellectually limiting" (2002, p. 213). However, it is a prominent and stereotypical view of non-Standard English even in urban areas that Andre, Pablo, and Tony shared throughout their discussions.

Pablo went further and used an example of "ain't" and "is not" to make a point. He explained that the two expressions actually represented the same idea and that one should not be valued over the other. His ability to articulate the nuances of these linguistic differences was impressive. Smitherman asks, "After all, what do you want—good grammar or good sense?" (2000, p.124). These themes that emerged during the boys' discussions of *Enemy Pie* and *Three Wishes* provide valuable insight that contextualizes the following findings from the retellings.

Findings from Retellings

The retelling scores are presented in a cross-case format given the analysis of the boys' transactions with each text. When asked whether they preferred retellings or traditional questions to evaluate their thinking, all three boys indicated that retellings were a better way for them to demonstrate their understanding of a story. Andre said, "[I like retellings]...because I'm good at it." He was familiar with the comprehension questions that follow a reading passage because he was assessed with the Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2005) several times earlier in the year. As well, comprehension questions were consistent in the boys' regular classroom experiences. Table 3 (page 12) displays the retelling scores for Andre, Pablo, and Tony across both texts, *Enemy Pie* and *Three Wishes*.

Pablo indicated that he was better at retelling because, "I usually hear a lot of things so I usually get the things that are said in the story, every single part, and the pictures help [to] understand." Pablo's retelling scores were quite a bit higher than Andre's and Tony's, but the point of this inquiry was to examine the boys' thinking across texts for differences, rather than measure their abilities against

Table 3. Cross-case Analysis of Retelling Scores

Text Reader	<i>Enemy Pie</i> Andre	<i>Three Wishes</i> Andre	<i>Enemy Pie</i> Pablo	<i>Three Wishes</i> Pablo	<i>Enemy Pie</i> Tony	<i>Three Wishes</i> Tony
Story Structure						
Characters	6	5	8	8	8	8
Character Description	3	1	6	6	3	3
Theme Statement	8	5	8	7	3	8
Plot Statement	10	9	10	9	1	5
Events	16.5	12	26.5	25.5	8.25	7
Optional	5	2	11	2	5	2
Total Score %	49%	34%	70%	58%	28%	33%

one another. Pablo scored 70% on *Enemy Pie* and only 58% on *Three Wishes*. Andre scored 49% on *Enemy Pie* and 34% on *Three Wishes*. According to the readability, length, number of episodes, and complexity of the stories, *Enemy Pie* was a more complex and lengthier story with a slightly higher readability level. As well, *Three Wishes* was a sequential story of events, had fewer episodes, and a slightly lower readability; yet, it produced lower retelling guide scores for both Andre and Pablo, who are clearly capable of understanding the story. They just happened to dislike it and, according to the retelling scores, did not attend to the same level of details that caught their interest in *Enemy Pie*.

When you consider the discussions that contextualize the boys' thinking about each text, it reveals more information about why Andre and Pablo have lower retelling scores in *Three Wishes*. Preference, personal connections, prior experiences, interest in activities and characters, as well as a complex story structure appear to support higher retelling scores for Andre and Pablo. It is also important to note that RMI retelling guides privilege length and attention to detail in a reader's retelling. Pablo's retellings were notably longer than the other two, and he did discuss his strong ability to recall details with the help of pictures.

However, it was a bit trickier to determine the cause of Tony's slightly higher score in *Three Wishes*. He had a special interest in the "dark-skinned" characters of this text; therefore, his retelling score may have been influenced by that personal transaction. During the discussions, he stated that he appreciates

seeing characters that look like him. Even though Tony ranked *Three Wishes* as his second choice after *Enemy Pie*, there seems to be a confluence of the gender and racial issues for Tony that brings his scores closer together. It should also be noted that Tony's scores are the lowest in the cross-case analysis. Regardless of his preferences for either text, he may have benefited from the sequential and slightly simpler story structure in *Three Wishes* given his higher scores in the theme statement and plot statement categories, which were 4% and 5% higher successively. Tony's plot statement score in *Enemy Pie* was only 1% compared to 5% in *Three Wishes*, and his theme statement scores were 3% and 8%. However, Tony earned an additional 3% in the optional details category for *Enemy Pie*, which indicates there are many variables to consider when evaluating a reader's thinking about text.

Analyzing retelling scores alongside of discussions about text provides a more naturalistic and student-centered perspective.

How Does this Study Inform Instruction?

As this study demonstrates, texts alone do not predict how a particular reader might look on an assessment. Instead it is what a reader brings to the text to help him (in this case) discuss his transactions and retell in his own words. The retelling assessments and discussions revealed a wide range of information that informs instruction for the boys regarding skill development, but more importantly, skills that may be developed in ways that are respectful to their

individual needs and identities. For example, the retelling scores show that one of Pablo's strengths is his attention to details and lengthy retellings. He would benefit from instruction that focuses on higher levels of summary. Andre and Tony would benefit from lessons on character development and description. Tony would benefit from learning more about themes and plot structures in narrative texts. Further, the discussions revealed that the boys' stance toward text is not naturally a critical stance, and they may all benefit from critical literacy instruction that draws their attention to issues presented in texts related to their own lives (Author, 2008). These findings draw attention to sociocultural issues around textual features and literacy assessments for diverse learners, particularly African American boys.

Without the discussion data, the analysis of retellings would not have been so transparent. Traditional and linear views of literacy credit the readability and structure of a text as one of the most important variables in determining a reader's ability to comprehend. (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The notion of leveling texts comes from the linear model of reading in which texts hold the power to communicate a single meaning to the reader, and it is believed that readers need to be developmentally ready to process higher levels of text. Through a combination of discussions and retellings, it was possible to observe the power of a reader's prior knowledge and life experiences in relation to each text, rather than only text structure. In sum, social and cultural interests in a particular text, their preferences for each story, combined with textual features are what mattered most during the boys' reading and thinking process. Transactional views of literacy make room for the individual and even provide opportunities for the individual's thoughts and feelings to become part of the reading process and part of the curriculum so that improving awareness and knowledge about oneself and one's role in the world is achieved at the same time.

Tatum (2005) reports, "A large percentage of students are unable to extend the ideas of a text, make inferences, draw conclusions, and connect text to their own experiences" (p. 111). He goes on to cite the abundance of statistical data that proves this deficit perspective of adolescent black males' academic proficiency. It is problematic to approach reading instruction and assessment with linear views of reading given the limited ability of those kinds of tools to address individual differences. Tatum

(2005) outlines four major considerations that would support teachers in developing culturally relevant practices:

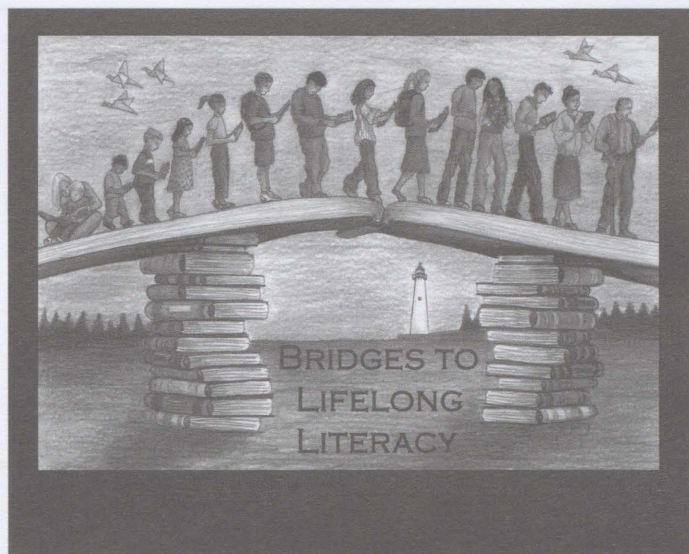
- Discussing texts with black males cannot be separated from the role of literacy instruction, the importance of curriculum orientation, and the need for a culturally responsive approach to literacy teaching.
- Discussing texts with these—or any—students is not possible if they do not have the skills and strategies that anchor a comprehensive approach to literacy teaching.
- Discussing texts with black male students cannot be done effectively without an awareness of their identity and their definition of masculinity, as pointed out in the research on boys and reading.
- Discussing texts with black male students cannot be separated from the turmoil they are forced to endure (p. 112).

Most importantly, this study revealed that individuals have unique perspectives that are not easily identified based on stereotypes of race or gender. Only through careful consideration of the boys' thinking and connections to text are we able to understand why their scores on some assessments were better than others. Children want books that are engaging and responsive to their own experiences. Assessment texts need to be chosen carefully to determine the quality of the stories: Are the stories predictable? Are the illustrations supportive? Are the stories coherent and cohesive? Do the characters represent the readers, their experiences, their interests? Assessments should be used to guide instruction rather than determine reading levels. These findings do not imply that all texts should be chosen according to readers' interests alone, but that teachers recognize and elicit students' interests as part of the process. Teachers will become more effective at addressing all readers' literacy needs when discussions of texts are included with instruction as well as with assessments.

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Artwork by Carolyn Stich

Michigan Reading Association

Bridges to Lifelong Literacy

53rd Annual Conference
March 14 - 16, 2009
Pre-Conference - March 13, 2009
Grand Rapids, Michigan
DeVos Place Convention Center and
Amway Grand Plaza Hotel

Online registration and additional
 information available at:
www.michiganreading.org

Join us for an unforgettable
Michigan Reading Association conference with inspirational speakers,
educators, authors, illustrators and many special events.

General Session Keynote Speakers: Katherine Paterson, Gay Su Pinnell, and Katie Wood Ray

Special Featured Keynotes: Regie Routman, Laura Robb, Carol Santa, Authors Readers Theater, Barry Lane, Alfred Tatum

Featured Speakers: Anne McGill Franzen, Rose Cappelli and Lynne Dorfman, Carol Santa, Cathy Toll, David Booth, David Pearson, Dick Allington, Dorsey Hammond, Irene Fountas, Jeff Anderson, Jeff Wilhelm, Karen Wixson, Kathy Collins, Laura Robb, Marcia Invernizzi, Mary Bigler, Mary Cowhey, Nancy Boyles and Jane Feber, Nell Duke, Pat Edwards, Richard Gentry, Sara Kajder, Susan Kempton, Suzanne Barchers, Taffy Raphael, Terry Thompson, Tim Rasinski, Tim Shanahan...and more...

National Authors and Illustrators: Avi, Deborah Hopkinson, Gloria Whelan, Jacqueline Woodson, Lester Laminack, Pam Munoz Ryan, Sarah Weeks, Eloise Greenfield, Jan Spivey Gilchrist...and more...

Plus many more Michigan authors and illustrators!

PLEASE READ FIRST:

- Full payment must accompany each registration form. Your registration will not be processed without full payment included.
- A separate form must be submitted for each conferee. Please complete and submit both pages 1 & 2 of the registration form.
- Registrations must be postmarked or submitted online on or before February 27, 2009. **After February 27, a \$25 processing fee will be charged.** Please do not submit registration forms to the MRA office after March 6, 2009. After March 6, registration will only be available onsite at the MRA conference registration desk in DeVos Place Convention Center. ***Send your registration forms and fee early to avoid the \$25 processing fee!***
- Confirmations, name badges and meal tickets will be mailed only if registration is received before Friday, February 27, 2009. All conference attendees that register after February 27 must pick up their conference materials at the MRA Registration Desk in DeVos Place Convention Center.
- **CURRENT MRA MEMBERS:** Current MRA members should register under the "New or Renewing" member category if their membership expires prior to May 2009. Check your membership card or the back cover of a recent copy of your MRA newsletter or journal for your membership number and expiration date.
- **Conference refund requests must be in writing and postmarked by Friday, March 6.** Your name badge must be included, and a \$15 processing fee will be assessed. Please note that membership fees and meal function tickets are non-refundable.
- Replacement cost for a lost name badge is \$10.00.

SB-CEU Credits Available Pending Approval

Conference Events: *Bridges to Lifelong Literacy*

Bridges to Lifelong Literacy: Reading and Writing Connections

In this outstanding pre-conference, learn from our nation's leading researchers about the research and practice of critical reading and writing connections in a variety of narrative and informational genres. For the third year, enjoy sessions targeted for educators from early elementary through high school, featuring well-known researchers from the Michigan State University Literacy Achievement Center and others, including a special policy panel led by IRA Board member Dr. Taffy Raphael from the University of Illinois-Chicago. Esteemed educators Laura Robb and Regie Routman will present opening and closing keynotes. Continental breakfast, lunch and reception are included. Separate registration is required. Open to all.

MRA 2009 Annual Conference Meal Events

Saturday, March 14, 2009

Administrator Luncheon - Featured Speaker: Dr. Taffy Raphael - IRA Board member, researcher, past president of the National Reading Conference, Distinguished Professor, professional book author, and engaging presenter, Taffy is well known among teachers for her publications about Book Clubs and the Question Answer Relationship (QAR) reading strategy. As a board member of the International Reading Association, Dr. Raphael brings wisdom from her current work and research for the University of Illinois. She shares lessons learned from "Partnership Read" that will help educators successfully lead the standards-based changed process and develop professional communities within challenging school literacy improvement initiatives. Open to all.

Adolescent Literacy Luncheon - Featured Speaker: Laura Robb - As the popular professional book author of *Teaching Reading in the Middle School*, *Teaching Reading in Social Studies, Science and Math*, and *Differentiating Reading*, Laura will focus on a topic of high interest to all middle and high school teachers: motivating adolescent readers. Open to all.

Pre-Service Teacher Pizza Lunch - Featured Speakers: Dr. Kathy Highfield and Dr. Laura Pardo. *Celebrate the Future of MRA!* Come network with fellow pre-service teachers during a pizza luncheon to celebrate our future teachers. Kathy and Laura, Michigan educators known for their professional publications about Book Clubs, talk about teaching as an inspiring, intellectual career path in which teachers build bridges of knowledge through connections with others. This luncheon is open to preservice teacher student registrants only.

Librarian/Media Specialists and Children's Literature Lovers Luncheon: Featured Speakers: Eloise Greenfield and Jan Spivey Gilchrist. This author/illustrator team, legends in their own right, will entertain you with a performance inspired by their books of rhythmic, multicultural poetry and prose - *Honey I Love*, *Singing Down the Rain*, *How They Got Over*, *In the Land of Words*, and *For the Love of the Game*. Spend memorable time with these guests and share your joy with students. Of special interest to Early literacy and Elementary teachers as well as school and community librarians and media specialists. Open to all!

MRA 2009 Saturday Night Party - *A celebration for all conferees!* Details coming...

Sunday, March 15, 2009

Author/Illustrator Breakfast - Everyone's favorite! *Sign up early! This event has limited seating and sells out quickly!*

Enjoy breakfast and conversation seated with one of 40 bestselling and award-winning authors and illustrators eager to spend precious time with you! Many have been honored as MRA's Great Lakes Great Books Award Winners. Guests include Gloria Whelan, the 2006 MRA Gwen Frostic Award winner, and many others. Participants will receive a complimentary signed book.

Early Literacy Luncheon - Featured Speaker: Kathy Collins - Kathy, well-known for her professional book *Growing Readers* and her recently-released title *Reading for Real*, helps teachers think through what is most important to our youngest readers and writers. Her inspiring ideas bring joy and talk to classrooms! Open to all.

Young Authors' Luncheon - Featured Speaker: Lester Laminack - Not only is Lester a storyteller extraordinaire and professional book author, he also writes beautiful children's books: *Saturdays and Teacakes*, *The Sunsets of Miss Olivia Wiggins*, *Snow Day*, and *Jane's 100th Day of School*. Students who have been published in the 2009 *Kaleidoscope* will be honored at this luncheon, along with their family guests. All conference attendees are welcome for this heart-warming presentation.

MRA 2009 Sunday Night Event - *Join the fun! Stay tuned for details....*

Monday, March 16, 2009

Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach Breakfast - Featured Speaker: Cathy Toll - Author of several popular books about literacy coaching, Cathy is committed to serving the needs of literacy coaches and those who support them. Her newest professional book, published by IRA, is *Surviving but not Thriving: Essential Questions and Practical Answers for experienced Literacy Coaches*. Her ideas will help you extend the impact of your coaching activities. Of special interest to all literacy leaders and coaches. Open to all.

Title I Luncheon - Featured Speaker: Barry Lane - The author of *After the End*, *Reviser's Toolbox*, *But How do I Teach Writing?* and other notable books about the teaching of writing, Barry has a multitude of motivational as well as entertaining tips for teaching students of all abilities and needs. He demonstrates how to make teaching and learning effective and fun! Gather your colleagues for this excellent yearly event. Open to all.

Adult Literacy Luncheon - Featured Speaker: Dr. Alfred Tatum - After years of research and observation, this professor from Northern Illinois University and IRA Board member delivers a thought provoking message about understanding the motivation and skill needs of students. As researcher and the author of *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males*, Alfred has impressed educators across the nation. This luncheon is of particular interest to educators of high school and adult learners. Early registration is suggested. Open to all.

CONFERE INFORMATION

(Please print clearly or type.)

Name (as you would like it to appear on your name badge): _____

Institution/District Affiliation (as you would like it to appear on your name badge): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____ County: _____

Email Address: _____

Position:

- ☐ Teacher
 ☐ Administrator
 ☐ Title I
 ☐ Paraprofessional
 ☐ Media/Librarian
☐ Adult Educator
 ☐ Pre-Service Teacher
 ☐ Teacher Educator

Level:

- ☐ Pre-K
 ☐ Elementary
 ☐ Middle
 ☐ High School
 ☐ University
☐ Other _____

PAYMENT INFORMATION

Method of Payment:

- ☐ Check* or money order enclosed (payable to *Michigan Reading Association*)
☐ MasterCard _____
☐ Visa Expiration Date: _____
 Signature (required on all credit card payments) _____
☐ Purchase Order (copy of purchase order must be included)
 Purchase Order Number: _____

Purchase Order bill to:

Institution District: _____ Contact: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____ Email Address: _____

*Checks returned for insufficient funds will be subject to a \$25 processing fee.

Current Members: Please check below if you had a change of:

- ☐ Name
 ☐ Address
 ☐ Affiliation
 ☐ E-mail



Full payment must accompany each registration form, registrations will not be processed without full payment included.
A separate registration form must be submitted for each conferee.
Please complete and submit both pages 1 & 2 of the registration form.

Photocopy pages 1 & 2 for your records and submit originals by February 27, 2009 to:

MRA Conference Registration
 668 Three Mile Road NW, Suite C
 Grand Rapids, MI 49544-8219

Fax credit card and purchase order payments to: **616-647-9378**

Please select membership status (Current, New or Renewing) and conferee level (Full or One Day Only)

REGULAR MEMBER

Full Conference **\$145** (Membership expires after 05/09).....\$
 Full Conference **\$180*** (New or Renewing Member - Membership expires before 05/09)\$
 One Day Only **\$100** (Membership expires after 05/09).....\$
 One Day Only **\$135*** (New or Renewing Member - Membership expires before 05/09).....\$

** Includes \$35 non-refundable regular membership fee.*

PLEASE SELECT DAY: ☐ Saturday (3/14) ☐ Sunday (3/15) ☐ Monday (3/16)

RETIRED EDUCATOR MEMBER

Full Conference **\$130** (Membership expires after 05/09).....\$
 Full Conference **\$150*** (New or Renewing Retired Educator Member - Membership expires before 05/09)\$
 One Day Only **\$85** (Membership expires after 05/08)\$
 One Day Only **\$105*** (New or Renewing Retired Educator Member - Membership expires before 05/08)\$

**Includes \$20 non-refundable retired educator membership fee.*

PLEASE SELECT DAY: ☐ Saturday (3/14) ☐ Sunday (3/15) ☐ Monday (3/16)

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT MEMBER

Full Conference **\$85** (Membership expires before 05/09)\$
 Full Conference **\$100*** (Membership expires before 05/09)\$
 One Day Only **\$65** (Membership expires after 05/09).....\$
 One Day Only **\$80*** (Membership expires before 05/09)\$

**Includes \$15 non-refundable Membership fee*

PLEASE SELECT DAY: ☐ Saturday (3/14) ☐ Sunday (3/15) ☐ Monday (3/16)

PARENT/NON-EDUCATOR MEMBER

Full Conference **\$80** (Membership expires after 05/09).....\$
 Full Conference **\$90*** (Membership expires before 05/09)\$
 One Day Only **\$60** (Membership expires after 05/09).....\$
 One Day Only **\$70*** (Membership expires before 05/09)\$

**Includes \$10 non-refundable parent/non-educator Membership fee*

PLEASE SELECT DAY: ☐ Saturday (3/14) ☐ Sunday (3/15) ☐ Monday (3/16)

NON-MEMBER (does NOT want to become an MRA member)

Full Conference **\$205**.....\$
 One Day Only **\$165**.....\$

PLEASE SELECT DAY: ☐ Saturday (3/14) ☐ Sunday (3/15) ☐ Monday (3/16)

MEAL EVENTS ☐ Check here for vegetarian meal(s) **Order your meal event tickets today! Seating is limited!**

PLEASE NOTE: Tickets for meal events must be pre-ordered and are nonrefundable.

Saturday, March 14

Administrator Luncheon (featuring Dr. Taffy Raphael) **\$29**.....\$
 Adolescent Literacy Luncheon (featuring Laura Robb) **\$29**.....\$
 Librarian/Media Specialists and Children's Literature Lovers Luncheon **\$29**.....\$
 (featuring "Two Legends" Eloise Greenfield and Jan Spivey Gilchrist)
 Pre-Service Teacher Pizza Luncheon (featuring Dr. Kathy Highfield and Dr. Laura Pardo) **\$6**.....\$
 Open only to undergraduate student members
 Saturday Night Party **\$10**\$

Sunday, March 15

Author/Illustrator Breakfast (featuring 30 authors and illustrators from the 2009 Conference) **\$20**.....\$
 Young Authors' Luncheon (featuring Lester Laminack) **\$29**.....\$
 Early Literacy Luncheon (TBD) **\$29**.....\$

Monday, March 16

Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach Breakfast (featuring Cathy Toll) **\$26**.....\$
 Title I Luncheon (featuring Barry Lane) **\$29**.....\$
 Adult Literacy Luncheon (featuring Dr. Alfred Tatum) **\$29**.....\$
 After February 27 - **\$25 Processing Fee**.....\$

TOTAL AMOUNT INCLUDED\$



Schedule of Events

8:00 AM

Check in and Continental
Breakfast

8:30 - 8:45 AM

Greetings and Overview

8:45 - 10:00 AM

*Keynote: Reading-Writing Connections:
Informational Texts, Students' Voices
and Work, Laura Robb*

10:00 - 10:30 AM

Break

10:30 - 11:45 AM

Breakout Sessions on Research and
Practice with Specific Genres
(Please see MRA website for detailed
agenda)

11:45 AM - 12:45 PM

Lunch

12:45- 1:45 PM

*Keynote: "It Takes a School": Working
Together to Improve Reading and
Writing Instruction for All Students,
Taffy Raphael*

2:00 - 3:15 PM

Breakout Sessions on Research and
Practice with Specific Genres

3:30 - 4:45 PM

*Keynote: The Power of Reading-
Writing Connections for Increasing
Student Achievement and Enjoyment,
Regie Routman*

4:45 PM

Reception

Michigan Reading Association 2009 Pre-Conference *Bridges to Lifelong Literacy: Reading-Writing Connections*



Friday, March 13, 2009 • 8:00 AM - 4:30 PM
DeVos Place Convention Center • Grand Rapids, Michigan

Interested Participants:

*K-12 Teachers, Literacy Coaches, Curriculum Coordinators, Reading Specialists,
Administrators, Publishers, College/ University Faculty and Graduate Students*

We all know that reading and writing are integrally related, but how can we best capitalize on these connections in our teaching? Join MRA and LARC once again for a day-long institute designed to show the value (and fun!) of connecting reading and writing. Enjoy nationally acclaimed experts Taffy Raphael, Laura Robb, and Regie Routman as they engage us with keynotes about the essential elements and issues surrounding reading and writing connections. Morning and afternoon breakout sessions by MSU faculty and others will focus on excellent research-based instructional strategies for building and strengthening vital reading-writing connections within specific genres.

Registration Information

***Registration fee includes continental breakfast and lunch.**

Pre-Conference Registration Fee.....\$115
(must be postmarked or submitted online by February 27, 2009)

On-Site Pre-Conference Registration Fee.....\$140

Regular Membership Renewal Fee\$ 35

Name: _____

Institution/District Affiliation: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____ **Email:** _____

Method of Payment: (Payment in full must accompany this registration form)

☐ Purchase Order Enclosed P.O.# _____

☐ Check* or Money Order (payable to **MRA**) *returned checks subject to \$25 fee

☐ MasterCard or Visa

_____ - _____ - _____ Exp: ____/____/____

Signature: _____

Please submit an individual registration form for each registrant.
Photocopy completed form for your records and submit original form to:

MRA Pre-Conference Registration

668 Three Mile Road NW, Suite C

Grand Rapids, MI 49544-8219

Fax: 616-647-9378

Phone: 800-672-7323 • Email: mra@michiganreading.org • www.michiganreading.org

SB-CEU credit available pending approval