

“It Happened to Me”: Third Grade Students Write and Draw Toward Critical Perspectives

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ABSTRACT: Elementary teachers and their students often find themselves using curricular frameworks with prescribed outcomes that closely align with current testing regimes and standards (Au, 2011; Botzakis, Burns, & Hall, 2014; Williams, 2007). Such learning rarely includes opportunities to problematize and consider multiple points of view about topics such as race and class. This article examines the written and visual responses of children as they read and discussed issues related to civil rights and migrant workers. Theories that guide this study include sociocultural and critical theories, specifically writing is a social practice, writing is a tool for thinking, and writing from a critical perspective contributes to developing globally minded and socially just students. Findings from a constant comparative approach to data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) suggest that children’s oral responses to the texts focused on the many injustices experienced during the time period. Topics such as friendship, violence, language learning, movement/solidarity, and healthcare were also apparent in published pieces and informal writing samples. Students utilized a range of sign systems through writing, language, and drawing to further their own understandings of the social, historical, and political events of days past, as well as current day happenings.

Keywords: critical literacy, English Learners, transmediation, writing instruction



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In a culturally and linguistically diverse third-grade class, William (all names of people and places are pseudonyms) and his classmates are busy reading, writing, drawing, talking, and thinking about issues related to civil rights and migrant workers. The rights and freedoms for everybody, including migrant workers, are being talked about as part of the mandated curriculum in social studies. As students consider the course of events during the 1960s and 1970s related to human and civil rights in the United States, they engage in "problem posing" (Freire, 1970) and wonder about fairness, race, language use, and the plight of African Americans and Latinos in this country. During a sharing time, William reads from his character perspective piece.

In this piece, William takes on the perspective of one of the marshals hired to escort and protect Ruby Bridges as she walks past the protesters into her new school and first grade classroom. He writes, "What will happen if I let Ruby walk by herself? I wonder what they are planning to do with Ruby? And I wonder if I will get a \$100 to walk Ruby to school." This particular writing invitation required students to address one of the dimensions of critical literacy: taking on multiple perspectives (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). While imagining what the marshal's experiences might have been like, William constructs a more in-depth understanding of the issues during this time period. He even considers the economic costs involved in protecting the rights of one young child, Ruby Bridges.

On a different day, William's classmates discuss their experiences related to learning English. Many of the students in this class are English Learners (EL) and have multiple experiences navigating between languages. One text in particular, *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* (Krull, 2003), resonates with the students as they listen to their teacher read about how Chavez was singled out by his teacher for speaking Spanish. As the discussion ensues, the students share stories of people who have chastised them for speaking Spanish or supported them in

learning English. Some begin to write about these personal memories.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Writing Instruction

According to recent National Assessment of Educational Progress reports (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), twenty-seven percent of all eighth grade students across the nation scored in the proficient range on the 2011 writing assessments.

For English learners (EL) the percentage drops dramatically with one percent at or above proficient. Such results, along with research studies (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006; Mo, Kopke, Hawkins, Troia, & Olinghouse, 2014; Soares & Wood, 2010) indicate teachers are not providing students with frequent opportunities to write or having writing tasks

that are limited in nature. A nationwide survey conducted by Cutler and Graham (2008) revealed that the majority of elementary school students were involved in writing activities for less than thirty minutes a day. Higgins et al. (2006) and others (Au, 2011; Botzakis, Burns, & Hall, 2014; National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2003; Williams, 2007) also note that many teachers devoted less time to authentic writing instruction that allowed students to make choices and write about meaningful topics because the time spent was focused on preparing students to take standardized tests at the end of the year.

Although former curricular standards included writing, recent efforts with the Common Core State Standards movement have welcomed a renewed emphasis on writing instruction (Mo et al., 2014). In grades K-5, teachers are advised to carefully choose texts that can strategically help students increase worldly knowledge (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The CCSS in English Language Arts encourage teachers to embed more integrated writing opportunities across the curriculum in multiple content areas (Graham, 2013). Writing

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across the curriculum is a powerful strategy for learning subject matter that “engages students, extends thinking, deepens understanding, and energizes the meaning making process” (Knipper & Duggan, 2006, p. 462). As with previous curricular standards, students are expected to write for multiple purposes, such as to persuade, inform, and narrate. Students are also expected to conduct research by gathering information from a variety of sources and use document-based evidence within expository text. Researchers such as Strickland (2012) and others (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Graham & Harris, 2013) note that it is critical for teachers to provide students with daily opportunities to write for multiple purposes and audiences across the content areas. Implementing these new standards provides educators and policymakers opportunities to “reevaluate current practices, abandoning less effective methods in favor of more constructive ways of teaching writing” (Mo et al., 2014, p. 452).

While the CCSS provides a roadmap and benchmarks for teachers as to what writing should look like for each grade level, several challenges still exist. Teachers still need to have a clearer understanding of how gaining a deeper understanding of students’ developmental writing stages will help them to more effectively differentiate writing instruction for students based on their abilities, experiences, and interests. The National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges (2003) and Cutler and Graham (2008) contend that many teachers lack confidence in their abilities to teach writing and feel underprepared to move beyond a scripted program or approach. Thus, writing assignments and assessments tend to be prompt driven. The formulaic nature of instruction and the commonplace structures rarely invite students to grapple with and think “on paper” about social justice issues and ideas. Yet, for the third grade students profiled in this article, opportunities to discuss and think about social justice topics as they worked with “writing invitations” allowed them to compose meaningful and authentic texts. (See Appendix A for descriptions of writing invitations.)

Back in William’s class, the reading, writing, drawing, and talking about issues related to civil rights and migrant workers revealed that students

took up and problematized how their own lives and experiences were being shaped by the social and political movements of previous eras. The read alouds, discussions, writing times, and author shares made it possible for the classroom community to reflect upon and consider multiple viewpoints and their own personal connections. In the context of these literacy engagements, the following questions were posed: (1) What topics and types of writing do students take up when discussing and learning about issues related to civil rights and immigration? And (2) What are the affordances and constraints of the different writing invitations as students engage with critical literacy texts? The purpose of this paper is to illuminate writing activities and children’s literature that support critical reflections from students of color, in particular English language learners. First we provide our theoretical perspective, which views writing as a social practice and a tool for thinking critically about historical and current events. Then, we describe our methodology, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. These sections address how the researchers worked collaboratively to analyze and interpret possible meanings behind the linguistically and culturally diverse third grade students’ writing samples. Finally, findings of this study are shared and followed by a discussion of what it means to engage students in writing about issues related to race, and civil rights.

Theories to Guide Our Thinking

The theoretical framework that guides study is grounded in sociocultural and critical theories, specifically the notions that writing is a social practice, a tool for thinking, and writing from a critical perspective contributes to developing globally minded and socially just students.

Writing as a Social Practice

Sociocultural theorists and scholars emphasize that learning and literacy development are socially, culturally, and historically situated practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). By focusing on the diverse contextualized practices in which reading and writing occur, literacy is viewed from what Street (1984) calls an *ideological* perspective. An ideological perspective acknowledges that literacy is a set of social practices based in

particular worldviews and varies from context to context. As children engage in reading and writing events, they draw upon social relationships with others, language patterns, and use of various tools and signs to construct meaning. These meanings are situated in the values, beliefs, and attitudes of those participating, leading to particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts. Literacy practices then are “never independent of [the] social world” (Perry, 2012, p. 52). They are connected to and are understood as existing in relationships between people, within groups, and among communities (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

A sociocultural theory of writing considers the interdependence of the individual and the social context as ideas are composed and knowledge is constructed. As children and teachers come together to participate in classroom-based writing events, they engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of interest. Children compose in a variety of modes and with a variety of materials to connect with others about matters of significance. In doing so, they draw upon their cultural resources, values, attitudes, understandings of the world, and networks of relationships. The features, processes, and design of the context influence the learning and the writing that occurs within such a community. Identities as writers are thus constructed, and their emerging identities in turn shape the contexts in which they engage in turn shapes the contexts in which one engages (Schultz, 2006).

Writing and Other Sign Systems as Tools for Thinking

Human beings strive to understand and make meaning of such things as experiences, histories, paintings, movement, scientific theorems, and mathematical computations. People seek to construct meaning by relating new experiences with existing mental structures or worldviews. Dix (2008) suggested, “While an idea is the thing you are thinking, when you write it down you can think about it” (p. 18). Writing brings vague perceptions or ideas to a verbal level that is explicit enough to reconsider or extend. Multiple theorists and researchers have contemplated the idea that writing

promotes and extends thinking for many years. Luria and Yudovich (1971) stated, “written speech represents a new and powerful instrument of thought,” while Vygotsky (1986) discussed this idea and argued that writing centrally represents a compression of inner speech. The slower nature of writing allows for and encourages movement among past, present, and future experiences and thought. Fu and Hansen (2012) claimed that writing could lead to deeper thinking.

Writing, as a mediating tool between thought and activity, however, is not the only possibility. Building from the theory of semiotics, Siegel (1995) and others (Short & Kauffman, 2000; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994) extend the idea that using a range of mediational tools (e.g., writing, drawing, music, dance, etc.) supports greater complexity of thought and the consideration of new ideas and connections. Defined as *transmediation*, this process reflects what happens when “understandings from one system (language) [are] mov[ed] into another sign system (pictorial representation)” (Siegel, 1995, p. 456). Further, this move from one sign to another and the functioning of these signs “always involves an enlargement and expansion of meaning, not a simple substitution of one thing for another” (p. 457). Transmediating across sign systems is a generative and reflexive act, whereby new connections and new understandings are created.

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy invites teachers and students to consider the varied ways literacy practices matter to the participants and their places in the world. As noted, literacy is seen as a social practice, not simply a technical skill (Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001; Luke & Freebody, 1997). Language and literacy are not neutral acts, but rather are situated in personal, social, historical, and political relationships. Lewison, Flint and, Van Sluys (2002) identified four social practices that reflect a critical literacy curriculum: 1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple perspectives, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action to promote social justice. Emphasis is specifically placed on the context in which the texts are created and contested. Students’ interests and purposes serve as the

foundation for what occurs in the classroom.

Despite the growing research centering young learners in critical literacy (Chafel, Flint, Hammel, & Pomeroy, 2007; Comber & Simpson, 2001; Flint & Laman, 2012; Vasquez, 2004); our collective experiences suggest that many educators believe that children are incapable of partaking in such controversial or political discussions. However, young students are already cognizant of issues of race, gender, class, and power. They are inundated with power struggles in both home and school settings and are able to recognize these hegemonies at an early age (Park, 2011; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Critical literacy invites students to discuss these pre-existing issues. Further, critical literacy “allows students to bring their own lived experiences into discussions, offering them opportunities for participation, engagement in higher levels of reading, and to understand the power of language” (Soares & Wood, 2010, p. 487).

The theories that guide this study point to the nature of learning and literacy as being socially, culturally, historically, and ideologically situated. Learners draw upon beliefs and values to construct critical understandings in language and other sign systems, as they engage with others in meaningful contexts. Moreover, these literacy practices “always comes fully attached to ‘other stuff’: to social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes, as well as things and places in the world” (Gee, 1996, p. vii).

Method

This naturalistic, qualitative study investigated how students engaged with and composed texts around issues of social justice. A naturalistic study is focused on the behavior of individuals when they are absorbed in life experiences in natural settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This qualitative study, following a naturalistic design, studied the engagements and interactions in a combined third-grade classroom, where students read texts representative of social issues such as the civil rights movement and migrant worker experiences. The researchers were participant observers as they

collected data related to the phenomena under study.

Participants and Setting

Richardson Elementary School is a school located off of what is an affectionately termed “international highway” in a large, urban southeastern city. Many of the restaurants and businesses close to the school are owned by families of Latin, Vietnamese, and Korean descent. The neighborhood, comprised mostly of older apartment buildings and small single-family homes, is diverse and transitory in nature with many children moving in and out of the school on a regular basis. At the time of the study, the school had approximately 800 students, with over 98% receiving free and reduced lunch and 57% receiving pullout ESOL services.

Participants in this study included two third-grade teachers and 38 students. The teachers, one female and one male, were Caucasian with over 25 and 15 years, respectively, of teaching experience. The student population in these two classrooms was predominately Latin@, with the exception of one African-American student. According to Stake (1994), of primary importance is participant selection. The teachers in this study had worked with first author Amy Seely Flint in previous years and were interested in continuing to learn about critical literacy and integrating more purposeful writing into their social studies curriculum. The teachers implemented two units of study, one focused on the civil rights movement and the other on migrant workers.

These topics were selected because they aligned with state-mandated social studies standards. The teachers were also mindful that social studies was often dismissed in favor of more time on reading and math and there were few authentic writing activities integrated into their social studies instruction. To address these concerns, the teachers in this study read aloud children’s literature selections on the identified topics of civil rights and migrant workers, introduced different writing invitations, and facilitated critical discussions of the texts (see Appendix A for descriptions of writing invitations and Appendix B for summaries of selected texts). The

teachers regularly brought the two classes together and took turns reading aloud the stories to their combined classes. While one teacher read the story aloud, the other teacher monitored the students' engagement, interjected with questions and ideas, and encouraged student response and discussion. As the students wrote in response to these texts before, during, and after they were read aloud by the two teachers, the students began to think critically about the characters' actions and the events occurring in these stories. These instructional activities were viewed during transcriptions of the videos.

The data collected during this study included video and audio recordings of the read alouds, discussions, and teacher debriefs; field notes; student constructed artifacts; and interviews with students and teachers. For the purposes of this article, to understand the topics students selected and the affordances of the writing invitations, we draw primarily upon the student artifacts: student writing folders that included the writing invitations and published drafts, as well as field notes of classroom discussions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was guided by the research questions and theoretical frameworks: writing as a social practice, writing as a tool for thinking, and critical literacy. A frequency chart was constructed to understand the relationship and prevalence of the writing invitations for each text. Based on frequency, Sketch-to-stretch and QuICS writing invitations (again, see Appendix A for descriptions of the writing invitations) were further analyzed to identify topics. Then, the students' writing folders were equally divided among the researchers and inductively analyzed to uncover how the students' writing was socially constructed and used as a catapult for thinking. During this stage, each researcher completed a data set chart per student, which summarized students' responses to the texts and described the various writing invitations. Researchers coded the data set with codes such as "personal experience," "family," "language use," and "struggle." Using a constant comparative method (Creswell, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994), researchers recursively read and re-read the student artifacts, highlighting the

similarities and differences among the students' writing.

After several rounds of reading and re-reading the data sources, themes were generated that ultimately revealed how the students constructed meaning as they interacted with critical literacy texts. The last stage of constant comparative analysis involved rereading the data until saturation took place (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), which was reached when redundancy in themes, patterns, and relationships amongst and between categories became apparent. This stage was heavily grounded in sociocultural and critical theories. The concluding themes illuminated student preferences, sociocultural links to the topics, and what each writing invitation either afforded or constrained.

Findings

Students addressed various topics in their responses to the critical literacy texts. Overall, five topics emerged from the data: friendship, violence, language learning, movement/solidarity, and healthcare. Two of the topics, friendship and violence, were mostly located in the civil rights text set, the other three (language learning, movement/solidarity, and healthcare) were more prevalent in the migrant workers text set. The distribution of topics within the two text sets reflects in some ways the focus of the text itself. For example, it is not surprising that students made comments about best friends after reading *The Other Side* (Woodson & Lewis, 2001) and moving from place to place in response to *The Circuit* (Jiménez, 1997). Overall, the five topics represented both larger social issues and intimate personal concerns.

Friendship

Friendship was a central topic across students' sketch-to-stretch responses to the stories *If A Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks* (Ringgold, 1999), *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (Coles, 1995), *White Socks Only* (Coleman, 1996), and *The Other Side* (Woodson & Lewis, 2001). Initially this finding surprised the research team because the stories highlighted the unjust treatment of African Americans during the civil rights era. Discussions following the read alouds of the texts focused on how inequality and prejudice prevailed in the communities and around the

country. However, many of the students drew images for their sketch-to-stretches, which included girls holding hands, BFF (Best Friends Forever), and hearts (see Figure 1). One of the stories in the civil rights text set, *The Other Side*, carried a subtheme of friendship, which seemed to resonate with students. The positive, colorful images that the students produced contrasted the difficult and trying events depicted in the text. In addition to the images that reflected friendship, students captioned their drawings with words and phrases such as, “now,” “XOXOXO,” and “black and white can be together.” These descriptors symbolized what they saw as the outcome of the work of civil rights activists such as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ruby Bridges: that African Americans and Whites can get along and be friends. The focus of friendships across racial lines was commonplace among the students’ writings in response to the Civil Rights texts they read and discussed.

Violence

One topic, indicative of the Civil Rights Era that appeared in students’ written artifacts, was the issue of violence. When students wrote about what surprised them, they noted the violent nature of many of the incidences that took place. This emphasis perhaps was a surprise because students had not encountered picture books that addressed these events. Although many of the texts themselves did not explicitly foreground the violence, students picked up on the subtleties in the images and in passing references. The images in these texts contributed to students’ expanded understandings of the events of the 1960s. In responding to *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (Coles, 1995), students noted that the marshals carried guns. They were surprised to learn that the White students in the school hated Ruby Bridges. One student wrote “Everybody at the school hate her [sic].” Gabriel wrote, “The whole school was mean to Ruby.” As they read and talked about *If a Bus Could Talk* (Ringgold, 1999), students again commented on gun use. Alicia made references to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the violence that surrounded his life: “In the scary night, they would kill Black people. They burned MLK house [sic].” And still another responded to dangers and consequences that Rosa Parks endured: “Rosa

threatened a White boy when she knew that she could get hung or shot.”

Language Learning

Language learning was a topic that appeared in many of the students’ images and words. None of the texts explicitly addressed learning a new language, but students’ own personal connections with events and people, similar to those represented in the stories, were highlighted. For example, in the book *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* (Krull, 2003), the author writes about Chavez’s experience in school when the teacher hung a sign on him that stated “I am a clown. I speak Spanish” (Krull, 2003, n.p.). Chavez’s experience resonated with students as they wrote and drew about this incident. While making a connection to this particular book, one student wrote “sad” next to the sign, “I am a clown.” His feelings for the incident were clear in his word choice. The image of the sign was also one of the most used when students used the sketch-to-stretch invitation. Several of the students drew the sign with the words written on it.

The Circuit (Jiménez, 1997) was another text that explored the challenges of learning a language. Similar to the author’s boyhood experiences in growing up in a migrant family, many of the students identified with and wrote about instances when they had been denied the right to speak their first language in school. They shared personal memories of when they or their friends were scolded for speaking Spanish in the classroom. Bernardo wrote, “It reminds me of kindergarten when I didn’t know any English.” In a personal memory text, Alejandro shared his friend’s experience of being admonished by a teacher for speaking Spanish the previous year. He wrote,

I remember in 2nd grade, Mrs. O said “English, English, no Spanish!” to Angel. And then he moved to Mexico to speak Spanish. And I feel sorry for him because he got yelled by Mrs. O ‘ cause she was a loud voice and she don’t want people to speak Spanish.

For many of the students, the challenges of learning a new language were something that they could connect to and write about using the different invitations.

Movement and Solidarity

An analysis of the writing artifacts suggested that students appeared to include images related to the tensions exhibited in the texts when reading books related to migration and Latin@ history in the United States. For example, they included images representing movement or migration from place to place such as maps, flags of Mexico and the United States, and large groups of people marching (see Figure 2).

One student, Xahari, chose for her final writing piece a response to the story *Harvesting Hope* (Krull, 2003). She illustrated her cover with a garden patch of lettuce, carrots, and grapes; an apple orchard with ladders next to the trees; and people holding baskets as they picked the fruit. All of the people were frowning. Inside she wrote,

Cesar Chavez live with his family.

He had a beautiful house.

His father had a job until the trees weren't so good.

His family didn't have any money so his parents had to work on a farm.

He left school and worked with his parents.

They were really poor.

Their house wasn't so pretty.

They were immigrants.

Their boss when the workers did something wrong sometimes the boss fired them, beat them or murdered them.

Cesar was scared.

He made speeches until one day he died.

Xahari's composition is a summary of the story; but it also demonstrates how she was able to encapsulate the central ideas around solidarity, power, and resilience among migrant workers.

Healthcare

The topic of healthcare came up often in the students' writings, especially in regards to family members being born, trips to the hospital, and remedies for illnesses. Students' wrote personal

connection stories, sketch-to-stretch pieces, and Fair/Not Fair responses as they listened to their teachers read chapters from *The Circuit* (Jiménez, 1997). In their personal connection stories two students wrote about baby sisters being born. Alejandro wrote about a remedy that his mom used to help him get better when he was sick, saying, "I remember when I got sick. My mom used to get a coin and put it with Tiger Balm" Another student's personal connection story included other family members: "My aunt had a baby who was sick and

went to the hospital and got better."

References to healthcare were also represented in sketch-to-stretch pieces that the students created. Alexis created two sketches that related to healthcare. In the first piece she drew a tent with a baby inside and wrote "the baby died." In the second piece Alexis drew a baby with a sad face and wrote "this is the baby that is sick when he is little,"; a picture of a tent is next to the words "this is

the tent they stay in and sleep in"; and she drew a hospital and wrote "this is the hospital that Torito went to when he was sick."

Similarly, another student depicted various aspects of family and illness in her sketch-to-stretch. Her images depicted a mother in the hospital taking care of a sick baby. She also drew a picture of people praying and wrote, "people pray when someone is dying or sick." A picture of the baby in the story with blood on his diaper depicted his illness. A third student drew a picture of a hospital and a baby. Students also connected to the unfairness of being sick and dying as an infant. Tomas wrote, "It's not fair that Torito is sick" while Diana wrote that it was fair that the doctors wanted to save the baby and that the girl tried to save the baby, too.

The varied topics that students took up in their writing suggest that the texts and conversations invoked ideas and concerns that are rarely seen in

As teachers and students work toward integrating critical literacy practices into their writing time, it is possible to transform and strengthen the literacy practices and repertoires of students as they navigate the larger social, cultural, and political events of the day.

elementary classroom curriculum. Making sense of the violence during the civil rights, understanding language use, or talking about different avenues for healthcare are not commonplace “prompts” found within elementary classrooms (Geisler, Hessler, Gardner, & Lovelace, 2009; Hudson, Lane, & Mercer, 2005). Students in these two classrooms were able to explore a range of ideas in a variety of sign systems, thereby increasing their abilities to demonstrate knowledge and understanding.

Affordances and Challenges Related to Multiple Writing Invitations

As we began to examine student response to the different writing invitations, we noted the frequency of certain invitations. This process led to considering the purpose and value of each invitation as students discussed social justice issues and historical events. The three most popular writing invitations were sketch-to-stretch, QuICS, and character perspective. By far, students selected sketch-to-stretch as a preferred response strategy ($n=71$). Every student had at least one sketch-to-stretch in his or her writing folder, while many students had multiple sketches. *White Socks Only* (Coleman, 1996), *The Other Side* (Woodson & Lewis, 2001), and *Harvesting Hope* (Krull, 2003) were the texts that invoked the most sketches.

We surmised that the events in the stories lent themselves to drawing selected images. The sketch-to-stretch invitation enabled students to visually represent the ideas in the story as well as in their own thinking as they read and discussed the texts. Students’ images were predominantly positive and happy, with icons reflective of friendships, family, solidarity of a group, and love. Occasionally, students would create a “collage” of sorts by drawing images across the texts. One student, Aaron, chose to symbolize his perspective of how race relations have changed over the 40-year period (see Figure 3). His images exemplify how sketch-to-stretch can push students to new understandings of complex ideas.

Alongside the sketch-to-stretch, students also responded to the texts through QuICS. The QuICS strategy was an opportunity for students to list initial thoughts about a text that they could develop further

in later writings. To illustrate, Alicia wrote for her question, “Why did the White people didn’t like Black people?” and she was surprised that the “White people wanted to kill Ruby.” These statements were developed into a more thoughtful piece about what was fair and not fair about the treatment of African Americans and Ruby Bridges, in particular. Aaron used his QuICS to develop a graphic organizer where he put himself into the perspective of one of the Marshalls that guarded Ruby as she walked to the school.

Understanding character perspectives, a CCSS standard for third grade, provide students a platform to discuss the behaviors of different characters in the text, which aligns with one of the tenets of critical literacy—taking on multiple perspectives (Lewison, et al., 2002). Further, students are supported to extend their understandings in new and novel ways. Specifically, the students in the study were able to conceptualize the characters from the text. To illustrate, Lisbeth articulated the perspective of Ruby’s teacher and wrote,

How did the judge tell her to go to this school? How does she stand the mob. How is she happy without even one friend? She is very smart. She is very brave. I wonder how she is not scared.

Lisbeth appeared to notice the empathy that Ruby’s teacher felt about the events surrounding Ruby’s attendance at the school. The sophisticated nature of these writings suggests that the students in these two classrooms were taking on the position of being knowledgeable and insightful about the events during the civil rights era and issues related to immigration and migrant workers.

The constraints of these writing invitations were revealed as the students engaged in making sense of the social issues presented in the texts. The sketch-to-stretch was often misunderstood in that students drew scenes from the story, rather than using images to represent the overarching theme of the text. This constraint apparent in many of the students’ pieces as they drew characters from *The Other Side* (Woodson & Lewis, 2001) sitting on a fence or holding hands (as friends do). Students also drew pictures of tents with a baby crying to represent the storyline of the family in *The Circuit* (Jiménez, 1997)

worrying about the baby's illness. QuICS' limitations foster little depth in response because of the size of the actual writing space, as well as trying to write while the teacher is reading the text. For some students it was difficult to write while listening; for others there didn't seem to be immediate connections in the QuICS categories which resulted in empty post-it notes. Character perspectives were sometimes challenging for students to take on, especially if there was limited knowledge of the events taking place. Most of the character perspectives (24 of the 29) were generated in the civil rights texts, which built upon students' previous knowledge base about this historical period of time (e.g., Martin Luther King and his work for civil rights).

Discussion

The students and teachers in these two third-grade classrooms constructed meaning of texts in novel and complex ways. They utilized a range of sign systems through writing, language, and drawing to further their own understandings of the social, historical, and political events of days past, as well as current day happenings. The generative nature of the writing invitations was essential as students constructed their own understandings and interpretations of socially significant topics. They examined a range of ideas and topics, including violence, language learning, and solidarity. These topics problematize what is often considered status quo or commonplace for young writers.

This finding is similar to the work of Heffernan and Lewison (2003), where they discovered how students readily took on the socially significant issues such as bullying and power in their social narratives. As Lewison and Heffernan (2008) note, "Such writing acted as a tool to disrupt students' naturalized ways of 'doing writing' in elementary schools, encouraging them to analyze and critique issues they described as important in their lives (p 436)". Opportunities for students to think and respond to topics related to the civil rights and migrant workers resulted in the construction of texts that demonstrated possibilities for extending conversations about these important issues. Moreover, the range and depth of the students' writing suggest that this type of writing is

critically important in the context of students' lives and experiences, as well as meets the demands of current standards and expectations.

Students also created a shared composing space, whereby ideas from one student manifested itself in someone else's composition. The sharing of ideas was particularly noticeable with the sketch-to-stretch artifacts. There were similar iconic images across many of the students' papers. For example, "BFF" and hearts to represent friendship and "getting along" were found throughout the students' writing folders. As the ideas and images traveled throughout the room, students took these and incorporated them into their own repertoire of understandings. Building on the belief that literacy is socially constructed (Barton & Hamilton, 2000), students came to value the icons and images in significant ways. Bakhtin (1981) talks about this movement of ideas in terms of appropriation and dialogism. These images and texts were "fluid and transactional, with each text serving to mediate and transform others" (Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994, p. 300). Thus, as the students appropriated each other's images, they drew upon prior understandings to make sense of texts and then reframed them to create their own representation of meaning.

Sketch-to-stretch enabled students the opportunity to represent their thinking in novel ways. Students had not experienced this invitation before, and as a result had mixed success with extending beyond a scene from a particular text. Yet, when students used symbols and images to reflect current and historical events, a wider range of thinking about their lives and the world emerged. Aaron's visual representation of race relations suggests that he was able to critically examine these larger social issues in ways that were not apparent in his written texts. By engaging in transmediation of sign systems, students adopted a critical stance toward the texts read by the teachers. They were able to examine the social and historical events presented in the stories and provide critique. This finding resonates with others working in the area of transmediation and critical literacy (Albers, Harste, & Vasquez, 2011). While the Albers and colleagues study focuses on teachers, it is important to note that the visual images from the young students carried similar messages of

friendship and racial unity. Additionally, students in this study were able to extend and expand their conceptual understandings as they mediated multiple symbol systems and lived experiences (Siegel, 2006).

Conclusion

Students' written and visual artifacts around two critical literacy units, civil rights and immigration/migrant workers, suggest that they were able to interrogate and problematize the social and political events of the time. They took risks with multiple perspectives and offered a number of personal memory narratives that were infused with connections and experiences. These third-grade

students also took up the invitation to work across sign systems and generate new and complex meanings through their sketch-to-stretch responses. Throughout the read alouds, discussions, writing time, and author's sharing time, opportunities existed for students "to expand their thinking and to grapple with issues of freedom, social responsibility, citizenship, and personal identity" (Soares & Wood, 2010, p. 493). As teachers and students work toward integrating critical literacy practices into their writing time, it is possible to transform and strengthen the literacy practices and repertoires of students as they navigate the larger social, cultural, and political events of the day.

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Appendix A

Descriptions of Writing Invitations

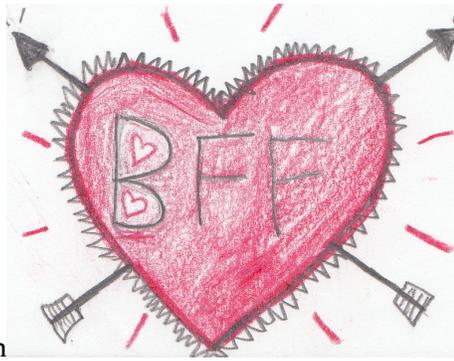
Writing Invitation	Description
Character Perspective	Students choose a character from the story and attempt to view and write about an event or events from that specific character’s viewpoint.
Fair/Not Fair	Students write about story events or ideas that are fair versus those that are not fair.
Personal Memories	Students write about a personal experience or memory that connects to an event or idea in the book.
QuICS	Students divide their paper into four squares and record their initial thinking about the story in response to the following four cues (one is written in each box): Qu - Questions I have I - Interesting points C - Connections I can make S - Surprising events
Sketch-to-stretch	Students “sketch” or draw visual images based on what they found as important or interesting in the story. The images that the students draw represent their personal interpretations of the text as well as connections between the text and their real life experiences.

Appendix B

Summaries of Texts Selected for Read Alouds

Books Related to Civil Rights	
White Socks Only (Coleman, 1996)	A grandmother shares with her granddaughter a story of her childhood when she misunderstood the meaning of a “whites only” sign on a water fountain. She removed her shoes to drink from the fountain only to discover that the sign meant white people only. A white towns person was ready to beat her but African American bystanders stepped in and also removed their shoes to drink from the fountain.
The Story of Ruby Bridges (Coles, 1995)	A true story of Ruby Bridges, the first African American girl sent to first grade in an all-White school in New Orleans in the 1960s. The book tells about her negative experiences and the crowd’s hostility as she walks to school. The book showcases the courage that Ruby Bridges has in the face of racism.
Sister Anne’s Hands (Lorbiecki, 2000)	Seven year-old Annie has a new teacher. Sister Anne is the first dark skin person that Annie has met. Sister Anne is met with resistance. Although kids are pulled from her class, Sister Anne continues to teach. One day, a student throws a paper airplane with an offensive poem. At the end of the book, Annie describes her year with Sister Anne as a year full of learning when an important lesson about acceptance was learned.
If a Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks (Ringgold, 1999)	In this story, Marcie takes a magical ride on a bus that details the life experiences of Rosa Parks. Readers learn why Rosa Parks is such an important figure in the civil rights movement. At the end of the book, Rosa Parks gets on the bus and the little girl understand the importance of Rosa Parks’ actions that inspired others to stand up for freedom.
The Other Side (Woodson & Lewis, 2001)	This book tells the story of a friendship between two girls whose houses are separated by a fence. Despite knowing that they are not supposed to play with each other due to the racial differences, the girls develop a friendship and begin to sit on the fence together.
Books Related to Migrant Farm Workers	
A Day’s Work (Bunting, 1994)	This is the story of a young boy, his grandfather and the challenges they face when looking for day labor. The young boy lies to a potential employer by saying that his grandfather knows how to garden. The boy and grandfather mistakenly pull plants instead of weeds, which is discovered by the employer. The grandfather and boy rectify the mistake by working for no extra pay. The young boy learns a lesson about telling the truth.
The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child (Jiménez, 1997)	This book is a collection of short stories about a boy named Francisco and his family as they work the farm fields in California. Included in the short stories are memories of going to school for the first time, not speaking English, and when the youngest child in the family gets very sick.

<p>Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez (Krull, 2003)</p>	<p>The book begins by detailing Cesar Chavez’s childhood and struggles in schools and chronicles his life as a migrant farm worker. The book recounts how Chavez began to organize farm workers and how he was instrumental in organizing a non-violent movement for farm workers’ rights.</p>
<p>Tomas and the Library Lady (Mora, 1997)</p>	<p>This book tells the story of a little boy who moves from Texas to Iowa. Tomas begins to visit the library and is greeted by the library lady who shows him that he can check out books. Tomas begins to read many different types of books and learns about the joy of reading.</p>



Sketch-to-stretch



Figure 1. Sketch-to-stretch to illustrate iconic images

Sketch-to-stretch

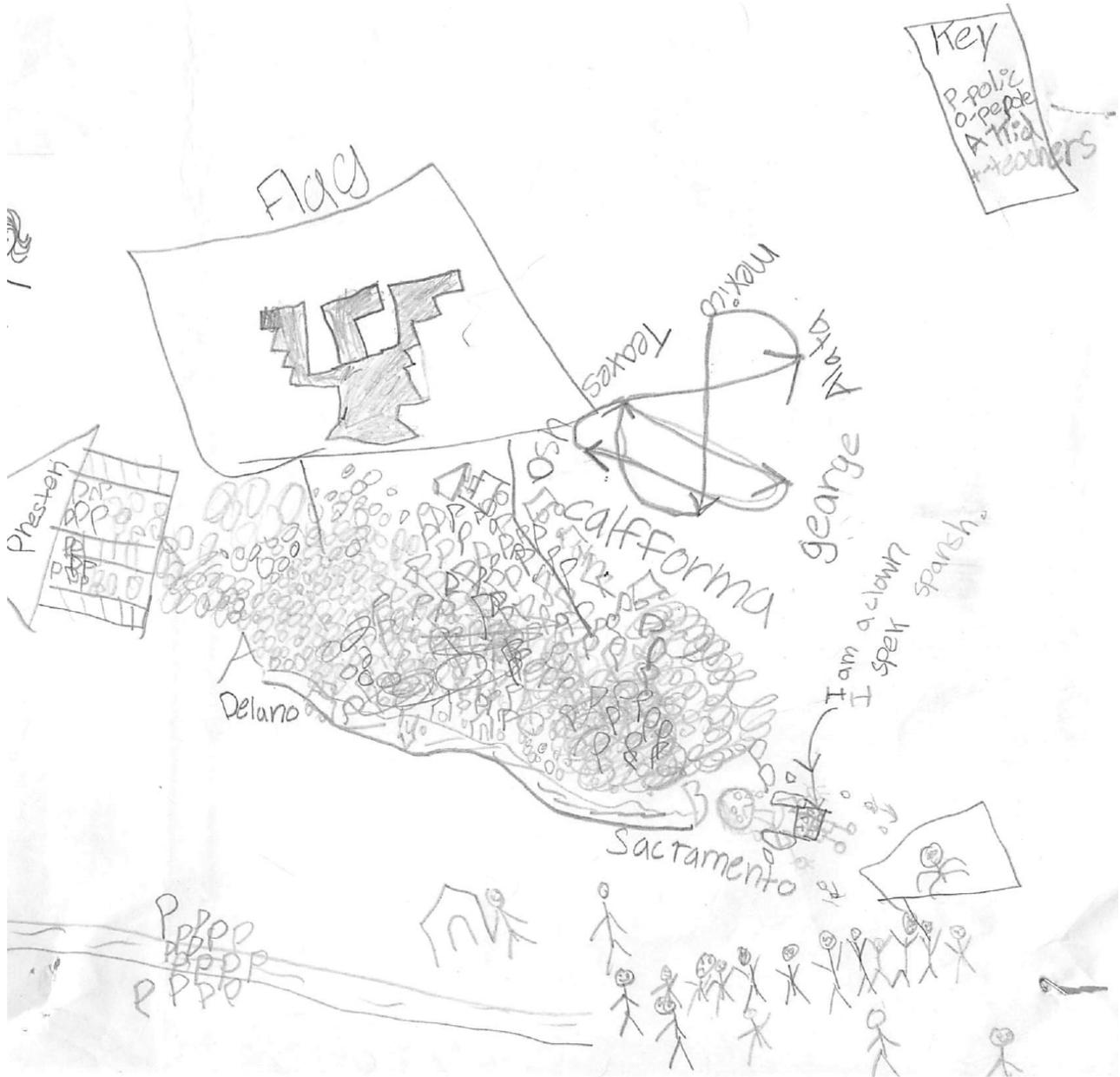


Figure 2. Sketch-to-stretch to illustrate movement and solidarity

Sketch-to-stretch



Figure 3. Sketch-to-stretch to illustrate race relations for 40 years.