SECOND GRADE AFRICAN-AMERICAN READER RESPONSE TO

CULTURALLY CONSCIOUS AND MAINSTREAM LITERATURE

USED FOR COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION

A THESIS

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SABA KHAN VLACH, B.A., B.A.

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ABSTRACT

SABA KHAN VLACH

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This thesis documents a qualitative research study that explored how 2nd grade

African-American students responded in writing to picture books written by and about

African-Americans (defined as *culturally conscious*, Sims, 1982), and how those

responses differed from those student's responses to mainstream picture books. Over six

weeks, the teacher-researcher read aloud six mainstream picture books and six culturally

conscious African-American picture books to a 2nd grade class including ten African-

American study participants. Data collected included 115 student written responses to

literature, audiotaped book introductions, and field notes. A sentence-by-sentence

analysis of the written responses revealed that for some African-American 2nd graders,

culturally conscious literature produces a more emotional and more authentic response

than mainstream literature.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, only 55% of African-American students graduate from high school, compared with 71% of all students (Swanson, 2009). The National Assessment of Educational Progress found in 2008 that in every American state, white fourth-graders scored higher in reading than their African-American classmates (Vanneman, A., Hamilton, L., Baldwin Anderson, J., & Rahman, T., 2008). While economic differences may contribute to the difference, it is not solely economic: Middle-class African-American children scored significantly lower on a standardized measure of achievement than their majority peers who lived in the same community (Singham, 1998).

The disparity between various demographic groups of students is commonly referred to as the 'achievement gap'. In actuality, a number of different gaps exist that result in this phenomenon of low achievement. These include an opportunity gap, resource gap, readiness-to-learn gap, and a teacher-preparation gap constituting an overall education gap. (State of Washington HB2722 Committee, 2008)

What causes the African-American achievement gap in the United States? A 2008 report by the State of Washington (State of Washington HB2722 Committee, 2008) listed the following primary causes:

- Inequitable distribution of skilled, experienced teachers

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- Insufficient and inequitable school funding

- Inadequate, obsolete, and unbalanced distribution of facilities, technology, and instructional materials

- Institutional racism

- Lack of cultural competence among teachers, school staff, administrators, curriculum and assessment developers and the school system itself (p. 10)

Based on this list, one can conclude that the causes of the achievement gap are due to inadequacies in United States public education. The fault does not lie with the African-American community. Tyson (2002) and Lewis and Kim (2008) found that elementary age African-American children view academic achievement as an important outcome of school. Tyson conducted an ethnographic study of two all-black elementary schools made up mostly of families with middle-class incomes. Her findings suggest that elementary age African-American children "begin school achievement-oriented and engaged with the process of schooling" (p. 1157). Tyson's data implies that engaged students care about their performance in school and are active participants in the classroom. Her study provides evidence that a school experience of respect and high expectations shapes the attitudes of elementary age African-American students. Further support for motivation among young black children can be found in Lewis and Kim's study of 2008. Their findings suggest that elementary-aged African-American children from low income, urban environments wanted to learn and responded positively to high expectations. Moreover, these children were able to clearly articulate the characteristics they desired in their teachers. The children in this study defined a good teacher as

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"someone who teaches you things-someone who helps children to achieve, and not merely someone who treats you well or does good things for you" (p. 1316). Unfortunately, many of these children's teachers had low expectations and accepted poor quality work as exceptional. When the same children were placed in an environment in which the "teachers perceived and valued the competencies of their children" and treated them with respect, the children responded positively (Lewis and Kim, 2008).

In summary, recent research indicates that there is an achievement gap between African-American students from all economic backgrounds and their white counterparts. The research reviewed for this study indicated that this achievement gap is not due to lack of motivation from young Black children. Elementary age African-American children are motivated and desire academic success.

One of the primary causes listed in the State of Washington report (2008) was institutional racism. Naturally the presence of racism will impact the success of children in school. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and Ogbu (2004) found that some African-American children feel that they must become "raceless" in order to succeed in school. These students carry the "burden of 'acting white'" and have to find a way to cope with the pressures of the mainstream cultures' demands, as well as their community's resistance to this identity (Ogbu, 2004). Tyson's (2005) study in two all-Black elementary schools speculated that the all-Black environment benefitted the children. All students were of the same race; therefore, the "burden of acting white" (Ogbu, 2004) was not an obstacle.

One primary cause for the African-American achievement gap is the lack of cultural competence among teachers, school staff, administrators, curriculum and assessment developers and the school system itself (State of Washington HB2722 Committee, 2008). In the United States the majority of teachers are women from White, middle-class backgrounds (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 1999). Glazier (2005) observed two White high school English teachers at a culturally diverse campus. The data indicated that the teachers' own cultural background influenced their discourse. The study found that this had a negative impact on those students whose home culture was different than their teachers' (Glazier, 2005). So one reason that African-American children struggle in today's classrooms may be that they have to compromise their collective identity – their cultural identity – in order to attain their academic identity.

This problem, the opposition between the minority home culture of African-American students and the majority home culture of their White teachers, has been the focus of a whole field of research. Glazier (2005), Delpit (2006) and others have tried to find ways for White teachers to validate the home culture of their minority students. The State of Washington report on the African-American achievement gap (2008) listed this as the second key area of education that has contributed to the problem and the now the solution: "Teaching and learning: structured, rigorous and culturally responsive curriculum" (p. 2).

Delpit (2006) recommends making schools' teaching staffs diverse, broadening the scope of the "Eurocentric curriculum", and explicitly teaching the culture of power to

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children of color. Ladson-Billings (1995) observed successful teachers of African-American students and found that they employed what she calls a *culturally relevant pedagogy*. Ladson-Billings (1995, p. 160) outlined three criteria for culturally relevant pedagogy:

- "Students must experience academic success." This means effectively helping students read, write, speak, compute, pose and solve higher order problems, and engage in peer review of problem solutions.

- "Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence." The key for teachers is to value and build on skills that students bring from the home culture.

- "Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order." Teachers help students recognize, critique, and change social inequities.

The teachers in Ladson-Billing's study (1995) believed that their pedagogy was an art form that was always evolving. At the heart of their instruction were the needs of their students, and their constant effort to build a community of learners. Ladson-Billings emphasizes that the focus of a culturally relevant pedagogy is "committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment" (1995, p. 160). A culturally relevant pedagogy involves a "willingness to nurture" the students' home culture, along with a respect for the school culture. One question that arises is how can a willing teacher invite the home culture into the classroom?

It is worth considering the impact of the type of literature teachers select to read and share with their minority students, once they have created a space for the home

cultures of their students in the classroom (Delpit, 2006; Glazier, 2005). What are the attributes of an appropriate literature for African-American students? Sims (1982) categorized children's literature about African-Americans into three categories. *Social conscience* books are usually written by non-African-American authors to depict the historical struggles of African-Americans. These books encourage their White readers to sympathize with African-Americans. *Melting pot* books are written for an integrated audience. Their message is that under our skin, we are all the same. *Culturally conscious* books are usually written by African-American authors for an African-American audience. These books reflect the reality of the African-American experience. Sims (1982) advocated culturally conscious literature for African-American students because she believed that when children read authentic representations of themselves, it helps them construct their own cultural identity.

However, in 1982 when Sims wrote her seminal text, *Shadow and Substance,* she faced a challenge in finding culturally conscious literature because very few children's books were written by African-American authors. This scarcity continues to the present day— of 3000 children's books reviewed in 2007, only 77 were written by African-American authors (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2007). This is less than 3% of the total books published that year.

There are many resources available to help guide teachers in their selection of literature for instructional purposes. Among the resources are practitioner texts like *Reading with Meaning* (2002) by Debbie Miller, a popular professional text used in preservice and inservice training. In her text, Miller shares "tried and true" literary

resources for strategy instruction for kindergarten through second grade students.
Teachers who use these books may feel that their search for the best books or best authors is over. The recommended texts provide examples of quality writing, opportunities for meaningful analysis, and authentic learning of reading and writing processes. Unfortunately, Debbie Miller's (2002) list of 139 books only includes five titles by African-American authors, which is fewer than 4% of the titles listed. The composition of Miller's list parallels the 3% of all published books by African-American authors (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2007). Due to this shortage of available culturally conscious literature, it is difficult for teachers to find literature for developing a culturally relevant curriculum for their African-American students.

In America, African-American children underperform their White counterparts in literacy (Singham, 1998). African-American children hold positive attitudes towards learning and academic success (Lewis and Kim, 2008; Tyson, 2002), and they want teachers that will teach them new things, but their motivation decreases when the school culture doesn't recognize, or even stigmatizes, their home culture (Glazier, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lewis and Kim, 2008). In order to foster a sense of cultural identity and academic excellence among African-American children, Delpit (2006), Ladson-Billings (1992), and Sims (1982) advocate a culturally relevant pedagogy. This study will examine two possible components of a culturally relevant pedagogy for African-American students: the literature-based classroom and culturally conscious African-American literature. It seeks to understand how African-American students may benefit from the freedom of expression inherent in the concept of literature-based classroom; and

to see how culturally conscious African-American books may allow African-American students to be more engaged with literature.

This study seeks to answer the following two questions:

- In a literature-based classroom, how will 2nd grade African-American students respond in writing to culturally conscious books and practitioner-recommended books?

- When 2nd grade African-American students in a literature-based classroom respond in writing to culturally conscious books and practitioner-recommended books, how will the responses differ?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part describes the theoretical framework in which my study is situated, and the second summarizes three areas of published research that informed the study.

Theoretical Frame

This study was informed by three complementary fields of research: Ladson-Billings's (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, Sims's (1982) analysis of children's literature about African-Americans, and Rosenblatt's (1982) transactional theory of literacy.

Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy identifies the characteristics of a teacher that works to empower and educate her African-American students (1995). According to researchers like Allington (2000), the teacher is the most critical determinant of a child's success in school. Therefore, before further exploration regarding the type of literature that is best suited for African-American students can take place; the teacher must define her attitudes and beliefs towards the success of African-American children. Ladson-Billings's theory (1992) describes an ideological stance that a teacher should take in order to best support her African-American students. "Culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy of opposition that recognizes and celebrates African and African-American culture" (p.314). Ladson-Billings contrasts culturally relevant

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pedagogy with assimilationist pedagogy, which assumes that African-American students must set aside their culture in order to participate in the educational process. The ultimate goal of culturally relevant teaching is to "use student culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge" (p.314).

Ladson-Billings (1992) focuses on the practices of teachers, not on the textbooks and trade books they use. Although she does not prescribe the types of resources that a teacher should use to access student culture, this study will examine the use of culturally conscious African-American literature as one method for inviting student culture into the classroom. In *Shadow and Substance* (1982), Sims surveys and critiques many children's books about African-Americans. Among these, which were a tiny fraction of all children's books, only a small few met Sims's criteria for 'culturally conscious' literature, which she felt "directly addressed" African-American culture. Just as Ladson-Billings contrasted culturally relevant pedagogy with assimilationist pedagogy, Sims contrasts culturally conscious literature with 'social conscience' books which are written from a non-African-American perspective, and 'melting pot' books which deny the existence of cultural differences between African-American and mainstream culture. Culturally conscious literature portrays African-American culture through language, stories, and illustrations. The authors are typically African-American themselves, so they are writing from a place of authority and authenticity (Sims, 1982). Textual features that are commonly found in African-American culturally conscious texts include: living in the city, African and "downhome" heritage and traditions, friendship and peer relationships,

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family relationships, and growing –up and finding oneself (Sims, 1982). These types of texts may serve as a way for teachers to share their acceptance and interest of their students' home culture, as well as allow the children to understand themselves and others through literature. This shared cultural knowledge might then allow for a teacher with a culturally relevant pedagogy, but who is an ethnic outsider, to teach a culturally relevant curriculum to her African-American students.

Such a teacher will require a theoretical lens through which to assess the ways her students interact with literature. Rosenblatt's (1982) transactional theory of reader response identifies two primary transactions in which readers interact with text: efferent and aesthetic. She writes that "any reading event falls somewhere on the continuum between the aesthetic and the efferent poles" (p.269). The efferent response is the search for the information in the text, or the information to be "carried away" at the end of the text. On the other end of the continuum is the aesthetic response that refers to the "sense" of the text felt by the reader during the act of reading (p.269). Based on Rosenblatt's transactional theory, while students are listening to stories or narratives, they will all have their own unique transaction with the text, which will include both efferent and aesthetic transactions. As aesthetic readers, Rosenblatt writes that we use our emotions, our past experiences, our senses to help us identify with the characters and the feelings of the text (1982). The transactional theory allows that an African-American student's aesthetic response to a book will necessarily be informed by his or her ethnic culture, and that the interactions between African-American culture and literature are available for analysis.

I intend to use these three theoretical frames to situate my study as follows: My pedagogy will be culturally relevant according to Ladson-Billings's (1995) definition. Within the context of that pedagogy, I will present culturally conscious African-American literature according to Sims's (1982) definition. In analyzing the students' reader response, I will employ Rosenblatt's (1982) transactional theory of literacy.

Review of Related Research

The three theoretical frames just summarized informed my research focus on teacher's cultural identity, culturally conscious African-American literature, and reader response. Before turning to the study itself I now offer a review of recent research related to the three theoretical frames organized into three major categories. The first category is research about the influence of the teacher's cultural background on his or her pedagogy. The second category is research about literature-based classrooms. The third category is research about students' responses to texts with a focus on culturally conscious and multicultural literature. Together, all three categories of research provide a foundation for this study.

Teacher's Cultural Identity

Teachers' personal beliefs, values, and experiences have been found to play an active role in teacher talk and practice with students (Athanases, 2006; Delpit, 2006; Glazier, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Larson & Irvine, 1999). In 1994 Ladson-Billings published *The Dreamkeepers*. This text shares the findings of her three-year study in classrooms of effective teachers of African-American children. She selected eight teachers whose African-American students were consistently successful. Ladson-

Billings coded the characteristics of a culturally relevant pedagogy across the eight classrooms. In her findings she had three categories: the conceptions of self and others, the manner in which social relations are structured, and the conceptions of knowledge. Ladson-Billings (1995) did not explain how the eight successful teachers had developed a culturally relevant pedagogy. Of Ladson-Billings's eight teachers, five were Caucasian and three were African-American. Therefore, a culturally relevant pedagogy does not require that the teacher's ethnic background match her students'.

Culturally relevant teachers' conceptions of self and others included the belief that all children were capable of academic success. They believed that they were members of the communities in which they taught and felt that by teaching they were giving back to their communities. In their social relations, these teachers did not exclude any member of the class. They developed a classroom community in which the students felt a sense of responsibility for their individual success and for the whole-group's success. The conceptions of knowledge held by these eight teachers included a belief that teachers must be passionate about knowledge and learning. They assumed responsibility for scaffolding students to facilitate learning, and conducting a variety of assessments, "incorporating multiple forms of excellence". These teachers ensured the academic success of their African-American students and "developed a relevant Black personality" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 314).

Larson and Irvine (1999) interviewed teachers from nine classrooms from an urban school district in the northeast United States. One finding that emerged from the interviews and fieldnotes was that "teachers' literacy practices were influenced by beliefs

about their students' abilities and background" (p. 394). Their findings suggest that when teachers choose to separate their experiential background from their students' backgrounds a phenomenon of reciprocal distancing, "a discourse process in which teachers and students invoke existing sociohistorical and political distances between their communities in classroom interactions" (p.394), takes place that keeps both teachers and students from accepting each other.

Glazier (2005) studied high school English teachers' discourse with each other and with their students. A significant part of her study included the teachers examining their own discourse, as well as that of their colleagues. The teachers were surprised to find that their beliefs, values, and experiences were a large part of the discourse and teaching with their students. Since the teachers' discourse was influenced by their beliefs, values, and experiences, it tended to either include those students with similar backgrounds and beliefs or exclude those with different backgrounds and beliefs – another example of what Larson and Irvine (1999) defined as reciprocal distancing. Interestingly, one teacher participant, Julie, acknowledged the effects of her discourse with her students, but continued to teach in the same way without any shift in her discourse or classroom resources. However, other teacher participants were very upset by what they saw and heard. One teacher in Glazier's study (2005), Sarah, realized that her self-image as a White, American, middle-class insider was excluding students in her classroom. As a result, she worked towards a culturally relevant pedagogy by acknowledging that her concept of 'American' needed to expand to include minority students. Sarah's position and discourse was not allowing minority students in her class

equal space or equal voice in classroom conversations. One shift that Sarah made in her practice towards a culturally relevant pedagogy was selecting literature that represented the ethnicity and culture of her Hispanic students. Because Sarah was willing to shift her discourse to be more inclusive, as well as select resources that were culturally relevant, she may be able to succeed in developing equity in her classroom for all of her students. Glazier's findings (2005) suggest that teachers can be taught to change their practice by becoming aware of how they position students who hold different societal and cultural positions. Teachers can learn to include other cultures in their classrooms, and stop privileging certain students over others. According to Ladson-Billings (1995) and Glazier (2005), teachers from mainstream backgrounds can acknowledge, value, and respect the cultural identities of their minority students.

Ketter (2008) found that in-service teachers can shift their perspectives to culturally connect with their students. This study began with the teachers' exploration of their own identities and the impact that those identities had on their teaching. Ketter's purpose (2008) was to read and discuss multicultural literature with teachers of adolescents in order to research how theses teachers made their decisions about what types of texts to use and how they would teach these texts in their community. Specifically, the study focused on the teachers' discourse of these resources to reach struggling or disengaged youth. Ketter's findings suggest that "how teachers envision and respond to their students' identities and affiliations affect the literature and media texts they select for classroom use and, in part, determine the literacy practices that have purchase in the classroom" (p. 305). Ketter (2008) proposes that teachers should be

willing to engage with struggling students around activities that reflect "those students' out-of-school literacy practices" with the hope that this would "disrupt the interactions that have created the learning disabled identity for the students" (p. 290).

Au and Mason's (1981) study with six second grade Hawaiian students focused on the participation structures of two teachers during reading comprehension discussions. Au and Mason (1981) hypothesized that teachers who shared the rights of talk with their students would have greater academic achievement than those teachers who held exclusive rights. They called this the *balance of rights hypothesis*, and their findings supported their hypothesis. The teacher that developed a balance of rights during discussion had worked with children with Hawaiian ancestry for five years and understood that these children were accustomed to story-like talk outside of the classroom (home culture). Story-like talk allows multiple speakers to share at once, and the speakers determine who will speak next. The teacher that allowed for this open structure of response during reading comprehension discussions had 80% of her students engaged; whereas the teacher, who had no experience teaching Hawaiian children, insisted that all children raise their hands and one child speaks at a time had only 43% of her students engaged during the conversation. The second teacher with low student engagement was conducting her classroom discussion in a traditional, mainstream structure, in which the teacher manages behavior as much as she provides instruction. This teacher was not aware of her students' cultural background and interpreted their desire to talk without following the traditional method as a lack of regard for classroom structures. This study suggests that teachers should consider the culture of their students

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when developing their classroom routines and procedures for instruction. Au and Mason's research findings and conclusions promote a balance between the speaking and turn-taking rights of the teacher and the students, which may increase engagement for all students.

Literature-Based Classrooms

Classrooms in which teachers select the literature for instructional use are referred to as literature-based classrooms. In literature-based classrooms, as described in Allington (2000), Fountas and Pinnell (2006), and Miller (2002), students have ready access to a variety of authentic texts that serve as the primary teaching tool. Rather than following a script from a basal textbook with prescribed reading, literature-based classrooms employ "authentic literature as a vehicle to teach skills strategically" (Routman, 1991, p.135), as well as to provide pleasurable reading experiences. Teachers with literature-based classrooms tend to organize their time in reading and writing workshops with embedded minilessons and ample time for students to practice meaningful reading and writing in small groups and independently, instead of traditional skills-based instruction with worksheets (Allington, 2000 and Routman, 1991).

Two research studies have demonstrated that African-American students can succeed in literature-based classrooms. Morrow (1992) found that students from both mainstream and diverse backgrounds could attain literacy success in literature-based classrooms. Extending Morrow's inquiry, Bauman and Ivey (1995) demonstrated long-term growth in African-American second graders in literature-based classrooms during their yearlong study. The second graders were from low-income backgrounds, and many

of them were identified as low-performing readers. The classroom instruction was designed to provide instructional balance between teacher-initiated lessons and lessons responsive to students' needs and interests. Findings were categorized into five areas: development of low-performing readers, engagement with literacy increased for all students, word identification improved, fluency improved, and comprehension improved.

Rasinski and DeFord (1988) found that the learning environment shapes children's understandings of the purpose for reading and writing in three first-grade classrooms. In traditional skills-based classrooms, the children viewed reading as a process of decoding, with a goal of accuracy, whereas in literature-based classrooms, the children viewed reading and writing more holistically – the goal is to make meaning. Arya (2005) expected to find that children in commercial phonics-based programs would have significantly stronger results in their use of graphophonics within the reading process and in isolation, and would be more accurate readers, which would possibly lead to an advantage in developing comprehension. However, the children in the phonics-based programs were no stronger in phonics use, neither in isolation nor within text; and there were no significant differences in accuracy or comprehension. Arya (2005) did find, however, that the children in phonics-based programs were less willing to take risks while reading. The children in this study continued to read on without comprehending.

The practices in literature-based classrooms promote discourse—both between the teacher and the students, and between students. With more talk, children of all backgrounds are able to participate in rich conversations that increase vocabulary development, strengthen language structure, and develop critical readers and writers

(McGinley & Kamberelis, 1996; Morrow, 1992). A primary practice that advocates talk within literature-based classrooms is the interactive read-aloud. A study conducted by Fisher, Flood, Lapp, and Frey (2004) identified the essential components of an interactive read-aloud during their study of twenty-five expert teachers in San Diego urban schools. They identified seven components that all of the teachers used:

- Books chosen were appropriate to students' interests and matched their developmental, emotional, and social levels.

- Selections had been previewed and practiced by the teacher.

- A clear purpose for the read-aloud was established.

- Teachers modeled fluent oral reading when they read the text.

- Teachers were animated and used expression.

- Teachers stopped periodically and thoughtfully questioned the students to focus them on specifics of the text.

- Connections were made to independent reading and writing. (p. 10-11)

When the teachers in this study shared an overview and clear purpose for listening, student engagement increased with the text. As identified in the Fisher, et al. study (2004), one aspect of interactive read-alouds included conversations between the teacher and students during the reading. They found that expert teachers consistently incorporated book discussions before, during, and after the read-aloud. The students actively participated in focused conversations with the teacher and their peers. The teacher's goal was to ask questions that elicited both aesthetic and efferent responses from her students in order for them to experience the text completely. Barrentine (1996)

also wrote about planning effective interactive read-alouds, and she had some additional ideas that involve the teacher being flexible with his or her plans because the primary goal of the read-aloud is to be responsive to students. She also mentioned building students' background knowledge; and she recommended creating opportunities for students to explore stories in personal and exciting ways. Barrentine (1996) emphasized the necessity of student interaction with the text through conversations with their teacher and their peers. Interactive read-alouds allow for the opportunity for children to share their thinking before, during, and after the reading to facilitate meaning making and to engage with the text at a personal level.

Practitioner texts, such as Miller's *Reading with Meaning* (2002), advocate the use of interactive read-alouds as the primary method for whole class comprehension instruction. Each chapter of Miller's book (2002) focuses on a specific comprehension strategy, and concludes with a list of recommended books for teaching that strategy through interactive read-alouds. The comprehension strategies include using schema, inferring, creating mental images, asking questions, and synthesizing. Miller's pedagogical approach as defined in her book is consistent with the balance of right hypothesis (Au & Mason, 1991) and the research findings on literature-based classrooms.

Reader Response

Literature-based classrooms promote students' transactions with literature. The transactions between student and text can be observed through talk and written response. The students' talk and written response to text is defined as reader response, according to Rosenblatt's transactional theory (1982). Talk is an essential part of literacy learning,

especially for young children who are still developing their oral language skills. The presence of a teacher might affect the type of talk students will have in response to literature (Short, K., Kaufman, G., Kaser, S., Kahn, L., & Crawford, K.M., 1999). Students may feel more inhibited in front of their teacher, especially if they feel that the teacher's values and beliefs are different than their own (Glazier, 2005; Ketter, 2008). However, even when speaking with their teachers, children of all ages tend to offer candid, honest responses to text (Brooks, 2006; DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Enciso, 1994; Short, et al., 1999; Sipe & Bauer, 2001; Sutherland; 2005). Studies that focused on students' responses to multicultural text found that when children encountered personal issues like race, culture, and ethnicity in text, it pushed them to become active participants in the discussion, instead of just focusing on the characteristics of the text (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Enciso, 1994; Michael-Luna, 2008; Sutherland, 2005).

Reader response to culturally conscious literature. Brooks (2006) and Sutherland (2005) researched the use of culturally conscious literature as defined by Sims (1982). Brooks (2006) studied African-American middle school students and Sutherland (2005) studied high school students. Both studies found that textual features of culturally conscious literature prompted transactions that allowed these students to access their cultural identity in a school context. Brooks and Sutherland did not expect all of the students to connect with the same textual features in the same way; however, in both studies, there were features of the text that the majority of the participants were able to relate to at some level. For example, in Sutherland's (2005) study with adolescent girls reading Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, there were two primary features to which all the

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girls responded, both in discussions and in writing: 1) how a Eurocentric view of beauty acts as a boundary in Black women's lives and 2) how other's assumptions about who they are acts as a boundary (p. 380). The use of culturally conscious literature in these classroom contexts enabled African-American students to openly discuss their cultural identity through text and find some common ground with each other.

Whereas Brooks (2006) and Sutherland (2005) found that students bonded with each other when reading literature that represented them culturally, Michael-Luna (2008) observed students coming together to oppose an identity that they felt did not represent them. She observed how a piece of multicultural literature caused bilingual Hispanic first graders to construct racial identities in a classroom context. The text was a biography about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the teacher was talking with the students about the significant contributions made by Dr. King to society. During this talk, the teacher compared his students with the young Martin Luther King Jr., but the students responded that they were all White. At the young age of six and seven, in the context of a literature-based classroom, the children in the study felt that they were being faced with being either Black or White, and they were able to speak up for themselves and reject their teacher's positioning. This transaction with a short biographical text made the teacher aware that his first graders were trying to find their cultural and ethnic identity in school. In response to their rejection of a Black identity, the teacher developed a culturally relevant curriculum for his students focusing on their Latino culture. The teacher's focus in his culturally relevant curriculum was *pride* and *community*. Michael-Luna's findings (2008) did not include the students' responses to this new curriculum. It

was important to observe that the teacher did make a shift in his instructional practice as a response to his students' needs.

Reader response in young children. Sipe has conducted numerous studies with young children, primarily kindergarten through second grade students that focus on children's meaning making through reader response with picture books. Sipe's (2000) study and Sipe and Bauer's (2001) study identified five types of literary understandings made by young children during interactive read-alouds. The five categories included personal response (connection between book and student's life), transparent response (students talking back to the text and using it as part of their identity), and performative response (students respond to text through performance), all of which are classified as aesthetic transactions with the text. In addition, Sipe and McGuire (2006) proposed that young children are also capable of resisting text for a variety of reasons, as did the Hispanic students in Michael-Luna's (2008) study. Young children, according to the findings, may resist a text because it is too realistic or harsh, or it is not real enough. Three studies by Sipe (2000), Sipe and Bauer (2001), and Sipe and McGuire (2006) concluded that teachers of young students should recognize the depth of understanding that they bring to literature discussions.

Summary

Recent research. An analysis of recent research suggests that a teacher's pedagogy is influenced by his or her cultural identity, although the teacher's pedagogy can evolve with an awareness of that influence; that children of all ethnic backgrounds can be successful in literature-based classrooms; that children who are exposed to

culturally conscious or multicultural literature can negotiate their cultural identity in a classroom context; and that young children are capable of making meaning for themselves during classroom discussion.

Need for current study. All of the studies reviewed that examined student written response to culturally conscious literature did so with adolescent-aged students (Brooks, 2006; Glazier, 2005; Sutherland, 2005). All of the studies reviewed that examined young children's responses to culturally conscious literature relied solely on oral reader response (Michael-Luna, 2008; Sipe, 2000; Sipe and Bauer, 2001; Sipe and McGuire, 2006). The current study will investigate younger students' written responses to culturally conscious literature.

The review of research did not find any studies that compared the students' responses to culturally conscious literature with their responses to any other type of literature. By comparing responses to practitioner-recommended texts side-by-side with the responses to culturally conscious literature, the current study may offer justification for the general use of culturally conscious literature for instruction.

The studies reviewed suggest the value of culturally conscious literature, but none of them investigated culturally conscious literature in relation to comprehension strategy instruction. In order to move away from the "Eurocentric curriculum" (Delpit, 2006) it needs to be established that culturally conscious literature can be used for day-to-day instructional purposes, and not only to expose students to different cultures. This study will further that inquiry.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of the study was to investigate second grade African-American students' responses to culturally conscious African-American literature, as categorized by Sims (1982), and mainstream children's literature that is referenced and recommended in teacher practitioner texts, such as Miller's *Reading with Meaning* (2002). Questions that this study explored were:

- In a literature-based classroom, how will 2nd grade African-American students respond in writing to culturally conscious books and practitioner-recommended books?

- When 2nd grade African-American students in a literature-based classroom respond in writing to culturally conscious books and practitioner-recommended books, how will the responses differ?

This was a qualitative study conducted in a second grade classroom during regular school hours. The elementary school is part of a large urban school district in the southwestern region of the United States. At the time of the study the district had a total of 74 schools: nine high schools, 13 junior high schools and 52 elementary schools, including alternative schools. More than half of the elementary schools are classified as Title 1 campuses.

The elementary school where the study took place is a Title 1 campus with pre-kindergarten through sixth grade students. The school enrolled its students from the surrounding neighborhood, a community largely comprised of African-American families; most of the children in this school and classroom were likewise of African-American ethnicity.

Research was conducted during the second semester of the 2009-2010 school year. Texas Woman's University's Institutional Review Board authorized the research to be conducted.

Participants

Students

The second grade classroom was a self-contained ESL classroom. There were six ESL students and fifteen native English speakers. The students were all seven or eight years old. There were nine girls and twelve boys. The students were from diverse backgrounds. There were eleven African-American children, two Vietnamese children, four Hispanic children, two Caucasian children, one Filipino child, and one Middle Eastern child. All of the student participants had been students at the school for at least two years. The students in the classroom represented a wide-range of academic abilities. One student received special education services for speech articulation. The remaining twenty children did not receive any special instruction in reading or writing beyond what was provided by the classroom teacher. Although all of the students enrolled in the class participated in the study, the purpose of the study was to only consider the responses of

the eleven African-American students in the class. Table 1 describes the eleven student participants.

Table 1

Student Participants

Student	Sex	Age	Reading Ability[a]	Special Services
Aisha	F	8	2.0	Speech
Cordell	M	7	2.5	
Clarissa	F	8	2.4	
Emanuel	M	8	2.5	
James	M	8	3.5	
Jasmine	F	8	2.5	
Jerome	M	8	2.0	
Jamal	M	8	2.5	
Kelby	M	8	3.0	
Fatima	F	8	2.5	ESL
Tanisha	F	8	2.5	

[a]Reading ability was assessed at mid-year and is expressed in terms of grade-level equivalence.

Researchers

      Principal researcher. I was the principal investigator and the classroom teacher. At the time of the study, I was in my mid-30s and pursuing a Master's degree at Texas Woman's University. This was my thirteenth year as a teacher, my eleventh in the school district (ten years on a Title 1 campus), and my third year as a second grade teacher at the school. I am of Pakistani ancestry.

      Since the start of my teaching career, I have strived to develop my pedagogy based on constructivist theory and a culturally relevant pedagogy. My classroom can be labeled a literature-based classroom. I see myself as the facilitator; and my students and I learn together in all subject areas through the use of authentic literature, hands-on experiences, conversations, and collaboration. For the purpose of this study, I used the lens of Ladson-Billings's (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy to define my stance as teacher in the classroom and Miller's *Reading with Meaning* (2002) as my primary resource for planning comprehension instruction.

      I was motivated to research the use of African-American culturally conscious literature as part of a culturally relevant curriculum because I had listened each year to concerns about the academic achievement gap of the African-American student population in all subject areas, especially in terms of the Texas state exams at our school. Although I had not observed an achievement gap in my own classroom, my goal was to search for ways to improve the academic success of African-American students at my school. Examining my own practices, I came to realize that in my literature-based

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classroom, I had under-represented the cultural backgrounds of my African-American students in my book selection for interactive read-alouds and for our classroom library. I had acquired high quality children's books that were recommended in highly regarded practitioner texts. Most of the books listed in practitioner texts address our mainstream American culture, and rarely addressed the home or ethnic culture of my African-American students. I wanted explore the effects of culturally conscious African-American literature with my African-American students.

Research assistant. My colleague served as a research assistant for the duration of data collection. Her role at our campus was Language Arts Instructional Facilitator at the time of the study. My research assistant earned her Master's in Reading from Texas Woman's University in 2008. She is Caucasian. The research assistant's role was to transcribe the classroom conversations during the daily read-aloud, and to discuss the procedures and student responses with me during that time.

Study Materials

I collected data with four tools. Each student was issued a reader response notebook. This was an ordinary black and white composition book. Audio recordings of the book introductions were made using the voice recorder application on an Apple iPhone. My research assistant transcribed class discussions by typing them in her school laptop as they happened. I kept a personal journal of field notes in my own composition notebook.

Setting

The study took place in the classroom. The students and I met in our carpeted whole-group area. Each whole-group lesson was between 20 and 40 minutes in length. The students sat either in rows or in a circle around the rug. I made anchor charts and kept notes on our thinking using the classroom easel and large chart tablets. The children wrote in their reading response notebooks at their desks, which were organized into four groups of six.

Children's Literature Used in the Research

Culturally Conscious African-American Literature

For the purpose of this study, I searched for African-American picture books that met Sims's (1982, p. 49) criteria for *culturally conscious African-American literature.* Culturally conscious literature is typically written for African-American children by African-American authors. Sims excluded historical fiction (i.e. books about slavery) from her definition of culturally conscious African-American literature, thus I excluded historical fiction from the research.

I began searching in winter 2010 with a visit to the Texas Woman's Children's Collection. I collected nearly thirty books by authors including Jerry Pinkney, Eloise Greenfield, Nikki Grimes, Walter Dean Meyers and others. As I read through these books, I found that a majority of the books dealt with issues of slavery and segregation, or the genre was poetry instead of narrative, or the illustrations were outdated. Although I only used a few of these titles in the research, I was able to develop a clearer idea of the

types of books I hoped to find – I needed six culturally conscious narratives written by African-American authors that were fairly recent and would relate to the lives of eight-year-old boys and girls that could be paired by theme with six recommended mainstream texts.

I found a total of twenty culturally conscious books that were narratives written by African-American authors with themes that fit Sims (1982) categories and that were accessible to seven and eight year olds. These twenty books excluded historical fiction, biographies, and poetry. These twenty books were found at the university library, the local library, online, and with the guidance of my supervising professor.

Mainstream Literature

My resource for selecting mainstream literature or practitioner-recommended books was Debbie Miller's *Reading with Meaning* (2002). Practitioner-recommended books are those books that are listed in professional practitioner texts as high-quality children's literature for specific areas of strategy instruction and for different age groups. I selected books that were listed in Miller's (2002) chapters on schema (chapter one), inferring (chapter eight), and synthesizing (chapter ten). These three chapters listed a total of thirty-six titles. I already owned many of the books from Miller's "tried and true" lists because I had relied heavily on Miller's lists as I acquired books during the three years I had taught second grade to plan comprehension instruction. In addition to the titles I owned, I borrowed many of Miller's recommended books from my local library for further consideration. Of the thirty-six books listed, I eliminated five titles because they were poetry, not narratives.

Pairing Culturally Conscious African-American Books

with Mainstream Books

My professor and I discussed the criteria for pairing books. We had twenty culturally conscious books that I had found in my search to consider against thirty-one mainstream books that Miller (2002) recommended. We agreed that the books should be of the same genre, share common themes, provide equal opportunity for strategy instruction, and have a similar readability level. I used Miller's *Reading with Meaning* (2002) to plan comprehension instruction, strategies and techniques, for the length of the study. The story lines did not have to reflect each other exactly in terms of the specific problems; and the main characters did not have to be the same gender. It was critical to determine clear criteria for pairing the books because the purpose of the study was to compare the responses from the two types of texts. It was essential that the paired sets have many parallels in order for the presence of African-American culture in the culturally conscious literature to be notable as the significant difference between the two types of texts. In addition the books had to be new books to the students, which meant that I had not read or discussed them with the students previously. I used narrative difficulty and complexity to decide the order in which to read the books to my students. I started with books that had simpler, more familiar themes for us all. By spring 2010 I had finalized my six pairs for the purpose of the study. I paired six culturally conscious books with six mainstream books as follows (Table 2):

Table 2

Literature Used in the Study

Week	Theme	Mainstream Book	Culturally Conscious Book	Strategy Instruction
1	Family Relationships	*The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant (1985)	*We Had a Picnic this Sunday Past* by Jacqueline Woodson (1998)	Inferring character's feelings
2	Urban Living versus Suburban Living *and* Growing Up and Finding Oneself	*Fireflies* by Julie Brinkloe (1986)	*Max Found Two Sticks* by Brian Pinkney (1994)	Inferring character's feelings
3	Growing Up and Finding Oneself *and* Peer Relationships	*Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes (1991)	*Looking Like Me* by Walter Dean Myers (2009)	Inferring character's feelings and author's purpose
4 *3-day week	Growing Up and Finding Oneself *and* Family Relationships	*Ira Sleeps Over* by Bernard Waber (1972)	*Precious and the Boo Hag* by Patricia McKissack (2005)	Inferring character's feelings and author's purpose
5	Family Relationships, Social Concerns	*Now One Foot, Now the Other* by Tomie dePaola (1988)	*Bird* by Zeta Elliot (2008)	Inferring author's purpose and extending synthesis of the literal meaning to the inferential level
6	Family Relationships, Growing Up and Finding Oneself, Social Concerns	*Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting (1991)	*Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold (1996)	Inferring author's purpose and extending synthesis of the literal meaning to the inferential level

The quality of the six titles of culturally conscious literature was evaluated. All of

the books genuinely depict African-American life and are examples of high-quality

children's literature. Each of the six authors has published several books; many of the books have won awards; and the work of all six authors is highly regarded in professional book reviews. The six titles of mainstream literature were not evaluated outside of the recommendation given by Miller (2002) in *Reading with Meaning*.

Research Design

This section of the paper will describe the procedure for data collection. It will be divided into two subsections: The first, Procedure, describes the original procedure planned for data collection, and the second, Implementation, is a narrative of how I revised and adjusted the procedure during the process of gathering data.

Procedure

The study extended across six weeks with weekly lessons that involved one culturally conscious African-American picture book and one mainstream picture book.

Weekly schedule. The week's lesson started on Monday and ended on Friday, except for week four which was a three-day week. On Mondays and Wednesdays the class gathered in rows in the whole-group meeting area to listen to the whole-group interactive read aloud of one of the books for that week. On Tuesday and Thursday the class reread the book, discussed and practiced that week's comprehension strategy, discussed their thinking, and each child wrote a response to the book in his or her reading response notebook.

Order of presentation. The order of the books alternated each week. The study started with a mainstream book, *The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant (1985), and it was followed with a culturally conscious book, *We had a Picnic this Sunday Past* by

Jacqueline Woodson (1998). The goal was to continually alternate the order of the books, so that each type of text was presented an equal number of times as first or second.

Book introductions. Before a book was read aloud, it was introduced. The following table gives two examples of book introductions.

Table 3

Book Introductions from Week 1

The Relatives Came by Cynthia Rylant	*We Had a Picnic this Sunday Past* by Jacqueline Woodson
Today we will read *The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant. While we are reading I want you to remember that authors write about what they know. This book is about a family visiting, traveling, and enjoying each other. The last couple of weeks we have been reading and discussing the characters' feelings in narratives. As we read, we are going to turn and talk in order to figure out how these relatives feel, how do we know, and determine the type of family we are reading about.	Today we will read *We Had a Picnic this Sunday Past* by Jacqueline Woodson. Again, remember that authors write about what they know. In this story, Ms. Woodson writes about a family getting together for a family picnic. They have lots of fun. I noticed that in this book, we get to know the characters by name – that's different than the decision Cynthia Rylant made in her book. As we read, we are going to turn and talk in order to figure out how these relatives feel, how do we know, and determine the type of family we are reading about.

The book introductions to both books for the week were preplanned, in order to remove teacher bias toward either book. The purpose of planning was to develop an introduction to both texts that were almost identical, except for the title, author's name, and brief overview of the plot. Opening remarks sometimes (but not always) focused on the cover, end pages, dedication, book jacket, author information, or publication date

(Fountas and Pinnell, 2006, p. 218). The book introduction allowed the teacher to share the comprehension strategy, as well as go over any new ideas or concepts that might be in the book. For example, the teacher defined *boo hag* (a mythical creature that originated in South Carolina Gullah culture) before reading *Precious and the Boo Hag* (McKissack, 2005)*;* and explained what a labor union was before reading *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1996). The book introductions were audio recorded to check for consistency.

Read-aloud. Next the teacher read the book aloud to the students. Each interactive read-aloud followed the process defined by Fountas and Pinnell (2006, p. 16):

The teacher reads aloud to students; but both the teacher and the students think about, talk about, and respond to the text. Both the reader (in this case the teacher) and the listeners are *active*. The teacher is reading the words aloud, but in every other way the students are processing the language, ideas, and meaning of the text. Occasionally, the teacher stops briefly to demonstrate text talk or invite interaction. These pauses are intentional and planned to invite students to join in the thinking and the talking about the text. There is no way to predict what students will say, of course, that is part of the appeal of this interactive way of working with texts. The conversation is grounded in the shared text.

Expectations for class discussion. During each interactive read aloud the children were allowed to share their thinking with each other before, during, and after the read aloud. This took the form of either turn-and-talk or raising their hands to share. The

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expectations for turning and talking with each other were discussed, developed, and posted on an anchor chart on the classroom wall; see Figure 1.

Figure 1

Anchor Chart of Expectations

Reading Partners...
Sit knee to knee
Look eye to eye
Make a connection with each other
Wait patiently for their turn
Stay calm and friendly
Listen respectfully

Session length. Each read-aloud session lasted between twenty to forty minutes. At the end of each read-aloud, the teacher reminded the students that they would revisit that book the next day. The students were reminded of the thoughts they had shared, as well as the comprehension strategy that they would think about for the next day.

Second read-aloud. On Tuesday and Thursday mornings, the teacher reread the story from the previous day one more time in the morning in order for the students to have more time to think about it. At this rereading, the students were encouraged listen quietly, holding on to their thinking for later that afternoon, and just to enjoy the story and think about what they wanted to share later with their peers.

Strategy discussion. The class met again later in the afternoon on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the whole-group area, but this time rather than sit in rows, the children sat in a circle around the rug to discuss that week's comprehension strategy. The students faced each other, and the teacher sat outside the circle. This was to encourage them to talk to each other rather than to the teacher. The teacher asked the children to start the conversation with the comprehension strategy in mind, and repeatedly encouraged to bring their thinking back to the text. The research assistant transcribed all of the conversations that occurred Monday through Thursday during the six weeks.

Anchor charts. One tool that was used during the comprehension discussion was the anchor chart. The primary use of the anchor chart is to record the students' thoughts for reference (Miller, 2002). The purpose of the anchor chart in this study was to validate and record students' thoughts by writing them on the chart. During the six weeks, ideas about the author's purpose, characters' feelings, synthesizing, and other important terms and ideas were charted. Anchor charts were used on an as-needed basis. The anchor charts provided a strong visual tool for the kids for the day's discussion and for future conversations.

Written response. After each Tuesday and Thursday comprehension conversation, the children responded to that day's book in their reading response notebooks. The children's written response was in the form of a letter to the teacher. The teacher's prompt for their reading response was "Now that we comprehend the book at a deeper level – what does it mean to you?" "How does this book speak to you?"

Generally, the students took anywhere from twenty to thirty minutes to complete their responses.

Pick of the week. Every Friday, the teacher asked the children to consider both picture books from the week and select the one that they thought next year's second grade class should hear. This activity was referred to as the "Pick of the Week". The purpose of this response was to position the students in an evaluative role, in which they saw themselves as experts. The teacher asked them to write another entry in their reading response notebooks indicating which book they chose for the week and why they chose it. The students also wrote this response in the form of a letter. The teacher asked her students to keep their selection private, so that everyone could choose for himself or herself. The rationale behind Friday's writing was to gather further data to better understand how the children were feeling about the literature. The idea was to discover which book they preferred and why. I was wondering if these ten second graders would acknowledge some of the features of the African-American culturally conscious literature in their Friday responses.

Revisions to the Research Design

This section describes some of the ways that the procedure was adapted over the course of the study.

In week two, I expanded on the prompt, "Now that we comprehend the book at a deeper level – what does it mean to you?" "How does this book speak to you?" by creating three new charts for the children that provided more suggestions on thoughtful ways to respond to the text. Second graders are just beginning their journey as writers in

response to reading. I found these charts in Mooney's *A Book is a Present: Selecting Text for Intentional Teaching* (2004). These charts allowed the reader to consider for himself or herself the direction to take in his/her response by maintaining a universal focus that could be used for both mainstream and culturally conscious literature.

Anchor charts. The first chart highlighted elements of the story and the author's purpose. The second chart helped to guide the students back to their own thinking about the text. The third chart shared acceptable ways in which students can respond to literature. Refer to Figure 2 for the text of the charts.

Figure 2

Anchor charts describing response strategies

Chart 1	*Chart 2*	*Chart 3*
What might you respond to?	**What makes you respond?**	**How might you respond?**
Character(s) Problem Setting/Mood (How did it feel?) Event(s) Author's purpose You learning	Is it something… <u>You</u> wonder about <u>You</u> feel strongly about <u>You</u> want to explain <u>You</u> want to share (connection) <u>You</u> want to explore <u>You</u> want to remember	Talking/conversation Writing Reading Sketching Acting it out

Circle maps. Even after the addition of these charts, I kept trying to model different ways for the students to grasp the idea of books speaking to them directly due to the fact that this type of written response was a relatively new experience for my students. I modeled this idea with favorite books of my own by the third week of the study because I wanted to keep trying to open up the text to the children for further exploration. I shared some of my favorite books with my students and used a circle map (graphic organizer) to list all of the ways each of my favorite books spoke to me. I listed words like 'woman', 'Pakistani', 'mother', 'daughter', 'teacher', 'American', 'reader', 'thinker', and 'nature lover' to help explain that I am all of those things, and when I read a book I try to figure out which part of me it speaks to. I did state that not all books speak to me – only certain ones, but I had to pay attention to whether it did or not. I had the kids make their own circle maps, so that they could identify who they were, and how a book might speak to a specific part of their identity. The children were welcome to refer to their circle map while writing their responses during the remaining weeks of the study. Appendix A is an example of one student's circle map.

"So What?" chart. By the fifth week of the study, I added one final chart to help clarify the prompt for written response. It was my "So What?" chart. As a class, we discussed going deep as readers, and I hoped that this visual would help explain that idea. I used the analogy of swimming in deep water comfortably as the same as reading and going deep. We agreed that on the surface level (where it is safe) we can retell the story. However, everything else goes below the surface. The children's ideas for deep thinking included making connections, determining important ideas, understanding the

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organization of the text, identifying the author's purpose(s), and identifying the character's feelings and motives. Then I asked them "So what? Why do we need to do all of that work?" The children said, "Comprehension!" At this point, I explained that it is important for us to have deep comprehension because then we can figure out the "So what?" for ourselves. I extended this with "How do I see myself in this book? What does this book make me want to do or think about?" Throughout the study the prompt was revised and added on to so that the children could consider the book beyond a surface level due to their limited experience in written response.

I wrote back to many of the students' written responses by writing a brief letter back to them in their reading response notebooks. I wished to avoid prompting the children towards issues of culture and race. I generally just acknowledged their response without much questioning. I responded in writing to nearly half of all of the student responses.

Data Analysis

There were eleven African-American students in my second grade classroom. Collection of data included a reading response journal for each student, a circle map (graphic organizer) made by each child in week three of the study, my research assistant's transcriptions of our classroom discussions, my weekly lesson plans, and my personal journal for field notes. I transcribed each response for ten of the eleven African-American students in the class. The eleventh student, Aisha, did not write legibly enough to transcribe with accuracy. Each child wrote three responses per week, or approximately eighteen reading responses over the six-week period of the study. One response was

written in response to each of the two books read that week, and then one additional response was written on Friday. Friday's response was called the "Pick of the Week"; and explained which of that week's books the student preferred, and why. In all, I transcribed 175 responses. I corrected student spelling while transcribing, but I left the student grammar as it was.

Data was analyzed using Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994) to develop an analytical framework for this study. Data analysis took place after I had collected all the data for the six-week study. Analysis of the data followed an inductive approach (Patton, 1990). Therefore, all categories and patterns emerged from the data during analysis.

At first, I read and made notes by hand in the margins attempting to describe the action the student was taking in each response. I read and made notes to each response in sequential order by date. After my first reading, the patterns of response that emerged were response to strategy instruction, personal connections (family issues and kid issues), and text-to-text connections.

I reviewed my organization of the data, and I decided to separate the responses to culturally conscious literature and mainstream literature into two separate documents for each student. Therefore, for each student I had one file that contained all of the transcribed responses in sequential order, another file that contained only the student's responses to culturally conscious literature in sequential order, and a third file that contained the student's responses to mainstream literature in sequential order. Again, I read over each response and made notes in the margins by hand based on what I was

noticing. Due to my dual role as researcher and classroom teacher, I had difficulty at times staying objective in my analysis because I knew each student very well. I would often infer what the student meant, or felt; rather than identifying what the student had written. I was trying to remain neutral, but it was hard at times. During this reading I started to notice that many of the students were writing about their role with their family or friends and using different voices or language structures (teacher, book, own), in addition to making connections and writing about the strategy instruction for each text.

My final revision to the organization of my data, in order to support a neutral stance and analyze sentence by sentence, was to place each response in a table and separate each sentence into a separate row. The table below is an example of the final organization of the reader's response and my data analysis notes. Table 5 is an excerpt from Tanisha's response to *We Had a Picnic this Sunday Past* (1998).

Table 5

Sample Data Analysis Notes

Text: *We Had a Picnic this Sunday Past*	Student Response	Researcher's Notes
"Oh, but Cousin Martha," Grandma said, "all year long I've been thinking about your pie."	The part when the grandmom said that she was thinking about Cousin Martha's pie – she was a telling a lie.	*comprehension strategy – inferring* *student noticing main character's action 'lie'* *'Grandmom' – student language*
	Like once my Mama made this dish and I didn't like it.	*comprehension strategy – connection* *beginning of personal narrative: student feels about Mama's cooking like Grandma to Cousin Martha's cooking*

Beside each sentence, I wrote by hand what action I noticed the child taking in his/her response. I created a table like the one above for every response written by all ten students. I analyzed and made notes sentence-by-sentence for each student. With the sentences separated from each other, I was better able to analyze each sentence independent of its context. In this exercise I was able to develop categories and codes of patterns of response that I found myself using over and over again. The categories and codes included: personal narrative, comprehension strategy (connection, inference, synthesis, author's purpose), text (event, language, feeling, character, setting, retell), teacher language, and book language.

I developed a table to summarize the student's written transactions with each text. I reread my notes to each student's response for each text, and by hand, I filled in the table with a summary of the patterns of response observed from each of the sentences in the response. Recording brief summaries of each student's responses to each text allowed me to reassess the frequency and validity of my codes, begin to look across the data collected and within each student's responses for any differences between the responses to the two types of texts. To ensure the trustworthiness of my codes, I analyzed a portion of my data with both of my advising professors.

I reread the data and reviewed the codes I had developed during each reading of the data and consolidated them into four categories of patterns of response: Comprehension, Connections, Language, and Engagement. To answer my first question, 'In a literature-based classroom, how will 2nd grade African-American students respond in writing to culturally conscious books and practitioner-recommended books?' these

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four categories represent the patterns of response across the ten African-American

students. Based on my analysis, each sentence that each student wrote can fit into one of

the four categories identified. Table 6 is organized to display the categories, codes,

definitions, and students' responses that exemplify the definitions for the purpose of this

study.

Table 6

Patterns of Response

Category: Comprehension Strategy

Codes	Pattern Definition	Example
Retelling	Writing includes retelling of the current text's plot.	"Like when Precious did open the door because it was a penny so when Precious pick it up the front was George Washington, but it is supposed to be Abraham Lincoln."
Minilesson Strategy Response	Writing includes strategy discussion from classroom minilesson during interactive read-aloud and comprehension conversations	Minilesson Focus: Character's Feelings "I can't understand Chrysanthemum's feelings because I have never been picked on and that's good. Chrysanthemum's feelings change through the whole book. Her feelings are happy (excited), dreadful, wilted, bloomed. It really changes through the whole book."
Theme Statement	The reader synthesizes a statement about the overall theme of the current text in his/her written response.	"I noticed that in *Bird* and *Now One Foot, Now the Other* that there are some people that have gotten sick, but sometimes you can save them and sometimes you can't save them."

(continued)

Table 6 continued.

Category: Connection

Codes	Pattern Definition	Example
Parallel Connection	Creating an autobiographical experience that parallels the text's plot closely. For example, the student's connections may include a parallel problem, parallel actions, parallel emotions, and parallel outcome as that of the text.	"I have a connection to this book. I remember when I did not want to talk. I did not open my mouth, all I did was to find music that nobody sing, and it is just a beat. And I do not know if Max used this beat, but my beat was pop, pop, pop, pop, pop and it kept going on and on . . .I had made noises that I heard in my city, just like Max."
Authentic Connection	Authentic autobiographical experience that allows the reader to make meaning of the current text using his/her background.	"My family was happy to see us, and they was knocking on the (car) window and saying to me 'Unlock the door', so my mom had opened the door, and they hugged me just like the book."
Personal Narrative	The reader shares an autobiographical narrative with a problem and a solution.	
Personal Narrative - Text	The reader's autobiographical narrative is closely related to the text in content.	"This book make I remember that when I went to my friends house and I had to make a hard decision that I would bring my dog to sleep or not bring my dog to sleep so I bring my dog so I keep it in the bag and when I saw he had a dog I went to go get mine."
Personal Narrative - Unique	The reader's narrative is unique in content.	*We had a Picnic this Sunday Past* when cousin Martha made that dry pie reminded me of when my mom made some greens and Josh did not eat the greens and when my mom left the room he throw them away then he said I ate all of your greens."

Table 6 continued.

Category: Language

Codes	Pattern Definition	Example
Teacher Language	Writing includes samples of teacher's language from reader response prompt or classroom strategy discussion.	Teacher Prompt: *"How does this book speak to you?"* "This book **does speak to me** because when my cousin wants to fight Christian's big sister, so I'm trying to fix it with Christian's mom about what happened."
Book Language	Writing includes direct language from current text or language that sounds like language from the current text	Repeating lines in *Looking Like Me,* including "I gave it a bam!" and "That's who I am." Responses to *Looking Like Me* (2009) included, "This made me think about who I am. Am a runner, talker, drawer, brother, son, student, worker, player, basketball player, reader, football pro and way more."
Student Voice	Writing that depicts the student's personality as indicated on his or her circle map.	"But *Fireflies* have lots of connections to talk about like we did. *Fireflies* is a good book because it expresses me because I am really into insects and animals."

Category: Engagement

Codes	Pattern Definition	Example
Emotional Engagement	Becoming emotionally involved, empathizing or identifying with the text in written response.	"This book speaks to me when I'm a kid, Marcus is too and Bird. This book speaks to me as a family. Marcus was his big brother. And Marcus passed away."

Each child's written responses to each of the twelve books displayed one or more

of the above categories and codes in a variety of combinations. In order to understand

how often the students responded with these categories and codes, I conducted frequency

tallies to each student response. If a code was identified as part of the student's response, I tallied its presence one time. Appendix B includes a complete tabulation of the frequency of coded responses.

The second research question was 'When 2nd grade African-American students in a literature-based classroom respond in writing to culturally conscious books and practitioner-recommended books how will the responses differ?' To answer it, I assembled the responses for each student and arranged them in pairs by week. This way I could compare one student's response to a culturally conscious book with that student's response to the corresponding mainstream book. I was searching for any notable differences in the responses to the two types of text, specifically any indication of a more aesthetic transaction with the culturally conscious literature. Again, I shared my process and observations with both of my advising professors to ensure trustworthiness. Together we reviewed the within-case analysis for many of the students.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

I will divide the analysis of the data into two parts. The first part will address the first research question: 'In a literature-based classroom, how will 2nd grade African-American students respond in writing to culturally conscious books and practitioner-recommended books?' The second part will answer the second research question: When 2nd grade African-American students in a literature-based classroom respond in writing to culturally conscious books and practitioner-recommended books, how will the responses differ?

Patterns of Response

I will discuss patterns of response that were found in many of the responses to both mainstream and culturally conscious literature; and then I will discuss some of the individual forms of response which some of the students employed. This portion of the findings takes a look at the unique structures that several students developed independently, and used to construct many or all of their responses to these twelve narratives.

There were 59 responses to the African-American culturally conscious literature and 56 responses to the practitioner-recommended mainstream literature. Due to student absences neither type of text had a total of 60 responses. There were a total of 115 written responses analyzed. A complete tabulation of responses by student and book can be found in Appendix B.

General Patterns of Response

Based on the data analysis, there were four primary patterns of response that the students used in responding to both types of literature: comprehension strategy instruction, connections, language, and emotional engagement. Each student used one or more of the patterns in each of his/her responses.

Strategy. Comprehension strategy instruction was the teacher's focus for each lesson; therefore, the students did attend to the strategy lesson as part of their written responses. Across the twelve books, this type of response was noted in 87 out of 115 responses. Reference to the comprehension strategy revealed three patterns: students who responded by simply retelling a part of the story; students who directly addressed the whole-class minilesson focus; and students who synthesized the text into a single theme statement. According to the data, both types of literature allowed students to use the focus of the lesson to aid comprehension.

Retell. Retell, when the student retold the story's plot as part of his/her written response, was one of the least sophisticated strategies the students employed. During the whole-class meeting, when the students and I were developing our final anchor chart titled "So What?" the children identified retell as a surface level comprehension strategy. They all agreed that it was a necessary part of comprehension; however, they decided that it was the first step to making meaning. Students included retell as part of their responses in 13 out of 59 responses for culturally conscious literature and in 12 out of 56 responses for practitioner-recommended mainstream literature. Therefore, for both types of texts, students retold the parts of the texts about 22% of the time. The students in the class

were accustomed to retelling the story as part of their oral and written response during their formal reading inventory the *Developmental Reading Assessment 2* (Beaver & Carter, 2006). In the DRA2, retelling is a major component of the comprehension assessment. In the students' written responses, they did not feel the need to retell in response to every text. One possible reason for the low percentage of retell across the responses may be because the students did not view their written responses to the literature as a formal assessment.

One student in particular, Fatima, incorporated retell in nine of her twelve responses. Fatima was identified as an English Language Learner, and her family had recently immigrated to the United States from Africa. Her limited English language development may have been one reason why Fatima felt safe to retell the parts of the story as part of her written response before going any deeper with the text. Fatima may have been monitoring her comprehension through this process.

Minilesson Strategy. Many of the responses were informed by that week's comprehension strategy minilesson. The strategy lesson topics were inferring character feelings, inferring the author's purpose, and synthesizing of the literal meaning to the inferential level. The minilesson language included the book introduction, the questions that I prompted with before, during, and after the reading for the children to consider and discuss with each other, and any charts that were developed during the lesson. In many of the written responses, the students referred to the comprehension strategy discussions and at times extended the conversation in their response. The students referred to the minilesson comprehension strategy in 28 of 59 responses to the culturally conscious

literature (47%) and in 39 of 56 responses to the mainstream literature (70%). The students referred to the minilesson comprehension strategy more often in their response to mainstream literature. The findings suggest that in the books without African-American culture, the students remained focused on the lessons that were frontloaded by the teacher. The students seemed to maintain more of an academic or school focus when responding to the mainstream literature than to the culturally conscious literature.

Theme statement. Some students wrote theme statements in their written responses, synthesizing the big idea of the book in one or two sentences. Students included theme statements in 14 of 59 responses to culturally conscious literature (24%) and 22 of 56 responses to mainstream literature (39%). Learning to synthesize was part of the whole class comprehension work. These results indicate that the students were actively engaged in higher order thinking while listening and responding to the literature. As with the minilesson language, the distribution of theme statements suggests that the students responded more often to class strategy instruction in their responses to mainstream literature than in their responses to culturally conscious literature.

Connections. The students made text-to-self connections in a majority of their responses. Text-to-self connections are when readers use their schema, what they already know, to make connections from their life to the story (Miller, 2002). The students in this class had been explicitly taught how to make text-to self connections during the fall semester of second grade. In addition, making meaningful connections was another portion of the *Developmental Reading Assessment 2, Kindergarten through Third Grade* (Beaver & Carter, 2006), which the students in this class had been assessed with since

Kindergarten. The connections varied in length from single sentences to complete personal narratives with beginnings, middles, and ends. Many of the text-to-self connections seemed to be true, *authentic* connections (Miller, 2002, p.62). Some of the connections were so similar to the plot of the story that I coded them as *parallel connections*. When students made text-to-self connections, whether authentic or parallel, they were attempting to make meaning of the text through a personal lens. The students made either authentic or parallel personal connections in 75% of their responses. Out of 115 responses, 86 contained text-to-self connections. Of those, 63 were personal narratives. Authentic connections, parallel connections, and personal narratives all indicated that making a connection, or sharing a story, from their own lives that related to the book being discussed, was a primary method for these ten second graders to make meaning from the texts. This pattern of response was also suggested in the anchor chart, *What makes you respond? Is it something you want to share? (connection)* (Mooney, 2004), that was added in Week Two of the study.

Authentic and parallel connections. The students made authentic connections in 41 of 59 responses to culturally conscious literature (69%); whereas, the students made authentic connections in 29 of 56 responses to mainstream literature (52%). However, the students made parallel connections to culturally conscious literature in 6 of 59 responses (10%) and 10 of 56 responses to mainstream literature (18%). This suggests that the presence of African-American culture in the culturally conscious literature may have influenced the students to make authentic connections. The presence of African-American culture seems to have enabled the students to see themselves and their family's

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stories reflected in that literature. Many of the second grade students desired to make text-to-self connections in their responses. The data suggests that it was easier for the students to make authentic connections to the culturally conscious literature versus the mainstream literature. Furthermore, parallel connections were not as prevalent as the authentic connections, but students made those almost twice as often to the mainstream literature. This suggests that the students had more difficulty connecting to the mainstream texts and possibly invented stories to describe a connection to those stories when they couldn't think of something from their lives that reflected the mainstream stories.

Personal narratives. I identified two types of personal narratives during data analysis: personal narratives that were unique in content and personal narratives that were similar to the text in content. Both types of narratives were effective in displaying the students' comprehension of the text. The narratives were written thoughtfully. It was clear to me, the reader, that the children were making meaning of the text through their narratives and connections. When responding to culturally conscious literature, students wrote unique personal narratives in 14 of 59 responses (24%) and text-like personal narratives in 20 of 59 responses (34%). When responding to mainstream literature, students wrote unique personal narratives in 4 of 56 responses (7%) and text-like personal narratives in 25 of 56 responses (45%). Again, as indicated by the findings with authentic and parallel connections, the students seemed to write significantly more unique personal narratives to culturally conscious literature than to mainstream literature. The

data suggests that the students felt it was easier to tell their unique stories under the influence of the culturally conscious literature.

Language. Students written responses revealed three different ways students used language in their responses. First, many of students incorporated the teacher's language from the whole-group minilesson and interactive read-aloud directly into their response. Second, the students included the language directly from the text or language that sounded like the language in the text. Third, the students responded in a voice that was unique and original, which was identified as student language.

Teacher's language. Many of the students' written responses began with the teacher's prompt, or with a sentence stem from the classroom strategy discussion. This use of the teacher's language suggests that the students were striving to directly respond to the teacher's prompt or instruction. The students included teacher language approximately in 20 of 59 responses to culturally conscious literature (34%) and 32 of 56 responses to mainstream literature (57%). This distribution is consistent with the distribution of responses that directly addressed the minilesson. Both patterns of response are far more prevalent in the written responses to the six mainstream books.

Text language. The second pattern of response within language was the use of text or book language. I identified the language as text language if it used language from the text directly or language that sounded like the text's language. An example of this is when the students responded in a similar dialect as that of the text. Students wrote their responses with the influence of text language in 38 of 59 responses to culturally conscious literature (64%) and 24 of 56 responses to the mainstream literature (43%).

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One attribute of African-American culturally conscious literature was the use of language that reflected that culture (Sims, 1982). The students chose to incorporate that attribute of African-American culturally conscious literature more often than the text language of the mainstream literature. For example, every child's response to *Looking Like Me* by Myers (2009) included examples of language from the text. In the original text there were many repeating lines such as, "I gave it a bam!" and "That's who I am." At the end of his book Myers asks the readers to "Make a long list if you want to - have yourself an 'I am'jam." The students responded to *Looking Like Me* (2009) with an "I am jam" by writing responses like,

> This made me think about who I am. Am a runner, talker, drawer, brother,
>
> son, student, worker, player, basketball player, reader, football pro and
>
> way more.

In the book the main character, Jeremy, is approached by the people in his life, and they tell him who he is to each of them. A student in the class, Jasmine, noticed that aspect of the book and wrote in response,

> My mom had wrote a note to someone. My mom had wrote a whole page,
>
> and I said 'Mom, you is a writer.' And she said, 'I know I am.'
>
> For all ten of the African-American students in the study, their response to

Looking Like Me was basically an "I am jam", just as Myers suggested. In the case of this one book, the children responded to the author's prompt more than they did the teacher's prompt.

There were other examples of text language use in the students' responses besides *Looking Like Me* (2009). In week one the paired texts were *The Relatives Came* (1985) and *We Had a Picnic This Sunday Past* (1998). Seven out of ten students used book language from *Relatives* in their response. For example, the students used the term "relatives" from the book instead of "my family". This was the only book that the word "relatives" was used to describe immediate or extended family. In response to *We Had a Picnic* six out of ten students chose to incorporate book language into their response. This book by Woodson is written in southern, black dialect. I considered it text language if the children wove dialect into their response. For example, Clarissa's response included,

> I like have a cousin and he is a lady's man. He gives flowers to all of the
>
> girls, but boys nothing. And boys go like 'Homey, I don't like you.' So
>
> that what it reminded me of Cousin Trevor (a character in the book).

Student language. The third pattern of response within language was when the child's unique voice came through in his/her written response. In many of their responses the students addressed the text in a way that was directly related to their self-image. I was able to connect some of the students' responses to the circle maps that they had made during the third week of the study. In those circle maps they described things about themselves that they thought were important. I identified student language by referring back to their circle map. In many responses, the students' own voices shone through. The students responded with student voice in 52 of 59 responses to culturally conscious literature (88%) and in 49 of 56 responses to mainstream literature (88%).

There was no difference in the use of student language to either type of text. For example, Clarissa described herself as "crazy" in her circle map. I found an example of this "craziness" when Clarissa wrote in response to McKissack's *Precious and the Boo Hag* (2005). She included a personal narrative of a time that she was home alone waiting for her mom to return. Clarissa's narrative ended with "I laughed so hard that I peed on myself!" Another student, James, described himself as an "eater," a "seafood lover," and a "shrimp lover". I found James's voice in his response to *We had a Picnic this Sunday Past* (1998) when he wrote,

> When I heard Mrs. Vlach read all that food it sounded gooooooooood. And
> when you kept saying the food it made me reeeaaalllyyy hungry, even
> now. And the cakes at the end sounded goooooood. When people come
> over my mom cooks things. It makes me say the same things. My mom's
> food is chicken, rice, pork chops, deviled eggs, and macaroni. It's really
> good. I love food.

Cordell described himself as a "son", a "yeller", "angry", and "laughter". In his response to *Precious and the Boo Hag* (2005), Cordell wrote as part of his connection,

> When I obey my mom and dad, they buy me something. When I don't
> obey, they take everything away in my room. It makes me feel sad and
> throw a fit and kick stuff and knock down the plant.

There were many more examples like these in which the written responses to the books display each child's unique personality. These examples indicated that the students transacted with the text at a personal level, as themselves.

Engagement. The final pattern of response was engagement. I coded for engagement when the student became emotionally involved, empathizing or identifying with the protagonist in the book in his/her written response. The students responded with engagement in 49 of 59 responses to culturally conscious literature (83%) and in 47 of 56 responses (84%) to mainstream literature. The data indicates that the students were engaged with the characters for both types of texts. For example, Fatima demonstrated engagement in her response to *Fireflies* (Brinkloe, 1986). Fatima wrote, "I made meaning of *Fireflies* because the little boy felt unhappy because he wants the fireflies and can't keep them. That's the part I want to tell you. I got that because my head was thinking about that – the little boy." Fatima was expressing her sadness, her feeling of connection, to the main character.

Summary.   In analyzing the patterns of response that were identified across the children's responses I observed that all students were able to engage with both types of texts. However, the students responded in different ways to the two types of literature. When responding to mainstream literature students were more likely to incorporate the minilesson and state the theme, to write parallel connections, and to respond with the teacher's language. When responding to culturally conscious literature, the students were more likely to share authentic connections and unique personal narratives, and include language from the text. In general, the students' responses relied more on the teacher's guidance in their written response to mainstream literature, whereas the students' responses to culturally conscious literature were more personal. Table 7 and Figure 3

represent the tabulated distribution of patterns of response found across the students'
responses.

Table 7

Frequency of Response Patterns

Category	Subcategory	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	Total
Strategy	Strategy – Retell	13/59 22%	12/56 21%	25/115 22%
	Strategy – Minilesson	28/59 47%	39/56 70%	67/115 58%
	Theme Statement	14/59 24%	22/56 39%	36/115 31%
	Strategy – Any	40/59 68%	47/56 84%	87/115 76%
Connection	Parallel Connection	6/59 10%	10/56 18%	16/115 14%
	Authentic Connection	41/59 69%	29/56 52%	70/115 61%
	Parallel and Authentic Combined	47/59 80%	39/56 70%	86/115 75%
	Personal Narrative – Text	20/59 34%	25/56 45%	45/115 39%
	Personal Narrative - Unique	14/59 24%	4/56 7%	18/115 16%
	Text and Unique Combined	34/59 58%	29/56 52%	63/115 55%
Language	Language – Teacher	20/59 34%	32/56 57%	52/115 45%
	Language – Text	38/59 64%	24/56 43%	62/115 54%
	Language –Student	52/59 88%	49/56 88%	101/115 88%
Emotional Engagement		49/59 83%	47/56 84%	96/115 83%

Figure 3

Graph of frequency of response patterns
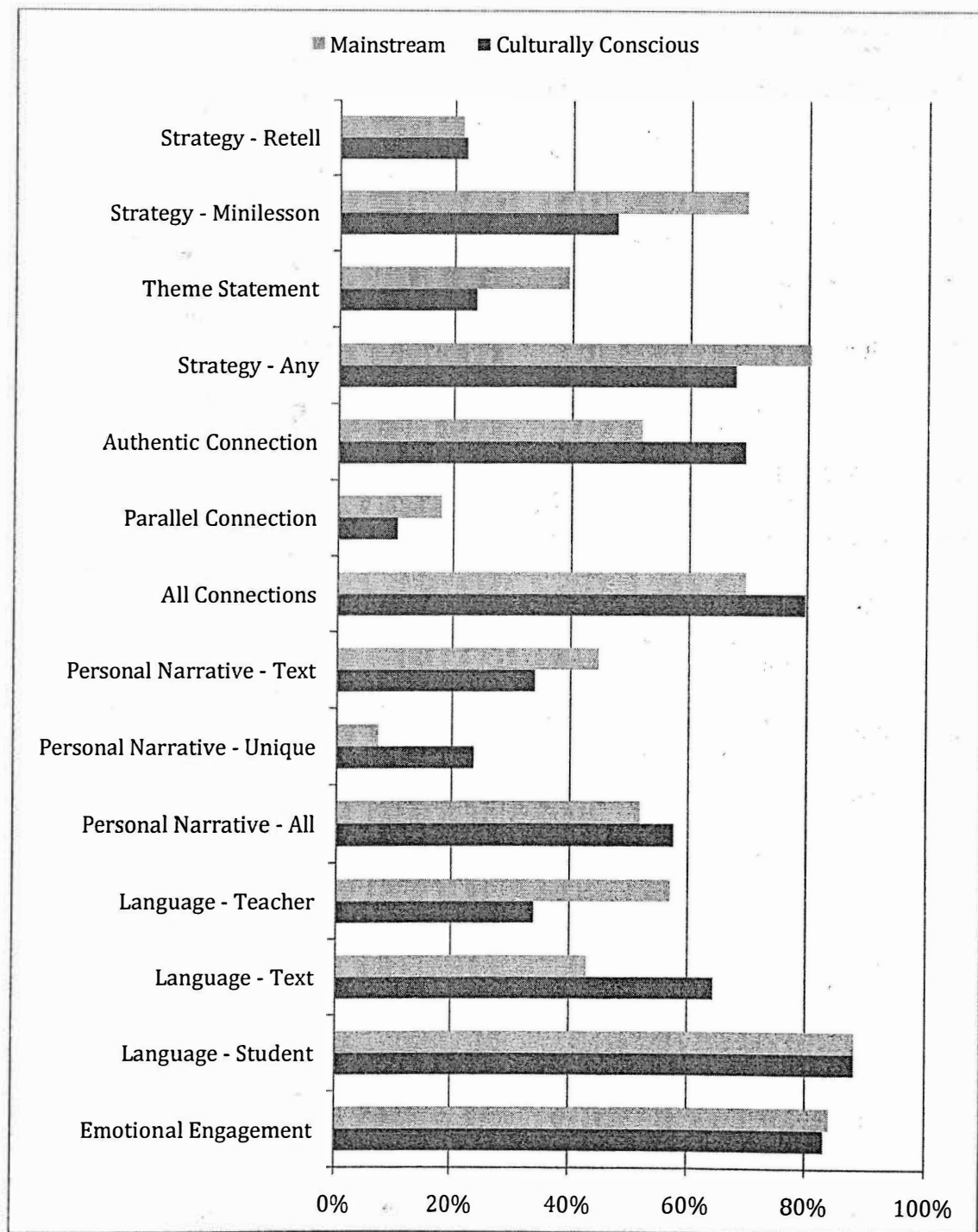
Individual Patterns of Response

This section of the findings will shift from across-case findings to within-case findings. I will focus on how the classroom context and teacher instruction enabled students to 'open up' their transactions and respond in individual ways, rather than limiting their transactions to a certain format or structure.

The students wrote their response in the form of letters to me. They followed that guideline, including the date, greeting, and closing as part of their response. However, after the greeting and before the closing, the children made their own decisions about how to organize their responses and what to notice about each book. Although each sentence from each response fit into one of the four categories of patterns of response, every child had an individual approach to composing his/her response. Some children shared complete personal narratives for most of their responses; some felt a need to retell parts of the story as part of each response; some developed a structure in order to include a little bit of everything (i.e. first strategy, next theme, then connection). Therefore, the data indicated that the classroom context, the teacher, and the books allowed the children to open up and respond to the books in ways that were meaningful to them personally. In this section I will share the individual patterns of response of three students: Emanuel, Clarissa, and Cordell.

Emanuel. Emanuel developed a structure by Week Two of the study. On his own, Emanuel decided that the best way for him to organize his thinking was to write first about the book and then about his connections to the book. Furthermore, he divided his response into two sections, and he labeled each section with a heading. In a sense

Emanuel had developed his own reading response template that included what he felt was necessary and valuable to answer the teacher's prompts and share his thinking about the books. The following responses are from Week Two's paired texts, *Max Found Two Sticks* (Pinkney, 1994) and *Fireflies* (Brinkloe, 1986).

Figure 4

Emanuel's responses to *Max Found Two Sticks* and *Fireflies*

Dear Mrs. Vlach

Book:

I think that Max is celebrating his music. I was trying to tell Joshua that Max sees how it sounds because I think that all musicians do that. So I think that Max is trying to be a musician. Every thing Max hears he plays the rhythm of the rain and the church bells and the pigeons being scared. And when his sisters and mom and dad ask him what he is doing with those two sticks, I think he was trying to answer them with his two sticks. Max was happy with his two sticks.

Connection:

My connection is when I was playing outside. I said "timeout" and when the wind blew, two big sticks fell. When I had those sticks, I started to bang those two sticks on the stairs. Then I started to make a rhythm. I played it all day because that is my new favorite cool rhythm. I want to tell you that I make the rhythm with my mouth and sticks.

Love,

Emanuel

Fireflies!!!

Dear Ms. Vlach,

Book:

I think that the little boy had to make a very hard decision. If he wanted to keep the fireflies or not. But in the book the boy really wanted to keep the little insects. I wanted to say that you can still love something even if its not with you like the little boy. When the boy saw the fireflies dying so when he saw it was time to let them go. But the very next summer I think that the little boy will only catch one firefly next hot summer.

Connection:

My connection is when I saw one ladybug sitting on a leaf then my big sister came out she saw the ladybug too. But when my sister was almost about to grab the ladybug I said "no!" because you can still love or like something you can watch or catch a bug.

Love,

Emanuel

Emanuel was the only student who developed this type of structure in his responses. Based on my data analysis of Emanuel's responses, I did not observe any notable differences in his responses to the two different types of books.

Cordell. Another student that composed an individual pattern of response was Cordell. At the end of each week, each child participated in a third response called the

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"Pick of the Week" that gave them each an opportunity to recommend the book from that week that they thought was the better book for second graders. Cordell made his decisions about the books he preferred based on the criteria of whether or not the books were directly relevant to his life. He was the only student who explicitly stated in his responses the lack of a personal connection. In four of his responses, Cordell stated that he had no connection to the text. For example, his opening lines in both *Max Found Two Sticks* (1994) and *Ira Sleeps Over* (1972) were, "This doesn't give me no connection about me" and "I don't have a connection for this book". Cordell's explicit acknowledgement of his lack of connection can be viewed as resistance to the text because he feels excluded from it (Sipe, 2006). The other two texts to which Cordell did not feel connected were *We had a Picnic this Sunday Past* (1998) (because, he wrote, he had never been on a picnic) and *Chrysanthemum* (Henkes, 1991). Cordell did not recommend or pick these four texts for future second graders, possibly because he felt excluded. Cordell felt excluded from two mainstream books and two culturally conscious books. I did not observe any notable differences in the content of Cordell's responses to the two different types of books.

Clarissa. Ten of Clarissa's eleven responses took the form of emotional personal narratives. Of all the students, Clarissa was the only one who included developed dialogue in her responses. She incorporated dialogue, with quotation marks, in five of her responses. For example, in Week Two Clarissa's response to *Fireflies* (1986) was as follows:

Figure 5

Clarissa's response to *Fireflies*

Fireflies

Dear Miss Vlach,

I have a connection to this book. When I saw fireflies I had a cup and I caught fireflies and it lighted up and one side of me said "I want to let him go" and the other side said "Don't let her go". I said to myself I won't let her out. I open my window and while I was going to let her out I was crying and I said "I will miss you fireflies." "Fireflies see you next summer again." Just like when he see his fireflies again. And the reason we figure it out because when he say "No they're my fireflies!" I was thinking that what Cordell said.

Love, Clarissa

This response was coded as a parallel connection because it had many parallels to the plot of *Fireflies*. It has several interesting features. First, Clarissa became a storyteller. At some level, it seems that she entered the world of the story – believing in it so much that it became her story to tell. But Clarissa did not choose to simply tell the story exactly as Brinkloe had written it; she gave voice to the main character's conflict. At the moment of the boy's conflict, Brinkloe's text reads,

I shut my eyes tight and put the pillow over my head. They were my fireflies. I caught them. They made moonlight in my jar. But the jar was nearly dark.

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whereas Clarissa's version reads,

and I caught fireflies and it lighted up and one side of me said "I want to

let him go" and the other side said "Don't let her go". I said to myself I

won't let her out.

Clarissa wrote about the conflict that she felt the boy was going through – she gave voice to her inferences about the main character's feelings.

Brinkloe ends *Fireflies,*

I held the jar, dark and empty, in my hands. The moonlight and the

fireflies swam in my tears, but I could feel myself smiling.

Clarissa ends her response,

I open my window and while I was going to let her out I was crying and I

said "I will miss you fireflies." "Fireflies see you next summer again."

Just like when he see his fireflies again.

The original text never mentions the boy seeing the fireflies again, but Clarissa's interpretation included details beyond the author's. Based on her response, it was evident to me that Clarissa comprehended the story at a deep level, but her response also suggests that she positioned herself as an author – a storyteller. Clarissa's version of *Fireflies* was individual to Clarissa - she was composing and learning from Brinkloe's craft. Clarissa was trying out some things as a young writer. Based on my data analysis of Clarissa's

responses, I did not observe any notable differences in her responses to the two different types of books.

Summary. Individual patterns of response demonstrate that in a literature-based classroom, these second graders were able to have authentic transactions with the text – they were making meaning in sophisticated, personal ways. The examples of individual patterns of responses suggest that the students were not simply trying to find the right answer for the teacher, but making meaning of the literature for themselves.

Cultural Responses

This portion of the findings will address my second research question: 'When 2nd grade African-American students in a literature-based classroom respond in writing to culturally conscious books and practitioner-recommended books, how will their responses differ?'

I will examine in detail the texts of three students' responses to each type of literature, which reveal some of the ways that culturally-conscious literature can engage African-American students more fully than mainstream literature.

There were three students in the study whose responses to the two types of texts had clear differences throughout the six weeks. They are Jamal, Tanisha, and Kelby. I will examine each child's patterns of differences within the responses.

Jamal

The primary difference between Jamal's responses to the two types of texts was that he frequently made authentic personal connections to the culturally conscious literature, but rarely made personal connections to the mainstream literature. Typically

when Jamal responded to a culturally conscious text, he wrote about personal connections that helped him make meaning of the text. However, when Jamal responded to a mainstream text, Jamal frequently assumed an evaluative voice and focused on the characters and theme of the text – the lesson Jamal thought the reader could learn from the text. This difference was noticeable as early as week one of the study, when Jamal wrote in reply to Woodson's *Picnic* (1998) and Rylant's *Relatives* (1985).

Table 8

Jamal's Responses to *Picnic* and *Relatives*

Picnic (culturally conscious)	*Relatives*(mainstream)
The grandmom remind me because I had a picnic with my grandmom. She call some of my family members. She will tell them to bring food. Half do not bring food! Half do bring food. Sometime she say "Hmmmmm". The grandmom in the book might tell her family to bring food. The grandmom is just like my grandmom because sometimes my grandmom brags about burnt cookies. I say "Just get over it."	The family do things for one another. It remind me when I see my family they do a lot of things for me because they say that they love me. I cry for the tears of joy. Maybe they is talking about they do not get very much love. I mean they come apart. Sometimes they show all they love.

Jamal's responses reflect the tone of each book – he used a humorous voice in his response to *Picnic* and a heartfelt tone in his response to *Relatives*. In both replies he connects the characters of the text with his own family, but he avoids giving any specific details about the "things" his family does for him in his response to *Relatives*. In his

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response to *Picnic*, on the other hand, the reader gets an intimate look into the type of relationship Jamal shares with his own grandmother. His grandmother "brags" and he tells her to "Just get over it." In his response to *Picnic* Jamal kept going back and forth when referring to the grandmother in the text and then his own grandmother, but in his response to *Relatives* he wrote more about his observations of the characters in the text - "do things for one another", "maybe they (relatives) is talking about they do not get very much love. I mean they (relatives) come apart..." Jamal spends most of his response trying to figure out the *relatives'* feelings in the book.

Jamal does the same thing again in week four with McKissack's *Precious* (2005) and Waber's *Ira* (1972).

Table 9

Jamal's Responses to *Precious* and *Ira*

Precious (culturally conscious)	*Ira* (mainstream)
I used to be scared of the bathroom. When I was four because I shut the door in the bathroom. The bathroom shower curtains would move. I used to yell too. That's my connection – just a little different than the boo hag. I do not think that nothing is behind the shower curtains. I was just scared that the curtains was moving. I think that Precious she had a hard time not letting the boo hag in. She did obey her brother. She did believe him.	I don't think that you have to hide something that you feel embarrassed. And just be your self. You don't need to be afraid of something, like Ira was afraid to show a teddy bear. And you can even talk about it that you don't get embarrassed.

In week four Jamal had a very different tone in the two responses. In his response to *Precious* he shared a connection in which he felt vulnerable or "scared", even though at some level he can now look back at that fear and know that there wasn't anything to really be afraid of behind the "shower curtain". Through his personal connection in his response, Jamal shows that he understands the tough position Precious is in because he has been there himself. In responding to *Ira*, however, Jamal did not display any fear or vulnerability. He took on the role of an authority, a person who is here to set the record straight, "just be yourself, and don't be afraid …" Jamal chose not to share a personal connection; instead he stayed focused on the author's purpose or theme of the book.

In week five, Jamal used his response *Bird* (Elliott, 2008) to share a subject that he had never openly discussed in our class.

Table 10

Jamal's Responses to *Bird* and *Now One Foot, Now the Other*

Bird (culturally conscious)	*Now One Foot, Now the Other* (mainstream)
I had a hard time like Bird when my Mama past away of breast cancer. I had a hard time facing that. At first I thought that she lived apart away from me. I can tell how Bird feels- really it is important to him – it hurts deeply inside.	I have a connection about my baby cousin could not walk. She learned on her own. And my so what part is…That Bob help Bobby when he was small and Bobby help his Grandpa. I have a connection. Grandpa had to help Bobby and Marcus had to help Bird to draw.

Most everyone at the school knew that Jamal had recently lost his mother to breast cancer. But Jamal had never opened up about it or even mentioned it himself in our class. This response was written at the end of April, and it was the first time that Jamal mentioned his mother's passing in any context (I had been Jamal's teacher since August). Jamal was able to relate to the protagonist's sense of love and loss for his brother. Jamal knew that they both "hurt deeply inside". This response from Jamal felt very intimate. As the reader I felt his confusion and pain myself. His response to *Now One Foot* (dePaola, 1988) includes the teacher's language, "my so what part", and keeps to the surface of Jamal's emotions, whereas his response to *Bird* goes deeper.

Tanisha

Tanisha was originally from New Orleans and had relocated to Texas after Hurricane Katrina. She had four siblings, and her (single) mother worked at the local Subway restaurant. Tanisha and her siblings were often caught in the middle of disputes at school, and she had a hard time keeping friends. Tanisha made many personal connections in her responses to the literature over the six-week period to both types of texts. However, there were differences in her use of connections.

Tanisha tended to be hard on herself when comparing and contrasting herself to the characters in the culturally conscious literature. She never contrasted herself to the characters in the mainstream literature.

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In week one Tanisha responded to *Picnic* (1998) and *Relatives* (1985)*:*

Table 11

Tanisha's Responses to *Picnic* and *Relatives*

Picnic (culturally conscious)	*Relatives* (mainstream)
The part when the grandmom said that she was thinking about Cousin Martha's pie – she was a telling a lie. Like once my Mama made this dish and I didn't like it. So I put it in my brother's food and I said I ate all of my food. But I didn't, and I told a lie. And that part talks to me.	The relatives are like your cousins or grandparents or uncles or aunts. Because in the book they would never go to relatives they don't know cause what if it is a stranger or someone you don't remember at all. The relatives in the book are helpful, loveable and kindly to each other and in the book they are hugging like I do when I see my relatives that was in Mississippi and that is my grandparents.

In the book, it is true that Grandma "lies" about liking Cousin Martha's pie; however, it is because she does not want to hurt Cousin Martha's feelings. Teeka, the narrator of *Picnic*, says, "Every year, same Cousin Martha, same dried out apple pie. And you better eat every bite of it so you don't hurt Martha's feelings." This is the lesson Teeka has learned from her Grandma – sometimes you don't tell the truth because it is not as important as taking care of your family.

In Tanisha's response, she did not write about why she did or did not lie to her mother. Tanisha noticed that Teeka's Grandma lied and she, Tanisha, has lied too. Woodson does not portray the Grandma in her book as a liar, more of a storytelling matriarch. Tanisha's response is factual and judgmental, whereas Woodson's book is playful in tone. Her response to *Relatives*, on the other hand, seems to parallel the content and tone of the text. Rylant writes about the relatives in a tender way, and Tanisha draws a direct parallel between the relatives in the book and her own family.

Table 12

Tanisha's Responses to *Looking* and *Fireflies*

Looking (culturally conscious)	*Fireflies* (mainstream)
The author's purpose is to show us who we are and to share who he is. Like I'm a lot of things like a daughter. I'm a sister. I'm not a good person or nice one either. I'm a niece and a friend too. I'm not a runner. I'm not a city girl. I'm part of New Orleans. I'm a student. I'm a cousin and a lover and nothing else.	I had friends in my old school and we used to catch fireflies and put them in jars and bring them home. And when I bring them home they start to die and when they start to die I had to let them go. I cried every time I thought about them. I learned that taking fireflies is not good to do.

The difference in these two responses is the stance that Tanisha takes towards the two books. She wrote that she had the same reaction as the boy in the *Fireflies* (1986), "I cried every time I thought about them." Tanisha aligns herself harmoniously with the protagonist of the story. However, in her response to *Looking Like Me* (2009) she listed how she did and did not see herself as compared to Jeremy, the main character, and the

world. She admitted that she is a lot of things, a lot of good things like a daughter, a sister, and a friend. But within her response she also wrote that she was "not a good person or a nice one either". Also, the character Jeremy was described as a *runner* and a *city child*, and Tanisha listed that she was not a runner or a city girl.

Table 13

Tanisha's Responses to *Precious* and *Ira*

Precious	Ira
Once my mama told me not to open the door for any one, not even for her. And I did when I was in New Orleans. So I got punished for one day. But the little girl in the book didn't get punished for a day, but I disobeyed my mama and she obeyed her mama. In New Orleans my Mama told me not to open the door for my dad, and I did. So I got in trouble for letting him in the house when my mama told me not to let him in. So I disobeyed my mom by letting my dad in the house. So now I'm not going to let him the house, even though he is my dad.	This book is trying to tell us no matter if you sleeps with a teddy bear no one needs to make fun of you. Because what if they sleeps with a teddy bear too. I sleeps with a teddy bear to like Ira to and if I don't have my teddy bear I will get up and go to my house and go in my room and get my teddy bear and go back to the living room and go to sleep.

Again, in this example, Tanisha wrote in her response to the mainstream literature that she would handle the situation just like Ira, the main character, did. Tanisha did not indicate any personal conflict with Ira or the situation in the text. However, she had a

conflict within herself when she responds to *Precious* (2005). Precious, the main character is the type of daughter that obeyed her mother, but Tanisha "disobeyed" her mama. In her response Tanisha admits her mistake, explaining to the reader that she did receive a punishment, and that she would make a change in her behavior – maybe to be more like the character Precious. Tanisha goes back and forth in her response by stating her actions and rationale and making it clear that she behaved differently than Precious; therefore, she was punished and Precious was praised. Tanisha's responses to the culturally conscious books do not reveal a carefree, happy child. In Tanisha's journal, the responses to the mainstream literature felt like the right answer for school, but her responses to the culturally conscious literature revealed her critical stance towards herself. For whatever reason, when responding to the culturally conscious books she allowed herself to be less inhibited and to take a chance at facing some of her true concerns about herself and her position in her family. Literature is not always supposed to make you feel happy and agreeable; sometimes it makes you think and reflect honestly. Tanisha's responses to the culturally conscious books were examples of a child that was trying to figure herself out – the easy and the hard parts.

Kelby

Kelby made personal connections to both culturally conscious literature and mainstream literature. The difference was that when he shared his connections to the mainstream books, he never included any words or statements that described his feelings or the feelings within the situation. But when he responded to five of the six culturally conscious books, he recorded his feelings, the feelings of the family, or his feelings that explained the rationale for his actions.

Table 14

Examples of Kelby's Responses

Culturally Conscious	Mainstream
We laid down on the couch and the floor like everybody in the book. We had a fun time! (Picnic)	One day I went to my relatives' house. My mom and dad didn't stay with us. We stayed for weeks. (Relatives)
One day I didn't feel like talking so I went to my friend's house so we could go to the park. (Max)	One day my brother Chris's friend came to my house like Ira went to his friend's house but Truong didn't sleep at my house he just stayed for a few minutes. (Ira)
One day when I was at my Dad and my Mom and Christian, which is my favorite brother in the world! … When he go for the door I go after him, and I take Christian so he doesn't get the door and hold him on the ground so he doesn't go for the door again. (Precious)	Cameron got hurt in three places – his head, hand, and knee. I helped Cameron get home. When we got home Cameron laid down in the bed and watched tv. I went to the park and started playing again. (Now One Foot, Now the Other)

Table 14 continued

Culturally Conscious	Mainstream
One day my mom was looking sad. I asked "Why so blue mom?" and bam! It hit me and mom said my friend died. She started crying for a few days. (Bird)	I gave Chris a dollar so Chris wouldn't feel bad. (Tar Beach)
When Cassey was talking about her father's story it made me feel scared until Cassey said he wouldn't fall. I felt better after that. (Tar Beach)	

For both types of texts, Kelby's personal connections focus on his family, typically his immediate family including his mom and three brothers, Chris, Christian and Cameron. I did not find a difference in the significance of the connections for one type of text versus the other. For example, Kelby's connection to *Precious* (2005) focuses on a time when Kelby's baby brother Christian seemed to be in danger because of a stranger at the door, and his connection to *Now One Foot, Now the Other* (1988) is about a time that Kelby helped his little brother Cameron home from the park after he had gotten hurt. In both instances Kelby is looking out for his brothers. However, he shared the two connections with a different tone, a different sense of urgency. Kelby wrote his response to *Now One Foot* in a matter-of-fact tone. He listed all of the things he did to help Cameron home, including where Cameron was hurt. But after settling Cameron in at home, he "went to the park and started playing again". In this response, Kelby wrote without emotion. In contrast, Kelby's response to *Precious* communicated a sense of real fear for "his favorite brother in the world!" when he "held him on the ground" to keep

him safe. Kelby used the exclamation point in his response to express his feelings for Christian. After reading this response, the reader gets a sense that Kelby was prepared to save Christian's life. This pattern ran through all of Kelby's connections to culturally conscious literature.

Summary

Three students - Jamal, Kelby, and Tanisha – responded to African-American culturally conscious books in ways that suggested strong aesthetic transactions with those texts, whereas their responses to mainstream texts suggested more efferent transactions.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study sought to answer the following questions:

- In a literature-based classroom, how will 2nd grade African-American students respond in writing to culturally conscious books and practitioner-recommended books?

- When 2nd grade African-American students in a literature-based classroom respond in writing to culturally conscious books and practitioner-recommended books, how will the responses differ?

Analysis of the data found that African-American 2nd graders in a literature-based classroom can write authentic responses to age-appropriate literature. Given an open-ended prompt, the ten student participants developed a variety of patterns of response, such as retelling the plot of the story, synthesizing a theme statement from the story, connecting the story to events and characters in their own lives, and adopting language from the story into their responses. Furthermore, several of the students came up with unique, personal approaches to responding to the literature, which they applied to a majority of their responses. For example, one of the students developed dialogue, with quotation marks, in many of her responses, and another student created a formal structure and applied that structure to all of his responses.

In comparing the responses to six culturally conscious African-American books with the responses to six mainstream books, a number of differences emerge. Efferent

patterns of response associated with academic instruction (Rosenblatt, 1982), such as referring to that week's comprehension strategy, synthesizing theme statements, and using the teacher's language, appeared more frequently in responses to mainstream texts; whereas aesthetic patterns of response associated with emotional connections with the literature (Rosenblatt, 1982), such as making authentic connections to the student's experience, incorporating language from the book, and writing unique personal narratives, appeared more frequently in responses to culturally conscious African-American books. Furthermore, analysis of three student's responses indicated that they had a stronger aesthetic transaction with almost every culturally conscious African-American book than they did with the mainstream books. When Jamal responded to mainstream texts, he extended the week's comprehension strategy lesson in his journal, taking an evaluative tone. In his responses to culturally conscious African-American books, he made connections between the books and his personal experience. Tanisha compared and contrasted herself with the characters in the culturally conscious literature, but only drew parallels between herself and the characters in the mainstream literature. Kelby wrote text-to-self connections for both types of literature, but told his stories without emotion in response to the mainstream literature and with emotion in response to the culturally conscious literature.

Implications for Teachers and Research

My pedagogical approach is consistent with Ladson-Billings's (1995) theory of a culturally relevant pedagogy. A teacher with a culturally relevant pedagogy believes that "students must experience academic success, students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). A teacher's personal beliefs, values, and experiences have been found to play an active role in his or her talk and practice with students (Athanases, 2006; Delpit, 2006; Glazier, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Larson & Irvine, 1999). As a teacher, and as a researcher, I try to avoid the phenomenon that Larson and Irvine call 'reciprocal distancing' (1999), in which teachers and students disengage from each other because of cultural differences. I invested a great deal of time in exploring my own beliefs and values before embarking upon this inquiry.

My pedagogical bias necessarily impacted the students in this study. My students knew me very well, and they were accustomed to talking to me and sharing their thinking with me and with each other. Glazier (2005) found that the teacher's position influences the student's position. I support a culturally relevant curriculum and value diversity in my students, and I think my students understood that about me. Although I worked diligently to remain neutral, my personal beliefs favor the use of culturally conscious literature. Before using culturally conscious literature with students, teachers may consider reflecting on their own beliefs and perspectives with their colleagues. In Ladson-Billings's (1995), Ketter's (2008), and Glazier's (2005) research, the teacher

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subjects were asked to speak with each other and then to listen to audio recordings of their dialogue in order for them to reflect on their own position in the classroom. Glazier's (2005) and Larson and Irvine's (1999) studies revealed that when the teacher did not accept the students' cultures, the use of multicultural literature was ineffective in reaching the children. The findings in the current study may have been different if I subscribed to an assimilationist pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

The context of this study was a literature-based classroom that relied on the use of authentic literature to teach second grade readers and writers. In this context, authentic literature is the primary instructional tool to develop the young child's use of comprehension strategies in an integrated manner (Miller, 2002). My intent was to replace some of the practitioner-recommended texts that I had always used in the past with African-American culturally conscious literature, but to continue with the interactive read-alouds, comprehension strategy discussions, and open-ended oral and written reader-response as usual. During all of this instruction, I was careful to make no reference to the African-American culture in these texts. I wanted to see how the children would transact with African-American cultural material without any kind of coaching, and I wanted to compare the books to practitioner-recommended books as comprehension strategy tools by presenting them in the same way.

This study compared the responses to two types of literature side-by-side, which was a research design that I did not find in my review of research. Brooks (2006) and Sutherland (2005) studied African-American reader response to culturally conscious

literature (Sims, 1982), but they did not compare those responses to a 'control group' of responses to mainstream literature.

Brooks and Sutherland explored adolescent students' responses to books that included African-American culture; therefore, many of the classroom conversations focused directly on ethnic culture and home culture, whereas the classroom conversations during the current study were focused on reading comprehension. I have found that when most teachers present literature that depicts a minority culture, be it African-American, Mexican-American, or other, they present it specifically for the purpose of learning about that culture (for example during Black History Month) and not for the day-to-day purpose of teaching reading comprehension. In reviewing research, I didn't find any studies addressing the question 'How does culturally conscious literature lend itself to strategy instruction?' The findings in this study suggest that both types of text were accessible to the students, and the reading responses to both types of literature demonstrated student comprehension. One implication for teachers is that African-American culturally conscious books do not have to be used solely for conversations about culture, but rather, are resources that can be used for comprehension strategy instruction. These books can provide a balance for comprehension strategy instruction alongside practitioner-recommended literature.

The six African-American culturally conscious books in this study may have represented the students' home culture, and thereby activated their schema (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Miller, 2002; Sims, 1982) in a way that was more complete or more immediate than when reading the mainstream books. Sims's (1982) purpose for

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categorizing books that depict the African-American culture was to depict which type of text allowed African-American children to see true representations of themselves in literature. She referred to these books as 'culturally conscious' due to the author's ethnic background and the multilayered representations of African-American life in America including family, peers, traditions, self, language, and urban life. Although Sims did not study African-American children's responses to these books, she assumed that they would speak to them personally because they honestly depicted African-American culture. The current study supports her hypothesis. I found that on average, culturally conscious books generated authentic connections more frequently than mainstream books. In addition, three student's responses indicated strong aesthetic transactions with culturally conscious books. The implication for teachers is that African-American students may be more interested in culturally conscious books and may be more inspired to respond to them creatively.

I should note that culturally conscious African-American books can be difficult to acquire. They account for a very small portion of children's books published each year (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2007), and when I was searching for these books for this study, they were not displayed or readily available at several large bookstores I visited. Teachers wishing to use culturally conscious African-American literature should plan to invest some time searching for books that meet Sims's (1982) criteria.

Lastly, the aesthetic responses that culturally conscious books generate can be intense. I found that the students sometimes took pleasure in seeing their home lives reflected in books, but they frequently wrote about the hard realities and struggles of their

home lives. Some of the responses addressed fear, loss of loved ones, and critical self-reflection. Brooks (2006) found similar results with her middle school students. In her study, the students often responded to the themes about family life and growing up in the city. These themes allowed the students in Brooks's study (2006) to share some of their own personal experiences and struggles, such as gang membership and neighborhood violence. In this study, reading Tanisha's responses was often difficult for me because she was struggling with her own self-image. I felt that she was too critical of herself, and I wanted her to be happy. Tanisha's responses allowed me, her teacher, an entry point into her struggle. Our relationship grew stronger through these six weeks and after because I understood how she felt at times about herself, and I was able to support her in an emotional way that was only possible because she had shared her feelings in her written responses. An implication for teachers is that with the use of culturally conscious literature, some young children are willing to share their struggles as a response to literature. This context may allow for a student like Tanisha an appropriate setting in which she can freely voice her fears and concerns.

In reading Tanisha's responses, I discovered that rather than allowing me to better entertain my African-American students, these books allowed me to better understand them. Teachers must understand that not every African-American culturally conscious book will "speak to" every African-American student. As this study suggests, each child is unique and interacts with each text in his or her own way (Rosenblatt, 1982). It is not the teacher's job to force a transaction between the reader and the text; rather, the teacher should provide the opportunity for a transaction.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE CIRCLE MAP
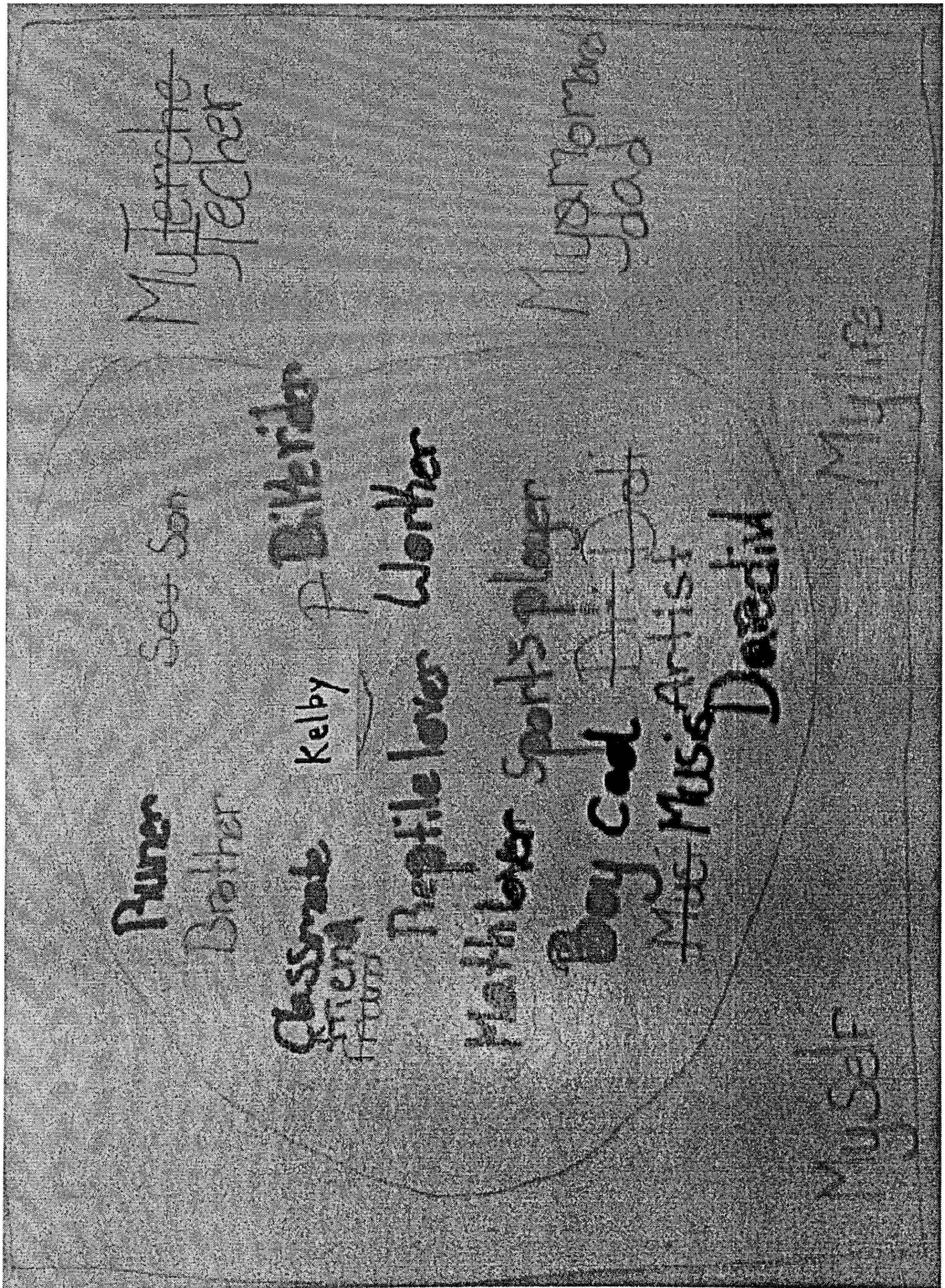
Kelby's Circle Map

APPENDIX B

TABULATION OF COLLECTED DATA

Strategy - Retell

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa									A				0 / 6	0 / 6	0 / 12
Cordell				•			•		•				1 / 6	2 / 4	3 / 10
Emanuel													0 / 6	0 / 6	0 / 12
Fatima	•			•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	4 / 5	5 / 6	9 / 11
Jamal								•				A	0 / 6	1 / 6	1 / 12
James			A	•									1 / 6	0 / 6	1 / 12
Jasmine			•			•		•	•			•	3 / 6	2 / 5	5 / 11
Jerome				•					•				2 / 6	0 / 5	2 / 11
Kelby			•		A						A		0 / 6	1 / 6	1 / 12
Tanisha				•	•					•			2 / 6	1 / 6	3 / 12
													13 / 59	12 / 56	25 / 115
													22%	21%	22%
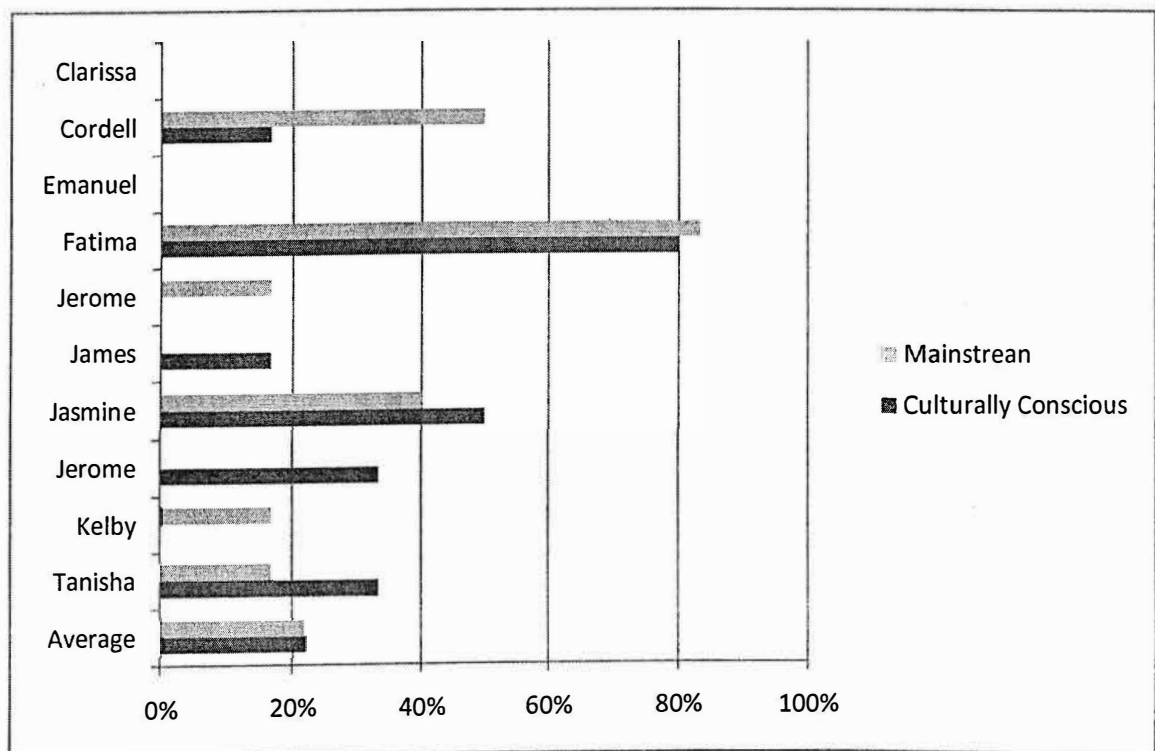
Strategy - Minilesson

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa	•	•	•	•		•			A		•	•	3 / 6	3 / 6	6 / 12
Cordell	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	5 / 6	5 / 4	10 / 10
Emanuel	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	5 / 6	5 / 6	10 / 12
Fatima	•		•			•	•	•			•	•	2 / 5	4 / 6	6 / 11
Jamal	•		•			•					•	A	2 / 6	4 / 6	6 / 12
James	•		A		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	4 / 6	5 / 6	9 / 12
Jasmine					•					•			1 / 6	1 / 5	2 / 11
Jerome	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	3 / 6	6 / 5	9 / 11
Kelby		•	•		A						A		1 / 6	1 / 6	2 / 12
Tanisha	•				•	•		•		•	•	•	2 / 6	5 / 6	7 / 12
													28 / 59	39 / 56	67 / 115
													47%	70%	58%

98
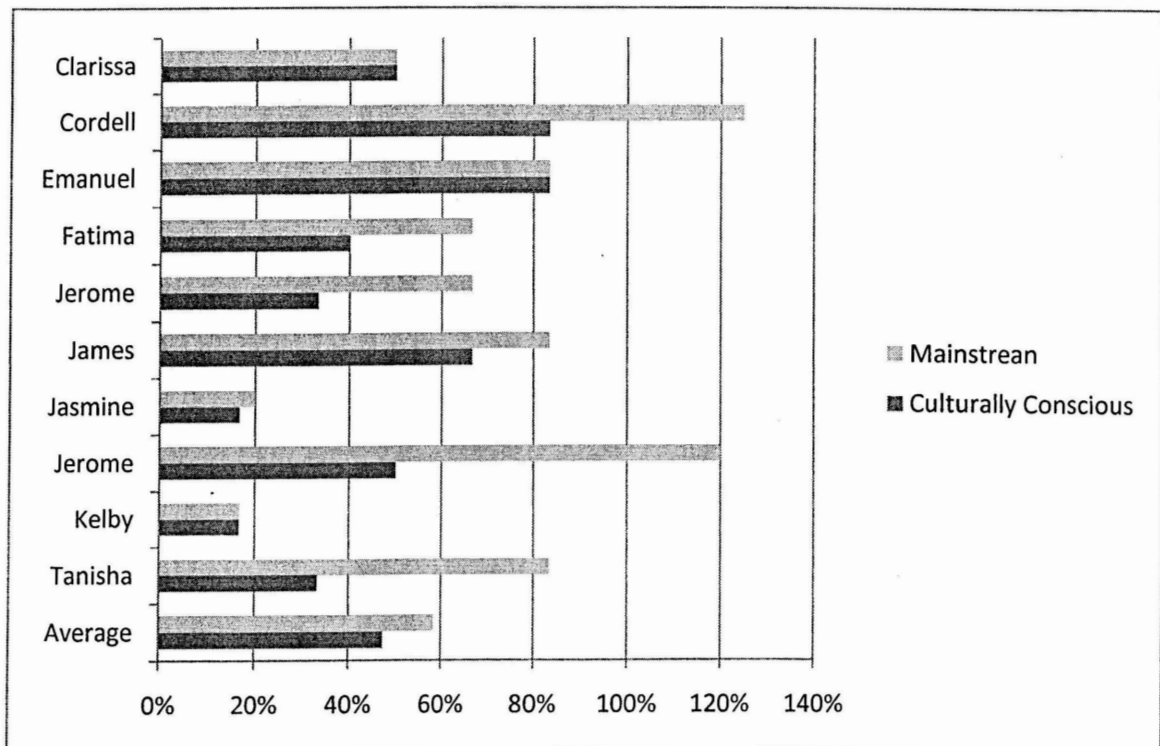
Theme Statement

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa				●					A				1 / 6	0 / 6	1 / 12
Cordell						●	●	●	●	●			2 / 6	3 / 4	5 / 10
Emanuel	●		●			●	●	●			●		3 / 6	3 / 6	6 / 12
Fatima				●		●	●						1 / 5	2 / 6	3 / 11
Jamal	●		●		●	●	●	●			●	A	1 / 6	5 / 6	6 / 12
James				A		●	●		●	●			2 / 6	2 / 6	4 / 12
Jasmine										●			1 / 6	0 / 5	1 / 11
Jerome					●	●	●					●	2 / 6	3 / 5	5 / 11
Kelby					A						A		0 / 6	0 / 6	0 / 12
Tanisha			●			●	●		●		●		1 / 6	4 / 6	5 / 12
													14 / 59	22 / 56	36 / 115
													24%	39%	31%
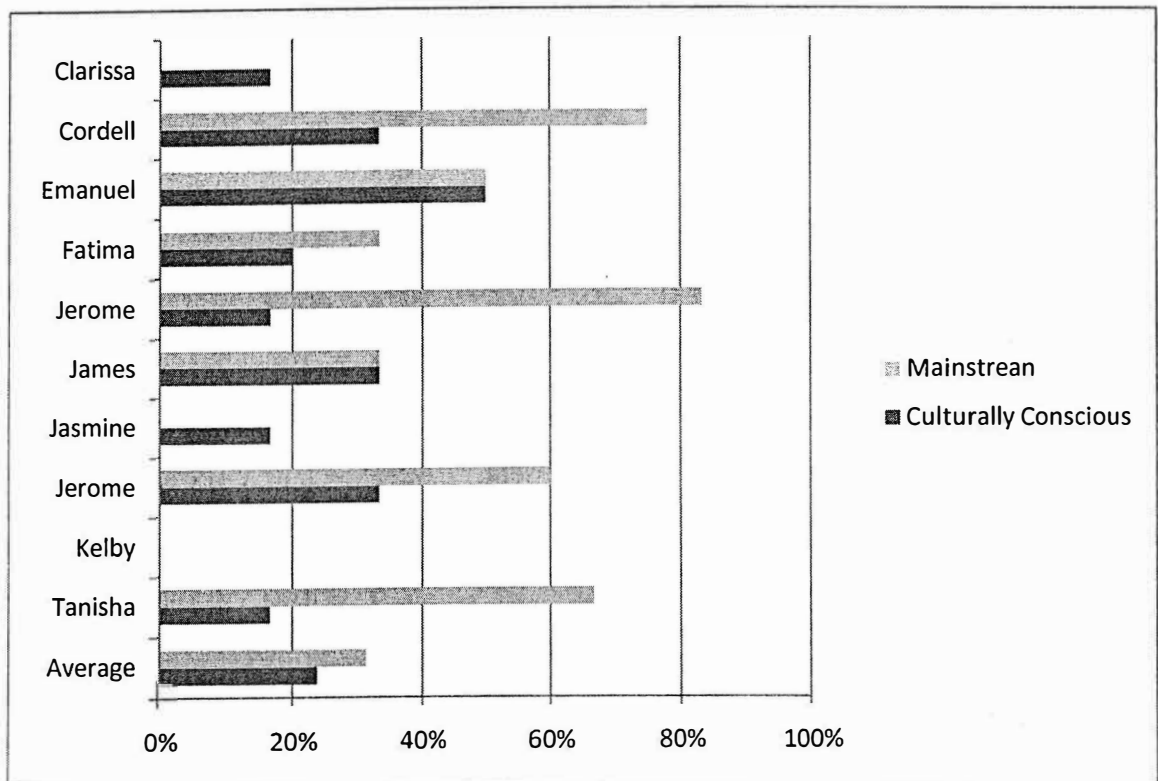
Strategy - Any

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa	•		•	•		•			A		•	•	3 / 6	3 / 6	6 / 12
Cordell	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	6 / 6	6 / 4	12 / 10
Emanuel	•		•	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	5 / 6	5 / 6	10 / 12
Fatima	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	5 / 5	6 / 6	11 / 11
Jamal	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	A	2 / 6	6 / 6	8 / 12
James	•		A	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	5 / 6	5 / 6	10 / 12
Jasmine			•	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	4 / 6	3 / 5	7 / 11
Jerome	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	5 / 6	6 / 5	11 / 11
Kelby		•	•		A						A	•	1 / 6	1 / 6	2 / 12
Tanisha	•		•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	4 / 6	6 / 6	10 / 12
													40 / 59	47 / 56	87 / 115
													68%	84%	76%
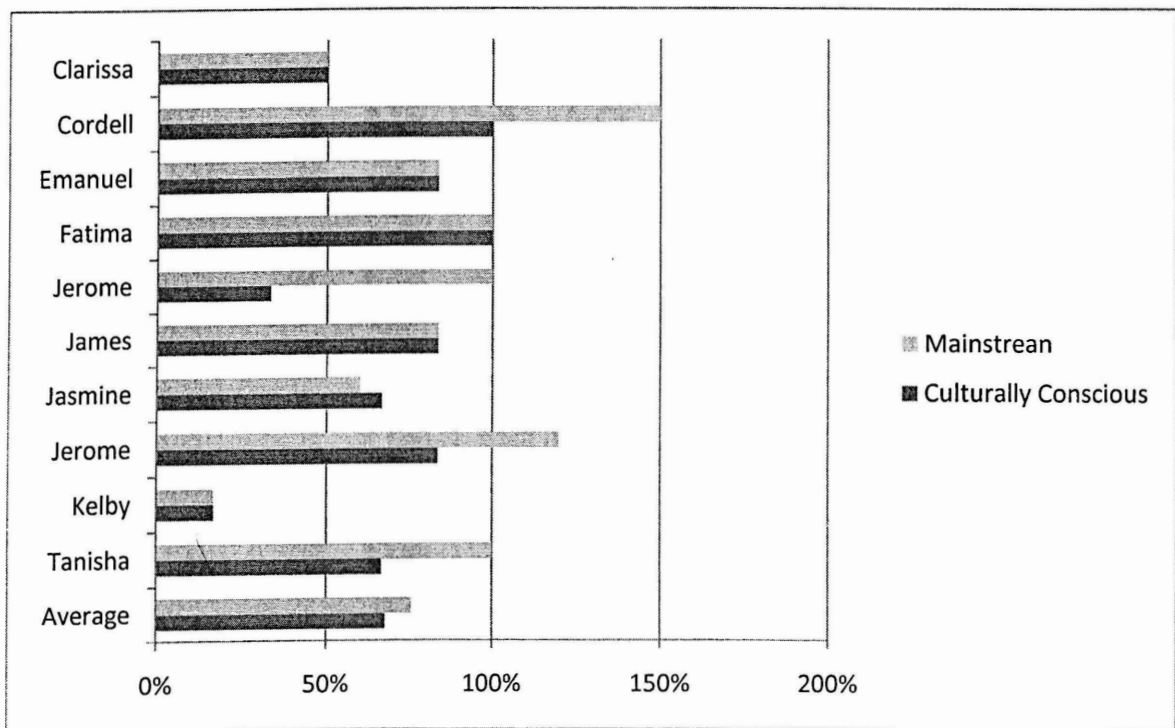
Parallel Connection

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa			•						A				0 / 6	1 / 6	1 / 12
Cordell													0 / 6	0 / 4	0 / 10
Emanuel				•			•						1 / 6	1 / 6	2 / 12
Fatima							•	•	•				1 / 5	2 / 6	3 / 11
Jamal												A	0 / 6	0 / 6	0 / 12
James				A									0 / 6	0 / 6	0 / 12
Jasmine	•							•	•	•		•	3 / 6	2 / 5	5 / 11
Jerome							•						0 / 6	1 / 5	1 / 11
Kelby				•	A							A	1 / 6	0 / 6	1 / 12
Tanisha			•				•		•				0 / 6	3 / 6	3 / 12
													6 / 59	10 / 56	16 / 115
													10%	18%	14%
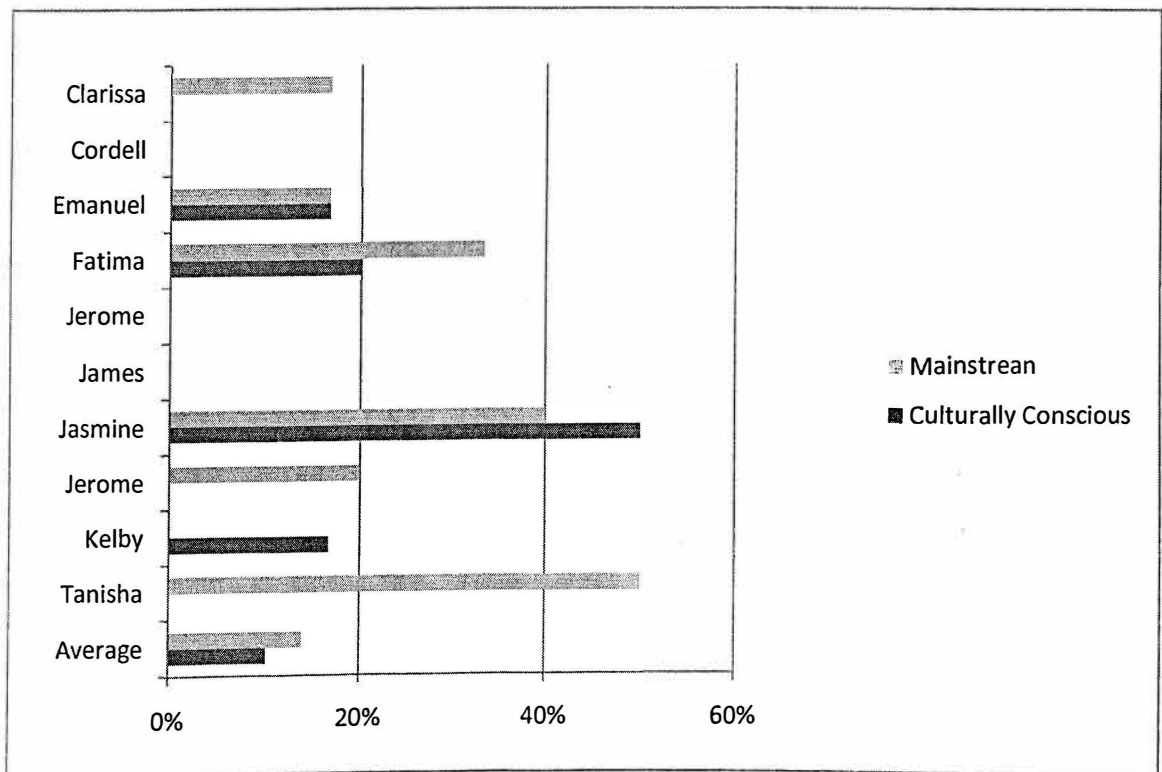
Authentic Connection

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa	•	•		•	•	•		•	A			•	4 / 6	2 / 6	6 / 12
Cordell	•		•			•		•	•	•	•	•	3 / 6	4 / 4	7 / 10
Emanuel	•	•	•		•	•		•				•	4 / 6	4 / 6	8 / 12
Fatima		•			•	•		•	•				3 / 5	1 / 6	4 / 11
Jamal	•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•	A	5 / 6	4 / 6	9 / 12
James	•	•	A			•	•		•	•		•	5 / 6	3 / 6	8 / 12
Jasmine	•	•	•		•	•		•					2 / 6	3 / 5	5 / 11
Jerome	•	•	•	•	•	•		•			•		5 / 6	4 / 5	9 / 11
Kelby	•	•	•		A	•		•	•	•	A	•	5 / 6	2 / 6	7 / 12
Tanisha	•	•		•		•		•			•		5 / 6	2 / 6	7 / 12
													41 / 59	29 / 56	70 / 115
													69%	52%	61%
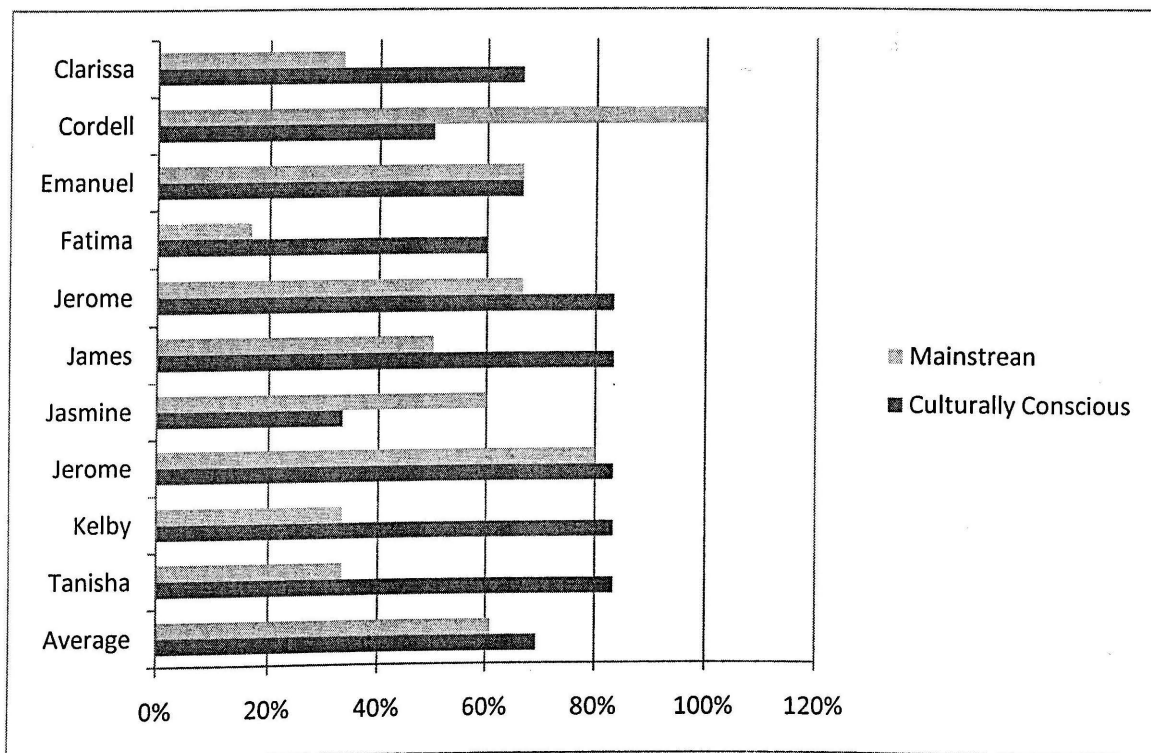
All Connections

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa	•	•	•		•	•		•	A				4 / 6	3 / 6	7 / 12
Cordell	•		•			•		•	•	•	•	•	3 / 6	4 / 4	7 / 10
Emanuel	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	5 / 6	5 / 6	10 / 12
Fatima		•			•	•	•	•	•	•			4 / 5	3 / 6	7 / 11
Jamal	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•		A	5 / 6	4 / 6	9 / 12
James	•	•	A	•		•	•	•	•	•			5 / 6	3 / 6	8 / 12
Jasmine	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•			5 / 6	5 / 5	10 / 11
Jerome	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		5 / 6	5 / 5	10 / 11
Kelby	•	•		A	•		•	•	•	•	A	•	6 / 6	2 / 6	8 / 12
Tanisha	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•		5 / 6	5 / 6	10 / 12
													47 / 59	39 / 56	86 / 115
													80%	70%	75%

103
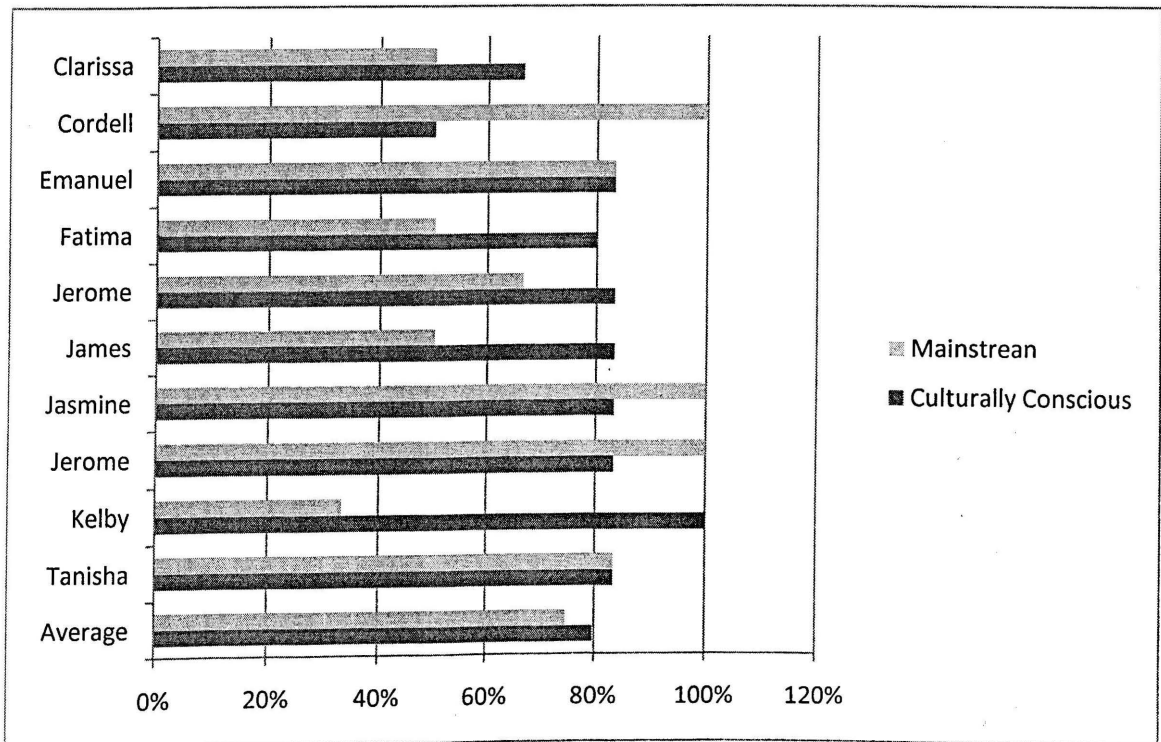
Personal Narrative - Text

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa			•			•	•	•	A	•			3 / 6	2 / 6	5 / 12
Cordell			•			•							1 / 6	1 / 4	2 / 10
Emanuel				•			•	•					2 / 6	1 / 6	3 / 12
Fatima		•				•	•						2 / 5	2 / 6	4 / 11
Jamal	•	•	•			•			•			A	2 / 6	4 / 6	6 / 12
James	•		A	•				•		•			3 / 6	1 / 6	4 / 12
Jasmine	•	•					•		•	•			3 / 6	4 / 5	7 / 11
Jerome	•		•		•	•	•				•		1 / 6	5 / 5	6 / 11
Kelby	•	•		•	A		•	•		A			3 / 6	2 / 6	5 / 12
Tanisha			•			•		•					0 / 6	3 / 6	3 / 12
													20 / 59	25 / 56	45 / 115
													34%	45%	39%
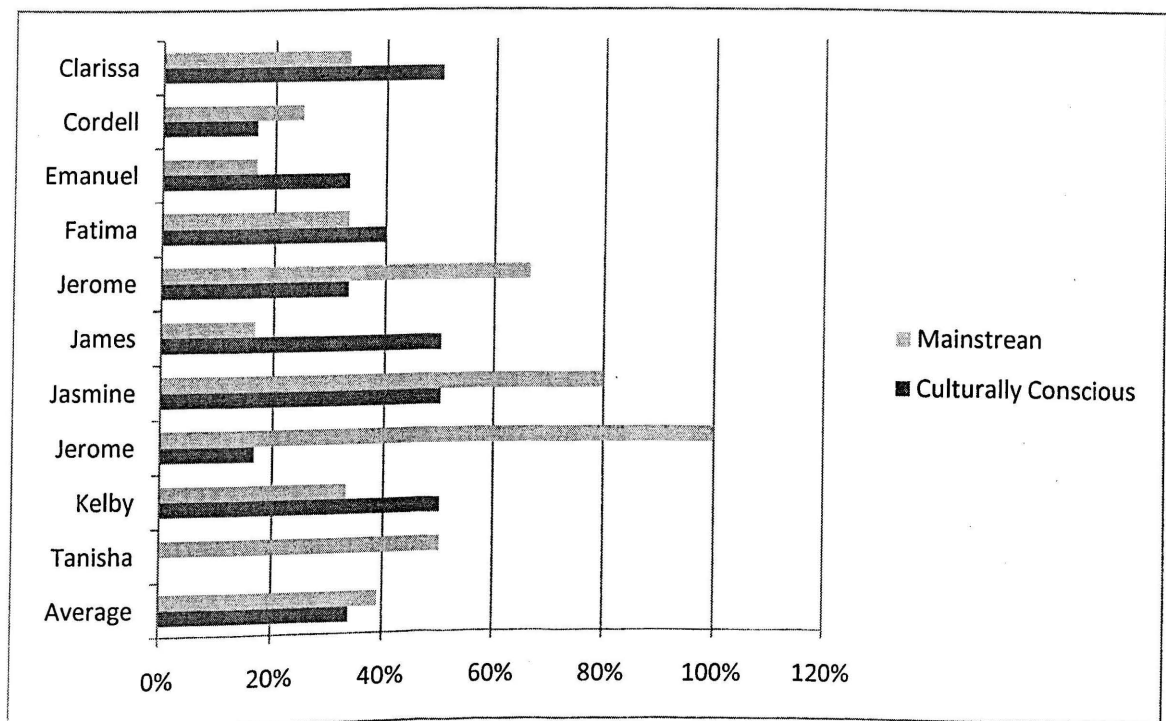
Personal Narrative - Unique

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa									A				0 / 6	0 / 6	0 / 12
Cordell		•						•					2 / 6	0 / 4	2 / 10
Emanuel		•	•						•				1 / 6	2 / 6	3 / 12
Fatima													0 / 5	0 / 6	0 / 11
Jamal			•					•		•		A	3 / 6	0 / 6	3 / 12
James				A									0 / 6	0 / 6	0 / 12
Jasmine													0 / 6	0 / 5	0 / 11
Jerome		•						•					2 / 6	0 / 5	2 / 11
Kelby					A			•	•	•	A	•	3 / 6	1 / 6	4 / 12
Tanisha		•						•		•		•	3 / 6	1 / 6	4 / 12
													14 / 59	4 / 56	18 / 115
													24%	7%	16%
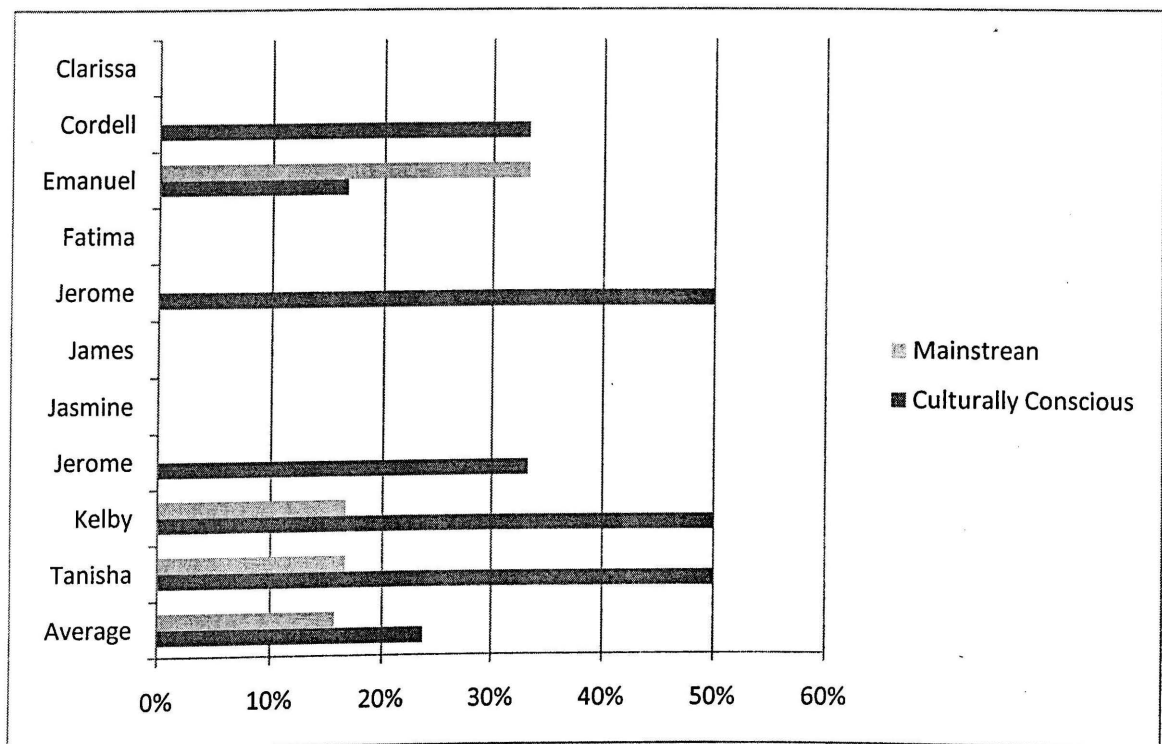
Personal Narrative - All

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa			•			•	•	•	A	•			3 / 6	2 / 6	5 / 12
Cordell		•	•			•			•				3 / 6	1 / 4	4 / 10
Emanuel		•	•	•				•	•				3 / 6	3 / 6	6 / 12
Fatima		•			•			•					2 / 5	2 / 6	4 / 11
Jamal	•	•	•				•	•	•	•		A	5 / 6	4 / 6	9 / 12
James	•		A	•		•		•					3 / 6	1 / 6	4 / 12
Jasmine	•	•	•			•	•	•	•				3 / 6	4 / 5	7 / 11
Jerome		•	•			• •	•	•			•		3 / 6	5 / 5	8 / 11
Kelby	•	•		•	A		•		•	•	A	•	6 / 6	3 / 6	9 / 12
Tanisha		•	•				•	•	•		•	•	3 / 6	4 / 6	7 / 12
													34 / 59	29 / 56	63 / 115
													58%	52%	55%

Language - Teacher

Name	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa	1 / 6	0 / 6	1 / 12
Cordell	5 / 6	5 / 4	10 / 10
Emanuel	2 / 6	3 / 6	5 / 12
Fatima	3 / 5	4 / 6	7 / 11
Jamal	2 / 6	5 / 6	7 / 12
James	3 / 6	3 / 6	6 / 12
Jasmine	0 / 6	3 / 5	3 / 11
Jerome	2 / 6	6 / 5	8 / 11
Kelby	0 / 6	0 / 6	0 / 12
Tanisha	2 / 6	3 / 6	5 / 12
	20 / 59	32 / 56	52 / 115
	34%	57%	45%
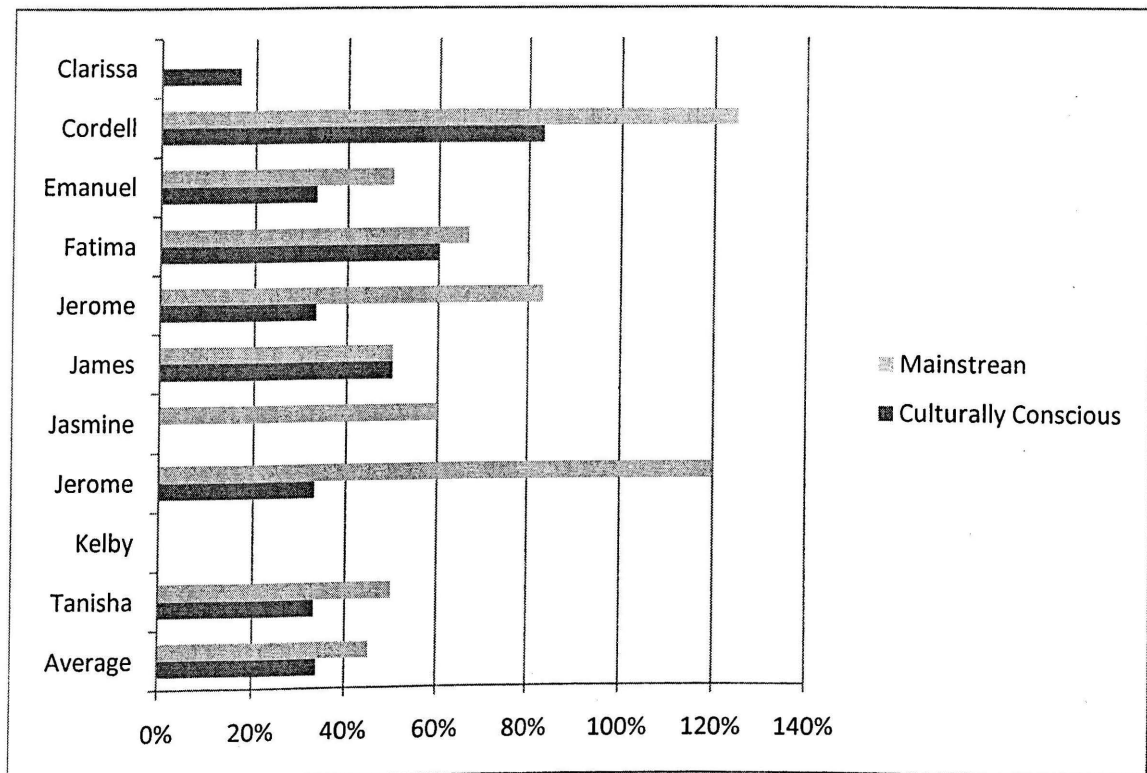
Language - Text

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa	•	•	•		•	•			A	•			3 / 6	3 / 6	6 / 12
Cordell	•	•	•			•		•		•	•	•	5 / 6	4 / 4	9 / 10
Emanuel				•		•		•					3 / 6	0 / 6	3 / 12
Fatima	•				•	•	•	•		•	•		5 / 5	4 / 6	9 / 11
Jamal					•	•		•		•	•	A	4 / 6	3 / 6	7 / 12
James			A		•	•	•			•			3 / 6	1 / 6	4 / 12
Jasmine		•	•		•				•			•	4 / 6	2 / 5	6 / 11
Jerome	•	•			•	•		•				•	4 / 6	2 / 5	6 / 11
Kelby	•	•		•	A	•				•		A	4 / 6	1 / 6	5 / 12
Tanisha	•		•		•	•			•				3 / 6	4 / 6	7 / 12
													38 / 59	24 / 56	62 / 115
													64%	43%	54%
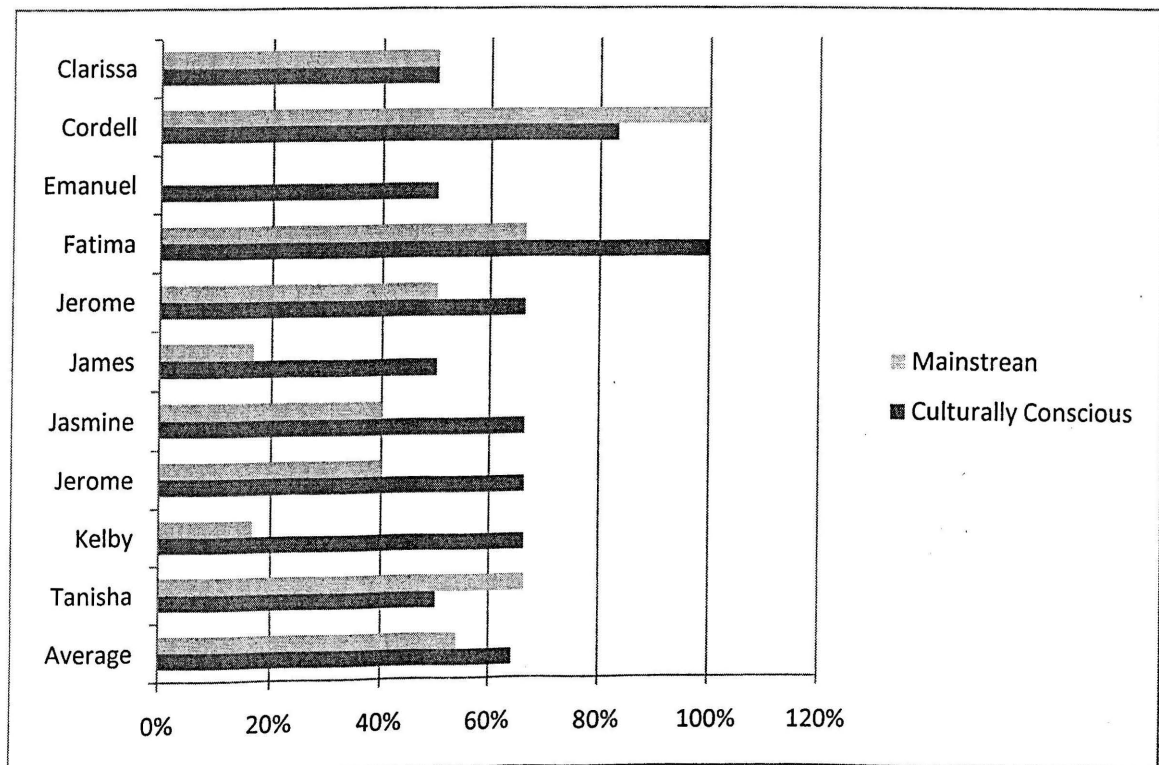
Language - Student

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	A	•	•	•	6 / 6	5 / 6	11 / 12
Cordell	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	6 / 6	6 / 4	12 / 10
Emanuel	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	3 / 6	5 / 6	8 / 12
Fatima	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	5 / 5	6 / 6	11 / 11
Jamal	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	A	4 / 6	6 / 6	10 / 12
James	•	•	A	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	6 / 6	5 / 6	11 / 12
Jasmine	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	6 / 6	4 / 5	10 / 11
Jerome	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	6 / 6	5 / 5	11 / 11
Kelby		•	•	•	A	•		•	•	•	A	•	5 / 6	2 / 6	7 / 12
Tanisha	•	•	•	•		•	•		•	•		•	5 / 6	5 / 6	10 / 12
													52 / 59	49 / 56	## / 115
													88%	88%	88%
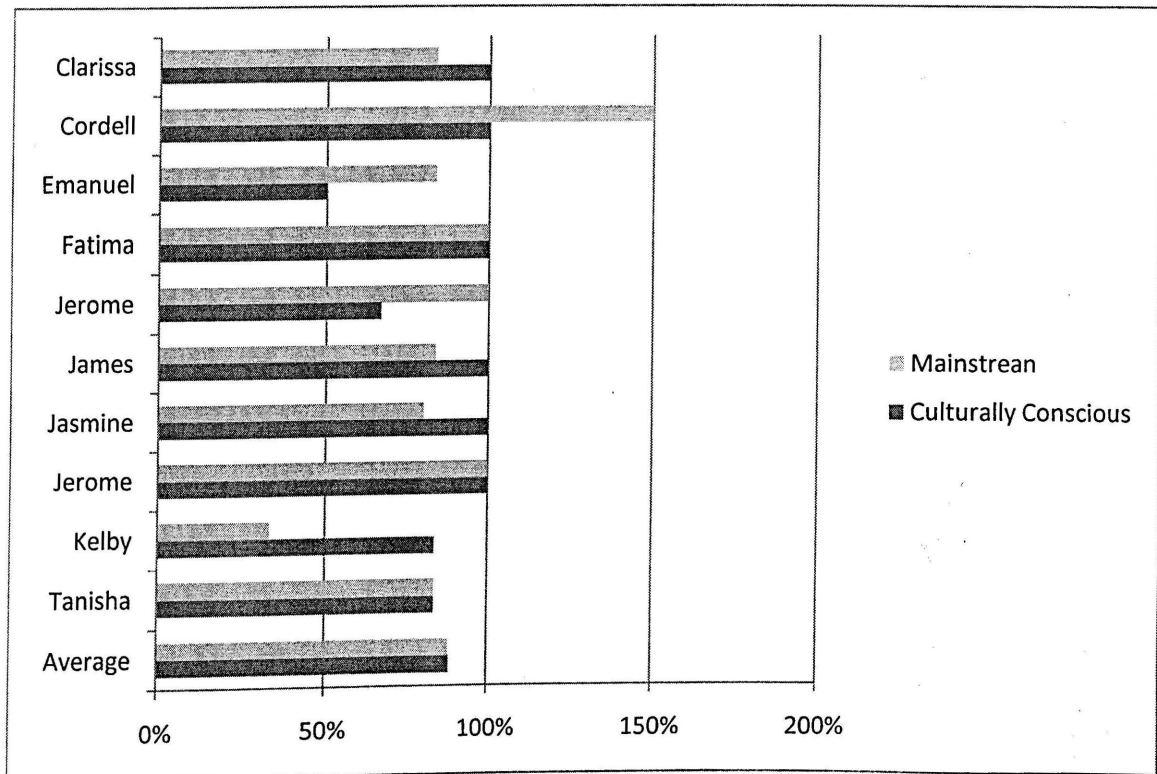
Emotional Engagement

	Relatives	Picnic	Fireflies	Max	Chrysanthemum	Looking	Ira	Precious	One Foot	Bird	Fly Away	Tar Beach	Culturally Conscious	Mainstream	All Books
Clarissa	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	A		•	•	6 / 6	5 / 6	11 / 12
Cordell	•		•				•	•	•	•	•	•	4 / 6	5 / 4	9 / 10
Emanuel	•		•	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	4 / 6	6 / 6	10 / 12
Fatima		•	•	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	5 / 5	5 / 6	10 / 11
Jamal	•	•	•	•		•	•		•		•	A	5 / 6	5 / 6	10 / 12
James	•	•	A	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	6 / 6	5 / 6	11 / 12
Jasmine	•	•	•		•	•		•	•		•	•	5 / 6	5 / 5	10 / 11
Jerome	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	6 / 6	6 / 5	12 / 11
Kelby		•			A	•	•			A		•	2 / 6	1 / 6	3 / 12
Tanisha	•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	6 / 6	4 / 6	10 / 12
													49 / 59	47 / 56	96 / 115
													83%	84%	83%