

**Combatting Intolerance, Developing Empathy, and Prioritizing Student Choice Through  
Young Adult Literature**

by

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Combatting Intolerance, Developing Empathy, and Prioritizing Student Choice Through Young Adult Literature

Previous research has established relationships between reading fiction and increased empathy levels, an effect amplified by reading young adult fiction and by feeling transported by, or wholly immersed within, one's reading. Given the established correlation between increased empathy and decreased intolerance levels, reading fiction may decrease intolerance levels as it increases empathy levels; however, a gap in the research exists. This 10-week mixed methods intervention study examined pre- and post-test data in conjunction with analysis of student artifacts produced in five secondary-level language arts classes. Results provide evidence that reading fiction benefits students by increasing their empathy and decreasing their intolerance. Choice in text selection and reading transportation are shown to increase student engagement and improve learning. These results suggest that teachers should prioritize student choice and transportation for deeper learning in the language arts classroom.

*Keywords:* Young adult literature, fiction, empathy, cross-racial empathy, transportation, representation, high-interest texts, diversity, #WeNeedDiverseBooks, empathy crisis, secondary English, English language arts

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

Access to diverse literature is a crucial component of any child's education. In 1988, Emily Style wrote that classroom curriculum should act as both a "window" and a "mirror;" this concept was later applied specifically to children's literature by Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) in her seminal work *Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors*. When a book is a mirror, Bishop writes, we see our own lives reflected back to us as part of the greater human experience. When a book is a window, on the other hand, we get to glimpse worlds "real or imagined" (p. 1), and when a book is a sliding glass door, we get to walk in another's proverbial shoes. Children's literature taught to students in today's public schools must contain a wide variety of diverse characters to reflect the diversity inherent in the U.S. student population.

Diversity encompasses racial and ethnic background, but it is a concept that must be applied more broadly to accomplish the above objective. Diversity includes one's sexuality, gender and gender identity, cultural practices, socioeconomic status, physical ability and attributes, and religion. Thus, diverse children's literature might feature characters who are: autistic, differently abled, neurodivergent, mentally ill, Muslim or Jewish, queer, Latinx or Native American, Black or Asian, pansexual or nonbinary, and so on. This is because, in the words of a mantra adopted by many language arts teachers today, "representation matters." Education must, according to Style, teach students to see both their own realities and the realities of others. She calls this the "great conversation" (p. 1) that occurs as one comes of age. Representation matters, in other words, because it prioritizes diversity and promotes empathy. Empathy - the ability to sit with someone in understanding and without judgment - is vitally

important to our social fabric (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). It can and must be taught in schools today.

As it turns out, the English language arts (ELA) classroom is the perfect place to teach empathy because—as I will show in my literature review—reading fiction, especially young adult fiction, increases empathy in readers. Yet, whereas the U.S. student population is increasing in diversity at a rapid rate (National Center for Education Statistics), the novels read in ELA classrooms are stagnant, featuring predominantly white characters (and are written nearly exclusively by white male authors). Therefore, to promote diversity and increase empathy in teens, high school language arts curriculum should – nay, must – incorporate diverse young adult fiction novels.

In this literature review, I examine the research used to draw this conclusion. First, I review the predominant social science research as it pertains to empathy, exploring why empathy matters and how it can be taught, and concluding with a discussion of the causal connection between reading young adult fiction and an increase in empathy. The next section examines the pertinent literature showing the relationship between prejudice and empathy; namely, that as empathy increases, prejudice decreases. Trends in adolescent empathy and prejudice are both examined. Finally, in a third section of this literature review I explore trends in current language arts classrooms, demonstrating that, while we know representation in literature matters, today's language arts curriculum is alarmingly white and Eurocentric. Finally, in the conclusion, I discuss a clear path forward: ELA curriculum must be overhauled to include diverse young adult texts which, when paired with explicit perspective-taking instruction, can increase empathy and decrease prejudice, thereby creating a better, more just world for all.

### **Procedures for the Literature Review**

I selected literature for this review using a systematic search and coding process. Because the argument I will develop here contains multiple facets, so too did my search process. First, I searched for literature surrounding empathy, specifically looking for articles that defined empathy and positive and negative social and emotional correlates of empathy. I searched too for articles about the development of empathy in adolescents and data about empathy levels displayed by teens. For this search, I relied on the following search terms: *empathy*, *empathy in teens*, *empathy in adolescents*, and *empathy deficit*. I conducted my search using the University of Oregon database search tool, specifically searching with Academic Premier and Education Database tools. When search results returned too many results for me to code, I used delimiters such as: *peer-reviewed*, *full-text available*, *United States*, and *published since 2018*. I repeated this process with each remaining facet of the paper. After conducting a broad search for empathy research, I narrowed my search to look at connections between empathy and fiction (and even more specifically, between empathy and young adult fiction). Next, I moved on to exploring the connection between empathy and prejudice. I also explored the modern English language arts landscape, searching specifically for details about assigned texts at the secondary level. Finally, I looked for research about the importance of representation in literature.

### **What is Empathy?**

Defining empathy is a difficult task. In a meta-analysis of 496 studies, Hall and Schwartz (2019) examined the various definitions researchers have used to define empathy, concluding that the field of empathy research is not “conceptually coherent” (p. 237) while also acknowledging that perhaps there is an assumption of researchers that “everyone shares a basic, perhaps intuitive” understanding of empathy (p. 234). It is not within the scope of this paper to examine the many definitions researchers have offered to define empathy.

Yet, because of the ever-increasing proliferation of studies being performed about empathy, and because a clear definition of empathy is vital to this research study, Hall and Schwartz's major findings will be discussed here with an aim toward defining and clarifying the term empathy as it will be both used conceptually and measured operationally in this study. Citing multiple authors (Bayne, 2011; Buffel du Vaure et al., 2017; Carré et al., 2013; Decety & Meyer, 2008), Hall and Schwartz identify the ability to distinguish one's own feelings as distinct from another's as a hallmark of empathy. Depow et al. (2021) offer a simple definition in line with the above, defining empathy simply as "understanding, sharing, and caring" (p. 1198) about the emotions of other people. Depow et al. further suggest that many researchers agree that empathy has three components: emotional (e.g., sharing another's emotions), cognitive (sharing another's perspective), and motivational (a desire to help stemming from either the emotional or cognitive process). Like Depow, Hall and Schwartz identify facets of empathy they found to be measured regularly: prosocial feelings toward others, especially others in distress; perspective-taking; feeling what others feel; and accurate perception of another's feelings.

Depow, Hall and Schwartz, and many other researchers define empathy by its "multidimensionality" (Hall & Schwartz, 2019), or its composition as a trait made up of multiple facets. The most common distinction, according to Hall and Schwartz, is to divide empathy between *affective empathy* (feeling compassion for others) and *cognitive empathy* (perspective-taking), though other researchers offer more complex definitions with more dimensions. The problem, as Hall and Schwartz note, is that "definitions containing multiple features leave questions unanswered" (p. 232). The more complex the definition, the more difficult it becomes to accurately measure empathy.



Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, empathy is defined in line with the majority of papers analyzed by Hall and Schwartz; that is, as a multidimensional trait with at least two facets: affective and cognitive. In straightforward terms, empathy is both a feeling of vicarious emotional experience and prosocial concern for another's welfare. Empathy stands in direct contrast to sympathy; where sympathy is feeling pity *for* someone, empathy is feeling *with* someone. It is important to note that, in the upcoming review of research about the importance of empathy, the various social scientists cited do not necessarily use the same definition that I will use in this research study; I instead fall back upon Hall and Schwartz's observation that humans collectively share an intuitive understanding of empathy and move forward to a discussion of why empathy is important.

### ***Why Empathy Matters***

Regardless of the way empathy is defined, decades of research studies have demonstrated that it is vitally important to our social and emotional welfare. Empathy is an advantageous trait in nearly every human relationship and is beneficial in school and workplace settings (see Table 1). Many researchers frame the benefits of empathy in terms of a spectrum that runs from prosocial to antisocial behavior. Weinstein and Ryan (2010) defined prosocial behaviors as acts intended to help another person, whereas antisocial behaviors are intended to harm another (Sage et al., 2006). High empathy levels correlate positively with numerous prosocial behaviors, and low empathy levels correlate negatively with numerous antisocial behaviors as enumerated below.

Empathetic individuals are more likely to be happier and make friends more easily (Morelli et al., 2017). Spouses of empathetic partners report higher satisfaction in their marriages (Cohen et al., 2012), and children of empathetic parents have greater social-emotional literacy

(Manzack et al., 2015). Patients of empathetic doctors are more satisfied with their care (Kim et al., 2004). Increased empathy can decrease bullying and aggression and foster inclusivity (Jones et al., 2018). Empathy may even combat prejudice (Miklikowska, 2018; Todd et al., 2011), a finding particularly relevant to this research.

**Table 1**  
*Prosocial and Antisocial Correlates of Empathy*

Prosocial Correlates of Empathy	Antisocial Correlates of Empathy
Empathy is positively correlated with: Creativity Volunteering Donating to charity Returning incorrect change Helping victims of bullying Making friends Happiness Marriage satisfaction Higher GPAs Greater success in college Better workplace performance	Empathy is negatively correlated with: Bullying Aggression when drunk Prejudice Narcissism Sexual offenses Child abuse

*Note.* Research has shown that high empathy levels have many prosocial correlates and low empathy levels have many antisocial correlates.

In addition to these social-emotional benefits of empathy, there are practical reasons to value empathy, too. In the workplace, employees of empathetic bosses experience less stress (Scott et al., 2010). Highly empathic individuals are more prosocial, which translates to higher performance, productivity, and creativity in the workplace (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013). Academically, empathic students have higher GPAs (Bonner & Aspy, 1984) and achieve greater success in college (Sparkman et al., 2012). Konrath et al. (2011) found that participants scoring higher on the empathetic concern subscale of the *Interpersonal Reactivity Index* are more likely

to return incorrect change, pet sit for a friend, and offer to carry a friend's belongings. Higher empathic concern subscale scores are also correlated with volunteering (Unger & Thumulari, 1997) and donating to charity (Wilhem & Bekkers, 2010).

While high empathy levels are clearly advantageous in social settings, low levels of empathy correlate with many antisocial behaviors. Studies of negative correlates typically focus on a sub-group within the population who have committed a crime or wrongdoing (Konrath et al., 2011). Bullying in young people is negatively correlated with the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Ireland, 1999). It is also negatively correlated with aggressive behavior while under the influence of alcohol (Giancola, 2003), sexual offenses (Burke, 2001), and child abuse (Wiehe, 2003). Konrath et al. write: "On the whole, the correlation between low empathy and violent behavior is so strong that Bovasso, Alterman, Cacciola, and Rutherford (2002) strikingly concluded that 'violent crime may be predicted by traits, such as empathy . . . over and above the assessment of prior antisocial behavior'" (p. 371). Additionally, researchers have found that prejudiced adults exhibit low levels of empathetic concern for outgroup members (Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2012).

Given the numerous positive correlates between prosocial behavior and high empathy levels as well as the inverse relationship between antisocial behavior and low empathy levels, it is clear empathy is an advantageous trait. However, today's adolescents may be in the midst of an empathy crisis and therefore unable to reap the many benefits of empathy.

### ***Empathy in Adolescence***

Researchers have raised the alarm in recent years that adolescents are exhibiting less empathy than previous generations. In a 2011 cross-temporal meta-analysis, Konrath et al. found a "sharp decline" in the empathic concern scores of American college students. Little research

has been done to follow up on this finding a decade later, resulting in researchers continuing to cite Konrath et al. as a comprehensive analysis of the current state of adolescent empathy, likely due to the large number of individuals involved in the meta-analysis. In all, Konrath et al. analyzed 72 studies in which college students completed at least one of the four subscales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), a common empathy measure, between 1979-2009. In sum, 13,737 individuals were included in the meta-analysis.

Konrath et al. found that, while empathy levels remained relatively stable from 1979-2000, they began to decline in 2000. The IRI measures four subscales: empathic concern (EC), perspective-taking (PT), fantasy, and personal distress. The first two, empathic concern and perspective-taking, are the most central components of empathy, according to the researchers. Participants who complete the IRI do so by answering 28 self-report questions (seven for each subscale) on a five-point Likert scale. A sample EC question is: “Sometimes I don’t feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems” (Davis, 1980). The self-report aspect of the IRI is particularly notable in relation to Konrath et al.’s findings; the decline in empathy scores over time is a result of self-report rather than observation. This means that American college students perceive *themselves* as less empathetic. Because self-report measures often suffer from self-report bias (i.e., the tendency to answer questions with what one perceives as the most socially desirable response), the fact that participants still showed decreasing levels of empathy in spite of self-report bias is concerning.

The next question, of course, is why is empathy declining in college-age students (and, by extrapolation, adolescents)? Konrath et al. identify several correlates relevant to this research paper. First, they point to the narcissism rates, which are negatively correlated with empathy (Konrath 2018), and which, according to some researchers (e.g., Stewart & Bernhardt 2010;

Twenge & Foster 2008, 2010; Twenge et al. 2008) but not all (Donnellan 2009; Roberts et al. 2010; Trezesnicwski et al. 2008), are also on the rise, leading to what Twenge et al. (2008) term a “narcissism epidemic.” A shift toward a society that prizes individuality is a possible culprit, according to the Twenge and Konrath research teams. This shift is apparent in the meteoric rise of social media and reality TV, both of which prioritize the individual over the group. Additionally, Konrath et al. point to a rise in bullying as a sign of low empathy, given the negative correlation Ireland (1999) established between the IRI and bullying.

Earlier I noted that little follow-up research has been done to establish whether the trend toward decreasing empathy in young people identified by Konrath et al. in 2011 continues to this day. However, in spite of the lack of hard data to address this issue, the correlates established by Konrath et al. can still help us extrapolate empathy levels in adolescents today. We know that bullying and empathy are negatively correlated; therefore, we can look toward studies of bullying recently conducted to hypothesize about current empathy levels. The National Center for Education Statistics conducts regular research regarding bullying in schools; recent findings compare 2019 bullying levels to those reported in 2009: In 2019, approximately 22% of students ages 12-18 reported being bullied at school during the school year (down slightly from 2009 when the figure was 28%) with 16% of students reporting being electronically bullied sometime in the past year. We know, too, that narcissism and empathy are negatively correlated (Kernberg, 2004; Hart et al., 2018). Ronningstam (2010) writes that a lack of empathy is broadly recognized by clinicians and researchers as a key-feature of narcissism to the point where it is listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed., DSM-5) as the seventh diagnostic criterion of narcissistic personality disorder: “*Lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others.*” (American Psychiatric Association,

2013). Research supports these two ideas: narcissism correlates with decreased empathy, and an indicator of narcissism is social media usage (Casale & Banchi, 2020); therefore, if we look at research surrounding teens and social media use, we can similarly hypothesize about empathy levels. The Pew Research Center reports that teen social media use is meteoric, with 45% of teens reporting that they are online on a nearly constant basis.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have had an effect on teen empathy levels, too, according to recent research by van de Groep et al. (2020). In this study, teens in the Netherlands were asked to respond to daily online questionnaires measuring prosocial experiences during the early days of the pandemic. Their research demonstrated that levels of empathic concern dropped during the pandemic, which they hypothesized could be related to the fact that opportunities for prosocial interaction were limited due to lockdown. Adolescents across the world experienced months of relative isolation due to the pandemic; these months without typical prosocial opportunities meant fewer opportunities for teens to practice empathy skills such as perspective-taking.

Taken together – understanding the relationships between empathy, bullying, social media, and the pandemic – a picture begins to emerge of the empathy landscape as it exists for adolescents today. Ample research demonstrates that adolescent empathy levels are low, and given the numerous prosocial advantages of empathy, it would benefit America's teens to develop increased empathy skills.

### ***Empathy Can be Taught***

Luckily, empathy can be taught. It is not fixed, immutable, something a person is born with and cannot affect. Instead, researchers have identified numerous techniques that can be used to increase empathy in people of all ages. Children can be taught empathy, as can adolescents

and adults. This means that, while today's adolescents may be currently exhibiting low levels of empathy, this trend can be reversed. And, given the numerous benefits of empathy outlined earlier, teaching it should be a moral imperative for today's public schools.

Various techniques can be used to increase empathy such as promoting active listening, focusing on similarities between the self and others, and focusing on body language (Konrath, 2018). Because developing empathy skills is both important and straightforward, many empathy development tools are already being tested, such as the Inside Out online tool for middle school students developed by Kralicek et al. (2018). Empathy instruction has become an important part of medical and nursing schools because studies have shown that empathy declines during medical training (Nunes, 2011) and yet is a crucial component of patient care (Riess, 2017). The tools necessary to incorporate empathy instruction into the secondary language arts classroom already exist and simply need to be adapted to a new setting.

### ***Reading Fiction Increases Empathy***

Although there are many ways to increase a person's ability to empathize, one reliable way to do this is through deliberate exposure to diverse fiction stories. Research consistently shows a link, both correlational and causal, between reading stories and an increase in empathy. Moreover, there is an especial link between adolescents who read young adult (YA) literature and an increase in empathy. Black and Barnes (2021) report that "adolescents may be particularly able and willing to learn from books" (p. 152). Noting that research has already established "a growing body of evidence" suggesting "reliable if small positive correlations between reading and empathy" (p. 152), Black and Barnes designed a study to test whether a causal link exists between reading YA fiction and an increase in empathy. Their conclusions supported this notion. They write, "Most hypotheses concerning YA fiction were confirmed: It

was related to integrity, moral agency, and empathic concern, and moral self via empathic concern” (Black & Barnes, 2021, p. 159) and note that “YA author exposure was positively related to empathic concern” whereas “exposure to nonfiction was not significantly related to the three moral traits” (p.159).

Bal and Veltkamp (2013) found similar results, with an interesting twist. They explored the role of what they call narrative “transportation,” the experience of being so fully immersed within a story that you are transported into a fictional narrative world. Readers experiencing transportation may be so deeply absorbed within a story that they are able to tune out life around them to stay inside the fictional narrative. According to their study, this emotional transportation is critical when it comes to triggering an empathy response: Their study “provides first evidence that fiction reading causes empathic skills to increase over time when the reader becomes emotionally transported into the story” (p. 5). However, they also found that “the reverse occurs when the fiction reader does not become transported at all: then the reader actually becomes less empathic” (p. 5). They conclude that “these are the first empirical studies showing under realistic conditions that fiction reading is related to empathic skills” (p.8), but empathic skills are only present when a reader experiences that elusive transportation effect.

Green and Brock (2000) write about “transportation theory” as a tool that can provide “a lens for understanding the concept of media enjoyment,” (p. 311) explaining that transportation can lead to immersive media consumption experiences that lead to connections with characters and, ultimately, self-transformation. Green et al. (2004) write that, naturally, people interact with media because it makes people happy and people want to feel entertained. Because the term “enjoyment” is vague, Raney (2002) developed a theory of media enjoyment, suggesting that both affective and cognitive factors play a role in the way individuals experience media.



According to Raney, complete enjoyment of media encompasses affective responses (such as identification with and empathy toward fictional characters) and cognitive responses (such as a reader's assessment of the actions of characters and analysis of a narrative's overarching themes). Raney notes that enjoyment leads to individuals being in a better mood and seeking out similarly positive interactions with media in the future. Green and Brock (2000) write that "one key element of an enjoyable media experience is that it takes individuals away from their mundane reality and into a story world" (p. 311), and they term this experience transportation. Transportation, Green et al.'s "flow-like absorption" that is arguably the goal of anyone reading for pleasure, leads to more than simple enjoyment of a text; it can lead to benefits such as self-transformation. Further, Green et al. have identified some of the conditions needed for a text to be transportative. They list the following factors that influence transportation:

1. **Craftmanship:** An author's use of stylistic or literary devices can boost transportation. Green et al. (2004) write, "The presence of rich detail leads to greater transportation and enjoyment, perhaps because details allow individuals to form more vivid mental images, or perhaps because these details allow individuals to feel that they are closer to or more knowledgeable about the story characters" (p. 320).
2. **Lack of distracting stimuli:** The presence or absence of external stimuli can influence one's immersion into a text. Green et al. (2004) cite examples such as a distracting noise as stimuli that would prevent a person from experiencing transportation. Additionally, "instructing readers to focus on surface aspects of a narrative, such as grammar and sentence structure, can reduce transportation relative to a baseline" (p. 321, Green & Brock, 2000 as cited in Green et al. 2004).

3. Prioritizing fictional narratives: Green et al. (2004) note that when individuals are seeking to consume media for entertainment purposes, they gravitate toward fiction rather than nonfiction. However, an earlier study by several of the same researchers found that individuals may be transported “equally well” into fictional or factual worlds (Green & Brock, 2000); what matters is the plausibility of the media (whether consumers can readily suspend their disbelief).

These findings, taken together, have serious implications for today’s secondary language arts classrooms. The benefits of empathy are well-established: Empathetic people are happier and healthier, have better relationships with their families and friends, are better students and employees, and are more likely to be inclusive and productive members of society. Those who lack empathy lack it to their detriment: Less empathetic people struggle more to overcome prejudice, experience difficulty in interpersonal relationships, and are less successful in work and school. Given these many demonstrable benefits of empathy and the fact that reading YA fiction can increase a student’s empathy levels, it feels prudent to look at ways in which today’s secondary language arts curriculum might be transformed in order to meet this empathy crisis head-on.

### **Empathy and Prejudice**

As the previous section suggested, people who lack empathy are more likely to display intolerant or prejudicial behaviors. In this section of the literature review, I will explore research examining the relationship between empathy and prejudice, although as I will show, there are multiple gaps in the research in this area. Although some researchers posit that a person’s intolerance will decrease as their empathy increases, questions remain.

### ***What is Prejudice? What is Intolerance?***

It is important to define the terms *prejudice* and *intolerance* as they will be used in this study. Duckitt (1992) defined tolerance as a “tendency to be generally free of prejudice” (p. 8) leading Verkuyten et al. (2020) to conclude that “intolerance is then equated with prejudice as generalized negativity or antipathy toward a group of people that is different from oneself in various respects, often because of feelings of threat” (p. 468). Throughout this paper, I will use both the terms intolerance and prejudice, and when I do so, I define them in alignment with Verkuyten et al.; that is, they will be used interchangeably. I will, throughout the literature review, use whichever term the authors of a particular study prioritized in their work, switching between intolerance and prejudice according to the studies being examined. Later, I will discuss the research instrument used in this study to measure prejudice, the Intolerance Schema Measure (ISM). Because the ISM uses the word intolerance in its title, I will use the term intolerance when referring to data gathered by the ISM.

Prejudice and intolerance are in some ways the enemies of empathy. Where empathy is about compassion for others, prejudice is a callousness toward others of a specific group based on a preconceived opinion about that group. Empathy, no matter how it is defined, involves understanding a single person on an intimate level, whereas prejudice disregards the individual. Empathy is seeing the individual; prejudice is seeing stereotypes.

### ***Prejudice in Childhood and Adolescence***

Research is clear that childhood and adolescence are critical time periods in the development of prejudice (Fishbein, 1996). However, the factors involved in childhood and adolescence prejudice development are unclear (Miklikowska, 2018; Raabe & Beelman, 2011). Researchers note that an understanding of self, ingroups, and outgroups develop in early

childhood and that as part of the development of self-concept, individuals are motivated to develop and maintain a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Maintaining a positive social identity can come at a cost, however, as children appear to be sensitive to status differences between social groups, which in turn impacts their attitudes toward their ingroup and other outgroups (Abrams et al., 2003). However, children today have an “increasing understanding of antidiscrimination norms” (Miklikowska, 2018, p. 704), which accounts for a steady decline in explicit but not implicit prejudice in the elementary years (Rutland et al., 2005). Miklikowska notes that longitudinal research on prejudice in adolescents gets even murkier as research is both scarce and contradictory.

### ***Relationship Between Empathy and Prejudice***

If adolescence is a critical period for prejudice development, it is also a critical time for empathy development (Miklikowska, 2018). The relationship between empathy and prejudice is complex, and, as such, is the focus of much research. What is clear is that a link between empathy and prejudice exists (Miklikowska, 2018), meaning that prejudiced individuals tend to have lower empathy levels, and highly empathetic individuals demonstrate less prejudice. However, the direction of the effects has not been clearly established. We know that empathy enables perspective-taking, and thus, researchers hypothesize that “an increase in empathy should lower the risk of prejudice development” (Miklikowska, 2018, p.703). Indeed, Miklikowska cites much research that supports this idea in children, adolescents, and adults (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Black-Gutman & Hickson, 1996; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Nesdale, Griffith, Durkin, & Maas, 2005; Quintana, Castaneda-English, & Ybarra, 1999; Batson et al., 1997; Dovidio et al., 2004; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Stephan & Finlay, 1999; Vescio,

Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). However, other research has shown limited effects of empathy on prejudice (Cikara, Bruneau, Van Bavel, & Saxe, 2014; Vorauer & Sasaki, 2009).

A specific study conducted by Miklikowska (2018) exploring the link between empathy and prejudice (specifically: anti-immigrant attitudes) is worth examining in some detail.

Miklikowska asked three research questions: “(1) whether adolescents’ empathic concern and perspective taking would predict within-person changes in their anti-immigrant attitudes, (2) whether adolescents’ anti-immigrant attitudes would predict within-person changes in their empathic concern and perspective taking, and (3) whether adolescents’ empathic concern or perspective taking would be a stronger predictor of within-person changes in their anti-immigrant attitudes” (p. 711). Miklikowska was able to demonstrate within-person relation between perspective-taking and anti-immigrant attitudes, offering “stronger evidence” that perspective-taking and prejudice are causally related (p. 713). Using the same IRI measure mentioned earlier, Miklikowska’s results show that adolescent perspective-taking undergoes more changes than empathic concern and therefore may be a “better target for antibias interventions aimed at adolescents” (p. 713). Finally, Miklikowska concludes that those interested in facilitating positive intergroup relations focus more on increasing empathy rather than decreasing prejudicial attitudes.

### **Bridging the Gap: From Empathy Research to the ELA Classroom**

So far, I have explored the extant data surrounding empathy and prejudice, especially as they relate to adolescent development. We know the benefits of empathy – and the consequences when empathy is not present. We know that empathy and prejudice are correlated and that some research points to a causal connection between the two. Research shows that teens are lacking empathy and that adolescence is crucial developmental juncture for empathy traits. Most

importantly, psychologists have demonstrated that empathy skills can be taught, practiced, and honed.

We also know that one way to increase empathy levels is through exposure to fiction. As empathy and prejudice are correlated, it stands to reason that as adolescents are exposed to literature featuring diverse characters, their cross-diversity empathy will increase and their prejudice will decrease. Given the importance of empathy trait development – and the fact that fiction is an ideal vehicle with which to develop those skills – the secondary language arts classroom makes an ideal laboratory to test this hypothesis. The next section will delve into the current state of affairs in public secondary ELA classrooms, demonstrating that the current curriculum isn't helping students – and may in fact be harmful to the mental health of BIPOC students.

### **Today's English Language Arts Classroom**

It is interesting – and alarming – to note that, even as research has examined best practices within the language arts classroom, language arts curriculum has changed very little since the early days of public education in the United States. The texts that are predominant in secondary language arts classrooms today are overwhelming written by white male authors, and the majority feature white protagonists. At the same time, the national student body is growing ever-more diverse with each passing year. The modern-day language arts curriculum is not keeping pace with the changing student body, which is harmful to all students.

### ***Current and Past Curriculum: A Comparison***

Today's high school language arts curriculum needs an urgent overhaul at the national level. It lacks diversity and relies too heavily upon the canon to the detriment of America's increasingly diverse student population. This is not a new problem. In 1989, Applebee conducted

a nationwide study of books being taught in high school English classes, replicating a survey that was conducted in 1963. His conclusions are worth including here in their entirety:

In all settings which we examined, the lists of most frequently required books and authors were dominated by white males, with little change in overall balance from similar lists 25 or 80 years ago. Such findings lead to fundamental questions about the nature of the literary heritage for which schools claim responsibility. Is it appropriate for this heritage to remain stable and limited, providing a restricted reference point for students from diverse backgrounds? Or is it more appropriate to broaden the canon to provide a richer sampling from the variety of different literary and cultural traditions that make up the American populace? How, if the canon is so narrow, will young women and students from minority cultures develop a sense of their own place within that culture? Such questions clearly have no easy answers, but teachers and departments provide operational answers every time they choose another book to read (p. 18).

Applebee also comments on the fact that reform movements aimed at diversifying high school language arts curriculum to include more selections by women and minority authors have existed since at least the 1960s. He was forced to conclude, “Yet the results of the present study suggest that 20 years of these strategies have been ineffective” (p. 18) and that “new strategies are obviously needed” (p. 18).

In 1992, Applebee wrote that texts read in the language arts classrooms then (1992) compared to thirty years before (1963) had changed “remarkably little.” In the sixties and in the nineties, these eight novels were in the top ten most commonly taught texts in American schools: *Macbeth*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Hamlet*, *Lord*

*of the Flies*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. All eight of these texts were written by white authors, and only one was written by a woman. All feature white protagonists.

Applebee's findings were reconfirmed by Stallworth et al. (2006) in a survey of 142 language arts teachers in 72 secondary schools in Alabama. Teacher participants were asked to identify book-length works they include in their curriculum. In 2002-2003, the top 10 most frequently mentioned titles were: *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Crucible*, *Macbeth*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Animal Farm*, and *A Separate Peace*. In 2003-2004, a few new titles entered the list: *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Our Town*. While there is one new diverse title on this list (*A Raisin in the Sun*), the remaining titles are written by white authors who are predominantly male, and all feature predominantly white protagonists.

More than a decade after Stallworth et al.'s research was published (and more than 60 years beyond the 1960s), today's ELA classrooms rely heavily upon the exact same texts. One need look no further than the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) "text exemplars" to discover this is the case. The CCSS are the standard used by many school districts to make curriculum decisions. The CCSS describes its exemplars list as text choices that "should serve as useful guideposts in helping educators select texts of similar complexity, quality, and range for their own classrooms." In the 9-10 grade text exemplars list, the CCSS suggests 16 "stories" (fictional novels). Of the 16 texts suggested, 12 are written by men, four are written by women, only two are written by people of color, and all but four were published prior to the 1960s. In the 11-12 grade text exemplars list, the CCSS suggests 19 stories. Of these 19, 12 are written by men, seven are written by women, six are written by people of color, and only three were published since the 1960s.



Authors suggested by the CCSS are straight out of the canon. The “canon” is a comprehensive term for a collective body of literature that is highly valued by the Western world; these are our “classics. There is no official list of canonical texts, but there are core texts that have withstood the test of time and therefore are considered essential reading. CCSS exemplar texts include those written by: Shakespeare, Faulkner, Hemingway, Homer, Fitzgerald, Melville, Poe, Bradbury, and Steinbeck. Even the female authors are straight out of the canon: Austen, Bronte, Lee.

While the canon (predominantly written by white men and featuring predominantly white protagonists) stays static, the demographics of student populations are changing rapidly. In 2018, for the first time, there were more non-white than white students enrolled in U.S. public school: 47% of students were white, 27% were Hispanic, 15% were Black, 5% were Asian, and 1% were American Indian or Alaskan Native (NCES). This means that students who are predominantly not white are required to read literature written almost exclusively by white authors about white protagonists.

### ***Adolescent Reading Scores are Steadily Declining***

What’s worse than a static canon is perhaps the fact that adolescent reading scores on the national level are showing a statistically significant downward trend (see Table 2). Not only is our literature unchanging and under-representative of a majority of our students, but it is also demonstrably ineffective in helping raise reading scores. Whether there is a correlation between reading test scores and representation in literature has not been studied, but it is at least true that adolescent reading scores in America are steadily declining, which means the static curriculum being used is becoming less effective over time. It is time for an overhaul which includes greater representation in literature and explicit empathy instruction to go along with it.

**Table 2***Long-Term Reading, Age 17, All Students*

Year	Average Reading Scale Score
2019	284
2015	285
2013	287*
2009	287*
2005	285
2002	285
1998	289*

*Note.* Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress.

\* Significantly different from 2019 ( $p < .05$ ).

### ***Why Representation Matters***

The concept of the importance of representation in literature has been around at least since Bishop (1990) wrote *Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors*. Recall that Bishop argues that educators must provide students with books that act as both windows and mirrors. A “mirror” text is a text in which a reader sees themselves reflected back to them. Finding one’s self inside a book can mean many things: Perhaps a protagonist thinks like the reader does or shares a similar hobby, interest, or family dynamic. Often, a mirror will reflect back the physical features of a reader. If a character in a book is, like me, a white middle class female in her thirties, I will likely see myself mirrored back to me in the pages of a book. Bishop writes that “in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (p. 1). When the books presented by language arts teachers to students feature only white male protagonists, only white male students will be able to see themselves mirrored back. Because

most of America's public school students are not white males, a majority of American students are robbed of finding themselves represented in the curriculum.

Chimamanda Adichie speaks to the problems inherent in just such a scenario in her TED Talk *The Danger of a Single Story*. She recalls growing up as a black girl in Nigeria. She read the books she had access to, which were British and American children's books featuring characters who ate apples and played in the snow, two experiences that Adichie herself did not have growing up. When she began to write her own stories, her characters were exclusively white with blond hair and blue eyes. Her TED Talk includes this powerful and important sentence: "But the unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature." Without representation in the ELA classroom curriculum, children who do not look like the characters in the canon do not have their experiences validated. They do not get to see their lives as part of the greater human experience.

But books as mirrors are not enough, Bishop writes. Teachers must also offer students books that are windows into the worlds of people unlike them. While a mirror book for me, a white female, would feature a white female protagonist, a window book for me would feature a protagonist unlike me, allowing me to walk in their shoes and vicariously live their lives. Window books, especially for members of the dominant culture, help students understand the "multicultural nature of the world they live in" (para. 5), according to Bishop. If students who are members of the dominant culture are only exposed to books that reflect themselves, they risk growing up with an "exaggerated sense" of their own importance in the world, which Bishop calls a "dangerous ethnocentrism" (para. 5).

Today, educators speak of the importance of Bishop's mirrors using the phrase "representation matters." There are serious mental and social consequences for children who do

not see themselves represented in media. For example, studies have shown that, for black children and teens, exposure to stereotypical media representations is related to lower self-esteem, confidence in one's own abilities, and academic performance (Gordon, 2015; Martins & Harrison, 2012; Ward, 2004). Similar studies have found the same negative psychological outcomes apply to other groups such as Native Americans (Fryberg, et al., 2008) and members of the Latino community (Rivadeneira et al., 2007). Additionally, when white audiences are exposed to media portraying negative or stereotypical portrayals of people of color, a number of negative consequences are observed, including: increased anxiety about interracial contact and promotion of the use of stereotypes to judge BIPOC (Mastro & Stamps, 2018).

### **Reading Fiction Featuring Diverse Characters May Promote Increased Empathy**

I have presented in this chapter many “threads” of research which now need to be woven together to present my research questions. The first thread is the empathy thread. Research has shown that empathy is important for prosocial interaction. It is especially important to note that empathy can be taught; unlike other characteristics that are immutable beyond birth, empathy is like a muscle – the more it is flexed, the stronger it gets. One of the best tools we have for increasing empathy is exposure to fiction, especially young adult fiction. Research demonstrates both correlation and causality between fiction and empathy, meaning that exposure to fiction can increase a person's empathy.

The next thread deals with the relationship between prejudice and empathy. Prejudice is prevalent today in all parts of society, from children to adults. Prejudice correlates negatively with empathy, so where high empathy is present, so is low prejudice. The inverse is true: individuals with low empathy levels are more likely to have higher prejudice levels. There is

evidence that empathy and prejudice may be casually related and that those interested in facilitating positive intergroup relations could focus on increasing empathy to decrease prejudice.

A third thread has to do with the current state of language arts curriculum which is static at best and, given the lack of representation in increasingly diverse classrooms and the mental health risk this poses for BIPOC, may actually be harmful to students who are not white and heterosexual. Since at least the 1960s, novels read in secondary language arts classrooms have remained unchanged and are predominantly pulled from the canon, which consists almost entirely of books written by white males. At the same time, data show that student demographics are becoming ever more diverse, and that reading test scores are decreasing over time. The relationship between the former and latter has not been established; yet it is clear that the status quo is resulting in a worse education as time goes on.

Finally, a fourth thread delved into the importance of representation in literature. According to seminal research, students must be exposed to both window and mirror texts for their empathetic prosocial development. For literature to be sometimes a mirror and sometimes a window, it must be representative of the students in classrooms across the country. Yet, as student populations become more diverse, the novels they are required to read remain static. Representation matters because there are serious mental and social consequences for children who are underrepresented.

My hypothesis, supported by the research presented here, is that reading young adult literature in the secondary language arts classroom will increase students' empathy while decreasing their prejudice. The research questions on which this study is based are as follows:

RQ1: What effect does reading young adult fiction have on adolescent empathy?

RQ 2: What effect does reading young adult fiction have on adolescent intolerance?

RQ 3: What effect does transportation have on an individual reader's intolerance and empathy levels?

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

#### **Brief Overview of Study Design for Context**

This mixed methods intervention study took place in a small, rural high school in Oregon's Willamette Valley from fall 2023-winter 2024. For 18 weeks, I worked in cooperation with one secondary language arts teacher at this school to build rapport with and then co-teach her junior and senior language arts classes on a weekly basis. In designing this study, I drew upon the literature presented in the previous chapter, which tells us three important things: that reading fiction, especially young adult fiction, increases empathy; that in order for empathy to increase, an individual must feel transported by the text they are reading; and that as empathy increases, prejudice decreases. Based on existing research, I found it reasonable to posit that high school students will experience some increase in empathy and a corresponding decrease in prejudice any time they are required to read a novel in a language arts class. I further hypothesized that this increase in empathy and decrease in prejudice would be more marked in adolescents when three factors are present: when students are allowed to choose the text they read, when text choices include high-interest, diverse young adult fiction, and when students feel transported by their choice novel. My research design put this hypothesis to the test, as follows.

The research sample consisted of three junior level language arts classes and two senior level language arts classes. These classes were randomly assigned to treatment or control group. One senior class was selected to be in the control group and the other to be in the treatment group, and one junior class was selected to be in the control group and the remaining two classes were placed in the treatment group. All students in both groups participated in a 10-week literature circle, a well-known language arts teaching strategy in which students are presented

with a selection of books to choose from. Once an individual selects their choice text, students read and discuss their novel alongside peers who selected the same text. In this study, students met in literature circle groups weekly, when I was a guest teacher in the classroom. Each week, students were given discussion prompts and formative assessments to complete; the discussion prompts and formative assessments were the exact same whether students were in the treatment or control groups.

The text selection students were presented with in the treatment and control groups became the independent variable. Students in the control group chose between one of six novels from the Western English Canon: *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, and *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. These novels are commonly taught in secondary language arts classes and have been for decades. They do not feature diverse characters and were all written by white, majority male, authors. Students in the treatment group selected from six novels with diverse characters, which were selected to thematically match the canonical texts: *Wilder Girls* by Rory Power, *Pride* by Ibi Zoboi, *The Chosen and the Beautiful* by Nghi Vo, *Cold the Night, Fast the Wolves* by Meg Long, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika L. Sánchez, and *My Dear Henry* by Kalynn Bayron.

Once students selected their texts and before they began reading, they took two self-report measures, Davis's *Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI)* to measure empathy and the *Intolerant Schema Measure (ISM)* to measure intolerance. They took these measures again after reading, which allowed me to do a pre- and post-test analysis of results. Students also took a reading transportation survey, the *Green & Brock Narrative Transportation Scale (NTS)*, upon completion of their novels.



## **Research Foundation**

The design of the study was mixed methods. According to Creswell (2014), utilizing the mixed methods approach allows for the implementation of both quantitative and qualitative research. A mixed methods approach assists researchers in obtaining “more detailed, specific information than can be gained from the results” (p. 535) of qualitative or quantitative data alone (Creswell 2012). Thus, by combining quantitative and qualitative data, researchers can construct a comprehensive model of a social phenomenon.

I begin first, then, with a discussion of my philosophical worldviews, as recommended by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007). Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) identify four overarching worldviews that serve as foundations for various research traditions: postpositivism, which focuses on cause and effect relationships and is thus used to guide quantitative research; constructivism, which constructs data such as interviews and observations and is therefore used to guide qualitative research; participatory research, which advocates for participants to collaborate with researchers throughout the research process; and finally, pragmatism, which employs multiple methodologies and focuses on “what works” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 41). Because a Doctorate of Education degree is designed to produce results that are practically driven as opposed to theoretical in nature, it is fair to say that the pluralistic “what works” approach of pragmatism aligns well with the aims of this dissertation.

While the two broad facets of mixed methods research - qualitative and quantitative - appear at first glance dissimilar from each other, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) highlight similarities in the two research traditions. Both methodologies begin with a research question and use observations to answer those questions. Additionally, researchers build safeguards into their research processes to minimize confirmation bias. Because of these and other similarities,

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) argue that qualitative and quantitative methodologies can and should be combined. In the same way that triangulation in research uses multiple sources of data to enhance the reliability and validity of results in qualitative research, it seems to me that mixed methods research could be considered a sort of meta-triangulation as even more data and more types of data can be used to draw stronger conclusions.

The desire to contribute practically to my field through methods that “work” to address my research questions is reflected in my choice to conduct a mixed methods study. Although I intended for my overarching stance to be pragmatic, it makes sense to shift worldviews when working in each research methodology, as recommended by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007). Thus, I approached quantitative data analysis as a postpositivist and qualitative analysis as a constructivist. Finally, during the study’s integration phase, I returned to the pragmatic perspective to reconcile the two strands. My overarching goal was to research a problem of practice in the field of secondary English language arts that will enable educators to facilitate more positive curricular experiences for our students. In order to do so, I need to know, in the school of thought that is pragmatism, *what works*.

My three research questions and data sources can be found in Table 3. This mixed methods study aimed to answer three research questions, with equal weight given to each question in the study. As such, and in an effort to ensure triangulation, multiple qualitative and quantitative data sources were used to answer each question.

**Table 3***Research Questions and Corresponding Data Sources*

Research Questions	Quantitative Data Sources	Qualitative Data Sources
RQ1: What effect does reading young adult fiction have on adolescent empathy?	Davis's Interpersonal Reactivity Index	<p>Focus group questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What characters in all the stories you've interacted with stand out as window characters? Why?</li> <li>• What characters in all the stories you've interacted with stand out as mirror characters? Why?</li> </ul> <p>Artifacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characters as mirrors</li> <li>• Literature circles roles sheet</li> <li>• One-pager</li> <li>• Setting illustrations</li> <li>• Class discussion board posts</li> <li>• Written journal entries</li> </ul>
RQ 2: What effect does reading young adult fiction have on adolescent prejudice?	Modified Godfrey Richman ISM Scale	<p>Artifacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characters as mirrors</li> <li>• Literature circles roles sheet</li> <li>• One-pager</li> <li>• Setting illustrations</li> <li>• Class discussion board posts</li> <li>• Written journal entries</li> </ul>

**Table 3***Research Questions and Corresponding Data Sources (Continued)*

Research Questions	Quantitative Data Sources	Qualitative Data Sources
RQ 3: What effect does transportation have on an individual reader's prejudice and empathy levels?	Reading transportation survey	<p>Focus group questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What characters in all the stories you've interacted with stand out as window characters? Why?</li> <li>• What characters in all the stories you've interacted with stand out as mirror characters? Why?</li> <li>• What sorts of stories do you find yourself immersed in? This includes any kind of stories, including books, movies, video games, role-play board games, short stories, TV shows, etc.</li> <li>• Which English language arts novels have you enjoyed over your career as a student? Why?</li> <li>• Which English language arts novels have you not enjoyed over your career as a student? Why?</li> <li>• Which book did you select to read for our literature circles, and why did you select this book? Describe your enjoyment of this book. Did you ever lose yourself inside this text? If so, when?</li> </ul> <p>Artifacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Book tasting</li> <li>• Literature circles roles sheet</li> <li>• Class discussion board posts</li> <li>• Written journal entries</li> </ul>

## **Research Design**

In the quantitative phase of the study, I used a quasi-experimental pre- and post-test design. To determine any changes in empathy and prejudice, I administered a pretest and posttest survey, using an ANOVA and multiple regression to test for statistically significant differences between the groups prior to and after the intervention (to measure group comparability) as well as within-group differences (to measure changes pre and post intervention for students in each group).

In the qualitative phase of the study, I paid particular attention to a criticism of mixed methods research identified by Plano Clark et al. (2013); namely, that the qualitative component of mixed methods studies is often not as robust or well-conceptualized as its quantitative counterpart from the beginning of the study. To address these concerns, Plano Clark et al. (2013) recommend three steps: development of the research questions; the presence of a robust data collection design; and data analysis, results, and interpretation. I designed the qualitative portion of this study with these recommendations in mind. Data collection occurred through separate but related streams: focus groups, field observations, and artifact collection. I conducted a thematic analysis of the data using the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), the steps of which will be explicated later in this chapter.

## **Setting and Participants**

This study took place in a rural community in the mid-Willamette Valley region of Oregon. This community is small, with a population just under 2500, according to data obtained in the 2020 U.S. Census. The town that was the site of this research straddles two Oregon counties and is surrounded on two sides by nearby major metro areas. In spite of its proximity to larger cities, the research site rests in a small town with a decidedly rural feel. Life moves slower

here, with many residents employed by the area's two largest industries: farming and logging. The average household income in this area is just over \$52,000, but the community is negatively impacted by the 21.36% poverty rate and the 10.7% unemployment rate. The community is composed of predominantly white families, which make up 88.45% of the population, followed by people of two or more races (7.84%), and Native Americans (2.97%).

It is important to note here that another factor that influences the local culture is the nearby confederated tribe. Locals who are not employed in industry or by the school district may be employed by the neighboring tribal centers or the nearby casino. Many urban visitors stop at this casino on the way to visit the Oregon Coast, and many teachers in the local high school commute into town from outside the city limits. The tribe annually makes large financial contributions to all schools within the district, which benefit its own students, who attend these schools, but also the student population at large.

The majority of residents have graduated from high school (31.5%) or have completed some college (37.7%). Others have an associate's degree (12.27%) but only a small percentage of community members have a bachelor's degree (6.13%) or a master's degree (1.41%). Historically, according to the *2021-2022 Oregon At-A-Glance District Profile*, the elementary, middle, and high schools within this district underperform when compared to similar schools in Oregon. The 2021-22 report card indicates that only 15% of third graders met state grade level expectations in language arts, compared to the state average of 40%, and only 5% of eighth graders met grade-level expectations in math, compared to the state average of 27%. These low numbers are influenced by the percentage of students with disabilities (21%), the percentage of mobile students (20%), and the percentage of students who receive free and reduced lunch (100%). The majority of teachers (96%) and students (60%) are white, followed by the 22% of

students who are Native American and the only 4% of teachers who are Native American. Small subsets of students identify as Hispanic (9%) and multiracial (8%), with no teacher representation from either of these groups.

The primary participants in this study consisted of students who attended this small, rural high school from fall 2023-winter 2024. There are roughly 300 students in grades 9-12. The student body was evenly spread between the four grades, with approximately 75 students in each grade, though attrition means that upper grades (junior and senior classes) have fewer students than lower grades (freshmen and sophomore classes).

All students with the exception of those on a modified diploma plan are required to take four years of high school language arts. The high school employs three language arts teachers who split the instruction of the student body between them. One teacher teaches students in the lower two grades, one teacher teaches the two upper grades, and a third language arts teacher teaches career and technical education (CTE) language arts. This study was set in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade language arts classrooms for several important reasons.

The 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade language arts teacher is a colleague with whom I have a long history of collaboration. She was a student in my journalism class the first year of my teaching career, and she was my student teacher from 2014-15. We worked together at a summer school program for the local Native American tribe, and she was eventually hired as the second member of the language arts department. We worked and presented together at professional conferences for several years before I took a job as an instructor of preservice teachers at a nearby university. While we are now working in different buildings, we desire to continue our collaboration due to our shared values around the importance of young adult literature in the secondary language arts

classroom. For the reasons listed herein, her classroom was chosen as the site of the research conducted in this study.

### **Sources of Data**

A variety of data sources were used to address my three research questions. Qualitative data were collected in the form of researcher field notes, focus groups, and student-generated artifacts, which were then coded for thematic analysis. Quantitative data were collected using three different measures. The measures and their available reliability and validity evidence are outlined below.

#### ***Qualitative Data Source: Focus Groups***

Five focus groups were convened with six students each. Focus group participants were selected from each of the five class periods in which the literature circles were conducted. This meant that heterogeneous focus groups were conducted with participants from both the treatment and the control groups. Focus group participants were asked a variety of open-ended questions about the book they chose to read, their enjoyment of it, their lives as readers, and their life experiences as English language arts students. Each focus group was asked the questions listed in Table 4 alongside a brief rationale for the reason behind asking each question. Their answers were recorded, transcribed, and then coded.



**Table 4***Focus Group Questions and Their Rationale*

<i>Focus Group Questions</i>	<i>Question Rationale</i>
1. What sorts of stories do you find yourself immersed in? This includes any kind of stories, including books, movies, video games, role-play board games, short stories, TV shows, etc.	This question is designed to explore texts that participants find to be transportative; that is, what sort of stories does each participant get lost inside? The answers to this question allow me to see if genres of reportedly transportative fiction match up with the texts participants have chosen to read.
2. What characters in all the stories you've interacted with stand out as window characters? Why?	Participants in this research study were familiar with the concept of window and mirror characters prior to the beginning of this research study. Asking participants to talk about their books through the lens of "mirror books" and "mirror characters" allows me to learn about self-empathy levels while still maintaining a level of deception in regards to the key aspects of the research study.
3. What characters in all the stories you've interacted with stand out as mirror characters? Why?	Participants in this research study were familiar with the concept of window and mirror characters prior to the beginning of this research study. Asking participants to talk about their books through the lens of "window books" and "window characters" allows me to learn about empathy levels toward groups of people participants see as "other" while still maintaining a level of deception in regards to the key aspects of the research study. In many cases, this question prompted participants to make value judgements about minority groups and so allowed me to understand their tolerance/intolerance levels toward these groups, too.
4. Which English language arts novels have you enjoyed over your career as a student? Why?	This question aimed to explore the importance of narrative transportation. Participants were able to recall novels they either loved or strongly disliked throughout their school career, which allowed me to draw conclusions about the types of novels that are and are not transportative.
5. Which English language arts novels have you not enjoyed over your career as a student? Why?	This question aimed to explore the importance of narrative transportation. Participants were able to recall novels they either loved or strongly disliked throughout their school career, which allowed me to draw conclusions about the types of novels that are and are not transportative.
6. Which book did you select to read for our literature circles, and why did you select this book? Describe your enjoyment of this book. Did you ever lose yourself inside this text? If so, when?	This question allowed me to see further into the ways in which participants select texts. I was listening particularly to see if participants selected books that were windows or mirrors for them and why. This allowed me to explore whether participants preferred mirror books, which develop self-empathy, or window books, which may increase empathy levels while decreasing intolerance levels.

***Qualitative Data Source: Formative Assessment Artifacts***

A foundational practice in any classroom is formative assessment. Formative assessment is the process of monitoring student understandings while they are in the process of learning something new. For the purposes of this research study, formative assessments comprised the normal classroom activities in which students were required to participate whether or not they consented/assented to participate in this study. In the complete absence of this study, students would have still been required to attend their English Language Arts classes, read novels, and complete assignments developed by the teacher. The activities that were used in these literature circles were determined pedagogically to be best practices in the field of English Language Arts and were developed by two experienced ELA teachers (myself and the regular classroom teacher). Every effort was made to ensure that these lessons were engaging and educational for the students.

During weeks three through nine of the study, students discussed their novels in literature circles and were then responsible for turning in one or more forms of formative assessment (see Appendix A). In these formative assessments, students were asked a variety of questions about the book they chose to read, their enjoyment of it, and their lives as readers. They presented their responses to these questions in a variety of ways: through class discussion, in written responses, and in art projects. Assessments were designed to check for student comprehension of the text and were aligned with one of the three research questions.

These lessons were developed and field tested in the spring of 2023. Once the lesson was developed, the lesson plan stayed the same for all five classes, whether treatment or control. All formative assessments from all students (whether they were or were not participating in the study) were graded by the classroom teacher using normal classroom grading procedures.

Formative assessments submitted by students who consented/assented to be a part of this study were then treated as artifacts for coding and analysis.

***Qualitative Data Source: Field Journal***

I kept a field journal throughout the 10-week data collection cycle. Using Gold's typology (1958), I positioned myself in the "participant as observer" stance, in which "the researcher's observer activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher's role as a participant" (Merriam, p. 101). During my five-hour weekly research site visits, my primary role was to act as a guest teacher for the day. This meant I had many enriching conversations with participants, but it also meant that my notetaking was constrained to five-minute passing times between class periods. I jotted down as many impressions as possible during these short time frames.

For triangulation purposes, I also engaged in weekly conversations with the classroom teacher in whose room I was conducting research. We spoke about our observations during each of my site visits, with our conversations taking place before the school day, during lunch, during the classroom prep period, and after school hours. These conversations were recorded in my field journal.

Then, at the conclusion of each site visit, I sat in my car and spoke aloud into the notes application on my smart phone, which allowed me to capture longer-form impressions of the day's observations. I also sketched the classroom after each visit, labeling important parts of each drawing. It was imperative to capture my observations in this way because, Merriam explains, observations are an important part of triangulation; "that is, they are used in conjunction with interviewing and document analysis to substantiate the findings" (p. 96).

***Quantitative Data Source: Davis's Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI)***

The IRI (See Appendix B) is a questionnaire consisting of 28 questions divided equally among four distinct subscales: “perspective taking” or “the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological view of others in everyday life;” “empathic concern” or “the tendency to experience feelings of sympathy or compassion for unfortunate others;” “personal distress” or the “tendency to experience distress or discomfort in response to extreme distress in others;” and “fantasy” or “the tendency to imaginatively transpose oneself into fictional situations” (Davis, 1994, pp. 55-57). The IRI does not calculate an overall value for empathy but calculates a separate score for each of the subscales. Although scores were generated for each participant in each of the four subscales listed above, this study focused only on the perspective-taking (PT) scale, as “the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological view of others in everyday life” is the type of empathy I was investigating.

***Quantitative Data Source: Intolerant Schema Measure (ISM)***

The ISM (see Appendix C) is a 54-item self-report survey that assesses sexism, racism, sexual prejudice, ageism, classism, and religious intolerance using a single instrument (Aosved et al., 2009). Aosved et al. note that there are multiple studies suggesting that various forms of prejudice/intolerance are interrelated. Aosved & Long (2006) find that the constructs of sexism, racism, sexual prejudice, ageism, classism, and religious intolerance were strongly interrelated. Aosved et al. (2009) write,

In addition to the possibility of an underlying construct, the findings here point to the likelihood that various intolerant attitudes will co-occur. Thus, if someone holds one intolerant attitude, he or she will likely hold multiple intolerant attitudes simultaneously. These findings suggest that individuals who endorse one form of intolerance are likely to endorse multiple forms, thereby supporting the need to assess multiple types of

intolerance, even when only one type of intolerance is the construct of interest for a given study.” (p. 2346)

Noting the similarities between intolerance constructs and the dearth of researchers studying multiple forms of intolerance simultaneously, Aosved et al. set out to create a short questionnaire to investigate intolerant beliefs together. They explain that they used questions from seven existing measures (*Attitudes Toward Women Scale*, *Neosexism Scale*, *Modern and Old-Fashioned Racism Scale*, *Modern Homophobia Scale*, *Frabroni Scale of Ageism*, *Economic Beliefs Scale*, and *M-GRISM*) to create the ISM. The ISM was then administered to samples of students from several colleges. Although, according to Aosved et al., the ISM is both valid and reliable, with strong internal consistency and test–retest reliability, intolerance scores are based on self-report and it is “important to recognize that individuals may underreport such behaviors (as suggested by our findings with social desirability here) or may not be consciously aware of their own beliefs and how these beliefs impact their behaviors.” (p. 2346).

#### ***Quantitative Data Source: Narrative Transportation Scale (NTS)***

Green and Brock (2000) define narrative transportation as “absorption into a story,” noting that there are three qualities transportation encompasses: imagery, affect, and attentional focus. They developed the NTS (see Appendix D) to measure the degree to which an individual feels absorbed or transported by a story. The NTS is an 11+ item self-report survey measure intended to be administered after a reader has finished a story. The final item on the NTS is: “I had a vivid mental image of [character name].” This item must be adapted to include the character names according to the specific novels at hand. This has become the standard instrument used to evaluate the experiential state of narrative transportation.

#### **Data Collection**

Study participants included students from five sections of upper-level secondary English: two sections of senior English and three sections of junior English. Using random assignment, one senior class was selected for the control group and the other for the treatment group. Again using random assignment, one junior class was selected for the control group, and the remaining two classes were assigned to the treatment group. In research design, random assignment into both the control and treatment group is desirable to balance out participant differences on a variety of characteristics and reduce differential selection (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002).

For the duration of the study, I was a guest teacher in these five classrooms on a weekly basis. I worked cooperatively with the regular classroom teacher to develop, instruct, and assess the learning that took place during the research period. I was the lead teacher in one senior class and two junior classes. The classroom teacher delivered the same lesson to the remaining two classes. This counter-balancing of instruction was in an effort to remove the teacher as a confounding presence.

At the beginning of the study, students in the control groups selected a text from the Western canon to read during literature circles (students were given six text options to choose from; see Table 5). Students in the treatment groups selected a diverse young adult text to read during literature circles (students were given six text options to choose from; see Table 5). Prior to reading, I administered an empathy measure (IRI) and an intolerance measure (ISM).

Young adult texts and canonical texts selected for this study were chosen with great care according to the following criteria. Canonical texts were first evaluated for their length, with priority given to novels under 250 pages. Then, novels were evaluated for how interesting they might be to a high school reader (admittedly, “interesting” is a subjective term, but given my experience as a high school language arts teacher who has taught many “classics” over the years,

I have a better-than-layperson’s understanding of what novels a high school student might enjoy). *Interesting* was included as a criterion because research tells us we can expect to see an increase in empathy only if a reader feels “transported” (here, a reasonable synonym for “interested”). Additionally, the plain, simple truth is that students are more likely to finish a text if they find it interesting, and my research hinged on them actually completing the assigned reading.

**Table 5**

*Literature Circle Choice Novels: Canonical and Young Adult Titles*

Literature Circles: English Canon Choices	Literature Circles: Young Adult Choices
1. <i>Lord of the Flies</i> by William Golding	1. <i>Wilder Girls</i> by Rory Power
2. <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> by Jane Austen	2. <i>Pride</i> by Ibi Zoboi
3. <i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald	3. <i>The Chosen and the Beautiful</i> by Nghi Vo
4. <i>The Call of the Wild</i> by Jack London	4. <i>Cold the Night, Fast the Wolves</i> by Meg Long
5. <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> by J.D. Salinger	5. <i>I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter</i> by Erika L. Sánchez
6. <i>Frankenstein</i> by Mary Shelley	6. <i>My Dear Henry</i> by Kalynn Bayron

Canonical texts were short-listed for consideration if they were written by a member of the dominant culture (white, straight, male). Finally, the Common Core State Standards Text Exemplar list was consulted as these are texts that “serve to exemplify the level of complexity and quality that the Standards require all students in a given grade band to engage with” (CCSS); that is, these texts have been officially codified as texts an authoritative body deems to have serious literary and educational value. Only prose novels were considered to eliminate additional genres as confounding factors. Ultimately, not every novel met every criteria; instead, a careful weighing of factors resulted in the final booklist.

Young adult texts were selected using a similar process. Books were again evaluated for length with preference given to shorter, more manageable texts. Young adult texts were also evaluated according to how interesting they might be to student readers, though this was less of a priority than when selecting canonical texts, as young adult novels are written for teens (and should naturally be interesting to their target audience). Special attention was given to analyzing the diversity factors in potential young adult texts. In the end, the texts selected for inclusion in this study feature representation in the following areas: LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, mental illness, Latinx, Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Chinese, adoption, poverty, Muslim, and disability. Priority consideration was also given to award-winning books, especially books receiving the following awards: Printz Award, National Book Award for Young People, Stonewall Book Award, Morris Award, and the Schneider Family Book Award.

Finally, young adult novels with thematic connections to books from the canon were especially considered. Several of the young adult novels selected are direct retellings of classics, including *Pride* by Ibi Zoboi (a retelling of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen) and *The Chosen and the Beautiful* by Nghi Vo (a retelling of *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald). See Table 6 for a side-by-side comparison of the novels included in this study. Ultimately, the 12 books that made the final cut represent a wide swath of genres, interest areas, and reading levels, the outcome being that students from either the control or the treatment book were able to find a book that appealed to them.

After selecting their texts, students read independently and met in small groups weekly to discuss their novels and complete assignments about their texts. Literature circle lessons were facilitated by myself and the regular classroom teacher. After students finished reading their texts, they again took the IRI and ISM. Focus groups were formed, and written responses and



artifacts collected from participants during literature circles so I had access to qualitative data as well. Written response and focus group questions took the form of open-ended questions.

Participant observation occurred during focus groups, too.

For clarity's sake, it's worth pausing for a moment to explore what a literature circle is, how a literature circle operates in a secondary language arts setting, and what research indicates are best practices concerning their use. According to Daniels (2006), one of the first researchers to write about student book discussion groups, literature circles are “essentially well-structured collaborative learning [experiences] applied to reading” (p. 13). Literature circles are an instructional technique that moves away from all students in one class reading the same novel (this is known as a whole-class novel) and into a space where a teacher selects several interconnected texts. From this list, students select which book they would prefer to read. Once students self-select into small reading groups based on text preference, they read and discuss their novel together. Ragland and Palace (2017) write that one advantage of literature circles is the element of student choice; students who are allowed some choice in the text they read demonstrate increased engagement. Wilhem and Smith concur, explaining in an interview that “we think that our data clearly establishes that young people are doing sophisticated intellectual work in their pleasure reading—much of it is just the kind of work that the CCSS calls for, so making pleasure more central to our practice is not in conflict with working to achieve the CCSS” (Ferlazzo, 2014, answer to interview question 5).

**Table 6***Side-by-Side Comparison of Young Adult Texts for Literature Circles*

Title & Author	Canon Pairing	Page Length	Representation	Awards
<i>Wilder Girls</i> by Rory Power	<i>The Lord of the Flies</i> by William Golding	400	LGBTQIA+ Feminist	New York Times Bestseller New York Public Library Best Book of the Year
<i>My Dear Henry</i> by Kalynn Bayron	<i>Frankenstein</i> by Mary Shelley	272	LGBTQIA+ BIPOC	Junior Library Guild Selection
<i>Cold the Night, Fast the Wolves</i> by Meg Long	<i>Call of the Wild</i> by Jack London	368	BIPOC Feminist	Indie Next Pick
<i>The Chosen and the Beautiful</i> by Nghi Vo	<i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald	288	LGBTQIA+ AAPI Immigrant	2021 Time Magazine Best Books of the Year 2021 Washington Post Best Books of the Year 2021 NPR Best Book of the Year
<i>Pride</i> by Ibi Zoboi	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i> by Jane Austen	304	BIPOC Afro-Latino	Two starred reviews
<i>I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter</i> by Erika L. Sánchez	<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> by J.D. Salinger	352	Latinx	Tomás Rivera Book Award Winner, 2018 Best Fiction for Young Adults Selection, 2018 National Book Award for Young People's Literature Finalist, 2017 SLJ Best Books of the Year, 2017 International Latino Book Award

Ragland and Palace (2017) found that effective literature circles have some elements in common: first and foremost is student choice, as discussed above. Next, literature circles, while student-led, are still teacher-monitored. An effective teacher will set expectations, model accountable discourse, and step in where necessary to facilitate groups that are struggling. Additionally, literature circles are most effective when they include individual reading conferences with students, teacher-led mini lessons, and in-class reading time. When planning literature circles, Ragland and Palace write, “teachers should schedule ample time so that students can immerse themselves in a rich literary environment where they develop reading stamina and are encouraged to discuss the text with their peers” (p. 40). When these ingredients exist, students become more strategic readers and their reading comprehension scores increase as well (Ragland & Palace, 2017).

Therefore, the literature circles employed in this study utilized the above-discussed best practices; namely, in-class reading time was provided to students daily alongside mini-lessons that preceded literature circle discussion time. The classroom teacher and I facilitated group discussion so that all students could access the rich benefits that come from literature circles, regardless of their selected text.

The research followed the 10-week schedule outlined here from Dec. 1-February 16, 2024. All students, whether study participants or not, participated in week 1-10 activities. If they did not give consent to participate in the study, they still participated in the weekly literature circle lessons but did not participate in focus groups and did not take either the IRI or ISM measures. I also did not collect artifacts from these students.

1. Prior to week 1: After receiving permission to proceed from the school principal and district superintendent as well as IRB approval, the study was introduced to all 11<sup>th</sup> and

12<sup>th</sup> grade students at the study site, and the informed consent process took place.

Students who wished to participate signed an assent form (if they were under 18) or a consent form (if they were 18 or older). Minor students brought consent forms home to their parents/guardians and returned the forms to school. I kept track of consent and assent forms and assigned participants a number for deidentification purposes. Pre-ISM and pre-IRI survey measures were also administered prior to week one activities to consenting/assenting participants.

2. **Week 1:** All students took part in an activity called book tasting, in which they were able to browse the six book choices available to them. The following directions were projected on the board:

- To get a good taste of the book in front of you, follow the steps below and take notes on the back of your placemat:
  1. Take a good look at the front cover. What images do you see, and based on these, what do you think the book will be about?
  2. Read the summary provided by the author on the back of the book. Does the plot sound intriguing to you?
  3. Flip through the book and read excerpts here and there. Find one quote to record as “book graffiti.”
  4. Based on your book tasting, how interested in this book are you? Rank your interest on the back of your placemat.
- In-class time: 50 minutes.
- Out-of-class reading homework time: None

3. **Week 2:** Literature circles meeting 1. Books were checked out to students (10 minutes).  
Students met in small groups to determine a reading schedule. Students began to read their choice novels.
  - In-class time: 50 minutes.
  - Out-of-class reading homework time: 1 hour
4. **Week 3:** Literature circles meeting 2. Students met in small groups to talk about the first two chapters of their novels. Students were asked to select either a character or a setting from their novel. They were to draw a detailed picture of the character or setting and label the parts of the drawing with details from their texts.
  - In-class time: 50 minutes.
  - Out-of-class reading homework time: 1 hour
5. **Week 4:** Literature circles meeting 3. Students met in small groups to discuss their novels. They were asked to select roles from the following options: summarizer, questioner/discussion director, connector, illustrator, travel tracer, word wizard, literary luminary. Once each student selected a different role, they were given the corresponding “role sheet” which listed directions and acted as a discussion aid for the day.
  - In-class time: 50 minutes.
  - Out-of-class reading homework time: 1 hour
6. **Week 5:** Literature circles meeting 4. Students met in small groups to discuss their novels. They were then asked to create a one-pager following the directions printed on the assignment.
  - In-class time: 50 minutes.
  - Out-of-class reading homework time: 1 hour

7. **Week 6:** Literature circles meeting 5. Students met in small groups to discuss their novels. They were then asked to reflect on ways in which characters act as mirrors for them in their choice novels. Students filled out a “characters as mirrors” graphic organizer.
  - In-class time: 50 minutes.
  - Out-of-class reading homework time: 1 hour
8. **Week 7:** Literature circles meeting 6. Students met in small groups to discuss their novels. They were asked to select roles from the following options: summarizer, questioner/discussion director, connector, illustrator, travel tracer, word wizard, literary luminary. Once each student selected a different role, they were given the corresponding “role sheet” which listed directions and acted as a discussion aid for the day.
  - In-class time: 50 minutes.
  - Out-of-class reading homework time: 1 hour
9. **Week 8:** During week 8, class was moved to an asynchronous online format due to expected absences as a result of students competing in or spectating at the state basketball tournament.
10. **Week 9:** Literature circles meeting 7. Students met in small groups to discuss their novels. They were asked to select roles from the following options: summarizer, questioner/discussion director, connector, illustrator, travel tracer, word wizard, literary luminary. Once each student selected a different role, they were given the corresponding “role sheet” which listed directions and acted as a discussion aid for the day.
  - In-class time: 50 minutes.
  - Out-of-class reading homework time: 1 hour

11. **Weeks 10-11:** These two weeks were used to complete end-of-novel tasks. All students filled out a Google Forms questionnaire that asked them to reflect in writing on their learning during the literature circles unit. Students answered 11 short-answer questions. Study participants completed the post-ISM, post-IRI, and took the NTS. I conducted focus groups in week 11.

- In-class time: 2 50-minute sessions

### **Data Analysis**

In keeping with qualitative traditions, I began analyzing the qualitative data immediately upon gathering it. Thus, although I have previously discussed the quantitative design first, heretofore I focus first on the qualitative data.

#### ***Phase 1 Analytic Approach: Qualitative Analysis***

Qualitative research is a research paradigm; that is, it is a specific perspective the researcher maintains while conducting a study. It involves a specific orientation to research that Merriam (1998) refers to as interpretive, which views education as a process and school as a lived experience (p. 4). As such, qualitative research is a broad umbrella term that encompasses multiple forms of inquiry aimed at helping a researcher understand and describe a social phenomena. Collectively, qualitative researchers are interested in how people make sense of their world. Merriam describes five key characteristics of qualitative research:

1. The researcher's goal is to understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives.
2. The researcher acts as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
3. It involves fieldwork.
4. It employs an inductive research strategy.

5. The final product is richly descriptive.

Although researchers do not agree on the specific number of different types of qualitative research that exist, it is reasonable to say that numerous variations exist, including study types such as ethnographies, case studies, and grounded theory research. This study falls under the category of a “basic” or “generic” qualitative study. Merriam writes,

Many qualitative studies in education do not focus on culture or build a grounded theory; nor are they intensive case studies of a single unit or bundled system. Rather, researchers who conduct these studies (i.e., basic or generic qualitative studies), which are probably the most common form of qualitative research in education, simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (Merriam 11).

A qualitative researcher must have three things: a tolerance for ambiguity, sensitivity, and good communication skills (Merriam, 1998).

1. Tolerance for ambiguity: The process of data collection and analysis is ambiguous. Many qualitative researchers note there are no set guidelines or procedures that can be followed in a step-by-step fashion (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdale, 2022). Instead, the researcher is akin to a detective, allowing a trail of data “clues” to guide both the fieldwork and data analysis as they are uncovered.

2. Sensitivity: A qualitative researcher must be highly intuitive, able to tune into all variables within a setting. This includes the ability to read nonverbal cues, listen for subtext during interviews and focus groups, and be attuned to personal biases and how they could influence the research project at hand.



3. Good communication skills: Merriam writes that “a good communicator empathizes with the respondents, establishes rapport, asks good questions, and listens intently” (Merriam, 1998, p. 23), adding that “empathy is the foundation of rapport” (p. 23). The positionality of empathy in a qualitative research study lends itself well to a study designed to investigate adolescent empathy, as this study did.

Qualitative research as a framework may feel ephemeral due to its inherent ambiguity, but this important work has been done throughout history. Guba and Lincoln (1981) write that qualitative researchers “do what anthropologists, social scientists, connoisseurs, critics, oral historians, novelists, essayists, and poets throughout the years have done. They emphasize, describe, judge, compare, portray, evoke images, and create, for the reader or listener, the sense of having been there” (p. 149).

Reading the Guba and Lincoln quote above allowed me some relief from the muddy waters of ambiguity, as I have worked as a writer, as a journalist, and as an anthropologist before, learning along the way to rely upon my instincts and professional judgement and to trust the process. Using Merriam (1998) and Glesne (1999) as guideposts, the qualitative phase of my study was designed to include data collection from interviews in the form of focus groups, artifacts in the form of student assignments, and the careful recording of notes and observations in a field journal.

**Focus group interviews.** Focus groups took place at the end of the study, after the participants had completed the reading of their choice novels. Participants were selected based on observations during the previous weeks and the classroom teacher’s recommendations. Positioning focus groups at the end of the study allowed me to build rapport with students during the preceding class sessions so that they felt comfortable expressing opinions during interviews. I

used a semi-structured interview format, bringing a prepared list of more and less structured questions along with me to the focus groups. I based my questions on Merriam's recommended types of questions to use in qualitative interviews (see Table 7).

**Table 7**

*Question Types to Use (Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, & Sabshin, 1981)*

- 
- Hypothetical: Asks what the respondent might do or what it might be like in a particular situation
  - Devil's advocate: Challenges the respondent to consider an opposing view
  - Ideal position: Asks the respondent to describe an ideal situation
  - Interpretive questions: Advances an interpretation of what the respondent has been saying and asks for a reaction
- 

During focus group interviews, the conversation was allowed to flow organically, and I used probes as needed to gently guide the conversation or to follow up on information offered by a participant.

**Artifacts.** Throughout the study, I collected various artifacts in the form of assignments from participants for data mining and data analysis. When I visited the research site each week, I asked participants to complete a formative assessment that documented their current thoughts and feelings about their choice novels. Formative assessments took various forms. Sometimes participants were asked to draw, sometimes they were asked to write, and other times they were asked to discuss their thoughts with a group. Table 8 outlines the artifacts collected each week. A blank copy of each formative assessment can be found in Appendix A.

**Table 8***Artifacts Collected Each Week*

Week	Artifact Collected
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Book tasting menus</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading schedules</li> <li>• Week 2 discussion post on Google Classroom: Somebody wanted but so then (SWBST). Students summarized the plot using the SWBST format.</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labeled drawing of character or setting</li> <li>• Week 3 discussion: What do you think the author wants you to learn from reading this story? Why do you think the author wrote this story and the audience it intended to impact? Your answer should be at least 7-10 complete sentences.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature circles role sheet</li> <li>• Week 4 discussion: Rate the opening of your book. On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest, how well done is the opening? Does it get your attention? Give you necessary information to understand the text? Your answer should be between 7-10 complete sentences.</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-pager</li> <li>• Week 5 discussion: Does your book contain more mirror or window characters for you? Give an example of either kind of character in your novel. Do you typically consume more media (books, TV shows, movies, etc) with mirror or window characters? Why is it helpful to have both experiences? Your answer should be between 5-7 complete sentences.</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Books as mirrors</li> <li>• Week 6 discussion: Week 6 discussion: From your Lit Circle Book, do the characters or events connect to people or events in our world? What issues are still present today in your book? Does it remind you of another movie/show/or book you have read? Your answer should be between 5-7 complete sentences.</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature circles role sheet</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School was moved to an asynchronous online format this week due to anticipated student absences for state basketball tournament. No artifacts were collected.</li> </ul>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature circles role sheet</li> </ul>

**Table 8**  
*Artifacts Collected Each Week, Continued*

Week	Artifact Collected
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students answered the following questions via a Google Form. Length requirements follow each question.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What theme do you think this book is addressing? 1-2 sentences</li> <li>2. What concepts or ideas did you find the most interesting and the most thought provoking? 2-3 sentences</li> <li>3. Consider the author's purpose. What were they trying to say? 1-2 sentences</li> <li>4. How meaningful and important is this theme in the world today? 2-3 sentences</li> <li>5. How will this book help you in the future? Be specific and include details. 3-4 sentences</li> <li>6. How will this book help you in the future? Be specific and include details. 3-4 sentences</li> <li>7. Analyze the development of one character throughout the novel. How did this influence the novel? 2-3 sentences</li> <li>8. What did you like about getting to choose your own novel? 2-3 sentences</li> <li>9. What surprised you about your novel? 2-3 sentences</li> <li>10. What did you dislike about your novel? 2-3 sentences</li> <li>11. Who would benefit from reading your novel? 2-3 sentences</li> </ol> </li> </ul>

I used the constant comparative method of data analysis as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). To utilize this strategy, I began with one unit of data and compared it to another unit of data. These comparisons led to tentative categories that were then compared to each other until I felt an overall picture coalescing in my mind. Glesne (1999) compares qualitative data analysis to dropping down a long, dark mine shaft. The researcher's job is to mine through pages upon pages of notes, impressions, interviews, and other documents, searching for the gold buried within. At first, she writes, the task feels overwhelming, but slowly, with painstaking care, a picture begins to emerge. Experienced qualitative researchers write that there is no wrong way to do qualitative research – with one crucial exception. Qualitative researchers must begin data analysis as soon as data collection begins (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998). This is because, at the

outset of data collection, the researcher does not know what the final analysis will look like (Merriam, 1998).

Each evening after a site visit, I sat down with my notes and artifacts from the day to begin rudimentary analysis. This involved reading through everything I had collected already and jotting notes in the margins; the notes became the beginning of my coding scheme. I tried to keep in mind this advice of Glesne's: "Understanding that you are in a learning mode is most important; it tells you that you need not be all at once as accomplished as eventually you need to be to meet the challenges of data analysis" (p. 132).

Coding is simply the process of sorting collected data into meaningful groupings. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a six-phase guide I used in my study as a foundation in conducting thematic analysis.

1. Phase one: "Familiarizing yourself with your data, is focused on reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). In the first phase, I read through my notes, transcripts and all artifacts, start to finish. Phase one allowed me to become familiar with the data to begin compiling initial impressions.

2. Phase two: "Generating initial codes: coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). In this phase, I focused on the development of themes in an effort to begin reducing the data and dividing it into manageable chunks. I read through each data unit thoroughly and noted potential codes in the margins.

3. Phase three: "Searching for themes, collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). In this phase, I highlighted

data from the transcripts and artifacts, recording the codes on post-it notes, and then clustering them according to similarity.

4. Phase four: “Reviewing themes, checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), I read through the codes for each theme and determined whether a coherent pattern had emerged. I also did another read-through of the entire data set to ensure that I did not miss any additional data that needed to be coded.

5. Phase five: “Defining and naming themes, ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). The purpose of this phase was to clearly define what my themes were – and what they were not (p. 92). I focused on identifying the essence of each theme and determining what research questions the theme fit under.

6. Phase six: Braun and Clark describe this phase as the stage in data analysis in which a researcher writes a narrative about the data that “goes beyond description of the data, and make(s) an argument in relation to your research questions” (p. 93). This is the storytelling stage of data analysis in which codes and themes are transformed into the story of the data. That story is presented in Chapter 3.

### ***Phase 2 Analytic Approach: Quantitative Analysis***

I ran statistical analyses of my data using SPSS 29.0.2.0. First, I used a one-way ANOVA to analyze the pre-post data from the two quantitative scales administered. An ANOVA is used to test for within- and between-group differences. Between-group differences were analyzed prior to the intervention to evaluate comparability of the groups and to address the threat of

differential selection. Prior to running the analyses, I tested to be sure that all assumptions had been met for the ANOVA. The assumptions of an ANOVA test are as follows:

1. An ANOVA can only be conducted if there is no relationship between the subjects in each sample (i.e., the subjects in the first group cannot also be in the second group).
2. The dependent variable must be normally distributed so that the middle scores are the most frequent and the extreme scores are the least frequent (neither skewness nor kurtosis are present).
3. There must be homogeneity of variance, meaning that the deviation of scores (measured by standard deviation) is similar between populations.

Next, I ran a repeated measures ANOVA to test for between-group and within-group differences. This statistical analysis indicated whether any differences in empathy or prejudice metrics between the treatment and control groups were statistically significant. After establishing that the pre-test treatment and control groups were comparable, I ran post-test between-group analyses to determine whether statistically significant evidence of causality was present. If, as the pretest ANOVA determined, the groups did not differ from one another prior to the intervention, but differed from one another after the intervention, this was interpreted as evidence of causality, which enabled me to conclude whether the intervention caused the change. Within group differences allowed me to measure whether a group was statistically significantly different post- versus pre-intervention.

I also ran a multiple regression analysis to determine to what degree two predictors (book choice and transportation) taken together influenced students' empathy and intolerance levels at the end of the 10-week unit. Multiple regression includes two or more independent variables, or predictor variables, in the model, rather than just one. Regression analyses reveal relationships

among variables but do not imply a causal relationship. The purpose of multiple regression is to determine the utility of a set of predictor variables for predicting an outcome, which is generally some important event or behaviour (in the case of this study, the outcomes of interest are empathy levels and intolerance levels). This outcome is called, alternatively, the outcome variable, the dependent variable, or the criterion variable.

### **Research Integrity**

Although the concepts of reliability and validity generally refer to quantitative research, it is important for the qualitative researcher to establish credibility and accuracy of representation (Krefting, 1991). My research was undertaken with great care in regards to credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity. In addition to efforts that were undertaken to ensure researcher credibility, every effort was made to ensure that qualitative data were examined from multiple angles using the principles of both data and investigator triangulation. Additionally, I am confident that saturation was reached and that I did not end data collection too soon. Finally, I made every effort to examine my own personal biases and experiences in light of conclusions drawn from my data.

### ***Yardley's Framework of Trustworthiness***

I used Yardley's (2008) framework of trustworthiness specific to qualitative studies to bolster my credibility and trustworthiness as a researcher.

Yardley identifies four aspects a researcher should consider when the goal is to establish trustworthiness. These principles were recognized and applied to this research.

1. *Sensitivity to context*: There are a number of ways a researcher can show sensitivity to context, including a deep understanding of the existing literature in the topic being studied or from research that has employed similar methods. I have dedicated myself to



an immersive study of the various facets of research that are important to this study, as demonstrated through my critical evaluation of the literature in Chapter 2 and through the engagement of theoretical concepts discussed in relation to the data. An additional facet of sensitivity of context includes an understanding of the power balance at play between student, teacher, and researcher. I did my best to ensure that my positionality as a researcher and teacher did not limit the candor or truthfulness of responses students offered during the interviewing process; I communicated to students verbally and in writing that the opinions expressed within their interviews or written artifacts were valued and would in no way impact the grade they received for any classwork or homework turned in in conjunction with this study.

2. *Commitment and rigor*: Commitment and rigor were maintained during the analysis process through the degree of attentiveness and sensitivity towards the data and continued care with each qualitative data source.
3. *Transparency and coherence*: According to some researchers, being transparent about the nature of the researcher's personal views through reflexivity is an important way that qualitative research achieves validity (Willig, 2008). Reflexivity is the examination of one's personal beliefs, judgements, and practices during the research process and how these may influence the research. *Transparency and coherence* are here shown through a detailed description of each stage of the research and the decision made where each argument is presented, and the degree of fit between the research and the underlying theoretical assumptions of the approach implemented. *Transparency* was ensured through continuous reflexivity toward the research process.

4. *Impact and importance:* The impact and importance of the study is demonstrated through the research's interesting, useful, or important findings, which are discussed in Chapter 4.

### ***Data Triangulation***

Data triangulation occurred as multiple sources of qualitative data were collected and analyzed. According to Patton (1999), triangulation is the use of multiple methods or data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena. Triangulation is a strategy used to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) identified four types of triangulation: (a) method triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) data source triangulation. I used data source triangulation. Specifically, my study compared and contrasted data from multiple sources: focus group transcripts, participants' written artifacts, and my own field notes. Embedded within the prompts in focus group questions and participant written response questions were attempts to mine participants' thoughts in relation to their empathy skills, prejudice levels, and feelings of transportation after reading. While one data source may offer insight into answering my research questions, three data sources all providing data in support of my conclusions is even more powerful.

### ***Data Saturation***

Data saturation is the point in a research process where enough data has been collected to draw conclusions, and further data collection will not produce any value-added insights. Saturation is used in qualitative research as a criterion for discontinuing data collection and/or analysis. The importance of data saturation is clear in the research. Morse (2015) notes that saturation is "the most frequently touted guarantee of qualitative rigor offered by authors" (p. 587), and Fusch and Ness (2015) write that "failure to reach saturation has an impact on the

quality of the research conducted” (p. 1408). Francis et al. (2010) implore qualitative researchers to provide a thorough and transparent reporting of how they achieve saturation in their results in order to allow peers to assess the validity of the saturation claim. Given the importance placed on saturation by the research community, one way in which I ensured research integrity was to demonstrate saturation thoroughly and transparently, which I do in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER III

### FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings of my research, both qualitative and quantitative. First, the purpose of the study and research questions are reviewed. This is followed by an overview of my qualitative research findings, which reviews focus group transcripts as well as student artifacts in the form of journal entries, discussion board posts, and formative assessments completed during the course of the study. To these data, I add my own narrative in the form of a field journal generated during the research process. The qualitative data findings are followed by an overview of the quantitative findings from the three survey instruments used during the study. An analysis of qualitative and quantitative data follows in the next chapter.

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to compare the impact of reading young adult literature to reading novels from the Western Canon on adolescent empathy and intolerance levels. The study also examined the degree to which a teen reader found themselves transported by their choice novel, and how this transportative effect impacted empathy and intolerance levels. Another purpose was to add knowledge to the existing literature describing the relationship between young adult fiction and empathy levels, the relationship between young adult fiction and intolerance levels, and the importance of narrative transportation to both empathy levels and intolerance levels.

The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What effect does reading young adult fiction have on adolescent empathy?

RQ 2: What effect does reading young adult fiction have on adolescent intolerance?

RQ 3: What effect does transportation have on an individual reader's intolerance and empathy levels?

This research project occurred over the course of 10 weeks while students explored, read, and discussed novels in literature circles. Prior to the beginning of the literature circles, students took two pre-test self-report survey measures: the ISM and the IRI, to measure baseline intolerance and empathy levels. After the pre-tests were completed in anticipation of the quantitative phase of data analysis, the qualitative phase of the study began. Qualitative data collection took place over the 10-week literature circles cycle. During this time, I visited the classroom once a week for five-hour visits to facilitate the literature circle discussions and observe participants in action. While on-site, I acted as the lead teacher for four class periods. This meant introducing the day's planned discussion activity, modeling the activity, giving directions, moving students into groups, and helping manage the classroom during literature circles discussions.

The role of lead teacher allowed me to have many interactions with students over the course of each class period. These interactions allowed me to glean valuable insight from students about the literature circles and their choice novels. I recorded these insights and my own observations by dictating into my smartphone microphone using the Otter.ai voice transcription app during each five-minute passing period. At the conclusion of each classroom visit, I sat in my car and recorded another longer-form note that summarized the day's activities, student insights, and researcher observations. In the evenings after each classroom visit, I read through my notes, organized my thoughts, and began the process of coding and categorizing observations.

The qualitative data collected during this study did not end with field notes and researcher observations. In addition to my own observations from my site visits, I also collected and analyzed multiple student artifacts. These artifacts included assignments formative assessments, student journal entries, and student discussion board posts added to Google Classroom. These artifacts, too, were analyzed in my evening analysis sessions, with initial coding taking place for future thematic analysis.

After students completed their novels, five six-person focus groups were conducted, yielding 86 pages of transcripts. The transcripts were coded and categories constructed for presentation here. Finally, students completed their part in the study by taking three self-report survey measures: the ISM, the IRI, and the NTS. The findings from both qualitative and quantitative phases of the study are presented in this chapter. Discussion and analysis of all data is presented in Chapter 4.

### **The Participants**

Participants were selected in this phase of the research from a single research site, a small high school in rural Oregon, described in Chapter 2. Criteria for selection were as follows:

- Enrolled in a junior- or senior-level language arts class at the research site
- Consented to participate in the study (or, in the case of minors, assented alongside parental consent)

After the informed consent process took place, 46 upper-class secondary students signed on to participate in the study across six periods of language arts. The control group began with 18 students spread across two randomly assigned class periods, and the treatment group began with 28 students spread across three randomly assigned class periods. Three students moved during the course of the study, so that the control group ended with 15 students and the treatment

group ended with 28 students. The control group read novels from the Western canon, and the treatment group read young adult novels.

### **Qualitative Phase**

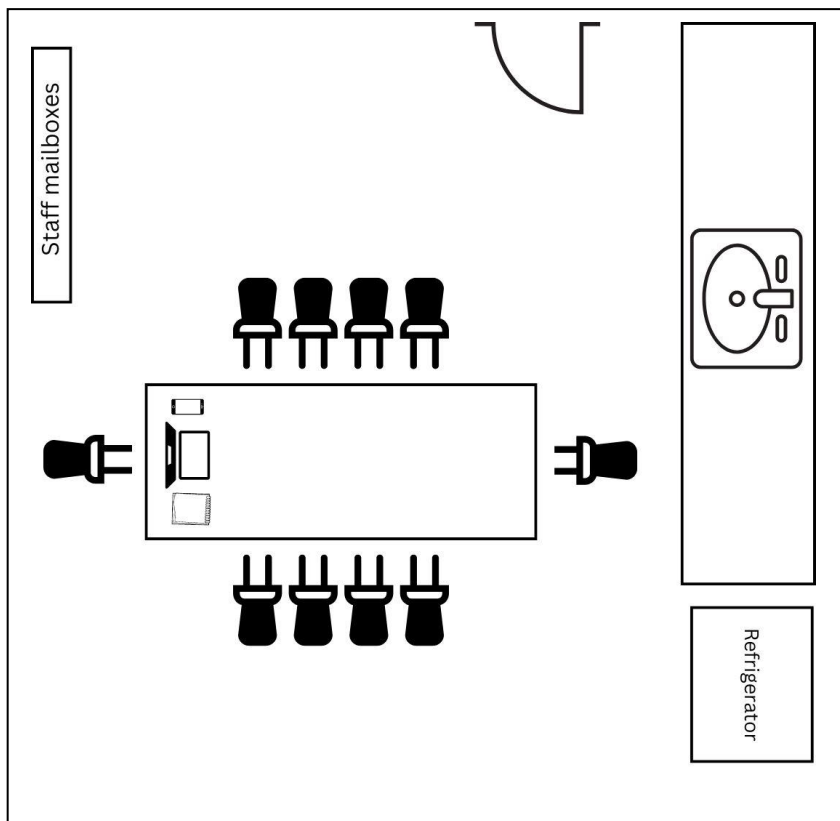
Because Merriam (1998) writes that “the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it *simultaneously* with data collection” (p. 162, emphasis in the original), I made time each evening after my classroom visits for data analysis. During these early analysis sessions, I took the following steps, again recommended by Merriam: reviewed the purpose of my study, read and reread my notes from the day, read through student artifacts, noted things to look for or ask about in my next data collection activity, and wrote a memo to myself designed to capture reflections and emerging themes. During each of these evening data analysis sessions, I compared new data to previous data sets. This meant that, as the study wound down, I already had a tentative set of themes from which to work. The end result, I hope, is that the data I present here is, to borrow Merriam’s words, “both parsimonious and illuminating” (p. 163).

### ***Focus Groups***

Focus groups were conducted after students completed their novels to be able to facilitate a conversation around the literature circles experience as a whole. Six students in class periods two through five were selected for focus group participation using purposive sampling. After checking into their language arts classroom for attendance purposes, students were instructed to make their way to the school’s staff room, where I conducted the focus groups. The school staff room was determined to be the best space for focus groups because it is a small space with table and chairs already available. The staff room is rarely used during the school day, as staff are busy teaching their classes. This allowed focus groups to proceed with some privacy and minimal interruptions. Figure 1 is provided to aid in visualizing the staff room space.

**Figure 1.**

*Layout of the Staff Room Where Focus Groups Were Held*



Once they entered the room, participants were invited to find a seat around the table. Many appeared nervous, which I guessed arose from the fact that none of the participants had ever been a part of a focus group before. To put participants at ease, I explained to students what a focus group is and shared with them the materials in front of me: my cell phone would record participant responses using the Otter.ai app, my laptop was open to allow me to scroll through focus group questions, and a notebook and pen would be used to take notes. Additionally, prior to beginning each focus group, I explained to students that candid responses are helpful and reminded participants that they were not being graded on their responses. I demonstrated the Otter.ai app, showing students that, while their words and voices are recorded, their names are



not (Otter.ai records and transcribes conversations by labeling different speakers as “Speaker 1,” “Speaker 2,” and so on). Because the informed consent process is an ongoing process that requires continual, voluntary consent from research participants, I asked students if they were comfortable with the focus group protocols as I had explained them. Participants agreed to participate and to have their voices recorded.

Focus group interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, meaning that I came prepared with eight interview questions but also allowed the conversation to flow naturally. Sometimes, additional questions arose, either from me or a participant. Because of the semi-structured format, each focus group was able to address my prepared questions and to have a conversation that was enriched by its ability to flow organically. While participants spoke, I listened and took careful notes. When a participant said something I knew fit into my then-evolving codebook and tentative themes list, I added a star to the margin as well as a time stamp from Otter.ai.

When each focus group was concluded, participants were sent back to class. I immediately reviewed my notes for correctness and completeness. I also ensured that my transcription software had functioned properly and that the transcription matched my notes. At the conclusion of a recording session, the Otter.ai software provided a complete transcript, a summary of each focus group, keywords, an outline of the conversation, and a percentage of the time each speaker talked during the recording. It is important to note that this software provides a transcript that has already removed filler words, interjections, and hesitation markers such as “hmm,” “um,” “ah,” and “uh.” An audio recording of each session is also captured, so it’s possible to move back and forth between audio and transcript. I found myself doing this

frequently in post-focus group analysis to check the transcript against audio qualities that can't be captured in words such as tone, inflection, and sarcasm.

Just as I did with artifacts in my evening data immersion sessions, I reviewed and coded the transcripts of each focus group. At the conclusion of data collection, I organized the resulting codes from all data into seven themes, based on similarities in their nature. I organized each theme under a research question: *Feeling seen, underrepresentation, and pleasure in learning new things* related to RQ1; *intolerance and real-world issues* related to RQ2; and *specific recall and engagement* related to RQ3. Presented here is a list of my major codes along with brief descriptions of each:

1. Feeling seen. This is about ways in which participants report recognizing themselves, their friends, or their family members in a text.
2. Representation. This label was applied to comments/artifacts discussing diversity (or lack thereof) present in books.
3. Pleasure in learning new things. This category encompasses moments when participants report deriving enjoyment from learning new things, such as learning about new places or learning about new cultures.
4. Intolerance. This category includes any discussion of stereotypes, or instances of observed prejudice, racism, sexism, and homophobia in participant comments and artifacts.
5. Real world issues. Beyond issues of intolerance raised above, any awareness of and/or concern about "real world" or social justice issues such as poverty and mental health was included.

6. Specific recall. Participants varied in their ability to recall specific details such as sensory description, scenes, or dialogue.
7. Engagement. This label was applied any time participants identified liking/disliking beginnings, endings, plot twists, characters, etc.
8. Choice. This category includes any data units relating to participants getting to choose the book they read.

Table 9 provides a summary of how the codes and themes were organized and lists a brief description of observed commonalities in participant responses.

To present the data from this study, I have organized and framed the narrative that follows according to the research questions. I am presenting these data through a summary of my field observations alongside quotes from the interviews with the participants and excerpts from collected artifacts. In an effort to present only the “marrow” of my findings, I have selected a small sampling of quotes that are representative of my overall findings. In all cases (except where noted otherwise), selected quotes represent opinions that recurred multiple times during data analysis. Opinions are not offered in isolation but are intended to be read as typical participant responses representing trends observed in data analysis. Below, each research question is followed by a summary of findings and a deeper dive into participant responses. Please note that, in participant written responses, grammatical errors have been left intact. In spoken responses, syntax has been left intact, even where it resulted in grammatically incorrect sentence constructions.

**Table 9***Codes, Themes, and Commonalities in Responses*

Codes	Themes	Commonalities in Responses
Friends Family Myself Embracing roots	Feeling seen	Participants reported liking characters who remind them of themselves or their loved ones.
Diversity Curriculum Book recommendations	Representation	Participants recommended books featuring diverse characters to their diverse peers. Participants recognize that most books in ELA curriculum are white-centric.
New cultures New places	Pleasure in learning new things	Participants report enjoying reading about “window characters” because they enjoy learning about new people/places/cultures.
Racism Sexism Sexual prejudice Stereotypes Deportation	Intolerance	Participants identify forces of intolerance working in the world, both historically and in a modern context.
Mental health Poverty COVID-19 Apathy	Real-world issues	Participants cite an awareness of and concern about “real world” or social justice issues such as poverty and mental health.
Sensory detail Scene description Dialogue Boring Hard to read	Specific recall	Participants often cited specific textual details from their books to illustrate their opinions. Descriptions were much more specific and vivid for YA texts.
Beginnings Endings Plot Character	Engagement	A variety of factors impacted participants’ enjoyment of their text. Their degree of transportation depended on the book’s beginning, ending, overall plot, and characters that acted in believable ways.
Choice Agency Book tasting More likely to read	Choice	Participants preferred selecting their own book to reading a teacher-selected book. Students reported that the element of choice resulted in finishing the novel, less fake reading, and agency over their learning.

### ***Qualitative Analysis of Research Question 1***

RQ1: What effect does reading young adult fiction have on adolescent empathy?

Participants reported deriving pleasure from reading about both window and mirror characters. Many participants cited enjoying reading about characters who reminded them of their friends or family members, and others discussed how finding a character they can identify with makes them feel seen. On the flip side, participants also enjoy reading about window characters so they can learn about new cultures and new places. Many commented on how infrequently they encounter books featuring diversity and frequently talked about how they know a diverse book would be a great read for a diverse friend (for example, a participant who read a book featuring a queer protagonist might recommend this title to a queer peer). While participants saw the importance of having mirrors in their own lives and in their diverse friends' lives – and while many reportedly derived enjoyment from learning about the world through window characters – they stopped short of recommending diverse books to white peers.

**Evidence of theme 1: Feeling seen.** Participants reported enjoying seeing themselves reflected in a book, whether through a major character or a minor character. A participant who read *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding said, “I am a teenage boy and most of the characters in the book are young boys so I can relate to them easily.” Some found the way a mirror character acted to be confirmation of their personal value system, as in this reader of Rory Power’s *Wilder Girls*: “I would go to great lengths to protect my friends and loved ones just as hetty does in the novel.” Some participants even reported feeling less alone in the world after encountering a fictional character, such as this participant, who read *Pride* by Ibi Zoboi:

Us, like Zuri and her sisters, have the same problems: people changing, relationships, college and expectations... I kinda felt less alone because those are some things that I

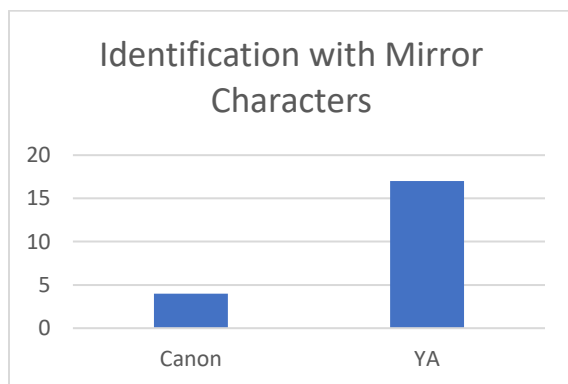
struggle with everyday. I think we can all learn from Zuri to be grateful for our family and pride of our traditions, but also that changing is normal and part of the process and first impressions are not always right.

In the same way that some participants found value in seeing aspects of themselves in characters, participants valued finding reflections of their loved ones in their novels. Here, in a journal entry about Erika Sánchez’s *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, a participant wrote, “One character that reflects my mom is Julias mom. She used to act pretty strict but now it is fine because I am older. She used to act like ama but really it is because she cared about her daughters.” Another participant said, “I think it’s super cute when I can see my closest friends reflected in the story, because it’s like the group is being moved into the book.”

Participants who read YA novels reported discovering mirror characters with greater frequency than those who read canon novels (see Figure 2).

## Figure 2

*Frequency Distribution of Identification with Mirror Characters in Canon and YA Novels*



**Evidence of theme 2: Representation.** Focus group participants were asked to reflect on the novels they were required to read throughout middle school and high school. These are teacher-selected texts that were an integral part of the language arts curriculum and, accordingly,

to a participant's educational experience. Participants recalled reading *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, and *Maus* by Art Spiegelman. Some books they could not recall by name, referring to them by descriptors such as "that book about Lewis and Clark."

Participants recognized that the novels they have read throughout their secondary schooling lacked diversity. One participant expressed surprise when seeing *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* as a novel choice, saying, "I chose that because, I don't know, I just don't see a lot of like Mexican authors write books and I was like, 'Oh, that's cool.'"

Just as the previous theme establishes that participants can easily see the value in a mirror novel for themselves, participants were easily able to apply this logic to both authors and other readers. One participant, who read Nigh Vo's *The Chosen and the Beautiful*, a retelling of *The Great Gatsby*, said,

She's [Jordan Baker] queer in a time that was not considered okay at all, she's Vietnamese in a time with a lot of hatred for any Asian person in America. I think the author wants to retell a story that some people didn't see themselves in.

Another focus group participant recognized ways in which *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* reflects the immigrant experience:

I believe the author likely wrote this story to give a voice to the experience of young people from immigrant backgrounds. To challenge stereotypes and to spark conversations about cultural identity. The intended audience may include young adults from similar backgrounds who can relate to Julia's struggles, as well as readers from diverse backgrounds.

Another reader of the same novel recommended it to others of her own heritage, explaining that:

I think lots of little Mexican girls that are in a toxic household currently would need a main character to tell them to follow their dreams and passion. This is so important because so many girls are ushered into having a family and never pursuing their dreams since birth.

Finally, a reader of *Wilder Girls* said, “The casual representation in the books is really nice to see. I think LGBTQ+ people who like to see representation would love this book.”

Participants applied this logic to issues of representation beyond race and sexuality, too. One participant wrote in a journal entry that “the author is representing those who have experienced depression/grief with the character Julia and her struggles. I'm sure there have been readers who have had similar experiences to her and feel seen when reading this book.”

**Evidence of theme 3: Pleasure in learning new things.** Moving beyond participants recognizing the value of mirror characters for themselves and others, participants reported finding pleasure in reading to learn new things about the world around them. One reader said, “When I read, I like to imagine my life if it were like theirs.” One participant said this about *Pride*:

We also learn about the "life in the hood" when Ibi Zoboi describes the long basketball matches at the park and the teenager meeting at the Bushwick bodega: I loved learning more about this part of New York that I didn't know.

Following up on that comment, another focus group participant said,

I like also reading about characters that do not represent either me or my friends, because it's fun to see those new personalities and behaviors, and I think they help you understand



what you look for in a person, because you are not influenced by the similarities to the people you know.

### ***Qualitative Analysis of Research Question 2***

RQ 2: What effect does reading young adult fiction have on adolescent intolerance?

Participants from both the control and the treatment groups spoke about intolerance through both an historical and a modern lens. Participants noted that intolerance, especially racism, is not a new problem, nor one that is going away any time soon. Those in the treatment group who read YA novels reported seeing a connection between issues in their novel and the real world, whereas those in the control group struggled to connect their book to the real world. Racism, sexism, and sexual prejudice were cited as types of intolerance participants encountered most frequently, and many participants raised other social justice issues such as poverty and mental health in connection with their novels.

**Evidence of theme 4: Intolerance.** In a journal entry, participants were asked to reflect on ways in which their novels connected to the real world. There was a stark contrast between the treatment and control group responses. The control group struggled to find concrete connections to much of anything, whereas treatment group participants easily connected their novels to issues of intolerance and theme 5, social justice. Here is a selection of representative responses from the control group:

- About *Call of the Wild* by Jack London: “Dog napping might still be a thing. and dog sled teams are a thing but thats not a issue.”
- About *Call of the Wild*: “I dont know something about dogs and them being abandoned. buck got left multiple times and lost a lot of things.”

- About *Lord of the Flies*: “I don't think the characters or events connect in any way with anything I've experienced or heard about in my life.”
- About *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald: I don't really remember what problems were in my book except for Daisy getting fought over by her husband and Mr. Gatsby. He said that Daisy doesn't love her husband anymore, just Mr. Gatsby and only Mr. Gatsby.”

Here is a selection of representative responses from the treatment group:

- About *Pride*: “I think the biggest connection with our society that my book, "Pride" by Izi Zobo, it's the embracement of our roots and traditions and the fight against racism.”
- About *My Dear Henry*: “Another thing is people changing their gender, which isn't bad. Homophobia has been a thing for a long time, which is bad.”
- About *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*: “I think the author of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* was spreading a message of hope and understanding. That things will get better and that we should try to understand other people.”
- About *The Chosen and the Beautiful*: “To acknowledge the racism and how difficult it is growing up around racism and homophobic people. also the poverty and the difference between the higher ups and how difficult it is to live in that world.”

**Evidence of theme 5: Real-world issues.** While theme 4 focuses specifically on issues of intolerance in modern society, I noted that many participants spoke and wrote about ways in which their novels connected to social justice issues. Participants easily (and expectedly) drew

parallels between the pandemic and the novel *Wilder Girls*, which is about a group of boarding school girls who are suddenly quarantined due to an outbreak of “the Tox.” One participant said, “It reminds me of when COVID happened and we had to quarantine when we got sick from it. Another said, “The government quarantined us just like the girls got quarantined in the book. Then when the girls broke the quarantine, they were punished. They were also forced to take the ‘cure.’”

Participants expressed equal concern over issues of intolerance and broader issues of social injustice and political import such as mental health concerns and poverty. *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* struck a particular chord with participants, who wrote about the importance of protagonist Julia’s struggle with depression and suicidal ideation. Here is a sample of responses:

- I think the author wants people to learn about part of the Mexican culture that is not at all talked about. In Mexican culture, Lots of parents are raised in difficult scenarios and often it is always a loop of traumatized people raising more traumatized people. The generational trauma passed down is something that no one really talks about but is something that affects loads of families everyday. I think the author wanted to speak about this because of how rare it actually is to say out loud.
- I think coping with trauma is pretty important. I think that it isn’t always focused on heavily in like schooling or things like that. I think it has increased in focus through social media though.

- This book was made to address the problem of depression and suicide in teenagers. I think it is very important and that people should read it to understand how it is a real issue and not just teens being dramatic.
- I think the messages and themes of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* are important and meaningful today. Not losing hope can be so difficult. Understanding others can be difficult too. This book spreads a message of hope and complexities, something I think many people forget.
- Families being separated by deportation, teenage suicide, grief, and other topics in the book are real issues today.

A participant who read *The Catcher in the Rye* connected to protagonist Holden Caulfield's mental health struggles, saying, "So many people suffer from depression and anxiety. People should know how big of an issue this is because some people don't realize that this is a big issue." Another participant, who read *Cold the Night, Fast the Wolves*, wrote that "Poverty is a real world issue that lives on everyday. There are many low income house complexes/ apartments where events similar to those in the book take place."

### ***Qualitative Analysis of Research Question 3***

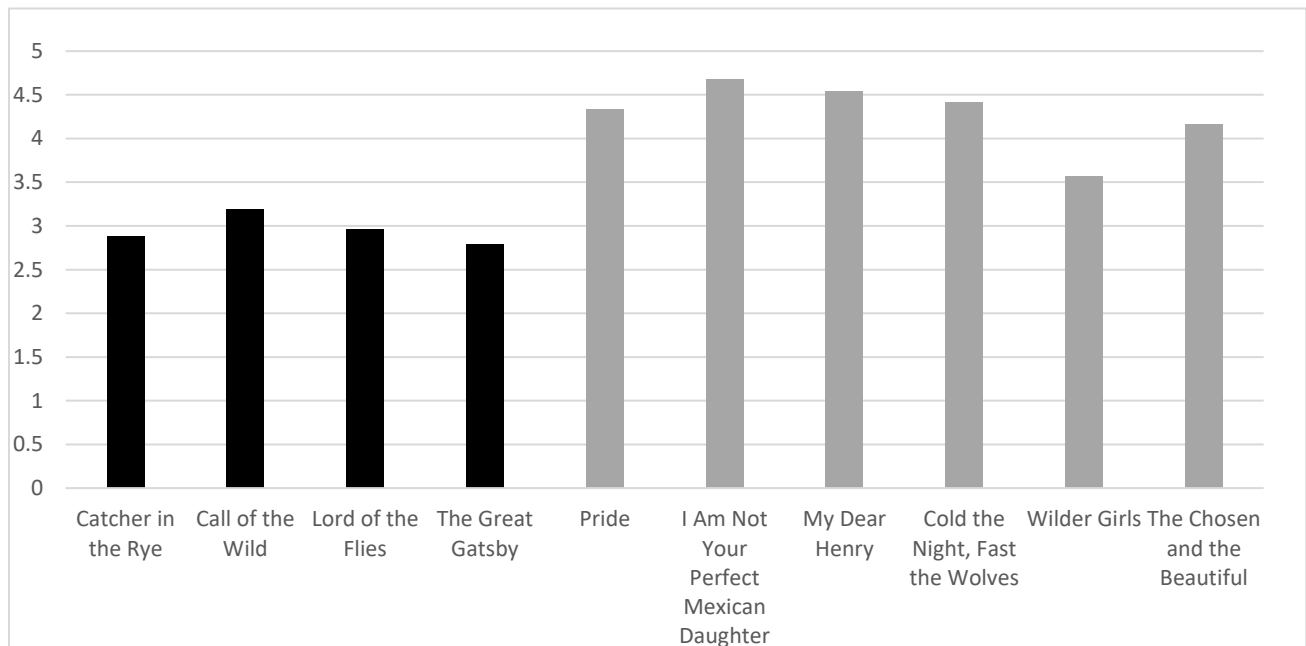
RQ 3: What effect does transportation have on an individual reader's empathy and intolerance levels?

I found that the first chapter of a book matters to adolescent readers. Readers who report being immediately transported by their novel wanted to keep reading, while others found themselves less invested in the story when the beginning felt slow or confusing. Multiple students reported being confused by their novels starting in media res, or in the middle of the plot, though others found too much exposition in the beginning of a book to be boring. Students

who reported being transported by their novel were able to recall specific scenes and details with great levels of specificity. Some students from the control group reported feeling transported by their novel, and many students from the treatment group reported feeling transported (see Figure 3). Participants reported that the number one factor that determined their level of transportation was the ability to choose the book they read for literature circles.

**Figure 3**

*Self-Reported Levels of Transportation*



**Evidence of theme 6: Specific recall.** The level of specificity with which participants can talk about their novel was an indicator of how transported that individual felt. Participants who reported their attention wandering while reading, or who reported disliking their novel, did not describe their books with the same level of detail as those who reported being transported by their text. During a focus group, one participant who described themselves as being transported by the novel *Pride* said this:

Especially in the parts where Madrina is talking, the author describes in a really characteristic way, all the colorful dresses and the smells, the dark basement where Madrina sings and does these spells, and we are immediately transported in South America.

Another participant, who read *The Chosen and the Beautiful*, wrote the following in a journal entry describing the beginning of the novel:

It started with a captivating scene. Daisy, an eccentric and vivacious woman, was seen seeking the help of her childhood friend, Jordan, to select the perfect dress for an upcoming party. The story commences with a gust of wind that enters Daisy's East Egg mansion, causing the curtains to flutter and the atmosphere to come alive. The wind swirls around the room, lifting Daisy's hair and dress, and stirring the air like dandelion seeds or foam. The scene is reminiscent of two young women in white dresses, carefree and light as a feather. The story takes place in bustling New York City, during a time that predates the lavish parties of the enigmatic Jay Gatsby.

Some participants found their books to be “hard to understand/confusing” and/or “boring.” To obtain an objective measure of the difficulty level of the various books, I present Table 10, which lists each title’s Lexile score, a number commonly used to interpret a book’s difficulty level (higher numbers correspond to more difficult texts). With the exceptions of *The Great Gatsby* and *The Chosen and the Beautiful*, the books generally fall within the same Lexile range, meaning that the perception of “hard to understand/confusing” is likely not the result of text complexity.

**Table 10***Lexile Scores and Self-Reported Levels of Confusion and Engagement with Texts*

Book Title	Lexile Score	# of times “boring” was coded	# of times “hard to understand/confusing” was coded
<i>The Lord of the Flies</i>	770	3	7
<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	1010	3	5
<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>	790	1	1
<i>Call of the Wild</i>	790	2	1
<i>Wilder Girls</i>	730	4	3
<i>The Chosen and the Beautiful</i>	1210-1400*	2	3
<i>I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter</i>	730	1	0
<i>Cold the Night, Fast the Wolves</i>	610-800*	1	1
<i>Pride</i>	760	0	0
<i>My Dear Henry</i>	760	0	1

*Note 1.* “Boring” and “confusing” are coded according to each time they occur in data analysis. If a participant referred to the book as “boring” in an artifact and then again in a focus group, each instance is counted separately.

*Note 2.* A range is given for starred texts, because these are texts not included in the Lexile database. The range was determined using the Lexile Text Analyzer tool.

**Evidence of theme 7: Engagement.** It is no surprise that some participants reported enjoying their choice novel and some reported disliking their choice novel. One finding of this study is that the first chapter of a book is critically important to a reader’s engagement. In focus groups, participants reached consensus and agreed that they can tell within the first two chapters if they are going to enjoy a novel or not. Interestingly, the majority of focus group participants

said they will finish a book whether they are enjoying it or not. One participant said, “If I start a book I'm gonna finish it just because it annoys me if I don't.” Participants reported liking an action-packed opening sequence and disliking book beginnings that have too much detail and don't get to the point. Here is a sample of passionate opinions about the importance of a novel's first few pages, excerpted from participants' first literature circle responses:

- *Wilder Girls*: The intro to my book was horrible. I didn't catch my attention, it was long and boring. It drug out too much detail and didn't get to the point. I had to give everything in me to not give up and pick a different book
- *Call of the Wild*: the opening is slow and boring it doesn't really grab my attention. I feel like if there was more action and more detail i would be interested.
- *Catcher in the Rye*: the first chapter just feels like a yap session. Which is good in some aspects but it also can make the chapter boring. Overall though it's a solid opening and it kept my attention for the most part.
- *Lord of the Flies*: The beginning is very interesting. But the book starts in the middle instead of the beginning. They kids are just start stranded on an island. I think the opening would of been better if it started off as them on the plane and then it crashing.
- *Wilder Girls*: In all honesty, it was a very slow opening. The interesting story elements weren't revealed until the end. After reading the entire book, I can see why it was written this way, as it opens possibilities to really good plot twists and reveals. However, without knowing the rest of the context, it made the beginning a bit of a drag.
- *Wilder Girls* starts off a little slow but then starts to pick up. The author did a good job at grabbing the readers attention. During the beginning, you don't understand a lot of things



going on, but then later it all makes sense. There is an element of suspense throughout the entire book. Its almost like you have to finish reading in order to satisfy your curiosity.

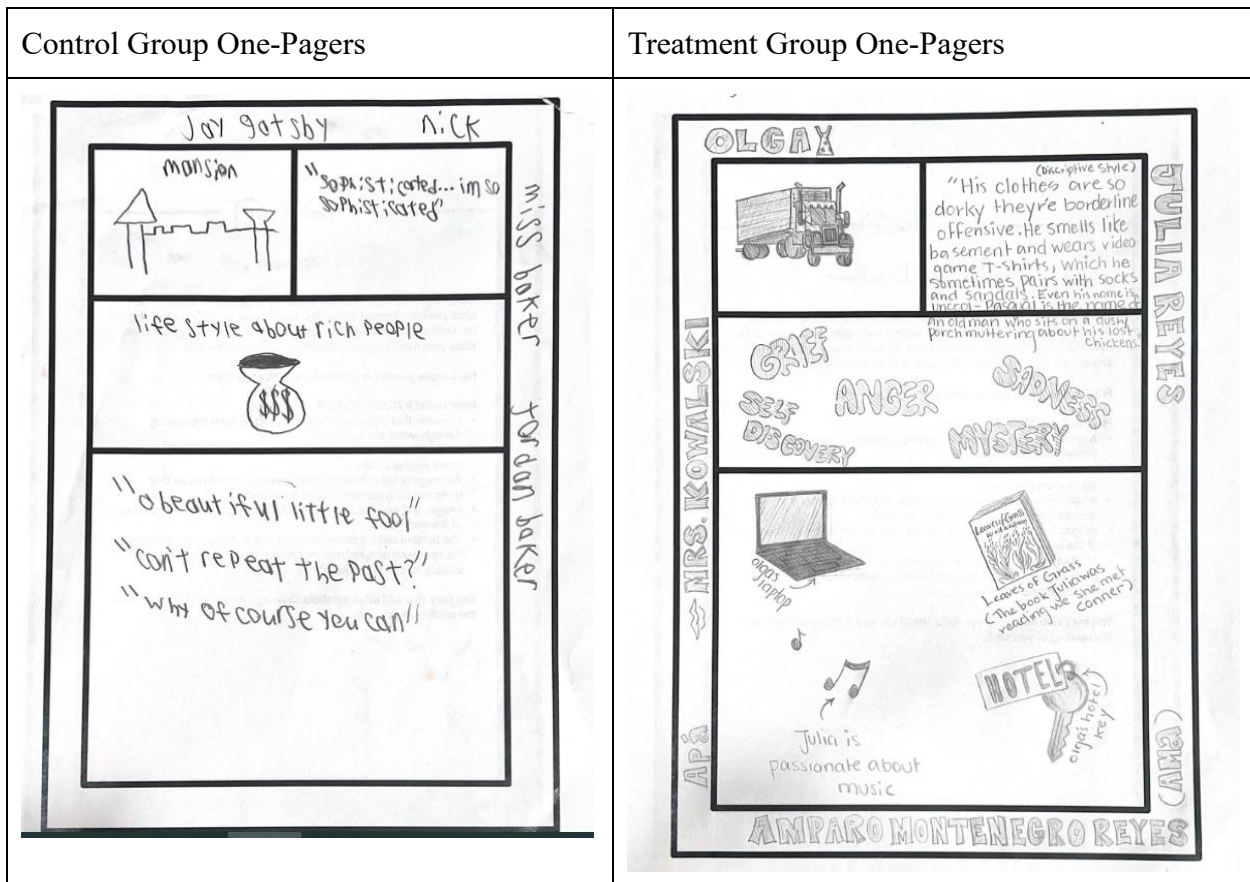
- *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*: It really caught my attention. The first sentence states, "What's surprised me the most about seeing my sister dead is the lingering smirk on her face." Right of the bat this makes me wonder how she died/want to read further to find out. I don't read very often and most books leave me uninterested from the first few pages. So a sentence like this to start had me hooked.
- *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*: The opening of "I'm Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter" immediately grabbed my attention with its raw and honest portrayal of the julias inner turmoil. It sets the tone for the story by introducing the complexities of Julia's identity and her strained relationship with her family. The opening effectively provides necessary context about Julia's cultural background and the expectations placed upon her, laying the foundation for the themes explored throughout the book.

I also found evidence of engagement in art submitted by participants, especially in the one-pagers they completed. Participants were asked to create a one-page document sharing key ideas and information from their text so far. YA novel one-pagers far exceeded canon one-pagers in the level of detail with which they were completed. Participants were not required to use color when creating their one-pagers; 17 students opted to add color to their one-pagers. This additional step can be seen as evidence of engagement because participants spent extra time on their assignments that was not required. Of the 17 colored one-pagers submitted, 13 were submitted by YA literature circle participants, and four were submitted by canon novel literature circle participants. Figure 4 presents a selection of representative one-pagers from the control and treatment groups.

**Figure 4**  
*One-Pagers from Control and Treatment Group*

Control Group One-Pagers	Treatment Group One-Pagers
<p><i>Pissy Pissy Ralph</i></p> <p>"Ralph came for work and I stole by Pissy"          "we must stay here till we die"</p> <p>shall</p> <p>"How does he know were here"          "The expression of pain and concentration is returned to Pissy face"          "You can't swim Pissy"</p> <p><i>Blind</i></p> <p><i>Group of wolf</i></p> <p><i>Blind</i></p>	<p><i>Tex</i></p> <p>"Nobody goes past the fence - that's the deal. You, the most important, and you're one of the guys allowed to work!"</p> <p>"Two before the wilderness reached inside, it was scoping into the darkness."</p> <p><i>Blind</i> <i>Survival</i> <i>tox</i></p> <p>"and they cut the land line that first day of the tox. To keep things classified. To manage information."          "The cure is coming, as long as we stay alive."          "We shouldn't be here. This place isn't ours anymore."</p> <p><i>REESE</i></p>
<p><i>Klondike gold rush</i></p> <p>This was the first time back had called in itself a sufficient reason, to drive the dog in a cage."</p> <p>The power of ancestral memory and primitive instincts, adapt and over come.</p> <p>the laws of the wilderness,</p> <p>Canada In stinct          1903 alaska Jack London</p> <p><i>couriers Francois and Permytt</i></p> <p><i>DOG</i> <i>DOG</i> <i>SPIT</i></p>	<p><i>Sam</i></p> <p>"I don't have you..."</p> <p>"What the hell is wrong with you..."</p> <p><i>Everywhere</i></p> <p>every five minutes a wolf is used for fighting. Donate now. 5000\$ a month.</p> <p>Please Donate.</p>

**Figure 4**  
*One-Pagers from Control and Treatment Group, Continued*



**Evidence of theme 8: Choice.** Participant reactions to being able to self-select their literature circle novels was overwhelmingly positive, so much so that the importance of choice in relation to intolerance constitutes one of this study's major findings. Every single participant from both treatment and control groups reported that choice made their reading experience more positive.

Several participants recalled enjoying the "book tasting" (Figure 5) that preceded the beginning of the literature circles. In the book tasting class period, students were escorted to their "table" (desks pushed together and covered by a tablecloth) and given menus (which featured descriptions of the books students would be "tasting"). Students were asked to sample (read

excerpts from) each book and write down pertinent details on a graphic organizer (see Appendix A) that doubled as their placemat. At the end of the class period, they wrote down their choice novel and were given an after dinner mint when the bell rang. One participant had this to say about the book tasting:

What I liked about getting to chose my own novel is the choice. I got to sample each book before to see what book interests me the most to read. Instead of being forced to read a book I got the choice and it makes me want to actually read when I get that choice.

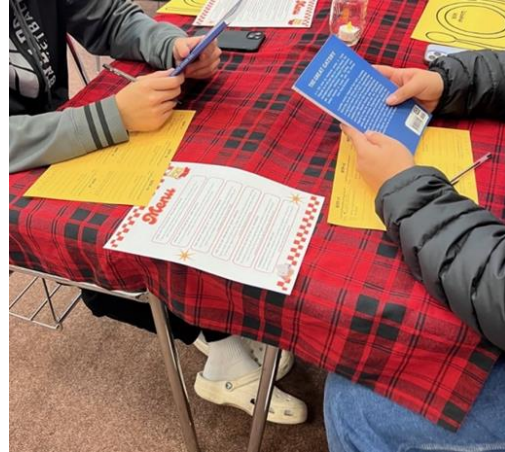
Some participants advocated for even more choice in the future (for this study participants were given a choice between six preselected novels): “I mean we only got four options that you picked so I don't think it was very good but I guess getting to choose between four is better than none.” Whether or not participants ultimately liked or disliked their novel, the ability to self-select their title mattered, and it mattered deeply:

Being able to choose my own novel automatically made me feel more inclined to read and enjoy it. I got to pick a novel that was suited to my own tastes and interests, which made me much more invested. Not to mention, reading a book I enjoy always makes it harder to put it down.

One participant even reported that the choice novel was the *first* book they have ever enjoyed reading: “I don't read often, this lit circle book was the first book I fully read and enjoyed.”

Some participants specifically selected their books to be mirrors: “I am Mexican and so getting the opportunity to choose a book rooted in Mexican culture really helped me understand more and relate to the book as well.”

**Figure 5**  
*Photographs of Book Tasting Activity Set-Up*



Even participants who disliked their novel saw the choice as their own and accepted ownership over the reading process: “Even though I didn't end up liking my book it was cool that I was able to choose.”

### **Quantitative Phase**

In this section, I present the findings for the quantitative data analyzed with descriptive statistics. Results from three self-report data measures were analyzed: the *Intolerant Schema Measure* (ISM), which students took as a pre- and post-test; the *Interpersonal Reactivity Index* (IRI), which students took as a pre-and post-test; and the *Green & Brock Narrative Transportation Scale* (NTS), which students took after completing their literature circle novel.

The ISM is a 54-item questionnaire in which respondents indicate how descriptive each statement is of their beliefs. Respondents rate their beliefs on a scale of one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). The ISM yields one total “intolerance” score (with a higher number

indicating greater levels of intolerance) and sub-scale scores in the following areas: homophobia, religious intolerance, economic belief, racism, ageism, and sexism. Study participants took the ISM prior to beginning their literature circle novels in order to establish a baseline intolerance score (as well as sub-scale intolerance scores). Study participants again took the ISM after completing their literature circle novels. Pre- and post-test data were then analyzed to see what effect, if any, the novel type (canon versus YA) and self-reported reading transportation had on overall intolerance levels. A full version of the survey instrument appears in Appendix C.

The IRI is a 28-item questionnaire in which respondents indicate how descriptive each statement is of their beliefs. Respondents rate their beliefs on a scale of A (does not describe me well to F (describes me very well). The IRI does not yield one overall empathy score but rather four sub-scale scores in the following areas: perspective-taking (PT), fantasy (F), empathic concern (EC), and personal distress (PD), with higher numbers indicating greater levels of empathy. Study participants took the IRI prior to beginning their literature circle novels in order to establish baseline sub-scale scores. Study participants again took the IRI after completing their literature circle novels. Pre- and post-test data were then analyzed to see what effect, if any, the novel type (canon versus YA) and self-reported reading transportation had on empathy levels using the PT pre- and post-test scores. I chose to focus on the PT sub-scale for this study because the PT definition, the “spontaneous attempts to adopt the perspectives of other people and see things from their point of view” (Davis, 1980, p. 2), most closely matches the type of empathy explored in Chapter 1 (see pages 16-18). A full version of the survey instrument appears in Appendix B.

The NTS is a 12-item questionnaire in which respondents indicate how descriptive each statement is of their beliefs. The NTS was modified for this study according to the instructions



given by Green and Brock (2000). The final item on the questionnaire is: “I had a vivid mental image of the book’s main character.” Researchers using the NTS are encouraged to repeat this question for as many protagonists as there are in a given text. Participants in this study were asked to select one character whom they perceive to be the main character and respond with that character is mind. For all 12 items, respondents rate their beliefs on a scale of one (not at all) to seven (very much). The NTS yields one total “transportation” score (with a higher number indicating greater levels of transportation). Study participants took the NTS after completing their literature circle novels. A pre- and post-test is not feasible with the NTS, which is designed to measure how a reader feels only after completing a text. A full version of the survey instrument appears in Appendix D.

All statistical analysis was done using the statistics program SPSS, version 29.0.2.0. I ran an ANOVA to check for comparability of the treatment and control groups prior to the start of the study as well as to analyze the change in group performance on the ISM and IRI over the course of the study, and between-group differences at the end of the study. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table X.

**Table 11**  
*Descriptive Statistics*

Group	ISM Pre-test			ISM Post-test			IRI-PT Pre-test			IRI-PT Post-test		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
YA	28	2.06	2.93	28	1.70	0.45	28	3.56	2.43	28	3.56	0.68
Canon	15	2.24	2.56	15	2.20	0.87	15	3.25	2.28	15	3.58	0.68

RQ 1 asks, “What effect does reading young adult fiction have on adolescent empathy?”

The corresponding null hypothesis is: There will be no difference in post-test empathy levels

after reading young adult fiction as compared to reading fiction from the canon. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to test this null hypothesis with the type of book acting as the independent variable and the IRI-PT Post-test scores acting as the dependent variable.

Prior to conducting the ANOVA, I checked to ensure that the assumptions of an ANOVA were met. The assumptions of an ANOVA are:

1. An ANOVA can only be conducted if there is no relationship between the subjects in each sample (i.e., the subjects in the first group cannot also be in the second group).

2. The dependent variable must be normally distributed so that the middle scores are the most frequent and the extreme scores are the least frequent (neither skewness nor kurtosis are present).

3. There must be homogeneity of variance, meaning that the deviation of scores (measured by standard deviation) is similar between populations.

The first assumption – the observations are independent – is met because my independent variable (book type) consists of two categorical, independent groups. IRI skewness is:  $[-.069/.361 = -0.19]$  within  $\pm 2.5$ , therefore within the acceptable range of skewness. IRI kurtosis is:  $[-.336/.709 = 0.47]$  within  $\pm 2.5$ , therefore within the acceptable range of kurtosis. In testing for homogeneity of variance, the Levene's test returns a nonsignificant result,  $p=.358$ ;  $p > .05$ , meaning that homogeneity of variance is present.

First, I conducted two between-groups ANOVAs to determine whether there was a significant pre-test difference between the treatment and control groups and whether there was a significant post-test difference between the treatment and control groups. I determined that IRI



PT scores are not significantly different between treatment and control groups at the time of the pre-test ( $p = .122$ ). The results of the IRI PT pre-test between subjects ANOVA are in Table 12.

**Table 12**

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects, IRI PT Pre-Test*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Corrected Model	.934*	1	.934	2.493	.122
Intercept	453.752	1	453.752	1211.593	<.001
BookType	.934	1	.934	2.493	.122
Error	15.355	41	.375		
Total	529.477	43			
Corrected Total	16.288	42			

*Note. R Squared = .057 (Adjusted R Squared = .034).*

I determined that IRI PT scores are significantly different between treatment and control groups at the time of the post-test ( $p = .01$ ). The between-subjects results tell us that there was a statistically significant difference in increase in empathy score based on the type of books students were reading  $F(1,41) = 6.79$ ,  $p = .01$ . The results of the IRI PT post-test between subjects ANOVA are in Table 13.

**Table 13***Tests of Between-Subjects Effects, IRI PT Post-Test*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Intercept	983.146	1	983.146	1330.221	<.001	.970	1330.221	1.000
BookType	5.019	1	5.019	6.791	.013	.142	6.791	.721
Error	30.302	41	.739					

*Note.* Computed using alpha = .05

Next, I conducted a within-groups ANOVA to determine whether the DV (IRI PT-post-test scores) are statistically significant related to the IV (type of book). Tables 14 and 15 show the results of the within-subjects ANOVA.

**Table 14***Tests of Within Subjects Contrasts, IRI PT Repeated Measures*

Source	Empathy	Type III Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power*
Empathy	Linear	1.51	1	1.51	5.02	.03	.11	5.02	.59
Empathy* BookType	Linear	.76	1	.76	2.53	.12	.06	2.53	.34
Error (Empathy)	Linear	12.37	41	.30					

*Note.* Computed using alpha = .05

**Table 15***Pairwise Comparisons: BookType\*Empathy*

Book Type	Empathy	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	1	3.253	.158	2.934	3.572
	2	3.334	.211	2.908	3.760
2	1	3.562	.116	3.329	3.796
	2	4.039	.154	3.727	4.350

The within-subjects results tell us that, for all students combined, there was a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-test empathy scores  $F(1,41) = 5.02, p = .03$ . When taken as a whole, students in this study experienced an increase in empathy from pre- to post-test.

Students who read YA fiction had statistically significantly higher empathy scores at the end of the study ( $M = 4.04$ ) than students who read from the canon ( $M = 3.33$ ), although their empathy scores at the start of the study showed no difference between the groups.

RQ 2 asks, “What effect does reading young adult fiction have on adolescent intolerance?” The corresponding null hypothesis is: There will be no difference in pre- and post-test intolerance levels after reading young adult fiction as compared to reading fiction from the canon. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to test this null hypothesis with the type of book acting as the independent variable and the postISM scores acting as the dependent variable.

Prior to conducting the ANOVA, I checked to ensure that the assumptions of an ANOVA were met. ISM skewness results are:  $[\frac{.894}{.361} = 2.48]$  within  $\pm 2.5$ , therefore within the acceptable range of skewness. ISM kurtosis results are:  $[\frac{.474}{.709} = 0.67]$  within  $\pm 2.5$ , therefore within the acceptable range of kurtosis. In testing for homogeneity of variance, the Levene's test returns a nonsignificant result,  $p = .518$ ;  $p > .05$  of variance, meaning that homogeneity of variance is present.

First, I conducted two between-groups ANOVAs to determine whether there was a significant pre-test difference between the treatment and control groups and whether there was a significant post-test difference between the treatment and control groups. I determined that ISM pre-test scores are not significantly different between treatment and control groups at the time of the pre-test ( $p = .47$ ). The results of the ISM pre-test between subjects ANOVA are in Table 16.

**Table 16**

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects, ISM Pre-Test*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Corrected Model	.36*	1	.36	.47	.50
Intercept	181.09	1	181.09	236.57	<.001
BookType	.36	1	.36	.47	.50
Error	31.38	41	.77		
Total	225.70	43			
Corrected Total	31.75	42			

*Note. R Squared = .06 (Adjusted R Squared = .03).*

I determined that ISM scores are significantly different between treatment and control groups at the time of the post-test ( $p = .03$ ). The between-subjects results tell us that there was not a statistically significant difference in reduction in intolerance score based on the type of books students were reading  $F(1,41) = 2.32, p = .13$ . The results of the ISM between subjects ANOVA are in Table 17.

**Table 17**

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects, ISM Post-Test*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Intercept	328.32	1	328.32	333.24	<.001	.89	333.24	1.00
BookType	2.32	1	2.32	2.32	.13	.05	2.35	.32
Error	40.40	41	.99	.99				

*Note.* Computed using alpha = .05

Next, I conducted a within-groups ANOVA to determine whether the DV (ISM post-test scores) are statistically significant related to the IV (type of book). The within-subjects results tell us that, for all students combined, there was a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-test intolerance scores  $F(1,41) = 4.83, p = .03$ . When taken as a whole, students in this study experienced a reduction in intolerance from pre- to post-test. Tables 18 and 19 show the results of the within-subjects ANOVA.

**Table 18***Tests of Within Subjects Contrasts, ISM Repeated Measures*

Source	Empathy	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power*
Intolerance	Linear	.83	1	.83	4.83	.03	.11	4.82	.57
Intolerance* BookType	Linear	.45	1	.45	2.64	.11	.0	2.64	.35
Error (Intolerance)	Linear	7.05	41	.17					

Note. Computed using alpha = .05

**Table 19***Pairwise Comparisons: BookType\*Intolerance*

Book Type	Intolerance	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	1	2.25	.23	1.79	2.71
	2	2.20	.16	1.87	2.52
2	1	2.06	.17	1.72	2.39
	2	1.70	.12	1.46	1.94

Students who read YA fiction did not have statistically significantly lower intolerance scores at the end of the study ( $M = 1.70$ ) than students who read from the canon ( $M = 2.20$ ).

RQ 3 asks, “What effect does transportation have on an individual reader’s intolerance and empathy levels?” The corresponding null hypothesis is: There will be no difference in pre- and post-test intolerance or pre- and post-test empathy levels after feeling transported by the novel. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to test this null hypothesis with book choice and transportation as the independent variables and the postISM and post-PT scores acting as the

dependent variables in turn. A regression analysis measures the amount of variance in the criterion variable (intolerance or empathy) that predictors (book, transportation) account for when taken as a group. The multiple regression analysis is designed to answer the question, when predictors are taken together as a set, do they predict intolerance and/or empathy levels? Table 20 shows the model summary for the multiple regression test with the postPT scores.

**Table 20**

*Model Summary for Effect of Transportation and Book Choice on postPT Scores*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.25*	.06	.01	.67

The  $R^2$  value is the measure of amount of variance in the DV that predictors account for when taken as a group. The  $R^2$  value is rounded to two decimal places and converted to a percentage. Taken as a set, the predictors book type and transportation account for 6% of the variance in empathy. The multiple regression model ANOVA demonstrates that this variance is not significant (Table 21). The null hypothesis cannot be fully rejected.

**Table 21**

*Analysis of Variance for Effect of Transportation and Book Choice on post IRI PT Scores*

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	1.16	2	.58	1.31	.28 <sup>b</sup>
1	Residual	17.84	40	.45		
	Total	19.00	42			

*Note.* Dependent variable: Perspective taking. Predictors: (Constant), Transportation, Book.

A multiple regression was also run to determine the amount of variance in intolerance score that the two predictors (book type and transportation) account for when taken as a group. Table 22 shows the model summary for the multiple regression test with the postISM scores.

**Table 22**

*Model Summary for Effect of Transportation and Book Choice on postISM Scores*

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> Square	Adjusted <i>R</i> Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.47 <sup>a</sup>	.22	.19	.60

*Note.* Predictors: (Constant), Transportation, Book.

Taken as a set, the predictors book type and transportation account for 22% of the variance in intolerance. This time, the multiple regression model ANOVA demonstrates that this variance is significant (Table 23).

**Table 23**

*Analysis of Variance for Effect of Transportation and Book Choice on ISM Scores*

Model		Sum of Squares	<i>Df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
	Regression	4.14	2	2.07	5.79	.01 <sup>b</sup>
1	Residual	14.33	40	.36		
	Total	18.47	42			

*Note.* Dependent variable: Intolerance. Predictors: (Constant), Transportation, Book.

Although the null hypothesis cannot be fully rejected, it cannot be fully confirmed, either. Book choice plus transportation *does not* significantly impact empathy levels in this data set, but book choice plus transportation *does* significantly impact intolerance levels, an important finding that will be discussed further in the next chapter.



Based on the significant result found in the multiple regression model regarding book choice, transportation, and intolerance levels, more analysis of transportation data seemed prudent. As Table 24 demonstrates, the mean transportation scores for young adult novels are much higher (4.28) than the mean transportation scores for canon novels (2.98).

**Table 24**  
*Self-Reported Transportation According to Book Title*

Book Title	# of Students	Mean Transportation Effect
Canon Books	16	2.96
<i>Catcher in the Rye</i>	2	2.88
<i>Frankenstein</i>	0	--
<i>Call of the Wild</i>	6	3.19
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	0	--
<i>Lord of the Flies</i>	4	2.96
<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	4	2.79
YA Books	27	4.28
<i>Pride</i>	1	4.33
<i>I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter</i>	6	4.68
<i>My Dear Henry</i>	2	4.54
<i>Cold the Night, Fast the Wolves</i>	3	4.41
<i>Wilder Girls</i>	11	3.57
<i>The Chosen and the Beautiful</i>	4	4.16

## **Concluding Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the quantitative and qualitative data collected over the course of my research study. Data analyzed includes: pre- and post-test scores for ISM and IRI self-report measures, scores from the NTS, participant artifacts, focus group transcripts, and field journal notes.

Several compelling outcomes of the research are presented in Chapter 3. These findings are:

1. Reading young adult fiction led to a statistically significant decrease in empathy levels.
2. For all students combined, there was a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-test intolerance scores.
3. Narrative transportation depends more on participant choice than text type.
4. 100% of participants reported that text choice positively impacted their reading experience.
5. Book choice plus transportation significantly impacted intolerance levels.

In Chapter 4, an analysis of the findings in relation to the research questions will be presented, along with a discussion of the relationship between findings and the relevant literature. Additionally, recommendations will be suggested for language arts curriculum best practices and future research study.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, I will interpret the data presented in Chapter 3 to develop meaningful findings. Next, I will relate my findings to the literature discussed in Chapter 1. Finally, and most importantly, I will relate my findings to my three guiding research questions. As this dissertation has been prepared in partial fulfillment for a doctorate degree in education, a degree that emphasizes a problem of practice over the development of theory, I will focus my conclusions on recommending practical applications for the findings of this research project.

#### **Review of Research Aims, Objectives and Questions**

This research project looked at a specific research problem: the fact that secondary language arts curriculum, which consists of texts predominantly written by straight, white males, has changed very little in the last 75 years in spite of the increasingly diverse student population in today's public schools. Meanwhile, Konrath et al. (2011) documents a trend toward less empathetic adolescent population in our schools. Miklikowska (2018) documented a clear correlation between empathy and prejudice, finding that prejudiced individuals tend to have lower empathy levels, and highly empathetic individuals demonstrate less prejudice. Finally, Black and Barnes (2021) found that reading young adult (YA) novels led to an increase in empathy, and Bal and Velkamp (2013) found that empathic skills are only present when a reader experiences transportation, the experience of being fully immersed within a story.

Therefore, it was my hypothesis that reading young adult literature (presumed to be more transportative than canon texts) in the secondary language arts classroom will increase students' empathy while decreasing their prejudice. My research questions were:

RQ1: What effect does reading young adult fiction have on adolescent empathy?

RQ 2: What effect does reading young adult fiction have on adolescent intolerance?

RQ 3: What effect does transportation have on an individual reader's intolerance and empathy levels?

### **Review of Research Methodology**

I conducted a mixed methods research study to test my hypothesis and answer the three research questions. Five high school language arts classes participated in a 10-week literature circle. Control group participants read a novel from the Western canon, and treatment group participants read a YA novel. Three validated and reliable self-report survey instruments were used to gather quantitative data: the IRI was given as a pre- and post-test to measure changes in empathy, the ISM was given as a pre- and post-test to measure changes in intolerance, and the NT was administered toward the end of the project to measure transportation. Qualitative data were collected in the form of student artifacts, focus group transcripts, and researcher field notes. Quantitative data underwent statistical analysis in the form of a two-way ANOVA and regression analysis. Qualitative data were coded and organized into eight themes.

### **Key Findings**

This study found that reading fiction and participating in literature circles, regardless of whether the students were given the option of selecting a text from the canon or a work of YA fiction, benefits students through increasing their empathy and decreasing their intolerance. Moreover, my results indicate that reading YA fiction is more impactful in terms of increasing their empathy than reading from the canon. A finding of statistically significant difference as a result of a ten-week unit on fiction might help incentivize teachers to continue to provide

opportunities for students to read fictional works and engage in discussions and activities related to those texts with their peers.

This research study yielded several key findings, as follows:

1. Reading young adult fiction led to a statistically significant increase in empathy levels.
2. Participating in literature circles led to a statistically significant decrease in intolerance levels.
3. Narrative transportation, or the experience of being wholly immersed in a text, depends more on reader choice of text than text type.
4. Participant choice in text selection is of paramount importance, with 100% of participants reporting that text choice positively impacted their reading experience.
5. Text choice plus transportation significantly impacted intolerance levels.

These findings will be discussed in further detail below.

### ***The Relation Between Reading YA Fiction and Empathy***

The first research question in this study examined ways in which reading YA fiction relates to empathy in adolescents. Previous studies have found that reading fiction is positively correlated with increased empathy (Bal & Velkamp, 2013), and Black and Barnes (2021) found that reading fiction, especially YA fiction, is the cause of increased empathy. Bal and Velkamp (2013) found that a spike in empathy is only seen when readers feel transported by their text, and that, when readers do not feel transported, we see a decrease in empathy.

This study was designed to maximize potential empathy growth in the treatment group. All participants were allowed to select their text from six novel choices. Choice was built into

the research design because it is assumed that the chances of transportation are higher when participants self-select a text they find most interesting. It was further expected that participants in the treatment group (reading a YA novel) would see correspondingly higher increases in empathy, just as Black and Barnes (2021) found.

I triangulated qualitative and quantitative data from the surveys, questionnaires, and interviews to answer this research question.

**Quantitative Data Analysis.** A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to test whether there was a significant difference between pre- and post-test perspective-taking (PT) scores on the IRI, and a one-way within subjects ANOVA was conducted to test whether there was a significant difference in pre-and post-test PT scores between the control and treatment groups. The  $p$ -value of .01 indicated a significant difference in empathy levels between the control and treatment groups, meaning that, in my study, the type of text had a statistically significant impact on empathy levels. Additionally, the  $p$ -value of .03 indicated a significant difference in empathy levels in all students from the beginning of the study to the end of the study, meaning that reading fiction in general also had a statistically significant impact on empathy levels. These findings are consistent with the literature (Black & Barnes, 2021; Bal & Velkamp, 2013), which suggested that empathy levels would increase after reading a YA fiction novel. These findings uphold previous studies that demonstrate a positive correlation between reading fiction and increased empathy levels.

**Qualitative Data Analysis.** The qualitative data adds shades of gray to the quantitative data's black and white answers above. Many participants expressed perspectives that can be interpreted as evidence of empathy. These data are discussed here in the same way they were presented in Chapter 3; that is, I will discuss evidence of empathy according to each of the three

themes developed during coding, which were: Feeling seen, representation, and pleasure in learning new things.

***Feeling seen.***

Participants in both the treatment and control groups expressed the experience of seeing themselves reflected back via so-called “mirror” characters (Bishop, 1990). Bishop refers to mirror characters as “a means of self-affirmation,” (para. 1), helping us “see our own lives and experiences as part of a larger human experience” (para. 1). A treatment group member explained, “Us, like Zuri and her sisters, have the same problems: people changing, relationships, college and expectations... I kinda felt less alone because those are some things that I struggle with everyday.” Other participants found characters who acted as mirrors for their loved ones (such as Ama, Julia’s mom in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*). Participants in both groups reported finding mirror characters in their novels, but only 26% of control group participants reported this phenomenon, compared to 60% of treatment group participants. This finding leads to the conclusion that readers of YA fiction are more likely to find mirror characters than readers of canon texts.

While this feeling of self-affirmation is not evidence of empathy for others, it is evidence of what is referred to as “self-empathy,” or what Barrett-Lennard (1997) defines as an awareness of one’s own inner experience and emotional and mental state. Barrett-Lennard explains that self-empathy is the first step on the journey toward empathizing with others.

***Representation.***

Just as participants found value in finding mirror characters for themselves, some readers of YA novels were able to extrapolate this experience and want it for their peers. For example, a heterosexual white female recommended *Wilder Girls* to the queer community, saying, “I think

LGBTQ+ people who like to see representation would love this book.” Another reader recommended *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* to others sharing her heritage, writing, “I think lots of little Mexican girls that are in a toxic household currently would need a main character to tell them to follow their dreams and passion.” The readers making book recommendations are demonstrating empathy for their peers – they are having an experience they find affirming and wish for others to have a similarly *affirming* experience.

***Pleasure in learning new things.***

Participants from both the control and treatment groups reported finding enjoyment in learning about new things. Some specifically cited deriving enjoyment through learning about new cultures or different ways of living. For example, one participant enjoyed learning about the Bushwick Bodega in *Pride*, saying, “I loved learning more about this part of New York that I didn't know.” Another participant said, “When I read, I like to imagine my life if it were like theirs.” These participants, as well as others who expressed similar sentiments, are experiencing their book through what Bishop (1990) calls “window” books or books that help readers see into a world unlike their own. Identifying window books and describing them as enjoyable is evidence that participants are empathizing with the characters inside their novels.

**Summary Thoughts.**

Research consistently shows a link between reading fiction and an increase in empathy. The results of my qualitative and quantitative research in this area are consistent with this finding. The qualitative data shows us that participants in this study are experiencing different aspects of empathy. First, they have the ability to self-empathize, which is a prerequisite skill needed to empathize with others. Next, participants clearly demonstrate empathy when they wish for their peers to experience the positive emotion that they themselves have experienced



(participants who report a self-affirming reading experience are more likely to recommend their book to a peer who might find it similarly self-affirming). Finally, participants seek knowledge and experiences outside their own, reporting finding pleasure in learning about new cultures.

There is one relatively unique curricular component present at the research site that deserves mention and raises questions for future research. Namely, all language arts students at the study site are required to spend the first 10 minutes of every class (every day for four years) engaged in sustained silent reading. Students are allowed to self-select their reading material for silent reading. Since there is no high school library at this school, students frequently borrow books from their language arts teachers. When I taught at this school three years ago, both language arts teachers in the building (myself and the teacher I worked with during this research study) had robust collections of diverse, high-interest young adult fiction. Although I cannot speak to the diversity of the classroom library of the new language arts teacher, my own observations conclude with confidence that students at this school are predominantly reading diverse YA fiction during silent reading time.

If, as the literature predicts and this study confirms, people who read more fiction have higher empathy levels, it is reasonable to guess that the student participants started the study with elevated empathy levels to begin with due to the silent reading requirements present in their language arts curriculum. It may be that the ability to increase one's empathy levels through reading fiction slows down or even tops out at some point; this would be worth exploring in a future study.

### ***The Relationship Between Reading YA Fiction and Intolerance***

The second research question in this study examined ways in which reading YA fiction relates to intolerance in adolescents. There is a gap in the literature here in that, as far as my

literature review could find, no studies have been done to explore the relationship between reading fiction and intolerance in adolescence. Although the literature is clear that reading fiction causes an increase in empathy, no such findings have been published correlating reading fiction and intolerance. What we do know is that a link between empathy and prejudice exists (Miklikowska, 2018). Miklikowska hypothesizes that “an increase in empathy should lower the risk of prejudice development” (p. 703) and cites existing research that supports this idea (see Chapter 1). Other research has shown limited effects of empathy on prejudice. Miklikowska notes that longitudinal research on prejudice in adolescents is both scarce and contradictory. It was my hypothesis, then, that participants would see a decrease in their overall intolerance levels that corresponded with increased empathy levels.

I triangulated qualitative and quantitative data from the surveys, questionnaires, and interviews to answer this research question.

**Quantitative Data Analysis.** A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to test this null hypothesis with the type of book acting as the independent variable and the postISM scores acting as the dependent variable, and a one-way within subjects ANOVA was conducted to test whether there was a significant difference in pre-and post-test ISM scores between the control and treatment groups. The  $p$ -value of .13 indicated no significant difference in intolerance levels between the control and treatment groups, meaning that, in my study, the type of text did not have a statistically significant impact on intolerance levels. However, the  $p$ -value of .03 indicated a significant difference in intolerance levels in all students from the beginning of the study to the end of the study, meaning that reading fiction in general did have a statistically significant impact on intolerance levels.

**Qualitative Data Analysis.** My quantitative data demonstrate no statistically significant decrease in intolerance scores between the treatment and control groups; however, an examination of my qualitative data tells a different, more nuanced story. Participants in the treatment group demonstrated a greater ability to draw thematic connections between their texts and issues in the real world. They further demonstrated characteristics such as compassion and concern for minority groups. Others expressed disdain for the racism and sexual prejudice they see in today's society. Treatment group participants expressed concern over issues of intolerance and broader issues of social injustice such as mental health concerns and poverty. Control group participants struggled to connect themes from their novels to the world around them and did not express negative opinions about the treatment of minority groups.

I will discuss evidence of intolerance according to the two themes developed during coding, which were: intolerance and real-world issues. Unlike the previous section, which looked at RQ1 themes individually, this section will address both intolerance and real-world issues in the same subsection. I make this decision because, in developing an analysis and answer to RQ2, I find that I need to make overlapping arguments for both themes. Therefore, I discuss intolerance and real-world issues together.

***Intolerance and Real-World Issues.*** Participants were asked to reflect upon ways in which their choice novels connected to real-world issues. The prompt was left intentionally open-ended, which allowed space for participants to select any issue that came to mind and allowed them to comment on the real-world issues if desired. With few exceptions, participants who read novels from the canon found themselves unable to move their journal entries beyond a discussion of the text. For example, one participant who read *Lord of the Flies* wrote in a journal entry, "I dont think the characters or events connect in any way with anything I've experienced or

heard about in my life.” In contrast, participants who read YA texts readily connected those texts to social justice issues in today’s society, noting, for example, that the book *Pride* is about the “fight against racism” and that *My Dear Henry* connects to the prejudice faced by gay and transgender individuals.

It is critically important to note that the canon text choices *can* be connected to real-world issues such as prejudice in the world today; control group participants were simply *unable* to make the connection. *The Great Gatsby* comments on ways in which wealth insulates one from the consequences of one’s actions; *The Catcher in the Rye* is about a severely depressed teen who contemplates suicide; and *Lord of the Flies* spotlights such extreme bullying that it results in the death of young children at the hands of their peers.

Participants who read canon texts expressed apathy and disinterest when they were asked to discuss the larger thematic issues in their novels. Phrases such as “I don’t know” and “I don’t remember” showed up frequently during coding.

Multiple participants from the treatment group and one participant from the control group spoke or wrote about the importance of mental health. A participant who read *The Catcher in the Rye* said, “some people don't realize that this is a big issue” when referring to teen mental health. A participant who read *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* said the novel is important because it addresses teen depression and suicide, saying, “I think it is very important and that people should read it to understand how it is a real issue and not just teens being dramatic.”

**Discussion.** I believe the lack of ability to connect a text to the injustices of the real world accounts for some of the difference in intolerance levels between books. Participants who read YA texts and made successful leaps of logic connecting their texts to the world around them were forced to move fictional issues off the page and into real life. Participants who read canon

texts were largely unable to find these connections and so never reached the next step wherein they contemplated the plight of real people in the world around them. It would be a mistake to interpret the control group's inability to connect their books to social justice issues as a comprehensive lack of care among all control group participants. Instead, I would posit that participants found the canon texts to be less approachable for a variety of reasons: they perceive the texts to be more difficult (some are, some are not; see Table 10 for Lexile scores of each text); they perceive the texts to be less interesting (see discussion of transportation in the RQ3 analysis that follows); they lack the ability to visualize the world in which a book written decades ago is set; the protagonists are not adolescents and are therefore harder to identify with; etc. When a reader finds a text to be boring or difficult, it is easier for them to disengage.

The literature circles format may have contributed to participants' inability to engage in the canon texts. In traditional language arts instruction, the whole class reads a novel together, with the teacher acting as a guide through difficult text, outdated allusions, or confusing passages. Participants who read the canon text may have expended their energy attempting to understand the plot and were therefore unable to perform more complex academic tasks such as applying a novel's themes to the world around them.

Regardless of the reason, qualitative data demonstrate that participants who read a YA novel have lower intolerance levels than those who read a canonical text, and quantitative data demonstrate that reading fiction in general led to an overall statistically significant decrease in intolerance levels.

### ***The Relationship Between Reading Transportation, Intolerance, and Empathy***

The third research question in this study examined ways in which reading transportation relates to both intolerance and empathy in readers. Transportation is the name given to the

experience of being so deeply absorbed within a story that a reader is able to tune out life around them to stay inside a fictional narrative. Bal and Velkamp (2013) found that “fiction reading causes empathic skills to increase over time when the reader becomes emotionally transported into the story” and that “the reverse occurs when the fiction reader does not become transported at all: then the reader actually becomes less empathic” (p. 5). Because changes in empathy levels are dependent upon transportation (and intolerance levels, too, if intolerance decreases as empathy increases), it was necessary to measure transportation at the end of the literature circles to see what effect, if any, transportation had on empathy and intolerance.

As it turns out, the answer is: Quite a lot. In fact, transportation in this study ended up playing a much more significant role than previously expected, leading to some fascinating implications for language arts instruction.

As with the two previous research questions, I triangulated qualitative and quantitative data from the surveys, questionnaires, and interviews to answer this research question.

**Quantitative Data Analysis.** I ran a multiple regression analysis with book choice and transportation as the independent variables/predictors and post-test ISM and post-test-PT scores acting as dependent variables in turn. A regression analysis is designed to measure the amount of variance in the dependent variable that the independent variables account for. The first multiple regression analysis tested whether the predictors book and transportation accounted for a significant variance in empathy. The test determined that, taken as a set, the predictors *book* and *transportation* account for .06% of the variance in empathy. The multiple regression model ANOVA demonstrates that this variance is not statistically significant. The next multiple regression analysis tested whether the predictors *book* and *transportation* accounted for a significant variance in intolerance scores. Here,  $R^2 = .22$ ; taken as a set, the predictors book and

transportation account for 22% of the variance in intolerance. This time, the multiple regression model ANOVA demonstrated that this variance was statistically significant. Therefore, book choice plus transportation significantly impacts *intolerance*, but not *empathy* levels in this data set.

**Qualitative Data Analysis.** My analysis of qualitative data provides overwhelming support to the quantitative analysis above. Participants in both the control and treatment groups demonstrated stronger recall and deeper engagement in their novel when they felt transported by it. The number one factor that determined reading transportation, however, was the participants' ability to choose the book they read. Interestingly, while more treatment group participants reported being transported by their YA novels, plenty of control group participants also reported being transported by their canon novels. Because this research question does not focus on YA versus canon novels but instead looks at overall transportation on empathy and intolerance, the following analysis will not be broken down by novel type as it has been in previous analysis sections. Instead, I will compare participants who self-report high transportation versus those who report low transportation, according to each of the three themes developed during coding, which were: specific recall, engagement, and choice.

**Specific Recall.** Participants who self-report high levels of transportation also had a correspondingly strong ability to recall specific details from their novels. These participants were able to offer clear plot summaries, recall specific details or dialogue, and draw highly detailed sketches of their novel's setting. Some participants were even able to remember specific sensory details from the text, such as the "gust of wind that enters Daisy's East Egg mansion, causing the curtains to flutter" or the "dark basement where Madrina sings." Readers who felt transported by their novels were less likely to describe the novel as "boring," though readers who felt

transported and those who did not still reported feeling “confused” by the first chapters of their novels. However, transported readers did not feel confused at the end of their novels, whereas non-transported readers reported still feeling confused at the end of their novels.

**Engagement.** One specific and unanticipated finding of this study is that participants wanted to feel transported by the first chapter of their novel. If they did not feel transported immediately, it impeded their overall enjoyment of the novel, though some were willing to give their book the benefit of the doubt and admitted to enjoying the book by its end. Participants spoke passionately about the beginnings of their novel, with opinions ranging from the enthusiastic, “The opening of ‘I’m Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter’ immediately grabbed my attention with its raw and honest portrayal of the julias inner turmoil” to the lukewarm “In all honesty, it was a very slow opening” to the downright antagonistic “The intro to my book was horrible.” Some participants reported that, if they were not required to finish the book for a school assignment, they would have abandoned it and selected something different, though others said that once they start a book, they feel compelled to finish it, whether it is for school or not.

**Choice.** Without exception, participants from both treatment and control groups reported that choice made their reading experience more positive, constituting one of this study’s major findings. The choice in text selection allowed students to feel more empowered by their reading experience. One participant explained that “being able to choose my own novel automatically made me feel more inclined to read and enjoy it.” Another participant noted that their choice novel was the very first novel they have ever read *and* enjoyed, not just within the context of a language arts class, but in their whole life. Even participants who did not enjoy or feel transported by their novel felt ownership over the process: “Even though I didn’t end up liking



my book it was cool that I was able to choose.” Multiple participants advocated that they be allowed to continue to select their own reading material in language arts classes.

I believe these enthusiastic comments speak to the reason why transportation plus book choice significantly impacted intolerance levels in this study.

**Discussion.** This study demonstrated that the importance of transportation to the participants’ learning and ability to apply their learning to the world around them is paramount. Participants who felt more transported by their novels were less confused at the end of their book and reported greater enjoyment of their book. Importantly, there is noteworthy overlap between the participants who felt transported by their novel and the participants who were able to extrapolate major themes from their novels and apply those themes to the world around them. Transportation ended up being a much greater factor in determining whether a participant’s intolerance level decreased. The important factor in transportation was not type of novel (i.e., YA or canon) as I originally hypothesized but was instead choice. This constitutes a significant finding and has major implications for secondary language arts instruction in this country.

### **Implications**

In this research study, I set out to investigate the effects of a stagnant language arts curriculum in secondary level public schools. Language arts curriculum has not changed in a significant way in decades; novels taught in public schools are overwhelming written by white heterosexual males and feature white heterosexual male protagonists. Meanwhile, the nationwide student body is growing ever more diverse.

I found, as hypothesized, that students are not best served by only being taught novels from the Western canon. This finding may be read as an indictment of a steady diet consisting of the canon and nothing but the canon. In their own words, participants in this study found

canonical novels to be confusing, difficult to read, and irrelevant. Whether or not these novels actually are these things is beside the point; the point is that students perceive them to be so.

When students do not understand the relevance of a novel to their lives, they cannot apply its themes to the world around them – which is arguably the entire point of language arts instruction. The goal of teaching classic literature to students in the hope that they will enter into a conversation around its timeless themes may be a noble one, but it is misguided. This study finds that students are significantly more likely to engage in these conversations after reading diverse young adult fiction.

Moreover, reading diverse young adult fiction may help students foster a more just society. Readers of YA novels came away from their literature circles discussing social justice issues ranging from poverty and mental health to racism and sexual prejudice. Readers of the canon novels did not. Other studies have consistently found that readers of YA novels have significantly higher empathy levels, too. Low intolerance levels and high empathy levels are desirable traits for students in schools and for employees in the workforce. Students are best served by developing these traits in their formative adolescent years, which means that students are best served by reading more young adult fiction in their language arts classes.

Another major implication of this research is the importance of narrative transportation, and it has implications for essentially every facet of language arts instruction. Students who are transported by a novel – meaning they are immersed in the text to the point where the real world falls away while they are reading – are empowered readers. They are more likely to finish a novel and more likely to perform literary analysis at a higher level. Transportation increases a student's ability to recall details from a text, provide accurate summary, analyze character motivations, identify themes, and apply those themes to the world around them.

And the major determining factor of transportation? Choice.

This constitutes the final major implication of this research study. Every single student in this study reported that choice in what book to read made their reading experience more positive. Students must be given choice in their language arts class. Text choices dramatically increase the chance that a student feels transported by their book. Transportation means students are more empowered readers – and empowered readers are the goal of any language arts classroom.

### **Limitations**

A close look at the limitations in this study are a starting point for recommendations for future research.

Although differential selection, when participants are differentially selected into groups, meaning baseline equivalence is not achieved, was a potential threat to validity, in the case of this study, it can be ruled out. As reported in Chapter 3, treatment and control groups did not statistically significantly differ from one another on the preISM ( $p = .52$ ). Therefore, differential selection was ruled out as a threat to validity.

Attrition is another potential threat to validity of studies in which group performance pre and post treatment is considered. During the course of my study, three students from the control group moved to different schools. This is a 6.5% attrition rate. The *What Works Clearinghouse* defines the “acceptable threshold” for attrition at 10.5%, meaning my study had low attrition.

Sample size is one limitation of this study. Although 43 participants provided ample data for qualitative analysis, including hundreds of pages of field notes, participant artifacts, and focus group transcripts, the sample size constitutes a small group for a quantitative study. A small sample size negatively impacts a study’s generalizability; that is, a small sample size may not be a true representation of a group, and results therefore cannot be extrapolated to the entire

population. In order for results to be more widely generalizable, this study will need to be replicated with a larger sample.

### **Recommendations**

A number of recommendations for future studies emerged from the data. This study was restricted to 43 students taught by one teacher in a rural Oregon school. The first recommendation would be to expand this study's sample size and the geographic area from which participants are drawn to strengthen the generalizability of the initial findings presented here. Another recommendation would be to study the perspectives of students not included in this study: middle school students, underclassmen in high schools, students from urban areas, and students from large schools.

In particular, more research is needed to investigate the relationship between reading YA fiction and intolerance levels. The study detailed in this dissertation presents exciting initial indications that intolerance levels can be decreased over time through thoughtful exposure to transportative fiction. As noted earlier, Miklikowska (2018) writes that longitudinal research on prejudice in adolescents is scarce and contradictory. Prejudice in adolescence needs more study alongside further study on the impact different types of reading have on adolescent intolerance levels.

Additionally, the findings presented in this paper point to the need to explore with precision the effects of transportation and choice on teen readers specifically as these factors relate to adolescent intolerance. Questions remain: are there specific book titles or types of novels that are most transportative to teens, and if so, what are they? Will adolescent readers self-select novels that are both transportative and literary in nature? How does transportation

impact academic performance? How can language arts teachers and students evaluate the transportative potential of a book prior to beginning to read it?

In summary, further research is needed to continue to explore the impact of young adult fiction, reading transportation, and book choice on adolescent intolerance levels. Further research in these areas may well increase teen empathy, decrease teen intolerance levels, and improve the quality of secondary language arts education in today's public schools.

### **Closing Summary**

Students in language arts classes all around the country are handed the same worn paperbacks year in and year out: *Macbeth*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Hamlet*, and *Lord of the Flies* to name a few. Yet, while language arts curriculum continues along the way it's been because it's always been that way, student reading scores are steadily declining. Worse, there is evidence that reading nothing but white-centric texts causes harm to all students. When the books feature only white male protagonists, only white male students experience the self-affirmation that comes from reading a mirror book. Because most of America's public school students are not white males, a majority of American students are robbed of finding themselves represented in the curriculum. If students who are members of the dominant culture are only exposed to books that reflect themselves, they risk growing up with an "exaggerated sense" of their own importance in the world, which Bishop calls a "dangerous ethnocentrism."

Is it not irrational to do the same thing over and over again expecting different results? Applebee (1989) asks the essential question: "How, if the canon is so narrow, will young women, and students from minority cultures develop a sense of their own place within that culture? Such questions clearly have no easy answers, but teachers and departments provide

operational answers every time they choose another book to read” (p. 18). If, as Applebee asserts, all choices have consequences (thereby rendering each curricular choice we make deliberate and, effectively, political), might we not prioritize the voices of all over the voices of a few?

In this study, students tell us clearly what they need: They need choice, they need young adult fiction, they need to feel transported by their texts, and they need to discuss ways in which literature relates to the world around them. In doing so, students demonstrate stronger language arts skills and lower intolerance levels.

Let’s give them what they need.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

*Book Tasting Menus: Canon and YA (two pages)*


# Menu

**LORD OF THE FLIES BY WILLIAM GOLDING**  
A group of boys find themselves on an island after their plane crashes. With no adult supervision, some members of the group soon turn to savagery.

**PRIDE AND PREJUDICE BY JANE AUSTEN**  
Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet initially dislike each other but a series of events leads to their eventual falling in love and happy marriage.

**THE GREAT GATSBY BY F. SCOTT FITZGERALD**  
Jay Gatsby's quest to win back his long-lost love by faking a successful life, this novel is about struggles around love, relationships, societal standing, and consumerism in the "roaring" 1920s

**THE CALL OF THE WILD BY JACK LONDON**  
Buck is stolen from his human owner, Judge Miller. He is taken and sold as a sled dog in the Yukon region of Canada. He learns how to work as a sled dog and how to survive in the harsh conditions

**THE CATCHER IN THE RYE BY J.D. SALINGER**  
The adventures of well-off teenage boy Holden Caulfield on a weekend out alone in New York City, illuminating the struggles of young adults with existential questions of morality, identity, meaning, and connection

**FRANKENSTEIN BY MARY SHELLY**  
Gifted scientist Victor Frankenstein who succeeds in giving life to a being of his own creation. However, he manages to create a hideous creature who is rejected by Victor and mankind in general.

# Menu



## **WILDER GIRLS BY RORY POWER**

A feminist *Lord of the Flies* about three best friends living in quarantine at their island boarding school, and the lengths they go to uncover the truth of their confinement when one disappears

## **PRIDE BY IBI ZOBOI**

Teenager Zuri Benitez, lives in Bushwick, New York, with her family. They live next door to a run-down mansion that is purchased and remodeled by a Black family from Manhattan. Zuri can't stand her new neighbors, especially Darius Darcy.

## **THE CHOSEN AND THE BEAUTIFUL BY NGHI VO**

Jordan is a queer, adopted Vietnamese woman who gets to see the best parts of society but doesn't get to experience them due to her race. Oh, and she has magic powers

## **COLD THE NIGHT, FAST THE WOLVES BY MEG LONG**

After angering a local gangster, seventeen-year-old Sena Korhosen must flee with her prize fighting wolf, Iska, in tow. A team of scientists offer to pay her way off her frozen planet on one condition: she gets them to the finish line of the planet's infamous sled race

## **I AM NOT YOUR PERFECT MEXICAN DAUGHTER BY ERIKA L. SANCHEZ**

Julia, a Chicago high school student, navigates trials and tribulations of following her dreams of becoming a writer, alongside the death of her sister, Olga—who might not have been quite as perfect as she seemed


## **MY DEAR HENRY BY KALYNN BAYRON**

In misty Victorian London, a teen boy tries to discover the reason behind his best friend's disappearance—and the arrival of a mysterious and magnetic stranger





**Book Tasting Placemat Front and Back**

<p><b>BOOK #1</b></p> <p>Title: _____</p> <p> Write a short summary of the book:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>How interested are you in this book? (1 = not at all, 5 = a lot)</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	<p><b>BOOK #2</b></p> <p>Title: _____</p> <p>Write a short summary of the book:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>How interested are you in this book? (1 = not at all, 5 = a lot)</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	<p><b>BOOK #3</b></p> <p>Title: _____</p> <p>Write a short summary of the book:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>How interested are you in this book? (1 = not at all, 5 = a lot)</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>
<p><b>BOOK #4</b></p> <p>Title: _____</p> <p>Write a short summary of the book:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>How interested are you in this book? (1 = not at all, 5 = a lot)</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	<p><b>BOOK #5</b></p> <p>Title: _____</p> <p>Write a short summary of the book:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>How interested are you in this book? (1 = not at all, 5 = a lot)</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	<p><b>BOOK #6</b></p> <p>Title: _____</p> <p>Write a short summary of the book:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>How interested are you in this book? (1 = not at all, 5 = a lot)</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>

*Literature Circles Roles Sheet (seven pages)***Summarizer**

Name:

Date:

Book:

**Summarizer:** Your job is to write a 1-paragraph (5-7 sentence) description of the book you are reading. What has happened so far? Your group discussion will start with your 1-2 minute statement that covers the key points, main highlights, and general idea of today's reading assignment.

**Summary (5-7 sentences):**

**Key Points:** Use the space below to record key ideas from today's group discussion. What did you talk about? What questions were answered? What will you think about as you continue to read your novel?

1.

2.

3.

4.

## Questioner/ Discussion Director

Name:

Date:

Book:

**Questioner/Discussion Director:** Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this part of the book. Don't worry about the small details; your task is to help people talk over the big ideas in the reading and share their reactions. Usually the best discussion questions come from your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns as you read. You can list them below.

### Possible discussion questions or topics for today:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**Key Points:** Use the space below to record key ideas from today's group discussion. What did you talk about? What questions were answered? What will you think about as you continue to read your novel?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

## Connector

Name:

Date:

Book:

**Connector:** Your job is to find connections between the book and you, and between the book and the wider world. Consider the list below when you make your connections.

- Your own past experiences
- Happenings at school or in the community
- Stories in the news
- Similar events at other times and places
- Other people or problems that you are reminded of
- Between this book and other writings on the same topic or by the same author

**Some connections I made between this reading and my own experiences, the wider world, and other texts or authors (list at least 5 things):**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

**Key Points:** Use the space below to record key ideas from today's group discussion. What did you talk about? What questions were answered? What will you think about as you continue to read your novel?

1.

2.

3.

4.

## Illustrator

Name:

Date:

Book:

**Illustrator:** Good readers make pictures in their minds as they read. This is a chance to share some of your own images and visions. Draw some kind of picture related to the reading you have just done. It can be a sketch, cartoon, diagram, flowchart, or stick-figure scene. You can draw a picture of something that happened in your book, or something that the reading reminded you of, or a picture that conveys any idea or feeling you got from the reading. Any kind of drawing or graphic is okay – you can even label things with words if that helps. Make your drawing(s) on any remaining space on the other side of this sheet.

**Key Points:** Use the space below to record key ideas from today's group discussion. What did you talk about? What questions were answered? What will you think about as you continue to read your novel?

1.

2.

3.

4.

## Travel Tracer

Name:

Date:

Book:

**Travel Tracer:** When you are reading a book in which characters move around often and the scene changes frequently, it is important for everyone in your group to know where things are happening and how the setting may have changed. That's your job: carefully track where the action takes place during today's reading. Describe each setting in detail, either in words or with an action map or diagram. While you may use this sheet, you may find that you need to use an additional sheet. If that is the case, be sure to staple any additional sheets to this role sheet. Also, always give the page locations where the scene is described.

Where today's action begins	Page #
Where key events take place	Page #
Where today's events end	Page #

**Key Points:** Use the space below to record key ideas from today's group discussion. What did you talk about? What questions were answered? What will you think about as you continue to read your novel?

1.

2.

3.

4.

## Word Wizard

Name:

Date:

Book:

**Word Wizard:** The words a writer chooses are an important ingredient of the author's craft. Your job is to be on the lookout for a few words that have special meaning in today's reading selection.

- Jot down puzzling or unfamiliar words. Look up the definitions in a dictionary.
- You may also run across words that stand out somehow in the reading – words that are repeated a lot, used in an unusual way, or are crucial to the meaning of the text. Mark these special words, too, and be ready to share your ideas on their usage to the group.

Word (define at least 5)	Page #	Definition

**Key Points:** Use the space below to record key ideas from today's group discussion. What did you talk about? What questions were answered? What will you think about as you continue to read your novel?

1.

2.

3.

4.

## Literary Luminary

Name:

Date:

Book:

**Literary Luminary:** Your job is to locate a few special sections or quotations in the text for your group to talk over. The idea is to help people go back to some especially interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important sections of the reading and think about them more carefully. Also look for literary devices and make connections to the six elements of fiction. As you decide which passages or paragraphs are worth going back to, make a note why you picked each one and consider some plans for how they should be shared. Remember, the purpose is to suggest material for discussion.

Page and paragraph #	Reason for picking	Plan for discussion

**Key Points:** Use the space below to record key ideas from today's group discussion. What did you talk about? What questions were answered? What will you think about as you continue to read your novel?

- 1.
  
- 2.
  
- 3.
  
- 4.

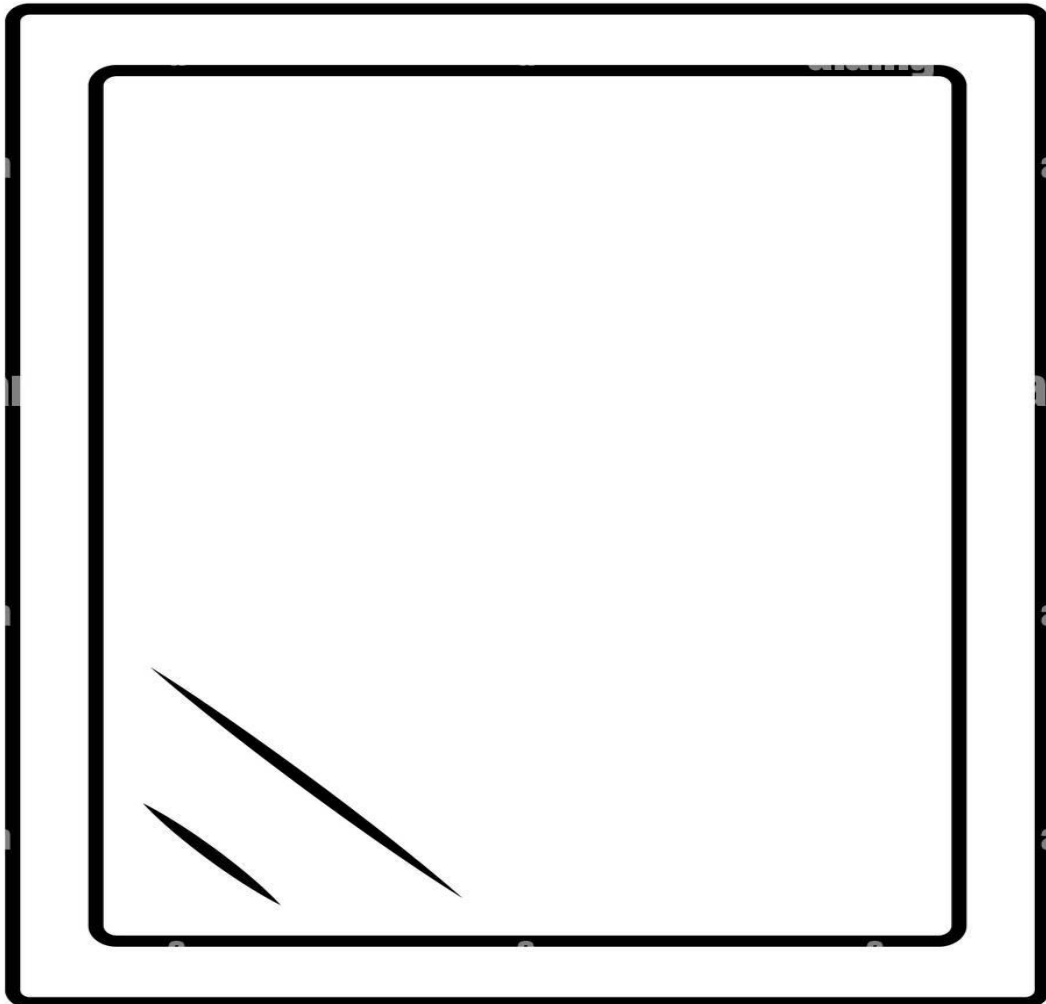


*Characters as Mirrors (two pages)***Characters as Mirrors**

Name:

**Part 1 Directions:** Look in the mirror. What do you see? **Fill the mirror with at least 30 identifiers/descriptors of you.** You can include things like:

- Physical descriptions (brown hair, green eyes)
- Identify markers (race, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation)
- Hobbies you pursue (basketball player, gamer)
- Relationships with people (big brother, cousin, god-daughter)




•

**Part 2 Directions:** List the characters in the novel you are reading. For each character, find at least one connection point. Then, explain that connection point. You must write at least two sentences per character.

**Book I am reading:**

<u>CHARACTER</u>	<u>HOW THIS CHARACTER IS A MIRROR FOR ME (how I see myself in this character?)</u> <i>At least 2 complete sentences</i>
<i>Example:</i> Sena Korhosen	<i>Example:</i> Sena is a mirror character for me because we both love dogs. I identify with Sena because she will do anything to save the life of her dog.
	_____ is a mirror character for me because _____. I identify with _____ because _____.

## *One-Pager Directions*



### One Pager Directions

A one pager is a way to visually share key ideas and information from what you have learned. When you create a one pager, you are trying to use both visual symbols and important words to clearly and concisely share your most important takeaways with someone else.

For this one pager, I've provided you with a template.

**Here's what it MUST INCLUDE:**

- A border that represents the key characters from the reading through words and/or images
- A look at the author's style in the upper left hand corner, including some short quotations
- An image or set of images in the upper right hand corner that represent an important symbol in the work
- Images and words across the middle that represent the key themes of the work
- The bottom section should show images and words that connect the text to other texts, movies, history, or modern day life. Please include at least three quotations.

You may also add other symbols, drawings, and words that represent the reading as you wish.

***Discussion Questions Posed on Google Classroom***

- Week 3 discussion: What do you think the author wants you to learn from reading this story? Why do you think the author wrote this story and the audience it intended to impact? Your answer should be at least 7-10 complete sentences.
- Week 4 discussion: Rate the opening of your book. On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest, how well done is the opening? Does it get your attention? Give you necessary information to understand the text? Your answer should be between 7-10 complete sentences.
- Week 5 discussion: Does your book contain more mirror or window characters for you? Give an example of either kind of character in your novel. Do you typically consume more media (books, TV shows, movies, etc) with mirror or window characters? Why is it helpful to have both experiences? Your answer should be between 5-7 complete sentences.
- Week 6 discussion: From your Lit Circle Book, do the characters or events connect to people or events in our world? What issues are still present today in your book? Does it remind you of another movie/show/or book you have read? Your answer should be between 5-7 complete sentences.

**Final reflection questions**

- What theme do you think this book is addressing? 1-2 Sentences
- What concepts or ideas did you find the most interesting and the most thought provoking? 2-3 Sentences
- Consider the author's purpose. What were they trying to say? 1-2 Sentences
- How meaningful and important is this theme in the world today? 2-3 Sentences

- How will this book help you in the future? Be specific and include details. 3-4 Sentences
- What did you like about getting to choose your own novel? 2-3 Sentences
- What did you dislike about your novel? 2-3 Sentences
- Who would benefit from reading your novel? 2-3 Sentences

## APPENDIX B: INTERPERSONAL REACTIVITY INDEX

### Interpersonal Reactivity Index

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by choosing the appropriate letter on the scale at the top of the page: A, B, C, D, or E. When you have decided on your answer, fill in the letter on the answer sheet next to the item number. **READ EACH ITEM CAREFULLY BEFORE RESPONDING.** Answer as honestly as you can. Thank you.

#### ANSWER SCALE:

A	B	C	D	E
DOES NOT				DESCRIBES ME
DESCRIBE ME				VERY
WELL				WELL

1. I daydream and fantasize, with some regularity, about things that might happen to me. (FS)
2. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me. (EC)
3. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view. (PT) (-)
4. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems. (EC) (-)
5. I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel. (FS)
6. In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease. (PD)
7. I am usually objective when I watch a movie or play, and I don't often get completely caught up in it. (FS) (-)
8. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision. (PT)
9. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them. (EC)
10. I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation. (PD)
11. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective. (PT)
12. Becoming extremely involved in a good book or movie is somewhat rare for me. (FS) (-)
13. When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm. (PD) (-)
14. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal. (EC) (-)
15. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments. (PT) (-)

16. After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters. (FS)
17. Being in a tense emotional situation scares me. (PD)
18. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them. (EC) (-)
19. I am usually pretty effective in dealing with emergencies. (PD) (-)
20. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen. (EC)
21. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both. (PT)
22. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person. (EC)
23. When I watch a good movie, I can very easily put myself in the place of a leading character. (FS)
24. I tend to lose control during emergencies. (PD)
25. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while. (PT)
26. When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me. (FS)
27. When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces. (PD)
28. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place. (PT)

NOTE: (-) denotes item to be scored in reverse fashion

PT = perspective-taking scale

FS = fantasy scale

EC = empathic concern scale

PD = personal distress scale

A = 0

B = 1

C = 2

D = 3

E = 4

Except for reversed-scored items, which are scored:

A = 4

B = 3

C = 2

D = 1

E = 0

## APPENDIX C: INTOLERANT SCHEMA MEASURE

### Intolerant Schema Measure (ISM)

**Instructions:** Please indicate how descriptive each statement is of your beliefs by circling the number that corresponds to your response. (1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)

1. Marriages between two lesbians should be legal.

1      2      3      4      5

2. Christians are intolerant of people with other religious beliefs.

1      2      3      4      5

3. People who stay on welfare have no desire to work.

1      2      3      4      5

4. I favor laws that permit racial minority persons to rent or purchase houses, even when the person offering the property for sale or rent does not wish to sell or rent to minorities.

1      2      3      4      5

5. Women should worry less about their rights and more about becoming good wives and mothers.

1      2      3      4      5

6. Complex and interesting conversation cannot be expected from most old people.

1      2      3      4      5

7. I don't mind companies using openly lesbian celebrities to advertise their products.

1      2      3      4      5

8. Catholics have a "holier than thou" attitude.

1      2      3      4      5

9. Welfare keeps the nation in debt.

1      2      3      4      5

10. Racial minorities have more influence on school desegregation plans than they ought to have.

1      2      3      4      5

11. It is ridiculous for a woman to run a locomotive and for a man to darn socks.

1      2      3      4      5

12. Most old people would be considered to have poor personal hygiene.

1      2      3      4      5



13. I don't think it would negatively affect our relationship if I learned that one of my close relatives was a lesbian.

1      2      3      4      5

14. Jewish people are deceitful and money-hungry.

1      2      3      4      5

15. People who don't make much money are generally unmotivated.

1      2      3      4      5

16. Racial minorities are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights.

1      2      3      4      5

17. The intellectual leadership of a community should be largely in the hands of men.

1      2      3      4      5

18. Most old people can be irritating because they tell the same stories over and over again.

1      2      3      4      5

19. Lesbians should undergo therapy to change their sexual orientation.

1      2      3      4      5

20. Atheists and agnostics are more self-centered than people from other religious groups.

1      2      3      4      5

21. Homeless people should get their acts together and become productive members of society.

1      2      3      4      5

22. It is a bad idea for racial minorities and Whites to marry one another.

1      2      3      4      5

23. In general, the father should have greater authority than the mother in bringing up the children.

1      2      3      4      5

24. Old people don't really need to use our community sports facilities.

1      2      3      4      5

25. I welcome new friends who are gay.

1      2      3      4      5

26. Muslims are more treacherous than other groups of religious people.

1      2      3      4      5

27. Too many of my tax dollars are spent to take care of those who are unwilling to take care of themselves.

1      2      3      4      5

28. Racial minorities should not push themselves where they are not wanted.

1      2      3      4      5

29. There are many jobs in which men should be given preference over women in being hired or promoted.

1      2      3      4      5

30. It is best that old people live where they won't bother anyone.

1      2      3      4      5

31. I would be sure to invite the same-sex partner of my gay male friend to my party.

1      2      3      4      5

32. Wiccan and pagan people practice thinly veiled evil.

1      2      3      4      5

33. If every individual would carry his/her own weight, there would be no poverty.

1      2      3      4      5

34. If a racial minority family with about the same income and education as I have moved in next door, I would mind a great deal.

1      2      3      4      5

35. Women shouldn't push themselves where they are not wanted.

1      2      3      4      5

36. The company of most old people is quite enjoyable.

1      2      3      4      5

37. It's all right with me if I see two men holding hands.

1      2      3      4      5

38. Many of the social problems in the U.S. today are due to non-Christian religious groups.

1      2      3      4      5

39. There are more poor people than wealthy people in prisons because poor people commit more crimes.

1      2      3      4      5

40. It was wrong for the United States Supreme Court to outlaw segregation in its 1954 decision.

1      2      3      4      5

41. Women's requests in terms of equality between the sexes are simply exaggerated.

1      2      3      4      5

42. I sometimes avoid eye contact with old people when I see them.

1      2      3      4      5

43. Movies that approve of male homosexuality bother me.

1      2      3      4      5

44. The Hindu beliefs about reincarnation results in people not taking responsibility for their actions in this life since there is always the next life.

1      2      3      4      5

45. Poor people are lazy.

1      2      3      4      5

46. Over the past few years, racial minorities have gotten more economically than they deserve.

1      2      3      4      5

47. Over the past few years, women have gotten more from government than they deserve.

1      2      3      4      5

48. I don't like it when old people try to make conversation with me.

1      2      3      4      5

49. Gay men want too many rights.

1      2      3      4      5

50. Despite what Buddhist people may say, Buddhism isn't really a religion, but more of a philosophy.

1      2      3      4      5

51. Most poor people are in debt because they can't manage their money.

1      2      3      4      5

52. Over the past few years, the government and news media have shown more respect to racial minorities than they deserve.

1      2      3      4      5

53. Universities are wrong to admit women in costly programs such as medicine, when in fact, a large number will leave their jobs after a few years to raise their children.

1      2      3      4      5

54. I personally would not want to spend much time with an old person.

1      2      3      4      5

**Note.** MHSL/G = Modern Homophobia Scale Lesbian/Gay (Raja & Stokes, 1998); RIS = Religious Intolerance Scale (Items 1–5 originally developed by Godfrey et al., 2000, and included in M-GRISMS); MEBS = Modified Economic Beliefs Scale (Items 1–3 and Items 5–8 originally developed by Stevenson & Medler, 1995); MOFRS = Modern and Old-Fashioned Racism Scale (McConahay, 1986); AWS = Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1972); FSA = Fraboni Scale of Ageism (Fraboni et al., 1990); NS = Neosexism Scale (Tougas et al., 1995). Subscale scores are calculated by averaging the 9 items (resulting in a range from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating higher intolerance). A total score is calculated by averaging all 54 items. (R) = reverse-scored item.

- (R): 1,4,7,13,25,31,36,37
- MHSL/G: 1,7,13,19,25,31, 37, 43,49
- RIS: 2,8,14,20,26,32,38,44,50
- MEBS: 3,9,15,21,27,33,39,45,51
- MOFRS: 4,10,16,22,28,,34,40,46,52
- FSA: 6,12,18,24,30,36,42,48,54
- AWS: 5,11,23,29
- NS: 35,41,47,53





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